Windows into Young Children's Thinking: A Study of Children's Storytelling

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Many researchers are interested in how young children think about the world. Few researchers, however, have examined young children's storytelling as a means of understanding children's thoughts. Our research project explores these issues through a qualitative analysis of 750 original stories told over a three year period by 153 children (71 Male, 82 Female), ages three to five and a half years old, enrolled in the University of Utah Department of Family and Consumer Studies' Child and Family Development Center (CFDC). Just under half of the stories we collected include elements of fantasy, while 31% of the stories involve elements of real life. Common characters include animals, royalty, friends, family, superheroes and dinosaurs. Some of the common themes include aggression, nature, good vs. evil, relationships, death and dying, physical needs and natural disasters. Further analysis has helped us to better understand gender and age differences in how children think about narratives. No significant differences were found in how often boys and girls include elements of conflict, fantasy, and media influence in their stories. Boys were, however, significantly more likely to include aggression, while girls were more likely to include elements of real life. The use of aggressive and real life elements seems to decrease with age, while the use of fantasy seems to peak at around five years. We also found evidence that the number of stories influenced by the media increases with age.

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