

Teachers Don't Focus on Oral Storytelling Even Though It's Important

Article

Hall, C., Capin, P., Vaughn, S., Gillam, S. L., Wada, R., Fall, A.-M., Roberts, G., Dille, J. T., & Gillam, R. B. (2021). Narrative instruction in elementary classrooms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 121(3), 454–483.

What did they find?

Overall, they found that 44% of the minutes observed focused on story comprehension and 10% of minutes addressed story writing. Researchers observed no focus on oral storytelling, concluding that narrative story production is not a focus within the primary grade classrooms. Given the available research demonstrating the effectiveness of oral storytelling as an evidence-based practice, coupled with evidence indicating that proficiency in narrative language correlates with enhanced reading comprehension and writing proficiency in elementary school students, it appears prudent to allocate instructional time toward cultivating this skill.

What did they do?

They conducted an observational study to observe the amount, type, and quality of narrative instruction (story comprehension, oral storytelling, story writing) in grades 1-4 general education classrooms. The participants included 41 teachers across three school districts in the U.S. Four different core curriculum programs were represented. They conducted 121 30-minute lessons and coded for many factors, such as amount of time allocated to story comprehension, oral language storytelling, story writing, materials used, and grouping patterns. Additionally, they rated teachers' instructional quality, behavior management, and student engagement.

What could this mean?

As stated, teachers tend to favor teaching story comprehension and production centered around characters and events, yet research suggests gaps in student understanding of key story elements such as initiating events, character responses, goal-directed actions, and consequences. Proficiency in these narrative structures is crucial for enhancing comprehension and production skills. Studies show that elementary students benefit from peer collaboration, facilitating oral responses and repeated retellings, related to effective oral storytelling interventions. Additionally, employing single- or multiple- scene picture prompts or wordless picture books can stimulate story production during instruction. To effectively implement such instruction, educators and administrators should prioritize professional development and curriculum objectives focusing on oral storytelling and story writing, especially in grades 1-3. Collaboration with speech language pathologists, who frequently utilize narrative instruction, can enhance training effectiveness. Addressing the gap between research recommendations and current practices holds promise for improving student outcomes significantly.

