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Apprentice story writers: Exploring young children's print awareness and agency in early story authoring

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Chapter 4: Apprentice story writers: exploring young children's print awareness and agency in early story authoring

Teresa Cremin

Introduction

This chapter examines the contribution of Vivian Gussin Paley's (1990; 1992) storytelling and story acting pedagogy to young children's growing word and print awareness and their agency in early story authoring. Whilst many scholars have asserted and documented the value of Paley's approach for children's oral development and narrative comprehension (e.g. Cooper, 2009; Nicolopoulou, McDowell and Brockmeyer, 2006; Nicolopoulou, Cates, de Sá and Ilgaz, 2014), considerably less attention has been paid to its potential contribution to children's early writing and their development as authors. In telling their tales to an adult, children watch as the adult scribes their spoken words and later they participate in bringing their own and others' written tales to life through enactment. This close observation of adults' writing, coupled with their active participation in the acting out of their peers' stories were salient features of children's participation in a recent UK based study of the approach upon which this chapter draws. In half the settings, children (aged 3-6 years old) initiated their own writing activities, authoring and co-authoring their own tales with friends and scribing their peers' stories for later dramatisation (Cremin, Swann, Flewitt, Faulkner & Kucirkova, 2013). The agency and intentionality shown by these young authors was marked; they seized opportunities to write their own narratives and to scribe others' tales and in the process learnt about writing through their authorial engagement.

Anchoring the work within a sociocultural approach to learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) and literacy (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000) the chapter begins by discussing children's early authoring and the concepts of intentionality and agency from different ontological perspectives. It argues that children's early authoring needs to be viewed as a socially situated act of meaning making, and recognizes that reading, writing and oral language develop simultaneously, not as discrete entities (Bloome, Carter Christian, Otto and Shuart-Faris, 2005; Rowe, 2003). Related research on the writing practices associated with Paley's (1990) storytelling and story acting approach is also considered. The chapter then details the ethnographic data collection tools which enabled close documentation of the writing experiences of the children who participated in the UK instantiation of this approach (see Chapter 2 for more detail on the methodological approach). Data are drawn predominantly from two of the six settings involved in the study: a primary school and one of its feeder pre-schools, located within half a mile of each other in a semi-rural, suburban context in southern England. One class in each setting was involved, with children aged three-four, and four-five years old respectively. Specific, local enactments of learning-to-write practices that were evidenced during the use of the Helicopter Stories in these settings are examined. The chapter explores the ways in which storytelling and story acting enabled children to learn about writing and prompted some to scribe others' tales spontaneously as well as author their own. Importantly, it argues that this playful pedagogic approach creates a possibility space for young apprentice writers, one which not only draws attention to the

written word enabling children to observe its use in a meaningful context, but which may, in some settings, also serve to motivate their engagement in self-initiated and purposeful writing activities and become authors.

Early authoring

The nature of young children's authoring is viewed from different ontological standpoints: research from cognitive and psycholinguistic perspectives locates authoring in the mind of the child as an individual mental act, whilst research from sociocultural and situated cognition perspectives locates it as occurring collectively between children and others. Working from an emergent literacy perspective, cognitive and sociocognitive scholars have tended to describe early authoring in relation to young children's intentionality (their understanding that written marks have cultural meanings), and children's cognitive hypotheses about print which it is perceived shapes early authoring (e.g. Clay, 1975; Ferrreiro and Teberosky, 1982). As a consequence scholars have examined and described patterns and perceived progressions in children's early texts, focusing for example on speech-print links, directionality and depiction of word units. They argue these are signs of emergent literacy which precede and develop into conventional literacy.

Sociocultural researchers have shifted this focus on cognitive intentionality to examine children's participation and the social construction of their understandings when engaged in joint social activity (Dyson, 2001; Gee, 2001; Rowe, 2008). From this standpoint, how children's hypotheses and texts are shaped by the cultural practices in the classroom (and their communities), and how these practices shape what it is to be an author in these contexts becomes central to understanding early authoring. The social construction of intentionality is specifically examined by Rowe (2008) in her study of 2-3 year olds engaging in writing practices at an officially designated classroom 'writing centre'. In this context she found adult talk focused mainly on: understanding the children's literate intentions; guiding their participation in writing; drawing attention to the adult's own activity (by authoring/co-authoring at the table); and simultaneously explaining the thinking behind their actions. Other studies have also shown that teachers' conceptualisations of writing and their roles in guiding young children's participation as writers, frame and shape the authorial identity positions offered to children, as do the official learning-to-write practices on offer (Bourne, 2002; Fisher, 2010). Additionally research reveals that children actively work to take up or reject the roles on offer and seek to exercise agency as authors, thus contributing to the shaping of literacy practices in classrooms (Dyson, 2009; Rowe and Nietzel, 2010). But how children exercise their agency varies as a result of their perceived degree of freedom and independence, and as Rowe and Nietzel (2010) have shown, children's underlying interests and orientations also influence their play and writing choices.

The study upon which this chapter draws, acknowledged the complex, contextual nature of early literacy, and the active role that children play as meaning makers. Recognising that young children author as they play, and that language is not the only or even the central semiotic mode they draw upon to do so, the study also viewed early authoring as multimodal (Flewitt, 2012). (See Chapter 10 for an examination of children's multimodal meaning making). Research has additionally demonstrated that young children use the language practices of childhood as they write and that they appropriate, remix and recontextualise familiar cultural material in the world of school (Dyson, 1997, 2009). This body of work affirms that even in highly structured writing activities, writing is socially rooted in playful

peer dialogues often of an unofficial nature. Pahl's (2007) work too shows that children playfully draw upon multiple modes, events and practices at home and at school to convey their meanings, which, she suggests, reveals the creativity and intertextuality involved. Early authoring can be seen therefore as 'a material and embodied process through which children adapt and transform cultural resources' (Rowe, 2003, p.266). This underscores the inadequacy of locating authoring in the mind of the child and as uniquely expressed through words, since as Lancaster argues, early symbolic activity is 'a process in which bodily experience, living environments and culture are linked through semiosis' (2013, p. 30).

Despite the wealth of research into early authoring and the multiple assertions made about the potential of storytelling and story acting in supporting young writers (e.g. Paley, 1990; Cooper, 2009; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006; Nicolopoulou et al., 2014), there are only two known studies which include particular attention to the relationship between Paley's (1990) approach and writing in the early years (Nicolopoulou, McDowell, and Brockmeyer, 2006; Nicolopoulou, Cortina, Ilgaz, Cates and de Sá, 2015). The first study highlighted that 14 of the 19 children in one pre-school class who participated regularly in this story-based practice increased their engagement with their journal writing activities (dictated and drawn); they began to narrate entries and the length and complexity of these increased substantially over the year (2003-4). The second research study sought to examine the developmental and educational value of the approach for pre-school children from low-income homes. It involved a randomised waitlist design, with half the classes randomly assigned to receive the intervention early and half randomly assigned to receive it later over a two year period (2005-7). A total of 149 pre-schoolers (almost all 3- and 4-year-olds) participated in the study. During the intervention, storytelling and story acting were used as part of a regular component of the pre-school curriculum. Pre- and post-tests of 11 measures were administered to capture skills deemed relevant to 'school readiness', focusing on three domains: narrative and other oral-language skills, social competence and emergent literacy. Whilst the concept of 'school readiness' which is linked to cognitive perspectives on emergent literacy has international currency, its use is contentious, and is differently employed by policy makers, practitioners and academics (Whitebread and Bingham, 2012).

In Nicolopoulou et al's (2015) study three items of the children's emergent literacy skills were assessed: beginning sound awareness, rhyme awareness, and print and word awareness (subscales from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening: PreK; Invernizzi, Sullivan, Meier, and Swank, 2004). Through hierarchical linear modelling analysis, the research found that engagement in storytelling and story acting was significantly associated with increased print and word awareness and that within the intervention classes, the number of stories told by children was a significant predictor of this enhanced awareness (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). As the researchers acknowledge, this is perhaps not surprising since the approach provides children 'with a range of engaging literacy-related experiences that concretely demonstrate the uses and mechanics of writing, reading and print' (opcit, 2015, p.159). Nonetheless, the nature of this large scale study and the demands placed upon the team to ensure practitioner fidelity to the specific intervention programme, is likely to have reduced their documentation of the children's lived experience of both story scribing and dramatisation, and the nature of their interaction around writing during these activities. No mention is made of the practice of children scribing their own or their peers' stories which, as noted earlier, was an observed feature in half of the six settings in the UK study.

Methodology

This present study was not only much smaller scale, it also adopted a different ontological orientation and methodological approach. Whilst similarly naturalistic in nature, the design was not experimental, and ethnographic tools (Green and Bloome, 1997) were used to document the social practices of storytelling and story acting in the UK classrooms. The present study thus offers a complementary, closely observed data set. This is drawn upon to examine the contribution of the Helicopter Stories approach to children's growing word and print awareness and to their unprompted agentic participation as writers in the early years classroom.

The study was undertaken to evaluate a training programme offered by a theatre and education company who have developed Paley's (1990) approach in the UK. See Chapter 2 for further details of this programme entitled 'Helicopter Stories', which in essence encompassed an eight-week programme of provision for practitioners through both professional development and in-class support in six early years settings. The university research team collected a wide range of data from the Helicopter Stories theatre art trainers, teachers, classroom support staff and child participants. The adult-focused data collection methods included: observations of the pre-programme training sessions; interviews with the key practitioners and trainers in each setting throughout (early, middle and late phase); and video stimulated review at the end of the project with the education practitioners. The child-focused ethnographic data collection methods encompassed: observation and video recording of a sample of the programme's implementation (again early, middle and late phase), and the collection and photocopying of the children's stories, both those scribed by practitioners, theatre arts trainers, and those children themselves wrote, as well as those children scribed for other children. Both teachers and researchers documented the involvement of three case study children in each classroom. Two researchers visited each setting three times: one made detailed field notes on both observations and informal conversations with adults or children, whilst the other researcher video-recorded the storytelling and story acting activities initiated by adults or children. The nature of this set of data collection methods enabled the research team to document the children's close attentive engagement in their teachers' scribing and their own self-initiated writing practices, although data collection was constrained to 'Helicopter' days.

The dataset outlined was collated: audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, detailed logs were made of video-recordings and the analytical software Atlas.ti was used. In line with the qualitative approach, the dataset was subject to scrutiny, and open and later axial codes were identified. A sub-set of the data were checked to ensure consistency in coding both across the data and between the five coders. The axial themes identified included: children's agency; confidence; sense of belonging and identity; communication, language and literacy; and creativity in children's stories and performance. The data presented in this chapter connect to the axial themes of agency, and language and literacy. In relation to print awareness the data are drawn from all six settings, in relation to children scribing their own and others' stories, the data are drawn from two of the six settings. These were a Reception class in a school, referred to as St Aidan's Primary School, with a class from one of its feeder pre-schools referred to as Eager Beavers. As children scribing their own and others' stories became a distinct and well-developed feature in these classrooms, and as they were located in the same

catchment area, (a semi-rural suburban area in the south of England), they were purposively selected for re-examination.

St Aidan's was a small primary school with less than 150 children on roll at the time of the study. The head teacher and staff had been stable for several years. The school catchment was diverse, with children coming from local farms, nearby villages and the local low-cost housing estate: 'It looks middle class when you drive through it, but I'd say it's mixed' (Reception teacher, 19.04.2012). In its last two Ofsted¹ reports, provision for children in Reception was seen as 'good', in particular the care provided and progress made. Good links with pre-school provision were noted. The Reception class comprised 20 children aged four-five years old.

Eager Beavers was a pre-school setting which provided full day and sessional care for children between one-four years old, with 82 children on roll at the time of the study. In its most recent Ofsted report the overall quality of the provision was judged as 'outstanding'. The environment was described as relaxed and nurturing; tailored to meet children's individual needs. The key strengths of the setting were reported as their drive for continual improvement, the organisation of transitions and the influence that children's interests and ideas had on planning. The pre-school morning class who participated in the 'Helicopter Stories' programme included 19 three-four year olds. None of the children in the two participating classes at St. Aidan's or Eager Beavers were identified as having special educational needs and none spoke English as an additional language. The study which followed the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines, offered information to practitioners and parents, made clear that withdrawal was possible at any stage, and ensured principles of confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms, were applied. Data were secured in password-protected files with restricted access.

In what follows, initially the practice of adults' scribing the children's stories and its inherent learning potential in relation to print awareness is considered. The teachers' observations included here are drawn from across the six settings to demonstrate the recognition and value afforded by all teachers of the approach's contribution to apprenticing story writers. Then examples of children exercising their agency as authors and scribing their own and each other's stories are presented, first from the focus class in St Aidan's and then Eager Beavers. The children who were observed undertaking these spontaneous writing practices were not those who were the focus of the project's case studies. Since the practice of self-authoring and scribing was child-initiated, data were collected opportunistically in the three extended visits to each of these two classrooms. The time spent in each classroom varied in response to the practitioners' own time frames; it was never less than an hour and a half and was frequently between two and three hours.

In the Reception class, the teacher in response to the children's observed practice of writing and scribing their own and others' stories, provided them with two 'non-school' 'Story Books' (lined and blank exercise books which had colourful covers) for this purpose. These were in addition to the conventional exercise book (with a plain cover) in which adults scribed children's tales. The Reception children frequently made use of their 'own' class Story Books; they drew and wrote their own tales in them and recorded stories dictated by

¹ The inspection of publicly funded schools in England is carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), a non-ministerial department of the government.

their peers, both on 'Helicopter days' and in free-play sessions on other days. Two entries from the Reception books are examined: one drawn, one written. Such books were not offered in the pre-school, but the practitioners noticed that one girl, three year old Fiona, began to scribe stories for her peers on 'Helicopter days'. In the example examined, Fiona took up the mantle of the scribe for her friend Will.

Enhancing children's awareness of written language

The observational data from all six settings evidenced the children's intense engagement in the adult scribing of their narratives (see Chapter 7). The adults in both St. Aidan's and the Eager Beavers classes positioned themselves carefully to ensure that the young tellers who sat alongside them were able to see the lined page of the Helicopter story book. Tellers and scribes either sat together at tables or on the floor, sometimes leaning against a wall. Four salient print-related conventions appertained to story scribing practice. The first was that the adult began by writing the child's name at the top of the page, often, though not always, speaking their name aloud as they did so. The second was voiced by the adult at the outset, this was that the child's story could be as short or as long as they wanted, but could not extend beyond the page. In response to this, children sometimes pointed to where they wanted their story to end and if it looked as if a story might run over, the Reception teacher suggested the child's narrative might become a chapter in a longer story, to be continued another day. The third print-related convention, which was arguably for the adult's benefit, was the adult underlining nouns in the child's text in order to support the adult reader when allocating roles during the story's enactment. As the story was read aloud in story-acting, the adult invited children, individually or in groups, to become the 'castle', the 'dragon' or the 'bin' for example; the underlining served to prepare the ground for the later telling. The final print-related convention at the close of the tale involved the adult asking the storyteller who they wanted to be in the story acting. This object or character was then encircled. Again this drew children's attention to the teacher's writing; specifically to the selected word which the storyteller would later embody and enact.

During the process of scribing and without exception, as the children in the two classes became familiar with the storytelling process, they (like their counterparts in the other settings), paused as they told their story to allow the adult sufficient time to transcribe the words they had voiced. Most, if not all, watched very carefully as their words became pencil marks on a page, arranged on the lines from top left to bottom right. Joint attention between adults and children on the story text, both as the adult transcribed and later as the adult read the story back to the child, was a common characteristic of the practice observed. Sometimes children were seen to lean over the page as the adult scribed, looking intently at the marks being made as if they were studying them, and sometimes they pointed to particular words (not necessarily the right ones), if they thought the adult might have misheard what they had said, or if they wanted to act out a specific role.

Practitioners from all the settings and the researchers noted that the children were highly attentive as adults scribed. They also noticed that the gaze of other children present often focused on the text as it was being transcribed; they too were potentially developing print awareness through observation and attention. One practitioner commented that a story listener in the Reception class: 'definitely wanted to know what happened in the end, and wanted a longer ending you know, pointing out where you could fit in more words'. Additionally, children sometimes commented upon their adult scribed stories, for instance a

practitioner from the pre-school observed ‘often at the end she’ll look at it (the scribed story) and point to long words and ask what they say - she never asks about short ones!’ Another practitioner noted that one boy ‘was saying that “I filled a whole page” and looking at the words and he was so proud’. Some practitioners also referred to the significance of this for individual learners, one noted for instance about a boy that ‘he wouldn’t be a child who would sit and look at the book with you, and doesn’t really show much interest in the written word at all’. In this context however, as their stories were committed to paper, such interest on the part of the young people was demonstrated frequently.

The children’s stories were meant to be transcribed verbatim by the adult, including any use of non-standard grammar which might be expected at this age, since children aged between two-four years often engage in spontaneous language-creating attempts (Whitehead, 2003). Whilst the transcription of non-standard grammar was accepted by the pre-school practitioner, the Reception teacher expressed a degree of uncertainty about this practice. She perceived tension between the power of Helicopter Stories to support children’s self-expression and her assumed professional responsibility to improve the accuracy of children’s language. She felt strongly that the ‘teacher should model the correct language... should model always if possible how to do things properly’, and occasionally repeated children’s words using standard grammar. As a consequence she re-voiced and wrote down the ‘corrected’ version of the child’s text. The extent to which this influenced the children’s understanding in this context is not known.

At the end of the scribing, the adults read the whole tale back expressively to each child; this arguably endowed increased significance to their story and demonstrated that their words were available for re-reading. It can be argued therefore that the process of telling stories to adults who scribed these before the children’s eyes, offered the young writers multiple different opportunities 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 which must be planned for in terms of overall story length. In addition, and significantly, the fact that this writing was used later the same day as the ‘script’ for whole class enactment of their tale, not only served to affirm that their written words had permanence, but gave a real purpose to telling and scribing.

Self-initiated authoring in Reception

This sense of purpose is likely to have motivated children in the Reception class at St Aidan’s who began to spend their free-play time writing and drawing their own stories and scribing peers’ tales. This child-initiated practice comprised a naturally occurring individual and often collaborative, shared activity. Their stories were committed to paper in various ways: in the class’s two Story Books dedicated to this purpose, in ‘instant books’ (made from folded A4 paper) at the writing table, and on paper in the ‘office’ role play area. The Reception teacher was enthusiastic about the children’s self-directed engagement with writing, she commented that ‘writing each other’s stories and making books to write stories’ became ‘one of the main activities of the classroom’. As she noted:

One of the things that has really fascinated me is the way the children have extended it, and put themselves into the roles of story taker and storyteller, and have actually wanted to be Caroline [trainer] or myself and do what we do, and they’ve done that both at the sessions and independently outside the sessions as well.

The motivational power of the approach was also commented upon by the teaching assistant who perceived it encouraged the boys to write:

*The thing that has had the real impact is the fact they **want** to write their own, so do what we've been doing themselves....*

It's been getting the boys more into mark making. It almost seems to give them permission to do it, because the mark making table can be quite a girl heavy area ... this seems to have given them [the boys] a purpose to put to their mark making and to have something to link it to...

The researchers observed some of this child-initiated story writing, and opportunistically filmed children scribing each other's stories and writing and drawing their own. The class's Story Books were packed with entries which were potentially ripe for analysis. However the books were also used on 'non-Helicopter days' (when researchers were not present), entries were mostly undated and unnamed, and it was difficult to ascertain whether an entry had been authored, co-authored or dictated. This inevitably hampered the systematic data collection of this spontaneously occurring writing practice. Nonetheless, an examination of the Story Books revealed considerable diversity. All entries, which were made in felt tips, pencil and pens, were no longer than a page, and variously included: drawings, with and without accompanying writing, (by an adult or a child); long strings of letters spread across the page; mixtures of letters, lines and dots, with and without drawings; and some short written tales. It was apparent that the books afforded space for child-directed authorial experimentation and exploration, and that in committing to paper in this context the young authors were not only ascribing meaning to their mark making, they were drawing upon the cultural practices inherent within the storytelling and story acting approach that their teacher had adopted.

For example, observational field notes of one afternoon's Helicopter session during the middle of the eight week programme, show that in 40-minutes of 'free choice' time, six children (who had volunteered previously) told their stories to adult scribes, whilst at least five others were involved in writing and drawing their own and each other's stories. As soon as the teacher announced free choice time, children quickly gathered around the two class Story Books, and five year old , Joy, perhaps conscious it would not be easy to share, offered to 'take story'. Holding one Story Book like a prized possession, she was eagerly followed by two children, one of whom immediately asked Joy 'are we going to act them?' The remaining book was seized by Ellie. The last child, looking disappointed, initially went to the outdoor area and then to the office where he wrote a story on a piece of paper. Standing at a table, Ellie (also aged five) chose to write her name at the top of the page and then wrote a tale using visuals to represent parts of the narrative and depicting these on a single page, starting at the top and working from left to right across the page and down (See Figures 4.1 and 4.2). As she did so she muttered subvocally, gesturing back to her first drawings (a godmother, princess and rain) almost every time she came to draw another element, as if she were re-reading at the point of composition. When the page was nearly full, she sought an adult and retold her tale thus far, pointing to her drawings as she did so, 'Once upon a time there was a fairy godmother, then the bad fairy/ bad princess came along and then it started raining and the fairy godmother went to her house, but the bad fairy broke the house down'. The characters and the rain and the house can be seen in Figure 4.1, alongside other visuals, which remained key elements of the narrative when Ellie read it for the class to enact later that morning.

PLACE FIGURE 4.1 here

Figure 4.1 Ellie writing her story

Another example, which was not observed during the composition, but was found in a Story Book and connected to its author, is Isabelle's tale of the little bird (see Fig.4.3). Here she uses writing for an expressive and perhaps metaphorical purpose; the practitioner commented that this five year old was moving house and perceived her tale may have been alluding to this. Isabelle employed two conventions used by the adult scribes. She underlined a number of words, mirroring the convention to highlight roles for later enactment; these were mainly, although not exclusively, nouns: 'tree branches', 'little bird', 'nest' and 'shivering'. In addition, Isabelle encircled the word 'mummy', making use of the convention to encircle the character the author would 'like to be' in the dramatisation. In these ways she mirrored the adult scribes' written practices and engaged in writing a story - a kind of play-script- in the manner she had observed. The extent to which Isabelle's use of underlining and encircling was intentional in that she expected or hoped her tale would later be enacted is not known, but it seems likely.

The video footage and observational notes indicate that children who scribed others' stories or created their own tales during the designated Helicopter sessions frequently sought to 'read' these for peer dramatisation during story acting time. The Reception teacher only assigned acting time on Helicopter days and tended to prioritise the tales scribed by adults, but sometimes the children's self-initiated tales were also enacted, giving real purpose to their writing and making public their narratives. Furthermore, on two occasions, small groups of children were observed enacting their written or scribed stories during free choice time, once using the class's 'stage' denoted by white tape for this purpose, and once placing chairs to denote their own 'stage'. This further demonstrates their agentic participation and appropriation of resources enabling them to follow through from authoring/ scribing to enactment.

PLACE FIGURE 4.2 here

Figure 4.2 Isabelle's tale

Self-initiated authoring and scribing in the pre-school

The pre-school practitioners noted that two children committed to paper for the first time when 'writing' their own stories, also that four weeks into the programme, three year old Fiona took this a step further and began to take up the mantle of the scribe for her peers on 'Helicopter days'. She did so on several occasions and was observed and filmed one morning as she scribed Will's tale. At this time, with a large sheet of paper in front of her, Fiona leaning on her elbow looked up at Will expectantly, crayon in hand. Due to the classroom noise only some elements of their interchange were able to be captured; it was clear however she was adopting the role of scribe and seeking faithfully to commit Will's tale to paper. She had written his name in the top left corner and had half encircled/underlined this, reminiscent of the adult's recording of children's names in the class's Helicopter book. Fiona and Will

both took the telling and scribing seriously. Initially he was unsure how to begin, but supported by Fiona in ‘teacher role’, he found his way forward.²

Fiona: What does your story start with?

Will: Don’t know (pause) Once upon a time (pause) there ...?

Fiona: Do you want to say ‘Once upon a time there lived?’

Will appeared to agree with Fiona’s suggestion and she committed this opening to paper, making a series of capitals F’s on the page, one for each word. She voiced each word aloud as she wrote it, in a similar manner to an adult taking story, although Fiona scribed each ‘word’ more slowly with considerable focused intent. Will waited until this was written before he continued his tale:

Will: (indistinct utterance) ...

Fiona: (writing) There- lived- a li-ttle- doggy- that? ³

Will: Had a wolf in his belly

Fiona: A wolf in his belly?

Will: Yes

Fiona: (writing) That- had- a- wolf- in- his- bell- y-

Fiona: What happened next?

Will: (Indistinct utterance) ...the wolf came out and he smashed the wolf in his window

Fiona: (writing) The- wolf- came- (looks up at Will to check and mouths ‘out’)

Will: Out

Fiona: (writing) out -

Will: And the wolf

Fiona: (writing) And- he-

Will: Smashed it out... (indistinct)

Fiona: (writing) He smashed a

Will: (indistinct utterance) ...wolf

Fiona: (writing) The- wolf –out- his- win- dow - (looks up at Will)

Will (indistinct utterance) ...

Fiona: (writing) And- the wolf-was- born-

Will (indistinct utterance)...

Fiona: (writing) He- then- he- smashed- a- eye- ball- from- the- wolf-

Will (indistinct utterance)... belly

Fiona: (writing) He-smashed- in- his- bell- ly-

Fiona continued to scribe Will’s tale which also involved a knife, the wolf dying and being born in a tree; the order and nature of events are hard to ascertain with any certainty. What is clearly audible is that after 4 minutes and 28 seconds of assiduously committing his tale to paper, Fiona advised Will ‘I think it should be the end now’, whilst offering him the smallest smile. Will consented with a nod of his head and Fiona voiced ‘the end’ as she wrote two F’s at the bottom of the page with strong strokes. The pair then got up and set off together across the classroom. A practitioner commented as they passed ‘Have you written a story together? How exciting!’ Fiona showed her the story (see Figure 4.3) observing ‘It’s very long!’ Another practitioner, who had been scribing children’s stories, asked Will if he wanted to tell her a story, (that morning he had asked to be placed on the day’s list), but he shook his head,

² The opening three lines of this conversation come from field notes; the remainder from the transcribed video.

³ Each mark made by Fiona, where visible in the footage, is demarcated by a line, e.g. The- wolf- .

informing her he had already told his tale to Fiona; he recognised her as a story scribe. Fiona went to Will's tray to place the story there, but instead held onto the story for over five minutes until the story acting began.

PLACE FIGURE 4.3 here

Figure 4.3 Fiona's scribing Will's story

In this extract Fiona can be seen to bodily engage in the beginnings of alphabetic writing as she represents sounds in abstracted symbols, in this case mostly using the single demarcated upper case letter 'F' (she used a lower case 'b' for ball and some P's are evident although they may be indistinct F's). As Kress observes, in such early writing the body is 'orientated towards regular repetition of similar simple units' (1997:84). Each letter F represents a single word which Fiona repeats aloud following Will carefully as she records them, separating each letter from the others. Initially she commits these to paper in two rows from left to right, then returns to the top of the page and places the next Fs in an available space there, again working within the cultural convention of directionality from left to right. When this space is full she works from right to left back across the page, adding further Fs for each word she voices. Interestingly she records two slightly shorter Fs to represent three multisyllabic words: 'li-ttle' 'bell-y', and 'win-dow', demonstrating an implicit awareness both of the complexity of written language and of syllabic beat. Her use of the upper case 'F' is likely to be connected to her name; research indicates that children move more quickly towards conventional use of the letter forms in their own names than in other words (e.g. Levin, Both-De-Vries, Aram and Bus, 2005).

Later when Fiona was invited to read the tale for dramatisation the practitioner offered to help, but Fiona, seeking to retain ownership of the telling space, replied firmly 'I know how it goes'. She voiced various elements of Will's tale and later accepted the practitioner's support as Will and the class enacted it. The processes of telling, scribing and story acting appeared to serve social-relational purposes for Fiona and Will, who were friends outside school. As they returned to the class circle after the acting they were smiling broadly.

Discussion

The storytelling and story acting approach adopted in the Reception and pre-school classes at St Aidan's and Eager Beavers prompted the children to engage enthusiastically in these complementary classroom-based social practices. Their oral stories were respected, scribed by interested adults and later enacted by their peers and this not only supported their literate participation, but also afforded opportunities for these young apprentice writers to engage purposefully in writing. The children's commitment and interest in their own and each other's stories encouraged considerable self-directed learning and engagement with writing. It can be argued therefore that the approach has the potential to increase children's awareness of written language and the cultural practices associated with writing. It indicates the transformation of spoken to written representation, demonstrates that mark making can and should be read as linguistic messages and that the written word can be used for collaborative enactment. Nicolopoulou et al., (2015) suggest that Paley's approach opens up an opportunity space that supports children's learning and narrative development. This chapter, in examining the opportunities that some children seized to engage authentically and agentically as authors

and scribes, significantly extends this to argue that the approach also affords a possibility space for learning about writing *and* becoming a writer. It reveals that the process of storytelling and its attendant scribing and later story-acting represent not only rich and specific, local enactments of learning-to-write practices, but also that the process can enable children to adopt the position of being-a-writer, a young, apprentice writer.

Some children imagined and identified themselves as authors or scribes in this possibility space for writing and became involved with other children in the production of meaningful narratives. They not only creatively and intentionally positioned themselves as writers; they were recognised as such by the practitioners who from the outset positioned all children as authors with oral stories to tell. The young people's adoption of the roles of tellers, writers, scribes and readers was accepted and valued in both classes and the resultant child-initiated writing was often shared through enactment. In this way Ellie, Isabelle, Fiona and Will experienced writing as a social and relational process, not only in the construction of the texts, but in their later enactment. Their texts were shaped by the cultural practices inherent within the approach (the print related conventions for example and the later enactment) and these practices shaped what being an author comprised in these classrooms, at least during free choice time.

The children's self-initiated practice of scribing and writing their own and others' stories was observed both on 'Helicopter days' and on other days during free choice time. In the two classrooms this time involved open access to multiple areas (e.g. the role play area, the outdoor area) and to resources (e.g. the construction equipment, dressing up clothes); during these unstructured periods children made their own decisions and chose activities in which to engage. The non-regulatory nature of this time and space appeared to act as a potential 'textual playground' (Dyson and Dewayani, 2013, p.258) for the young writers. Motivated by the newly introduced practice of storytelling and story acting, the playground afforded new possibilities for exercising their freedom. Indeed as Dyson (1997, p.166) argues:

For children, as for adults, freedom is a verb, a becoming; it is experienced as an expanded sense of agency, of possibility for choice and action.

Significantly, there was evidence of a desire and determination on the part of the young writers to follow through their texts (or those they scribed) to story acting, whether on the communal class stage or on a smaller group-created one as seen in the Reception class. In the pre-school it is likely that Fiona expected or hoped that her scribing of Will's tale would be used for later dramatisation; she chose to keep it with her until the acting time commenced. Her written text which functioned as a vehicle for communication and the sharing of Will's narrative highlights the critical interdependence of the two strands of the approach in relation to apprenticing young writers. The telling establishes that each child has a story to tell, which by being committed to paper is ascribed value, and the enactment affords an opportunity to demonstrate the purposeful and social use of children's written stories. Thus the enactment, a communal social activity which involved the whole class, may represent the driver of the self-initiated practice of children authoring their own or scribing others' stories. Indeed it is possible that the eventual peer-oriented enactment arouses an 'intrinsic need' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.118) in children and that this prompts them to compose and share their stories, fostering their volitional involvement as young apprentice writers.

With the downward pressure of performative cultures, the focused early learning of letters, sounds and spelling and the evidence that many practitioners make use of copying (Dyson, 2010) in order to ensure that young writers learn 'the basics', Paley's (1990) story-based

approach offers a richly conceived and complementary way forward. Few communal practices in the early years classroom offer as much scope and potential for young children to learn about writing *and* to position themselves as writers, apprenticed to the craft.

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