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## STORIES IN DIFFERENT DOMAINS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

**Resume:** This article is based on the results gained from the research about the perception teachers have about stories. The study was conducted in Sweden and the main purpose was to partially fulfil the requirements for Erasmus Mundus joint degree “International Master of Early Childhood Education and Care”.

In accordance with previous research that are based, on the benefits of story-based practice for the child development, this research analyzes and discusses teachers’ perceptions of the stories in their practice. In order to get the answers to the research question, a small-scale interview study was conducted. Data was collected in four preschools in South-western Sweden, including one international and three Swedish preschools. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The questions were designed as open-ended in order to gain broad and deep information about the teachers’ perceptions on stories in preschool practice. The study adopted Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory as a theoretical framework.

The study showed that the new technological era, brings innovative approach to teaching and learning though the teachers still appreciate and value a good story. They argue that storytelling should be part of early childhood practice and preschool curriculum. This study looked at the teachers and their perception of stories since studies about teachers’ perspectives are not in abundance. Certainly, the understanding of the importance of the stories, would be more evident, if some of the future studies would consider the views of children regarding stories in their childhood.

**Key words:** early childhood education, developmental areas, storytelling.

### Introduction

Child development implies many aspects, but what lately has become the focus of attention is literacy development and readiness for school on one side and art and creativity development on the other. Preschool activities are expected to be governed by children’s needs and interests and the time children spend in free play becomes very important. All of this is followed by new age technologies that bring new approaches in teaching and learning processes.

Where do the stories fit into this diversity of educational needs and pedagogical approaches?

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A great deal of research discusses the role stories have on child development and addresses benefits children have from storytelling practice. Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004) argue that through stories children acquire language, vocabulary development and they develop communication skills. Engel (1995) argues that children, who lack storytelling in their life, cannot be fully literate. Dowley and McNamee (2005) argue about Paleys' statement that through children's narratives, the adults can reach children's thoughts and concerns. Ahn and Filipenko (2007) argue that storytelling and children's narratives affect the way children form the picture of self and construct an understanding of the world. Opposed to the traditional storytelling, Boltman and Druin (2003) argue that storybooks did not outplay new technologies and that children are eager to engage in technology. By discovering children as important users of technologies, stories got a significant place in technology designs. Famous story characters are digitized and used for educational programs for children.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

In order to provide high quality service and meet the needs of children, teachers face many challenges when choosing pedagogical and methodological approaches and teaching philosophy. In the light of contemporary views on teaching practice, the approach should be child centered and play based. At the same time, the teacher is an active observer who gives the support and stimulates the child to reach his highest developmental potentials. Different developmental theories like psychoanalytic child development theories, cognitive, behavioural and socio-cultural theories, give wide scope of approaches and definitions that can help teachers in their understanding of children's behaviour and developmental capabilities.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of human learning refers to learning and development that occurs at two levels, first, on the social level and later on the individual level. Social environment and interactions with other humans are of the main importance for Vygotsky, who saw the development as the transformation of socially shared experiences into internalized processes (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989). According to socio-cultural approaches, humans act in a social environment where their actions and interactions are presented through language and other symbols (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) argues that, human's higher mental functions have to be treated in the social sphere, before they are internally integrated through thinking and the use of language. Lutz and Huitt (2004) argue about the principles that underline Vygotsky's theory and state that the importance of social interactions for cognitive development is related to what is learned, where, and how the learning process occurs. This principle highlights the importance of the fact that the learning process should be a result of social interactions, where the learner's use of language and symbols brings complexity to the thinking process.

Socio-cultural theory focuses on the social and cultural context of child development and language as a cognitive tool. Vygotsky (1986) argues that when mastering the ability of external speech, humans start with one word and slowly proceed towards sentences that are more meaningful. Language and imagination give to the humans an ability to express their feelings. Vygotsky (2004) argues that imaginative images give internal language of human emotions. All life experiences are coloured with emotions. People use language to shape the experiences and to socially interact and communicate their stories to others.

While discussing child development, Vygotsky (2004) also gives his opinion about creative development. Vygotsky explains human creativity through two basic types. First one, Vygotsky calls reproductive type of human behaviour and explains it as the human ability to recall memories from the past and reproduce them through words, drawings or other expressive mediums. Here, Vygotsky notices that humans are not producing anything new and original. Second one, Vygotsky names combinatorial or creative human behaviour. In this case, humans use their imagination to picture things from the past or future that are not part of their personal experience. This kind of human activity is creative and produces new things. Further, Vygotsky argues that creativity is essential for human existence and that first trace of creativity can be noticed in the early childhood period, especially in children's role-play.

### **Stories in different areas of child development**

In recent years, there have been many discussions about the right pedagogical approaches and reconciliation between play based and structured pedagogies as well as literacy and numeracy development and creativity (Martlew, Stephen & Ellis, 2011; Prentice, 2000; Rao, Ng & Pearson, 2010). Stories and storytelling as a phenomenon certainly have its place in different domains of child development. Hendy and Toon (2001) argue that teachers should take the stories seriously in their practice and not only as an entertainment session at the end of a learning activity.

#### **Stories and Language Development of Preschool Children**

Early childhood period is a time when children develop oral language as well as literacy skills like reading, writing and listening. Language development is important because it is inseparable part of the learning process, communication and social interactions (Wells, 1981). Having positive experiences in that period is of huge importance in order to develop these and many other skills, as far as possible. Brock and Rankin (2008) argue that every child eventually acquire a system of symbols that is used in communication. The quality of the language development depends on many factors like the home environment, language-rich experiences, child's well-being, physical health and intellectual development. In order to help children with their literacy development, parents and teachers should be supportive and responsible for creating conditions for enriching conversations. Strategies like phonological and alphabetical activities, play as a natural environment for language development, recognition of print in the immediate environment and storytelling and reading, can help teachers in supporting children in their language development (Pelletier, 2011; Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003).

Different pedagogical approaches in preschool practice can help improve children's literacy. Nicolopoulou, McDowell and Brockmeyer (2006) argue for a balance between teacher-directed and child-centered approach because studies showed that children's styles for grasping and understanding adult's instruction, are various. Further, they argue that for literacy development, stories have great importance because they help children realize the symbolic potential of the language. Listening to and telling the stories challenge children to build pictures of the real and imaginary world. When discussing children's capability to acquire language and learn to read and write, Miller and Pennycuff (2008) argue that many children struggle to become literate. They see storytelling as a good way to address literacy development because of the interrelated nature of processes involved in storytelling, reading and writing. Further, they argue that literacy learning occurs easier through social interactions

and storytelling is a perfect way for children and adults to be socially active. Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004) did a study of the impact storytelling has on language development of children ages three to five. Two groups of children heard the same stories. One group had a storytelling session, while the other one heard the stories read from the book. The results showed that, the group, who had stories being told to them, was more able to identify the characters and the setting of the story as well as the moral messages of the story. Many other studies show that children enjoy any form of story presentation and that those activities help language development (Collins, 1999; Isbell, 2002; Isbell et al., 2004; LaFlamme, 1975; Malo & Bullard, 2000).

### Stories and Creative Development of Preschool Children

Teaching in a holistic manner or pedagogical approach of teaching the “whole” child implies developing children’s abilities in affective and psychomotor domains, as well as in cognitive (Edwards, 1990). Pramling Samuelsson, Asplund Carlsson, Olsson, Pramling and Wallerstedt (2009) argue that children are most creative in the early childhood period when they are curious and playful. The children are perceived as creative in telling stories and inventing songs and stories, painting and drawing, acting, dancing and expressing their feelings through different body movements. Further, they stress the importance of the role of parents and caregivers in supporting children’s creativity.

In the document of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (1999), studies done in the field of creativity show how different expressive arts can be combined with greater success and benefits for children. One of the case studies took place in the gallery where children had a chance to see watercolour pictures of the book characters. Children were encouraged to create their own stories, for the mentioned book characters, by using body movements. They worked with dancers who were supporting them in their dancing performances. Later, children met a sculptor who helped them to manipulate clay and make characters from their own stories. The purpose of this study was to create a creative workshop, where the children will be able to learn and try different art techniques.

### Stories and Play in Child's Development

Play is very important in a child’s life and even though sometimes it is perceived as separate from learning, a great body of literature advocates that playing is a child’s way to learn and meet the world (Bodrova, 2008; Gupta, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008).

Role-play or make-believe is a very common way for children to engage in play activities. Role-playing gives them a possibility to act and imitate the situations they face every day and in that way understand them better. Hendy and Toon (2001) argue that in make-believe play children manipulate identities and ‘play out’ features of their culture and environment. Gupta (2009) argues that make-believe play gives children a space to mature in areas of cognitive, emotional, kinesthetic and creative development. Further, she argues that while role-playing, every time when storytelling takes place, children are able to express their emotional needs, improve their language and enhance their vocabulary.

Nicolopoulou (2007) sees make-believe play and storytelling as complementary modes. In her research on three to five years old children in the preschool context, storytelling and story

acting were ordinary components of the curriculum. Every day, children dictated their stories to the teacher and later those stories were read aloud and performed by children. These activities enabled children to compose and direct the story and take part in acting. The results showed that children were very imaginative in picking themes and characters for their stories. Elements of familiar stories, fairy tales and their own experiences were often part of their stories. At the same time, they showed selectiveness and the ability to adjust the elements to their story plots.

### Stories and New Technologies in the Child's Development

Another way to be engaged in playful activities and at the same time be creative and innovative, is to be open to the challenges and possibilities brought by new technologies. It looks like for children that is the least problem due to their curious nature. Yelland (2011) sees new technologies as a good way for children to play and explore the world that surrounds them. With cameras, children can make photographs and later create their own stories of playful adventures. The technological devices give new dimensions to the stories, while stories make those devices more appealing for children.

Colbert (2006) argues that information and communication technologies inspire children to write or tell stories that are complex in the selection of themes, characters and actions. He also sees advantages for teachers who can create a multimodal representation of any story and in that way make any educational activity more interesting for children. Ryokai and Cassell (1999) give the example of a completely innovative approach in supporting children's storytelling play by computer. The main technical support to their study was a StoryMat. StoryMat is a soft play mat and a system designed to support children's fantasy play and emerging stories. Except for the language development and play, this StoryMat mediates natural cooperation between peers. While the child plays and tells a story on the mat, the mat records the story as well as the movements the child produces with the toys. When the story is over, the mat compares the story with all the other recorded stories. The most similar one is then repeated. The child can collaborate with the other child with the similar story, and together they can make a different ending for a story, for example. The study showed that this technological innovation provides a place for children to foster their storytelling and develop their language. This and many other innovative technological tools make technological equipment a desirable asset in the learning and teaching process.

### Methodology

A great body of literature and research done about the impact of stories on child development, made me think about the place of stories in preschool practice. Children's interest in stories and the way stories are part of children's upbringing is not a new research phenomenon. However, studies done about teachers, as storytellers, are not in abundance. The moment of uncertainty when I myself was preparing to introduce the story to children, made me think about the quality teacher should have or need to develop, in order to become storytellers. The story based practice refined my way of working with children. That is why the aim of this study was to gain insight into how teachers perceive and argue about the way they use stories in their work. The research question that guided this study is:

- How do teachers perceive stories in preschool practice?

Regarding the design of the study, after considering the facts that the research question is descriptive in nature and that I expected textual data coming from the discussion, I have decided to use small-scale qualitative interview research.

Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke argue: “Qualitative research claims to describe life-worlds ‘from the inside out’, from the point of view of the people who participate. By so doing, it seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features” (cited in Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004, p. 3). Qualitative research as such, gave options to start from the inside of the researched phenomenon, the teachers. It was a possibility to hear and learn about their arguments, meaning patterns and structural features regarding story-based practice.

Sampling strategy was non-probability, purposive sampling. This type of sampling suggests that the participants are chosen with a specific purpose and that they already have a certain level of knowledge regarding the research topic (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002; Teddlie and Yu, 2007).

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (Dicicco- Blum and Crabtree, 2006). The method used for analyzing the data, was meaning analysis (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were transcribed, read and coded. The meanings that emerged were condensed and interpreted. This process of data analysis allowed me to narrow down the large amount of information, compare the answers, condense their meaning and interpret the results in accordance with the existing literature and theoretical framework.

## Results

The analyzed data gave some interesting insights into the teachers’ views about stories. Their comments also showed the place of the stories in different areas of child development.

### Stories as a Tool for Language Development

Teachers report that they use different approaches when presenting a story. Whatever the approach, telling or reading, analyzing or dramatizing the story, teachers argue that it affects language development by introducing the children with new words and meaning concepts.

The sooner you start to read stories aloud to children that affect their language development. When you read stories to children, you might use some words that are not used in your daily communication with children. In that way, there are new words coming to children’s vocabulary. (Teacher A)

Further, the teachers argue that the stories are full of unknown words for children and those words should not be avoided or replaced, but explained by teachers. That approach will help children build their vocabulary. By reading and telling stories and letting children see the texts, children learn the structure of the sentences and recognize the letters and words. This will later help them to learn how to read and write more easily.

### Social aspect of stories

One of the important aspects of child early development is socialization and development of communication skills. By spending time in the preschool, surrounded by adults and peers, children are exposed to different social conditions that make them adjust and learn how to communicate and develop their language. The interviews show that stories, especially the personal ones, that children tell spontaneously, are perceived as valuable for development of communication skills and delivering of messages, through which children communicate with adults.

#### *Stories as a Means of Communication*

Teachers find it very important to help children learn how to express themselves and how to have a dialog with their peers. When a story is included in peer interactions, the conversation between them is usually joyful, but at the same time serious. One of the examples is 'Socrates dialog' technique that one of the teachers discussed in the interview.

I also use 'Socrates' dialogs' in my work. It is the philosophical form and in that kind of conversation, we have some rules we all agree about. To have Socratic dialog I can use the story or picture, poetry, article from the newspaper, but the start of everything is a story.  
(Teacher B)

This Socrates' dialog enables the children to discuss concerns and issues in their surroundings, what makes them active agents in the formation of knowledge about social interactions. The basis of the dialog is the story and the teachers argue that it is usually personal stories, where children share their experiences and learn from them.

#### *The Story as a Messenger*

In their discussion about stories and their purpose, teachers see stories also as messengers. The stories can deliver messages to children, teachers and parents. From this point of view, the stories can be seen as social and cultural tool that proclaims humans as cultural beings, who share their experiences through stories. If we look for messages that stories bring to the teachers, we can talk about personal stories children tell spontaneously. Teachers argue that, that kind of stories could help teachers to meet the children and learn what is important for them in that moment of development. In addition, teachers argue that they have to deal carefully with personal children's stories, because the stories present children's perception of life events at a given moment.

When looking from the child's perspective, teachers argue that stories send many different messages to children. By repeating the same story over and over again, children learn about the content and the structure of the story. That is the way children construct the meaning and receive the message of the story. Teachers have to be very cautious when choosing a story to tell. The teachers always have to check what kind of messages the story will bring to the children.

Personal stories children tell are something the teacher in this study value very much. The teachers perceive children's personal stories as a good source for parents to be involved in their child's inner life. It is not important where children share their stories, at home or in

preschool, good cooperation between parents and teachers enables that they receive the message the child expresses in the shape of the stories.

### Stories as a Cornerstone of Creativity

Through my discussion with teachers, I found that they see every aspect of child development important and present in the curriculum, though sometimes, the number of children and teachers' resentment towards "messy job" as stated by one of the teachers, can be seen as a reason why creative activities are not so present. Teachers found imagination very important and stories as a source of ideas and creative thinking. When discussing creative activities, teachers mostly refer to painting with colours, acting and imagining new stories with children.

#### *Stories as a tool for understanding children's drawings*

When discussing stories in connection to drawing, the interviews show that stories are used as a medium for drawings' interpretation and the other way around. Drawings and stories present very rich material, which allows the teachers to organize activities where children's creativity will be fully employed. One of the ways that is always interesting for the children is to tell them a story with the striking character and then enable them to present that character while experimenting with different art techniques.

During the interview, one of the teachers showed me a drawing from a five-year-old girl. The teacher described the drawing as the story in itself. The story is about the goddess of the sea who had a man and he left and never came back. However, one day he came back to wipe her tears and they stayed together forever. The teacher writes children's stories behind the drawings and later discusses them with the children. The story about the goddess together with the painted presentation has a great power for the teacher because already, thanks to the stories and drawings, the teacher knows the inner and outer world of this child.

One of the teachers explains an activity that is in her opinion, very interesting for the children. Each day one child has his turn to tell the story. Other children hear the story and later they draw different parts of the story that were interesting for them. During the circle time, the teacher and the children connect the drawings in one big story and the child has a chance to tell the story again in front of the peers. This technique is interesting for many reasons. First, every time the children draw, they produce a picture book. The teacher staples the drawings that present the story and keep it as a book. Children like to go back to the picture books they made and tell the stories again. Second, there is always an interesting possibility that the first version of the story is upgraded, thanks to the drawings. Third, this correlation between stories and drawings, teachers can use to develop collaborative work among children.

#### *Stories as a Path to Imagination*

The teachers find imagination as very important for young children because it gives them a way to understand reality, think about the future and see things from other people's perspective. Imagination is also something that teachers like to present to children as their own world, where nobody can interfere. That is why they teach children to develop and value their own imagination. Stories, together with other media, like theatre and film are a good way for children to be involved in an imaginative world.



Even though imagination is perceived as important, teachers see some children often living too much in their fantasy world. Teachers' opinion is that computer games give a wrong view of reality. In this case, the teacher considers stories as useful for children to face the reality and make the difference between unrealistic events of computer games and real life. Stories also can be unreal, but the teachers argue that storytelling is an activity where children and adults interact and children can always get the immediate explanation from the adults.

#### Using technology for storytelling

Stories have found their place in new technological devices too. It looks like digital stories are very popular among teachers and children. Devices like computers, tablets and interactive white boards are story friendly and stories are now more popular in the form of cartoons. Opinions regarding storytelling and new technological devices are divided. Some teachers think that stories and new technologies should go together and that new devices improve the quality of the stories. Others argue that new technologies are taking over and that traditional way of storytelling loses its places in preschool practice. All the teachers agree that children should be technologically literate, but that computer devices should be used consciously.

In their work, teachers use computers and tablets. The teachers report that children enjoy combining different pictures on computers in the form of a story. They recognize colors, learn letters and numbers, and all that is placed in the form of a story.

While most of the teachers report that children enjoy looking and hearing stories on tablets, there is also a concern coming from some teachers that in that way, since the story is presented through cartoons, children do not have time to reflect on the events in the story. Children perceive it more as a fun activity and they do not think too much about the story, unless the teacher discusses the cartoon with them.

#### Discussion

The results of this study suggest that stories are part of preschool teachers' practice. Teachers perceive stories as educational tool useful in different domains of child development, like mathematics and language development, science, musical and motor skills development. Teachers see stories as valuable for creative expression and imaginative development and they find stories as a good asset in the process of mastering new technologies.

#### Stories as a Frame for Language Development and Communication

Early childhood period is a time when children acquire language and by being socially active, they develop communication skills. When discussing the development of thought and language, Vygotsky (1986) argues that those two processes are different, but they intervene at a certain point of the cognitive development. During the cognitive development, children develop language that brings the possibility to express their thoughts more clearly. The immediate environment where the child grows and develops affects both, language and thoughts.

The teachers in this study argue that stories comes as a good tool for language development and that they use stories for that purpose a lot. The stories open a completely new world of words that children do not hear in daily communication. By hearing and telling the stories,

children become aware of the sentence structure and the symbols that are used in storytelling and in communication in general. Their engagement in seeing the text and pictures, gives them possibility to see and recognize the letters, what helps them later in reading and writing process. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) argue that storytelling is a good way to address literacy development because of the interrelated nature of processes involved in storytelling, reading and writing. Further, they argue that literacy learning occurs easier through social interactions and storytelling is a perfect way for children and adults to be socially active, what is in a way suggested by Vygotsky (1986).

Regarding language development, Brock and Rankin (2008) argue that child eventually acquire a system of symbols that is used in communication. For that purpose as well as for language development, Pelletier (2011) and Roskos, Christie and Richgels (2003) argue that strategies like phonological and alphabetical activities, recognition of print in the immediate environment and storytelling are good assets in teachers' practice. During the interviews, the teachers described their activities in the similar way. Usually, it was correlation between storytelling and reading, book illustrations and materials in the surroundings.

As a way to develop open communication in a problem-solving situation, one of the teachers mentions the Socrates' dialogs technique. The teacher argues that children are more relaxed and open for honest dialog, when group issues are presented in the shape of a story. Dowley and McNamee, (2005) discuss the Socrates' dialogs method, that is suggested in Paley's storytelling curriculum as a positive approach, that encourages the children to discuss the issues they have through open communication.

Stories are perceived as a messenger and the teachers argue that those messages can be directed to children, teachers and parents. Through the messages received from stories, children learn about the culture and the society they live in, but also about other people, their culture and history. Ahn and Filipenko (2007) argue that storytelling and children's narratives affect the way children perceive others and how they perceive the world and their place in it.

The teachers argue that parents and teachers can learn a lot about children, their interests or problems by paying attention to the stories children tell. Further, they give examples of the situations where children tried to communicate by telling a story. Engel (1995) finds stories children tell or listen, important for the development, especially in the period between the age of one and eight. Further, she argues that adults can learn a lot about children from the stories children tell.

#### Creativity in the context of stories

The goal of preschool education is holistic development of children, which includes cognitive, socio-emotional, motor skills and creative development. Pramling Samuelson et al. (2009) argue that children are most creative in the early childhood period when their curiosity and playfulness come to the fore. Vygotsky (2004) explains human creativity through two basic types, reproductive and combinatorial. During this study, the teachers stress the importance of creative development and argue that stories play a significant role in creative development of the children. The teachers argue that children express their creative side through many activities, especially through role-play, storytelling and drawing. The teachers explain how children draw and tell stories. Sometimes the stories and drawings are the product of something that the child experiences and sometimes it is the product of the child's very rich

imagination. Vygotsky's approach to the creative development can be applied in the case of these examples.

In their practice, the teachers see many opportunities to connect stories to drawing and coloring activities. The children are usually interested to hear the stories with striking characters that later, they like to present through drawings and make books out of it. Another type of stories that are very well connected to the drawings are children's personal stories. The teachers argue that except for educational and entertaining purpose, this kind of stories presented through drawings, can serve for better understanding of the children's world. Griffiths (2010) and Wright (2010) argue that storytelling and drawing are two techniques that allow children to alter the drawings or story compositions to their own needs and feelings. Those two media are also suitable for the teachers to meet and understand the children.

When discussing creativity, Vygotsky (2004) argues that imagination and creativity go hand in hand and that it is important to understand that there is no strict line between fantasy and reality. Everything that imagination creates has its roots in reality. Further, he argues that how rich somebody's imagination is, depends on how rich and fulfilling his real life experiences are. That is why he argues that it is important to offer a stimulating learning environment for children. In stimulating environment children adopt different elements of reality and those elements are later processed through the imaginative operations. The teachers in the study argue that the stories are a good material for teachers, because they use them to explain to the children fictional and real life events. The teachers find stories as a good tool to create a stimulating learning environment for children, what is in accordance with Vygotsky's attitude towards the learning environment in connection to the development of creativity and imagination.

Another site for creative development, according to Vygotsky (2004) is children's role-play. The teachers in the study find the stories as a great plot for drama activities or children's role-play. Gupta (2009) argues that make-believe play gives children a space to mature in areas of cognitive, emotional, kinesthetic and creative development. This corresponds to the teachers' statements that stories are used for dramatizing, but also children use them spontaneously in their play. In both cases, every aspect of children's development is included.

#### Technological futures of stories

New technological devices bring opportunities for teachers to make their practice innovative and more interesting for children. Nowadays, it is evident that children are prone to operate computer devices very skilfully. Every activity that includes some new technologies is more appealing for children. The new technologies shed new light on stories and storytelling as one of the oldest ways of shaping and transferring human experiences.

The results of the study show that some of the teachers have concerns that new technologies will take over and completely exclude storytelling. While some express doubt and stress that technological devices should be used consciously, others find both stories and computers important in a child's development.

In general, the teachers argue that technological devices make the learning environment more provocative for the children. They argue that stimulating environment is crucial in learning process. This view is supported by Vygotsky's (2004) argument that stimulating

environment is important for learning processes. Colbert (2006) and Yelland (2011) argue that technological devices help children to explore the world around them and stimulate them to tell stories.

### Conclusion

From the time when humans have mastered language as a means of communication, they began to shape their life experiences into narratives. Storytelling as a way of passing wisdom, knowledge and culture, exists for centuries and humans were always fascinated by stories. In human history, stories have great value in saving historical data and preserving cultural heritage of different societies.

Early childhood is a period when children develop and learn by doing, observing and listening. Traditional way of storytelling has its place in preschool practice. The stories are part of a children's life and it is evident that the benefits of story-based practice are huge. Stories are used in language and communication skills development. The stories can affect how children see and understand the world that surrounds them. As a part of other activities, the stories can be a good asset in socio-emotional and motor skills development.

This study was conducted as a small-scale interview research. Eight teachers from Swedish and international preschools participated in the interviews and gave their opinion and views about the stories. The data that was collected were analyzed and gave some interesting insights into teachers' practice regarding storytelling. The teachers reported that they are aware of the benefits stories bring and they use them in different situations. Sometimes that is only to amuse children and sometimes to educate them. When using stories, the teachers prefer to read from the books, but also to tell stories, dramatize them or organize activities where children will draw parts of the story they like the most. The teachers perceive that stories are a valuable asset in their work on language development, self-regulation and motor skills and creative development. New technological devices are mostly welcome, though some teachers expressed their concern that new technologies will take the place of traditional storytelling.

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