



PRAESA

*Nurturing the growth of
biliteracy and multilingualism*



*The Project for the Study of
Alternative Education in South Africa*

The importance of stories

The potential and importance of stories for learning is often undervalued. For young children, listening to stories being told and read aloud provides important and powerful stepping stones to literacy learning.

Listening to and sharing stories does many positive things for children and adults:

- 1.** Through reading and telling stories, adults and children are able to get to know one another in relaxed and nurturing ways.
- 2.** Stories provide examples to children of how people meet the challenges that they face in life. Children learn appropriate ways to respond to situations emotionally and socially. For example, both oral and written stories about events in children's lives or issues they face – such as the arrival of a new sibling, moving home or bullying – can help them to cope with fears and feelings. By hearing and discussing the themes of such stories with friends and understanding adults, children are provided with a safe space to think about how to cope with their own situations.
- 3.** Children and adults develop feelings of empathy through stories. For example, when children identify with the experiences and feelings of story characters, they grow emotionally.
- 4.** Stories help us to remember more things and more clearly because we use stories to record important experiences and events.
- 5.** Books and stories deepen our thinking by stretching our imaginations and encouraging us to solve problems creatively.

6. Through enjoying stories, children experience the power of reading, which helps to stimulate their desire to have stories read to them and to read by themselves.

7. When children experience stories being told and read to them, they are encouraged and inspired to try telling and writing their own stories.

Stories are important for literacy development. They help children to develop their language and thinking, especially when children hear or read them in their home languages. While they are engrossed in listening to a story, children grow rich language – full of new vocabulary and expressions! They become familiar with the way ideas are expressed verbally, sentences are structured, and words and sounds are pronounced. Children who have enjoyable storytelling experiences are more likely to be motivated to read.

Literacy development can start at any age. Language learning begins with meaningful engagements with listening and speaking. When children don't have to struggle with decoding text, their minds are free to concentrate on the story itself. This promotes language development, meaning-making and vocabulary development.

Children will not get confused if they hear stories in languages other than their home language, as knowledge and experiences can be transferred from one language to another.

Phonemic awareness develops in young children when they take part, often, in rhymes, songs and wordplays. When storytellers or readers and children play with language, phonemic awareness can develop in an enjoyable way.

All areas of language – reading, writing, speaking and listening – are interrelated. Children learn best when they are given opportunities to use the skills they have in one area to support their learning in another. For example, hearing words and sentences makes it easier for them to associate sound patterns with the visual patterns of words on a page. They also hear how stories can be read with expression to make them come alive.