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Topic: **Build skills to promote child development and learning and lead to life and school success.**

Wright, C., Diener, M. L., & Kemp, J. L. (2013). Storytelling dramas as a community building activity in an early childhood classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41, 197-210. doi: 10.1007/s10643-012-0544-7

Context

The use of storytelling drama activities provide children with the opportunity to dictate their own stories, act out those stories, and share experiences and ideas with one another. Being able to engage in peer interactions and collaboration assists children with fostering healthy social and emotional development. As noted in Wright, Diener, and Kemp (2013), engaging in sociodramatic play provides children with opportunities to solve problems, deal with conflict, conquer fears, adopt new perspectives, regulate emotions, and practice self-regulation skills. However, little research has examined the drama aspect of the storytelling process and how it may promote group social interactions and classroom community building.

Purpose of the Article

The intent of the article was to describe storytelling dramas as a community building experience for preschool children. More specifically, researchers sought to answer, “How does the process of storytelling dramas influence group social interaction and community dynamics?” Wright et al. (2013) used a qualitative interpretive analysis to examine videotapes of 20 storytelling sessions in one preschool classroom that enrolled 22 children 3 to 5 years of age over a 6 month period of time.

Storytelling Process

The study focused on the drama process based on the storytelling procedure of Vivian Paley’s work (see Child Care Collection, 1999; Paley 1990; Wright et al., 2008). Researchers trained teachers and assistants on how to use Paley’s storytelling method prior to data collection. As

part of the weekly preschool curriculum, teachers collected stories for each child during learning centers and then assisted children in dramatizing stories; this activity was considered an optional activity during learning centers. Each child who wanted to be involved recited his/her story as the teacher wrote down what the child said; the teacher then reread the story aloud to the child. After the stories had been written, the class would act out the stories written that day during whole group time. The teacher would read the story aloud to the class. The author (e.g., the child) would chose his/her role in the act, chose classmates for other roles, and then act out the story as it was read aloud. This process generally lasted 20 to 30 minutes and took place toward the end of the day.

Results

Researchers used qualitative methods (e.g., observation, note-taking, video recording, interviewing, journaling) to analyze group interactions of children during the storytelling dramas. A total of four themes emerged from the data of storytelling dramas. The themes aligned with community building and included: (a) Individual Roles, (b) Group Membership, (c) Inclusion, and (d) Relationship Building.

Individual Roles

A total of 20 of the 22 enrolled children told and directed stories or volunteered to act in the dramas while all children were observed being members of the audience. Children engaged in the roles of storyteller, audience, and actor which provided numerous opportunities to participate and contribute to the community.

Group Membership

Through the storytelling and drama process,

children learned to value the ideas of others, contribute to stories, and experiment with peer strategies. Children also learned to become valued members of the group through problem solving and negotiating roles. These experiences could assist children in feeling that their own ideas are valued among their peers thus creating a sense of belonging among members of the group.

Inclusion

The class consisted of a mixed age group with great developmental diversity. Children were able to engage in the activity based on his/her individual interests and ability levels. Storytelling dramas allowed children to learn about others' individual abilities and appreciate the differences of others.

Relationship Building

Through the elements of storytelling and dramatization, children shared meaningful experiences and learned to show appreciation of others' experiences and ideas. As children participated, they engaged in laughter, discussion, the sharing of emotional experiences, joy, and appreciation of one another.

Discussion

Storytelling and drama conducted within the classroom as an optional activity for children provided a unique opportunity to interact with peers as a group to build relationships and develop a sense of community. The dramas included pretend play and incorporated the ideas, participation, and cooperation of the class as a group.

How to Use this Article

For Instructors

This article provides a great example of how to engage children in various forms of learning experiences that promote various parts of development. Scholars could read this article and works by Vivian Paley to learn about the storytelling method and then engage in the method within small groups to be later acted out for the class. Afterwards, the class could engage in whole group discussion for how this activity could be incorporated into the curriculum.

For Practitioners

The storytelling method could be implemented within the preschool classroom with the current curriculum. Teachers could video record their students and share their experiences with the children and their families.

This activity includes all children and can be modified to meet the needs of children with varying abilities.

References

- Child Care Collection. (1999). *Guide to Vivian Paley and the boy who could tell stories*. Muncie, IN: Ball State University.
- Paley, V. G. (1990). *The boy who would be a helicopter: The use of storytelling in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wright, C., Bacigalupa, C., Black, T., & Burton, M. (2008). Windows into children's thinking: A guide to storytelling and dramatization. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35, 363-369.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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