

Adventures in ponds and streams: Preschool children's re-telling of Mercer Mayer's frog book stories

Wordless picture books are popular resources for supporting children's emergent literacy and their skills in imaginative and creative story-telling, and used by teachers, librarians and speech-language pathologists. Such books vary in whether they are humorous, imaginative, silly or serious. Mercer Mayer's Frog books launched his literary career and contain illustrations in brown and white line drawings of the mischievous and funny adventures of a boy, dog, turtle and frogs. They contain plots focused on the antics of these characters mainly around ponds and streams, based on the author's childhood play in the swamps of Arkansas. This study reports on twenty preschool English-speaking children who individually heard a pre-recorded audio story of one of Mayer's Frog books from the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) software. The children then re-told the story from the pictures in with minimal prompting from the researchers. These re-told stories were audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researchers and the transcripts entered into SALT. Another twenty English speaking children created stories from the pictures without hearing a target story. The narratives of both groups were compared and analyzed for grammar complexity, vocabulary, and picture interpretation. Results revealed that children imposed their own experiences on the story re-telling such as referring to a pond as an ocean, and sometimes misinterpreted the actions portrayed in the pictures such as one frog licking instead of biting another frog. Those children who retold a story used their existing vocabulary rather than words they heard in the original story. The results are considered in the context of the role and use of wordless picture books in early literacy experiences for young children. The use of story re-telling as a tool for developing and enhancing vocabulary and the macrostructure and microstructure of narratives, as part of the foundations of literacy, is also discussed.