



Transcript for the [video](#):

Engaging Children in Oral Storytelling to Support Oral Language Development

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Voiceover (with music): Have you ever noticed how eager children are to tell stories about their lives, or stories they've made up? What kinds of stories do children tell in your classroom, and how does telling them enhance their oral language skills?

Engaging Children in Oral Storytelling to Promote Oral Language Development

Boy: And this story is about three crocodiles and one dragon.

Luz Ramos, Host: All young children have stories to tell, and they want an audience to listen. Because of this, storytelling is one of the best ways for children to develop oral language skills. When a child tells a story, he learns that he must choose his words carefully, use his narrative skills, and understand the role of the audience. Through storytelling, children use what they know about literature as they focus on story elements such as the characters, the plot, problem and resolution, and the sequence of events. They also learn how to use abstract language, which enhances their language development.

Host: Since stories originate in children's lives, storytelling provides an opportunity for children to express what is going on in their lives or what is interesting or important to them. This allows children to talk more confidently, because they are the experts on their own story.

Teacher: A lost tooth! Where did it go? Is it in your ears? Is it in her nose? Where did her lost tooth go?

Child 1: It fell out.

Teacher: It fell out?

Child 2: It went to the tooth fairy.

Teacher: It went to the tooth fairy. Tell me about that.

Host: Encouraging children to tell stories gives you the opportunity to engage them in conversation, use child-directed speech, and ultimately enhance their oral language.

Judith Schickedanz, Boston University (Emerita): Much of our language with children is about the here and now. We label; we comment; and things are right there and we all know what we're talking about. But a more abstract kind of language is language about things that have already happened, or thinking ahead to what will happen, or a fantasy—making up stories.

Teacher: So, Alexa, what did you see at the beach?

Child 1: A monster!

Judith Schickedanz: And that's a harder kind of language to understand. And that's called decontextualized language.

Child 1: Roar!!! Like that.

Child 2: For real?

Judith Schickedanz: We're using language to talk with children about something that is not right here in the here and now.

Teacher: When you did gymnastics, what did that room look like?

Child: It was red.

Teacher: It was red? I see you going like this (spreading arms out wide). Was it a little room? Was it big room?

Host: One strategy for incorporating storytelling into the preschool classroom is known as "Doing Stories." In one version of this strategy, you listen for possible stories in children's play and write down the stories as children dictate them.

Child: I'd like to see some lions?

Teacher: Ohhh. See some lions. I'm going to write that down, Migdaliz.

Vivian Paley, early childhood author and MacArthur Fellow: During an extended free play time, that's exactly what I listen for, so that I can say, "Ah, that sounds like an interesting story you're doing. Do you mind telling it to me over again so I can write it down, and later when playtime's over, we can act it out?"

Host: With the simple prompt of, "That sounds like a story," you invite children to dictate the story they are playing. As you transcribe the story, children will use their language and literacy knowledge to define key story elements.

Teacher: Pan street has pandas?

Child: Yep.

Teacher: Really?

Child: It has, like, lions, or like, pandas, or like, tigers, like, jaguars...

Host: These stories can be acted out later during group time.

Vivian Paley: Now I say, “Jenny, in the doll corner, was acting out a good story. So I asked her if she would tell it to me. So Jenny, you’ve got the mother, the baby; you’ve got the doctor; you’ve got Superman. Who do you want to be in your story?” And then other children will act out the other roles.

Child: I’m the princess; she’s a princess. And she’s a princess, and he’s a frog.

Host: While many stories emerge spontaneously during children’s play, you can also plan time for Doing Stories by having a “story table” as one of your centers.

Teacher: Ok. So you and your mom went to Hartford and you got ice cream. What happens next?

Host: Children can take turns coming to the table and dictating stories for you to write down to be acted out later during group time.

Vivian Paley: They are all eager to dictate a story. Not only that, but they borrow each other’s characters and they borrow each other’s plots. The practice of “Doing Stories” initiates a great many basic practices that lead toward enhanced verbal skills. A little boy telling a story has every reason to want to speak clearly, so that the other characters will understand how they are to do their roles.

Boy 1: He, he runs all around the castle until...

Boy 2: *rooster sound*

Boy 1: Police stand here and over there and everywhere

Boy 3: I’m the police, I, I’m the police.

Boy 1: HALT.

Theresa Bouley: When children do oral storytelling, they get this very sophisticated knowledge of story elements and how stories work: characterization, sequence of events, plot and resolution. And that’s definitely going to help them when they start to read. It helps them to understand how we use story structure, or how we use story elements to predict what’s going to happen next, or just to better understand the story.

Vivian Paley (with music): We know that it is a very, very good, useful, early language activity. The connection to their own play is immediately obvious, and those are the best stories of all. It’s just like play.