

A Story to Share Tells Children you Care: Promoting Literacy in Young Children



MORGAN SCHATZ BLACKROSE



**Nation
Year of
Reading
2012**

A Story to Share Tells Children you Care: Promoting Literacy in Young Children

Literacy acquisition is a process that begins from birth and requires input from families, caregivers and teachers, with the growing independent and professional support of the public library network. Children entering school without emergent literacy skills may struggle to keep up with their peers' rate of literacy acquisition. This can affect children's engagement with school and in turn, affect overall successes in education and life, perpetuating a cycle of low literacy. However, the development of emergent literacy skills *is* attainable for most children, even those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

(Children, Early Reading & a Literate Australia, Sylvia Marshall, Geoff Stempel, PLA, 2009)

To celebrate Australia's National Year of Reading, NYOR 2012, storyteller, Morgan Schatz Blackrose, has prepared this booklet, to inspire and resource parents, carers and early childhood professionals in their important work of promoting literacy.

An exponent of oral storytelling and the arts to promote literacy, tolerance and peace, Morgan believes that being able to read is a right, not a privilege. As a society we must work towards every member being able to actively enjoy that right, and our work must begin from the moment a child is born.

A Storyteller's Duty of Care

Our duty of care to all children,
is to provide them with the necessities
to sustain life, but,
we must also impart to them
what is their right, their global inheritance;
traditional stories and songs,
music, dance and folklore.
And in turn, we trust that we have endowed them,
with the ability and desire to joyfully pass on
their renditions of these tales and tunes
to future generations.

Why Storytelling?

Storytelling entertains, enlightens and educates
Storytelling stimulates the imagination
Storytelling develops speech and language ability
Storytelling celebrates humanity
Storytelling teaches about the world
Storytelling introduces countries and cultures
Storytelling expands the vocabulary
Storytelling challenges prejudices
Storytelling creates a safe learning environment
Storytelling promotes resilience
Storytelling nourishes the mind, body and soul
Storytelling fosters tolerance and understanding
Storytelling nurtures intellectual growth
Storytelling values stories and storytellers

Ten Telling Tips for Terrific Talkers

1. Ten minutes a day, twice a day, take the time to tell children stories.
2. Show children that reading is fun by enjoying reading yourself.
3. Share your favourite childhood nursery rhymes and riddles out loud.
4. Celebrate even the smallest successes with a hug and a smile.
5. Sing in or out of tune and encourage children to sing along with you.
6. Trust yourself to teach wisely, willingly and with love.
7. Trust your children to learn wisely, willingly and with love.
8. Praise children's efforts and also your own.
9. Progress and accomplishment is the reward for perseverance and patience.
10. Remember we are all more than the sum of our abilities and disabilities.

Performance Guidelines for Building Self Esteem in Children

1. Don't criticize children's movements or voices unless it is to prevent injury to themselves or others e.g. Please don't shout in someone's ear or stomp on children's feet because it hurts them.
2. Welcome every contribution, no matter how small. e.g. I think you listened very well to the song and when you're ready you might like to sing a long too.
3. Offer alternatives. e.g. Let's not stomp out the beat with our elephant feet, lets use our horse's hooves, so we can hear the drum.
4. Give opportunities for suggestions as to how a rhyme or rap can be performed. e.g. Now we know the whole rhyme, let's take it in turns to saying one line each and the last line all together?
5. Talk about consensus decision-making and encourage children to make choices about what material they want to perform.
6. Teach them that although they are individuals they are also part of a group and have to learn about co-operation, and listening to each other.
7. Praise any attempts to create harmony and understanding within the group.

Storytelling Preparation Guide for Teachers

1. Prepare the students for the storytelling session first so they know what is about to happen. i.e. set the stage for storytelling.
2. Explain where the story is from, by showing on a map or globe where the country is. Acknowledge students who may be from that country. Show pictures or other props of animals that are in the story. Allow students to offer their own language names and write them down with the English word beside it.
3. Teach any rhymes, refrains, movements, gestures or required phrase responses to students beforehand, so they can participate in the story.
4. Explain that there will be time to discuss the story after you've told it.
5. The story can be retold a number of ways and the more familiar students are with it, the more confident they will become in retelling it. Allow students to share their own versions of the story or similar stories.

Guide To Being A Good Storyteller

1. Storytelling is an act of Love. Never tell a story you don't like.
2. Learn the bones of the story. Know the characters, the sequence of events and the ending. Now tell it to a friend or colleague in a few sentences.
3. Learn any rhymes off by heart and say them out loud.
4. Speak as though you want to be heard and you will be.
5. Maintain eye contact with your audience and take your cues from them. e.g. pause for effect, or when you want students to contribute to the story.
6. Create a context to tell the story within. e.g. Frame it or make a special story time.
7. If using props ensure you have them all and they work, before you tell the story.
8. Trust yourself and trust the story. Learn it, and establish the right setting to tell it and most importantly, enjoy the experience. Your students certainly will.

What is the best way of promoting literacy in young children?

Parents, carers and early childhood professionals want to know the best way of promoting literacy in their children. Is reading them stories enough? Should they also be telling them stories?

These forms of storytelling are complementary not competitive. Children need to experience as many forms of storytelling as possible to become fully literate human beings in the twenty first century. This includes written text and images that books offer; songs, rhymes, dances, plays and other performances and oral storytelling communicated from one human being to another.

Children learn that stories can be presented in all manner of ways, and that when they are familiar with a story they too can share it, verbally, pictorially or dramatically. These mediums of expression are accessible to them before their ability to read and write, but continue beyond the acquisition of text literacy.

Non - reading parents are less likely to seek out storytelling experiences for their children, particularly those involving books. Their children are thereby disadvantaged in the amount of storytelling experiences available to them.

Text literacy is not mandatory for storytelling to occur, as oral storytellers don't use

the written word to convey their tale. However, most oral storytellers are familiar with either an oral or cultural tradition that their stories come from. They are proficient in oral literature.

Oral storytelling is a way of passing on cultural traditions and values, teaching life lessons and showing love. Storytelling is also fun, and sharing stories should be a positive experience for both the teller and listener.

The most dominant storytelling medium in the Western world, and increasingly so in many countries throughout the world is television. However, it is a medium that is adulterated with advertising, propaganda and messages and images inappropriate for children. While there may be some good quality stories presented on television there are so many competing agendas that make it a medium that needs adult supervision. It is also the least interactive and flexible of all storytelling mediums, but it is the primary source of many young children's storytelling experiences.

It would be remiss of me to ignore the use of computers in the acquisition of literacy. Children as young as two years are engaging in interactive games and stories. The audio-visual medium is a powerful one and children need to be monitored for both the amount of time they spend in front of a screen and the programme content. It is an activity determined by how many children can sit in front of a screen. For most it is an individual activity with a personal computer,

however, interactive whiteboards in the classroom have enabled teachers to work with a whole class. We must remember that however long we spend with them, computers are not a substitute for human interaction.

The most effective way of ensuring that children have positive, interactive, joyful storytelling experiences is to ensure that the adults who care for them share stories with them. Not being able to read and write does not preclude parents from being able to tell stories, share rhymes and songs, draw stories or organize for other adults to take their children to free storytimes at their public library.

Many parents are embarrassed about their inability to read, so informing them about adult literacy classes should be done with sensitivity. Promoting adult literacy not only improves the quality of an adult's life, but impacts positively on their children. Children are influenced by the actions and attitudes of their parents and carers. Therefore modelling reading for pleasure is important in developing children's literacy.

Often people with English as a second (or third or fourth) language may not be fluent in English but are proficient at reading and writing in other languages. Libraries that house bilingual picture books in their collection enable these parents to share the joy of reading aloud to their child. Bilingual parents are also a wonderful, if often untapped resource, for Children's Librarians conducting multilingual storytimes.

Offering storytimes and language sessions that include multiple storytelling methods, not only showcases the myriad of ways that stories can be presented, it assists children in finding their own ways of expressing themselves, understanding the world and developing self esteem. It is more important to have different mediums of storytelling in a storytime than different subjects.

Children listen and look as a picture book is read to them, they perform a finger rhyme, they stand up and do a dance, they may draw their own pictures of the story and listen as their parent or carer retells the story that was read. They may also watch or participate in a dramatization, or other visual interpretation of the story.

Children have the opportunity to engage in storytelling activities at their own level of comfort, depending on how confident and familiar they are with the material. Children who are actively anticipating events in a story, and verbalizing them, are expressing their familiarity with the tale, and can be offered the opportunity to tell the tale themselves or with others.

Some children prefer the intimacy of being individually read aloud to, and others like to join in with group activities. By presenting many ways of storytelling you are ensuring that there is something for everyone. Children can make informed choices about their participation.

Most picture books that are read aloud are interactive, and can be made more so by

questions and comments inserted by the reader. While many picture books have text that the children verbalize, particularly repeated words or phrases, there are some picture books that don't have any text, and rely on visual elements. These may be colours, patterns, symbols or pictures. Learning to 'read' pictures, colours and symbols and understand their meaning in context, is an important part of becoming visually literate.

Sharing stories bilingually and with signing shows that humans can speak both with their hands and their mouths. Children learn that there are many different languages that we can share with each other. Songs and rhymes incorporating words and phrases from languages other than English are not only fun for children to learn and say, but welcoming to children who speak languages other than English.

When stories are told dramatically or acted out, children learn that as well as spoken words, there are gestures, movements and facial expressions that convey meaning.

The best way then to promote literacy in children, is to read, sing, tell, act, draw, sign, rap, act, dance stories, inside, outside, at home, in bed, at the table, in the car, at the library, at bedtime, dinnertime, playtime, anytime, anywhere, any place and often.

© Morgan Schatz Blackrose 2011

<http://www.schatzblackrose.com>

References

Tell Me: Storytelling as a Global Language

© Morgan Schatz Blackrose 2008

*Storytelling Preparation Guide for Teachers,
Guide To Being A Good Storyteller*

Talkabout: raps and rhymes songs and stories
promoting speech and language development in
children.

© Morgan Schatz Blackrose 2008

*Ten Telling Tips for Terrific Talkers,
Performance Guidelines for Building Self Esteem
in Children*

Mouthmovers: raps and rhymes songs and stories

© Morgan Schatz Blackrose 2011

*A storyteller's Duty of Care
Why Storytelling?*

www.schatzblackrose.com

*What is the best way of promoting literacy in
young children?*

*Children, Early Reading and a Literate Australia
- the Role of Australian Public Libraries* ALIA
Public Libraries Summit – Public Libraries
Australia Presentation Paper, by Sylvia Marshall,
Chair, PLA and Geoff Stempel, Deputy Chair,
PLA, Australia, 2009