



The Creative Skills Podcast Transcript

Creative Skills Podcast S3, Episode 5:
The Importance of Storytelling with Early Years Children

Featuring Heather Armstrong, Starcatchers' Head of Early Years Development
and Storyteller Andy Cannon

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Transcript: Andy Cannon Storytelling podcast

Introduction

[Music plays]

00:00:10:02-00:01:30:11

Heather Armstrong

Welcome to the Creative Skills podcast – I'm Heather Armstrong. May is National Share a Story Month, and the theme for 2024 is a Feast of Stories.

So, who else would we speak this to this month, but one of Scotland's leading storytellers Andy Cannon. Andy's been involved in the Creative Skills programme since we started in 2013, he was our lead artist in our Talking Tales project in ELC settings in Dundee a few years ago and teamed up with David Trouton to create Starcatchers' production Spike: a dinosaur tale.

If you are listening to this podcast directly from the Starcatchers website, you may already know that with every episode, we create a reflective practice sheet - they are FULL of links to creative play ideas we speak about in the episode, and they have discussions questions and quick team exercises you can use to deliver your very own in-house training based on the podcast! So, if your early years setting is looking to take your storytelling to the next level, I strongly encourage you to check out all the resources we've developed to sit alongside this episode.

Also, a wee reminder that you can find all the episodes of this podcast on Spotify, the Apple podcast app, or indeed any other podcast app on your smartphone.

But whenever you're listening to us, I hope you enjoy my chat about storytelling with Andy Cannon.

[Music stops]

00:01:31:04 - 00:01:33:13

Heather Armstrong

How do you describe yourself Andy?

00:01:34:13 - 00:02:05:16

Andy Cannon

I describe myself as a storyteller and it took quite a few years to do that, to be honest. There's lots of reasons for that, I think. when I first started working in theatre, storytelling was very much seen as the traditional arts and very much in the world of a

folk music so that's that's the world it inhabited. It wasn't seen as I suppose an established rigorous discipline.

00:02:06:00 - 00:02:28:06

Andy Cannon

But then over the years, starting with huge personalities erm like Spielberg saying, I'm a storyteller, slowly the word storyteller started to become more and more accepted. Now we're in the situation that everybody's saying they're a storyteller, you know, from your artisan baker to you, you know, dare I say, your prime minister, you know that's

00:02:30:11 - 00:03:00:02

Andy Cannon

And but one of the things I've really started to appreciate and when I've been doing through Starcatchers, when I started doing training actually and doing some research into it, is that of course, we're all storytellers, that's that is the point. And there is a there's a really good argument to say that we are the as we are the fifth ape, we are the storytelling ape.

00:03:00:03 - 00:03:36:24

Andy Cannon

That's our difference. Yeah. And the storytelling is arguably and unfortunately I don't have any names here to cite, but please do Google it. If you look into evolutionary biologists, a lot of people do believe that this storytelling has been a huge evolutionary advantage, arguably the greatest of all, because we are able to imagine situations, rehearse situations, and to deal with them.

00:03:37:05 - 00:04:09:12

Andy Cannon

And I just start to find that really, really fascinating and how it linked. And obviously with a lot of what people were talking about, the importance of of story for children as well, and this idea of rehearsing, of practicing, of trying, of experimenting and that and, you know, maybe something will come onto later on. But for me, the the joy of words of just and experimenting and just talking and and and that kind of thing, that as adults, I always find hilarious.

00:04:09:12 - 00:04:28:01

Andy Cannon

But I also know in myself, you're having a great time with some children in your maybe joining and you're playing away. And then all of a sudden the dinosaur has to try and go in top of the car and starts bashing it. And then it goes into this complete surreal world of the adult in there who's been following that kind of logic.

00:04:28:11 - 00:04:53:16

Andy Cannon

And before you know what it is, you go to this kind of crazy, wonderful stuff and they're laughing away so much, and it's just that kind of idea of your imagination being able to create all these wonderful things. And yeah, I really do think that from this simple thing of what I am a storyteller, but then I would say we all are storytellers.

00:04:53:24 - 00:05:00:19

Heather Armstrong

So, Andy, a few years ago you went into a early years settings in Dundee as part of our Talking Tales project. Do you want to tell us a wee bit about that?

00:05:01:17 - 00:05:37:07

Andy Cannon

Yes. First of all, I have to say it was an absolutely wonderful experience. It was a real joy. The project started as a very simple premise of just looking at the role of storytelling in language acquisition, which obviously a very important part of growing up and a tool for life, but also something that is very different depending on the different communities and where you might find yourself growing up.

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Andy Cannon

So we approached Dundee Council and they've got a fantastic, very forward thinking and early years sector organization and they suggested to nursery schools, which was, as I say, the reason it was for me it was so fascinating because the one thing I really want to do, first of all, was just and get into the rhythm of what a morning would be in the in the nursery.

00:06:13:00 - 00:06:35:19

Andy Cannon

So for a couple of weeks, I went twice a week to both settings and there was another nursery that was I was doing more specific work with at the time in Dundee as well, which was great actually because I was able to really, erm sort out the experience of spending a whole morning in a nursery rather than going in and just doing your thing.

00:06:36:05 - 00:06:56:12

Andy Cannon

Yeah. So that's why I mean, it was almost like being on a special course, but I was able to just, so on a Monday morning I'd be there at nine and I'd leave at 12, and in that time I would be just joining in and just giving a hand. The other one was in the afternoon and then getting a sense of the rhythms and what happened and stuff.

00:06:56:12 - 00:07:27:10

Andy Cannon

And I became part of the furniture. You know, times are literally and, and then what I started to do then was then I would have a kind of storytelling session and it was

during that period when I was certainly in the first one, which was a lovely nursery, but it was, it was in a big primary school, so it had its own space, but it didn't have quite enough space.

00:07:27:14 - 00:07:48:24

Andy Cannon

You know, the children didn't seem to bother them and if anything, they were kind of just curious and excited by it. But for me, I really, really sensed that going where where the preschool nursery experience was very much always on evidence and that it fed into the big school. Yeah, but it was when I was doing the kind of just experiencing the nursery day.

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Andy Cannon

It was one day I was sitting down and there was a it was almost like a garden pond on legs, you know, full of toys and Lego and things and dinosaurs. And I was sitting cross-legged down with some children that were pulling things over this big basement type thing and were playing. And I was at their eye level. And I looked around and I remember just seeing all these things were all really, really fascinating, absolutely fascinating and stimulating and just thinking, wow, there's a Bob the builder kind of world full of big rubber bricks and hats to put on.

00:08:32:16 - 00:08:55:05

Andy Cannon

And then there's a dressing up thing and there's a there's a video screen showing some videos and there's this happening. Yeah. And I found it really hard when it came to start to do my session to find a place that wasn't, you know, and right next to something equally, if not more interesting in than anything I was going to do.

00:08:55:12 - 00:09:28:15

Andy Cannon

Yeah. And so what I did in that setting, I was they did a great resource, which was a sensory room. And that's, that's what the great thing about it was, it was probably about the size of the livingroom I'm in and it was painted white. And so what I offered to do was I would arrive at the nursery at 9:00 and I would spend 45 minutes packing everything away in this quiet room.

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Andy Cannon

Yeah. And I would create a completely empty space with a beanbag, and then two or three children with the staff would come in and I would do some storytelling in that room and that was amazing, the effect that that that had. One of the things I started to then experiment with as well, because I was also looking at how we could maybe come

up with them different ways of, of, of telling, telling stories, but also using books which lots of people want to use.

00:10:03:24 - 00:10:34:19

Andy Cannon

And that's fine. I've got no problem with books and books are wonderful. But perhaps like I would like photocopy one page and laminate it from a book. And it would just have a picture of the tiger that came to tea and that was it. And being able to just use that as a starting point in telling a story and then sometimes using it even like a puppet and making kind of tiger noises just with this one picture.

00:10:34:19 - 00:11:01:12

Andy Cannon

And that that worked for me, worked really well. There was also fantastic, a book of Scandinavian stories, which was good for me because my Scandinavian language skills. My Norwegian, my Swedish is terrible, but better than the Danish. But, but what I meant was that when I looked through these books, I kind of worked out the stories and then photocopy them.

00:11:02:15 - 00:11:55:08

Andy Cannon

But then I would take a one picture, one drama from the book that nobody had seen because it was Scandinavian. It wasn't part of our menu. And just having that picture as a starting point to discuss what's in the picture and let's make up the story. Yeah. Together was it, was a very simple thing. If I tried to do that next door surrounded by all the Lego that you could ever want and all the other wonderful things, it just would be nowhere for that to go. So that was a that was a great experience. And but the thing that for me as a I suppose a theatre maker and a performer as well, it was also nice having a project where there was no and there was no pressure to create anything.

00:11:55:08 - 00:11:55:17

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:11:56:10 - 00:12:20:13

Andy Cannon

And, and how much of, particularly in those schools, is, where also looking at the time they were and trailing the two years plus age group. So, there was a couple of groups I worked with that were two years old and a lot of the children hubs and social challenges, Shall we say, hence the reason they were in the in the early intake age.

00:12:20:21 - 00:12:43:23

Andy Cannon

And, and so just being able to and spend the time and just let them pick up the laminate it and rabbit around a little for a while until they were exhausted and then

come back to it was, was good and such an important part of the experience for all of us and just having the time for that.

00:12:44:18 - 00:13:09:18

Andy Cannon

And and that's where I think, you know, obviously Starcatchers is is great because it's got a it's got so much such a broad artistic, creative wellspring. It's yeah, you know, it might, it might have many years ago and kind of only been understood as this is theatre for children, but it's not become and always has been more than that.

00:13:09:18 - 00:13:44:04

Andy Cannon

And so having the space for that was was brilliant. So that was the kind of Dundee project and it was then looking back, you know, trying to find ways and yeah, I suppose tools to, to bring storytelling and make it most effective. And it was for, for all of us to kind of learn and certainly from myself, the thing that I learned the most from it was the importance of the neutral space.

00:13:44:10 - 00:14:23:14

Andy Cannon

Just and finding the right time for it. And because and this comes down to one of the things about storytelling, think one I'm often asked as other people are, you know, is there any golden rules for storytelling? And I've thought a lot about that. And I've really only come up with two Golden rules. And at this point, I also feel it's really important as to do the normal workshops is to to quote Leonard Bernstein, who said, "as a teacher, I reserve the right to be wrong."

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Andy Cannon

So, this is from my experience up to been asked specifically for me, that is there's only two rules about storytelling. One is the most important thing a storyteller does is listen. That is, you have to be listening as well as telling a story. And that's listening to the room. It's listening to the story yourself, listening to any feedback, listening even listening to, you know, a knock on the door, all these things.

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Andy Cannon

It's all about listening and working with your audience to create something together. That's what's happening is that your creating something together. So that's the first rule/ lesson. And the second rule for me is don't tell a story. You don't think it's as simple as that? If you don't like it, don't tell it. No, that's easier said than done.

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Andy Cannon

When a child comes up clutching something that you think is ghastly, you can't be bothered with it and then demands to tell it. So in that situation, what I always try and do and I'm I appreciate I'm not in that situations as much as other people are, is trying to find what the essences of the story that they like.

00:15:47:10 - 00:15:49:02

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:15:49:02 - 00:16:51:11

Andy Cannon

And then find that essence that you like and then go somewhere there. So, for all kinds of reasons, the example I always use, maybe some people might switch off at this point, but there's one story that I can't stand and it's the princess and the pea. It just, for all kinds of levels that the main reason being, of course, this idea that somebody is inherently superior and should be treated differently from anybody else. So for me, the if I, if I was really pushed to tell that story, I do know that I would, I would just have to slightly mock it in a friendly way and get it over and done with as quickly as possible. I suppose, painting the princess as somebody that was spoiled.

00:16:51:24 - 00:16:52:11

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:16:52:18 - 00:17:36:01

Andy Cannon

And long before mattresses were involved, I would be off the top of my head here. I'd be thinking about you should be trying to enhance what he'd be trying on hats would probably make him a prince, first of all, and trying on hats. And the hats would be sore, and try on spectacles and they'd be too nippy and stuff like that, you know. I mean, I would and then I'd start to enjoy it. In a kind of subverting way. And I would like to think that I would do it if any parent who loved the Princess and the pea know it was doing and would appreciate what it was trying to do with it, and they can tell their own version. I wouldn't diss it, but I would try and play with the themes in it.

00:17:36:14 - 00:17:37:01

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:17:37:03 - 00:18:03:18

Andy Cannon

And I think what I would do then, I've not thought about this, but I think I would have the prince who's so sensitive with all the mattresses pretending to be asleep and see somebody put a pea underneath the mattress and then pretend and then they would be

going ow, ow, ow. But then the character that was putting the pea under the mattress would pretend to put the pea under the mattress.

00:18:03:18- 00:18:03:30

Heather Armstrong

But hadn't

00:18:03:30 - 00:18:17:15

Andy Cannon

So that in the morning they would take them away and the people would see it's not there. And I don't know what the moral of the story is, but the moral of the story is.

00:18:17:22 - 00:18:19:07

Heather Armstrong

Don't be spoiled.

00:18:19:14 - 00:18:24:16

Andy Cannon

Don't be spoiled and democracy is rubbish but it's the best thing we've got. Stick with that!

00:18:24:16 - 00:18:43:23

Heather Armstrong

What I find really interesting about that is that I think actually if a wee one really loved the story of the Princess and the Pea, they would still love that because they would recognise the elements that they enjoy. But see you playing with them in a completely different way.

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Andy Cannon

Mhm, yes, hopefully! I think they would too. And I think that's where the listening would come in and then would be.

00:18:51:12 - 00:18:51:21

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:18:51:21 - 00:19:17:15

Andy Cannon

And also, the thing about storytelling is, certainly from me, but it is, it is about that personal connection is that you do connect with the storyteller. Now, that's I think something that teachers do instinctively is that, you know, that you have to have a bit of yourself as a teacher. But there's a private teacher. There's the 9 to 5 teachers so we are not...

00:19:19:10 - 00:19:39:04

Andy Cannon

There's the kind of professional ask that you're prepared to share it with. And so that there is, I think the the kind of the relationship with the storyteller, as you say, the storyteller having fun with the story is as much the story as the story.

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Heather Armstrong

Yeah. Do you know what I find really interesting Andy? I think when people think about professional storyteller coming into a setting, I think they would think about it being very performative, but it would almost be like a one-way street. And so I think the question would normally be, well, where's the voice of the child? And although obviously you do perform stories, the voice of the child is very much. In there isn't it?

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Andy Cannon

Oh, absolutely!

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Heather Armstrong

It's quite an informal, flexible approach to exploring stories, isn't it?

00:20:11:11 - 00:20:36:15

Andy Cannon

Yes. When it comes to putting the child at the the heart of it, one of the things I've really enjoyed doing over the last few years is I've been doing some work at the, the hospital in, in Edinburgh. And you know, somebody coming in to your your ward or into your room with some, you know, two people coming in and somebody saying he's here to tell you a story.

00:20:36:15 - 00:21:07:02

Andy Cannon

Is kind of like okay. Nice. But what's? And, and so one of the things I've really enjoyed doing that, in that project is developing a couple of stories I've got where I don't know how the end. You know, and it's an, a kind of theatricalised a little bit sometimes I've got a bit of paper with the story written now and it's torn, so I can show them the story that I found in a book, as a placemat.

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Andy Cannon

And it's amazing and, and I can read the story and then together using that as a starting point of, how do you think it's going to end? Yeah, I've seen it myself, you know, with children sitting down and coming up with ideas and I'm getting a penguin. Hang on,

hang on. What's that? That's brilliant and then turning it over and saying thank you very much.

00:21:25:09 - 00:21:45:22

Andy Cannon

You know, those aren't kind of, that that works really well. They I also use origami quite a lot in my stories. I've got one particular gambit I use a lot, which is a crown. I can make it with a piece of paper and, and I've got quite elaborate story which has grown and grown and grown and you know.

00:21:46:11 - 00:22:15:11

Andy Cannon

Children helped create the stories. It grows. And it's a very simple story about a set of traditional Scottish stories. Basically, it's a fairy king's crown and these are kind of nasty little imp of a thing and how he's kind of defeated. In that story I use an origami crown so I can take this paper and fold up.

00:22:15:11 - 00:22:34:01

Andy Cannon

It pulled into tiny little crown and and that it's got a kind of a magic to it because as does appear, but other little origami ones I have done from time to time is I can do quite a good origami duck. So just taken a bit of paper and folding up and going what do you think this is?

00:22:34:01 - 00:22:51:12

Andy Cannon

And people will often feel this and think it's a plane to go last does fly in or something like this and then suddenly you've got a duck and then you can put eyes on it. They can draw their eyes on it with a pen. I've got one that appeared by accident, which was great, it was a duck's one job was to wake up a village.

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Andy Cannon

And it was very proud with its quack, but one day it got a sore throat and couldn't quack the village turned in with all kinds of problems to do with that. Yeah. And, and that, you know, that just kind of appeared nowhere. But what's lovely about it is that when you set up those kind of, I call them Ealing comedy kind of stories, which I really like, which are stories that are about communities and villages or towns or cities where it's everybody.

00:23:19:02 - 00:23:35:15

Andy Cannon

Yeah, because you then got this kind of wellspring of Here's the place and you can ask the children who lives there and their use there. And there's a school and this is huge,

the shops and they're all going, and they don't have a clock. But don't worry, they don't have a clock because they've got the loudest duck in Scotland.

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Andy Cannon

And every morning at 7:00 it quacks. So, you can, you can set up this little village with them and have great fun and then when it doesn't quite at that point it's like, so what happened, you know. I say this is somebody who doesn't really cook much at all, but you know, when you're cooking something, there's always somewhere you can go with something.

00:23:58:16 - 00:24:18:06

Andy Cannon

If you haven't got the ingredients, it's certain things that you can go with, but sometimes you can really surprise yourself. So, there's when I when I tell stories like that, I always tell people, make sure that, you know, that you're going to make you're going to make beans and toast. You know, that's that's a guaranteed, but as you make the beans and toast.

00:24:19:21 - 00:24:40:14

Andy Cannon

You could find yourself making a pizza base at the bread stage and, you know, and it can go but just start off knowing that you're going to make beans and toast. Don't worry about it. You know, and that will be fine and that will be delicious. And that sometimes is the best thing ever. So it's about having just thinking of it in that way.

00:24:40:15 - 00:25:23:14

Andy Cannon

When you've got these little gambits for telling stories that you want to create stories with your audience, and yes, the audience is you and one person sometimes. The thing that I do like about nursery teaching particularly and primary teaching is that to come in at this time, for me to be able to go out a fantastic story there with a great thing and to really almost more so like actors in the bar afterwards, that was a great show and, and I think that's what I love about nursery settings particularly is just people coming in and sharing things and just so focused on getting the work done and creating an atmosphere.

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Andy Cannon

But when that chance to going to talk to colleagues and debrief is actually quite important, you know, because you'll be good enough and can put it mildly about the story and that's really important. But they'll be making the connections to all the outcomes that are happening while that takes place.

00:25:39:17 - 00:26:10:07

Andy Cannon

Yes, definitely. And I think as well, the the listening that the children as much as possible and they kind of know that you know nothing about the setting and that gives them a freedom as well. Yeah. Those like those and that gives the staff a freedom because they can then participate but observe as well and, and yeah. And see those kind of, those kind of connections.

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Andy Cannon

But as I say, going right back to my first thing about when you asked what we are, we all are storytellers. So how I tell stories is, is different from how other people tell stories. And what I like to do is share, you know, whether it's the origami duck story, you know, that's something that works for me.

00:26:34:02 - 00:26:46:20

Andy Cannon

But somebody would do it in their own way, you know, and that's it. So they might say I was having a bath and it reminded me of a duck and make an origami.

00:26:48:11 - 00:26:55:22

Heather Armstrong

Yes, So you're saying that, you know, we all tell stories in our own ways. But you have worked out a bit of a recipe over the years, haven't you?

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Andy Cannon

Yes. I think I have!

00:26:58:10 - 00:26:59:19

Heather Armstrong

Which I'm really excited about.

00:27:00:04 - 00:27:45:11

Andy Cannon

I call it the wheel of enchantment. And the wheel of enchantment is something that I've is the name I've given to something I realized that I just was kind of doing. I was going to say instinctively, but that's non- observed, learned behaviour is probably what it is. If you can imagine a bicycle wheel and you put your bicycle upside down for whatever reason and you've got a wheel and and the wheels there and you want to spin it, you get your hand and you can grab hold of the wheel and you can.

00:27:46:17 - 00:28:09:14

Andy Cannon

You can grab the wheel and you can just give a good push and all start spinning, right? And as it starts to build up momentum, you might then just very quickly be kind of scuffing it and hitting it to keep it going, to keep it going, to keep it going. But then

when it's up to sentiment and speed, it's going and then you might want to keep it going. You may only give a wee hit every 10 seconds.

00:28:09:14 - 00:28:38:13

Andy Cannon

And then maybe every 15 seconds. And then there's something just lovely about just then hitting it for the last time and then just watching it come to its conclusion. So that was the kind of the reason of the wheel because I started to think, you know, when I'm telling stories and what I do, there's three very distinct parts to it.

00:28:39:13 - 00:29:01:24

Andy Cannon

So the first thing that I always do is just engage and if you like, that's the grabbed hold of the wheel. And that first move in it. There's just no getting away from it. So the first thing you do in any storytelling is engage. And that engagement 99 times out of 100 has got nothing obvious to do with the story at all.

00:29:02:19 - 00:29:42:16

Andy Cannon

It can be anything! You could even take it. Say, Okay, it's story time. That's your first engagement in the story, and that's the wheel moving. But if you imagine what said story time so that's our first engagement. So let's engage again people have actually come and sat down and you're making yourself comfy. That's engagement, engagement that your comfy that so goes right back to the forty's and fifties, the BBC's classic erm listen with mother, you know, are you comfy or whatever it was you said let's begin. You know that is engagement with nothing to do with the story just engagement, engagement, engagement.

00:29:42:16 - 00:30:04:22

Andy Cannon

This is where I think the clear space that you're telling it isn't so important. So you're in control of that engagement. One of the other engagement things which is a great tool to have for teachers is and a lot of them have got it is storytelling corner is a storytelling chair you know get a nice old chair.

00:30:06:17 - 00:30:38:16

Andy Cannon

The one I really like is the storytelling hat. Now, the storytelling hat is a great thing because it allows a teacher to become the storyteller. And if they feel that they need to come into more and controlling with authority through the hat can come off and be down, you know? Another thing that's great about the storytelling hat is you can then ask people to, you know, pick a word and pretend to hold the word.

00:30:38:18 - 00:30:55:22

Andy Cannon

I sometimes pretend to take out the mouth and tell this what we can tell this dinosaur. Okay, so let's imagine, you've got dinosaur, and put dinosaur in the hat, and you can take all the different ideas from the children and catch them and shout out words and put them in the hat and shake them up, and put them on your head.

00:30:56:06 - 00:31:17:22

Andy Cannon

And much like that classic scene from Harry Potter, the sorting hat, there's something really nice about your words going up north into the hat and listening to all the words and imagine them going up into your brain and then kind of *gasp* moment of I've got the story you know yeah so all that, is that first you know so that's engagement and what you're also doing is the next time you hit the wheel to get it spinning is entertainment.

00:31:17:22 - 00:31:49:08

Andy Cannon

So engage, storytime, entertainment putting on the hat, that's entertainment and storytime is engagement and entertainment. Maybe there's a special way we walk or fly or sing to the storytelling corner. You know, the child worker. Oh, so we've engaged, we've entertained.

00:31:49:15 - 00:32:05:18

Andy Cannon

And then the last E, which I wish could be enchant, but I'd just like to think it's like is enlightened because so much I like to use the word enlighten at the moment is because it's about giving them a story. You're giving over information.

00:32:06:06 - 00:32:06:13

Heather Armstrong

Yeah

00:32:07:16 - 00:32:37:17

Andy Cannon

And if you think about the the classic story at the moment, we have on telly all the time. And this is adult stories is, you know, a murder mystery. The whole reason it works is that somebody finds a body and everybody, including the characters, is enlightened as to how that happened. Yeah. And thinking of enlighten as opposed to the word story, what's the story behind this?

00:32:38:00 - 00:33:04:06

Andy Cannon

And that can become quite ploddy and sequency and with when you use the word enlightened to describe something that's happened, if you're doing that kindness, which is a great gambit, which I'll mention later on of arriving at a story in a period of time, something has happened. You know, there's a big turnip in the field. You know, how the heck did that happen?

00:33:04:06 - 00:33:33:11

Andy Cannon

There's a beanstalk. How the heck did that happen? So it was really interesting to think about when you can start a story and then enlighten and use the murder mystery body in the library backwards. Is is a really is a really interesting gambit. And if you're making stories up on the spot because like a detective, you're just you're putting out theories and hypotheses.

00:33:34:01 - 00:33:37:07

Andy Cannon

You don't have to be right. You're just having to kind of go, okay, how has this happened?

00:33:40:02 - 00:34:14:01

Andy Cannon

And so when? So the straightforward if you said, okay, it's so we engaged storytime and we're entertaining, so we're sitting down and I'm putting on the hat and I'm entertaining and enlightening. It might be the most famous enlightenment in the world. You might just go once upon a time. That's enlightenment, you know, the story's begun. I don't know, the actual Russian for it, but apparently in Russian tales and they have the beginning of their stories translates to once there was and once there wasn't.

00:34:14:01 - 00:34:43:17

Andy Cannon

Is their equivalent. And which I love, because I think even more than once upon a time, it puts it in a different place, it makes it safe. And but when you're starting to tell a story and this is where the field comes in for me, what it is, we might be straight away into another engagement.

00:34:43:17 - 00:35:07:00

Andy Cannon

And it's so it's a circle going on. We're about to move the wheel again. So the engage is letting the wheel go round and then it entertains and you enlightened, but it needs more momentum. So you're hitting it again. So every time you're moving along, that's the engagement. The engagement is the thing that is really important and they all start to meld into one and the other.

00:35:07:00 - 00:35:48:12

Andy Cannon

And what I realized is that the wheel of that engagement spend in this and the engagement leads you to the entertainment and entertainment take you into the light and then engage again is like that. Will There comes a point that we've got to know the characters so well that you have to do less and less engaging and entertaining because the story and the characters that have now been created with your audience when it comes to the end is just the momentum of the wheel going round by itself. That is engaging us, that's entertaining us. Yeah, the storytellers no longer doing it, the stories doing it. So that's my kind of a wheel of enchantment.

00:35:49:04 - 00:36:01:07

Heather Armstrong

Yeah. And when you're talking about that engagement and I know you use a lot of, sometimes it's about performing yourself, but you also use a lot of what I would term audience interaction.

00:36:01:17 - 00:36:42:03

Andy Cannon

Yes, yes. Well, and particularly particularly in in any setting outside of a big theatre erm it it's the most natural thing to do. I can't imagine why you wouldn't from my point of view, it would be an odd thing to just create a fourth wall. Yeah, but it's also the continual listening and assessment. That's the other thing. And the one very simple level is just making sure that you know what a farmer is.

00:36:42:03 - 00:37:03:01

Andy Cannon

Yeah, you know, and I and so Billy's granny's a good one because when a when, when he gets to the farm, granny is busy and says, I'll be with you in a minute, I've just done some things. Just say hello to the animals and as I okay on. And so the way I love to do it is I just will go.

00:37:04:00 - 00:37:49:12

Andy Cannon

So Billy went up to the cat and he said, Hi Cat. And the cat said, and they just so come back with a meow, you know, there's no need to say what you can't see. Mm. It's in the cat said meow. And then these kind of things going on and, and so there's a very simple interaction but you're always finding out what's going on and occasionally there might be a time when you and you might actually have to almost like an an educational book, have a kind of sidebar.

00:37:49:12 - 00:38:18:18

Andy Cannon

But you might have to actually go, this is what this thing is, you know, so but totally in some and I would say traditional stories, there might be things that people have got no real knowledge of at all, adults as well, because they're from another time or depending on where you live. So if you're telling a story about, as I did with my colleagues years ago when we did a story, basically The Emperor's New Clothes, which was the lears new kilt.

00:38:18:18 - 00:39:03:15

Andy Cannon

And if you're telling that story in Stornoway, you can just see there was a loom and that's fine. Yeah, but anywhere else they're quite hard things to work out. So my colleague Ian and I, we talk about a something loom that in the story we kind of did a real kind of time to an end hopefully, and people did appreciate it in an entertaining way and the clattering and making the noise of it, I kind of explained a time of what a loom was to then come back.

00:39:03:22 - 00:39:25:01

Andy Cannon

But the way that Ian and I kind of worked and I suppose his clown worked at times make a loom. And so when I used him, not the audience at that point, I said, Do you know what a loom is? Yeah. I said, Well, what is it? And he went, Well, I've got a bedroom and a living room and a bathroom.

00:39:25:13 - 00:39:43:10**Andy Cannon**

And I said, You don't know what it is. You haven't a clue that you know, this is how it is. And we kind of made and got something but the long and the short of it is that what's important is not actually that you would be able to go away and draw a loom from the description and the enlightening, the of it is you just would hopefully know that that's where material is made is on the loom.

00:39:44:24 - 00:40:13:20**Andy Cannon**

That's all that matters in the story and but I think as well in that little studio to which there is another importance, is not being scared, but actually celebrating and sharing your ignorance and something. And but not that, you know, you're going to carry on being ignorant, but let's find out about it.

00:40:13:20 - 00:40:36:03**Andy Cannon**

So one of the things I really like doing and I've done that a couple of times is when you've been in a setting and you've used a book to show something in the loom situation. Yeah, you know, so if you need to, if you need or a globe for the world, I mean Globes is fantastic. Oh, here we are here.

00:40:36:14 - 00:40:55:17**Andy Cannon**

That's there. And this is what's happening. And walking around the room and having a little bunch of tilt in the middle with our hands and kind of jazz hands pretending to be the sun as you walk around the hall being the earth, showing her the orbits, the sun. Yeah. Now I know that a three-year-old is not going to go.

00:40:55:17 - 00:41:31:11**Andy Cannon**

Oh, yeah, of course. Or when I see the sun in the morning rising. It's not that I know that's not what's going on, but you've actually posited the Biba stuff and I always have a laugh at this topic, but then you go as a stem pick. But but just. It's laying down foundation, isn't it. And it's about showing that learning and inquiry is is fun. And if you don't know let's have a look. But it's about that fun and it's about telling the story to yourself. And even as a tell you that story, I just I get this kind of I'm reminded of how much how enjoyable it is to do to tell the story to everybody, including yourself.

00:41:31:11 - 00:41:42:18**Heather Armstrong**

I feel a bit silly asking this, but it's good to get the clarity. I'm assuming that you're not wedded to the idea that children need to be sat down, legs in a basket and still feel they're listening to stories.

00:41:44:13 - 00:42:08:19

Andy Cannon

I think the the the kind of being told to listen in is it's a bit like when you can't sleep at night and you lie down and you try to sleep, it's not going to work. It's the one thing you should try not to do when you need to go to sleep and then you will fall asleep.

00:42:08:19 - 00:42:30:19

Andy Cannon

And I and for me now that's not to say that in the setting the the little gambits I've come across, which I think are great, there was one nursery in Dundee that just had the biggest sofa I've ever seen, and there groups were no more than eight or nine children and eight or nine of the children on the staff could all fit the sofa.

00:42:30:19 - 00:42:58:08

Andy Cannon

And, you know, they'd all get comfy on this sofa you know, the beginning of The Simpsons and then the other one is rugs and stuff and corners and things. So it's not to see that kind of gathering. As a starting point isn't important, but actually when, when you do, when it works, them sitting down paying attention happens naturally like the falling asleep.

00:42:58:24 - 00:43:27:09

Andy Cannon

Yeah. You do not have to tell them to sit down if they're engaged, if they're entertained and they're being enlightened and they're that inquiring. And that was one of the words I kind of put down. what's happening with the feel all the time and is that there is an inquiry going on from the audience all the time of that.

00:43:27:18 - 00:43:52:14

Andy Cannon

That's why you engage. I'm hopefully being entertained. I am hopefully being entertaining. They're being entertained. And this all comes to what you're saying about them sitting down and paying attention is because they're being entertained, they're engaged, they're being enlightened. And during the contently inquiring as to what's happening there, that's what we mean by what's going to happen next.

00:43:52:14 - 00:44:24:06

Andy Cannon

What's this about? So hopefully by starting your story is going to keep them in the position. And then the other thing is that they're really small and moving away and this is something that people and their feedback talked a lot. But what I did, which I hadn't realized that I did as much and this is probably from my theatrical and it's experience and doing pantos and being on stage, is I would use the characters to bring the focus back

00:44:24:18 - 00:44:56:13

Andy Cannon

I wouldn't like, can you come and say don't hear or whatever, particularly if there was some movement, but certainly with the two year olds when they got quite excited that could go their I would do a big yawn as the characters was going to go sleep or I would make a big farmyard noise or or use noises from the characters, from the story to bring the tension back, rather than tell people to come back and, pay attention to the story.

00:44:56:13 - 00:45:06:16

Andy Cannon

The did probably have every right as a two-year-old go, I'm not engaged with this. I'm now going to look at something else.

00:45:07:08 - 00:45:28:21

Heather Armstrong

And and I guess that's what really comes into that aim. That point of engaging is understanding your audience and listening to your audience and see and will actually attention's beginning to waver or someone's getting the big block. So yeah, you know, I something to reengage them and their story.

00:45:29:10 - 00:45:29:20

Andy Cannon

Yes

00:45:30:21 - 00:45:36:12

Heather Armstrong

And for little ones that makes funny noises or faces

00:45:36:19 - 00:46:10:10

Andy Cannon

Yeah. And it's it's about the pace of storytelling and I think this is is that we there's there's lots of different pieces for different teams. So you can think about it, whether it's, you know, to use a crude example. But if you're looking at the television, there's one of the reasons we had this huge explosion in Scandinavian dramas and murder dramas was because they gave time to dramatic stories.

00:46:44:24 - 00:47:09:04

Andy Cannon

But as we would take a crime book traditionally and and and put it into a one-hour television program and, a big story like that, all it can be is a list of events, really if you're going to come into an hour. if you go at speed, you're more likely to lose them. And that, you know, great writing and in novels and stuff, you can do it in storytelling as well if if people are interested in it and when your character arrives at the loch, maybe they will go for a swim, maybe they'll chase a fish, maybe they'll whatever you can, you can wallow in that.

00:47:48:19 - 00:48:07:14

Andy Cannon

Yeah. If you listen to the audience that the roads in so like we just need to get across this loch. Yeah. Then they'll find the boat in the cross. You can go and there's different times but in all these kind of stories. But this, I think particularly for preschool, they've been saying that a lot, but particularly for preschool, it's about the size of the audience as well.

00:48:07:14 - 00:48:33:19

Andy Cannon

And that to me is absolutely key that if you're in a preschool setting, you're looking at 7 to 8 max. Yep. In a what I would say in a kind of storytelling session to really get the most over is not to say that you can't. But for the kind of storytelling I think we've been talking and thinking a lot about today is about that smaller group where you can really get to know everybody in the group and be able to allow them to come into it in their own wee wee. If particularly if you know their names, it's fantastic but there's nothing different.

00:48:33:19 - 00:49:20:12

Andy Cannon

You know, eye contact is as good as knowing somebody's name and just asking somebody. So they're in the boat and they're all having their saying, which is, what would you like in your sandwich if you were a nibble? What would you like a nurse? What would you have a nurse will you look at? I have some of that.

00:49:20:12 - 00:49:41:13

Andy Cannon

That sounds really good. I've been really good and I've done that. Yeah. Which actually brings me to something I was going to say earlier on is that sometimes stories in preschool can be so simple. And I often start with a new group. If I've got six or seven kids around and I'm about to tell a story, I'll often tell them the story of waking up in the morning and brushing my teeth and nearly missing the bus and running for it.

00:49:41:22 - 00:50:10:06

Andy Cannon

And yeah, you know, another thing, as good as looking from a bus path, making lots of noises and percussion and stuff, and a the one that I do a lot is I'll put my glasses above my head and I'm going to confirm my glasses, my glasses and my glasses with my glasses. But then you go, you know, it's amazing how many times I do that, but it's something that we've all I suppose my mum does, but you know, just actually getting up, pretending to wash your face, brushing your teeth, having your breakfast, catching the bus, going to the zoo, saying hello to all the animals in the zoo, getting the bus back, or maybe got

00:50:10:06 - 00:50:42:10

Andy Cannon

a tram or a subway for the change. Do the same journey, but slightly different coming back. Or ideally, ideally, a strange word to use ask them what we get back. So we've got the number 17 bus or bus or what was the number? What was the number? You know, yeah, that kind of stuff getting back and then repeating everything that we've done.

00:50:43:03 - 00:51:11:12

Andy Cannon

But because it's the end of the day, we're just doing it tired, it's really good and it's already doing it to you. Really good way to get the whole audience to be that good day, that is as good a story as is any stories. When people say, Oh, we want to tell the story, what am I thinking all the year?

00:51:11:12 - 00:51:20:15**Andy Cannon**

Immediately thinking, you know, Harry Potter's Odyssey or whatever? No, actually, that that can be can be good. And then with joke about it, you know, stick a bit of petty craven to like got the zoo come back and somebody's got a penguin. So we all have to go back under the cover of and put the penguin back into like that and nobody knows that. So, it's one of my favorite ones and the speak catches and hopefully going to be developing more. And in that there's a it turns out it's actually a dream but and the character not with her granny and all the granny's friends they break into museum at night because of had the strange noise. Yeah and it works so well it's so innocent and lovely but the husband a couple of teachers and really the sequence of encouraging children to break into public building. Yeah, but they do it very well. They're very conscience. There's a reason for it.

00:51:20:15 - 00:51:25:08**Heather Armstrong**

So, yeah. Andy, thank you so much. It's been an absolute joy. Talk to you.

00:51:25:08 - 00:51:30:20**Andy Cannon**

It was lovely! Thank you.

[Music plays]

Outro**00:51:30:20 - 00:52:23:06****Amy Hall-Gibson**

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