Storybook Investigation

Part I:

For the storybook project, I chose the book *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister. I remember reading this book as a child so I was curious if a child today would be familiar with the book. I chose to read the book to my six year old cousin. She is in first grade and can read very well, but she said she liked the story when I asked if she had heard of *The Rainbow Fish*. For the retelling portion of the project, I created a storyboard with movable characters. I chose the main characters that interact in the story to use on the storyboard. I drew each of the seven characters, colored them according to the way they appear in the story, cut them out, and put a piece of Velcro on the back of them. I then placed the paired piece of Velcro on the storyboard where I wanted the characters to be. I did this so that I could challenge my participant to retell the story without any of the characters in the correct place. There is only one Rainbow Fish character, but I provided multiple placements of Velcro so that this main character can be moved around to the other characters.

Once I gained permission from my participant’s mother, I began my project. I read the story to my cousin, asking her questions as I read. I asked her a few questions about her opinion of the book right after I read it, and then I showed her the storyboard. I gave her the seven characters and asked if she knew where they went. She struggled with this part, but I don’t think she clearly understood what she was supposed to be doing. I helped her find where the “co-starring” characters went and then asked her to tell me the story using the Rainbow Fish character. She seemed to find this task easier than the previous one I asked her to do, but she still didn’t seem to understand as well as I’d hoped she would. She was able to tell me the basic
storyline and plot that the story followed, but she wasn’t interested in explaining the details or discussing them like she was when I read the story to her. When she got to the end of the story, she said that it was her turn to read to me and she read the book to me. It was in this interaction that I was able to see many examples of language awareness.

Part II:

With this project, I learned that children gain knowledge from many outside sources and constantly apply them to new situations. While reading the story, I asked my participant to tell me what the word “wise” meant. She is only six, so I didn’t expect her to have an answer, but she told me that it meant smart, which impressed me. I also learned that children notice the details in things, such as the intonation with which certain parts of stories are read. When my participant read the story to me, after using the storyboard I made and not understanding it, she used the correct voice fluctuations for exclamations and questions in the story. I was very impressed with her pragmatic knowledge, especially when it came to giving voices to each character and changing her intonation when a character was speaking or thinking. I think the purpose of the story is to teach children that they should share, so I was also impressed by the fact that my participant recognized this idea very soon in the story. When I asked her on the first page why the rainbow fish was the most beautiful fish in the sea, she told me that it was because he had the shiny scales, and when I asked her why he didn’t want to give away any of his scales, she told me that he wanted to be beautiful but that he wasn’t being very nice even though he was beautiful. Because I was consistently impressed with the language knowledge and awareness that my participant displayed, I think this book may have been a little too easy for her. I think the
book provides examples of language awareness that can used with many age levels, but I think my participant would have shown just as much awareness with a more challenging story, as well. Two of the main things that I learned from this project are to never underestimate a student because they know things that they wouldn’t be expected to know, and to be sure that the teaching tools you are using are easy to understand. It actually benefitted me in this project that my participant didn’t understand how to use my storyboard, but I think it is important to use tools in the classroom that will foster learning instead of slow it down because the tools need to be explained. If I could have changed something about the project, I would have liked to read multiple books by the same author to a child to get a better measure of language awareness. With different books, there is a better chance that the child has not read the story and that the different books will be of varying difficulty. I would advise others attempting this project to make sure your mode of retelling the story is comprehensible for the child so that you don’t have to make changes or help constantly as the child is doing the retelling of the story.