Integrating Indigenous Knowledge in ECD Training and Services

by

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ABSTRACT

In time past in Africa, stories and proverbs have been major strategies for character moulding and preparation of children for adult life. There is no aspect of child development that parents would not find a suitable story for it. It is a well known historical fact that stories are vehicles of oral tradition in communities. These stories range from the historical identity of a group to socialization of children in communities. But urbanization and technological development are gradually eroding these stories, as the elders who are custodians of these stories no longer find willing listeners in children who are more interested in foreign films and television, which now threaten Indigenous stories.

This project was undertaken to identify and document Indigenous stories in Umuchigbo community, to integrate Indigenous stories into ECD services by encouraging parents to come to the centre to tell stories, to develop strategies for reintroducing storytelling into annual festivals, and to disseminate the outcome to ECD practitioners in ten states of UNICEF Field Office A.

Three focus group interviews were used to identify stories from the community and a format was developed for analysis of the stories.

The major findings include that stories are used for character moulding and inculcation of beliefs in children. Features that make stories interesting include proverbs, rhymes, clapping and singing. For stories to be effective, children should participate.

The project recommended that parents tell children stories at home in order to prepare them for storytelling at school.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) program is a holistic approach that demands the interplay of various segments that ultimately lay the foundation for the growth and development of the child. By extension, the basic needs of the child (viz, nutrition, health care, infant stimulation, affection, early learning, cognitive stimulation, social protection and cultural practices) are addressed through IECD as it facilitates ‘optimal development’ (Evans, Myers, & Ilfeld, 2000). The basic needs are not exclusive of each other; they are all inter-related and interact in the early life of a child. Consequently the isolation or non-recognition of nutrition, health, child learning or stimulation (within the culture of the child) affects the others. Accordingly, the denial of any of the basic needs noted above during the time it matters most may eventually lead to irreversible damage (Evans et al., 2000). A considerable knowledge of these basic needs is required by ECD program planners for effective integration of Indigenous knowledge as cultural, religious values and traditions are transmitted through children. All young children need adequate nutrition, health and care from birth onwards, but any deficiency during the early years makes a negative impact on later development. These basic needs, which are mediated through the child’s traditional practices, patterns and beliefs, interact with, and have impact on the child’s social and cognitive development.

Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a culture or society. Other names for it include: ‘local knowledge,’ ‘folk knowledge,’ ‘people’s knowledge,’ ‘traditional wisdom’ or ‘traditional science.’ This knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has been the
basis for agriculture, food preparation, health care, education, conservation and the wide range of other activities that sustain societies in many parts of the world.

Indigenous people have a broad knowledge of how to live sustainably. However, formal education systems often disrupt the practical everyday life aspects of Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, replacing them with abstract knowledge and academic ways of learning. Today, there is a grave risk that much Indigenous knowledge is being lost and, along with it, valuable knowledge about ways of living sustainably.

There are ways that Indigenous knowledge may be integrated into education, thereby bringing the benefits of helping to “sustain” Indigenous knowledge and societies to all. Integrating Indigenous knowledge into education also encourages teachers and students to gain enhanced respect for local culture, its wisdom and its ethics, and provides ways of teaching and learning locally relevant knowledge and skills. Some of the objectives of integrating Indigenous knowledge into education, according to UNESCO (1997), include:

1. To appreciate Indigenous perspectives on ways of living together and using resources sustainably.

2. To appreciate the role of Indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of learning in maintaining the sustainability of a community.

3. To understand the role of “modern” education in undermining Indigenous knowledge and ways of teaching and learning.

4. To identify opportunities for integrating relevant aspects of Indigenous knowledge and approaches to teaching and learning into the school curriculum.
Indigenous African Ibo education is primarily an oral one that provided for comprehensive learning in three domains: cognitive, affective and psychosocial. For affective learning, traditional stories were used to teach societal values such as honesty, diligence, hard work, sense of responsibility, selflessness, justice, fair play, endurance, chastity, punctuality, regularity, and the like.

The stories were also used to develop the child’s imaginative, thinking and learning skills, especially when the histories of the communities or biographies of founding fathers of the villages are narrated. There are different types of stories: true accounts of events that took place and folktales (i.e., a narrative form that has been retold within the culture for generations and is well known) such as those featuring the tortoise and other purported events in the animal kingdom and the spirit world.

Beyond the entertainment potential of the stories, the moral lessons conveyed by these stories were considered very significant in the culture. Those stories impacted positively on the recipients (children and youths). The moral concerns of contemporary times may well suggest one effect of the erosion of Indigenous knowledge.

In Igbo land, storytelling includes proverbs, tongue twisters and rhymes. Confirming the effectiveness of proverbs in storytelling and childrearing in Igbo land, Achebe (1986) noted that proverb is the palm oil Ibos use in eating yams; proverbs are a necessary ingredient for discussions or stories. Ubiesie (1976) opined that when a proverb was interpreted to the person it was used for, the dowry paid on the mother’s head was a waste. This then implies that as a true son of your father, you are expected to understand the meaning of proverbs when they are used.
There is a general pattern or sequence of child development that is true of most children. However, the rate, character and quality of development vary from child to child in a cultural milieu. Culture influences development in many different ways, and the goals for children differ from culture to culture as stories are usually drawn from the cultural environment of the child. For example, in a farming community, the stories are largely from farming activities and animals. These stories promote the child’s imagination, participation and creative sense as the storyteller weaves the animal world into reality. Adults also listen to children retell stories in a bid to teach them and for them to tell the stories to their mates, thereby passing the story from one generation to another. Stories can be used to guide children’s lives, especially in character formation.

The effects of Westernization and globalization have affected storytelling activities in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Traditional childrearing practices and Indigenous knowledge are also disappearing in society due to changes in family members’ roles, rural to urban migration, and the erosion of extended family systems, which has serious and important consequences for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge.

To be effective, the holistic nature of ECD programs has to be protected from tendencies that play down the various aspects and which have the most significance for sustainable programs of Indigenous knowledge and the values of each community.

In this connection, this project aims at identifying and documenting stories and proverbs used in traditional childrearing, traditional teaching and learning of the child. Furthermore, strategies are developed for integrating Indigenous knowledge in ECD using traditional annual festivals.
Project Statement

Urbanization has seriously affected the rural poor in many ways. Prior to this time, rural communities took childrearing seriously, by ensuring the participation of all. As one Igbo proverb says, “One person does not own a child; rather, the child belongs to the community.” Moonlight nights were common occurrences, with people gathering in village squares to tell stories, dance, share riddles and jokes. Storytelling was one medium through which the history of the community was passed from one generation to another. It also provided opportunities for communities to stress good behaviours expected from community members. During this period, communities identify their leaders who may be orators, administrators and organizers. These are usually people who are well versed in the use of proverbs and stories around the main occupation of the community. In addition, storytelling was the principal avenue for informal education. But today the presence of televisions, audio and video tapes, CDs and films that were once alien to the people are now commonplace as children watch foreign films and enjoy stories that are alien. Consequently, Western influences threaten the existence of African cultural practices, stories and proverbs.

This project involved advocacy visits to the traditional leader and his cabinet to explain the whole project to them and to seek their approval for participation. The project will be very useful to the community, and to the other communities in which UNICEF is working. The report will be shared with government and NGO partners from ten states in UNICEF Field Office A that have more than 50 community-based ECD centres. Umuchigbo community has three annual festivals each year, one at the beginning of farming season, (January-April), another after planting season (April-June) and the third
after harvest season (October-December). Introducing storytelling in each of these festivals will provide a rich community entertainment and education, ensuring the continuity of their stories from generation to generation.

*Rationale for the Project*

The project is intended to be a pilot work to identify and document stories and develop processes and strategies for introducing Indigenous knowledge into community-based ECD training and services.

This project is important because integrating traditional storytelling into ECD training and services will help identify, document and share some of the rich stories in the community. The project will be used to sensitize the community toward positive parental interactions by storytelling, which will promote child participation and opportunities for adults to listen to children. Furthermore, by listening to them, learners are stimulated and entertained; this provides an opportunity to impart knowledge and skills in a valuing process. It will also encourage the transfer of cultural knowledge, respectful norms, sustainability of community projects and revitalization of the role of the extended family system, thereby helping to retain cultural identity.

*Project Objectives*

The objectives of the project are:

1. To identify and document Indigenous knowledge (stories and proverbs) in Umuchigbo community related to early child development.

2. To integrate storytelling in ECD training and services by encouraging elderly parents to come to the centre to tell stories.
3. To develop strategies and to reintroduce storytelling into community annual festivals.

4. To disseminate the outcome of this project by sharing it with IECD practitioners in the ten states.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration of Indigenous knowledge into ECD implies reforming Indigenous knowledge to suit the needs of ECD training services through storytelling. The literature review will be discussed under the following headings: Concept of Indigenous Knowledge; Importance of Indigenous Knowledge; Case Studies of Indigenous Knowledge; and Storytelling as a Key Strategy for Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into ECD Services.

Concept of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous or traditional knowledge simply means something which is not exotic or imported; rather, it is part and parcel of the place. Okonji (2000) defined tradition as handing over the social principles of the “modus” of living and ruling of the people through generation. He further stated that tradition is the traffic of teaching sociocultural cognitive elements from one generation to another. In this study tradition can be interchanged with Indigenous knowledge.

Writing on the promotion of Indigenous knowledge in Asia, Flavier et al. (1995) contend that Indigenous knowledge is the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision making. Indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems.

In this connection, the special features of Indigenous knowledge can be distinguished from other knowledge. According to Ellen and Harris (1996), Indigenous knowledge is:
1. **Local**, in that it is rooted in a particular community and situated within broader cultural traditions.

2. **Tacit** knowledge and, therefore, not easily codifiable.

3. **Transmitted orally**, or through imitation and demonstration. Codifying it may lead to the loss of some of its properties.

4. **Experiential rather than theoretical knowledge.** Experience and trial and error, tested in the rigorous laboratory of survival of local communities, constantly reinforce Indigenous knowledge.

5. **Learned through repetition**, which is a defining characteristic of tradition even when knowledge is added. Repetition aids in the retention and reinforcement of Indigenous knowledge.

6. **Constantly changing**, being produced as well as reproduced, discovered as well as lost; though it is often perceived by external observers as being somewhat static (p. 4).

The foregoing therefore implies that Indigenous knowledge is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management, and a host of other community activities. Communities rather than individuals commonly hold Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is tacit knowledge and therefore difficult to codify, since it is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals.

*Importance of Indigenous Knowledge*

Indigenous knowledge, in the view of Upadhyaya and Beier (1993), is an important part of the lives of people living in rural areas whose everyday lives are woven
with nature. It is an integral part of the local ecosystem. Indigenous knowledge provides problem-solving strategies for local communities and helps shape local visions and perceptions of environment and society. It spans the entire range of human experience, including history, linguistics, politics, art, economics, administration and psychology. Its technical aspect includes agriculture, medicine, natural resource management, engineering and fishing. In most human communities, especially pre-literate ones, Indigenous knowledge is encoded in proverbs, stories, riddles, music and songs, dances, drama, poems, idioms and other verbal skills, which together form the repository of knowledge for each group. This knowledge is taught to children through the various institutions that characterize a particular society (Atte, 1992). Furthermore, Indigenous knowledge is used to promote participatory teaching and learning in classrooms, resulting in increased enrolment, retention and performance of pupils in science and mathematics.

Case Studies of Indigenous Knowledge

To illustrate some of the concepts of how traditional knowledge can be integrated into projects, case studies are presented to show project areas where traditional knowledge is included.

Indigenous postpartum maternal and health care rites improve the health of mothers and children among the Igbos of Nigeria.

In recognition of the three vital events of the reproductive process, namely pregnancy, parturition (delivery) and puerperium, the Igbos provide some postpartum maternal and childcare practices. ‘Omugwo’ rites, from all indications, have the dual purpose of not only providing postnatal medical refurbishment of mothers’ internal
organs that have been impaired through childbirth, but also serve as the most appropriate time the new mother is inducted in her new environment in the act of domestic chores by the older mother. ‘Omugwo’ rites last for a minimum period of two months, during which the new mother’s food is prepared with local spices and herbs like “Udah, Uziza, Nchanwu,” which make the uterus contract and thus help in expelling blood clots. The diet helps to restore energy and blood lost during childbirth, facilitates the healing of wounds, restores normal bodily functions and promotes lactation. (World Bank IK Notes, 1998). When these issues are integrated in postnatal education of the mother, communities easily accept such projects. The challenge for integration lies in changing negative practices without changing positive one within the community; this can be done by working with the project beneficiaries through the processes of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation using a participatory approach with full community involvement.

Writing on the same topic, Obikeze (1997) identified the three interrelated activities with the reproductive process as pregnancy, delivery and puerperium (omugwo). He brought out the relevance of “omugwo” in improving the health practices and, by extension, advancing the cause of primary health care programs (if “omugwo” rites are incorporated). He summarized the theoretical implication of “omugwo” rites as: closeness of mother and child during this period, which encourages early psychological bonding and helps the child’s emotional development; and cross-generational maternal health, as the grandmother has the unique opportunity to put right some traditional demands that pass from one generation to another. The ‘omugwo’ rites clearly underscore
the crucial importance of the neonatal period for the survival of human beings and society.

*Traditional ethno-veterinary medicine and modern medicine work as partners in Cameroon, Africa.*

In Cameroon, the modern veterinary sector witnessed constraints, including erratic supply and high cost of drugs, supplies and communication facilities and a shortage of manpower. The study on how traditional veterinary medicine and modern medicine can complement each other in Cameroon looked into the promotion of complementary uses of Indigenous and conventional veterinary medicine for sustainable livestock production and conservation of medicinal plant resources. Indigenous treatment of various diseases and ailments of livestock were documented. Diseases are now being treated using effective remedies that were used by local communities many years before the arrival of drugs. The practices depend above all on Indigenous farmers’ knowledge (World Bank IK Notes, 1998).

It is understandable that the application of local veterinary medicine derived from the people’s environment on their livestock is of value as it is based on experience from generation to generation. Above all, it cost them nothing except their knowledge of appropriate herbs; hence, a third party does not expropriate their profits.

*Locally available indigenous edible species of plants enhance community health, provide income, and conserve biodiversity in Kenya.*

Due to their ignorance of the nutritional values and cultivation of the local edible plants, the younger generations in Kenya were despising their traditional foods in favour
of exotic foods, resulting in poverty, famine and malnutrition in rural areas despite the fact that local foods were readily available. Cultivation of local foods would have raised the living and health standards of the local communities, raised the status of Indigenous knowledge in the eyes of the people and generated knowledge of making more money thereby alleviating poverty. Having not been written down, the Indigenous knowledge of the elders was slipping away day by day; as well, a number of important species or varieties of species were on their way to extinction. This resulted in the national museums of Kenya compiling a database of the indigenous food plants of Kenya and promoting the cultivation, consumption and marketing of these foods through field demonstrations, educational materials and media (World Bank IK Notes, 1998).

Knowledge and acceptance of the local edible species, be it food or medicine, is central in enriching Kenya’s cultural and biological diversity; furthermore, its non-usage in the life of the people gives an insight into the genesis of the acquired diseases that are ravaging Africa in recent times.

*Gengenlilas preschool: Community effort for community gain in Canada.*

The essence of Gengenlilas preschool is an attempt in modern times to recapture and institutionalize the lost culture and history of First Nations, as there is recognition of the fact that without Indigenous knowledge, a people has no history. The Campbell River First Nation on Vancouver Island, Canada built a preschool with specific needs in mind. They wanted a preschool that would teach the children about their Nation’s culture and would be free of charge to anyone in the community. The First Nations used resources from its bingo operation and from outside resources to build the school. The school has a play-longhouse, First Nation theme, toys and traditional articles such as drums and
masks. Elders and other communities help teach the basics of First Nations culture, including Campbell River stories, dances and song (World Bank IK Notes, 1998).

Abolition of female circumcision in Senegal.

The Senegalese Rural Women came together and decided to abolish the problem of female circumcision, a pattern in Bambara/Mandingue and Pulaar communities for centuries. This they did by informing themselves on practices elsewhere and on the effects of circumcision on girls’ health and sexual life. They developed an arsenal of arguments such as its effects on girl’s normal sexual function, increased risk of health complications, and infringement on the girl’s reproductive health rights, and eventually convinced the village council to officially abolish the practice. Not satisfied with this result, they consequently created a team to visit the neighbouring villages to speak to the women there and help them win cases in their own communities. In January of 1998, a congress of 16 villages from the region of Bambara or Mandingue lineage met to discuss the changes in practice and adopted the “Declaration of Malicounda.” The effect of this initiative was felt in the Casamanece region of Southern Senegal, where another group of 16 villages, all of Pular lineage, assembled for a similar conference and declaration. In fact, President Abdou Diouf of Senegal himself proposed the “oath of Malicounda” as a model for national adoption. The lesson learned from this project is that mobilizing public opinion against the established order can help to modify discriminatory Indigenous practices.
Oral rehydration solution to combat diarrhea.

The introduction of Oral Rehydration Solution in combating diarrhea in many developing countries increased the number of donor agencies with health programs. In some countries aggressive promotions of subsidized, ready-made industrial packets undercut the use of long-known home remedies. When the subsidies ended and health education efforts stopped, the rate of use fell. But households that might have then reverted to traditional home remedies did not, because confidence in them had been undermined by the promotion of the commercial remedy. To avoid such an outcome in Nepal, oral dehydration programs preserved Indigenous knowledge by encouraging the use of homemade simple solutions alongside the modern packet solution. The lesson from here is that it is possible to preserve Indigenous knowledge alongside modern techniques.

Summary of Case Studies

In summary, Africa’s forcible integration on unequal terms into the world culture and values has eroded much of its proud Indigenous knowledge. The ‘omugwo rites,’ the local veterinary drugs for livestock, indigenous edible spices, the Oral Rehydration Solution in Nepal, and the Senegalese rural women’s abolition of circumcision are indicative of functional Indigenous knowledge in all facets of life that ought to have been complemented on equal terms. The local people would have seen their role as dictating their development rather than having development forced down their throat, with the resulting resistance that is found in most cases and which is erroneously termed as “impervious attitude to change.”
The disappearance of many Indigenous practices could have a negative effect, primarily on those who have conceived them and who make a living through them. A greater awareness of the important role that Indigenous knowledge can play in the development process is likely to help preserve valuable skills, technologies, artefacts, and problem-solving strategies among the local communities.

*Storytelling as a Key Strategy for Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into ECD Services*

Storytelling is a significant, attractive and persuasive teaching skill, because the storyteller creates the environment in which the story is told. Storytelling is an excellent teaching tool that entertains children and is also capable of holding children’s attention by mirroring real life – while they learn important concepts, attitudes and skills. Storytelling provides opportunities for child participation, for retelling and repetition of the story, and for deeper understanding. In her book, *Earth Tales: Storytelling in Times of Change*, Alida Gersie (1992) notes that traditional stories convey contemporary concerns about our future as they concentrate on the Earth, how it was created, and the problems that can arise when we forget the importance of living in harmony with each other.

Although technology seems to have taken over the role of storytellers, technology-aided stories are empty, as they do not allow alternative thinking; hence the children’s thoughts are programmed. Traditional stories, on the other hand, mirror real life situations by promoting social values and inform communities of what happens elsewhere.

This position informed Livo and Rietz (1986) to argue for stories which influence our emotions, require our involvement, and transport us into timelessness. Livo and Rietz (1986) also posit that stories are a way of thinking, a primary organizer of information
and ideas, the soul of a culture, the consciousness of a people and, ultimately, a way in which we can know, remember and understand.

Telling stories to children and teaching them to tell stories themselves can have astonishing and thrilling effects. Storytelling is an entertaining and deep-seated way of making meaning out of life; it helps people make connections in and to their lives. A growing body of research supports the benefits of storytelling and also recognizes storytelling as one of the most powerful teaching and motivational tools available. Through their research and use of storytelling with children from Hillsborough County public schools in Florida, Gregor et al. (2004) have compiled a truly impressive list of reasons for teaching storytelling, demonstrating that its effects reach far beyond the Language Arts curriculum.

The use of storytelling in teaching children is a strong motivational tool that develops the skill and art of listening, thereby leading to a love of literature. Storytelling introduces children to pattern of language and gives them practice in visualization skills, which is the basis of higher-level thinking. Storytelling helps children’s affective domain by giving insight into motives and human development. These visualization skills, that aids children’s high level-thinking will be used in this project as a guide to further encourage ECD teachers/caregivers and parents to get involved in the exciting activity of storytelling.
CHAPTER 3: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This chapter presents the design of the project including population, sampling techniques and instrumentation. The following objectives were used to guide the project:

a) identify and document Indigenous knowledge (stories) that are related to ECD in Umuchigbo community; b) integrate storytelling into ECD training and services by encouraging elderly parents to come to the centre to tell stories; c) develop strategies for reintroducing storytelling into community annual festivals; and d) disseminate the outcome of this project by sharing it with IECD practitioners in the ten states.

Who is the Community?

The Umuchigbo community in Enugu North Local Government area of Enugu State of Nigeria is made up of seven villages with a population of about 1,000. Eighteen percent of the population are children between the ages of 0 and 8 years (Nigeria Population Commission, 1991). The community is about 15 kilometres from the capital city of Enugu state. It has a community-based ECD centre that was established in 2000, which is being facilitated by a non-governmental organization (NGO) and assisted by UNICEF.

In terms of administration, the Town Union is at the apex of local governance overseeing the traditional institution, the women’s group and youth organizations. The traditional ruler, known as Igwe Nnaji, has a cabinet that is made up of a traditional Pre-minister and 22 appointed members. Out of these, five are women while the rest are men. The traditional ruler also has some titled elders who are charged with the responsibilities of keeping the culture and traditions of the community. The traditional ruler is responsible for the day-to-day running of the community, and acts as a link between the
community and the state government. The Town Union is responsible for community
development activities such as health, education and water projects. Their major language
of interaction and communication is Igbo.

Population and Sample

The population for this project included all of the 25 men and 45 women (n = 70)
from the seven villages who either have their children in the ECD centre or participated
in the ECD needs assessment workshop supported by UNICEF.

A cluster sampling technique was employed, using the seven villages as clusters.
This method of random sampling was intended to obtain a fair geographical
representation of the parents and caregivers and, by implication, the characteristics of the
community. Cluster sampling is a technique of random sampling from the population in
clusters and then using all subjects drawn from each cluster as the sample (Ott, 1997, p.
647). The ten persons from each of the seven villages in Umuchigbo community were
first listed and numbered from one to ten. In order to give each village an equal chance of
being sampled, a table of random digits was used for composing the sample. The first
three numbers between 1 and 10 listed in the table columns constitute the villages
sampled for this study. The final sample consisted of 21 subjects drawn into three groups:
seven parents; seven caregivers and seven community elders that participated in ECD
Community Needs Assessment (see Table 1).
Table 1. Sample distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten samples in each cluster selected three samples through simple random sampling.

The project adopted focus group interviews (see Appendix I). A general interview guide that covered the three project objectives was developed. The question guide consists of three sections: Section A covered the first objective of the project and contained questions on the origin of stories, types of stories, how stories are preserved, benefits of stories and stories that are related to ECD; Section B contained questions on how stories were used in the past, how children can be encouraged to tell stories, methods of storytelling and interaction with children; and Section C contained questions on the type of festivals in the community, the objectives of such festivals and whether children participate in such festivals. The guide for the focus group interview was developed by the researcher for the purpose of eliciting responses from participants for the project. The guide for the focus group interview consisted of 14 questions developed by the
researcher, which she asked verbally under face-to-face interaction with the respondents (parents, caregivers and community elders) who provided verbal answers to those questions (see Appendix I).

Three focus group interviews (see Appendix I) were conducted with 21 participants, 7 in each group made up of parents, caregivers, siblings and elders in the local language. These groups have considerable knowledge of ECD.

During the focus group interview, each group was asked to prepare at least two stories that were Indigenous and relevant to early childhood development. After each story, using a question and answer session, the whole community participated in content analysis using the attached format (see Appendix II). This served as participatory training for caregivers in the centre who are part of the group. The interviews sought to identify sources, types, objectives and values of stories from the communities and techniques of storytelling.

**General Community Awareness**

The two major activities before the focus group discussions were a) awareness and advocacy visit to the Town Union executives, traditional ruler and community elders, and b) awareness with the representatives of different community groups. The researcher organized these activities for the purpose of securing the support, involvement and participation of all community members.

The first meeting was with the Town Union executives, traditional rulers and elders who represent the gateway to the community. This meeting was conducted mainly to create awareness of the project, obtain community support for participation and identify criteria for participation in the project. At the end of the meeting, leaders asked
for time to confer with other community members. During the meeting, the project objectives and activities were explained to the group while their roles and responsibilities were identified. A month later, the Town Union executive chairman issued an official letter to the researcher stating their participation in the project.

The second meeting was with representatives of women’s groups, men’s groups and elders in the community. The criteria for representation were that the person must have either participated in ECD Needs Assessment, had children registered in the ECD centre, had been a caregiver in the ECD center, or possessed the ability to tell Indigenous stories, proverbs and moonlight songs.

Seventy (70) community members were invited for the one-day awareness creation on the objectives of the project, roles of the community and expected outcomes. The Director of Chline Associates for Health and Family Development (CAPHAD), an NGO working with the community, participated actively in the mobilization. Out of 70 people who participated, 45 (64%) were women while 25 (36%) were men. During the session, the main objectives of the project were explained and the roles of community members in the integration of Indigenous knowledge (storytelling) into ECD services were also identified.

The format for analysis of story (see Appendix II) begins with the title of the story to be discussed. It further highlights features and interest of the story to the children, especially in ECD centre. The format also identifies the importance of the story in the life of the children with appropriate examples. Additionally the format identifies themes of the story that are relevant to ECD with storytelling techniques, indicating lessons learned and aspects of the story that promote the community’s culture. To avoid disruption of
activities in the ECD centre and participation of caregivers in the centre, the interviews and discussions took place in the centre during the recreation period (10-11 am) and at the end of each day’s activities (1-3 pm). The ECD centre is also centrally located and accessible to all other community members.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the information gained using the guide (Appendix I).

Focus Group Interview Responses

**Question 1:** Cast your mind back when you were growing up; were stories told at that time and how were they told?

**Group Response:** There were lots of stories of different types told when we were growing up. These stories were told in different ways, at different places, either in the farm, the market, at home while cooking and even at moonlight nights that are no more. One of the group participants said, “This is an aspect of traditional education or educating our children, as the environment where the story is told is part of education.”

**Question 2:** What is the origin of these stories, that is, how are these stories and proverbs formed?

**Group Response:** Stories originated from the time of our great-grandfathers who used stories in teaching us lots of things. Some parents are good in using situations to form stories for correction or teaching principles of life to children. Our grandfathers used situations in the family, community or even personal issues and other people’s experiences, histories, traditions and stories from animals to form stories.

**Question 3:** What types of stories do you have in Umuchigbo?

**Group Response:** We have different types of stories that teach different things. There are stories about the origin of our village Umuchigbo, where we came from, how our fathers fought and conquered other villages. Because our fathers were great traders, we had stories on effective bargaining skills and principles and how to preserve and store goods in order to make gains during scarce periods. We also have stories that emphasize purity,
especially among the girls who are expected to be married off as virgins. There are stories on discipline, honesty, hard work, obedience, love, forgiveness, nature, environment, the animal world, etc. The group response is in line with the works of Livo and Rietz (1986), who found out that story is a way of thinking, a primary organizer of information and ideas (see p. 24).

**Question 4: What type of stories do men and women tell in your community?**

**Group Response:** Women usually tell stories of love, care, and humility while men tell stories of bravery, intelligence, honesty, wisdom and problem solving. Men tell children stories that put them in difficult situations and observe to see how they will wriggle out of such a situation. Usually their stories require thinking very hard because they believe men should be tough. A member of the group said, “My grandfather was a wealthy farmer who will always tell us stories of early and late rains and their effects on the crops. Because of this, we can forecast the weather, to know when to prepare the land for farming.”

**Question 5: Do you as parents, caregivers or grandparents tell stories to your children at homes or ECD centre?**

**Group Response:** Yes, as caregivers we have in our timetable storytelling periods. During this period we tell stories to children or get a child to tell a story. As mothers most of the time we rarely have time these days to tell children stories as we were told, because we have to rush out for economic activities. As grandparents most of our grandchildren now live in urban centres, but whenever they visit home we spend time together telling stories of the past.

**Question 6: What are the reasons why you tell stories to children?**
**Group Response:** Storytelling is a way of passing on the family history and identity from one generation to another. Every parent is happy when a child exhibits very high intelligence and leadership skills in community issues. Stories help sharpen a child’s thinking faculty and by extension help a child develop good behaviour, exhibit honesty and discipline. Stories are used to find out whether children will remember what was taught in school; hence we encourage a child to retell the story.

**Question 7:** How often do you use stories in teaching your children some cultural values?

**Group Response:** You may be aware that we have some traditional values, norms and taboos, so we often tell children stories relating to these issues to ensure they do not go against them. These stories will clearly show the consequences of someone in the past that violated these norms and how such a person was punished. In the area of preserving our culture, we regularly tell these stories to our children and encourage them to retell these stories to their mates.

**Question 8:** Are there stories that are specifically targeted at children? If yes, what are the objectives of such stories?

**Group Response:** We have many stories targeted on the child. These stories have the objectives of promoting bravery, intelligence, cleverness, love, care for others, forgiveness, honesty, self esteem, listening skills and integrity. They also discourage lying, stealing, fighting, laziness, etc.

**Question 9:** What type of story features mostly – cultural or social?
Group Response: Our stories are both social and cultural, but more of them are cultural because we want our children to be deeply rooted in our culture so as to avoid being affected by current changes in the society.

Question 10: How do you ensure children participate in storytelling – listening, analysis, role-playing or drama?

Group Response: Children participate by first making sure that they listen attentively, responding to the chorus if any, and retelling the story to their mates or to their families when they gather for storytelling.

Question 11: How many major festivals do you celebrate in this community and when?

Group Response: We have three major annual festivals. The first is from March to April, being the beginning of the farming season. The second, called “Odo,” is from July to September and marks the period of rest after planting and weeding of the farm. The third one is the annual yam festival to mark the period of harvest. Everybody participates in these festivals, marked with eating, drinking and merry making.

Question 12: What do children do during these festivals?

Group Response: Children do nothing but play around, visiting friends; that is all they do.

Question 13: Is there any way storytelling can be made to be part of any of these festivals?

Group Response: It can happen if the men in the community accept. It can happen, but it will take series of meetings, discussions with the elders, at times involving men, women
and even youths in the community. It is possible if it will help to restore some of our values that Western culture has affected so much.

**Question 14: Can someone tell us a story that she/he usually tells her/his children?**

There are rules or guidelines governing storytelling in Igboland. These rules have different aims and objectives. For example, the storyteller starts with greeting signifying that he/she has a story to tell.

**Storyteller:** *Ndibanyi O nwere akuko, M gakolu unu.* (I have a story to tell you.)

**Listener’s response:** *Kolu anyi ka obi di anyi nma, ma odi nma ma odi njo. Onye emekwana mkpotu.* (Tell us the story whether it is good or bad and nobody should make noise or disturb.)

The purpose of the greeting is to get the attention of the audience and to assure that everybody is comfortable and well positioned to listen and participate in the story.

Other guidelines are that the source of the story must be a folk or fairy tale, fable, myth or legend that is appropriate to the age of the children or any other target group. The storyteller should be capable of creating vivid images, with proper poise, while maintaining eye contact with the audience. If it is a long story, there must be a chorus in between for everybody to participate in, hence erasing monotony and boredom. Above all, the story should have relevance with what is happening or has happened in the community. Story A is a good example of the use of chorus in storytelling, to ensure participation of everybody while promoting extended family system values and care towards children.
Story A

A man once had a wife who had just one child and died. The name of the child was Obinna. Obinna’s father later married another wife who had four children, two boys and two girls. Obinna was then left in the care of his stepmother who hated him so much that most of the time she would not give Obinna food to eat.

In the land of Umudi where Obinna’s father came from, he was noted for his fame in wrestling. Every year there was an annual wrestling competition among the surrounding villages. Obinna’s father was the village hero for years as nobody defeated him in wrestling during his youthful days, and Obinna took after his father in wrestling. Although he did not go out to practice with other boys (because the stepmother gave him no chance), yet he would defeat all his opponents.

The village had two streams, the big one called Amuma and the small one Igwu. While everyone could fetch water from Igwu any time and any day, people were not allowed to visit Amuma stream on Afo day, which was the fourth day of Igbo market days. Anybody who dared to visit Amuma on Afo day would not come back alive, as the person was expected to wrestle at three spots with seven-headed spirits.

One beautiful day Obinna’s stepmother went to her maternal village for the burial of her uncle and was not due to come back till the following day. She made sure Obinna had enough work in the house to keep him from playing with other children. The poor obedient boy quickly finished his assigned worked and went to Amuma stream to fetch water for the family use. Obinna was in the house when he heard the wrestling drum; he now remembered that Umudi had a wrestling competition with Awka village. He could not make up his mind to go, as it was the day his stepmother was expected to come back.
When all his stepsisters and brothers had gone to watch the wrestling, Obinna went to the wrestling arena. When he got there, there was the champion from Awka at the centre patiently waiting for his opponent from Umudi, but there was nobody coming out to challenge him. Obinna could not bear the sight and quickly pulled off his shirt and jumped into the wrestling arena without the right regalia. Within the next ten minutes his challenger’s back was on the ground. Everybody from Umudi ran out to centre and Obinna was carried shoulder high round the whole village.

Obinna could not wait for the feast, as he ran home and collected a little of the water he fetched from Amuma and took his bath. Immediately after that, the stepmother came back, and when she noticed that Obinna finished all the work assigned to him, she now went to inspect the water containers. Here she saw that two pots were filled to the brim, but the smaller bucket was half full. On realizing that Obinna used it for his bath, she insisted that he must go back to Amuma stream the next morning to fetch water. However, Obinna reminded her that the next day was Afo market and that nobody goes to the stream and comes back alive, to which she expressed indifference. Very early in the morning of Afo market day Obinna with his bucket went to fetch water at Amuma Stream. On his way he started singing this song.

My God, my God Chorus: Amumangwe
My stepmother Amumangwe
Went to her village Amumangwe
Gave me work to do Amumangwe
Asked me to fetch water Amumangwe
I finished all the work Amumangwe
Fetched water

I took part of the water I fetched for my bath

She asked me to fetch her water from Amuma

Amuma that kills on Afo market

My God My God, if it is your will

I will go and come back

If it is not your will

I will go and not come back

As he was approaching the first spot where the first set of spirits with seven heads was, he heard a song in inner spirit giving him encouragement, and the song goes like this:

Obinna leee (twice)  Chorus:  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
If you wrestle you win  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
If you do not wrestle you win  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
Because you did nothing wrong  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
The gods of Umudi are not wicked gods  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
You will go to Amuma, Fetch water and back  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo
You will do what nobody has done  Ngolodi, Ngolodididii, Ngolo

Obinna wrestled and defeated the first set of spirits; he also defeated the second and third spirits. At each point he would sing the courage song before wrestling with the spirits. When he got to the stream and fetched the water, he could not find anybody to help him lift up the bucket to his head. He sang his courage song again and immediately a hand lifted up the bucket and placed it comfortably on his head. Obinna carried his water...
home. On getting home all the villagers of Umudi were gathered in his father’s house crying, but when they saw Obinna, they all started dancing and singing. Obinna recounted his ordeal on his way to Amuma and the wrestling with the spirits with seven heads.

Obinna was asked to request anything he wanted from the community. Before this time, his stepmother had packed her things ready to go back to her father’s house but Obinna made two requests:

He requested that the stepmother be forgiven and be allowed to stay.

Secondly, he requested that Afo day be set aside for all children to meet and discuss their experiences in their homes.

The two requests were granted by the elders of the land and from that day children met at the palace of the Chief of Umudi to discuss issues that concerned them and the community. The outcome of these discussions was later presented as their contributions to the administration of the community.

*Analysis of Story A*

**Question 1:** What is the title of the story?

**Response:** The title of the story is “Obinna and His Stepmother.”

**Question 2:** What features of the story of “Obinna and His Stepmother” make it interesting?

**Response:**

- The rhymes in the story are features that make it more interesting.
- The clapping of hands that goes with the chorus is another interesting feature.
• The suspense of the storyteller with which she captures our interest is another.

• Imagining Obinna’s wrestling with spirits is also an interesting feature.

• The traditional wrestling festivals that are no more, but one would have loved to witness it.

• The story has phases: a beginning, a middle and an end.

**Question 3:** What makes listening to the story more interesting than reading?

**Response:**

• Listening to the story is more interesting than reading because of the demonstrations and gesticulations by the storyteller.

• The participation of everybody in singing the rhymes and clapping.

**Question 4:** List three major functions of this story.

**Response:**

• development of oral expression

• character moulding

• entertainment

**Question 5:** Identify six major themes of the story that are relevant to ECD.

**Response:**

• obedience

• respect to elders

• hard work

• forgiveness

• good is rewarded and evil is punished

• play
**Question 6:** Suggest ways in which Umuchigbo community can follow up some of the lessons or principles of the story.

**Response:**

- We will find out whether there are children like Obinna in our community.
- We shall find time and venues for us to discuss issues concerning them.

**Question 7:** What three major lessons are learned from the story?

**Response:**

- Love and care of children, especially orphans, is important.
- A child who obeys and respects his elders has nobility and honour awaiting him in life.
- Fathers should be part of a child’s upbringing. Obinna’s father was not paying attention to Obinna, hence the bad treatment from the stepmother.
- The story reveals some of the experiences of children from homes where maternal love does not exist; the rights of the child are abused. Children have inherent talents and, if nurtured in a loving and uninhibited environment, their best could be revealed.

*Story B*

Story B is woven around the animal kingdom to discourage greed amongst children.

**Storyteller:** I have a story to tell you.

**Listener’s response:** Tell us the story whether it is good or bad, nobody should make noise or disturb.

The title of the story is “Why the Crack on Tortoise’s Shell?”
Once there was famine in the animal kingdom, but only the birds were healthy because the King of Birds usually provides food for all birds every four days. When Tortoise realised that the famine was not affecting the birds, he decided to find out why. Tortoise went to the tree where the birds usually gather before visiting their King and pleaded that they allow him to go with them. The birds being aware of the tricks of Tortoise would not allow him but, after some persuasions, the birds accepted that Tortoise would go with them and also donated wings for him to fly.

Before they left they all took new names and Tortoise was known as “All of You.”

When they got to the palace of the King of Birds, the king welcomed them very well and different types of dishes were brought out and set before them. The Tortoise rose and asked the king, “Who are these foods meant for?” The King replied, “All of you.” Tortoise then reminded the birds of their new names, and that the foods were for him. He then told the birds to go home. This annoyed the birds and each of them demanded and collected the wings that were donated to Tortoise.

Tortoise was then stranded in the sky and could not come back, but he sent word to his wife through the parrot. He told Tortoise’s wife to bring out their mattress and all soft materials in their house, so that when he dropped from the sky, he wouldn’t hurt himself. But the parrot gave a contrary message to Tortoise’s wife to bring out stones, hard objects, hoes and machetes. When Tortoise felt that the wife should have brought out all the materials, he then dropped from the sky onto the hard materials. Tortoise’s shell broke into pieces and his wife tried to put them back the way they were before the
fall, but she could not. This is why Tortoise’s shell looks cracked. That’s the end of my story.

*Analysis of Story B*

**Question 1:** What features of the story of “Why the Crack on Tortoise’s Shell?” are interesting?

**Response:**

- The feature of the birds having a king.
- The birds bringing out part of their wings to give to Tortoise.
- Tortoise fixing the wings and flying to the sky with his weight.
- Tortoise dropping from the sky and not dying.
- Imagining the cracked shells of the Tortoise and the wife trying to patch it up.

**Question 2:** What makes listening to the story more interesting than reading?

**Response:**

- Listening to the story is more interesting than reading because of the demonstrations by the storyteller.
- The participation of everybody asking questions and retelling the story.
- The demonstration of how the tortoise as the leader acted out its speech, showing the food belongs to “all of you.”

**Question 3:** List three major functions of this story.

**Response:**

- development of oral expression
- character moulding
- entertainment
Question 4: Identify five major themes of the story that are relevant to ECD.

Response:

- greed
- lying
- lack of trust
- evil is punished
- cheating

Question 5: Suggest ways in which Umuchigbo community can follow up some of the lessons or principles of the story.

Response:

- We will teach our children to be honest and trustworthy.
- We shall find time and venues for us to discuss issues concerning these principles and give time for interaction with children.
- We shall hear them out by creating programs for them.

Question 6: List three major lessons that came up in the story.

- He who does not keep to his word dies of hunger, as nobody is ready to lend to him.
- A greedy child grows up a jealous youth and dies a thief.
- A lying child is threading a rope to hang himself.

Story B reveals that greed breeds animosity and that a selfish child will always meet disappointment at the end.

Story C
Story C is a good example of a spoiled child. The main purpose of training a girl in a traditional Ibo society is to produce a good housewife, and this process perpetuates gender discrimination within the community.

**Storyteller:** I have a story to tell you.

**Listener’s response:** Tell us the story whether it is good or bad, nobody should make noise or disturb.

The title of the story is “The Beautiful Ugonma.”

A woman gave birth to a baby girl after being married for more than 20 years. The woman Ahudiya and the husband Emeka loved each other so much that they refused separation or divorce, despite pressures from relations. Ahudiya was called names, insulted that she could not give the husband a child. She would not attend village gatherings or visit anybody; rather she kept to her self all those 20 years looking on her God for a child. God answered her prayers and gave her Ugonma. Ahudiya did not allow Ugonma to do any work in the house. The mother did all the household chores, went to farm, washed her daughter’s dresses and prepared the food. Ugonma would not greet elders on the way and would not help anybody. She was so disrespectful that she called elders by their first names, which was not accepted within the community. Ahudiya would always pick quarrels with anybody who dared to correct Ugonma. So Ugonma was seen as belonging to Emeka and Ahudiya and not to the whole community.

Ugonma grew up a beautiful girl and attracted many suitors. Eventually she got married to one of them called Nweke, a rich businessman living in the city. Nweke did not know anything about Ugonma and did not bother to ask. Some of his relations tried to advise him against marrying her, but his mind was made up because of her beauty.
Ugonma had a lavish traditional and church wedding. Ugonma’s ordeal started after her weddings, when she could not perform her duties and roles as a housewife. She could not sweep, cook, wash, trade or do anything.

All she did was fight, and gave her husband no peace. He started regretting marrying her. Later he fell seriously sick because of worrying and thinking. Throughout her husband’s period of illness, Ugonma never visited him or asked how he was feeling. Other people visited him. One day Ugonma came to see him after being pressured by people. On seeing her, he asked her to take care of their two children, that he was leaving the world. After saying this, he fell back and died. That was the price he paid for marrying a woman for her beauty and not for her character or love. Ugonma was then left alone to care for two children.

Analysis of Story C

**Question 1:** List three major functions of this story.

**Response:**

- character moulding
- entertainment
- development of oral expression

**Question 2:** Identify six major themes of the story that are relevant to ECD.

- laziness
- lying
- hard work
- peaceful conduct
- humility
• respect for elders

Story C shows that parents who indulge their children through over pampering have only regrets to harvest.

**Question 3:** Suggest ways in which Umuchigbo community can follow up some of the lessons or principles of the story.

**Response:**

• We will recognize, promote and protect the rights of our children.

• We will assign duties that are commensurate with their ages to both boys and girls.

• We shall unite together to fight discrimination against the girl child.

**Question 4:** List three major proverbs that came up in the story.

**Response:**

• A fly that refuses to listen to advice follows the corpse into the grave.

• Just because antelope meat is good does not mean I will eat a swollen bad one.

• It is the duty of an adult to advise a child against wrongs, but the child’s duty to listen to the advice.

**Summary of Findings**

The project revealed that proverbs are an integral part of Indigenous stories and that a story without proverbs is like a home without a child.

Developing strategies for reintroducing storytelling into community annual festivals requires time and funds. It also requires the consent of all community members both home and abroad. Because the project is an ongoing one, funds will be sought for
the activities. The outcome of the project will be presented to and shared with partners from the ten states during 2004 work planning meeting on ECD.

In summary, the Umuchigbo community has many stories that originated in the past through their grandparents. While men tell stories of bravery, women tell that of love and care. The stories in the community are cultural and social. Stories are used in the ECD centre in the community, but analysis and role play of the stories are practised in the centre. Storytelling is not part of community annual festival, but can be added with the consent of the community elders.

Three stories were documented and the project is still ongoing as many are still interested in telling stories. It was agreed that stories would be recorded by videotape by CAPHAD. For future direction of this project, the strategy used in eliciting stories in this project and the format for story analysis will form part of the training program for more than 510 caregivers from 80 ECD centres in ten states of UNICEF Field Office A.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter will interpret the outcomes of the project, discuss their implications and contrast the outcomes in relation to the objectives of the project. Limitations in the project will also be discussed in this chapter.

Question 1: Cast your mind back when you were growing up, were stories told at that time and how were they told?

In the past, storytelling was part of childrearing practices in Umuchigbo. These stories were of different types and different methodologies were used. Stories were also told in different places, homes, and farms. By implication, stories are told as situations that give rise to them occur.

Question 2: What are the origins of these stories, that is, how are these stories and proverbs formed?

Umuchigbo community, like most Igbo communities, inherited stories and proverbs from their forefathers, although some have been lost as result of urbanization. This has equally affected community values and customs as very few are interested in promoting cultural beliefs. In support, Alida Gersie (1992) stressed that storytelling convey contemporary concerns about our future and the problems that can arise when we forget the importance of living in harmony with each other and with nature. On how their forefathers came about the stories, the respondents said that there are two major sources of the stories. The first is that in the past, the community had a comedian who entertained during festivals. The contents of his entertainment were usually mimicking the negative attitudes of some community members. This acted as a check on community members, who were careful not to do anything that might attract the comedian. Secondly, intelligent
elders in the community come up with stories to teach their children certain values and skills cherished by the community.

**Question 3: What types of stories do you have in Umuchigbo?**

Stories in the community are related to current, future and past issues within the society and are aimed at harmonious living in the society. Gersie (1992) notes that “storytelling relates to current concerns about our future because most stories focus on the Earth, how it was created, and the problems that can arise when we forget the importance of living in harmony with it and each other” (p. 1).

**Question 4: What type of stories do men or women tell in your community?**

The community realises that early childhood development is the responsibility of both the mother and father. Parents in Umuchigbo see a good story not only as entertaining but as a way of teaching children important concepts, attitudes and skills.

In this connection, Livo and Rietz (1996) stressed that stories are a way of thinking, a primary organizer of information and ideas, the soul of a culture, the consciousness of a people and, ultimately, a way in which we can know, remember and understand.

In recognition of this, fathers tend to focus on the child’s cognitive and psychosocial development while mothers come up with stories that promote the social aspect of the child’s development. This is in agreement with Piaget’s (in Berk, 1999, p. 327) developmental theory which states that “the developing child builds cognitive structure” in other words, mental “maps,” schemes, or networked concepts for understanding and responding to physical experiences within his or her environment.
Question 5: Do you as parents, caregivers or grandparents tell stories to your children at homes or ECD centre?

The ECD centre in the community has storytelling on their timetable, which implies the use of storytelling in the centre, but mothers confessed a lack of time for telling stories to children due to their serious engagement in economic activities. Grandchildren now reside in urban cities, leaving grandparents in rural areas. Grandchildren still find time to enjoy stories whenever they come home to see their grandparents in rural areas.

Question 6: What are the reasons why you tell stories to children?

Storytelling is a way of passing on the family history and identity from one generation to another. Every parent is happy when children exhibit very high intelligence and leadership skills in community issues. Stories help sharpen a child’s thinking; they help a child develop good behaviour, honesty and discipline. Along this line, Livo and Rietz (1986) emphasized those stories that influence our emotions, require our involvement, and transport us into timelessness. Stories are used to find out whether children will remember what was taught in school; hence caregivers encourage a child to retell stories. Storytelling is therefore an effective strategy for teaching children.

Question 7: How often do you use stories in teaching your children some cultural values?

One of the major reasons why the community uses stories in ECD is to promote knowledge and understanding of traditions, values and norms while preserving same. It is also used to ensure that children keep away from taboos to avoid sacrilege within the community thereby offending the gods. These stories will clearly show the consequences
of someone in the past who violated these norms and how such a person was punished.

To promote cultural values, stories are often used in aid of childrearing.

**Question 8: Are there stories that are specifically targeted at children? If yes what are the objectives of such stories?**

In Umuchigbo, Indigenous stories linked around rain, sun, moon and the animal world are usually targeted at children to teach nature study and seasons of the year. These stories also promote bravery, intelligence, cleverness, love, care for others, forgiveness, honesty, self esteem, listening skills and integrity while discouraging lying, stealing, fighting, laziness and other vices.

**Question 9: What type of story features mostly – cultural or social?**

The community has both social and cultural stories for children; although emphasis is laid on the cultural aspect as a strategy to ensure that children are deeply rooted in their culture and tradition and avoid being swept away by societal changes.

**Question 10: How do you ensure children participate in storytelling – listening, analysis, role-playing or drama?**

Storytelling is used in ECD centre in the community and children participate by listening, responding to choruses and retelling the stories. The findings also revealed that stories in the centre are not acted out as dramas or role-plays and children are not fully involved in drawing out the lessons from the stories.

**Question 11: How many major festivals do you celebrate in this community and when?**

The community has three major festivals in the year, in spring, summer and autumn. The first festival (February-April) is celebrated in preparation for planting of
crops. Between April and June, actually planting is celebrated with active farming, while the festival of harvest is celebrated from October to December. During these periods people come home from major towns to celebrate. The celebrations are characterized by eating, drinking, dancing, exchange of gifts, etc.

**Question 12: What do children do during these festivals?**

Children are neither included in planning nor planned for during these festivals. They only move from one corner of the community to another. On further questioning of how they intend to pass on the festival and their significance to the future generations, the response showed that the community has not thought about including activities for children that can contribute toward the preservation of the tradition.

**Question 13: Is there any way that storytelling can be made to be part of any of these festivals?**

The community at this point realized that storytelling can be organized for children during these festivals and stories can be constructed to show the importance, significance and strategies for celebrating these festivals. This can only happen if the elders, men, women and youths in the community accept this suggestion of integrating storytelling into the community’s festivals. It is possible if it will help to restore some of our values that Western culture have affected so much.

**Question 14: What features of the story of “Obinna and His Stepmother” make it interesting?**

The story of Obinna and his stepmother provided a known completion, a unity of form. It has beginning, middle, climaxing by creating suspense before the end. It also brought to the fore the past Indigenous activities like wrestling; going to the Amuma
stream, the seven-headed spirit and the traditional counting of the market days. The clapping and the rhymes make it participatory and help the children to internalize the lessons learned and eager to retell the story to others.

**Question 15: What makes listening to the story more interesting than reading?**

Listening to stories generate communication by creating a warm bond between the listeners. Once the story is finished, listeners automatically turn to each other to talk and share their feelings. Likewise good stories reproduce the perspective of Indigenous people and also bring their lessons for sustainability (Livo & Rietz, 1986).

**Question 16: List three major functions of this story.**

Indigenous stories are valuable in education and as a strategy for sustainable future because of their various functions. Stories are used for entertainment and relaxation after the day’s work. They also help to work through traumatic and stressful experiences; allowing the listener to regain mastery and develop new insights. Cognitive development of literacy develops within the context of family, peers, community and culture; hence the overall abilities of the child also play a role in language development and oral expression (Durgunoglu & Oney, 2000). The prime determinant of individual development is culture. Humans are the only species that have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture. Home experiences play an important role in developing language skills and, because of this, literacy skills (Durgunoglu & Oney, 2000). With both oral and written language, children become familiar with the characteristics of their language and develop understanding of functions of literacy.

**Question 17: Identify six major themes of the story that are relevant to ECD.**
Parents effectively use stories to develop the child’s interpersonal skills in areas of communication, value judgement, self assertion, self esteem, respects for others views and values, respect, and humility. Children often identify and associate themselves with the heroes and heroines of the stories they hear. As a strategy for moulding character, good behaviour should be rewarded and evil punished. Bukenya et al.(1996) pointed out specialization and teaching of social values through selection of good stories and practicing the art of telling stories to develop the skill.

**Question 9: Suggest ways in which Umuchigbo community can follow up some of the lessons or principles of the story.**

According to Livo and Rietz (1986), “Stories are a way of thinking, primary organizer of information and ideas, the soul of a culture and consciousness of a people” (p. 23). Stories have the powerful effect of commanding the emotions of Indigenous people, assessing and analysing the lessons and viewpoints beyond the current situation, conscientizing them, thereby facilitating the emergence of fresh perspectives on actual situations. Lessons drawn from good stories make impressions on a child prompting a change for good. Such change can be taken collectively, as seen in the case of Umudi village.

High points of discussions are that storytelling is an integral part of childrearing practices in Umuchigbo and these stories have their origin from the time of their forefathers, with the main objectives of entertainment, socialization, promoting cultural values, and character moulding. Storytelling is also an approach for integrating Indigenous knowledge into the community life of the people, thereby promoting harmonious living in the society. Stories are used to maintain the purity of the
community, as children are discouraged from offending the gods, while awareness, understanding, and knowledge of traditions and values (Indigenous knowledge) are promoted.

Although stories are told in the ECD centre, children do not participate in analysis of the stories; hence lessons learned from such stories are seen from adult perspectives. The community has three annual festivals into which storytelling can be integrated.

Limitations of this Study

The project was faced with many constraints arising from the choice of the community and non-availability of time on the part of the researcher.

The community was chosen because of its proximity to the duty station of the researcher without realising that the urban city has affected the lives of the community to the extent that it was very difficult getting their approval and participation.

The first challenge was the demand for monetary compensation by members of the community before their centre could be used, followed by demands for some construction work in the ECD centre. It took several visits to meet the elders of the community, mostly men, to get their approval, which I eventually demanded in writing.

When eventually the two groups of men and women were constituted for the group interview, few men turned up; this limited the researcher to only three interviews with a combined group of men and women. The timing was an issue; hence the interview was moved to evening leaving only three hours for storytelling and identification.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes the key outcomes and the conclusions from these outcomes. The project identified and documented some Indigenous knowledge (stories) in Umuchigbo that are related to ECD. Both the community and an NGO were involved in the process of identification and documentation. This was to ensure continuity as the research has all it takes to elicit further interest for robust academic work. It is worth noting that although urbanization has affected the use of Indigenous stories in childrearing, Umuchigbo still makes use of stories inherited from their grandfathers for harmonious living in the society. Both men and women tell stories to children aimed at the holistic development of the child, well garnished with proverbs, tongue twisters and rhymes.

It was also observed that storytelling goes on in the ECD centre in the community but that effective story analysis was not employed. However, analysis during the group interviews provided hands-on participatory training for parents and caregivers and generated lots of useful discussions which, although outside the objectives of the project, resulted in good knowledge and information for the community. Features of interesting stories were identified as encouraging children’s participation using rhymes and clapping, Indigenous activities like wrestling and orderly organization of one’s work.

The findings also revealed that listening to stories is more interesting than reading because stories engender communication by making a bond between the listeners, which leads to discussion between two listeners and sharing of responses. Indigenous stories also serve the purpose of entertainment, character moulding, development of oral expression, language development and promotion of culture.
Parents apply Indigenous stories in teaching problem identification and solving, resilience, bravery, cleverness and intelligence. Storytelling is a strategy for moulding character, rewarding good and punishing bad.

Indigenous stories create awareness by sensitizing individuals and communities on current situations and the need for change for the better. It acts as a mirror through which the community assesses, analyzes itself and decides for action.
CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and implications of this project, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is advisable that schoolteachers and ECD caregivers should adequately apply storytelling as a key strategy in the integration of Indigenous knowledge in ECD centres. Such knowledge could also assist the teachers to utilize community resources in the teaching and learning of other related subjects in order to make Indigenous knowledge functional and relevant to the child. Thus, the relevance of storytelling in teaching Indigenous knowledge should not be neglected.

2. The NGOs should avail themselves of the findings of the project and organize seminars and workshops for teachers in order to enhance their professional skills in the use of storytelling.

3. Based on participants in the project, parents would benefit if they come to ECD centres to tell stories and also prepare children at home to tell stories in the school.

4. Donor agencies should consider supporting the training of caregivers in the art of Indigenous storytelling, analysis and interpretation.

5. Donor agencies should support community-based sensitization activities on reintroducing Indigenous storytelling in community annual festivals.

6. The project should be replicated in at least five more communities in Enugu State for documentation of more stories from Igbo land.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR
MAJOR PROJECT INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE INTO ECD
SERVICES IN UMUCHIGBO COMMUNITY

My name is Mgbechikwere Uche Ezirim. I am undertaking a distance education course with the University of Victoria, Canada on Early Childhood Development.

As I have often explained to you during our previous meetings this project has the overall goal objectives of ensuring that the rich heritage, culture of our fathers are not lost to Western civilization. We all are in the business of making sure that those good childrearing practices, employed by our parents are retained for our children.

Today we are gathered here to discuss these practices with specific reference to storytelling and proverbs. We are going to discuss what these stories/proverbs are, how they came about, why they were told, for whom and the benefits of these stories in childrearing. We will ensure that everybody participates, by either asking or answering questions or even making comments. Some of you will tell us those beautiful stories you tell your children at home.

The following questions, based on the objectives, were made to guide the focus group interview:

1. Cast your mind back when you were growing up; were stories told at that time and how were they told?

2. What is the origin of these stories; that is, how are these stories and proverbs formed?

3. What types of stories do you have in Umuchigbo?
4. What type of stories do men and women tell in your community?

5. Do you as parents, caregivers or grandparents tell stories to your children at home or the ECD centre?

6. What are the reasons why you tell stories to children?

7. How often do you use stories in teaching your children some cultural values?

8. Are they stories that are specifically targeted at children? If yes, what are the objectives of such stories?

9. What type of story features mostly – cultural or social?

10. How do you ensure children participate in storytelling – listening, analysis, role-playing or drama?

11. How many major festivals do you celebrate in this community and when?

12. What do children do during these festivals?

13. Is there any way storytelling can be made to be part of any of these festivals?

14. Someone tell us a story that she/he usually tells her/his children.
APPENDIX II: FORMAT FOR ANALYSIS OF STORY

Title of story: __________________________________________________

1. What features of the story make it interesting?

2. What makes listening of story generally more interesting than reading one?

3. Identify three ways in which stories have been important in the life of your children. Give an example for each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mould Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Oral expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/history/Customs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Identify themes that are relevant to ECD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good rewarded/bad punished</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lying/stealing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleverness/intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love and care for others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for elders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. What storytelling techniques help to make stories useful for educational purposes?
6. List three lessons learned and how they can be used in the community for ECD.
7. List proverbs used in the story and explain their meanings and relevance to ECD.
8. How would you prepare your child to tell stories in the ECD centre?
9. What storytelling skills or techniques would you like to develop as a caregiver?