

The Effects of Storytelling Experiences  
On Vocabulary Skills  
Of Second Grade Students

A Research Paper  
Presented to the  
Faculty of the Library Science Department

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Success in school has been measured largely by grades and academic achievement tests. Success on academic achievement tests has been largely based on the student's facility for using language. Thus, the acquisition and use of words has enhanced and become a predictor of one's aptitude for future learning.

Language has been acquired in many different ways. A child's first and primary way of learning language occurred through listening to and imitating oral language of parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and other persons already skilled in language use. Listening played an important role in acquiring language through hearing stories, reading books, and using other media. While many ways of gaining vocabulary and language skill involved visual stimulation, listening to tales from a storyteller does not. The listener would bring the story being told into his or her mind and image the events, characters, plot, excitement, sadness, etc. The use of the language would paint pictures, evoke emotion, develop empathy, and totally absorb the listener. The impact of the story upon the listener and the teller would form a strong connecting bond.

Storytelling was an ancient means of communication. It began before recorded history and has been without physical boundaries. The early teller fulfilled basic social and individual needs. Preservation of history, the telling of beginnings, and a need for entertainment all were a part of the storyteller's call (Baker and Greene, 1977). The first written record of storytelling exists in the Egyptian Tales of Magicians. During the Middle Ages, minstrels and troubadours traveled bringing news

from one castle to another, one town to the next, sharing stories from one land and people to another. Written language and especially the advent of movable type brought versions of these old tales to more people. But the decline in storytelling began then also (Baker, 1979). Now storytelling has become an art of communication rather than a necessary means of communication. This art form has been endangered by many forces in modern society. Television and other forms of visual media, radio and other forms of audio media, have been primary among these forces. This technology negated the need to concentrate on and understand precise language in order to derive meaning from a story. The viewer relied on visual images, sound, and context developing material to grasp the story message. Thus, the listener or viewer has not been challenged to develop vocabulary and language usage skills. These skills are likely to increase reading comprehension in an academic setting.

Storytelling for this paper meant telling a story to an audience without using a book, other printed materials, puppets or other props. The stories have come from the general category, "folktales". The following definitions come from the 5th Annual Oswego County Storytelling Contest (1985).

**FOLKTALES:** All forms of narratives, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the ages. They have no known authors,...but many collectors and compilers.

**FAIRYTALES:** A particular type of folktale that takes place in an unreal world without definite locality or time....Contains elements of magic and supernatural happenings. Sometimes called a "wonder tale"....

**MYTHS:** A myth has been a narrative that tells of origin, explains natural or social phenomena, or suggests the destiny of humans through the interaction of people and supernatural beings.

...

LEGEND: Purports to be an account of an extraordinary happening believed to have actually occurred....Many American Indian Stories are called "legends." These "legends" may include myths and how-and-why stories (pourquoi stories)....

TALL TALES: Tales of lies and exaggerations - sometimes considered folktales, but actually many are not....

FABLES: An animal tale with an acknowledged moral purpose. The moral purpose has been the essential quality which distinguishes the fable from other animal tales...(pp. 1, 2).

### Problem Statement

Would second grade students at Lowell School, Waterloo, Iowa, who were taught storytelling techniques and given opportunities to practice these techniques increase their performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Primary Battery, Test V-Vocabulary, when compared to the national norms of the same test. The researcher predicted that there would be no significant difference in the standard scores at .05 level on the ITBS Primary Battery, Test V-Vocabulary, between students who had been taught storytelling techniques and given opportunities to practice these techniques when compared to the national norms of that same test.

This study has been predicated on an assumption that helping second grade students learn how to tell stories, providing them opportunities to become proficient in this art, and developing these same students as listeners for each other's stories would increase the students' vocabulary and possibly their reading comprehension. As a supplementary measure, the students' scores on the Reading Comprehension section of this test were also compared.

This study had several limitations. The intervention was for a 6 months period only. A more intense or longer time period might have influenced the results. Lowell School's population in October, 1986, was primarily lower socioeconomic and contained about 380 students of which

approximately 36% were minority. The second grade at the beginning of the intervention had 70 students in 3 classes. The population at Lowell School has been very mobile. From past experience it was probable that about 15% of the second grade population in November would not be attending this center by April. This mobility combined with population characteristics could make it difficult to replicate this study or to generalize the results. The classroom teachers characterized the members of this second grade class as good workers who for the most part were not easily discouraged. The participants were volunteers whose entry reading levels were determined by the ITBS scores and classroom reading placement.

One of the goals of the library media program in the Waterloo elementary schools has been to encourage reading and promote growth in communication skills. This study will help determine the benefits, or lack thereof, to students in becoming storytellers, and whether this activity would be an appropriate role of the library media program. Possible outcomes may be the continuation of the storytelling program with close monitoring for a second year and beyond, inservice for other library media specialists interested in the program, video presentations on the school or the community service television channel, or a decision that the results of the program did not warrant the time required to implement. While the library media curriculum has incorporated new and developing technology, reestablishing the simple technique of storytelling, in an expanded way, could prove a valuable resource for achieving the reading and communication goal.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Even though storytelling has declined since the time of Guttenberg, in the late 1800's and early 1900's storytelling became an intregal part of library programs for adults and children. Until recently, the majority of emphasis has been on telling stories to children. That is, without benefit of written text, the teller told a tale, and the child listened. However, the 1980's storyteller has an adult audience as well. Lewis Carroll said that stories are love gifts (Baker and Greene, 1977). Storytelling exists today as a form of entertainment, an art form, a link with our past heritage, and a way of sharing literature (Baker, 1979). Storytelling is an act of creation between the teller and the listener (Baker and Greene, 1977). Each time a story is told, it is being written for the first time (Shannon, 1979).

#### The "Why" of Storytelling

Benefits claimed for the child as listener of storytelling include a heightened awareness of self, a sense of wonder, and a maturing of the spirit self, while at the same time, sharing an experience that draws people closer together (Baker and Greene, 1977). Cone and Hall (1976) say that storytelling is the art of giving joy and instruction through word pictures. It gives the child the opportunity to know the best in literature, make constructive use of make-believe, enrich vocabulary and to make worthy use of leisure time. Children listening to stories are actively involved as the mind must see the characters, events, setting, and mood of the story (Stewig, 1975). "Hearing stories gives children practice in visualization which is the basis of creative imagination



which appears to have a positive effect on social and cognitive development" (Baker and Greene, 1977, p. 21). Baker and Greene (1977) go on to say that listening to folktales gives insight into the motives and patterns of human behavior and keeps alive the cultural heritage of a people. While the teller builds scenes with words, through imagination listeners interpret, visualize and develop vocabulary skills in a painless manner (Wilcox, 1981).

Arbuthnot and Taylor (1970) give four reasons to read aloud and tell stories to children: (a) to develop and deepen their enjoyment of literature; (b) to help them achieve competence in language arts; (c) to promote their psychological well-being; and (d) to expand their social awareness. Through hearing stories, they state, attention spans increase, words and phrases are incorporated into daily speech and syntax patterns are acquired and used. Through enjoying the literature they hear, children not only pick up hundreds of new words, but become aware of how words in combinations can express a wide array of ideas and feelings. When listening to a story told, children are making connections between the communication skills of reading, writing and speaking. They tell of a remedial reading teacher in California who began a project with fourth, fifth and sixth graders to strengthen their self-image and promote success in reading. A volunteer group of 20 boys and girls learned first to read aloud and then to tell fairly easy-to-read stories. The students met as a group, practiced, and talked with an adult writer and a story teller. The students went to other classrooms to read and to tell stories to other children. The results of the project showed that the students began to overcome reading

difficulties, to build self-confidence, and to generate enthusiasm about books (Arbuthnot and Taylor, 1970). Folktales offer society language in its prime, giving the listeners an opportunity to discover themselves and their surroundings. Telling fairy tales and folk tales is both entertainment and a venture into reality. Through storytelling one can travel vicariously through all human emotions and situations, thus increasing awareness of the world and each other (Shannon, 1979). The child listener becomes a caring individual. "To listen to and tell stories is to travel in such worlds and is an exercise for imagination--for creativity" (Shannon, 1979, p.2). Shannon (1979) also said:

While reading is taught, it is often difficult for children to move beyond the rote memory skill aspects of word identification and the sounding of syllables. To read well and for enjoyment one must be able to visualize and hear the words and events described. ... Through listening and, hopefully, sharing tales one comes to hear the language--to give life to the words they read on paper (p. 3).

The sound of words forming a rhythmic pattern encourages the art of listening and leads children to books. Through the told story, children can experience a whole piece of literature. Listening to stories introduces patterns of language and extends vocabulary (Baker and Greene, 1977).

So far, this review has concentrated on the values of listening to stories told by adults to children. However, there have been a few hints concerning values that accrue to the teller, whether child or adult, and some special values for the child as storyteller. Dorothy Strickland (1971) during research at New York University showed that black kindergarten children, who speak non-standard English, expanded their

language ability significantly. Experimental and control groups were both read to daily. After the reading, the experimental group participated in an oral language activity, while the control group's activity did not seek oral language participation by the children. Each classroom was provided with fifty books which met certain criteria. The teachers of the experimental group received additional training in specific techniques for reading aloud and the use of related oral language activities. Both groups were given the Education Study Center Bidialectal Task for Determining Language Proficiency In Economically Disadvantaged Negro Children in October and again in May. Analysis of covariance was performed on the posttest results of the standard repetitions on the Bidialectal Task, using the pretest scores as the covariate. This analysis revealed a significant F ratio favoring the experimental group beyond the .01 level (p. 1406-A).

Farrell (1982) reports "Williams & Maler state ...'that storytelling is a bona fide educational activity.' But there is little documented evidence that storytelling, no matter how inviting to the child, has any particular effect or educational value" (p. 1). Bellon (1981), reporting on a study by Carol Chomsky, stated "children with more reading experience tended to be at a higher stage of linguistic development" (p. 33). Chomsky (1969) investigated the acquisition of syntactic structure in children between the ages of five and ten. A sample of 40 children was interviewed using completing tasks, playing games, and answering questions. Bellon (1981) also mentions Lenneberg's research that indicated the preschool and elementary years seem to be the really critical time for acquiring language skills.

"Storytelling and picture book programs do make a contribution to language development. Research has not only shown a growth in vocabulary development, but an improvement in the ability to produce complex sentences" (Bellon, 1981, p. 34). Hearing books and stories provides colorful words chosen for specificity and vocabulary richness. A variety of sentence types provide linguistic richness. Children can become active users of language and personalize literature and communications when stories provide a base for using language (Bellon, 1981, p. 35).

Cohen (1968) in her dissertation felt that children's weakness of motivation and inadequate readiness for reading may be attributed to (a) a lack of experience with books as a source of pleasure, and (b) an inadequacy of language because of a lack of variety in experiences.

Specifically, the objectives of her research were:

1. To increase and strengthen the vocabulary of socially disadvantaged children at the second-grade level as a means of preparing them better for effective experiences in reading.
2. To offer socially disadvantaged children experience with books as a source of pleasure in order to stimulate and deepen their desire to read.
3. Through strengthening verbal readiness and heightening motivation to read, to increase the actual achievement in reading of children of culturally limited backgrounds who tend to fall behind in reading and therefore in academic achievement (p.209).

Working with 580 second graders in twenty classes in seven "Special Service" schools in New York City, Cohen (1968) prepared a list of fifty books chosen to fit judged criteria that the experimental group teachers would use in daily reading and follow up activities. The control group was read to occasionally following the teacher's usual practice. Following October and June testing with two vocabulary tests, the experimental group showed significant increases in vocabulary, word

knowledge, and reading comprehension. The experimental group narrowly missed significance of superiority in quality of vocabulary. Conclusions were:

The slower the children are in academic progress, the more difficult it is for them to deal with words in isolation, unrelated to a totally meaningful experience. Vocabulary thus appears to be learned best by young children in a context of emotional and intellectual meaning....Levels of competency in comprehension, oral language, and reading are interrelated, but facility in the last, i.e., the use of symbols, seems to be dependent on facility in...oral language and comprehension....The relationship believed to exist between oral language and reading has been confirmed. At the same time, it has been shown that primary grade children retarded in reading strengthen their language power when language learning is incidentally associated with experiences of intellectual and emotional meaning for the age and stage of development of the child (Cohen, 1968, pp. 213, 217).

Shannon (1979) says that the storyteller learns the patterns and rhythms of language that do succeed in the telling of a particular story. Listening to stories sharpens a child's ability to find the best words for that story. Children acquire language by using language (King, 1979).

Another study (Nagy and Herman, 1985) that was aimed at learning how to increase the size of students' vocabulary and increase their ability to comprehend text pitted incidental learning against the instructional approach. The writers found that regular and sustained reading can lead to substantial gains in vocabulary. The reading vocabulary rate of an average child grows at the rate of 3,000 words per year between grades 3-12. There is a 6,000 word gap between a child at the 25th and the 50th percentile for grades 4-12. A low vocabulary student would need to gain 4,000 to 5,000 plus 3,000 words to catch up. Only a few hundred words per year are actually taught. Most children must acquire the bulk of

vocabulary knowledge apart from the specific instruction. The most significant source of this vocabulary gain is not under the school's control. It comes from the speech of parents and peers. "Many believe that incidental learning of words from context while reading is, or at least can be, the major mode of vocabulary growth once children have really begun to read" (p. 17). Much of the incidental word learning that makes up the bulk of children's vocabulary growth in the pre-school and pre-reading years, especially word meanings, might be oral context learning. Since the bulk of a child's vocabulary growth occurs incidentally, outside of situations devoted to word learning, the most important goal of vocabulary instruction should be to increase the quantity of incidental word learning by students.

Successful vocabulary instruction in increasing comprehension is richer than the simple definitional approach. Nagy and Herman (1985) advocate two approaches for successful vocabulary instruction: (a) to increase the students' ability to profit from potential word learning situations outside of instruction and (b) to increase childrens' opportunities to learn. It should occur with (a) multiple exposure to words, (b) exposure to words in meaningful contexts, (c) rich and varied information about each word, (d) establishment of ties between instructed words and experience or prior knowledge, and (e) an active role by students in the word-learning process. "Although hard experimental evidence is not at hand...reading itself can be an effective way of increasing reading comprehension" (p. 19). It should also increase general knowledge and practice in various reading skills.

Cone and Hall (1976) developed a mini-course in California to teach

seventh graders to tell stories to primary students. They found that in telling a story the child learns to use oral expression in a clear, forceful manner. The child also arranges thoughts so events follow in a proper sequence. Baker and Greene (1977) say that children who are storytellers gain confidence in speaking before a group, learn to express their thoughts clearly, and come to appreciate the power of words.

Lucille Thomas (1981), one of the originators of the First Annual City-Wide Storytelling contest, sponsored by the Center for Library, Media, and Telecommunications of the New York City Board of Education, listed the goals for the storytellers from grades 3-6 as (a) to improve the student's ability to read, (b) to foster creative language growth, (c) to heighten a student's appreciation of literature, (d) to stimulate the student's imagination, and (e) to expand the student's knowledge of other cultures, times and experiences" (p. 29). "Storytellers developed the qualities of the creative artist - imagination, perception, insight, enthusiasm, spontaneity, and concentration" (Thomas, 1981, p. 29).

Stewig (1975) claims that one of the values of hearing stories is that it provides stimulus for children's tellings.

The goals for the Oswego County, N.Y. (5th Annual...1985) storytelling contest are much like those of the NYC contest, that is (a) to improve students' ability to read, (b) to foster creative language growth, (c) to heighten students' appreciation of literature, (d) to develop and enhance the student's listening and memorization skills, (e) to increase student's self-esteem, and (f) to develop poise and confidence in speaking before a group.

During the search of the literature on storytelling and vocabulary

growth, the researcher was struck by the repeated statements concerning the lack of empirical evidence on the benefits of either storytelling by adults to children, or storytelling by children themselves. The study by Farrell and Nessel (1982) is the most pertinent that this researcher found. A three year grant in 1975 permitted Farrell and Nessel (1982) to develop a program called Word Weaving: a Storytelling Workbook. This workbook combined storytelling method and materials and arranged the story material in a progressive order. "Overall, the existing research on stories and listener's responses to stories does not address the question of how stories told frequently (not read aloud) may affect listeners" (p. 11-12). A professional storyteller told the first story in the classrooms. The children then were each individually asked to retell the story to a researcher who recorded the telling. "Pickert and Chase suggest that having a child retell a story provides a better measure of language abilities than general observation and better than post-story questions for measuring comprehension" (Farrell and Nessel, 1982, p. 11). The control group did not hear another story told until the end of the study. The experimental group's teachers, K-3, were taught to tell stories and did so on a regular basis in their classrooms. At the end of the study, all the children were again told a story of similar type as the first and again asked to retell the story to be recorded by the researcher. The retold stories were analyzed for fluency, vocabulary, descriptive language, and recall. The results suggest a positive effect on children's ability to compose new stories based on stories they had heard, including new elements. The experimental group of children were enthusiastic about stories and



spontaneously asked to tell their own stories. That the experimental group improved to a greater extent than the control group, but not at a significant level, in fluency, vocabulary, and recall may be due to the small sample. In addition, children may need several years of exposure to the program. "Teachers who used Word Weaving in this study unanimously attested to storytelling's benefits on children's oral language development, comprehension and understanding of story. Developing a sense of story gives the child clues to language structure and predictability of outcome" (Farrell and Nessel, 1982, p. 21).

### The "How" of Storytelling

#### Selecting the Story

There have been as many different ways suggested for adults to learn to tell stories as there are adult storytellers. Methods for learning stories must be adapted by each person attempting to learn them. Fewer writers focus on learning stories by children, but many of the techniques were similar for both age groups. The constant found in all methods was that the teller must like the story chosen to tell. The story should also have been one the teller wanted to share. Stewig (1975) suggested the teacher read several stories and choose one. However, when readers of limited ability, i.e., second grade students, were involved, reading several, or even knowing several to choose to read would be problematic. Having a list or sample of books and stories for the beginner to choose from was helpful here. Testing the selected story by reading it aloud and listening to it helped the student hear whether a story "tells" well (5th Annual..., 1985). The Oswego contest directions also suggested that stories appropriate for beginners should be short and/or with a straight

forward plot.

A story should have picturesque language, a strong plot with an easy-to-follow sequence, believable characters, and a satisfying ending. Cone and Hall (1976) suggest that the story should contain action or dramatic qualities or emotional appeal and that it should have an interesting beginning and a strong, satisfying conclusion. Stories should be strong in characterization, plot or humor and stir a definite emotion, i.e. inspire, amuse, enlighten, or persuade. Rhythm, repetition, suspense and action are story elements to look for when selection was made.

Finally, Rollins (1981) asked if the story would bring enjoyment? The ability to select stories grows with experience and age. Experienced storytellers who have a repertoire will select a story to tell that is suited to the group of listeners and the occasion (Cone and Hall, 1976). The Oswego guidelines (5th Annual...1985) suggest that to test whether the story selected is the one the teller wants to tell, it should be read aloud five times in a short period of time. If the teller still thinks it is a good story, it probably is. The teller should read the story SLOWLY once and time it. Frequently a story has to fit in a certain time period.

### Learning the Story

Word-by-word memorization of the whole story is not encouraged by any source, although memorization of key words and/or phrases is. For instance, the listener to Jack and the Beanstalk might disengage from the story if the Giant said something other than "Fee, fie, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman." Several different techniques have been

suggested for learning the story. Reading the story out loud two to three times a day, especially just before going to sleep was one of the suggestions from Oswego (5th Annual...1985). Visualization of the story was the important step in Farrell's Word Weaving (1983). She suggested blocking out the structure of the story. Oswego (5th Annual...1985) puts it this way, "Try to visualize (SEE) the action of your story in a series of pictures (like a filmstrip). Think about: 1. what is happening?. 2. what happens next?" (p.56). Taping the story and listening or practicing with the tape is suggested by several sources. The most important action after the story is minimally learned is to tell it to self, friends, parents and anyone else who will listen.

### Telling the Story

After a story has been selected, learned, and practiced, it is time to begin telling to an audience. Several factors must be considered when telling a story. Usually the story and teller need to be introduced. The introduction may include the teller's name, the title of the story, and where the story comes from, i.e., country, story collection, book, or tradition. The introduction may need to include the type of story to be told. Is it a myth, tall tale, or fairy tale? The teller should also pause before beginning the story and think of the first line.

The teller needs to focus on five major factors during the telling; voice, poise, eye contact, timing, and enunciation and pronunciation (5th Annual...1985, p. 6). Voice includes using an expressive flexible voice, a low-pitched tone, projecting so that all can hear, conserving and controlling breathing. Poise consists of eliminating distracting mannerisms and purposeless movement, relaxing, remembering that your

audience is your best friend, becoming comfortable with your audience, and enabling your audience to be at ease. Eye contact is holding your audience with your eyes and looking at different parts of the audience from time to time. Timing includes pausing, pacing and using a variety of pace, if appropriate to the story. The words need to be pronounced correctly and enunciated clearly so the audience will be able to follow the story line (5th Annual...1985, p.6). Cone and Hall (1976) suggest the following statements be used to help the young storyteller understand the principles of voice, poise, eye contact, timing, and enunciation and pronunciation: (a) I will know my story well; (b) I will talk so all can hear; (c) I will use a pleasant voice; (d) I will look at the audience; (e) I will say the words clearly; and (f) I will avoid the use of run-on sentences and the use of AND, THEN, and SO. Other statements that could be added are: (a) I will relax and avoid unnecessary movements, and (b) I will speak slowly most of the time.

Stories have been told in a myriad of settings. The setting that provides some comfort for the audience and few distractions will aid the teller and the tale. Some authorities recommend standing while telling to an audience that is seated on chairs, stairs, logs, etc. Others recommend that the teller be on a low chair and the listeners be comfortably close on the floor or ground. The teller should be able to see all the faces in the group which also means that all the group members can see the teller. While storytellers have told to very large groups, a more intimate experience is usually more conducive to the tale well told by a beginner. A calm atmosphere with eager listeners will help a young storyteller succeed.

## Chapter 3

### Procedures

During the first week of November, the library media specialist introduced storytelling to all students in second grade classrooms at Lowell School in Waterloo, Iowa. The history and origin of the art was briefly described. The media specialist told Slip Slop Gobble from the book by Jeanne Hardendorff. This cumulative tale was about a parrot and a cat who are good friends. Since they both live alone the parrot suggested that they begin fixing dinner for one another on a turn and turn-about basis. The cat prepared a skimpy dinner the first night. The parrot decided to show by example what a good dinner should be and prepared a sumptuous meal. When all the food was eaten by the cat, the cat became greedy, wanted more, and ate the parrot. The cat then went down the road eating whatever she came upon, until she ate two land crabs who cut her side open and freed all the victims. Following the spontaneous discussion that occurred at the end of this tale, the students were offered an opportunity to join the Lowell Storytelling Team.

Students were told that the Team would learn to tell stories and have the opportunity to tell the stories to each other, other classes at school and their parents. They were then told about the expectations for each participant and the procedures for applying to participate. Names of interested students were taken and letters were prepared for the parents describing the activity and requesting permission for their child to be involved. The letter included information about the activity, time involved, the objectives, behavior expected from the student volunteer,

attendance requirements, and the need for testing in April to check the benefits of the activity. It also included a statement providing anonymity for their child in any dissemination of the results and an assurance that the parents would be given an opportunity to see any individual results for their child. (See Appendix A) A parent consent form was required for both the Waterloo Community School District and the University of Northern Iowa.

Requests were received from 51 students to take letters to their parents. Of these, 43 students returned permission slips. After taking permission slips home, 2 students moved, three slips were not returned and three parents declined to grant permission. When permissions were returned, the second grade teachers grouped the students from their classrooms so that this activity would create as little disruption as possible in the classrooms. These groups of between 8-9 students each were assigned a meeting time. The meetings took place during the students' lunch times. Students brought their lunches to the library media center, ate lunch while listening to a story, and developed their own abilities as storyteller. This period of time was about 35-40 minutes. The meetings began the first week of December and were held through March for a total of 14 meetings for each group.

#### First Session

The lunch period was divided into two parts. The students ate their lunches during the first 15 minutes. During this time students listened to the library media specialist tell the folktale The Enormous Turnip. When lunch was over the group went to a carpeted area and sat in a circle on the floor. All persons introduced themselves and told one favorite

activity or hobby (Shapiro, 1978). Then a relaxation activity was held. This includes slowly rotating the head, shoulders, wrists, and ankles from top to bottom and then from bottom to top. When the relaxation activity was over, the group was in "Storyland". To practice speaking in front of a group, each student told an experience tale; a time when he or she was happy, sad, excited, scared, etc. One minute was allowed for each teller. In the time remaining, a memory game was played, i.e., "When I was going to the library I took a..." with each student adding an item. Students who missed repeating the list of items, as the group built it, were out of the game. This activity helped promote concentration and develop memory skills in the participants. At the conclusion of the lunch period, the students were dismissed with hall behavior expectations firmly in mind. The students joined their class at the assigned recess door.

### Second Session

The second session began in the same manner, except that the story told during the lunch time was a participation type. The library media specialist told "Udala Tree" from Twenty Tellable Tales, Audience Participation Folktales for the beginning Storyteller by Margaret Read MacDonald. The students were first taught a chant that occurs several times during this story and to say the chant at appropriate times. The relaxation activity to take us to Storyland was after the group went to the carpeted area. During the second session, the students were given a nursery rhyme and asked to read or say it in a different manner. They choose the manner and stated it to the group before presenting the nursery rhyme. Suggested manners were as a baby, a witch, a monster, an

old person, a whiny child, etc. The student could not choose the same manner as the two persons before them. Children of this age sometimes want to do just what everyone else is doing. The two person statement insured that at least every third manner was different. This activity gave continued practice speaking before the group and expanded the possibilities of expression.

### Third Session

The media specialist told MacDonald's "A Whale of a Tale" during the lunch portion of this session. This tale was told twice. The students were encouraged to join in the telling the second time. In this way the students were learning a story and telling it in a casual way. After the relaxation exercise, some time was used for practice in communication and observation. The students divided into pairs. They spent between 1-3 minutes looking at each other. Then with their backs to each other, each person in a pair described, in as much detail as possible, the other person in that pair. In addition to honing the students' memory skills, this activity emphasized the importance of verbal accuracy and attention to detail. A memory game "I'm going on a picnic and I will take..." was played for the remainder of this session. The students each named something that began with their first initial. In this way, the idea of having a memory aid was introduced.

### Fourth Session

These sessions took place during the first week after the Winter Holiday Break. During the lunch portion of the session, students listened to two stories from the record Eskimo Songs and Stories compiled and recorded by Lorraine Donoghue Koranda. The first story was "The Three Brothers".



The second was "The Greedy Boy" and was a variation of "Whale of a Tale" that the media specialist had told during the third session. A few minutes were spent discussing how the two versions were the same and different. The library media specialist noted that when stories are told the same exact words are seldom used in subsequent tellings. A group of books and/or stories had been collected by the media specialist. The stories were short and/or repetitive and easy to learn for beginners. (See Appendix B). A letter had been prepared for parents that included "How to Learn a Story" (Shapiro, 1978). The library media specialist went over this section with the students. Choosing a story that the student really likes was emphasized. The library media specialist demonstrated how to draw the scenes from a story so that the storyteller can better visualize the story. With group input, the first several scenes from "The Gingerbread Boy" were drawn on the blackboard. Students spent the rest of the time looking at and skimming the books and/or stories. Most students chose one to learn. Since selection of a story that the teller really likes is paramount to success in telling, this activity was scheduled as part of two sessions. Students were asked to follow the instructions in "How to Learn a Story" and told that if by the next session, they did not still like the story they had selected, time would be available to change stories. The library media specialist consulted with each team member to be certain that the story chosen was one the student liked. Students were asked also to take the letter to their parent. (See Appendix C)

#### Fifth Session

The session began with the students listening to a recording of two

stories from Hopi Tales told by Jack Moyles. The two stories were a 'pour qoi' story "The Sun Callers" and another tale entitled "The Coyote's Needle". After a brief discussion, the library media specialist asked the students how many really liked the stories they had selected the week before. After ascertaining that some of the students liked their stories, the students who had not responded positively were asked why they did not like their stories. Responses included that the story was too long, boring, hard to learn, didn't understand the story and others. These students selected other stories to learn. Ideas on learning to tell stories were reviewed and expanded. Knowing the whole story, inclusion of sufficient details to make the story real to the listener, use of voice, poise, eye-contact, timing, enunciation and pronunciation are all needed for a good telling. A discussion about critiquing each other's stories was held. Students were told that in the next session volunteers would start to tell their stories to the group. A critique would follow each story. During the critique, the group will answer these questions. "What did the teller do well?" and "How can the story be improved?" During some of the sessions that week, a few students began to tell their stories. No one got past the beginning sentence. We once again discussed that the opening and closing should be memorized even though the rest of the story does not need to be. Because the stories were not really told, critiques were not done. Students were assured that it probably would take more than one practice to be able to tell their whole story. Students were also told that we would start with volunteers but that eventually everyone would need to try to tell their story. We also discussed the qualities of being a good listener or

audience - especially attentiveness and a quiet voice and body.

### Sixth Session

The session began with an explanation of the term 'noodle-head' story. This type of story demonstrates what can happen when people do not use their brains but act as though their heads were full of noodles instead. The stories are world-wide. Students were asked to think of any times that they had acted like noodle-heads. The library media specialist then told the tale "Epamamondis" which is from the American South. Following the lunch portion of the session, the students practiced the relaxation exercise. Following this exercise, one student from each daily group told or began to tell his/her story. Following the storytelling, the group was asked what did the teller do well. Children volunteered comments like, "I could understand all the words in the story." or "She did not speak too fast." or "He knew the whole story.," etc. Then the group was asked how could the teller improve the story the next time she/he tells the story. Comments like "She needs to sit still," or "He should look at the audience more." were common. During the time that the story was being told, the library media specialist was following the printed version of the story, coaching if necessary, and filling out the critique form. (See Appendix D) Student comments were also entered on the critique form. One student moved out of town this week.

### Seventh Session

The total length of time for the storytelling groups was 35 minutes for the Monday and Tuesday groups and 40 minutes for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday's groups. A small part of this time was taken for getting

lunch and going to the library media center. Some of the children slowed down their eating considerably if they were listening to a story. Between 15 and 20 minutes was needed for individual practice time which allowed 2 children to tell all or part of their stories. A decision was made that the library media specialist would not tell a story to the group for several sessions until every student had a chance to tell their stories once. The students were able to finish their lunches in 15 minutes. This corresponds to the time allowed in the lunchroom for eating. After lunch was eaten, the students relaxed and then reviewed good audience techniques. That is, a listener needs a quiet mouth and body and eyes on the teller. Two students from the Thursday group moved to other schools this week.

#### Eighth Session

Because the library media specialist needed to follow the story as students told, it was very important that storytellers brought their stories with them to their group. Several other behaviors, not anticipated, emerged as important to the success of the groups. Consequently, a chart listing these behaviors was made for each group and a point system developed by the library media specialist. A copy of the chart has been included in the appendix. (See Appendix E) Points could be earned by each for remembering the book or story, finishing lunch within the allotted time, being a good listener, telling the story to the storytelling group, and telling the story to an "outside" group, i.e., a group of people other than the storytelling group. The point system was in effect for four sessions beginning with the ninth session. One point per week could be earned for the first three behaviors. An additional

point could be earned for telling to the storytelling group, although not everyone could earn this point each week, and three points were given for telling to the "outside" group. A sticker was given each week to any student who (a) remembered his or her book or story (one could not tell to the group without it), (b) finished lunch on time and (c) was a good listener. Any student who earned 14 or more points over the four-week period was given a gold button with a drawing of a boy and a girl with lettering that said "Lowell Storyteller". Lowell's school colors are blue and gold. This system helped solve the problems of forgotten books, dawdling over lunch and not being a good listener. Some students had been given photocopies of their story. If the photocopy was lost, it was replaced one time. However, after the second loss, the photocopy was not replaced. This resulted in that student not telling a story, but the student did continue to come to story telling.

It appeared at this point, unless the time for the project was extended beyond 12 sessions, about one-fourth of the students would not reach the goal of telling to an outside group or, in some cases, even to their small group. The time was extended to 14 sessions but some students still did not reach this goal. Scores of these students have been identified as "non-completers" in the data analysis.

### Ninth Session

The point system was inaugurated during the eighth session. Students were receptive to the idea. Chapter I teachers were contacted about helping students in their classes learn their stories. Of the Chapter I students in the project, at this point only two had made good progress in learning their stories. The Chapter I teachers agreed to

help the students. Four students indicated that they felt ready to tell to an outside group. The point system was reviewed and implemented during this session. Also during this session, the critique was conducted by the storyteller. That is, the storyteller was put in charge of calling on others to give comments on what the teller did well and what the teller could improve. This change of technique seemed to keep the attention of all students and the comments were more meaningful to the teller. Before any teller practiced in group a second time, the previous evaluation was discussed and one or two points to improve were emphasized by the library media specialist. The conversation would go like this. "Mary, the last time you told your story your teammates thought that you maintained a good pace of telling but that you needed to learn all the story and to sit more still. Do you think you know your story better now?" Mary would usually say "Yes." "You need to try to be more relaxed and sit more still today. Are you ready to begin?" Students were encouraged to do a relaxation exercise or some deep breathing before starting.

### Tenth Session

During this week, a few students reached the point of being able to tell to an outside group. When the student and the library media specialist agreed that the student was ready to share the learned story with a class or small group of students arrangements were made for the student to do the telling. This point was determined by the library media specialist's (LMS') evaluations in which all scores were 7 or above and the storyteller felt prepared. The procedure for telling was explained to the students. First, the student indicated what grade level

he/she wanted to tell to. Then the student was given a note explaining to the classroom teacher possible times that this could be done. (See Appendix F) The telling was done in the library media center at a scheduled class time. Occasionally, the teller wanted to tell to a certain room because a sibling, relative, friend or favorite teacher was in that room. This was also specified on the note to the teacher. The note was returned to the library media specialist and entered in her daily plan book. Then the note was returned to the classroom teacher as a reminder to the teller and teacher. The library media specialist also kept track of which stories had been told to what room as several tellers were telling the same story.

#### Eleventh Session

The few students who told to an outside group during the previous week were asked to describe their experience to their teammates. The Storyteller's Self-Evaluation sheet (Appendix G) was discussed and the appropriate students asked to fill out the self-evaluation. The remaining students were informed that they would be filling these out as well. Following this week's sessions, two students who had not brought their story/book with them to any of the sessions were asked not to attend the remaining three sessions. Their behavior mandated this decision. These students were tested and their scores are included in the data analysis.

#### Twelfth Session

This session took place over a 2 week period of time. Because of teacher report card preparation time and parent-teacher conference time, 4 half days of school were missed by students. The schedule was adjusted

so that each group met once during these 2 weeks. The following week was Spring Break.

The School Community Relations Department of the Waterloo Community School District produces a half-hour program each week that airs over the school local access cable station. During this week the director of this enterprise asked if any storytellers were ready to tell for this program. Eight children who had already told their stories to outside groups were asked to participate. In addition, the library media specialist informed all parents that this was a possibility and invited concerned parents to contact the school. (See Appendix H) One of the eight children chose not to take part. The taping took place March 25, 1987 in the Administration Building studio.

#### Thirteenth and Fourteenth Sessions

During the last two sessions, students who had either not told to an outside group or practiced in group one or two times were given an opportunity to practice. Students were also informed that the storytelling sessions were over for this year. Students were still telling to outside groups through the following 2 weeks or up until the week of testing. It was obvious that the school calendar and library media specialist time would not allow a large group session with parents. The parents had been invited to come to the media center during the time their student told to the "outside group". No parents responded positively to this invitation.

#### Testing

Participants took the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills during district-wide testing in October, 1986. The Reading and Vocabulary



scores for the participants in the storytelling project were recorded. Participants were retested during the week of April 20, 1987, when the Waterloo Schools Chapter I testing is done. The researcher tested all project participants except those who are Chapter I students. They were tested by their Chapter I teacher.

Chapter I is a program funded by the federal government to provide remedial services to educationally deprived students in the areas of reading and mathematics. The program in the Waterloo Community School District remediates only in reading. A school building qualifies for funding if the number of students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program is the same or higher than the school district average. Lowell qualified as a Chapter I building during the 1986-87 school year. Once a building is designated Chapter I, every student in that building's attendance area can be considered for remediation. Students at the second grade level are included in the program (a) if they score at or below the 40 percentile on the ITBS Reading battery, (b) or on teacher recommendation or, (c) if the student is below grade level in reading. The ITBS score is weighted twice as heavily as the other two criteria. Those students with the greatest need are served first.

Scores for the April testing became available in late May. At this time the pre- and post-test scores for each student were compared to national norms using a dependent t-test, one tail.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The 40 second grade students in the project took an ITBS post-test in April, 1987. The scores of 1 student were not used because the school had no record of the Fall test scores. The students were retested with the Vocabulary and Reading Batteries. The 13 students who were also in the federally-funded Chapter I program were given the same batteries by their Chapter I teachers as part of their regularly scheduled testing program. The remaining 27 were tested by the researcher in groups of 14 and 13.

The standard score used for statistical analysis was the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE). The NCE is a standard score that has been designed so that the mean is 50 with a standard deviation of 21.06 and an effective range from 1-99. This score was developed so that the federal government could convert percentile ranks to standard scores and compare scores across different test batteries. Using this measure Congress has better access to the meaning of Chapter I test results. NCE measures the child's growth outside that growth that naturally occurs with additional months of schooling, maturity and life experience. From fall to spring testing a child would be expected to show normal growth and that child's percentile would stay at the same normal curve equivalent. Grade equivalent will increase but normal curve equivalent (normalized standard score) should stay the same.

The student scores from the storytelling project pre- and post-ITBS tests in both Reading and Vocabulary were compared using four

different population groupings. The term non-completer was used to identify students who participated in the project but did not learn a story or did not learn it to their satisfaction and chose not to tell their story to an outside group. These analyses and groupings are shown in Tables 1 and 2. A complete set of test results for all students is shown in Table 3. The statistical results were obtained using Keystat, a computer program published by Wadsworth, University of Virginia.

The statistical analysis showed that there was a significant difference at  $p < .005$  on the ITBS Primary Battery Test V-Vocabulary between students who have been taught storytelling techniques and given opportunities to practice these techniques when compared to the national norms of that same test and therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. This difference was found even though the participating students were grouped in 4 different ways. Student 21 was absent for the October vocabulary testing. This student has been included in the scores for reading but not for vocabulary.

The adjunct comparison of the students' scores on the ITBS Primary Battery Test R-Reading also showed a significant difference at  $p < .005$  for all students.

Table 1

## Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test ITBS Vocabulary NCE Scores

## All students included

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=37)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	38	46.61	18.58	-6.5	p<.005	.73
POST	38	60.32	15.79		one tail	

## All students with all Chapter I and Non-completers excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=18)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	19	55.95	19.54	-3.8	p<.005	.64
POST	19	69.11	11.17		one tail	

## All students with Chapter I completers included, all Non-completers excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=22)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	23	51.83	20.28	-4.16	p<.005	.73
POST	23	63.96	15.42		one tail	

## All students with Non-completers included, all Chapter I excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=25)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	26	52.92	18.42	-5.47	p<.005	.63
POST	26	68.23	11.01		one tail	

Table 2

## Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test ITBS Reading NCE Scores

All students included

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=38)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	39	42.33	24.73	-6.48	p<.005	.72
POST	39	60.36	15.09		one tail	

All students with all Chapter I and Non-completers excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=18)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	19	57.21	21.94	-2.33	p<0.025	.6
POST	19	66.23	13.53		one tail	

All students with Chapter I completers included, all Non-completers excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=23)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	24	49.88	24.94	-3.58	p<.005	.67
POST	24	63.67	13.46		one tail	

All students with Non-completers included, all Chapter I excluded

	<u>N</u>	<u><math>\bar{X}</math></u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t(df=25)</u>	<u>Sign</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
PRE	26	51.63	23.72	-4.01	p<.005	.64
POST	26	66.04	13.6		one tail	

Table 3

## Individual Student ITBS Comparisons

STUDENT	VOCABULARY						READING					
	OCTOBER 1986			APRIL 1987			OCTOBER 1986			APRIL 1987		
	NCE	NPR	NGE	NCE	NPR	NGE	NCE	NPR	NGE	NCE	NPR	NGE
Completers												
01	77	90	35	82	93	46	84	95	40	66	78	37
02	77	90	35	75	88	42	63	72	27	61	70	34
03	83	94	38	82	93	46	75	88	34	77	90	44
04	43	36	19	50	50	29	51	51	22	48	47	27
05	43	36	19	50	50	29	36	26	16	52	54	29
06	53	56	23	82	93	46	58	66	25	86	96	50
07	48	46	21	63	73	35	46	43	20	56	61	31
08	62	72	27	68	81	38	63	72	27	77	90	44
09	45	41	20	50	50	29	52	54	23	61	70	34
10	43	36	19	63	73	35	57	63	24	61	70	34
11	56	60	24	82	93	46	49	48	21	66	78	37
12	11	03	K6	55	59	31	18	07	K9	46	43	26
13	83	94	38	75	88	42	99	99	50	77	90	44
14	74	87	33	75	88	42	75	88	34	86	96	50
15	48	46	21	68	81	38	44	38	19	52	54	29
16	38	28	17	75	88	42	27	13	12	61	70	34
17	38	28	17	68	81	38	37	28	16	86	96	50
18	58	64	25	75	88	42	54	57	23	61	70	34
19	83	94	38	75	88	42	99	99	50	86	96	50
Completers Chapter I												
20	34	23	15	37	27	22	32	19	14	46	43	26
21	ABSENT.....			50	50	29	01	01	K4	52	54	29
22	34	23	15	44	39	26	18	07	K9	56	61	31
23	18	07	K8	33	22	20	35	23	15	56	61	31
24	43	36	19	44	39	26	24	11	11	52	54	29
Non-completers Chapter I												
25	18	07	K8	33	22	20	02	01	K5	22	09	15
26	34	23	15	68	81	38	44	38	19	66	78	37
27	34	23	15	44	39	26	41	34	18	44	40	25
28	38	28	17	40	32	24	11	03	K7	43	37	24
29	30	18	13	46	42	27	14	04	K8	56	61	31
30	22	09	K9	33	22	20	18	07	K9	35	23	20
31	45	41	20	50	50	29	37	28	16	52	54	29
32	45	41	20	46	42	27	32	19	14	56	61	31
Non-completers												
33	45	41	20	75	88	42	54	57	23	71	84	40
34	48	46	21	63	73	35	55	60	24	86	96	50
35	27	13	11	50	50	29	14	04	K8	61	70	34
36	45	41	20	82	93	46	24	11	11	52	54	29
37	56	60	24	68	81	38	49	48	21	61	70	34
38	62	72	27	68	81	38	58	66	25	77	90	44
39	30	18	13	55	59	31	01	18	13	43	37	24

Note. NCE=Normal Curve Equivalents; NPR= National Percentile Rank; NGE= National Grade Equivalents

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

Students who spent between 35-40 minutes each week during school hours practicing and/or listening to others practice telling folktales significantly increased their vocabulary and reading skills as measured by pre- and post-ITBS tests.

This activity was self-selected which indicated some intrinsic motivation. Was the self-selection based on interest in folktales and storytelling? Did the students' personal rapport with the library media specialist influence the self-selection? In a school where special activities are infrequent, was the idea of being a member of a special group the appealing self-selection factor? Whatever the incentive, from the potential group of 70 students, 51 took home permission slips with an intent to participate in the project. Of these 3 students never returned the slip, parents of 3 students refused permission, and 2 students moved out of the attendance area. Students who entered Lowell after permission slips were sent home were not given an opportunity to participate. Thus, the group was comprised of 43 members, 3 of whom moved after the intervention was begun.

Because of the surprisingly large group, the researcher decided to have 5 sections which averaged 8-9 students each. With 8-9 students and two tellings each session, it still took 4-5 weeks before anyone would tell their story a second time.

Behavior boundaries and expectations were set high, were clearly expressed and consistently enforced. Students' past experience with the library media center's conduct code helped them understand that their

group and their participation in the group was secure as long as each of them behaved according to expectations. They also understood that the library media specialist would protect this security. Every effort was made to insure a positive atmosphere. This factor might also help explain the significant results. Since many of our students do not live in secure conditions outside of school, they do respond with more self-assurance in a predictable and engaging atmosphere. Students were helped to develop sensible rules for the activity itself. By being asked to speculate about the type of behavior most desirable for the activity, they were able to see that if teller A was distracted from telling a story by the fidgety or chatty behavior of listener B, how could listener B expect quietness of mouth and body from A when their roles were reversed? Additionally, how could B help evaluate and improve A's telling, if B was not attentively listening? The fun and success aspect of telling and listening to stories was enhanced because of each student's responsibility for his/her behavior. The opening memory game activities also pointed out the need for both good listening skills and for developing the ability to concentrate. The concentration needed to learn and tell a story probably carried into other areas of the student's life both in and out of school. Concentration is a quality we may underestimate when looking for explanations for differences in pupil performance.

The group also frequently talked about words in the stories that were new, unusual or pleasing to the teller or listener. One student on his first attempt to tell "The Old Woman and the Pig" paused after the first occurrence of the word "shan't", smiled wide and said, "I just love



that word". This attitude awoke something of the joy of words and language to students. In the initial phase of story learning, the students were asked to write down words that they did not know. With the help of dictionaries and interested adults, students discovered the correct pronunciations and meanings. This information was shared informally during the eating portion of the group time.

The possible Hawthorne effect due to participation in a "special" group is a highly plausible explanation for the significant statistical outcome. The groups ate lunch in the library media center rather than the lunchroom. The difference between eating in a group of over 100 other people in a large open gym, with adults acting as monitors, and with a group of 8-9 in a more intimate setting with one adult who was acting as hostess and storyteller may have had an effect on the self-efficacy of students. All of the other students in the gym observed these students meeting the library media specialist and leaving the lunchroom. This type of recognition, being singled out in a special way, could have raised the self-esteem of students as well.

The pre-test had been given in the students' classroom administered by a classroom teacher the students had had for about 1 month. The post-test was administered in the media center by the library media specialist that many of the students had known since kindergarten and been actively involved with for 5 months or was administered by their Chapter I teacher with whom they had been working in small groups for one-half hour daily for 7 months. One might expect a more conscientious and competent performance under the second set of conditions.

Classroom and Chapter I teachers frequently discussed the progress

of storytelling in the classroom with their students. At least one-half of the students in each classroom were involved in the storytelling program. If, for instance, a folktale appeared in their literature book, a student might mention what kind of story it was, if it was the same as or similar to a story someone in their group was learning, or perhaps one that they had heard another time. Chapter I teachers had been asked to help their students learn their stories and did so. One could easily underestimate the greater sense of self-importance and the transfer value of such complementary activities.

Even though parents did not attend their students' storytelling at school, many students indicated that some family member(s) had helped them learn their story by reading to them, helping them with vocabulary, and/or listening to the student tell. The parents of the students who appeared on the school cablevision did try to find time to view the video tape. Additional interest of parents may have also affected the student's growth.

Despite all of the competing explanations for the statistically significant results, this researcher believes that the weekly group meetings, which were devoted to language acquisition through concentrated story preparation activities, story telling episodes and the opportunities to listen and interact with other storytellers over an extended period of time, were the interventions that most affected the student scores. In addition, the concentration required to learn and tell a story, the self-imposed effort and clear sense of purpose, the encouragement and readily available assistance throughout the learning

process, and an audience that wanted you to do well, were important factors in the higher student scores. A common goal, with everyone helping one another and the accomplishments of each storyteller celebrated by all, was an undoubtedly powerful inducement to learning. The group feeling was cooperative rather than competitive.

#### Recommendations

Storytelling is a natural part of a library media center's activities. Since one of the goals of the library media program is to encourage reading and promote growth in the communication skills, storytelling could be built into the curriculum regardless of the type of literature being discussed. When used with the Dewey Decimal organization of the library media center, various classifications in the 200's, 300's, 800's, 900's, as well as fiction and biography, could be the impetus for storytelling opportunities. When classes are studying the culture of different countries and holidays, storytelling could be utilized. Extending this activity so that students become storytellers could easily increase the contribution the school library media specialist makes to the total education of the child. School library media specialists and the library media program do make a difference, and in this era of accountability, a measurable difference.

In addition to teaching children to tell folktales, we can extend into other areas of the curriculum by having them write stories to tell. The idea of plot, setting, character, or crisis would be reinforced by using these in story creation. However, one must never forget that the storyteller's primary function is to share a story and create with the listeners an experience that will live in memory. Helping students share

their experiences contributes to a student's sense of self-assurance and self-esteem. Helping students develop their own story versions of historical events would bring more vitality to the entire social studies curriculum.

Carrying out this program was time-consuming for the library media specialist. Two hours and 45 minutes each week for a period of 14 weeks were taken from professional and/or planning time. What will these second graders want to do next year? Never tell stories again? Not likely. The third graders who sparked the idea for this paper insisted that they have another opportunity this spring. With the limited time most elementary school library media specialists have available, wise decisions on how to spend that time are crucial. So next year students who have had storytelling experiences will be in third and fourth grades and already first graders have asked if they will be able to learn storytelling when they are in second grade. A monster may have been created.

What are some possible alternatives to produce similar results with less time required of the library media specialist? The library media specialist could engage in instructional design with classroom teachers. Or act in an inservice role, and with the assistance of the school principal, help teachers learn how to teach storytelling to their students. Classroom teachers could more easily work the activity into the classroom experience on a daily basis. Parent or community volunteers could be enlisted to act as group leaders or even audiences. The student storytellers could expand their telling into pre-schools or provide programs for the area elderly. In the latter case, the

facilitator must provide for a microphone or other methods to provide for the possible hearing loss of the audience. Students could also be paired with an elderly person and through oral history methods share stories.

Some of the early steps in learning a story could be done through the library media center curriculum rather than as an additional or pull-out activity. Students could be grouped across age groups and effect some peer tutoring. A set of audio tapes could be developed so that students whose reading skills are not on grade level or who learn auditorily better than visually could learn the story more easily. Students could be paired after some of the initial tellings and tell to each other until they feel secure enough to tell to a larger group. Schools that have video capabilities could film students telling and have the tapes available for use in classes, with parents and for community groups. The tapes could also be used to help students improve techniques or as a program on a school, district, or area cable channel. In those cases care must be taken so that copyright is not violated.

The beginning activity of making a storyboard or sketches of the sequence of the story might be coordinated with the school art program. This exercise along with storytelling practice assists the students in visualization, creativity and imagination. In addition to aiding story learning this activity would clarify the concepts of plot, setting, characters, and climax. The process of listening to or telling stories actively involves the mind as the mind must see the characters, events, and setting. Researchers have shown attention span increases, the acquisition and use of syntactical patterns is strengthened and the use of language and its rhythms gains appreciation. Increased

self-confidence when speaking to a group and expressing one's thoughts clearly are also benefits that should accrue to children who learn the art of storytelling.

Storytelling competitions could be held on a classroom, grade level, building or district basis. These could be structured like secondary school speech or music contests or could follow the examples cited in Chapter 2.

Recommendations for additional research include (a) replicating this study, (b) replicating this study while keeping records of participants free reading choices, (b) replicating this study using populations that are not self-selected, (d) using measures of creativity as pre- and post-tests, (e) limiting the population to either students on grade level in language measures or students below or above grade level, and (f) using audio and/or video tapes in either the learning or sharing process.

#### Summary

The underlying assumption for this paper was that library media specialists, by helping second grade students learn how to tell stories, providing them opportunities to become proficient in this art, and developing these same students as listeners for each other's stories would increase the students' vocabulary and, possibly, their reading comprehension. This study was conducted with second grade students at Lowell Elementary School, Waterloo, Iowa, as the subjects. They were taught storytelling techniques and were then given opportunities to practice these techniques.

Storytelling was introduced to all students in second grade library media classes during the latter part of October, 1987. The history and

origin of the art was briefly described. The library media specialist told Slip Slop Gobble from the book by Jeanne Hardendorff. Following the story, students were offered an opportunity to become storytellers. Letters for the parents were sent home with the children detailing the activity, time involved, objectives, behavior and attendance expectations and the need for testing in April to check the benefits of this activity. A parent consent form was required for any participant.

The 43 students who were given parental permission were divided into 5 groups primarily by homeroom that would meet during one lunch period each week. The lunch periods, of either 35 or 40 minutes were divided into a 15-20 minute eating time and a 15-20 minute activity session. These meetings began in December. The first 3 sessions began with the library media specialist telling a story while students ate lunch. Then a variety of relaxation exercises, memory or concentration games, description activities, and dramatic presentations were used. Sessions 4 and 5 began with students listening to story recordings during the lunch period followed by a discussion on how to choose and learn a story. Then students were given opportunities to explore a group of easy-to-learn folktales. By the end of session 5 all students had chosen a story to learn.

During the 9 remaining group meetings, students practiced telling stories when they felt ready to do so. Each student was critiqued by the library media specialist and given evaluative statements by the rest of the group. As individual students felt ready to tell to a group outside of the storytelling group, arrangements were made for the student to share his/her story with another class in the school. Each student

filled out a Self-Evaluation sheet following telling a story to an outside group.

The researcher hypothesized that there would be no significant difference in the standard scores at  $p < .05$  level using as pre- and post-tests different forms of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Primary Battery, Test V-Vocabulary, when compared to the national norms of the same test. Students had participated in the regular school Iowa Tests of Basic Skills testing program in October, 1986. Subjects were again tested during the week of April 20, 1987, using the ITBS Vocabulary and Reading batteries, by the researcher or by the Chapter I teachers if the student was enrolled in that program. Test results from the pre- and post-tests were compared using the Normal Curve Equivalent, a standard score that has been designed so that the mean is 50 with a standard deviation of 21.06 and that has an effective range from 1-99. The statistical analysis showed a significant difference at the  $p < .005$  level on the ITBS Primary Battery Test V-Vocabulary between students who have been taught storytelling techniques and given opportunities to practice these techniques when compared to the national norms of that same test. The adjunct comparison of all students' scores on the ITBS Primary Battery Test R-Reading also showed a significant difference at the  $p < .005$  level. Therefore, the research hypothesis used in this investigation was rejected.



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## APPENDIX A

## Permission Letter

Lowell School  
 1628 Washington  
 Waterloo, IA 50702  
 November 6, 1986

Dear (Parent's name):

This year second graders at Lowell have an opportunity to learn to tell folktales as part of the library media program. The students will bring their lunches (hot or cold) to the library media center one or two days per week. During the 15-20 minutes after eating lunch the students will hear, select, learn, practice and present stories. The program will begin in November and continue through March. Your student (student's name) has indicated that (he/she) would like to participate in this program. The vocabulary and reading portions of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills that (student's first name) took in October will be regiven in April so that we can determine if storytelling had helped improve the students' vocabulary. Results of the testing will be available in early June if you wish to see them. (student's first name) will need your permission to participate in the program and the April testing. Participants will be expected to follow library media center conduct rules and regularly attend the storytelling sessions.

Students will tell stories to classmates and other classes at Lowell. We will also have a special program for parents in the spring. Please return the bottom portion of this letter by November 12 so that we will know if (student's first name) may participate. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gail Froyen  
 Media Specialist

-----  
 Yes, (student's name) may participate in the Lowell Storytelling Program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Parent's signature)

No, (student's name) may not participate in the Lowell Storytelling Program.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Parent's signature)

## APPENDIX B

## Folktale Bibliography

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\* denotes story chosen to tell

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## APPENDIX C

## How to Learn a Story

January 5, 1987  
Lowell School

Dear Parent,

The storytelling groups met three times before winter vacation. During those sessions, the students listened to several different types of folktales being told. They participated in the telling of two stories. The groups practiced relaxing so that they would not appear nervous when telling a story. We played games to increase memory and concentration like "I am going on a trip and will take..." with each student naming all the objects previously named and adding an item.

During the next two weeks your student will be choosing a folktale to learn and tell. The students may need help reading their stories at first. I hope that someone in your household will be willing to provide this help. Some ideas to help the student follow.

## HOW TO LEARN A STORY

1. Read the story silently or listen to it being read four or five times. Write down any words you do not know how to pronounce or know the meaning of.
2. Ask an adult to help you with the words you do not know or understand.
3. Read the story out loud several times. When you feel comfortable with the story, time yourself to see how long it takes to read it. Read the story out loud once or twice a day for a week. Doing this just before bedtime helps you remember the story.
4. Sometimes it helps to divide the story into scenes like a filmstrip and draw the story scenes in simple pictures. Then you can think of the pictures to remember what comes next.
5. Tell as much as you can of your story to anyone who will listen. But do not pester about this.

Thank you for helping your student with this project. If you have any questions or problems please call me at school from 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. (234-8713) or at home from 5:00-9:00 p.m.

Sincerely,

Gail Froyen,  
Library Media Specialist

APPENDIX D

LMS Critique Form

STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ RM. # \_\_\_\_\_ GROUP \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE OF STORY \_\_\_\_\_

PUBLICATION INFORMATION \_\_\_\_\_

LMS' EVALUATION	High 10	-----		
	Practice # (date)	1	2	1 Low 3

- 1. Knows story \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Pronounces words clearly and correctly \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Looks at audience \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Tells story at comfortable pace \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Is relaxed \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Uses no distracting mannerisms \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Uses no distracting words \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Speaks so can be heard \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Interest of overall presentation \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Practice #	1	2	3
------------	---	---	---

Does well \_\_\_\_\_

Can improve \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Told to outside group:

Who \_\_\_\_\_

When \_\_\_\_\_ Where \_\_\_\_\_





## APPENDIX F

## Note to Teachers

TO: Second grade teachers  
FROM: Media specialist  
RE: Student ready to tell to another class

DATE:

\_\_\_\_\_ is ready to tell his/her story to an outside group and would like to tell to a (grade level inserted). These classes next meet in the media center at:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Insert time and day of first section)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Insert time and day of second section)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Insert time and day of third section)

Please check which time would be best for \_\_\_\_\_ to be gone from your class and return this slip to me. I will record the selection and return this note to you as a reminder for you and \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you

## APPENDIX G

## Storyteller's Self-Evaluation

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

STORY \_\_\_\_\_ RM # \_\_\_\_\_

	Yes	No	Not sure
1. I know my story well			
2. I talk so all can hear			
3. I use a pleasant voice			
4. I look at the audience			
5. I say the words clearly			
6. I do not use run-on sentences			
7. I do not use AND, THEN, SO, etc.			
8. I seem relaxed			
9. I do not move unnecessarily			
10. I speak slowly most of the time			
11. I enjoyed telling the story			

## APPENDIX H

## Final Parental Letter

March 22, 1987  
Lowell School  
Waterloo, IA

Dear (Parent's name):

(Student's first name) has been participating in a storytelling group over the lunch time since December. All of the children chose a folktale to try to learn to tell to their lunchtime group and to another class as well. Many of the children have accomplished all or part of this goal. All have enjoyed being a part of the group, hearing others tell stories and helping each other by being good listeners. With the advent of nicer weather, the groups will not continue to meet. This is the last week all the groups will meet.

Some of the students will be telling the story they learned on the school cablevision channel. The first taping session will be this Wednesday at 2:30 p.m. If you have any concerns about this, please contact the principal. Only students who have already told to a class outside their storytelling group and want to will be taped.

If you have questions concerning storytelling and your student, I will be happy to talk to you. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Gail E. Froyen, Media Specialist

## ABSTRACT

### THE EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING EXPERIENCES ON VOCABULARY SKILLS OF SECOND GRADE STUDENTS

Subjects were 40 second grade students from Lowell School, Waterloo, IA. The students met for 14 weekly forty minute sessions where they heard folktales, learned folktales to tell, and told or listened to each other tell folktales. All second grade students were tested with the ITBS Primary Battery in October 1986 (pre-test) and the subjects took the post-test in April, 1987.

The null hypothesis stated there would be no significant difference in standard scores at  $p < .05$  using as pre-and post-tests ITBS Primary Test V-Vocabulary when compared using NCE's to the national norms of that test. Statistical analysis showed a significant difference at the  $p < .005$  level. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected.