

Bible Storying Through the Eyes of a Child

A research paper presented October 28, 2016 at the annual conference of the Society of Professors of Christian Education, Orlando, FL

by

Kristi Williams, PhD

Preschool Minister, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, GA

Abstract

The aim of this research project was to determine if some skills for Bible Storying (skills for which future training could be implemented) could be considered developmentally appropriate for children to learn. The researcher adopted the ST4Kids Bible Storying model as a typical example of the methodology being investigated. The research question was further clarified to include skills which specifically led towards the development of a child's ability to retell a story to others at the end of a Bible Storying session. After a survey of literature, the researcher concluded that there is insufficient evidence to reduce Bible Storying into skills. The most helpful information came from parallel issues found in the field of literacy and language development in early childhood. Additionally, viewing Bible Storying as a full process best described as a gradual release of responsibility teaching model or as a cooperative learning model were better answers than considering skills within the process.

In a North American city, home to an established seminary, a new church was forming. The target neighborhood was an area highly concentrated with newly arriving immigrants, and from the very beginning, pastoral leadership from 3 or 4 language groups was collaborating in this effort. One evening as the core group met during the preliminary formation stage (a meeting of 15-20 mature believers – many of whom were current or former seminary students), the pastor and elder team presented the concept of Bible Storying as a primary Bible teaching method they

desired to implement throughout small group studies in homes. The methodology was overviewed, modeled and then small groups were challenged to practice retelling two popular Old Testament stories before apply the framework of storying questions to the passage. As groups arrived at the “telling the story” part of the exercise, there were murmurs throughout the room. The murmurs seemed to express an undercurrent of: “I know this story, but I don’t know if I can tell it. I may not say it right! I might leave something out!” Before the groups could ever arrive at the phase of applying storying questions to investigate the meaning of the narrative, many of these adults were stuck.

This episode sets the stage for the current inquiry. The researcher’s mind leapfrogged backwards from this observation of adult behavior, and hypothesized that it might be possible to interject training into the education path of individuals, such as those comprising the church planting core group, prior to adulthood for the purpose of helping those individuals be better tellers of God’s story – so that they wouldn’t “get stuck” when trying to retell Bible stories that they previously learned. Admittedly, many factors may have been responsible for the hesitancy in retelling among members of the observed group. The researcher chose a factor that seemed interesting, and perhaps controllable. As stated in the original formulation, this research project determined to discover if some skills for Bible Storying (skills for which training could be implemented) could be considered developmentally appropriate for children to learn. The researcher began with a hunch that if a set of appropriate storying skills could be identified, then consideration could be given as to whether there was a need for more purposeful inclusion of such activities to foster Bible Storying skills in curriculum targeted at formative years.

Bible Storying is a methodology often used in cross cultural mission settings to communicate Biblical truths and the gospel, especially with oral learners (Terry 1997, 168). In

the case of the spotlighted church, the leadership hoped it would be a useful teaching strategy for transcending cultural and lingual differences in a diverse target neighborhood. The traditional implementation of Bible Storying with oral learners was a primary motivation for the researcher to consider storying skills appropriate for the developmental stage of “children”, because within the childhood stage the majority of individuals tend to begin as oral learners before developing abilities to read and write. Additionally, the researcher has personal experience in working with this demographic. Although no experimentation was conducted, the researcher found it useful to approach the project by limiting the focus to the early childhood years, approximately birth to age 8.

As cited in the anecdote which initially spurred the research project, the researcher translated the confounding issue for the adults into this idea: the adults lacked an ability to retell the Bible Story with no prior notification. With certainty, if any of the group was asked whether they knew the two selected Bible stories, all would have answered in the affirmative. Most of them would have claimed to have known the stories since childhood. Most of them likely had experienced multiple exposures to the stories from lessons, readings, and sermons from childhood onward. The observed session was for the purpose of training the adults in a Bible Storying methodology, a teaching method to which most of the individuals had no prior exposure. Yet it was striking to the researcher that when presented with the challenge to retell two of the most famous and celebrated Old Testament stories, many of the adults did not readily respond. The researcher chose to formulate the investigation as an inquiry into “lack of ability” and the possibility of identifying “skills” which might have developed a story retelling ability. The other possible factors which may have caused hesitancy in retelling the Bible stories were not included in the scope of this project.

Bible Storying

In its most basic form and in the widest sense, Bible Storying includes a variety of techniques for telling Bible stories. Of course, as recorded in Scripture pertaining to His earthly ministry, Jesus told stories using many forms such as parables and object lessons. As appropriate to the ministry setting, practitioners have found storying to be a helpful tool in “teaching God’s Word leading to salvation, church planting, discipling, leader training, and various ministry activities” (Lausanne 2004, 88).

For this particular project, the researcher declined to make any consideration of the efficacy of a chronological aspect of storying, as this additional qualifier is extraneous to the specific endeavor of the research. It should be noted that the typical model of Bible Storying that was considered in the research project was that as typified by the *ST4Kids* model found on the organization’s website and outlined in Figure 1. Additional models of similar format include *Foundations for Emerging Leaders*, *StoryRunners*, and *Simply The Story*.

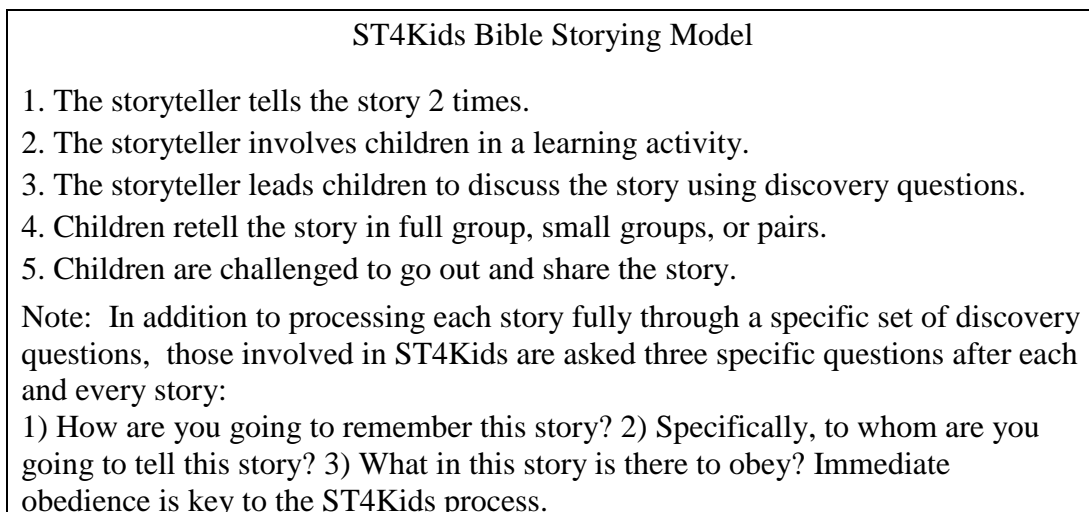


Figure 1. Steps in the process of the ST4Kids Bible Storying model

Principles that undergird the design and implementation of such models are nicely summarized by Jeff Palmer, and begin to give flavor to why such methodology might be appealing for use with children: (1) Be simple. (2) Be subtle. (3) Be flexible. (Palmer 1991, 9)

A simple man or child should be able to understand a Bible story, and the beauty of pure Bible Storying is that no supplies except a story are necessary, but if available, the process can incorporate props from simple everyday objects, or even elaborate costumes. The second principle of Bible Storying design is that the learning is not propositional. The process is designed for participants to uncover the meaning under the tutelage of the storyteller, in a way that reinforces and deepens the personal application of learning. When working with children, the axiom to “be flexible” always applies. Or as some say, be “fluid” because “flexible” is too rigid!

Palmer has this to say about the way the Bible speaks for itself through a simple and subtle Bible Storying process:

“Storying subtly impacts, atmospherizing folk to God. A God who made the world is some kind of powerful Being. He doesn’t like certain things like sin because He wiped out the world with a flood when people insisted on sinning. Thus, there is no need to isolate abstract doctrines. Instead the doctrine of God shines through the interaction we observe that God has with people in the stories. His character becomes clear as we see how He acts in story after story. Our own situation becomes clear. People begin to think through the implications of the stories....fellowship with God, rebellion against God, God’s love, etc. And the storyteller isn’t telling people what to believe. He is just telling them what happened. The temptation is to confront and explain rationally, when the story and the Holy Spirit speak quite well without our rational approach.” (Palmer 1991, 9)

Although each practitioner may have their own agenda for use of a storying technique, the goals of Bible Storying as iterated by the Simply the Story model and ST4Kids were those assumed by the researcher. Through Bible Storying, the listener/participant learns the character of God, what God wants for and from mankind, and sees and admits truth about himself (SimplyTheStory.org). The researcher also assumed that an inextricable outcome of this

technique is that the listener/participant leaves the storying session not merely knowing the Bible story and having some understanding about how to obey the teaching, but also having the ability to retell the story to others, a goal which ST4Kids and other models reinforce with an accountability component (Story Training 4 Kids, 2). This brings additional clarity to the research question: Are there some skills which can be separated out from the Bible Storying process, which would be considered developmentally appropriate for children to learn, and for which specific skill acquisition training can be applied, and skills which specifically lead towards the development of a child's ability to retell a story to others?

Confounding Issues

It seems appropriate to address several confounding issues related to this research endeavor that arose as the researcher began down a path of inquiry searching for "skills" components in the Bible Storying process.

First, if the project merely addressed the full Bible Storying process and its application towards children, there is some non-academic literature, all of which is directed at "how to" use Bible Storying with children and how to include them in the storying process. There is a miniscule amount of information pertaining to how to teach children the process of storying (such as the ST4Kids model). The primary concept in circulation is that children will learn the storying process by experiencing the process. A qualitative research approach could have yielded mountains of evidence that children accomplish the goals of learning content and applying meaning, and also have the ability to retell the story after participating in Bible Storying. Many practitioners would be happy to elaborate on the specific details of their successful implementation of Bible Storying with children and pitfalls to avoid. The researcher

did not doubt the efficacy of such a teaching method, although it would be interesting to experiment with different factors to see what effects could be measured. However, the way in which the research was framed called for dissecting the Bible Storying process and looking at possible “skills” within the process. This was a confounding issue.

Second, when considering the skill set involved in storying, an underlying research question arose: To which learning domain would said skill set belong? The original research question was formulated with the fore-knowledge that children can accomplish retelling at the end of participation in a Bible Storying process. Moreover, testimonies abound as to the life change in attitudinal, moral and spiritual domains as a result of learning through Bible Storying. Such effects were never in doubt, and were excluded from the research endeavor. Additionally, from a theological framework, the researcher did not intentionally include investigation into formation of an evangelism mindset through participation in Bible Storying. The question of which learning domain to consider became important due to a lack of academic literature related to “storying” as defined in this project. The researcher concluded that if a subset of skills were to be found, they were likely to be most closely related to parallel concepts addressed by academic literature pertaining to language and literacy. The Bible storying process in and of itself is an oral language endeavor, and the end result of retelling is also an oral language product. A deluge of academic research exists in the field of language and literacy development during childhood, and it was intimidating to select a starting point.

There were several confounding issues swirling around investigation of a skill set in the Bible Storying process through the lens of language and literacy development. Almost exclusively, published studies dealt with the progressive development of oral language towards a goal of language that is written and read. Although oral language skills are inherent in literacy,

traditional educational paths are rigidly focused on producing students who have the ability to read and write, and the ability to comprehend read and written language. There is virtually no desire to produce learners who persist only in use of oral communication. Therefore, the path of reception of learning content by oral transmission, processing the received content orally, and regurgitating the same content orally as an end product was hard to find in academic literature. When found, the goal of the retelling was the development of literacy skills. A meta-analysis of “Children’s Story Retelling” in 2012 captured 11 studies including a total of 687 children with a mean age of 57 months (just shy of 5 years old). “A cluster of instructional practices during both the adult reading a story and a child retelling the story were associated with positive child outcomes. These included an adult reading and rereading a story, prompting child responses and verbal elaborations, asking questions and requesting predictions, and encouraging and supporting child retelling” (Dunst, Simkus, Hamby 2012, 3). Relating a story to a child’s interests, and introducing or explaining the story also had an impact.

There is one additional caveat: the researcher is aware that some other faith traditions (concerned with religious knowledge/content and not merely secular knowledge pertaining to literacy) are deeply rooted in the heritage of oral transmission and rote memory, and it is possible that this trail of inquiry is a fount of transferable knowledge yet untapped in this inquiry. Further research in this area could be conducted following terms such as: narrative abilities, faith transmission, etc.

Next, retelling is a recognized literacy strategy, but it was not found to be used in the same way as described in our selected Bible Storying model. Almost exclusively, the academic studies used “retelling” as a tool for assessing student needs for language development intervention. Measuring comprehension of stories they had read, or which were read to them

through retelling was most common. There was a steady stream of affirmation through academic writings that retelling was a good strategy – for the purpose of building literacy skills. Further research may be helpful to demonstrate how retelling a pre-formulated narrative can build literary skills and it may help to correlate this question with skills derived through retelling the plot of a story book.

A parallel issue is that of the benefits of discussion questions during child-teacher and child-parent interactions after retelling or after hearing a story. This is a specific step on the Bible Storying process, so it is relevant. Secular research has much to contribute already in regards to the affect of quantity and quality of adult to child interaction on literacy development. Works such as those aggregated by Susan Massey would be a great starting point (Massey 2013).

Although a bit dated, Lesley Morrow’s insights (and older works cited in her writings) into using story retelling may still be the most helpful. Much of her specific work relates to children retelling after reading or listening to a book, and the goals she is aiming for are those of comprehension and language development. Rather than viewing the retelling of the story as an end goal, the terminal aim is always the development of other language skills. From the viewpoint of Morrow, some of the primary language skills developed through retelling are: “language complexity, comprehension of story, sense of story structure during retelling, and inclusion of structural elements in dictations of original stories generated by the youngsters” (Morrow 1989, 39). In support of story retelling, Morrow gives a defense that seems fully transferrable as an overview of benefits from a process such as that in the typical Bible Storying model adopted in this project:

“Retelling a story reflects a holistic concept of reading comprehension. Retelling requires the reader or listener to integrate information by relating parts of the story to one another and to personalize information by relating it to one’s own background or experience. It contrasts with the piecemeal approach of traditional posed questions which

require students to respond with specific bits of information about the text” (Morrow 1989, 40).

A story becomes easier to retell when there are elements such as repetitive phrases, rhyme, familiar sequences of numbers or letters, conversation, and general popularity (Morrow 1989, 46) many of which can be found in Bible narratives. Categories for assessment include a child’s sense of story structure as evidenced by their retelling of setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution (Morrow 1989, 51). Deducing from this, helping children with skills for describing story settings, emphasizing story themes, glorifying plot lines, and summarizing resolutions could be a possible answer to the research question. However, Morrow does not offer advice for skills development towards these assessment points except for advocating the retelling process. The researcher will comment on this answer at the end of this section.

It still may be possible that research into recall and memorization as a subset of language and literacy development could yield findings that inform the use of Bible Storying with children. Schneider and Dube updated research started a decade earlier through an experiment published in 2005. Forty-four typically developing children in Kindergarten and Second Grade were included in the study. Three stories were used, and they were told in 3 different ways. The first was told to the child orally, the second through oral delivery and accompanying pictures, and the third was told only through pictures. After hearing Story 1, each child retold the story to a naïve listener and grammar units in the retelling were measured. After hearing Story 2 and simultaneously viewing the accompanying picture cards, each child retold the story to the naïve listener. After taking as much time as they wanted to view the picture cards for Story 3, each child first told their own developed story to the tester and then to the naïve listener. In the retellings of Story 2 & 3 the child could use the picture cards in the retelling. The experiment involved a small sample, and a small range of ages, but the results were that children had the

highest level of retelling when they heard the story orally. For the younger children the pictures did not seem to aid in the retelling to the degree that they helped the older children. The hypothesized reason that the orally delivered story was easier to recall was that it did not require a child to formulate the story (Schneider and Dube 2005, 58). It seems reasonable that the Bible Storying model would carry such a benefit, as the story is pre-formulated by the original storyteller. Further research in this area could be conducted following terms such as: memorized language, remembering, recall, rehearsal, language organization skills, and mental frameworks.

Similarly, within the field of childhood literacy and language development, storytelling is a popular theme that may give insight into Bible Storying. In contrast to the Bible Storying model which seeks accuracy in retelling a pre-formulated story, the majority of secular studies consider the use of storytelling strategies as a way to develop creativity, as children make-up their own stories for telling. There is a plethora of books giving advice on how to be a better storyteller, and it would have been a small leap to find the best research on the use and development of skills such as expression, gestures, etc. in storytelling. Many other books offer help on how to help children be creative in story formation, so further research in this area could be conducted following terms such as: concept map, creativity, story formation, story awareness, story modes, etc. Such skills do not address moving a “non-teller” into a “reteller”, and no literature was found to lead the researcher towards the understanding that such skills are integral to Bible Storying for the purpose of producing the ability to retell the story.

Third, even after a refining of the research question(s), efforts to break down the Bible Storying process into skill sets were stymied. When reading the best literature about Bible Storying, the only trace of language related to “skills” was that of improving the technique of the teaching storyteller. When practitioners of the Bible Storying process were interviewed in hopes

of producing research leads, person after person was unable to reduce the process into parts – they believed in the full process. Confounded by each of these dead ends, the researcher used the remaining time allotment to consider a new angle. Of course, in assuming that a child can participate in a Bible Storying session, and in assuming that upon completion he or she has the ability to retell the Bible Story, the researcher assumes that learning will occur. Could an existing learning theory adequately explain the path and product contained in the research question? If so, would such a path describe typical skills which were to be taught? This is the best answer that could be ascertained in the time allotted for this project, but many more questions remain unanswered.

Storying Through the Lens of a Gradual Release of Responsibility Teaching Model

After investigation of academic literature parading through a range from Bible Storying to cognitive skills in language and literacy development in early childhood, the researcher's second approach is to provide answers to the research question through consideration of Bible Storying as an example of a gradual release of responsibility (GRR) teaching model.

Forms of apprenticeship learning have been around since the beginning of time. The term “gradual release of responsibility” was coined in the early 1980s, and has strong ties to Piaget, but even stronger ties to theories of Lev Vygotsky. In short, such a model begins with direct instruction from a teacher while a student observes, and ends with a student showing forth learning independently.

Considering Bible Storying as an example of a GRR teaching model gives an adequate framework for understanding how the Storying process can produce the ability to retell. In essence, the process itself leads to acquisition of skills, and the ability to re-tell is learned

through participation in the process, not through development of separate skills. There are four phases in a GRR model as described by Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2013). To begin, a focused lesson is the full responsibility of the teacher. In Bible Storying, the first step is for the storyteller to tell the story (sometimes twice). This individual should model good storytelling technique, and the student should actively listen. The second step in a GRR model is guided instruction. This aligns with involving students in a learning activity and leading them to discuss the story in a Bible Storying session. Students work with the teacher, and engage especially by asking and responding to questions. The third step in a GRR model is collaborative learning. By this point in a Bible storying session, students have acquired new information – a story – and their learning continues by working in pairs or small groups to retell the story and check for accuracy in accomplishment of the task. Finally, the GRR ends with the student accomplishing independent retelling. In the case of our selected Bible Storying model, participants are exhorted to go out on their own and become the storyteller by telling the story to a new audience.

A gradual release of responsibility model for teaching and learning describes a full process, so the implementation of the process is the focus for improvement. Primarily, the teacher can gain skills to be a better Bible story teller, and a better guide through the higher level questions comprising the instruction time. One critique is that preparation in a GRR approach can be time consuming for a teacher. Some Bible storying models try to mitigate this downside by pre-formulating a set of standard questions to use during the instruction time. Other storying models excel in training practitioners in the development of questions so that they can contextualize to the culture and audience.

One contemporary example of a gradual release of responsibility teaching session with preschoolers was a narrative retelling experiment conducted in 2013 (Spencer et al. 2013). The

researcher was motivated by a desire to promote narrative proficiency, and determine which students in the early childhood classroom might need additional instructional intervention.

During the experiment, 12 story sessions were presented in two Head Start classrooms, and compared to 2 control classes. The stories contained character, problem, feeling, action, ending elements and were presented orally with the aid of picture icons, and also hand gestures. The session included a 5 step process:

1. Model. The story was told by a storyteller teacher who emphasized each structural element in the story.
2. Story Gestures. The storyteller repeated the story and prompted the group to follow her use of hand gestures that corresponded with each story element.
3. Team retell. The storyteller asked the group to retell the story, calling upon a respondent after taking a pause for all to think of a response. "The instructor restated the target response at least twice and asked for the class to say it with her."(203)
4. Partner retell. Students retold the whole story to a partner who checked the story using a "Champ check" card. During this time, the storyteller and assistant assisted as needed.
5. Champ ceremony. After all children completed the story retell, the group returned to group time and celebrated.

This model was applied to a learning setting for the purpose of assessment leading to intervention, and is especially informative to the research question because the target audience is the same. The experiment was structured very similarly to a Bible Storying session, in that, a storyteller shared a story orally and during a retell process, the children retold the same story that they heard, and they participated in large group and small group settings during the process. Although the research sample was small (two classes), there was a statistical significance in the learning outcomes of the experiment groups as a whole compared with the control classes. Although the results were not earth shattering, the experiment provides a model that may be adaptable for further research.

There are several strong theoretical bases and elements related to gradual release of responsibility teaching models. The overarching theory comes from Lev Vygotsky's theory of

Zone of Proximal Development. The idea of “scaffolding” a child’s learning is pervasive in research about language and literacy development. Vertical alignment in curriculum is analogous to the chronological approach some take with Bible storying, and its impact on the outcome of story retelling is a topic for further research. Further research in this area could be conducted following terms such as: reciprocal teaching, and cognitive apprenticeship.

Storying Through the Lens of a Cooperative Learning Model

According to Johnson & Johnson (2013, 73), “cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups in which students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.” Benefits which have been measured can include: higher achievement and greater productivity, more higher-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions, greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another, and more time on task than competitive or individualistic learning. When conducted effectively it is a method which ensures that all students are meaningfully and actively involved in learning, and can aid the establishment of friendship with peers.

In a study of preschool children reported in 2015 by Kamuran Tarima, in addition to completing pattern sequences the children developed skills such as solidarity, sharing, active listening, and fulfilling their personal responsibilities in the group work activities (Tarima 2015). Lucas Butler and Gregory Walton conducted two collaborative learning experiments with preschoolers in 2013. When the children believed that they were cooperating with another child to complete a puzzle, both experiments measured that children worked at the puzzle for a longer length of time, and had more affinity for the working of the puzzle than did children who worked individually (Butler and Walton 2013, 957).

Not all groups and teams accomplish learning cooperatively. The need for purposeful design of instruction is recognized throughout research and Johnson & Johnson explain the required pieces (Johnson and Johnson 1999, 70): “In order for an activity to be cooperative, five basic elements are essential and need to be included: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing.” The work of Nokes-Malach and colleagues is not exclusively with preschoolers, but does explain conditions in which “collaboration improves outcomes” (Nokes-Malach, Richey, and Gadgil 2015, 645). It seems reasonable that some characteristics of collaborative efforts that improve outcome are quickly transferable to the Bible storying process. A few findings from the aggregation of studies by Nokes-Malach, et. al. suggest that cognitive and social elements such as these contribute to success in collaborative learning settings. Comments by the researcher regarding how the conditions may relate to a Bible Storying session are included. (1) “group members can use their collective knowledge about a problem-solving task.” All group members hear the same Bible story being told, so even if no one in a group has any prior Bible knowledge, each group member shares in the same knowledge base under consideration (2) Participants in a group may contribute “complementary knowledge”. During group activities to review through retelling, it is easily imaginable how two participants listening to the same original content may have remembered different complementary aspects. (3) “Collaboration can also increase memory and problem-solving resources through each individual’s contribution to the recall of the relevant problem features.” (4) “Error-correction, in which individual members can check the logic and rationale of each other’s solutions, has been hypothesized as a major source of benefit to groups.” So in the group retelling step in the storying process, group members hold

each other accountable to retell the story with correct details (Nokes-Malach, Richey, and Gadgil 2015, 649).

One study that is informative to the Preschool age group is a cooperative learning experiment conducted in 2 nursery schools during 2013 with 57 children averaging 5 ½ years of age. The aim of the study was to determine if the learning of young children would benefit from a cooperative setting compared to individual learning. “For a better cooperative learning atmosphere, it was necessary for the children to have some social skill standards such as active listening, happy talk and the participation of every child. The effective implementation of these standards has been found to contribute to an atmosphere which is comfortable, but challenging and where the children can interact freely with each other and exchange ideas” (Tarima 2015, 1599). The experimental group received instruction in these standards before being presented with a mathematical learning task, in which they completed sequencing tasks with patterns. The study concluded that more learning occurred in the cooperative setting. Moreover, by participating in training and subsequently guiding the learning of the experimental group, teacher attitudes shifted to be more accepting of the use of cooperative learning models with the preschool age group in topics aside from games and free play.

Fostering student interaction is a key indicator of success in secular instructional settings across a variety of age groups. Kaendler and colleagues posit 5 teacher competencies that contribute to quality student interaction in a collaborative learning session: (1) Plan student interaction, (2) Monitor, (3) Support, (4) Consolidate this interaction, and (5) Reflect (Kaendler et al. 2015, 505). Models of cooperative learning are a second lens through which to consider young children and their interaction with a Bible Storying model as the progress towards the goal of developing the ability to retell a story. Further research with the specific age group of interest,

and applied to a Bible Storying model would be needed in order to draw direct conclusions. Other terms which may produce helpful leads in research include: group work, group instruction, collaborative learning, and group-to-individual transfer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research endeavor specified a typical Bible Storying process for investigation. The terminal goal being investigated was that of discovering skills embedded in the process which could help produce the ability within a child to retell a story after the Bible Storying session. Excluded from consideration were other aspects of the Bible Storying process which may require skills – such as deriving meaning from a story, and making personal application of that meaning, and other elements which could be studied separately.

The researcher's original hunch has been answered with many questions and few answers. The researcher found that terminology of "skills" was not the best descriptor to include in the research question. Skills identified in the early childhood domain of language and literacy development show promise as being the most informative to the research question, but in most cases they are not directly aligned with the task being investigated.

As found in this project, a list of "skills" cannot be separated out from the Bible Storying process. Gradual release of responsibility teaching models such as the typical Bible Storying process described in this project are justified for use in early childhood, as attested to by numerous academic sources. A child's ability to retell a story to others has the potential to be affected by participation in a Bible Storying process. This project did not determine if teaching children through a GRR process is a better method than others for accomplishing the outcome of retelling, but did begin to give evidence as to why it does produce children who can retell.

During the quest for answers, the researcher talked with multiple Bible Storying practitioners whose responses were not recorded in this project. Each reiterated that children – even young ones - can accomplish Bible Storying, reach the goal of retaining knowledge of a biblical narrative, can conceive a plan for applying the meaning of the story to their own life, and are capable of retelling the story to others. As an outcome, the researcher suggests that a more appropriate refining of the research question should be: What are best practices found in gradual release of responsibility models that can be applied to a Bible Storying process with children for the goal of producing effective retelling of the story?

A second model that described a typical Bible Storying process was that of cooperative learning, which has also gained widespread acceptance as a developmentally appropriate instructional approach for young children. This project did not determine if teaching children through a cooperative learning process is a better method than others for accomplishing the outcome of retelling, but did begin to give evidence as to why it does produce children who can retell. A follow-up research question is: What are best practices found in cooperative learning models that can be applied to a Bible Storying process with children for the goal of producing effective retelling of the story?

It could not be determined that Bible Storying is comprised of “skills” building blocks, but rather the process itself is the mechanism for learning. A typical process includes telling/hearing of the story, teacher and learner engagement with the story through discovery questions, and pairs and small group review of the story in a retelling task. The process itself, whether viewed as a gradual release of responsibility model, or a cooperative learning model, seems to generate at a minimum, learning in cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains, and in turn precipitates retelling of the story.

The researcher surmises that the potential outcome of the purposeful application of instructional processes during early childhood years that are similar to the typical Bible storying process described in this project, whether viewed through a gradual release of responsibility lens, or the lens of cooperative learning, is that of a Virtuous Teaching Cycle (VTC) (Tichy 2002, 52). It is often said among Christian educators within the childhood demographic, that children are not just the church of tomorrow – they are the church of today. Through such a VTC, the ideal is that both teacher and student engage with Scripture in a mutually edifying way, both worship the God of the Story, both undergo spiritual formation through the experience, and both are motivated to tell forth what they have learned. In Bible Storying, content and skills comprise a mere fraction of the learning, as children actively respond to the narrative through the storying process, and as an end result, children have the ability to retell God’s Story.

REFERENCE LIST

- Beckwith, Ivy. 2010. *Formational children's ministry: Shaping children using story, ritual, and relationship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Butler, Lucas P., and Gregory M. Walton. 2013. The opportunity to collaborate increases preschoolers' motivation for challenging tasks. *Journal of experimental child psychology* 116.4: 953-961.
- CBS4Kids. *Bible storying and children's ministry handbook*. <http://www.cbs4kids.org> (accessed September 10, 2016).
- Dunst, Carl J., Andrew Simkus, and Deborah W. Hamby. 2012. Children's story retelling as a literacy and language enhancement strategy. *Center for Early Literacy Learning* 5.2: 1-14.
- Fisher, Douglas, and Nancy Frey. 2013. *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Foundations for Emerging Leaders. <http://sugarcreek.net/docs/missions/Foundations.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2016).
- Haven, Kendall. 2007. *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Johnson, David W., and Roger T. Johnson. 1999. Making cooperative learning work. *Theory into practice* 38.2: 67-73.
- Kaendler, Celia, Michael Wiedmann, Nikol Rummel, and Hans Spada. 2015. Teacher competencies for the implementation of collaborative learning in the classroom: A framework and research review. *Educational Psychology Review* 27.3: 505-536.
- Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism. 2004. *Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54 "Making Disciples of Oral Learners"*.
- Massey, Susan L. 2013. From the reading rug to the play center: Enhancing vocabulary and comprehensive language skills by connecting storybook reading and guided play. *Early childhood education journal* 41.2: 125-131.
- McIlwain, Trevor with Nancy Everson. 1993. *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ, children's edition*, Vols. 1-5. Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission.
- Morrow, Lesley Mandel. 1989. Using story retelling to develop comprehension. In *Children's comprehension of text: Research into practice*, ed. K. Denise Muth, 37-58. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

- Nokes-Malach, Timothy J., J. Elizabeth Richey, and Soniya Gadgil. 2015. When is it better to learn together? Insights from research on collaborative learning. *Educational Psychology Review* 27.4: 645-656.
- Palmer, Jeff. 1991. *Chronological storytelling: Telling the Bible story in 54 lessons*. Self published.
- Schneider, Phyllis, and Rita Vis Dubé. 2005. Story presentation effects on children's retell content. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 14.1: 52-60.
- Simply The Story. <http://simplythestory.org> (accessed October 10, 2016).
- Spencer, Trina D., Douglas B. Peterson, Timothy A. Slocum, and Melissa M. Allen. 2014. Large group narrative intervention in Head Start preschools: Implications for response to intervention. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*: 196-217.
- Story Training 4 Kids (ST4Kids). ST4T.org (accessed October 10, 2016).
- Stonehouse, Catherine and Scottie May. 2010. *Listening to children on the spiritual journey: Guidance for those who teach and nurture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- StoryRunners. <http://www.storyrunners.org> (accessed October 10, 2016).
- Tarima, Kamuran. 2015. Effects of cooperative group work activities on pre-school children's pattern recognition skills. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 6: 1597-1604.
- Terry, J.O. 2008. *Basic Bible Storying: Preparing and presenting Bible stories for evangelism, discipleship, training, and ministry*. Fort Worth, TX: Church Starting Network.
- Terry, J. O. 1997. Chronological Bible storying to tribal and nomadic peoples. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 14.4: 167-72.
- Tichy, Noel M. 2002. *The cycle of leadership: How great leaders teach their companies to win*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Yust, Karen Marie. 2004. *Real kids, real faith: Practices for nurturing children's spiritual lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.