Storytelling method in hearing children’s perspectives and improving their socio-emotional competence

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Children’s social-emotional difficulties are a relatively common in the context of early childhood education. Hence, there exists a great need for intervention methods targeted in improving these skills. We introduce here a playful, narrative, vignette-based storytelling method called Story Magician’s Play Time (SMPT). This method is inspired by the theories of Gumpel (2007) and Gresham (2002), and it has been designed both to listen to children’s own voice and interpretations about narrated social interactions, and to support their social-emotional reasoning and practicing social performance skills. SMPT provides adults with a ‘window’ to the child’s experiences and behaviors relating to emotionally and socially challenging situations. Furthermore, the SMPT contributes to the children’s experience of being heard, and participate in narration and plot development. Hence, the process of storytelling may be an important factor in supporting children’s thinking, self-awareness, and self-esteem.

The aim of this study is to investigate how SMPT-sessions function as a mean for the child to express social-emotional reasoning and practice social performance skills. This main question was divided in two sub-questions: 1) How did the children take advantage of the playful features of the story-telling sessions, and 2) What kinds of social-emotional reasoning and behaviors did the narrations produce?

Altogether 11 children, 9 boys and 2 girls, aged 4 to 6 participated in the SMPT, narrating in total 37 stories. In SMPT sessions, the children utilized vignette pictures, emotion cards, wooden dolls, and scenery to elicit story telling. The role of the researcher was to participate in the narrative story-telling and play with the child, and finally raise discussion of the narrated story. In the data analysis, theoretically oriented thematic analysis was exploited.

The results suggest the children were motivated in storytelling, especially when playing with the play materials. Visual elements, such as the emotion cards supported children’s verbal expression. The narrations dealt with emotional knowledge, social problem solving, and positive and negative social behaviours. SMPT sessions enabled children to reflect their own roles, emotions, and social functioning in challenging situations, and thus, practice socially responsible behaviors in the safe context of play.

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