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Introduction

Teresa Cremin, Rosie Flewitt, Ben Mardell and Joan Swann

Over the past 20 years, a considerable body of research by applied linguists, educationalists, and child psychologists has established the developmental significance of storytelling and imaginary play during early childhood. This book foregrounds the power of children's own stories and their dictation and dramatisation in the early years classroom. It provides empirical evidence that storytelling and story acting, a pedagogic approach pioneered by Vivian Gussin Paley (1990), affords rich opportunities to foster learning within a play-based and language rich curriculum. Narrative and imaginary play are widely recognised as valuable strategies for the development of spoken language and literacy within early years and elementary classrooms. Nonetheless in accountability cultures, where early years educators are pressured by the 'drive to literacy' and policy expectations regarding contested concepts such as 'reading readiness' (Whitebread and Bingham, 2012), practitioners often find it hard to make space for children's own stories. Drawing on studies in the USA and the UK, this edited collection illustrates and explores the multiple dimensions of Paley's storytelling and story-acting approach and shows how these interrelated practices enhance language and literacy learning, and contribute to an inclusive classroom culture that embraces young children's diverse interests and learning needs.

Paley's child-centred and play-based philosophy is well-known and well-respected internationally (Paley, 1981; 1984; 1986; 1988; 1990; 1992, 1997, 2001; 2004). Many researchers have recognised Paley's perceptive accounts of children's narrative engagement (e.g. Booth, 2005; Fox, 1993; Gupta, 2009; Nicolopoulou 2005) and educators interested in early learning have also acknowledged her sensitive understanding of the value and significance of child play (e.g. Craft, 2002; Whitehead, 2004; Wood and Attfield, 2005; Wright, 2010). Her work has made a rich contribution to both theoretical discussions and to professional practice, particularly in the US and in England (e.g. Cooper, 2009; Lee, 2015; Pound and Lee, 2011). In relation to her advocated practice of storytelling and story acting, researchers in the USA and the UK have sought to theorise this and understand more fully the nature of its contribution. In the US Nicolopoulou and her colleagues have undertaken a body of empirical work focused upon this practice (e.g. Nicolopoulou, 1997, 2002; Nicolopulou and Reichner, 2004, Nicolopoulou, Brockmeyer, de Sá, and Ilgaz 2014), Alongside this is the work of Cooper (Cooper, 1993, 2005, 2009), Gupta (2009) and McNamee (McNamee, McLane, Cooper, and Kerwin, 1985; McNamee, 2015). In England, speech therapists Typadi and Hayon (2010) investigated the potential of Paley's storytelling and story acting practice for promoting communication and language development, and more recently a team of interdisciplinary scholars have researched the wider social and cognitive impacts of this practice in early years education (e.g. Cremin, Flewitt, Swann, Faulkner and Kucirkova, 2013; forthcoming).

Based on new empirical studies, this volume further advances the field, offering new theoretical and practical analyses of storytelling and story acting from complementary

disciplinary perspectives. This book emerged from a Literacy Research Association symposium in Dallas 2013 which drew together a multidisciplinary team of academics from the international stage who were exploring the learning potential of Paley's storytelling and story-acting curriculum with particular focus on its contribution to young children's literacy development. Whilst the onset of an ice storm and the subsequent cancellation of flights prevented the whole team from presenting, synergies between members' studies, and interest in each other's research lenses prompted discussion of a book proposal. A common desire was identified to share theorisations and analyses of Paley's child-centred approach in order to enrich the field and offer support to early years educators who often struggle to foreground creative approaches to learning, particularly given the professional tensions that result from the cultures of assessment and accountability that predominate in UK and USA education systems. The volume thus offers evidence and examples of the power and learning potential of children's dictated and dramatised stories from early years classrooms in England and across the USA.

In order to set the context for the book, the opening chapter by Cremin and Flewitt reviews the research literature with regard to the role of narrative in early learning. Recognising the prevalence of narrative and its potency as a tool for thinking, the authors indicate that through storytelling and imaginary play, young children seek to understand and make sense of their world. The authors examine early narratives in the home and studies of the development of autobiographical memory which suggest not only that narrative begins to be established very early in life (e.g. Nelson, 1989), but that it also supports young children's capacity to make inferences, imagine and understand experience. Sociocultural research from many cultures is discussed, and this body of research highlights how children learn to talk about and organise their mental representations of past events through engaging in family conversations and through interaction in the wider communities that they experience (e.g. Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Studies of everyday narratives in the home and in pre-school settings are drawn upon to argue that these practices support early socialisation and integration into the worlds of their families and peers, and are often collaboratively achieved (e.g. Gupta, 2009). Additionally, research which examines the role of imaginary play and its dynamic relationship to narrative is considered, and how for instance through play children explore notions of self via their engagement with narrative. Working in harmony, both these forms of socially situated symbolic action make a rich contribution to young children's social, emotional and cognitive development. The nature of this complementary contribution, the creativity inherent in children's stories and pretend play and their contribution to early literacy learning are core considerations in this chapter.

Finally the authors turn to evidence which suggests that despite the wealth of research attesting to the value of narrative in the early years, the opportunities for children to participate in storytelling and improvisational play in classroom contexts are gradually being reduced and even eroded. Perceiving that practitioners are tethered to the accountability agenda, the authors argue that teachers in many western societies are increasingly obliged to focus on measurable outcomes at the expense of creative approaches to early learning. In these contexts, teachers and other early years practitioners are positioned as little more than technicians, charged with the task of delivering a centralised curriculum and preparing children for standardised assessments. Stripped of their professional agency and autonomy, Cremin and Flewitt argue that many practitioners find it hard to align their understanding and experience of child development and literacy learning with the narrow, mandated curriculum and its accompanying programmes of formalised literacy instruction.

In response to this challenging context, Flewitt, Cremin and Mardell focus in Chapter 2 on an approach which has stood the test of time: Paley's storytelling and story acting. As detailed earlier, although the operationalisation of this approach varies slightly in different contexts, its main components remain the same. These are: children telling their teachers a story which is scribed for them (storytelling), and later that day children enacting their own and their peers' tales in the forum of the classroom (story acting). Chapter 2 examines research, in the USA and more recently in England, which has specifically considered this approach, and its value both as a context for children's early learning, and as a practice which teachers can integrate effectively into the early years curriculum. In examining this focused research, the chapter thus locates Paley's approach within the wider empirical literature on children's stories discussed in Chapter 1. Whilst recognising the substantial body of work undertaken by Nicolopoulou and her colleagues, a thematic stance is adopted. Initially the focus is upon the research evidence to date regarding the contribution that storytelling and story acting can make to aspects of young children's learning. These include for example consideration of advances in children's narrative competence and cognitive abilities (e.g. Nicolopoulou, 2002); the nurturing of young children's oral language skills (e.g. Cooper, 2009; Typadi and Haydon, 2010); preparedness for school (e.g. McNamee et al., 1985; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015), borrowing of each other's story elements reworked from popular culture and story books (Nicolopoulou et al., 2014); and the development of cohesion and a common classroom culture (e.g. Nicolopoulou and Richner, 2004) which, research suggests, are supported by the multimodal and co-constructed nature of the practices of storytelling and story acting (e.g. Cremin, Flewitt, Swann, Faulkner and Kucirkova, forthcoming). Many of these topics are further advanced in the later empirical chapters in this volume.

Chapter 2 additionally examines the diverse routes that have enabled teachers in the US and in England to experience Paley's storytelling and story-acting curriculum, and the types of training and professional development they have been offered, as well as the perceived benefits. A resume of the multiple initiatives in both countries is offered which demonstrates the legacy of Paley's work in the classroom. Finally Flewitt, Cremin and Mardell present some background information on the methodologies employed by the scholars whose research studies are included in this volume.

Moving from reviews of the broader context and previous studies of Paley's story-based approach, Nicolopoulou in our first empirical chapter in the volume traces the development of young children's narrative abilities as they participated in this pedagogy over the course of a school year. Whilst valuing the contribution that adult-child interaction can make to children's early narrative abilities, Nicolopoulou argues that complementary educational practices are needed which are more 'child-centered, peer-oriented, and playful'. She considers storytelling and story acting one such approach and in detailing the context of her research underscores the voluntary nature of this activity. In this study during 'choice time' the children, (who were from 'disadvantaged' home backgrounds), were free to decide what activity to participate in, including storytelling. As she notes, almost all the children enthusiastically told stories during this time - between 9 and 21 stories each - and they all took part in acting out their own and their peers' stories. Most were not initially familiar with the basic conventions for telling free-standing stories, and many of their early tales were proto-narratives which encompassed little character action. However, through a thorough, systematic and detailed quantitative analysis of 118 spontaneously produced stories, Nicolopoulou reveals the presence of a clear and significant pattern of narrative development. Her quantitative approach employed seven measures of narrative development, the first four of which captured the narrative complexity and sophistication of the children's storytelling,

whilst the remaining three measures focused on the representation of characters in their narratives. The detailed results unequivocally indicate that the children's stories improved significantly on all seven measures of narrative quality between the autumn and spring semesters. Their stories included for example: more active characters with enhanced complexity and depth; higher proportions of narrative clauses; and a shift was indicated from the children's previous use of the present tense to the past tense when telling their tales. In discussing these findings, Nicolopoulou recognises that these shifts might be due simply to the children's maturation over time, but she draws on other evidence from related studies to further endorse the inference that the approach plays a significant role in promoting children's narrative skills. In reflecting upon why this apparently simple storytelling and story-acting activity is so influential, Nicolopoulou posits that the public, peer-oriented, and peer-evaluated nature of this activity supports the 'narrative cross-fertilization and reciprocal influence' which was evidenced in the data. She argues convincingly that it is the interplay between storytelling (and its highly decontextualized use of language) and story acting (and its highly contextualized enactment of narrative scenarios) which both promotes and facilitates the children's narrative development.

Cremin, also examining the contribution of Paley's storytelling and story-acting practice in Chapter 4, focuses on children's early print awareness and their agentic development as authors. Working from a sociocultural stance to literacy and learning, she commences by discussing children's early authoring from different ontological perspectives, arguing, alongside others (e.g. Dyson, 2009; Rowe, 2008) that such authoring needs to be viewed as a socially situated act of meaning making and one in which children become accustomed to and later adapt cultural resources. Cremin draws attention to children's close observation of the adult as their spoken words are scribed, and to their later engagement in bringing written tales to life through enactment. Based on a study of the approach in the south east of England, Cremin explains some children, (aged 3-6 years old), initiated their own related writing activities, authoring and co-authoring tales with friends and also scribing their peers' stories for later dramatisation (Cremin et al., 2013). In one classroom this child-initiated practice became so popular the teacher provided the class with two of their own storybooks for the purposes of child-initiated narrative composition and scribing.

The specific, local enactments of learning-to-write practices that were evidenced across the study are examined in detail, with examples of children's stories - drawn, written and scribed for their peers. The analysis indicates that story scribing offered opportunities for children to become acquainted with the relationship between the spoken and the written word, the sequential nature of writing, the direction that writing unfolds in English, and the notion that stories have endings. In addition, and significantly, the whole class enactment phase served to affirm the permanence of their written words and imbued the practice of telling and scribing with a genuine purpose. Cremin argues this sense of purpose may have served to motivate children to spend their free-play time writing and drawing their own stories and scribing their peers' tales. Connecting to Dyson and Dewayani (2013), she also suggests that the non-regulatory nature of this time and space acted as a potential 'textual playground' for young writers, and afforded new possibilities for exercising freedom. The children's early authoring comprised a naturally occurring individual and often collaborative, shared activity, which not only served social-relational purposes, but also enabled them to creatively and intentionally position themselves as writers. On the basis of the evidence presented, Cremin asserts that the interdependence of the two strands of the approach combine to help apprentice young writers, creating a possibility space for learning both about writing and perhaps more significantly about being a writer and author.

In Chapter 5, drawing upon the same study in England and also working from a sociocultural perspective, Faulkner explores young children's social and collective meaning making through focusing on the individual narratives children generated during the storytelling sessions. She highlights the presence of other children in 87% of these sessions as children's tales were scribed by adults, yet acknowledges that these young people did not overtly intervene or contribute their own ideas to the storyteller's narrative. Faulkner sought to explore if there was a relationship between the nature and quality of children's involvement in these sessions and cultural transmission.

Through employing Robbins' (2007) analytic framework, she analysed the video data and transcripts of children's stories on the interpersonal and cultural level and includes aspects of the personal. Building on an earlier study by Nicolopoulou et al. (2014) in Pennsylvania, Faulkner also undertook a thematic analysis of the 350 teacher-scribed stories from the English study in order to identify common categories and the children's use of conventional narrative structures. In addition she sought to trace interrelationships between particular story themes and identifiable groups of children. On the basis of this work, Faulkner argues that the nature of children's involvement in storytelling and story acting is well aligned with Rogoff et al.'s construct of 'learning through keen observation and listening, in anticipation of participation' (2003:176). She discusses how the partnership between the child telling the story and the adult scribing it guides the child's participation in the activity of storytelling at the personal level, and considers the nature of other children's intent participation in this, demonstrating that their participation takes different forms depending on their proximity to the storyteller and on their involvement in activities peripheral to the storytelling activity. The thematic analysis of the stories revealed narrative fertilisation within and between storytelling sessions, with central narratives and certain recurring themes and expressions which Faulkner argues served to build local 'communities of mind' characterised by distinctive narrative traditions employed by particular groups of children. Faulkner therefore asserts that Paley's (1990) storytelling and story-acting approach involves learning both through guided and intent participation, in anticipation of the children's own later participation as storytellers and actors. These processes of participation not only develop children's narrative competence, but also facilitate the emergence of distinctive peer-cultures and community mind-sets.

Connecting to the social, creative and interactional aspects of storytelling and story acting, Swann in Chapter 6 focuses on the collaborative nature of both practices. Like Cremin and Faulkner, she draws on evidence from the south-east England study of MakeBelieve Arts 'Helicopter Stories'. Swann draws on research from outside education to understand the collaboration evident in interactions between the young storytellers, their teachers and other children in this context. She argues that the analysis of conversational narratives (e.g. Norrick, 2000), while clearly focusing on very different types of stories, can shed light on storytelling practices in classrooms; and that the study of performance by linguistic anthropologists and folklorists (notably Bauman, 1986) may usefully inform the analysis of children's story acting.

Swann illustrates this argument in a close analysis of stories told by George, an initially reticent child who grew in confidence during his participation in storytelling and story acting. Detailed transcription and close analysis of the interactions between George, his teacher and a trainer during storytelling; and the interactions between the adults and children involved in story acting, illustrate the ways in which both written and performed narratives are co-constructed by all participants. The analysis makes evident, for instance, the subtle, moment-

by-moment interactional support provided by an adult as George produces each narrative clause in storytelling, and the close negotiation between the adult narrator, child actors and sometimes members of the audience as they contribute to the performance of a character on stage. Storytelling and story acting are inherently creative, and Swann relates both practices to contemporary research on creativity that highlights its collaborative nature. She argues that such collaborative processes of co-creation both value and add value to children's stories.

Chapters 7 and 8 are written by two scholars who have studied storytelling and story acting as classroom teachers and teacher educators, helping others understand and implement the practice, and researchers. In Chapter 7 McNamee introduces us to a specific classroom where storytelling and story acting thrives, and a theoretical perspective to understand how the practice promotes children's learning. The theoretical perspective is based on the ideas of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose explanation of the social nature of learning includes the concept of the zone of proximal development. In a zone of proximal development children move from what they are able to do with the support of others to internalizing thought and action and being able to act independently. Vygotsky believed that play provides young children ideal conditions for learning through the rich zone of proximal development it creates. Among the many benefits of play, children take their first steps into reading and writing. McNamee makes the connection between storytelling and story acting and Vygotsky's theory through play. She argues storytelling and story acting is a natural extension of play and thus creates rich zones of proximal development that promote literacy development and other learning as well.

Then, in a storytelling style reminiscent of Paley, McNamee introduces us to Veronica Adams and her 18 three and four-year-old students in an early childhood classroom in an economically stressed neighborhood of Chicago. In Mrs. Adams' classroom we find an oasis of safety, a rich learning environment, and a powerful illustration of storytelling and story acting in action. McNamee shares one morning in Mrs. Adams' room. We meet Keisha, Zoe and their classmates, and see how, through careful listening and skilled teaching, a teacher implements storytelling and story acting. Like all teachers, Mrs. Adams makes mistakes; ones that we can learn from. She also skillfully works with her students, eliciting a story from a shy child by first approaching his playmate, and protecting a child from sharing a private story involving domestic abuse. We see young children joyfully brought into the world of reading and writing.

In Chapter 8 Cooper also draws on Vygotskyan theory, again with play as the link between Vygotsky's ideas and Paley's storytelling and story acting. Along with Vygotsky, Cooper references the work of John Dewey to explain her characterization of Paley's teaching as involving a 'pedagogy of meaning'; an intentional effort to foster children's imaginative thinking and problem solving. In Cooper's words, this pedagogy, "Involves implementation of curricula that scaffold young children's investigations into or engagement with things, first, compatible with their *present* identity and knowledge base, and, second, the pull of new identities and knowledge."

In the spirit of promoting an open attitude about the themes of the stories children often tell, Cooper introduces a lens for understanding young children's narratives. Citing Paley, she explains that children's stories often involve the themes of fantasy, friendship, fairness and fear. For Cooper, fantasy does not necessarily mean not true, in the sense that true can be the most meaningful and a reasonable explanation to a five-year-old. Using this lens, Cooper makes a case for embracing unrestricted and unoriginal content in the stories children tell.

She recognizes what many teachers find, that children often tell stories that are derivative from popular culture and are very much like the tales their peers tell. But that, according to Cooper, can be the point for children: to tell stories not to stand out but to fit in. Cooper and Paley both believe young children should have the right to use stories to create a sense of belonging. Cooper identifies sources that are placing under threat by requiring children to write true stories (in the sense of abiding by an adult standard of reality): state and national curriculum standards and a popular writing curriculum that is often used in kindergarten. She offers a spirited critique of these threats.

Building on the theme of children's meaning making and interest in their own learning, in Chapter 9 Flewitt draws on data from a multicultural inner-city primary school in England, and explores how young children in the early stages of learning English express their thoughts and interests through combinations of spoken, embodied and enacted modes. The chapter begins by reviewing comparatively recent research in the field of multimodality, tracing this work back to its origins in social semiotic theory (Halliday, 1978), and discussing the radically new insights offered by a multimodal perspective into how children make meaning through the intentional interplay of multiple modes. The term 'multimodality' refers to the ways that meaning can be represented through different 'signs' (semiosis), such as gesture, gaze, facial expression, movement, vocalisations *and* language. It also refers to the range of modes used in spoken, handwritten, printed or on-screen texts, such as words, images and layout in printed texts, and wider modal combinations in digital media, including spoken and written words, still and moving images, screen design, sounds, music and so forth.

Flewitt illustrates the relevance of multimodality for understanding early literacy, its compatibility with sociocultural theories of learning and its potential for celebrating diversity and difference in the classroom. Through detailed analysis of the stories told by two boys aged 3 and 5 years, both from ethnic and linguistic minority families, the chapter argues that valuing the communicative potential of all modes in storytelling and acting, rather than always prioritising oral and written language, enables young children from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their English-language proficiency, to share their personal interests, perspectives, knowledge and expertise holistically, creatively and practically in ways that link with their imagination and promote their intellectual and social inclusion in the classroom.

In the penultimate chapter of the volume, Mardell and Kucirkova focus their attention on how children's sense of democratic responsibility can be promoted through this story-based approach. Connecting to Paley's own words and colleagues' observations, they highlight the essentially democratic nature of storytelling and story acting, including its child-initiated, voluntary, shared, collaborative and public nature. They argue that in the climate of curriculum pressure and direct instruction it is vital that practitioners employ practices that strengthen democracy. In particular these authors explore the ways in which the approach can nurture young children's own unique and individual voices and foster their agency as learners, as well as the ways in which it can support the development of learning communities within classrooms and early education settings. They highlight the trusting relationships that are built through the telling and enacting of stories – what they describe as the 'the glue of democratic classroom communities' and the fact that by listening to the stories of others, children get to know each other. The authors also consider the way in which the scaffolding of storytelling represents an opportunity to either support or undermine children's agency and voice and, drawing on the work of Mardell in Boston, and the efforts to

scale up the approach within Boston Public Schools, offer a strong theorisation of the professional development practices that will support teachers in preserving the democratic character of this approach.

In Chapter 11, Mardell and Swann review earlier chapters and identify important themes that emerge from the presented studies. These include the interdependence of spoken and written language: how a significant oral practice also provides pathways to literacy. Children's agency and creativity are also significant themes, as is the support provided by close collaboration between adults and other children in the production of individual children's narratives. Chapters take a holistic approach to children's development, pointing to the contribution of storytelling and story acting to children's cognitive, social and emotional development, and the essential links that exist between these. Chapters also illustrate the interplay between storytelling and story acting: critically, their interdependence is seen to underpin the potency of Paley's approach. Several chapters illustrate the contribution of visual communicative modes alongside verbal language. The multimodal lens adopted in these chapters adds to our understanding of the value of storytelling and story acting. Finally, chapters see storytelling and story acting as associated with equity and inclusion in individual classrooms whilst also promoting wider democratic ideals.

Whilst these themes demonstrate a degree of consensus between chapter authors, it is recognised that the storytelling and story acting field is far from settled. Mardell and Swann identify new theoretical, empirical and practical questions that require further research and debate. These include the value of the approach for dual language learners and children with special educational needs – e.g. the potential of using two or more languages in storytelling and story acting. The pressure of time in early years classrooms raises the question of 'dosage': how much time needs to be devoted to this storytelling and story acting practice in order to reap the full benefits of this? Proponents of storytelling and story acting also differ with respect to teacher intervention: should teachers simply transcribe a child's utterances, or may they intervene with 'gentle scaffolding' to support and guide the child? Should they accept any content or place restrictions on violence, or a reliance on popular culture? Mardell and Swann see differing views on these questions as part of healthy dialogue within the storytelling and story acting community.

Mardell and Swann's review also looks towards the future of storytelling and story acting. The vibrancy of this approach, they argue, depends on a supportive educational environment, including continuing recognition of the value of play; valuing the professionalism of early years educators; and seeing children as contemporary citizens with independent rights. None of these principles is guaranteed, in particular in the light of the 'accountability' culture discussed in Chapter 1, which tends to reduce agency (teachers' and children's) in the classroom. This uncertain climate highlights what we see as the value of the present volume. We hope the evidence, ideas and arguments presented in these pages will support educators, researchers and others seeking to engage with story in the early years; that they will stimulate further dialogue and debate; and promote further critical enquiry.

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