

Rethinking Story Reading in U.S. Preschools: Making Story Comprehension and Social-Emotional Understanding the Priority¹⁾

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Abstract

This paper begins with a brief historical overview that provides a context for understanding approaches to story reading in U.S. preschools. It also discusses factors that have prompted a new trend in story reading, one emphasizing story comprehension directly, not as a vehicle for developing only oral vocabulary and print-related literacy skills. This backdrop, as well as discussions of new research and achievement difficulties in school-age children, sets the stage for the author's suggestion that preschoolers' social-emotional understanding would also likely benefit, if story reading goals and strategies were changed to focus on higher-level story comprehension. Examples of suitable storybooks and comprehension support strategies are used to illustrate how the complementary goals of supporting story comprehension and social-emotional learning might be addressed. These examples also suggest a research intervention needed to determine whether story comprehension support strategies can also benefit social-emotional understanding.

Keywords : story comprehension, social-emotional understanding, inferential thinking, story reading strategies

¹⁾ This article is based on a paper presented during the keynote address at the 14th Conference of the Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association, Seoul, Korea in July 2013.
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Over the past few decades, academic learning has received increased attention in U.S. preschools. This trend has decreased opportunities for physical and imaginative play, and social and emotional learning (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012). Recently, however, concern for social and emotional development has increased because researchers have found strong correlations between it and academic achievement. Many early educators and policy makers now realize that academic achievement expectations cannot be met if social and emotional learning is neglected (e.g., Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Marshall, 2012; Blair, & Razza, 2007; Greenberg, et al., 2003).

In response, social and emotional skills curricula have been created for schoolchildren of all ages (see CASEL, 2013). But rather than devote time daily to a prepared curriculum, preschool educators often prefer to address social and emotional learning through opportunities that arise throughout the day and by embedding it in experiences they already provide. Story reading could be exploited to this end, although current story reading goals and strategies are not suited to supporting social and emotional learning. Fortunately, this is an opportune time to consider how story-reading practices might benefit social-emotional learning, because language and literacy goals for story reading are currently undergoing extensive rethinking.

This article provides a brief history of story reading practices in U.S. preschools from early in the 20th century to the present. This overview is followed by a description of a new trend in story reading that emphasizes higher-level story comprehension (i.e., inferential versus literal). The potential of this new emphasis to benefit social-emotional understanding is discussed next. Examples of stories, and strategies for reading them, are used to illustrate an approach that could be used as a treatment in research about preschoolers' story comprehension, with social-emotional understanding outcomes included among the measures. (See Collins & Dickinson, 2013.)

U.S. Preschool Read-Aloud Practices: A Bit of History

This brief history of story reading provides a context for understanding why story read-aloud practices evolved in specific ways. It also includes a discussion of factors that have

prompted a recent reconsideration of story reading practices.

Story Reading during the First Half of the 20th Century

In the early 1900s, prominent educators and psychologists were concerned about approaches used in U.S. grammar schools to teach reading. Huey summarized these in *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* (1908/1968), noting a “premature reverence for books...and a neglect of own thinking...” (p. 302). Some educators recommended delaying the teaching of reading until eight years of age. Huey noted, however, that children he described as living in “good homes,” would learn to read before this age:

All that is needed is books of good old jingles and rhymes and folk stories and fairy tales, with illustrative pictures and a mother or father or friend who cares enough for children to play this way and to read aloud to them. The child will keep it up by the hour and the week and the month, and his natural learning to read is only a question of time. (pp. 332-333)

Some early childhood educators were very concerned about book use in *classrooms*. For example, Lucy Mitchell, co-founder of the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) in New York, from which today’s Bank Street College of Education emerged, and a colleague, Caroline Pratt, who founded the Play School within the BEE (later renamed City and Country School), advocated firsthand over secondary experiences (i.e., books). In their view, children should “play and work, not listen” (Antler, 1987, p. 241). According to Pratt (1948/1970), “Words are too recent an acquisition to a five-year-old; his tools of learning...are still his own senses. When we thrust verbal information upon him, stories and talk, we are...coming between him and the things he is trying to learn” (p. 38). Decades later, Dr. James Hymes, a child development and early education specialist, described dangers of early book reading to children’s immature nervous systems, and eyes and ears. His intended audience was kindergarten teachers using new reading readiness workbook materials, but his book (*Before the Child Reads*, 1958) also limited story reading in preschools.

In addition to concerns about secondary information versus firsthand discovery and the immaturity of young children’s nervous systems, progressive era early educators, such as Mitchell and Pratt, were driven by social philosophy and democratic ideals (Antler, 1987).

Thus, they favored “free play” (i.e., child choice of activities). Even years later, some preschool educators warned that it was not “developmentally appropriate” to expect preschoolers to remain in a teacher-led story reading setting, if they did not wish to (Kostelnik, 1992). In other words, preschool education has been strongly influenced by progressive social and political philosophy, not only by nativist child development theories.

Questioning the Nature of IQ in the 1960s and the First Early Language Interventions

Of course, many children in the U.S. have not had rich story reading or other experiences at home from which to develop language and literacy skills needed for later school success. Not surprisingly, their achievement has been much lower than their more advantaged peers. But until the middle of the 20th century, lower achievement was attributed to lower “native ability.” By the 1960s, however, researchers, such as the psychologist J. McV. Hunt, questioned this view. In *Intelligence and Experience* (1961), Hunt provided evidence for the role of experience in intelligence. This research led to current views about human brain plasticity (Horowitz, 2000) and the critical role of experience in development and learning. The U.S. Civil Rights movement, which occurred soon after Hunt’s book appeared, required educators and government policy-makers to pay attention to new brain research.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. government funded early intervention research to study whether early experience affected IQ. Oral language was a primary focus, because researchers had found large differences in language interactions between lower and higher income parents and their children (Bernstein, 1965; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Hess & Shipman, 1965). Some of these interventions included book reading as a language stimulation context (Levenstein, 1977; Schaefer & Aaronson, 1977; Lally & Honig, 1977; Robison, 1977), because findings from a few studies (e.g., Irwin, 1960) had obtained positive language results from story reading. Typical measures of IQ were used to evaluate the effectiveness of these intervention programs, and the new *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (Dunn & Dunn, 1959/1981) was sometimes also used.

Preschool Story Reading Practices From 1980 through the Late 2000s

As a consequence of early intervention program success in boosting IQ and language, and

continued positive outcomes from basic research on early stimulation and brain development (e.g., Greenough, Black, & Wallace, 1987; Rosenzweig, 1984), language interventions for preschoolers became increasingly common. From the late 1980s into the new century, researchers investigated story-reading effects on overall oral language development (i.e., mean length of utterance--MLU) and oral vocabulary.

The language development approach to book reading, known as “dialogic,” received considerable attention (e.g. Valdez-Menchaca, & Whitehurst, 1992; Whitehurst, et al., 1988). In addition to this language development research on book reading interventions, earlier observational research on children who learned to read before first grade uncovered variations in parental reading practices that predicted beginning reading success. In her book, *Children who Read Early*, Durkin (1966) criticized child development and early education experts who claimed that maturation was primarily responsible for creating readiness for learning to read, while giving early literacy-related experiences little if any credit. She cited research by psychologists, such as Hunt, Ausubel, and Bruner, who questioned long-held views of development as primarily maturation driven.

Overlapping somewhat with dialogic reading of books were new understandings about literacy skills development, coming from research on phonological awareness and alphabet letter knowledge (e.g., Baghban, 1984; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979; Liberman, Shankweiler, Fischer, & Carter, 1974; Read, 1975). A major theme in this work was that skills required for later reading success are developed gradually (i.e., emerged) before formal schooling, in environments providing relevant experiences and adult support. Books about the early development of literacy skills soon followed: *Emergent Literacy* (Teale & Sulzby, 1986), *Writing Begins at Home* (Clay, 1987), *The Beginning of Writing* (Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982), and *More than the ABCs* (Schickedanz, 1986).

Writing centers appeared in many preschool classrooms, as did programs designed to teach alphabet letters and phonological awareness. Big print books also became commonplace, to encourage attention to print and memorization and “reading” of patterned texts (Holdaway, 1979). Specific strategies to bring print to children’s attention in books read aloud were also developed and researched a couple of decades later by Laura Justice (e.g., Justice & Ezell, 2002). However, the 1987 position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), regarding Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Bredekamp,

1987), took a largely genetic-maturationist stance. Even the 1997 revision (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) was criticized by Dr. Jack Pikulski, president of the International Reading Association, on the same grounds. IRA and NAEYC later developed a new joint position statement. (See van Kleeck & Schuele, 2010, for a detailed history of early childhood literacy in the U.S.) We see in this process of change in early educators' views of literacy development, the gradual influence of theory and research from psychology and reading.

In 2001, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to fund improvements in early literacy instruction for lower-income children. Although the majority of funds went to kindergarten through second grade, some were allocated to the Early Reading First program (ERF), to develop centers of excellence in preschool literacy. Although individual programs could design their early literacy approach, all ERF programs were required to focus on alphabet letter knowledge, phonological awareness, print awareness, and oral language. They were also required to use standardized tools to assess progress yearly. The assessment tools stipulated included the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (Dunn & Dunn, 1997). As a consequence, literacy (i.e., code-related) skills were a primary focus in ERF programs, while meaning (e.g., comprehension) foundations were narrowed to oral vocabulary development. Understanding stories at deeper levels (e.g., inferential) was largely ignored. As a consequence, in the view of some language and reading researchers, comprehension was at risk of under development during the preschool years (e.g., van Kleeck, 2007, 2008).

In many ERF programs, print awareness and alphabet goals also became primary goals for story reading. That is, teachers were encouraged to select books with salient print in illustrations and bring this print to children's attention explicitly during read-alouds (e.g., underline words in titles and text; ask children to read back book titles and to locate specific letters within the words) (Cabell, Justice, Vukelich, Buell, & Han, 2008). Although some advocates (e.g., Justice) of print-focused practices also encouraged teachers to support oral vocabulary and children's thinking (e.g., make predictions), some early educators worried that using *storybooks* to develop print and alphabet skills was not a good idea, no matter how limited, because it distracted children from a meaning focus. Even dialogic reading, with its oral vocabulary and expressive language focus, pulled teachers away from supporting children's story comprehension at anything beyond literal levels. (See guidance for reading

books in the *Read Together, Talk Together* program, Pearson Early Learning, 2003.)

In other words, inferential thinking, critical to story comprehension (Oakhill & Cain, 2012), was ignored. Calls for changes in story reading practices have urged moving away from using stories primarily as vehicles for furthering oral vocabulary and other language skills, and for teaching print-related skills (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Schickedanz & McGee, 2010; van Kleeck, 2008; van Kleeck, Vander Woude, & Hammett, 2006).

Part of the historical problem in establishing story comprehension as a primary goal of story reading has been a belief that preschool children cannot engage in inferential reasoning nor understand adults' use of it. Research now indicates, however, that preschoolers can think, inferentially, about narratives (van Kleeck, 2008; van Kleeck, Vander Woude, & Hammett, 2006). Early educators can miss this ability, because young children often arrive at false conclusions. But these result from failure to take all critical information into account, limited background knowledge, misinterpretation of illustrations, and tendencies to misapply personal experience, not to an inability to reason. (See Schickedanz & Collins, 2012.)

Other research also shows that young children benefit from modeling of inferential reasoning by adults. For example, when parents link people's mental states to their behavior, when discussing recent past experiences with young children, they model inferential reasoning. This behavior is related to higher levels of emotion understanding in young children (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Garner, Jones, Gaddy, & Rennie, 1997; Garner, Dunsmore, & Southam-Gerrow, 2008; Laible, 2011; Laible, Murphy, & Augustine, 2013; Slaughter, Peterson, & MacKintosh, 2007).

Research on parents' inferential reasoning in conversations with young children around science activities also suggests benefits. For example, in addition to focusing children on relevant evidence, some parents provide explanations linking observable evidence to underlying processes, such as the brain's interpretation of still pictures as a continuous moving picture when they pass quickly before one's eyes (Fender & Crowley, 2007). Researchers focusing on science learning in young children have begun to discuss how adult "testimony," especially explanations connecting facts, conceptually, or linking causes and effects not obvious from facts alone, benefit children (e.g. Callanan, 2006; Gelman, 2009).

The need to focus more directly on story comprehension, especially inferential reasoning, is highlighted by the low performance of U.S. elementary and high school students on national

assessments. Many U.S. children do not read at even a basic level; too few read at advanced levels (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). With research indicating that preschool children are capable of higher-level comprehension, changes in story reading goals at this level are occurring. Research on the foundations of social-emotional understanding suggests that a greater emphasis on higher-level story comprehension might be of some benefit.

Reading To Support Story Comprehension and Social-Emotional Understanding

Goals for social-emotional learning include helping children understand emotions, engage in social-perspective-taking, and respond to others with concern. Reaching these goals requires knowledge of emotions, coupled with understanding their likely causes and consequences. Responding to others appropriately also requires emotion regulation, because people cannot attend to another if their own arousal is too high. Learning to act on another's behalf is also the result of socialization about expectations for other-directed, moral behavior. Foundational understandings and skills that research indicates lead to optimal social-emotional development are summarized in Table 1.

The remainder of this paper describes story reading strategies that might be used as an intervention in research designed to explore whether both story comprehension and social-emotional understanding benefit from the same instructional strategies. (See Collins & Dickinson, 2013, for an example of research proposed for study inferential reasoning during story reading in preschoolers.) First, stories with a central problem and a plot through which characters resolve it are selected. Good stories are rich in emotional content and involve settings and situations that are somewhat familiar and appealing to young children. Ideally, characters show empathy toward one another, hold different perspectives, model emotion regulation, and solve their problems through effort and persistence.

A written description of adult story reading behavior hardly does justice to the strategies suggested here, because their full effect depends on the use of voice and facial expression. Alas, written descriptions must suffice to illustrate here.

Table 1. *Foundational Understandings and Skills for Optimal Social-Emotional Development*

Foundation	Description	Function	Evidence
Mental State Vocabulary	happy, sad, angry, frustrated, excited; want, like; know, forgot, think, understand, wonder, etc.	Allows children to talk about internal states, including feelings, which they and others experience.	Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982 Garner, 2003 Gavazzi & Ornaghi, 2011 Hughes & Dunn, 1998 Hughes, Lecee, & Wilson, 2007
Emotion Awareness and Identification	EA: Awareness of own feelings and skill in identifying others'.	Essential for relating appropriately to others.	Eisenberg, et al., 2003a & 2003b Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001
Emotion Expressivity	EE: Degree to which individual expresses emotion, and clarity and valence (i.e., positive or negative).	Essential to interaction and relationships, with kind of emotion experienced and expressed affecting social responding.	Panfile & Laible, 2012 Zhou, Q., et al., 2002
Emotion Regulation & Effortful Control	ER: Ability to monitor intensity and duration of emotions and modify to meet others' needs or reach goals. EC: Ability to inhibit a dominant behavior and deploy less dominant one, to meet situation demands.	ER: Prevents becoming overwhelmed; allows empathic responding to meet goals or benefit from adult discourse about emotion cause-effect. EC: Essential for turning attention to others' needs or important tasks at hand.	Blair & Razza, 2007 Eisenberg, 2005 Eisenberg, et al, 1996 McCoy & Raver, 2011 Murray & Kochanska, 2002 Panfile & Laible, 2012 Salmon, et al, 2013 Thompson, 1994
Emotion Understanding & Social Perspective-Taking	EU: Understanding causes and consequences of emotions. SPT: Knowing that different people feel differently about similar situations; ability to view situations from another's point of view.	EU: Essential for relating to others and understanding effects of actions on others. SPT: Essential to understanding others' emotions and thoughts, from their perspective.	Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991 Laible & Thompson, 2000 Ruffman, Slade, & Crowe, 2002 Tenenbaum, Alfieri, Brooks, & Dunne, 2008

"Llama, llama Misses Mamma" (by A. Dewdney, 2009)

In this story, a young llama misses his mama during his first day in child-care. He does not play with other animal children, even though his teacher encourages him. Finally, during lunch, little llama's longing for Mama overwhelms, and he cries. At this point, other animal children express concern through facial expressions depicted in the illustrations. While the animal teacher comforts little llama, the other animal children think about what they could do and decide to invite him to play. Suddenly, little llama brightens and joins the other children on the playground. When outside playtime ends, the other animal children invite little llama to join them at a drawing table. There, they explain how to get paper from the stack and select a crayon. Just as little llama begins to draw, his mother arrives. After happily reuniting, little llama hugs his teacher and waves goodbye to new friends. After showing Mama the playground, little Llama and mom leave. The narrator explains that little llama learned something new: he loves his mama and loves school too.

This story provides a good example of someone in distress, wonderful models of others' responses, and a good example of emotion regulation (i.e., though very sad, unhappy, and probably afraid, little llama's emotion expression is quite muted). When reading, the adult strives to capture characters' feelings in voice and facial expressions, and comments throughout to both label little llama's emotions and identify causes (e.g., sad, lonely, and probably afraid; misses mama, everything new and unfamiliar; doesn't know the other children) and consequences (e.g., he doesn't join play). The teacher also talks about the feelings and thoughts of the other animal children when little llama cries, while pointing to facial expressions (e.g., worried, concerned, wondering what to do). Positive emotions (e.g., happy, excited, interested) are also named and linked to their causes, and little Llama's teacher's words of comfort, and the information she provides about Mama's return, are brought to children's attention.

After reading the story, the teacher turns back to the page where little llama brightened and joined other animal children's play. Without the teacher's help, preschoolers are likely to miss that the other animal children invited the little llama to play, in contrast with earlier support from little Llama's teacher (i.e., she only pointed out where he might join in). Without a direct invitation from the other animal children, little llama was required to move into on-going play. Perhaps he wondered if others wanted him to join, or maybe he didn't know exactly where he would fit into their play or how to use materials. Once invited directly by the children, and

offered tutoring in how to do things, these worries subsided.

The reader can also point out the language of the other animal children on pages following the lunch table scene (e.g., “put on your coat and go outside”). Once outside, the animal children named specific pieces of equipment and taught little llama to play games and jump rope. The text language is quite minimal, but an adult can embellish it with details when returning to selected pages after reading the story. The teacher might even talk for the other animals, saying what they probably said as they taught little llama to play. This strategy not only helps children gain a better understanding of the kind of assistance the other animal children offered little llama, but also teaches something important about the nature of narrative: The author and illustrator never tell us everything, only enough to make it possible for us to fill in gaps, using text information, our background knowledge, and reasoning. This basic understanding about narratives is the cornerstone of higher-level story comprehension. A teacher can help children realize this critical aspect of narrative by filling in the gaps (i.e., drawing inferences about what probably happened) an author and illustrator leave.

“Hooray for Harry” (by Kim Lewis, 2006)

This story is about finding a stuffed toy elephant’s missing blanket. Harry’s friends, Lulu, a lamb, and Ted, a teddy bear, first help Harry search at home. But when not found there, Lulu asks Harry if he left the blanket outside. After thinking a moment, Harry remembered using it to make a tent. The three animals rush to the location, but the blanket is not there. Harry looks very sad and worried, but Lulu asks what they did next. The story continues in this fashion as Harry remembers someplace the blanket was used and all three animals hurry to that location, only to discover that the blanket is not there. Finally, they find the blanket hanging on a clothesline where put to dry after washing. Throughout the story, Lulu, especially, encourages Harry to think about where they played with his blanket, and offers support.

Although the mental state vocabulary in the text is primarily cognitive (e.g., thought/think, remembered, wondered, know/knew, worry, forget), not affective, teachers can use emotion words (i.e., sad, disappointed, frustrated, excited, happy) in comments, as they read the book. Of course, a teacher should vary voice and facial expressions to indicate sadness, disappointment, and worry, and also excitement and joy, two different happiness qualities. By

using emotions vocabulary, coupled with voice and facial expression, children develop an understanding of the meanings of these words. The teacher also links features of situations—story events-- to specific emotions. In other words, the causes and consequences of characters' emotions are made explicit to help children develop emotion understanding.

This story's main character also models emotion regulation (i.e., staying calm when frustrated and sad). With support from friends, Harry's calmness allows him to think about where to look next for his blanket. For example, when Harry first noticed his blanket was missing, Lulu didn't say, "Oh, how sad. I know you must be very concerned and upset about your missing blanket." Instead, she asked, "Did you leave your blanket outside?" (p. 6). When the blanket was not found in the first place searched, or in the second or even the third, Lulu did not say, "Oh, I'm so sorry, Harry. I know how disappointed and sad you feel, but I'm sure you'll find it, if you just keep looking." Instead, she asked, calmly and with concern, "What did we do next?" In other words, Lulu showed concern through steadfast engagement with Harry, and by helping him learn a strategy for finding lost things.

Some researchers who have studied the connections between cognition and emotion suggest that children's "thinking, learning, action, and relationships" support emotion regulation (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004, p. 330). Quality in adult emotional relationships with children is determined, in part, by their knowledge about what young children know, understand, and can do, and their skill in using this information to help children solve problems. Warmth and concern, *alone*, may not be completely effective. Helping children engage cognitively in solving problems is likely also required (e.g., thinking about where a lost item was last used; learning that starting with a puzzle's border pieces and referring to a picture of the completed puzzle on the puzzle box can help; etc.). With repeated experience of this kind, children might learn that engagement with cognitive strategies leads to solutions that remove barriers to desires and goals.

The ability to regulate emotions in challenging situations allows children to allocate mental resources to performing better academically or to dealing with someone else's distress. Indeed, research on the integration of cognition and emotion (e.g., Wolfe & Bell, 2007) suggests that emotion regulation is related to cognitive control. Whether modeling of this by characters in stories and highlighting these qualities through comments can contribute to children's emotional regulation is an open question, one that research needs to explore.

“Dreams” (by E.J. Keats, 1974)

In *Dreams*, a boy named Roberto sees a dog behind his apartment building one night, trapping and harassing his friend Archie’s cat. Roberto wondered what to do. But before he could think of something, his pajama sleeve accidentally knocked his paper mouse off the windowsill where he had left it. As the mouse fell, it cast a shadow that grew bigger and bigger, which scared the dog away, allowing the cat to escape.

Roberto shows great concern—empathy-- for the trapped cat. Because the problem resolved itself through Roberto’s accidental behavior, the story lends itself to a discussion after its reading about what Roberto *might* have done, had the paper mouse’s large shadow not solved the problem. One teacher the author observed asked, “What if there had been no paper mouse’s shadow to scare off the dog? What do you think Roberto might have done to help the trapped cat?” The teacher then set the stage by saying, “Remember, it was late at night and Roberto’s family and all the neighbors were sound asleep in bed.”

Children offered ideas: “He could go down there and hit the dog” and “He could yell ‘Go away! Get out of here!’ ” Other children thought Roberto should wake up his Mom or call Archie, because “It’s his cat.” The teacher commented about each idea, providing information about the danger or lack thereof to Roberto, and the extent to which an action would disrupt Roberto’s family’s or neighbors’ sleep. For example, yelling at the dog would not endanger Roberto nor require him to violate a rule about not going outside alone at night. But yelling would likely awaken Roberto’s family members and neighbors. Calling his friend Archie would wake up Archie’s family, while not endangering Roberto or waking up neighbors. The teacher conducted the discussion by relating each suggestion to likely effects for Roberto and other people. Good options were narrowed to those least likely to cause Roberto harm or to disrupt others. This kind of discussion probably supports children’s social perspective taking, which is required for understanding others’ emotions and behavior.

“Peter’s Chair” (by E.J. Keats, 1967)

This story relates Peter’s concern when his parents gave his old baby furniture to his new baby sister. Many teachers comment about how sad and upset Peter probably felt after Willie

knocked down his block building near the beginning of the story, especially after Peter's mother scolded him about the loud crash and accused him of not remembering that he had a new baby sister. But things were likely a bit more complicated in Peter's mind. No doubt, Peter was disappointed and upset about Willie knocking down his block building, given how hard he had worked on it. But it is worth suggesting to children that Peter might not have been very angry with Willie because Peter understood that Willie was so excited to see Peter after waking from his nap, that he didn't watch where he was going. Peter's mother's scolding and accusation probably also upset Peter and made him sad, but in a certain kind of way-- a "you hurt my feelings" sort of sad, not a guilty sort of sad, which results when the harm a child causes is in fact due to carelessness in thought or action.

When reading and commenting about these first pages, a teacher can provide more information, including details about each character's situation, and what Peter might have been thinking and feeling, given his understanding of others' perspectives. In other words, a teacher makes explicit the likely social perspective taking in which Peter engaged and the likely consequences for his feelings and behavior.

When explaining the behavior of story characters, one hopes that, over time, children will learn more about the reasons for others' behavior and begin to use this understanding when judging others' emotions and actions. In turn, it is hoped that this understanding will affect the child's behavior toward others. Of course, research is needed to determine whether the strategies suggested here have an effect on children's social understanding and emotion regulation.

Summary of Story Reading To Support the Development of Empathy

As these examples illustrate, story reading is a context in which children might be helped to understand more about emotions, empathy, and expectations for responding in situations where they or someone else is in distress. To utilize this context to the fullest, teachers must know what understandings and skills make up emotional and social competence, and must select books well and analyze and plan carefully for each book's use.

The advantage of approaching stories in these ways aids story comprehension considerably, because narrative comprehension rests on understanding the desires, beliefs, and feelings that

fuel characters' actions (van Kleeck, 2008). With the recent trend in focusing more directly on higher-level story comprehension, we might reasonably expect some additional benefit to children's social and emotional understanding, because its foundations and foundations for higher-level story comprehension overlap. Of course, research must determine whether this rethinking of the goals and strategies for story reading will also benefit social-emotional understanding.

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