Storytelling: Practice makes Perfect (Workshop)

Reading or Telling

Though 'storytelling' is often used as an over-arching word, some people will distinguish between 'reading' (from a text, perhaps with pictures) and 'telling' (from memory, using words alone). This distinction can be blurred; for example:

- When a picture book is very familiar to you, you may depart from, or add to the text (though this will be remarked on, if children are near enough to read!)
- You may tell a story from memory, but retain certain passage or phrases for the beauty of their language, to allow joining in, or to retain the shape of the story.
- You may tell a story, but use visual 'props' – drawings on a flip chart, projected pictures on an electronic white board, puppets, costume or objects.

Let's look at the two main methods, and their characteristics:

Reading stories...

- Has a more direct association with the written word; it therefore links more closely with literacy
- Enables a shared visual focus, which:
  - May help children to concentrate
  - Allows the pictures to augment the words
  - Enables children (if a small number) to see the text as you read
  - Allows pauses, to let children look at the detail in the pictures
- Involves accurate repetition of the text, which:
  - Children expect
  - You may not be able to do, from memory
- May allow a greater age and ability range of children to participate, because:
  - The pictures provide a focus and explanation for younger children
  - The book may be an older (or 'universal') story in picture book form
  - Children with special needs may be helped by this technique
- Allows the extra dimensions of book use - talking about the authors' and illustrators' names, the blurb, etc.; page-turning, prediction, lifting flaps - and wordplay which is only apparent in print
- Encourages children to re-read afterwards the same book, sequels, others by the same author, others about the same characters, etc.
- Models and encourages reading for pleasure
- Models book ownership or borrowing ('<u>You</u> could get one of these!')
- Introduces stories to children that are too difficult for them to read for themselves
- Allows a teacher to plan follow-up activities based on the actual text or pictures.

Telling stories...

- Gives greater freedom to the teller and the listener
- Allows a story to be personalised for a particular group of children
- Means stories can be lengthened and shortened more easily
- Stimulates the imagination, by letting children create 'mind pictures'
- Allows the teller to move, use gestures, etc.
- Enables stories to be shared when no books are to hand
- Allows a larger audience, who may not otherwise see the pictures in a book

Telling stories from memory (often traditional tales) has great variations. There is not 'one standard style of storytelling'; professional storytellers range from the 'quietly magnetic' to the 'loud and lively'. You will have to find your own style, which will be a reflection of your own personality. Most importantly, listen to others – you can learn a lot, and avoid being 'set in your ways', by hearing other tellers – whether they're colleagues in school, visitors, or performers who you go along to listen to.