THE STORIES WE TELL

HELPING HOMELESS CHILDREN USE LITERACY TO TRANSFORM EXPERIENCE

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THINK ABOUT A STORY THAT IMPACTED YOU:

- What was it about the story that drew you in?
- Why did this particular story have meaning for you?
- Did it have to do with something that you were experiencing at a particular time?
- What are the lingering effects the story had on you?
- How does the story continue to affect you today?
WHY DO WE NEED STORIES?

- Our brains are captive to a good story
- Connect us to friends and family
- Bring us comfort
- Give us meaning
- Provide us hope and healing
- When they touch our hearts:
  - We embrace them
  - They stay with us
- Who would we be without stories?
HELP US TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

• How could this happen?
• Why did this happen?
• Am I alone?
• Where do I come from? (family stories)
• What am I here for?
• Who I am?
STORIES GIVE US OPPORTUNITIES TO:

• Clarify our identity
• Make meaning of our experience
• Rehearse potential difficulties
• Learn how to solve problems
• Deal with real life experiences
• Broaden our perspective
• Become immersed in other worlds
STORIES ALSO:

• Entertain
• Capture interest
• Opportunity to work through fears & conflicts
• Rehearsal for life’s problems
• Transport us to another world
• Open us to new experiences in another world
• Allow us to imagine new ideas or possibilities
HOW MUCH TIME DO WE GIVE TO STORIES?

• Watch TV
• Play video games based on story
• Create stories or watch the stories of others
  • YouTube
  • Facebook
  • Twitter
• Blog about inner experience
IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Why do we get so deeply involved in things such as videogames, movies, or TV shows?
- Why is it that we can have such strong emotional responses?
- How are we able to read other people’s body language?
- What allows us to connect deeply when we watch others?
MIRROR NEURONS

• Brain circuitry helps us whenever we look at another person
• Gives us the ability to connect with one another
• Translates what we see so we can relate and understand it
• Mirror neurons fire as if you were experiencing the action yourself
• Not just actions, but feelings expressed through the face
• Allows us to empathize
WHAT’S OXYTOCIN GOT TO DO WITH IT?

• “Love Hormone” that drives urge for human connection
• Neurochemical released through any time of social connectivity
• Also triggers the release of serotonin resulting in happy feeling
• Motivates cooperation with others
• Increases our empathy or ability to experience others emotions
• Character driven stories tend to create more oxytocin in the brain
  • Generates sense of identification
  • Engages empathetic feelings
HOW DOES THIS RELATED TO STORIES?

• When we read a novel, mirror neurons simulate the actions, feelings, and experiences we are reading about
• Allows us to become invested in the lives of imaginary characters
• Making the characters real to us
• Reading fiction can help make us more empathetic
• Allows for self-reflection
• Narratives can help to focus pain or experiences
WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT STORIES:

• Compelling evidence that fiction can be even more powerful to impact or influence behavior than self-help of non-fiction books. (Appel & Richter, 2007; Djikic, Oatley, Loeterman & Peterson, 2009; Meek 2014)

• Effects of listening, reading or watching stories may permanently alter the architecture and neural connections in the brain (Berns, Bliane, Prietula & Pye, 2013)

• Stories can create neural representations of visual, auditory, or motor experiences that feel as real as anything we experience in daily life (Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, & Zacks, 2009)
WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN?

• Brain does not know difference between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life
  • Olfactory: “The smell of coffee wafting through the house”
  • Sensory Cortex: “He had leathery hands”
  • Motor cortex: “Nolan kicked the soccer ball.”
  • Auditory cortex: “The siren of the ambulance fading”
  • Visual Cortex: “The amber glow of a round gem”
IN STORIES WE OFTEN SEE...

• Child protagonist that is threatened by monsters, ogres, witches, evil stepmothers, abuse, abandonment, etc.

• Characters must solve problems resolve conflict, and look inside for courage to survive the situation

• Characters deal with obstacles, traps, tortures, and mysteries

• Transformation takes place from confronting adversity
  • Internal or external
STORIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- Living with uncertainty, chaos, and unpredictability
- Trauma can be seen as a disordered story
  - Something not coded in long term memory
  - Often stored in implicit memory
- Books are often in storage with other personal items
- Might not know how to write about experiences as a means to cope
- Stories make sense of our experiences
STORIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

• The stories we tell ourselves are integral to our well-being
  • “I’m not good enough”

• Lingering effect of trauma is the need to tell the story of what happened and what it means
  • Story needs to be told in order to be processed

• Stories work well with children due to active imagination and openness to fantasy experiences
  • “She has a treasure map. We are looking for gold.”

• Different perspective or framework to understand what happens based on life experiences
STORIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

• Juchniewicz (2012) found that:
  • Reading and writing provided control for those experiencing homelessness
  • Learned the value of their own personal stories
  • Created order in their lives with literacy tools
“Zora’s story… wasn’t a lie. It was her way of making things make sense, explaining our lives through a story. And just as stories guard the pictures of the selves and the worlds we cherish most, sometimes we have to defend our stories.”

“Zora had made me a story out of events that were too huge and too frightening for me to hold. She had put them neatly into places that let me step back and see them, name them, understand them, and do something about them.”

-Zora & Me by T.R. Simon & Victora Bond
STORIES TO IMPROVE LITERACY

“This is a great movie, isn’t it?”
POWER OF READING WITH CHILDREN…

- The more we read, the more proficient readers we become
- Those who read very little often have poor reading skills
- Read something according to specific interests
- Give them time to read
- Make sure book matches reading level
- One on one reading with them
USING HANDS ON EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP STORY SKILLS

• Start with a rough draft
• Use story organizer to decide what elements are important
• Don’t worry about spelling
• Cross out instead of erasing so you have it if you change your mind
• Create a clean copy
• Offered opportunities for them to type writings on computer
USING EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP STORY SKILLS
• Rumpelstiltskin

• This summer I went with my friends to south park theater to see R.S. My three favorite characters were the Miller daughter, the Queen, and the Rumple.

• Rumple-was funny, sneaky, and alone however is helpful to the miller daughter.

• Miller Daughter-was brave and needed help

• Queen was suspicious, mean and needed gold

• I was amazed how you guys did it. Thank you for the ticket
USING EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP STORY SKILLS
USING EXPERIENCES TO DEVELOP STORY SKILLS

We had fun with the plants and mine plant is the biggest plant of all and I planted beans and bean's are healthy for you make your bones strong and you could run fast and you will be excited you will get alot of new friend's and cool.

The plant was 5 inches tall and the other one was 8 inches tall.
The large ball crashed right through the table because it was made of Styrofoam.

What was made of Styrofoam, the large ball or the table?
CLARIFY FOR COMPREHENSION

• Vocabulary is fluid
  • Different meanings for different people at different times
  • Culture also plays a role in how we use and understand language
  • Prior knowledge influences our ability to make inference

• “Tell me what happened in that story”
  • If retell is inaccurate, they really did not get the meaning
CLARIFY FOR COMPREHENSION

• Beezus and Ramona written in 1955 from 9 year old Beezus’ point-of-view
  • Her little sister was playing the mouth organ
    • Why would she have an organ in her mouth?
    • My teacher said an organ is a heart, liver, or kidney
  • She was embroidering a steaming tea kettle
    • What is embroidering?
    • Does she know what a steaming tea kettle is?
  • When we don’t understand what is happening, and have no one to help us, it can be easy to just stop!
Dear Mr. Steve:

I had a blast on Tuesday it was fun. First you gave us a cup, cardboard, ruler, and a block. We had to put the cardboard on the cup, and take the block on it, and take the ruler, and try to put the block in the cup. Without your hand. Next we play with basketball try to put it in the garbage can. That was awesome, but everybody was acting a fool. I want to that again.

The Rapper Who Came to Our School

A great day at school. A rapper that worked with Rihanna. He rapped about cereal, Sponge Bob, Ariel of the Little Mermaid, and the herd of the apes. He was going hard rapping like he had a rap scar. Rapping to beastly like we going to a feast. He was going to feasty. We went to the gym. He was right there. All we had to do was go up the stairs. It got a little scary and hairy. I got stepped on, my ribs were buried.
The Spectacular Day

Today we had a rapper come to our school. All the students were in the gymnasium. He demonstrated how to rap. A rap can have up to 5 words in a sentence. All of the words rhyme. How cool is that! A lot of children were excited and wanted his autograph. Ms. Fisher told everyone to do the quiet sign. It worked. We all sat back down in our chairs and paid attention. It was a spectacular day!
Dear Ms. Ann: I love the bracelet and the necklace. It was so fun to make them with you. Thank you for being patient with me when you helping me with the bracelets and the necklace. I loved it, and I hope we could do it again.

Thank you for all the expression that we made it was genie bottles, bracelet, fishes, and mask. It was fun but the mask was fun with the glitter it was everywhere on your hair and stuff like that I still need glitter. That was fun. You told me no more glitter because I put it everywhere so thank you.
GRATITUDE FOR EXPERIENCES

• Ceramics studio: “I loved the ceramics that we did. It was so fun. I can’t wait to see my teacup. Mr. Luke was a gentleman with the colors. Thank you for coming here to do the ceramics with us.”
• Mr. Steve is the best person in the world and he has electricity stuff and I hope he could come again that was fun and Mr. Steve so nice. Ms. Abbey help sometime so that was nice and I hope he could come again so that was so sweet of Ms. Abbey and I need help sometime and I go to the learning center everyday and I have a Mom who help me when I need help sometime. That’s nice of Mr. Steve, and Ms. Abbey too. Thank you.
• Ms. Silk is the best person in the world because she does the best things in the hole world and she can do different kind of things and stuff she can do origami and we did all kind of stuff. We made a piano. We made a box we made a boat we made a hat we made a kite. I love it and hope she could comeback. I love her and hope she could come back. I like Ms. Abbey the nicest person in the world and I hope Ms. Abbey have a nice time on the trips and I and Ms. Abbey did the activities. I like doing a report on Ms. Silk and Ms. Abbey is so nice and they can help you with your problem.
The bracelet is fun and bracelet is fun to do and bracelet and Ms. Ann is the best person in the world and Ms. Ann is good to me. We did the mask and we did the genie bottles. WE did the compliment fishes and that was so fun. I hope she can come again and that was so sweat of Ms. Ann and I hope she can come again.

Today we went to a farm. We picked blueberries. I picked two basketfuls. After we finished, we went on a tour of the farm. There were two dogs that walked in front of the tractor. We saw a lot of plants. I got a chance to feed some animals. Once the tour was finished, we ate lunch. Lonell, our bus driver went over to see a goat, cow, chickens, and a rooster. And we left and went home.
BRING IN AN AUTHOR
COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL LIBRARIES

• Summer reading programs or after school programs
• Are there programs that they can bring to you?
• Help children to learn to access resources at the library
WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN ACCESS BOOKS:

• Access to books is key to successful reading development
• Reading programs at libraries may give books away
• RIF (Reading is Fundamental)
• Have a book drive so you have books to give students
A FINAL THOUGHT…

• Killing Monsters: Why children need fantasy, super-heroes, and make-believe violence by Gerald Jones

• Children need a place to become familiar with and control the emotions of anger and violence

• Importance of distinguishing difference between what violent games mean to children and what they mean to adults
  • Adults often horrified with content
  • Children more interested in emotional meaning

• “Children need to feel strong. They need to feel powerful in the face of a scary, uncontrollable world.”
A FINAL THOUGHT…

• The Scarred Heart: Understanding and Identifying Kids who Kill by Dr. Helen Smith
  • “Not one young person in my experience has ever been made violent by media influence. Young people who are already inclined to be violent do feel that violent media speaks to them. A few do get dangerous ideas from it. But more of them find it to be a way to deal with their rage.”

• Studies often do not distinguish between different types of media content
  • Results same for those who watch Rugrats and Arthur as with violence

• Story’s most important function is it’s emotional meaning

• People best able to act in the face of violence are least horrified by it
Tell me a fact and I’ll remember;
Tell me a truth and I’ll believe;
Tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.

-Proverb
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REFERENCES


• The Scarred Heart: Understanding and Identifying Kids who Kill by Dr. Helen Smith

• Killing Monsters: Why children need fantasy, super-heroes, and make-believe violence by Gerald Jones