

Pickens, Sue

A Qualitative Analysis of the Story Enactment 'Something Good' to Assess Comprehension in English and Spanish-Speaking Pre-School Children

Faculty Mentor: Barbara Culatta, Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology

Currently, Dr. Culatta is working on Project CALL, a Contextualized Approach to Language and Literacy. She is looking at how language and literacy skills can be taught to pre-school children in Head Start. As an extension of her research, I analyzed children's participation and engagement in story enactment. I also analyzed Spanish speaking children's engagement in story enactment, and the behaviors that affect story comprehension. By analyzing two enactments of the story, I hypothesized that I would find in the children's second enactment of the story that they will be able to make more relevant comments, predict and anticipate more story events, become more engaged in the story, and increase their levels of participation in the story showing their effective comprehension.

The participants in this study were selected from children who attended Mountainland Head Start located on the campus of Brigham Young University during the 2001-2 school year. Participating children were all in the same Head Start class. Approval for the use of the participants was given from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and through parental consent. The subjects are seventeen 3-5 year old children. Thirteen of the seventeen children speak Spanish as their primary language. A pre-requisite of the Head Start program is that children are from low socioeconomic and diverse cultural backgrounds. There was no attempt to alter the composition of the students used in this study.

The entire classroom experienced a dramatic telling of the story '*Something Good*' by Robert Munsch in the large group, circle time setting. The children had been doing story enactments all year long in their classroom, and '*Something Good*' was the last story in which they participated. The story 'Something Good' is about two children, Tyya and Tom, who go to the grocery store with their dad. The children want to get junk food, while their dad wants them to get healthy food. After two attempts of trying to put junk food in their basket, Dad tells Tyya to not go anywhere and stand still. She stands so still that she looks like a doll, and a clerk puts a price tag on her. The dad recognizes Tyya and the story ends with him buying her and taking her home. After the dramatic telling of the story, the children then enacted the story in small groups of four to five children. The story enactment was a part of a mandatory table rotation, including all of the children. The story was enacted twice and the children participated at least once in either the first or second enactment of the story. Each group consisted of both English and Spanish speaking children.

The children picked out their roles to begin the story enactment. A graduate student, Aubrey, taped the children during the enactment, while another graduate student, Maren, instructed and directed the children in the activity. Her job was to be the stage manager and the narrator. As the stage manager, she told the children where they should go or what they should do if they had a problem. As the narrator, she highlighted specific events from the story that allowed the children a simple, yet structured story pattern to follow.

For my part of the research, I viewed the videotapes of *'Something Good'* and analyzed them for actions and utterances that demonstrated the children's understanding of the story. I chose two Spanish speaking children, Abby and George, and the group George, Gabriel, Alexis, Hailey, Brenda, and Abby to study for this analysis. Abby was a Spanish speaker and had a low level of language. George was bilingual and had a good knowledge of English and Spanish. The group consisted of both English- and Spanish-speaking children.

Although Abby had a low level of language, she was probably one of the most engaged participators in story enactment. Abby was able to extend her role by incorporating a stuffed dog and relating it to the story in an appropriate way. The dog becomes a part of the enactment; for example, the dog helps to put the ice cream into the grocery cart. When she has to stand still, the dog has to stand still, too. In another enactment, Abby has the role of the customer. Consequently, she does not have a big part to play and watches the others while they are enacting. Because she can't participate yet, she asks questions about the story events, who the characters are, and wants to see the pictures in the book. For example, she asks 'Who's Tyya (referring to the enactment)? Why is she (Tyya) sitting on the top (pointing to the book)? That's Tom (looking at the book)? Tom is funny.' This gives Abby a foundation of knowledge of what is happening in the story that shows up in the next enactment. In her next enactment, Maren asks how many candy bars Tyya got and Abby knows that it is exactly 300 candy bars. Her knowledge that it was exactly 300 candy bars comes from paying attention in her first enactment. In this same enactment, Maren is beginning the story and asking the children when Tyya and Tim went to the store and what they wanted. Abby answered yelling, "Junk!" Her participation showed that she understood the story. Abby also understood the sequence of the story, allowing her to anticipate story events. In her first enactment, Abby is in the corner putting away ice cream. When Maren asks what happens next, Abby immediately turns around and jumps up, and squeals, "Candy!"

George joined the class late in the year, but he participated in a few story enactments and enjoyed it, according to Maren. He was bilingual and had a good knowledge of English and Spanish. In the first enactment in the role of Dad, he extends his role by putting his hand in his pocket to pull out some money to pay the store owner, because he had to pay for his children before he could leave the store, before Maren even gave him the money. This action was not included in the script; it was an action that George added. This action demonstrated that he understood his role as Dad. At the beginning of this enactment, Maren prompts him to tell Tyya to stand still. He stands there and shakes his head yes, but does not say anything. But while Maren turns back to Tyya to prompt her in her lines, George comes forward and says, shaking his finger, "Put that back!" in a loud voice. It took George a moment to think how to make the Investigator's voice his own, but he knew what was going on in the enactment. George needed a lot more physical direction as well in the first enactment. The first time George enacted the story, Maren had to physically take his grocery cart and direct it in the way it should go. In this enactment he is also not as engaged—he is playing with the cart instead of following the story. Throughout this enactment, George was very quiet and reticent, needing a lot of investigator direction and support to get through his first enactment. In the second enactment, George's behaviors showed that comprehension increased. George played the boy Tim. At the beginning of the story, George put his hands over his eyes when Maren told Mom and Dad to hide their

eyes. George remembered that he had enacted Dad in the previous enactment, and was becoming his previous role. Initially, he had role confusion, but once Maren directed him he got into his role as Tim. After the children had put the ice cream into the grocery cart, George puts the cart in front of Mom and Dad and says in a loud voice, "Mom, Dad, look it!" He needs less support and initiates this himself. In another instance, when Tim and Tyya are told to hold still, George immediately stands straight up, with his hands at his sides, and does not move. Maren comes over and pokes George, and he does not move at all. He stands still. He is following the actions that Maren tells him to perform and becomes the character Tim. He is pretending to be a doll. Lastly, at the end of the story, as the enactment is finishing, George says, "Have to buy me, have to buy me," demonstrating his knowledge that he is Tim, and that Tim must be bought before he can go home. George becomes more verbal in the second enactment, improving from his first enactment. In the first enactment, Maren prompted him in his lines, and he had to think a moment before he said them. He did not require as much investigator support in the second enactment. For example, he says, 'Mom, Dad, look it!' spontaneously and shows that he knows his role and does not need a lot of support in his lines.

As the role of the investigator was to refer the children to the book, narrating, and directing the children's actions, none of the groups were completely independent. Because of this, the less support the children needed, the more it demonstrated that they comprehended the story. In general, the children needed more support in the first enactment. In the second enactment, the children needed less support and direction than in their first enactment. The story enactment with George, Brenda, Hailey, Alexis, Abby, and Gabriel is a good example of less investigator support that is needed, and the story just flows. During the group enactment, the members enacting the story followed the text closely and needed very little support in their roles. They followed the events in sequence and the children had many connected turns. Maren was able to take a backseat in this enactment, and although her narration never stopped, she directed much less because they understand their roles.

The hardest part about this research was figuring out how we were going to analyze the videotapes of the story enactment. We went through several possibilities before we decided that I would watch the tapes, and analyze patterns of behaviors that demonstrated story comprehension.

The results showed that when the children enacted a story they comprehended it better. From these results, I think that story enactment could be an activity used in Head Start classrooms as an instruction method to increase story comprehension.