Promoting Democratic Classroom Communities through Storytelling/Story Acting
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We live at a time of unprecedented migration-between rural areas and urban metropolises and between impoverished and war-torn countries and wealthy nations. This migration presents opportunities (e.g., the vitality of new immigrants; the richness when different cultural groups interact) as well as challenges (e.g., disruptions of communities experiencing an influx of migrants). Successful navigation of these challenges will require a new generation of citizens with the abilities and dispositions to listen, take the perspectives of others, and collaborate. It will require people and communities to act with a shared sense of humanity and fairness; to be able to act and solve problems democratically. In this chapter, we focus on how children's sense of democratic responsibility can be promoted through Storytelling/Story Acting.

If the democratic nature of a particular early childhood activity could be measured, storytelling/story acting (Storytelling/ Story Acting) as enacted in Vivian Paley's classroom would surely score high. Cooper (2009), McNamee (2015) and Nicolopoulou and her colleagues (2015) have all described how Paley's Storytelling/ Story Acting promotes skills and dispositions essential to democracy. While not naming democracy explicitly, Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) list the democratic characteristics of Storytelling/ Story Acting, including its child initiated, voluntary, shared, collaborative and public nature. McNamee (2015) explains how Storytelling/ Story Acting helps create a democratic atmosphere in Head Start classrooms. Cooper (2009) describes how a "pedagogy of fairness" is deeply engrained in Paley's teaching, of which Storytelling/ Story Acting is an essential part. Paley concurs, commenting that, the Storytelling/ Story Acting involves "doing favors for each other and creating community. There is no room in this community for favoritism…[Storytelling/ Story Acting is an] opportunity for supreme intimacy" (Paley, 2010). Elsewhere she writes, 'Even more than play itself [Storytelling/ Story Acting] brings us several rungs up the ladder in our classroom democracy (personal communication, 1/3/14).' At a time of increasing direct instruction in early childhood settings (Bassok & Rorem, 2014), and declining opportunities for children to play (Miller & Almon, 2009), it is essential to recognize and support practices that sustain and strengthen democracy.

Storytelling/ Story Acting originated in a specific context--one particular classroom and--until recently efforts to expand it have involved individual or small groups of teachers who embraced the practice voluntarily. With increased interest in Storytelling/ Story Acting in the UK (e.g., MakeBelieveArts), the USA (e.g., the School Literacy and Culture Project and, in particular, the inclusion of Storytelling/ Story Acting in mandated curriculum in the Boston Public Schools *Focus on K2* kindergarten curriculum), the issue of maintaining the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting takes on particular urgency, and is the impetus for this chapter.

We begin the chapter by examining how Storytelling/ Story Acting can foster democracy, including its support for individual voice and agency, as well as promotion of learning

communities. Attention is then turned to risks to the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting in publicly funded settings.

Special attention is given to the scaffolding of storytelling as an opportunity to either support or undermine children's agency and voice. Concerned with the risks and opportunities present in efforts to scale up Storytelling/ Story Acting, we conclude by drawing on experiences in the Boston Public Schools, theorizing about professional development practices that support teachers in preserving the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting.

Storytelling/ Story Acting as a democratic classroom practice

In discussions of democratic classrooms practices, the distinction between democracy on national and local levels is useful (Moss, 2011). On a national level, democracy is operationalized through voting and majority rule, an independent judiciary, adherence to the rule of law, and a free press. On a local level-in clubs, community organizations, and schools-relationships play a prominent role in actualizing democratic values. While adherence to agreed rules and laws remain important, democracy also depends on the members of a group listening to, trusting, and treating each other fairly and with respect. It is on this local level that, Eleanor Roosevelt (1958) explained, "human rights begin, where, every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity.'

Early childhood classrooms operate on the local level and creating democratic communities here involves managing the tension between individual needs and desires, and the requirements of the group. In accord with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in a democratic classroom community, each child should have an equal opportunity to express his or her opinions and, to the degree appropriate to their development, has input on issues that impact his or her life. At the same time, a democratic early childhood classroom is not a free for all, with each individual doing what he or she pleases. Rather, it is a place where individuals act with a sensitivity to the needs of other community members; where children learn to develop control over impulses, and make decisions based on reason (Dewey, 2004).

Most importantly, a democratic classroom community is a community, where children have the opportunity to collectively create ideas and make meaning together. This involves far more than children voting for what kind of crackers they want for snack. It involves children and teachers creating a culture together by establishing the rules, rituals, stories, artefacts and ideas that define the group. It involves a collective, "who are emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically engaged in solving problems, creating products and making meaning" (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001, p 285).

With this in mind, it is clear why Storytelling/ Story Acting would score highly on a hypothetical democracy meter. The opportunities to tell a story, to choose whether or not to participate in story acting, and to have the license to decide how to portray characters in story acting, allows for individual voice, choice and agency. In addition, Storytelling/ Story Acting allows for children's creative ideas and impulses, while encouraging children to coordinate their ideas and actions with others. Storytellers and actors need to

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take turns. Children must agree that others can take coveted roles of princess or superhero. They have to watch and listen carefully in order to synchronise the enactment of stories on the classroom stage.

This tension between individual impulses and the needs of the group have led some to maintain that in order to promote democracy, teachers must, at times, be anti-democratic. Covaleskie (2003) labels this the "Paley's Paradox", arguing:

> The deepest habits of democratic life are, in a real sense, forced on children. If democratic citizens are to exhibit the sort of self-restraint and self-discipline, even at times self-denial, that are the cornerstones of a substantive democracy, this can happen only if responsible adults require of children that they are inclusive in the public spaces of our schools…This is just why the classroom that restricts children's freedom in the right ways is the best way to prepare children for the later exercise of responsible freedom in a democratic society (p. 336-7).

Covaleskie (2003) is right to point out the importance of self-restraint and self-discipline, but he is underestimating the power of stories and play in the lives of children. While the tensions between individuals and the group can never be fully resolved, the high level of children's investment in story- telling and acting can result in their voluntary self-restraint in order to insure the smooth functioning of the activity.

Paley's concept of "stage rules" provides a good example. While each classroom establishes its own rules, these stage rules often include: actors stay on the "stage" while audience members stay off the stage, and when the story says characters are fighting, an actor's punches need to stay one arms-length away from other actors. True, a rule dictating that even when you are a ninja, you cannot slug a classmate, is a restriction on individual volition. However, it is a restriction children readily embrace in order to proceed with the activity and to avoid hurting friends.

Importantly, Storytelling/ Story Acting builds the trusting relationships that are the glue of democratic classroom communities. By listening to the stories of others, children get to know each other. They can examine each other's ideas and co-construct how to enact characters. For example, over time a group may decide on the best way to enact a house, deciding how to position one's arms to depict the roof. As Cooper (2009) explains, the children's stories are invitations to classmates to play. Finding shared meaning is their point, and dramatizations enable cooperation and allow children to safely practice friendship.

The possibilities afforded by Storytelling/ Story Acting lead to a different conception of the relationship between the individual and the group; a conception articulated by Seidel (2001) when describing learning groups:

> It is possible to see the group as holding the individual in its arms with care, respect and love…The group that embraces the contributions of each member, however diverse and contradictory, may well provide exactly the right context for

the emergence of strong individual identities. Through the debate, experimentation and negotiation that characterizes the work of these learning groups, each member comes to see, and in time to value, the particular, even idiosyncratic, qualities of the others. The valuing of each member's contribution means that each person not only develops respect for the others, but also has the experience of being valued for what he or she brings to the problem at hand.

Paley (1997) captures this sense of democratic classroom communities, writing, "The whole point of school is to find a common core of references without blurring our own special profiles" (p viii). In sum, Storytelling/ Story Acting provides a powerful context for a collection of children to find common references while maintaining their special profiles. It is democracy in action.

Risks to the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting in publically funded settings

Paley created Storytelling/ Story Acting in the hospitable and relatively sheltered context of the University of Chicago Lab School, a historically progressive, well-resourced, private PreK through Grade 12 setting (children aged three through 18). What might happen to the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting when it is brought to scale in publically funded classrooms? To shed light on this question, in this section we:

- name two competing perspectives on evaluating young children's narratives;
- discuss the question of teachers' scaffolding of children's stories;
- describe the climate of publically funded early childhood classrooms in the USA and UK; and
- present anecdotal evidence on how the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting fares in public settings.

Our conclusion is that Storytelling/ Story Acting face pressures in publically funded settings that can erode its democratic character.

Stories in early childhood: One kind or many?

Asked to tell a story, four-year-old Gabriella responds:

> Once upon a time there was girl who didn't find a flower at the backyard cause she was planting a flower that she didn't saw it. Then a fairy come. Then she talked to the girl who didn't have flower in the backyard. The end.

What should we make of Gabriella's story? Is it a lovely fantasy about a girl playing in her garden, an immature narrative that is lacking a clear conclusion and with grammatical errors, or both? Judgments about Gabriella's story are shaped by one's perspective on evaluating young children's narratives.

One perspective, from the field of narrative studies, defines *story* as a chronological recapitulation of successive events, that is to say as two or more events logically connected over time (McCabe & Peterson, 1991). From this definition emerge several systems to evaluate children's stories. McCabe's and Peterson's (1983) High Point Analysis evaluates children's narratives in terms of their structural components (orientation, evaluation and appendages) and overall structure (e.g., does the story have a high point?). Story grammar analysis (Stein & Glenn, 1979) evaluates stories on whether they have a beginning, middle and end, with a story climax in the middle. From this perspective, Gabriella's story would be evaluated as typical for her age, and in need of development (in that it lacks a clear conclusion).

An alternative perspective on stories is associated with Moll and colleagues, who refer to 'funds of knowledge' (Moll & Cammarota, 2010), which acknowledges the diversity of families' practices and children's skills. In the early 1990s, research with immigrant families living in the United States started a new branch of literacy studies, which placed a strong emphasis on the cultural-historical context of literacy instruction. Whilst children in the Hispanic homes visited in Moll and colleagues' work were commonly considered 'disadvantaged', as their families were reputed not be able to provide the rich and engaging environments offered by other more 'advantaged' families, Moll's research showed that in reality, these families and their communities contain extensive 'funds of knowledge'. Funds of knowledge are described by Moll as 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (Moll et al., 1992, p.133). Moll and colleagues used this term to refer to the skills, strategies and information utilized by households, which may include information, ways of thinking and learning, approaches to learning, and practical skills. Examples given include knowledge related to farming, construction, and household maintenance, such as shopping, meal preparation, gardening, and socializing with wider family and community members.

We use funds of knowledge as umbrella term to celebrate the difference and diversity in children's narratives. Although Moll and colleagues did not talk about children's narratives specifically, we borrow their term to embrace children's locally constructed narratives. From this perspective, Gabriella's story is seen as a creative amalgam of story structures gleaned from home and school, reflecting her own personal interests.

How should Gabriella's teacher respond to her story? Should she simply accept Gabriella's utterances as told? Should she try to steer Gabriella towards a more mature, 'correct' form of storytelling? Should she engage Gabriella in a conversation about her story to learn more and potentially elicit more ideas? And how should the knowledge that Gabriella is a dual language learner from a Spanish speaking home, influence the answers to these questions?

In Storytelling/ Story Acting, teachers face the classic tension of whether to guide children towards certain outcomes or celebrate their achievements. Complicated by these two contrasting views of narrative, the teacher's scaffolding of children's storytelling is where this tension plays out particularly clearly.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding refers to paired adult-child activities (such as storytelling), where the adult supports the children's learning. The term was first used by Wood et al. (1976), to describe an interaction between an adult and a child constructing a wooden pyramidal puzzle. They referred to this process as 'a "scaffolding" process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts' (p. 90). The term has gained on a wider usage, including structuring and guiding a children's reasoning in a given task (e.g. Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010).

It should be acknowledged that the idea of scaffolding is based on Vygotskyan ideas, even though he didn't use the term himself. In Vygotsky's theory (1978), the notion of zone of proximal development (ZPD) relates to the scaffolding idea in that adults (or the 'more knowledgeable others') structure activities so that children are able to engage in more complex behaviours than they could on their own. Through feedback, adults provide support according to child's current knowledge and gradually increase the task complexity, extending, or 'scaffolding', children's learning (see Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976).

In Storytelling/ Story Acting, scaffolding of story dictation can support or undermine children's agency and voice. Agency can be undermined by teachers asking numerous questions and offering many suggestions, ultimately taking control and ownership of the story away from the child. Alternatively, the teacher's questions and suggestions may support the child in sharing the story he or she wants to tell.

Examination of an example of scaffolding clarifies the risks and opportunities inherent in scaffolding children's storytelling. In this episode, the first author supports four-year-old Gabriella in telling her story. A video of our example can be found on the Boston Public School Early Childhood website (http://bpsearlychildhood.weebly.com/dictation.html). As seen in the video, the session begins with the adult asking a question:

1. Adult: You have a story to tell?
2. Gabriella: Ah ha.
3. A: OK. Why don't you tell it to me.
4. G: Once upon a time there was girl who didn't find flower at the backyard cause she was planting a flower that she didn't sawed it. Then
5. A: You got to slow down a second. Cause I haven't got in the backyard. So once upon a time there was a girl who didn't find a flower in the backyard. She was planting a flower?
6. G: Yes.
7. A: She was planting a flower. OK.
8. G: Then a fairy come. Then she talked to the girl who didn't have flower in her yard. Then end.

9. A: The girl who didn't have flowers. Cool. You know what? I want to read you back the story and see if there is anything you might want to add or change.
10. G: OK.
11. A: And I have a question for you too. So you said: Once upon a time there was girl who didn't find a flower in the backyard. She was planting a flower. Then a fairy comes. She talked to the girl who didn't have flowers in the backyard. The end. You know what I'm wondering? What the fairy said to the girl?
12. G: The fairy said to the girl, "I'm going to make magic and put you a lot of flowers for you to pick."
13. A: And make lots of flowers for you to pick. Did the fairy do that?
14. G: Yes.
15. A: Should I put that in the story?
16. G: Yes.
17. A: What do you want to say? The fairy made the flowers?
18. G: Yes.
19. A: OK. The fairy made the flowers. And what did the girl do?
20. G: She picked all the flowers for herself and her mommy.
21. A: She picked all the flowers for herself and her mommy. Can I read it to you again?
22. G: Yes.
23. A: OK, and see if you like it. Once upon a time there was girl who didn't find a flower in the backyard. She was planting a flower. Then a fairy comes. She talked to the girl who didn't have flowers in the backyard. The fairy said to the girl, "I'm going to make magic and make a lot of flowers for you to pick." The fairy made the flowers. She picked all the flowers for herself and her mommy. The end.
24. G: Thank you.

Interpreting the nature of this conversation, there is evidence of little initial scaffolding. Other than the adult's inadvertent correction of grammar (changing "at the backyard" to "in the backyard"), the adult simply writes down what the child is saying. This changes in line nine. First, the adult explains he is going to read back the story to see if 'there is anything you might want to add or change', signalling to Gabriella that her story has permanence (is captured in writing and can be recounted verbatim) and can be modified. Then, beginning in line eleven, the adult begins asking a series of questions about the story. The story expands through Gabriella's answers.

Members of the Storytelling/ Story Acting community would evaluate this conversation differently, in part, influenced by their understanding of narrative in early childhood. In the UK, Lee's Helicopter Approach favours the interactions seen in lines 1 through 8, with teachers providing no input into the child's story (Lee, 2015). On one hand, this position is explained by the fact that often children have little agency in school; Storytelling/ Story Acting is a chance for them to express themselves. On the other hand, this position guards against the overzealous teacher whose multiple suggestions will rob children of their voice in storytelling. From this perspective, Gabriella's story was no longer hers after all the adult's questions.

In contrast, educators in Boston espouse the idea of "gentle scaffolding." In line with Cooper's (2009) notion of a "participatory scribe," the teacher should, along with writing down and echoing the child's words, ask "editorial questions." The goal, for the child, is a story that will be understandable when dramatized. For the teacher, story dictation is understood as an opportunity to support children's narrative development. The questions the adult asks begin in line 11 are consistent with these goals. Importantly, the questions asked are motivated by a desire to better understand the child's thinking. In the spirit of Duckworth's (1996) clinical interviewing, scaffolding is provided by asking for clarifications and the desire to know more. Gabriella's "thank you" in line 24 suggests that her voice was supported in this interaction.

Yet both groups would agree that scaffolding is the place where Storytelling/ Story Acting risks losing its democratic character. If teacher's questions and comments have an instructional intent, the focus can move from helping children tell their story to getting a story with correct grammar or with a beginning, middle and end. This is a particular concern in public settings because of the current climate of standards and high stakes accountability.

The climate of standards and high stakes accountability

In the 1980s, a consensus emerged among educational policy makers and political leaders in the USA and UK that the way to solve the ills of K-12 education was to create standards for schools and to deploy tests to insure the standards were being met. In recent years, efforts have been made to link these tests with rewards and punishments for teachers and administrators.

In parallel, a growing awareness about the importance of the early years has led to efforts to link early childhood education to K-12 systems (Key stages 0-5 in the UK) and the application of this standards and accountability paradigm to preschool (now often called pre-kindergarten in the USA).

While their defenders are clear that standards are not intended to standardize curriculum, this can be an unintended consequence. In the US, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), voluntary national standards that can be adopted by each state, name 75 standards for kindergarten English Language Arts. These include: participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts*; continue a conversation through multiple exchanges; with prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details; recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet; and read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding.

While some educators worry that these standards themselves will cause teachers to focus on the acquisition of discrete skills, to the detriment of creativity, what is more problematic for democracy is how these standards are evaluated. As even the small sampling of the CCSS illustrates, it is possible to have standards on a wide range of skills and dispositions, but if the accountability system measures only a small number of the

most discrete skills, other, unmeasured skills, will be undermined. As Frede, Gilliam and Schweinhart (2011) explain:

> Rather than measuring what we value, it may be accurate to say that we all too often value what we measure. Whatever is measured tends to become a focus of concern for preschool providers, policy makers, and the public. Therefore, assessment systems have the potential for driving much of what goes on in early education classes, simply by increasing the saliency of the measured areas of the curriculum relative to the unmeasured (or less well measured) areas (p.157).

In the US and UK, what are measured is generally literacy and numeracy skills, beginning in early childhood and even more so in the later grades. However, children's democratic dispositions and the democratic climate of the classrooms—for example whether children collaborate and have voice—are not assessed. With teachers and administrators facing sanctions in the current accountability system, the result is a climate that can be described as anti-democratic.

The US Alliance for Childhood report (2009) finds that in early childhood settings, standards and high stakes accountability has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, where open-ended play, the arts, and social studies are side-lined; additionally it reports, 'In an increasing number of kindergartens, teachers must follow scripts from which they may not deviate. These practices, which are not well grounded in research, violate long-established principles of child development and good teaching.'(p.11). Similarly, research by Bassok and Rorem (2014) finds that since the onset of the current school reform movement kindergartners play less, have less art and music and more direct literacy and math instruction. In the UK, Cremin (2006) concludes that tests and targets have fostered in teachers 'a mindset characterised more by conformity and compliance than imagination and inventiveness' (p.3).

These pressures have particular implications for Storytelling/ Story Acting. The view of "one kind of story" with a beginning, middle and end creates pressures to scaffold story dictation towards one particular goal. Indeed, the Boston Public School kindergarten report card includes the line, "tells and dictates stories with clear narrative structure (beginning, middle, end)." There is thus a concern that if teacher's scaffolding becomes overly emphatic, the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting could be lost.

Anecdotal data about when Storytelling/ Story Acting meets standards and high stakes accountability

If teachers are being monitored and rewarded for adhering to standards and rubrics, they are likely to interpret and implement Storytelling/ Story Acting in this light. In other words, they are not going to look for Storytelling/ Story Acting's democratic potential, but rather for links to specific, discrete literacy skills.

While we know of no studies to date on the impact of school climate on the implementation Storytelling/ Story Acting, anecdotal evidence from the field is

worrisome. In the UK, Cremin, Swann, Flewitt, Faulkner & Kucirkova (2013) conducted classroom observations as part of an evaluation study of Storytelling/ Story Acting. In one visit to a primary school in rural England, a teacher scribed a boy's story about knights who "tooked" all the treasures. When transcribing the story, the teacher made her own decision in situ and corrected "tooked" to "took". Similarly, Lee (2015) describes an observation of story dictation where the teacher repeatedly corrected the child's grammar as he tried to tell his story. Ultimately, in frustration, the child got up and left the table.

In the USA, we have seen signs posted in four-year-old classrooms which read, "Good stories have beginnings, middles and ends." We have seen graphic organizers such as charts and webs created to illustrate to kindergartners how their stories should proceed in this direction. We have talked to teachers expressing frustration with children not meeting this goal.

Such interpretations of Storytelling/ Story Acting are far from universal. However, they inject a note of caution to those aspiring to bring the practice to more classrooms, especially those in public settings. Nevertheless, in our work in Boston over the past three years, we have found some strategies which open up the curriculum and assessment practice for preserving the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting and which acknowledge different ways of storytelling and story acting. In the next section, we summarize these strategies.

Strategies to preserve the democratic ethos of Storytelling/ Story Acting

How a curriculum is operationalized is influenced by the experiences and backgrounds of the children, school leadership and climate, and community values, as well as by the experiences, abilities and beliefs of a particular teacher. Given that individual teachers have agency, professional development can help preserve the democratic ethos of Storytelling/ Story Acting.

Others have written with valuable insights on supporting teachers in implementing Storytelling/ Story Acting (Cooper, 1993, 2009; McNamee, 2015). Here we draw on experience in the Boston Public Schools (BPS), which are unique in: a) the size of the effort (involving 250 kindergarten teachers, and beginning in 2016, 150 pre-K teachers); and b) the mandatory nature of Storytelling/ Story Acting, as part of a prescribed curriculum.

The history of Storytelling/ Story Acting in Boston is described in Chapter 2. Regarding professional development, the focus on this section, author Mardell and his BPS colleague Marina Boni led seminars for three years that included over 100 teachers. During each seminar session, the teachers were presented with information about Storytelling/ Story Acting, and had time to discuss practices with colleagues. They also completed a reflection exercise that asked: what is something you learned and/or are taking away that you can use in your classroom from today's session?; what is a key

question you are leaving with?; and what feature(s) of today's session would you keep or change to enhance your learning?

Based on the experience of facilitating the seminar, interviews with participating teachers, and a review of the teacher reflections, we have developed several hypotheses about professional development strategies that can help teachers maintain the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting. Specifically, we believe it is important to provide teachers with:

- information about narrative development in early childhood;
- continuous support regarding the logistics of implementing Storytelling/ Story Acting; and
- a democratic adult learning environment.

We discuss each of these three elements next.

Information about narrative development in early childhood

Bringing Storytelling/ Story Acting to scale is not a matter of instillation; simply including it in the weekly curriculum plans and training teachers on the approach would not work. For teachers to embrace Storytelling/ Story Acting they need to understand why it is in the best interest of their children. Knowledge of how narrative development unfolds in early childhood is also important in maintaining the democratic nature of the activity.

As mentioned, the pressures to advance children's literacy skills are strong. "Yes, children love Storytelling/ Story Acting, but I need them to meet the benchmarks" is not an uncommon refrain among teachers asked to implement Storytelling/ Story Acting. An understanding that Storytelling/ Story Acting promotes language and literacy skills allows teachers to embrace the practice, reassuring them that it is *not in addition* to their literacy program, but a central part of it. The research basis is an important element helping teachers understand the reasons for including Storytelling/ Story Acting in their practice. In their reflections, a third of teachers expressed appreciation about hearing the research basis of Storytelling/ Story Acting during the initial session of the school year. Interestingly, this appreciation grew over time. 57% wrote positively about a review during a mid-year session, with one teacher explaining: "Now I get it."

The pressure to move children's literacy abilities forward often takes the form of expecting young children to tell stories with a beginning, middle and end (paralleling the writing they will be expected to do on high stakes tests beginning in third grade). Teachers new to Storytelling/ Story Acting often voice impatience with children's stories that do not match this expectation. Knowledge of narrative development in early childhood helps teachers adjust their expectations.

As a body of research by McCabe and colleagues has shown, there are important developmental stages in children's narratives. Three-year-olds' narratives often have an

unstructured, "leap-frog" nature. Four-year-olds' stories often consist of the telling of event after event, chronologies, or what some call "and then and then stories." It is not until the age of five that children reliably *begin* to tell stories that have a problem that is resolved (McCabe & Peterson, 1991). One needs to bear in mind that this is the developmental trajectory based on data of middle class children of European ancestry. Given that storytelling is a cultural construct and story structure varies based on children's backgrounds, there are important cultural differences in children's stories. For example, African American, Japanese and Taiwanese children sometimes produce performative narratives that consist of multiple related events (Champion & McCabe, in press).

Learning about the development of narrative in early childhood proved liberating for teachers in the BPS seminar. Knowing that four-year-olds typically do not tell stories with beginnings, middles and ends--and that this absence does not represent a problem-- freed teachers to listen to what the children were saying. Teachers could enjoy and celebrate the many ways children tell stories. Consequently, 63% of teachers expressed appreciation for learning about this research.

Continuous support regarding the logistics of implementing Storytelling/ Story Acting

On one level, Storytelling/ Story Acting is a simple activity; a teacher writes down a child's story and then brings it to a group time to be acted out. On another level, Storytelling/ Story Acting is a complex practice, with teachers having to make multiple decisions, including when and how to respond to a child's dictation and how to manage and support a group of young children in dramatizing a narrative.

Teachers beginning to work with Storytelling/ Story Acting have numerous questions and worries about specific parts of the practice, often asking whether they and their children are "doing it right." These concerns can lead more to a focus on behaviour and management rather than on stories and ideas. We found that an effective way of overcoming this hurdle is to provide teachers with continuous support regarding the logistics of Storytelling/ Story Acting.

Naturally in our work, the first seminar of the year focused on logistics—the basics of Storytelling/ Story Acting—which teachers found useful. 95% of teachers listed logistical information as something they learned/were taking away from these initial seminar sessions. Appreciation remained high throughout the year, with 79% of teaching naming logistical considerations as helpful. How the information was shared was also commented on, with teachers writing they were, "Glad it isn't a lecture."

Indeed, seminar leaders went to great lengths to provide information in an engaging manner. One particularly effective technique, introduced by Trish Lee, had teachers taking part in Storytelling/ Story Acting. Seminar leaders made a stage with tape, took story dictation from a teacher, and then had the teachers act out the story. The facilitator's strategies and the rationale behind these strategies were then discussed. In subsequent

seminars, the seminar leaders asked seminar members to lead the activity and to bring in children's stories in order to foster a deeper and more nuanced practice of supporting story acting.

A democratic adult learning environment

We believe that the learning environment for children often parallels that of the adults, and therefore hypothesise that creating a democratic learning environment for teachers is an important way to maintain the democratic ethos of Storytelling/ Story Acting. While not easy or straightforward in the context of a large bureaucracy, in the BPS Storytelling/ Story Acting seminar efforts to create a democratic learning environment included:

- use of protocols for small groups where teachers can learn from and with one another, and
- an ethos of flexibility about the details of Storytelling/ Story Acting.

After the initial seminars session, all subsequent sessions featured small group conversations about documentation from teachers' practice. Teachers brought documentation from their classrooms—either video of story dictation or acting or transcripts of children's stories. The small group conversations were structured with either the See-Think-Wonder or (where participants share "objective" observations before their evaluations) Ladder of Feedback (clarifying questions, appreciations, concerns and suggestions) protocols (Visible Thinking Project, 2015). To help teachers gain familiarity with these conversational structures, they were modelled in whole group conversations.

The small groups were very well received. In their end of session surveys, 65% of the teachers listed the small groups as something to keep, or requested even more time to hear from colleagues. One teacher explained that hearing from colleagues is a, "Great way to recharge my creative teacher brain." Another expressed appreciation for, "Suggestions and feedback along with knowing others have similar struggles and puzzles." A third teacher was more effusive, writing, "Love! Love! Loved! Seeing other classes acting out stories." Teachers also noted that the protocols were very helpful in supporting productive conversations.

An often-cited critique of small group learning, both with adults and children, is that peers might provide wrong information. In this case the seminar leaders have taken the stance that there is no one right way of doing Storytelling/ Story Acting. Instead, an ethos of flexibility about the details of Storytelling/ Story Acting was adopted. The stance of flexibility was expressed in an introductory quote from Vivian Paley (2012) on the Storytelling/ Story Acting guide provided to the teachers: '[the teacher's] own observations will inform her best about all these details.'

The question of violence in children's stories captures well this stance of flexibility. When children, boys in particular, are allowed to tell their own stories, fights and battle scenes almost inevitably arise, with the carnage that ensues. Teachers brought this to the

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seminar. Seminar leaders framed the question as one of "community standards"; that every community has norms and rules about how stories (books, plays, and movies) can be expressed and how the emotions and the realities of life are expressed. Leaders quoted Paley, who noted that, 'Boys, like Shakespeare, seem to have a need to see moments of violence acted out' (Paley, 2012) and a four-year-old BPS student who explained to his teacher, "this is the only time we get to pretend to be killing and dying." And then they returned to the notion of community standards, noting that each teacher is the guardian of her or his classroom community, and along with the children, needs to help negotiate their community standards. In other words, to ban, limit or accept violence in stories was ultimately up to the individual teacher.

As one BPS teacher explained, when she joined the Storytelling/ Story Acting seminar she worried about "doing it right." After a few sessions she realized that she was allowed to create structures that served her children best. The result, as she explained, was that "I could make it [Storytelling/ Story Acting] my own. Now I love it."

This stance is not always easy. Seminar leaders have strong opinions about Storytelling/ Story Acting practices (e.g., scaffolding) and issues that arise when children tell and act out stories (e.g., violence in stories). When implementing Storytelling/ Story Acting in Boston kindergartens, the leaders did not shy away from explaining their positions, but also made clear that teachers own observations will best inform the practice in their classrooms. Seminar leaders recognized the risks associated with giving teachers this license; that it might be done "wrong", or at least become something not recognized as Storytelling/ Story Acting. To date, this has not been the case.

Lytle (2013) has spoken about the importance of teachers being allowed to make mistakes. While our current educational climate is not hospitable to mistakes (by teachers or children), mistakes are an integral part of the learning process. A school district culture where teachers know they, as professionals, can experiment, learn from colleagues, be supported by experienced coaches and, yes, make mistakes, seems to us the environment best suited to preserve the democratic character of Storytelling/ Story Acting.

Conclusion

In *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* Paley tells the story of Jason, whom she describes as "the quintessential outsider." With some regularity, Jason fills the classroom with "wails of fright" and "earsplitting noises." Every classroom, indeed every society, must determine how to deal with their *Jasons*; with those who don't fit in. It is easy to imagine, even in a high quality classroom, Jason being ostracised or even expelled. The suspension rates in early childhood classrooms in the US are at a disturbingly high level (Gillian & Shahar, 2006).

Expulsion is not an option for Paley. As she explains, '[Jason] is the one we must learn to include in our school culture if it is to be an island of safety and sensibility for everyone. What happens to Jason in school is the mirror of its moral landscape (Paley, 1990, p. xi).'

In her efforts to include this child, Paley leverages Storytelling/ Story Acting as a way for the children and teachers to learn about Jason and, in turn, for Jason to learn about his classmates. Over the months, the progress is erratic, but in the end, by sharing his own stories and listening to and helping enact the stories of his friends, Jason becomes a valued member of the community. He has, in Steve Seidel's parlance, 'the experience of being valued for what he brings to the problem at hand', and in Paley's, 'found common references with his classmates without blurring his own special profile' (Paley, 1990).

Making Storytelling/ Story Acting part of the curriculum of large public school districts opens the possibilities to enhance the democratic character of hundreds and even thousands of classrooms. It also requires facing the tensions named in this chapter:

- the classroom tension between individual children and the group;
- the instructional tension between supporting children's emerging storytelling abilities and taking away children's voice;
- the professional development tension between fidelity of implementation and teachers finding their own way with Storytelling/ Story Acting; and
- the evaluative tension between measuring success through standardized tests of literacy sub-skills and the creation of a democratic classroom culture.

It is within this final tension, and belief that the creation of democratic classroom cultures receive high priority, where Jason's experience is relevant. How the *Jasons* of these classrooms are treated will serve as a measure to see if Storytelling/ Story Acting's potential is achieved.

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