



RESEARCH

Independent, published research on the positive link
between oral storytelling and academic success

"Oh, Yeah? Says Who?" By KENDALL HAVEN, PhD.

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Dozens of books proclaim storytelling works classroom wonders. Hundreds extol the unsurpassed benefits of story. However, such vague and sweeping claims leave questions and doubts swirling in their wake. Does rigorous research support the contention that storytelling is a powerful and effective tool for classroom teaching?

I wrote my book, *Story Proof*, to present evidence supporting the use of story. Here, I focus on research supporting storytelling with six reasons for teachers to make storytelling a greater part of teaching. Remember, these are just demitasse sips from the great mug of relevant research. The International Storytelling Center holds the complete research files.

Storytelling improves student comprehension.

- Lehr and Osborn (see references) showed storytelling is far easier for students to comprehend than the same information presented in expository forms.
- Trostle compared storytelling to story reading by measuring both vocabulary development and comprehension. She found telling stories to primary grade students improved vocabulary and comprehension faster.
- Cooper found student comprehension scores were 50 percent higher for information presented in story form than for similar information presented in expository forms. The Texas Education Association and
- National Reading Panel reinforced these findings.

Storytelling improves logical thinking and cross curriculum learning.

- From Polkinghorne, "Storytelling has value in science, therapy, history, fiction, natural science, human science, etc. Storytelling is universal." Research indicates math skills increase when young children are exposed to storytelling. In addition, storytelling skills predate, and are precursors to, logical thinking development.
- Coles tested college pre-med students finding, "Stories enhanced and accelerated virtually every measurable aspect of learning." Dozens of prominent researchers confirmed this through their individual studies.

Storytelling improves literacy and language mastery.

- Mello reported on ten major studies of elementary students. "Each study documented storytelling enhanced literacy."
- Cliatt and Shaw concluded, "The relationship of storytelling and successful children's literacy development is well established."
- Snow and Burns' examination concluded, "Recently the efficacy of early storytelling exposure has been scientifically validated. It has been shown to work to develop language skills."
- Bransford and Brown demonstrated early oral language activity (storytelling and story listening) is key to development of various brain centers which control language recognition, word generation, speech, and reading.

~Over~

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Storytelling improves student writing success.

- Engel concluded, "Storytelling is an essential precursor to mastery of expository and logical forms." Moss and Stott added, "Grade school students were better able to ... construct all forms of narratives after exposure to storytelling."
- Studies prove teaching storytelling structure to students improves writing skills for all types of writing. Simply listening to told stories teaches effective narrative structure to students.

Storytelling enhances student memory.

- Murdock says, "Memory plays a central role in cognitive processes of attention, perception, problem solving, thinking, and reasoning."
- Schank found that index labels controlling memory processes in the minds of listeners are triggered by storytelling. Forty other studies agree. Delivering key information in story form improves student ability to remember and to accurately recall information.

Storytelling improves oral language mastery and ability.

- Cooper concluded from industry leader surveys, ". . . researchers have found potential employers want their employees to have mastered two aspects of literacy often omitted from school curricula: listening and speaking."
- Kahan stated, "Storytelling is increasingly seen as an important tool for communicating explicit and especially tacit knowledge, not just information, but know-how."
- Numerous other studies link oral language skill development to reading and writing skill development. Work in any one of these language arts areas develops them all.

Conclusions

Any curriculum information will be learned better and more effectively if presented within the context of stories. Teachers can easily mold and adapt storytelling processes to fit their abilities, material, and students. Involving students early and often with storytelling, story listening, story reading, and story writing improves logical thinking and mathematical thinking as well as comprehension and writing skills. Is storytelling a powerful and effective tool for your classroom? "Not only, yes, but, hell, yes!"

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