



Story Makers Dialogues

Creative Possibilities

Issue 2



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Editorial and welcome to Story Makers Dialogues

The Story Makers Company was established in 2017 at the Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University by academics, teachers and artist educators concerned with the marginalisation of creative opportunities for young people to make and share their stories. Our aim is to nurture the spaces for diverse children's voices in stories through our research-based work with schools, communities and artist educators. We are partnered with over 13 local Theatre Companies, drama specialists and creative writing organisations and meet regularly to develop collaborative work. We also have a commitment to developing opportunities for all children to engage in arts and we develop specialist programmes for local children to work with artists at the University. We support artist educators to develop and articulate their practice.

Our latest project, Story Makers Press, publishes stories which capture children's underrepresented narratives. We use drama and storytelling to allow children to explore stories, which we transform into engaging fiction books. Our first story 'The Nightmare Catcher' explores gaming through the eyes of a child whose mum struggles with mental health and is explored in this issue by Tom Dobson. Our books draw from research from the Carnegie School of Education and are accompanied by helpful guides to teachers and parents on how to explore creatively these stories further with their students and children, developing emotional literacy and wellbeing. We welcome our children's Press Publisher Ana Arede!

Story Makers Dialogues are intended to connect artistic practice, policy, education and research. They are written with a diverse audience in mind: artists, teachers, academics, students, children, members of grassroots and community organisations, advocates, influencers and policy makers at all levels. We are interested in all voices. We intend that the content and audience is national and international. The Story Makers Dialogues will enable a diverse range of multi-disciplinary informed voices to co-exist in each publication, to encourage scholarship, critical debate and legacy. We aim to lay bare the complexity of these processes, problematising professional practices and policy where appropriate and recognising tensions that exist between them.

It is a pleasure to introduce the second edition of Story Makers' Dialogues. These stories represent the lived experiences of those co-constructing with and alongside a range of diverse learners. The stories articulate some shared themes: the power of co-construction; disrupting power through fiction and agentic learning. Please read, reflect and respond to any of them. Authors details can be found at storymakers@leedsbeckett.ac.uk.

Lisa Stephenson

Lisa is the director and founder of Story Makers Company and a research practitioner with expertise in drama pedagogy and children's wellbeing. @StorymakersCo

Tom Dobson

Tom is a founder member of Story Makers Press and a research practitioner with expertise in creative writing pedagogy and children's identities.

Ana Arede

Ana is the publisher of Story Makers Press and her expertise is in publishing.

Story
Makers
Company

1. In first paper, **Dr Tom Dobson** applies literacy criticism to explore the power structures applied by adults in the authoring of children's literature. He examines the process of authoring our first Story Makers Press story, *The Nightmare Catcher*, through this lens.
2. Our second paper is written by MA student **Jessica Gosling** and maps her journey as practitioner- researcher, exploring the role of parents as partners when working with preverbal children.
3. In our third paper, *Are Faeries Real*, Deputy Headteacher **Andrew Wilkinson**, examines the complexities of a 10-week project with his class using drama to explore some complex questions about 'wickedness' with children.
4. In our fourth paper, MA student, **Laura Bolton** explores the role of fanfiction as an agentic 'infinity space' for children and young children to participate in the social and cultural production of remixing narratives.
5. In our fifth paper, **John Mee** from Alive and Kicking Theatre and **Liz Taylor** examine the intergenerational role of a drama project called *In the Woods*, delivered to 44 Year 2 children over 2 terms. They argue that by giving children dilemma-based learning opportunities, they were able to make rich agentic choices within the fiction. The project also involves parents and this dimension is also explored in their findings. This research was part of the Carey Philpot award.
6. Our Sixth paper, *Graff...secret*, is a short story by MA student **Antonia Mourou**, who is on our MA Drama and Creative Writing Masters. The story includes a critical reflection which examines the process of authoring the story and is informed by a module which positions students as a community of writers.
7. In our seventh story, MA student **Charlotte Farnell**, who is also on our MA Drama and Creative Writing Masters, shares a reflective poetic response to author and poet Michelle Scally- Clarke after a seminar delivered by her during a Drama for Social Change module.
8. Drawing from empirical research at Story Makers and her own PhD, in our final paper, *Creative Possibilities*, **Lisa Stephenson**, articulates the role of agentic learning through drama and creative writing as foundations for the development of the Story Makers Company and Press.

To cite working papers from this issue please use the following format: Author surname, author initial (2018), Paper title, pages x-xx, Story Makers Dialogues [1], Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

Story Makers Press: Disrupting Aetonormativity by Positioning Children as Authors

by Tom Dobson

In a recent review of literary criticism relating to children's literature, Beauvais (2018) demonstrates how literary criticism tends to articulate the power that the adult writer has over the child reader. As Beauvais explains, whilst other forms of literary criticism have focused upon the reader as the meaning making, the fact that children's literature is written by adults means that literary critics are often beguiled into describing the ways in which the child reader is constructed by the adult writer. As Hunt puts it: "the writers and manipulators of children's books are adults; books are the makers of meaning for their readers, and the readers are children" (1994, p.2). For Knowles and Malmkjaer, this manipulation of the child reader is the ideological purpose of children's literature, which they see as a particularly effective agent in promoting "the acceptance by the child of customs, institutions and hierarchies" (1996, p.44).

Beauvais, however, problematises what she sees as an often simplistic view of the way which power is seen to operate through children's literature. In doing so she adopts Nikolajeva's (2010) concept of 'aetonormativity' – a view that it is adults' perceptions of what is normal which patterns children's literature. With the aim of attempting to save aetonormativity from becoming synonymous with power in literary criticism, Beauvais (2018) suggests that there are in fact a number of 'powers' at play in children's literature and that these are not necessarily one-directional, from adult to child. She highlights, in particular, the power of 'authority' and how 'authority' takes many forms and is often transgressed and repositioned by child readers. Equally, explaining the etymology of the French word for power ('pouvoir'), Beauvais highlights how power is linked to potential and how, regardless of authorial intention, future meanings of texts can change (what she calls 'might').

The idea of 'might' in children's literature is in part based on the fact that unlike other theories of power in literature which involve the self colonising the other (e.g. feminism, postcolonialism), aetonormativity has to acknowledge that the adult was once a child too. The fiction text, therefore, always already presents the 'might' for patterns not deemed normative by adult cultures to take hold. The 'might' in children's literature also includes reader response theories as a fiction text will always already be interpreted differently by the child reader, who necessarily constructs their own meaning. According to Brown and Brooks (2012), reader response theories in relation to children's literature often involves adult critics homogenising children's responses to texts as they fail to take into account cultural contextual factors which actually result in the child reader making their own meaning. Brown and Brooks (2012) call this cultural context a child's 'homeplace' and illustrate through children's responses to a range of fiction texts how homeplace helps children make meaning through four key dimensions – their ethnicity, their community, their family and their peers.

Taken together, notions of the range of powers involved in aetonormativity, including authority, aligned with a child's idiosyncratic, culturally informed response, seem to justify Rudd's earlier, sensitive view of textual meaning making as occurring "in the space between the constructed and the constructive" (2005, p. 23). What these positions do not take into account, however, is the possibility of authorship itself as a site shared by adults and children. If children were to have a degree of authorship in the writing of children's literature, the children involved would surely gain in authority and this would, in turn, have the potential to alter the ways in which the fiction text was patterned, as adults' views of normativity would no longer be pervasive. The co-authorship of texts by children and

adults is a central principle of our new and innovative publishing house, Story Maker Press (SMP). Housed within the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University, SMP's first publication is set for release in June 2019 and, like future publications, will involve children at each stage of the publishing process, acknowledging them as part of a collective of authors.

The idea of writing texts with children came from my PhD thesis (Dobson, 2014) where as a teacher-writer I created a 'community of writers' (Cremin and Myhill, 2012) with 11 year old children to co-construct texts. What emerged were 'hybrid' texts (Bakhtin, 1981) and elsewhere (Dobson, 2015) I discuss how in a community of writers the children would always respond differently to my writing. Thinking about this difference, I drew on another of Bakhtin's ideas, the superaddressee (1986). For Bakhtin, the superaddressee is the ideal reader of a text, someone who will respond just as the writer intended. Whilst new criticism renders the actual existence of the superaddressee impossible, the idea became useful to me as way of thinking about the extent to which the children in the writing of their stories apprehended what I perceived at the time to be my superaddressee as they responded to my writing. In short, what became clear to me was that children writers would always already replace my superaddressee with their own superaddressees, creating fictional worlds and characters I could not have anticipated. The hybrid texts that emerged were not only creative and original, but they also disrupted aetonormativity, with the construction of texts which captured the ways in which children experience their worlds.

SMP's first publication will focus on gaming – a cultural world which is largely constructed by children rather than adults. In writing this story, we are working with 16 children aged between 8 and 11 years, who are broadly in line with the middle grade readership of the book. Whilst the school is in an area of lower social economic status, the children come from different socio economic backgrounds and ethnicities and their homeplaces, therefore, vary. That said, the children all express an interest in and experience of gaming, which they bring to the workshop sessions we are running with them. These workshops are run through process drama – a child centred pedagogy which utilises drama conventions to facilitate children actively co-constructing meaning as they fluidly move between the roles of authors, actors, directors and audience (Edmiston, 2003), constructing the world of the protagonist and the gaming world they play.

This process and how it is being negotiated and framed by us as facilitators will be explored in future academic publications. At this point, however, it is worth giving an example of how involving children in authorship can serve to disrupt aetonormativity. Based within the Carnegie School of Education, SMP is aligned to our five research centres and seeks to explore and represent marginalised issues and childhoods in a way that is research informed. Accordingly, in discussion with our centre of Excellence for Mental Health, we are informed by research into the effects of social media and gaming on children in relation to mental health. Whilst such research often aims to take a balanced view, the headlines generated are often predominantly negative. Interestingly, some of these negative effects – sleeplessness, depression, antisocial behaviour – were also shared with us at the start of this process by the children's teachers. When running the workshops, however, the children themselves were excited and wholly positive about gaming and were keen to share with us their experiences and use these experiences to inform the story we were making. In utilising the children's ideas to write the first draft of the story, therefore, we realised that what we were constructing was a story about the positive effects of gaming – the ways in which it could develop skills, feed the imagination and ultimately help resolve considerable issues at home. As adult authors, we felt the need to apply aetonormativity by adding touches to the text, for example representing the protagonist as tired at school, which suggested that too much gaming could be problematic. That said, the story at the moment definitely disrupts aetonormativity in its depiction of gaming and it is difficult to imagine the story being written in this way without the children having authority as authors.

As well as seeking to capture this process of writing with children in order to think about the effect that children authoring has upon the meaning and patterns of texts, we are of course also interested

in the ways in which our texts are received by child and adult readers. To start with child readers, it will be interesting to think about how the child authors feel about the final text – how engaged they are and the extent to which they are the text's superaddressees. For other child readers, it will be interesting to explore the 'might' of the story and think about whether the story speaks for them and what the relationship is between their response and their respective homeplaces. For the adult readers, it will be interesting to explore the extent to which the story makes them think differently about children's lives and, conversely, it will also be interesting to find out how they feel about the way future childhoods might be constructed by the text.

The first SMP publication is due to be launched on the 8th June 2019 at the Story Makers Conference. At the moment it is entitled *The Warden Tree* (but this may change depending upon what the collective of children and adults decide).

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Parents as partners when working alongside very young, preverbal children

A practitioner-researcher's journey by Jessica Patricia Gosling

Abstract

I conducted a small-scale practitioner-research project to develop my pedagogical understanding of guided interactions within early years education. I identified three distinct phases within my inquiry. Initially I had focused on improving my interactions with children using Vygotskian pedagogy of guiding a child within a task. However I came to realise the limitations of this approach, therefore within the second phase I explored sociocultural understandings of a child reflective of their historical, cultural, familial and social experiences. Further, I gained confidence as a researcher, creating frequent dialogue with parents to better tailor my interactions. I embraced narrative inquiry as I began 'thinking narratively' and storying each experience. The final phase of the inquiry was pivotal, where the focus shifted from exploring pedagogy to exploring other's perspectives of an interaction. I shared my narratives with parents, who offered valuable sociocultural feedback. Their perspectives both validated and challenged my interpretations, illustrating the limitations of a singular practitioner's perspective of a child's intentions. The inquiry changed my outlook as a practitioner. I came to understand, in addition to practitioner knowledge, contextual understandings as well situational factors contributed to developing the pedagogy of a guided interaction. I therefore recognised the significance of the role of parents as partners when developing understandings of young, preverbal children within the educative process. I argue that such a partnership is fundamental in developing both pedagogy and curriculum to closely match a young child's individual needs.

Case Study: A practitioner-researcher's journey in narrative inquiry

Central to the Master's inquiry remained the 'case' of a practitioner-researcher seeking to improve practice and supporting learning through improved pedagogy (Doyle, 2007). The inquiry was an attempt to "bridge the gap" between theory and practice (West, 2011, p.89). I constructed a narrative inquiry as both a 'phenomenon' and 'methodology', a way of thinking about and storying experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p.375). I wanted an "insider" perspective therefore I worked alongside my participants in shared experiences. Through the course of three phases, I developed my methods to create an inquiry which encouraged collaboration, fulfilling a central tenet of narrative inquiry.

The Setting

My class, 'learning preschool' was established as a 'step' towards pre-school for 1-2 year old children and their caregivers in Vietnam. The curriculum was based within the British EYFS framework (DFE, 2017) with a purposeful focus on child-led play. The class took place in a large activity room above a café.

Methodology

This small-scale inquiry evolved over the course of thirteen weeks as concepts, methods, analysis and interpretations emerged (Robert-Holmes, 2006). The study centred on three individual children, or 'case studies'. For the focus of this paper I concentrate on a pivotal point in the inquiry which I

identify as 'Phase 3' within the case study of Thomas.

During 'Phase 1' of the inquiry, I wrote several autobiographic and ethnographic-style narratives. These were based on participant observation, verbal and written feedback from parents which had focused on aspects of the interaction. I led a semi-structured interview for each adult participant.

'Phase 2' marked a transition towards a more collaborative inquiry. I established a naturalistic two-way dialogue with parents, in addition to sharing frequent insights via email which included a 'story' of their child's experiences within the setting. I began to "think narratively" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.21), creating and recreating stories in "the midst" (Huber *et al.*, 2013, p.227). During this stage I applied sociocultural understandings.

Within 'Phase 3' my research was further co-constructed as narratives were shared, edited and discussed in detail alongside adult participants. Through this further triangulation of evidence, the inquiry was more valid, accurate and insightful as several interpretations and perspectives were explored (Robert-Holmes, 2006) which I could learn from. Through sharing the narratives with parents I lessened the ethical problem of imbalanced power relationships (Doyle, 2007) as parents were empowered as we created final research texts (Hart, 1995).

Case Study - Thomas

Situated within Phase 3, Thomas' mother, Hilol, had provided a detailed analysis of one interaction which substantially differed to my own. Our dual interpretations transformed the focus of the inquiry toward the necessity of constructing understandings of a child alongside a parent. The following narrative set forth an applied personal understanding of the ontology of social constructivism: as researchers both Hilol and I constructed an interpretation of Thomas's reality. Further, I therefore experienced interpretivism in practice: reality as a process of construction by individuals. I understood how digital recordings, when shared, could produce multiple interpretations of an event. This marked a development of epistemology which was crucial to my inquiry, providing a depth to the narrative I had not yet experienced. In addition, by combining interpretations, I genuinely attempted to account for Thomas' 'voice' within the narrative.

19th January - Bus

Previously when Thomas had played with the bus shape-sorter, he had focused on putting the animals in the back of the bus. I thought I would try to 'scaffold' his learning to show how to match the animals to the correct shape. He loved vehicles and I wondered if I could pique his interest in this activity.

In order to give you an understanding of Thomas's fascination with buses, I need to write an explanation. It began very early in his life, back in the U.K we lived in a very quiet suburb town, there were lots of trees and mainly sounds of nature, wind, rain etc. The only other noise was that of a bus going past our home every 30 minutes. I cannot remember exactly how old he was but, he would be very excited as a tiny baby when he heard the noise. As he grew up and I began showing him what that noise was, he was fascinated by this huge red bus that went past every day, it would even wake him up. His first word was Bus. His first toy was a bus and it's a type of comforter for him. It must be with him when he goes to sleep and when he has a meltdown. The relevance of a bus is huge in his world.

We begin playing with the expanding ball, calling big and small. Thomas was so excited he wanted to hold it and jumped up and down. He smiled broadly when I put my face close to the ball calling 'peek-a-boo', viewing him through a hole. He took it from my hands and looked like he wanted to play. But then he spotted Bus...

I was playing big and small with Ms. Jess. She played peek-a-boo with me. She held my ball and I pulled it away.

As more time passes, I notice that Thomas becomes increasingly confident with you and is happy to play without me being present. The peekaboo game and expanding ball are 2 things we have played in your class and at another toddler group.

“The bus!” cried Thomas and moved toward it. His fingers whitened as he grasped the bonnet tightly, pulling it away from Rachel.

“Hey hey!” He shouted angrily as Rachel continued to play with it. I showed some of the animals to add into the bus as an attempt to distract him, he was initially interested. He looked at them on the floor but with one hand protecting Bus. Then when Rachel joined in, Thomas pulled Bus back with force and shouted, “No...it’s mine!” He gripped tightly to Bus and one finger pointed accusingly at Rachel.

I want to play with Bus. Rachel has it. I tell her hey hey. I pull it. My toy. I point at her Ms. Jess she is taking it from me.

Interestingly, he looked to you to take the bus away from Rachel, he clearly sees you hold authority in this situation. Thomas would usually look for me.

“She’s ok she can do it too” I say very calmly. I know how to speak with Thomas as he responds well to a soft tone, he does not like touching to re-assure.

Thomas calms and looks at one of the animals. He accepts an animal I hand to him, whilst Rachel tries to put the animals in the holes. Thomas puts the animal in the back of the bus, where there is a door.

“That’s a big opening, isn’t it, that’s a quick way to put them in Thomas isn’t it?” I say and he responds, “Yes”.

I am doing the quick way of getting all the animals in the bus.

I do not think Thomas says the word “Yes” as it’s not a word in his vocabulary yet, I agree his body language says yes. It is hard to listen to all of the words in the video clip as it is a noisy room.

I say, “This is what we can do, let me show you. It’s a cat!”

He looks at the bus to see where I put the cat. He pushes it in the cat hole. “You did it” I say. He looks around excitedly, scanning the floor for the next animal. We work together in this shared learning episode. I don’t want to pressure Thomas as I see he is a little agitated as he keeps looking across to Rachel.

Rachel tries to lift the bus away and Thomas pulls it back so I put it back down centrally. Thomas is becoming frantic and less focused. He tries to find a hole briefly for the crocodile then adds it to the back of Bus.

“Here’s a little pig, Thomas”, Thomas doesn’t look up, still searching for animals but replies, “Yeah...”

Rachel continues to try to put the animals in the appropriate holes. Then she pulls it away again as Thomas tries to put one animal in the back.

“Share Rachel!” warns Rachel’s nanny.

Thomas grabs Bus. “Nooo...nooo” he cries in an escalated tone, holding tightly to Bus. I feel the situation keeps escalating, the interaction feels uncomfortable.

Rachel takes Bus again. I pull it back. I want to play with it my way.

“Let’s put it here in the middle” I say.

“Thomas are you ok?” I ask.

“It’s there”, Thomas says indicating to Rachel’s hand, face screwed in frustration.

“Noo noo...” Thomas pulls back on Bus, becoming distressed that Rachel is trying to block some of the animal holes with her hand. I remove her hand gently.

“its there” is usually a term Thomas says on repeat when he feels as if he is threatened or uncomfortable, if he was even more distressed he would have started to hit his face, which he didn’t. I’m not certain he is at his extremely high state of distress through the video. You manage to divert his attention and also he’s focused on the task but also he is concentrating on what Rachel may do next to take the bus away from him.

“It’s ok, it’s ok” I say. I hand him another animal and he physically calms down. He puts it through the large opening quickly. I hand one to Rachel, “And where are you going to put this one?” I ask. She tries again one of the holes on top. Thomas closes the back door of Bus.

“Is it all finished now, is it closed?” I ask. *I’d like this to finish.*

“Naay nee” Thomas replies and looks around the bus and I say, “There’s some more here...” I can see Thomas wants to continue this activity as he searches for more animals.

Thomas holds the monkey and looks briefly along Bus to find its place. He doesn’t see it so opens the back door to add the animal to the back. He closes the door.

Ms. Jess gives me monkey and I look at it. I put it in the back again, my quick way.

My reflections

After watching the footage several times I see how although Thomas was developing his ability to interact with a peer, the interaction in this case wasn’t helpful for him. It actually may have hindered his ability to persevere with a new learning point. Thomas was protective over the bus and he constantly defended it. After the teaching point Thomas tried to find an appropriate hole for the animal, but then he needed to protect Bus again. Thomas had very clear ideas about his purpose in the task and was happy to interact with the teacher.

Hilol’s reflections

I disagree that Rachel was a hindrance in this situation. I think Thomas really wanted play with her and the bus but was having some sort of inner conflict. Although it may seem he didn’t want Rachel involved, I believe that he would’ve just walked away with the Bus [if he didn’t want her involved]. He didn’t, he tried very hard to stay and play but was constantly feeling threatened. I think his friendship/relationship with Rachel is interesting as it’s competitive. He often competes with her for your attention

during circle time. This is quite different to Alice, who he plays with happily. I wonder if there was some sort of behaviour from Thomas to attempt to show you (as a person in a place of authority) that he has the ability to do what you want him to?

I was grateful that my chosen epistemology had supported an alternative perspective, with a different emphasis. Collaborating when re-creating the narrative had produced a more developed, rich and accurate final field text. I understood the necessity of a reflexive approach to pinpoint certain assumptions and bias within this narrative (Rolfe, 2001). I had felt Thomas was struggling to interact with a peer, whilst Hilol’s interpretation emphasised how this significant cultural/emotional artifact had caused conflict within a social interaction. In addition, I show bias at what I prioritised within an interaction as a practitioner, as I focused on Thomas being able to work on a learning goal. Hilol understood that the benefit of this interaction was that Thomas was beginning to play alongside another. With an emphasis on these new understandings, I could develop subsequent activities for collaborative work, involving a less significant cultural tool. I were to re-write this narrative applying both perspectives, our interpretations would be more like this:

Practitioner	Mother
<p>Thomas: I want to play with Bus. Rachel has it. I tell her hey hey. I pull it. My toy. I point at her Ms. Jess she is taking it from me.</p>	<p>Thomas: I want to play with her. She has Bus. Hey hey don’t hold bus. I want it. I want to play but I want bus. She’s taking bus. I don’t know what to do.</p>

Finalising the inquiry

As my inquiry came to an end, I reflected on how my research had become collaborative and more reflexive. My interactions had progressed towards greater sensitivity when following a child’s cues in addition to seeking understanding of their lives through contextualisation (Morrow and Richards, 1996). I understood how children lived within “two worlds” as places of curriculum making, the home and setting, which as adults we ask them to move between on a daily basis (Huber, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, I believe it is a practitioner’s role to understand both worlds to create appropriate pedagogy. I developed new directions of working alongside children and parents as a teacher. During the process of the inquiry my ontology developed to understand interactions as a shared experience between the child, the parent and myself.

My epistemology developed as the parents and I negotiated the interpretations to produce as realistic and accurate an account of the experience as possible. These interpretations were discussed, expanded upon, explained, confirmed and in one case, refuted. Therefore, the traditional roles within the inquiry redefined through the phases. Together we attempted to interpret the gestures and actions of preverbal, young children. This dialogic collaboration provided great insight into a child’s sociocultural behaviours. Often the discussion supported understandings of pedagogy, in addition to creating a genuine interests-led curriculum and resourcing. I was so glad I identified the need for parent collaboration early in the inquiry, as my original starting point had not valued the need for parental involvement to this degree. I identified that certain behaviour(s) and actions of a child were deeply interrelated with their ‘outside’ class experiences, often developed alongside the parent. The research also supported parent participants’ understanding of child-led play and pedagogy.

In the dual role as practitioner-researcher, I become even more absorbed within sociocultural activity and the subsequent analysis than I had as practitioner, which led to enhanced understandings of effective interactions. Through the rich, detailed case studies I became aware of my place as a small piece of the child’s learning puzzle. The setting, the environment, resourcing and peers all had their

part within the success or failure of an interaction. I will use these new understandings to develop early parent/practitioner relations within my future workplace. Future studies could facilitate further discussion within schools regarding the necessity of establishing joint interpretations of a child from key individuals both inside and outside of a school.

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Are Faeries Real?

by Andrew Wilkinson

*Help us
We are fading fast
We need your help
Without you our way of
life will disappear and
never be seen again.
Without us, the forest
will wither and change
forever.
Can you help?*

One warm Sunday afternoon in September, my then nine-year-old daughter and I visited a patch of woodland near to my school in order to do a risk assessment. I wanted to take my class there to immerse them in an imaginary world. I planned to help them to create and participate in a whole class drama set in the forest, learn about trees and plants, find out about the impact of deforestation and discover more about themselves by doing some outdoor learning. I did not have any clear narrative ideas - I needed inspiration and help. What happened next, amid the list of potential risks and plans to mitigate against them, was a lesson in how to let a story unfold without holding onto it too tightly.

On first inspection, part of the woodland looked like it had been smashed up by giants. Through conversation and a few questions, my daughter came up with a complicated narrative about a group of giants who had been put under a spell by an angry witch. They had been sent to the woods to take the 'heartstone' from the faeries who lived there. They also had orders to kidnap one of the faeries - the witch's very own great, great, great, great, great, great grandson.

Soon, my daughter and I were searching through the woodland, looking for the place where the 'heartstone' would have been kept and other evidence of faerie existence that they had left behind. She couldn't decide on a satisfactory reason as to why the witch had taken the 'heartstone' or kidnapped a member of her own kin. What she did decide however, was if the 'heartstone' was not returned, then the souls of all the faeries (who were now trapped inside it) would fade away and disappear forever.

With a completed risk assessment and a narrative start, we left for home. I felt happy - I could go into school, put my children into role as dwellers in the forest, take them to the woods and set them off with a problem to solve.

What unfolded over the next 10 weeks was something that as a teacher I will never forget. As far as the overarching narrative for the story we were making goes, for large parts I never felt like I was ever more than one step ahead of the children. We all knew that we were dealing with a terrible character and the consequences of not sorting things out would be catastrophic (having imprisoned and all but wiped out an entire species of faerie, the witch had also started a devastating campaign of

deforestation. The stakes were high!)

We were all in it together, asking real questions with genuine curiosity and a vested interest in the answers. Are all witches wicked? Are people born wicked? What makes people wicked and do dreadful things? We had powerful dialogic discussions and children questioned one another and put forth their points of view.

The discussion that held the key to what we should do next was prompted by the following simple question and response from a group of children in the class:

Q. What should we do with the wicked witch?

A. Find her and kill her!

Grab your pitchforks everyone - let's go!

Many of the children felt deeply uncomfortable with this outcome. After all, real life is not that simple. This was real life: she might not always have been wicked; something could have happened to her that made her heart evil; perhaps she had a history that we could explore. Maybe this would be the key to saving the faeries, the forest and at the same time rescuing the witch from a life of wickedness.

And so, the narrative plan was back on - she was not always wicked. In fact, once upon a time, she was a faerie herself and a guardian of the forest. An accident with an owl resulted in her losing her wings. Her fellow faerie folk cast her out as their superstitious beliefs stated that wingless faeries bring bad luck upon the tribe. Consequently, she wandered through the forest storing up her anger and animosity, letting it twist her faerie magic into something dark and sinister. Now we knew what we were dealing with, we could formulate a plan.

All we had to do next was to locate her and find that chink of light inside her shadowy, rotten and twisted heart. We had to recreate her past and show her the life she once lived as a guardian of the forest and then convince her to change her ways. We had to teach her what we knew about plants and woodlands, taking responsibility, seeking and accepting forgiveness and looking for ways to put right the wrongs she had done.

At the same time, we had to remind ourselves that life is not always easy or straight forward. We talked about the importance of having hope and faith that things can change if you back yourself and persevere. We discussed how you should not give up on others and how creating and maintaining a dialogue is often the hardest thing to do. We questioned one another and decided that building bridges is better than putting up walls. It worked! In this way we were able to rescue the faeries, save our forest from a deforestation catastrophe and help the witch rediscover her true self. It felt great. In hindsight, there was no way as a teacher I could have planned for these outcomes at the very beginning. What I wanted was a story set in the woods through which we could explore plant science and deforestation in the rainforest. To begin with I had the woods, a wicked witch and some missing faeries. By the end, the children's engagement, energy, creativity and imagination gave the narrative legs and a life of its own. Through collaborating with the children in my class, by having a structure loose enough to give me some wiggle room, and by keeping a keen eye on the sort of children we want our school to send out into the world, I had a group of children who were working their socks off with great compassion.

They were focussed on saving not just themselves and the faeries who were suffering alongside them, but also the witch who was inflicting pain on others through her own suffering. After the final episode in the drama, when we had all stepped out of role and were reflecting on what had happened, one of the children turned to me and with great conviction asked, "So, are faeries real?" Wondering how to answer the question, I looked at her and replied, "It all feels real to me. What do you think?"

Fanfiction as a Form of Cultural Participation for Children and Young People

By Laura Bolton

Culture refers to the “practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society” (Hall, 1996, p. 439) and is constructed through shared social meanings that give us the tools to be able to interpret and understand the world around us. Meaning is generated through signs and symbols, of which language is perhaps one of the most prominent. Language is able to give meaning to the social practices within society, the tools which play a role in the formation of meanings in such a way are referred to as signifying systems or practices (Barker and Jane, 2016). Cultural texts are another way in which meaning can be generated and understood, this refers not only to the written texts that are produced but also includes imagery, objects and artistic productions (Barker and Jane, 2016).

Power plays an important role in the formation of meanings within culture and this is no different in the case of creating children’s cultural worlds. Power pervades every level of social relationships and as a result influences the interactions that take place and the way that meaning is created depends on the views held by the structures and institutions within society that hold the most power (Ball, 2013). Children as a group are considered to have little power in many contexts and as a result find themselves positioned as passive in the creation of their own culture. Their lack of power affords them little agency to be active participants when it comes to their own lives which in turn means that they may find themselves being passive consumers of culture being able to actively contribute to the formation of their own cultural texts and cultures (Cumming, 2017).

Perhaps one of the major sources of cultural texts within children’s cultures is the large market of literature that exists aimed exclusively at children. Such texts play an important role in children’s understandings of both culture and society as they act as a way for them to interpret and understand the world around them (Barker and Jane, 2016). The overwhelming majority of children’s literature is written and produced by adults, meaning that children have no voice or agency in their own literature (Cumming, 2017). Adult production of children’s literature also acts as a way for adults to retain power by being able to regulate the content which children and young people are exposed to through the literature they consume, shielding them from adult issues in the hopes of protecting them from potential harm (Duggan, 2017). The rise of new media technologies and the prevalence of the internet have given children and young people the opportunity to create their own texts away from adult supervision and the institutions that control children’s literature (Duggan, 2017, Tosenberger, 2008). Fanfiction is a prime example of how young people are able to create their own texts, and in recent years the production of youth authored fanfictions has increased exponentially as more young people discover and engage with the online communities centred around various fanfictions (Tosenberger, 2014). Fanfiction refers to stories that utilise the characters, settings and content from existing cultural texts and as the name suggests are written by fans of such works (Tosenberger, 2008). The popularity of young adult fiction in the literary world has made franchises such as ‘Harry Potter’, ‘Twilight’ and ‘The Hunger Games’ all popular sources of inspiration for fanfiction. The online communities of fans act as affinity spaces where young people are able to engage with each other and collaborate in the production of works such as fanfiction through their shared emotional investment as fans of the original works (Ash, 2013). This not only helps with building online communities and friendships, but it also acts as a form of peer evaluation through which young people are able to improve their skills within the safety of these supportive online communities (Ash, 2013).

The content of young adult fiction has shifted in recent years to include more representation, but the majority of young adult fiction still tends to tell the stories of white, cisgendered, heterosexual characters above all else (Green, 2014). Fanfiction offers the perfect opportunity for children and

young people to engage with remix culture as they are able to take the original texts and manipulate them, using creative methods to reimagine them as entirely new works of fiction (Ash, 2013). Fanfiction is often dismissed in terms of its credibility as literature because it is the reimaging of already popular texts, but its popularity amongst youth cultures cannot be ignored as it is a major contributor to children's cultural worlds and the literature that they themselves are able to create (Tosenberger, 2017). With fanfiction the possibilities are endless, and this can be seen in the vast quantities of different stories that are being produced, from the creation of new relationships between existing characters within a fictional universe to cross overs that see popular texts coming together to form entirely new stories, young people are able to push the boundaries and experiment through writing fanfiction with no restrictions (Tosenberger, 2008).

Remixing is often used not only to imagine characters in new situations but to introduce representations that were omitted from the originals. One of the most popular subsections of fanfiction as a genre is slash fanfictions in which authors introduce representations of non-heterosexual romantic pairings. This genre first arose in the 1970's within the community of Star Trek fans who were producing their own fanfictions, since then slash fanfictions have grown in popularity as despite the acceptance of LGBT identities within society they are still offered very few opportunities for representation as a group so young people have taken it upon themselves to create their own examples of representation (Duggan, 2017).

Harry Potter is one of the most successful examples of children's literature to the point where it crossed over the constraints of the child market to also become hugely popular amongst adults. Having sold over 500 million copies since the series began it is unsurprising that this has resulted in there being a vast amount of Harry Potter fanfiction that is readily available for Potter fans to engage with (Pottermore, 2018). An advantage of Harry Potter when it comes to the creation of fanfiction is that there is a large and complex fictional universe that can be drawn upon and within that hundreds of characters exist meaning the possibilities are endless with the only constraints being author creativity (Haugtvedt, 2009). Perhaps the most common theme within fanfictions created by teens is the focus on romantic pairings, and Harry Potter is no exception to this trend. 'Shipping' is a term that is commonly used within fan cultures and refers to an emotional investment in wanting two characters to be involved in a romantic relationship with each other, fanfiction is a way of being able to explore the pairings that do not exist within the original texts (Reagan, 2018, Tosenberger, 2008). Many of the popular 'ships' within the Harry Potter fan community lie within the slash category, which could be because within the original texts there are only heterosexual relationships, so with no representation of other romantic relationships fans are using the characters they know and love to create their own examples of representation (Duggan, 2017).

Not only does much of children's literature show limited representations of for example LGBT characters and issues, the adults creating it are able to censor themes such as sex which may be deemed as controversial to include in literature made for consumption by children and young people (McLelland, 2017). This is another reason why fanfiction is so popular with young people as it allows them to explore and express their thoughts and feelings on subjects such as sex which are deemed as being taboo.

This raises the question of suitability though and whether the unmoderated or peer moderated ways in which many fanfiction sites are curated is in fact safe and is offering enough protection to the young people who they serve. A recurring concern in regard to the internet is the fact that it takes away the ability for adults to monitor the content which young people have access to, meaning that it is very likely that they will be exposed to adult themes and content (Elliot, 2010). The fact that such themes and content are readily available in texts and other peer produced materials may be of some concern because fan forums and affinity spaces are generally considered to be safe spaces for expression, however this also includes expressions of mature themes and so-called taboo subjects (Ash, 2013). One way that this has been addressed by the online communities is through the use of content warnings, whilst in online sites for fanfiction have acknowledged the freedom for their users

to write about any topic they have introduced content warnings as a way for viewers to be able to use their own discretion when it comes to the content they engage with (Lothian, 2016). Such warnings include age guidance on fanfictions with mature content as well as indicators of any themes such as abuse and mental illness which could be triggering and act as a way for individuals to protect themselves online (Lothian, 2016).

Another criticism of fanfiction comes from those who do not understand its true purpose and acknowledge it as an artform within its own right, instead describing it as nothing more than plagiarism (Burns and Webber, 2009). The roots of fanfiction are grounded in a love and deep connection with the original source materials and is a way for young people amongst other fans to express this by remixing and using it to inform their own cultures. Even though the content may be borrowed from existing texts there is still a great deal of work that goes into writing fanfictions that should not be written off because it is a reimagining rather than original content (Tosenberger, 2014). Fanfiction is also often dismissed because of its 'unpublishability', official publication is often viewed as the end goal when it comes to producing literature, Tosenberger points out that the reason why fanfictions written by young people are unpublishable has nothing to do with the quality of the writing, or the age of these young authors it is instead due to the fact that fanfiction at its very core is so deeply embedded within individual fan cultures that often they make very little sense to those who do not share the same passion for the original texts (2014). This is what makes fanfictions unique, in a way they are love letters to the original texts, a way for young people to engage with cultural texts and produce new ones whilst showing their appreciation and emotional connections they have made with the original versions (Haugtvedt, 2009).

The rise of the internet and new media technologies have afforded children and young people with the ability to engage with and produce cultural texts like never before and one way in which this can be seen is through fanfictions (Ash, 2013). Fanfictions are a way for children and young people to remix existing cultural texts for their own cultural production, and with the freedom granted to them by the internet allows for this to take place in safe affinity spaces away from adult control and supervision (Duggan, 2017). One of the appeals of fanfiction as a form is that the possibilities are endless and with nothing off limits young people are able to explore themes and create scenarios for themselves that they are unable to find in other cultural texts (Toseneberger, 2008). The remixing of children's literature in the creation of fanfiction is not done in rebellion against the children's literature that is being produced by adults for their consumption, instead could be regarded as a way for children and young people to show their appreciation for such stories whilst giving them the chance to express their own interpretations (Haugtvedt, 2009).

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In the Woods with Key Stage 1:

Exploring the Intergenerational Co-construction of Imaginary Worlds

by John Mee and Liz Taylor, with additional material from Martin Riley and support from Tom Dobson

Abstract

Although the current Primary National Curriculum in England (DfE, 2013) does not refer specifically to the teaching or development of drama during the primary years, it hints at a range of conventions such as those proposed by Readman (2007). In this paper we examine how Alive And Kicking in partnership with St Philip's Primary School in Leeds commissions young children and some of their parents to use the mantle of the expert (Heathcote, 2002) to create a hybrid version of drama in which conventions are employed to address a central focus. A highly participatory immersion in the as-if, in real time and eventually in a real wood, In The Woods is a two term investigation for 44 Year 2 children who are trained and ready to face the challenge of saving the woods from the clutches of Old Man Winter's Gang. This paper examines how process drama contextualizes the action in imaginary worlds set up by the drama practitioner and developed and recreated by the children in collaboration with their parents and teachers. Working from incomplete narratives towards negotiated moments where children and adults meet fictional challenges together and co-construct imaginary worlds, we demonstrate how children can take charge with adults placed in a supporting role. We argue that commissioning children to address a problem like that of In The Woods encourages adults to collaborate and experiment and to move away from leading while the children are released to show the wayforward.

Current Policy Context and the Importance of Creativity through Drama

Unlike other previous national curriculum documents, the Primary National Curriculum in England (DfE, 2013) does not refer specifically to the teaching or development of drama during the primary years. Reference is made to, 'participation in presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates,' (DfE 2013 p17) but this hardly covers the breadth and value that process drama brings to the curriculum and more importantly, the children's enjoyment of it. Drama works right across the multiple strands of child development. Situations are created, adventures developed, events investigated, problems addressed, decisions made, stories invented and roles adopted - all working in what has long been called 'the as-if'.



School Context

The beneficiaries of this project, the children, parents and staff, are from St Philip's, an inner-city, Catholic primary school in south Leeds. It serves a mixed area of re-generation and huge council housing estates, many of which are now owner occupied or privately rented.

The Middleton Park Ward, in which the school is situated, is still considered to be one of the ten per cent most deprived in the country. However, academic achievement at the end of key stage two is usually above that of the national average and the OFSTED findings for the past ten years have rated the school as good, with outstanding for behaviour and moral, social, cultural and spiritual education. Fifty-eight percent of children are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds with fifty-four percent of these speaking English as an additional language. Although decreasing, the number of children eligible for pupil premium funding (and therefore considered, 'deprived'), is higher than the national average whilst children with special educational needs or disabilities are broadly inline.

On average, ninety-nine percent of children are represented at parent consultation evenings. Many parents attend regular Friday morning assemblies and events such as sports day and workshop evenings (organised to support parents in their knowledge of the demands of the curriculum and how it is taught). Classroom volunteers have declined over the past ten years because of the need to seek work once the children are in school. The invitation to parents to be a part of this project was given not knowing what the response would be!

Importance of Parental Involvement/Literature Search

The impact of parental involvement is well researched and documented and according to the DCSF (2003): 'Parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.' It is widely acknowledged that parents play a unique and crucial role as their children's first educators. This is perhaps most apparent in the early years, with projects such as the Mosaic Approach (Clarke 2017) and the Pen Green Approach (Whalley 2017), with their 'knowledge sharing' mantra being two examples. Harris and Goodall (2008) drew the conclusion that it was parents' involvement with home learning that had far more of an impact in terms of attainment results than parents being involved in the school setting itself.



Although there is a plethora of literature surrounding different aspects of this project, for example children themselves co-constructing stories (Paley 1990), no evidence could be found of the intergenerational aspects of co-construction of imaginary worlds between children and their parents. As such, this research breaks new ground. Fortunately, many parents showed a keen interest and three, who are mentioned in this paper, remained involved throughout the whole process.

Project Design

The project, designed as a commission in Heathcote's (2002) terms, took place over a five-month period with Alive And Kicking Theatre Company (AAK) working with 44 Year 2 children, staff and a group of parents for seven sessions, including a fifth day which took place *In The Woods*.

In line with the lack of research into the intergenerational co-construction of imaginary worlds through process drama, this project had three interrelated aims, which were to:

1. Explore the ways in which children and their parents co-construct imaginary worlds;
1. Articulate what practitioners can do to help facilitate the intergenerational construction of imaginary worlds;
1. Identify what impact this creative intergenerational pedagogy has in terms of children's engagement and creative writing.

The key to the design of the *In The Woods* world is Tom Wayfinder, a character with a question, a dilemma and a quest who needs the children's help, a man who is looking for a place to call home. When he finds it *In the Woods*, there's trouble, and the only ones who can help are the children. They are important. They are at the drama's centre. Their quest is to help The Wild Man Of The Woods to defeat his enemies – Lady Lackleaf, Jack Frost and Old Man Winter. Before they travel to the woods to complete their mission Tom trains them up. He puts them in some of the places where he has been, trying their hand at imagining and bringing to life those worlds in their own way, solving for themselves the dilemmas that he faced. The development of the action in Tom's story and later in their own stories belongs to them and is supported by their parents.

At times everyone undertook drama activities together; at other times they were split into their classes. Participating parents attended their own children's class, but for pedagogical reasons parents were often asked to work in groups with children other than their own. As a finale for children, parents and school staff an exhibition celebrated the work. All were invited to experience interactive moments as well as slide shows, videos, creative writing and artwork.

The project involved a number of participants: 5 AAK practitioners; 44 Year 2 children; 2 teachers and 2 teaching assistants; the headteacher and 8 parents. Of the 8 parents, 3 attended regularly and this meant we were able to capture more data relating to these three. In this paper we focus upon the ways in which these 3 parents participated. Some background information about the parents is listed in Table 1.

Parent 1	35	Black African	CCTV operator	Daughter in class
Parent 2	32	White British	Specialist Practitioner (Children's Nurse)	Daughter in class
Parent 3	27	White British	Full time mum	Daughter in class

Table 1: Information about participating parents

All participants were recruited following Leeds Beckett University's ethical procedures in line with British Educational Research Association's guidelines. Participants were provided with information sheets and consent forms and verbal assent was sought from the children. Parents were invited to an induction session where the AAK lead and the headteacher explained the project and its aims. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the project at any time without penalty and that confidentiality would be assured through anonymising data.

The project took a multi-method approach to data collection led by the headteacher.

This data included:

- Baseline and end-of-project surveys relating to the project's aims
- Focus interviews with parents and children
- Session observations by the headteacher

For the observations, in line with research aim 2, attention was paid to the extent to which the pedagogy gave pupils and parents the freedom to construct their own imaginary worlds. In order to do this in a systematic way, Bernstein's (1990) concept of 'framing' was used.

Workshops, or moments in workshops, were categorised by the observer as either weakly, moderately or strongly framed (weakly framed lessons allowing participants freedom; strongly framed lessons controlled by the drama practitioner). For the focus group interviews, purposive sampling of pupils was used to ensure the children's voices were representative of both gender and ability. Attention was also paid to ensuring that the focus included children whose parents were both present and absent.

Following Miles and Huberman (2014), coding was used to identify three key themes in relation to the research aims. Below we discuss and explore ways in which children and parents collaborated to co-construct imaginary worlds, ways in which practitioners facilitated this, and what this meant for children's engagement and related creative writing.

Defining Drama and the importance of drama to young children

In The Woods admits everyone to the unfolding drama at life rate. All the building of settings, characters and problem solving is negotiated with the children. This is in line with a definition of 'process drama' -first proposed by Heathcote and Bolton (1995), restated by Neelands and Goode (2000) and applied in the research programme of Dobson and Stephenson (2018)– where all participants are implicated and provoked into deliberation, assumption of role and action. We are inside the drama -experts as we deal with the consequences that the drama reveals. Acknowledging children as experts is an important conduit to their playfulness, sense of purpose and ownership. The child who knows how to rescue the explorer from the grips of a hungry polar bear is both expert and hero.

Accordingly for young children and their parents, *In the Woods* provided lived-through, professionally facilitated immersive adventures which enabled children to be heroes. Stories came to life in collaboration with the children and the adults. The children found themselves in central roles becoming part of the action rather than having a play presented to them.

Their ideas were accepted (even the child's who, when asked what might happen if you are scared, said, 'You might pee yourself!') as the narrative was extended so that, whatever idea came out of their imagination, their input was honoured and drama frames created to support and challenge their thinking. So Imogen and Tayla told Tom that when he reached 'home' he would know because, 'you would feel it...inside your heart.' But what would Tom feel? Other children offered, 'safe, calm, joyful, peaceful, delighted, warm, loved.'



The process drama form itself is based upon that which involved the children being giving what Dorothy Heathcote (2002) called "the mantle of the expert".

Evidence as to the effectiveness of using drama experiences to support and improve children's writing is plentiful and includes McNaughton's (1997) research which that showed, primary school children who have been involved with drama prior to writing, 'write more effectively and at greater length, using a richer vocabulary that contains more emotive and expressive insights.'

Findings

Children and their parents co-constructing imaginary worlds

Adults found themselves together with the children in the unfolding drama right from the beginning. Strategies such as working in role, re-living adventures, small and large group work and a variety of drama conventions were used to ‘test’ their readiness for facing the central problem of an environmental issue. The focus provided by the immediate introduction of Tom Wayfinder in a strongly framed opening built belief in the setting, the central task and in Tom himself. One child, Isabelle, ‘was SO excited to see Tom again (for session two) – even when I thought we’d been going to the hall to see the Easter Bunny.’

A community of co-workers were commissioned to address Tom’s dilemma through the power of their imagination. The children and adults were ‘tested’ at first by Tom and then by children to see if they had the necessary qualifications. Tom’s simple rhythm clapping test became increasingly complex when Alex became the interrogator.

The building of this community relied on creativity in all its guises: talk, thinking, action, enacting, reflecting, revisiting, and a mixture of all these and more. One child, Kevin, still learning English as an additional language, described his part. ‘*I enjoyed being the boss of them (his group including parent 3) – telling them what to do as I was the only one coming up with plans and solving the problem. I planned the people made out of plants...working to keep the planet safe.*’ This from a child who would not usually be seen as a leader! When asked how the rest of the group represented his ideas, he responded, ‘*Mmm, OK I think (nodded) yeah, good.*’

Working with several incomplete narrative outlines enabled the children and their parents to experience adventures in the here and now. Initially Tom Wayfinder modelled a working drama as a prelude to handing the development over to the children and parents. This handing over was gradual and unfolded over four sessions until they controlled and developed their own new narratives from conception to presentation. Tom Wayfinder had been able to co-construct elements of the given narratives placing children and adults in participatory, decision making roles so that together they were armed to use drama to create new stories, new action, new ideas. The very fact that this happened showed successfully how inter-generational co-construction of drama can work to the excitement, enjoyment and development of all concerned. As one child commented, ‘*We could have done it by ourselves but it was good because she (parent 2) helped us to mix up lots of people’s ideas.*’



Including parents as participants in the drama enabled a new level of building belief.

The children, working in the mantle of the expert, had become the ones who played, invented, shared ideas, posed questions and led on solving problems, while the adults supported by being ready to challenge without taking too much of a lead. Their intervention at times, though, was laudable. Parent 1 gently guided his group away from the re-telling of an established traditional tale by pointing out that that was, 'someone else's story...we can make our own.'

Clearly, all three parents had a very positive impact on the experience as, at the outset, eleven children did not respond positively to the suggestion that parents may be involved. Post the day *In The Woods*, however, the responses were totally positive.

Responses included, 'because they helped me with lots of stuff I was struggling with,' 'they helped us train,' 'they helped me to think,' 'by helping us do things we might be scared of doing,' and even, 'they made me laugh.'

Practitioners facilitating the intergeneration construction of imaginary worlds

In Tom Wayfinder's world there is no place where an adult stands outside the fiction and tells the children what to do or deals with it as an invention. The different generations are in the drama together. Tom's quest is treated as reality in the way that children play games.

Working in a frame in which a story has sections devised and sections left ready for participation is a strategy for edging into drama. It offers a way in to building belief, a gradual introduction to the interactive drive behind the drama, an opportunity to create ways of dealing with problems, and a chance to discover expertise in dealing with consequences.

After the introductory sessions, the children, accompanied by parents, created imaginary worlds for Tom to experience as his home, and their own narratives in order to address requests from The Wild Man - a direct and powerful way to build dramas with purpose and context. This frame enabled the children to have their own stories and a reason for telling them. Using the commission structure gave purpose and context to the developing drama. The children needed to work at it.

Finally the children were given the task, still in role, still within the world of the story, to make new stories around objects that had been hidden away in the woods and bedtime stories for The Wild Man of the Woods.

Working in role with young children enabled the drama to feel real. Afterwards The Wild Man commented, *"In my first encounter with the group I was struck by how quickly the children empathised with my catastrophic state it seemed very clear that my predicament had thrust them into a situation where they would be given the agency to show some power and where they would be the people who resolved the story."* This process drama did all of that, and more besides, as the children's belief was established and as they learnt how to use the sixth sense of their imagination to overcome seemingly irredeemable situations and unfathomable problems.

Children's engagement and related creative writing

By setting up a commission in which the children and parents were relying on their powers of imagination and by building towards the day, *In the Woods*, where they faced the problem of the Wood never coming back to the natural cycle of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, there was a need for action. They were given the task of using their wide range of skills and powers of playfulness and invention to face up to a series of challenges that lead to a confrontation with characters who tried to stand in their way. The children and their parents worked alongside and inside the highly interactive drama and departed into co-constructing their own stories, artworks, songs and dances.



Children's engagement was real, focused and continuous – as was that of all the participating adults. It was evident that children who would normally 'hold back' in more formal classroom situations were empowered and enabled to 'take the space,' and offer suggestions for the many problems they encountered. This total engagement then led to many children producing writing that was of a higher than usual standard. This could be quantified into how many children achieved beyond, at and below expected outcomes (in the KS1 SATs terms) but more importantly, their improved use of language, their commitment to the tasks of writing and the creativity of their work was apparent, marked and gratifying. One child, for example, (assessed as at expectations in her SATs) wrote, '*She, (Lady Lackleaf), put her bony, little, skinny finger in his ear and got the song.*' Her description leaves the reader in no doubt about that child's disdain for the character although her creativity does little to support her in achieving national expectations. After session two, John, a child assessed as not yet having reached the same expectations wrote, '*One hot night the volcanow was getingredy to x-splowd...Owen and Clare were trying to stop (it)...but they carnt get past because the teradactel is blocking the path.*' His teacher confirmed that this came from one of the longest pieces he had ever created.

Conclusions

This project has shown that parents working with their children in co-constructing imaginary worlds and their stories, although in its infancy, is a valuable and perhaps untapped method of developing their drama experiences - in the case of parent 1, this certainly had a positive impact of altering the sense of playfulness when engaging with his children. For school, the impact of the drama experience in developing children's speaking, listening, understanding, engagement, empathetic and imaginative skills, as well as their writing, makes this a worthwhile investment in terms of time and resources. For AAK, to use this commission is invaluable as evidence in the debate around using an art form as a learning medium across and beyond the curriculum and in researching the power and meaning created. For policy makers at local and national level, even this small-scale project shows categorically that unless the position of drama in the school curriculum is firmly established and seen as 'core' then valuable, indeed unique, learning opportunities will be missed and generations of children will remain impoverished.



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Graff...secret!

A short story by Antonia Mourou

It was a quarter to midnight and it was the right time for him to get out and do what he knew best. His hands were shaking, he looked so nervous. That was the biggest project for him and failure was not in his plans. He slightly opened the old door and a cracking noise spread all over the place. Bandson took a good look at the city.

Silence was the only thing that survived in this mysterious and spooky place. Even the bravest used to lock their doors and stay at home every night. The shivery winter wind made this place look even spookier. Although Bandson was not a brave kid, he was not scared at that moment. He put warily his sprays into his backpack and started running to get to the Paddington building clock. His excitement filled the atmosphere.

Bandson passed through aged trees, jumped over cut branches, walked on fallen leaves and he finally arrived at his destination. The clock looked so depressive with all those dry branches on it and Bandson should remove them all to create his graffiti. He opened his big black backpack to get his magic gloves but, they were missing.

It all started a typical day for Bandson about a year ago. The city looked to be haunted with all those naked trees being almost corrupted by the steely winter. Bandson, as always, went to school and he found Robbin on his way. He slowed down, bent over, and started to observe him. Robbin, as always, was in a hurry because he didn't want to be late in class.

Bandson got close to him, touched his back with his finger and said, "Boo!"

Robbin shouted out full of fear: "Help! Help! Please!"

Bandson started laughing loudly, his eyes glowing as he replied, "Did you pee yourself? Do I need to get you a new diaper little boy?"

Robbin turned his back on Bandson and he silently continued to walk to get to school.

When Bandson finally arrived at class he sat, as always, at the back of the classroom, looking outside of the window and whispering his favourite songs.

His teacher was standing at the front of the classroom and, seeing Bandson was not concentrating, suddenly erupted in a menacing tone, "Get out of the class now! I don't allow this behaviour in my classroom!"

"Oh, you're cray! BB*" Bandson responded with a poisonous gaze, leaving the class. He was outraged with his teacher.

The young revolutionist decided to go for a walk to the park behind the school. In any case, he was alone, and he had nothing better to do. The park seemed to be vast and the shadows of the trees were like monsters looking for their next victim. Bandson was full of dread and he was feeling his pulse racing with every rustle of leaves. As he walked through the park, suddenly, he found a stack of old branches. He moved them to the edge, but then, he couldn't believe what he saw. A big cave revealed itself in front of him. He hadn't flashlight, so he used the torch of his cell phone to make his way safely inside the cave. As he entered, his boots became wet and dirty and within seconds, he saw something that was glowing between the fallen leaves. A pair of gloves was hiding beyond the leaves. Those gloves looked majestic to Bandson. They were black, fluffy and they had little gold sparkles on them.

“You are mine!” Bandson said with a wide smile, then he took the gloves from the ground, put them into his school backpack and started walking to get back home. As he was walking, Bandson was wondering all the time how he managed to reach the edge of this scary park and who left those magnificent gloves behind. The young boy as he was walking, minute by minute, started to be more curious about those gloves. ***Why did I find those gloves? Should I take them?*** Bandson was thinking and his heart was pounding loudly. When he finally got home, his mum was waiting for him with her sleeves rolled up.

“I got a call from school today. What did you do again? Grow up Band! You are already 12 and instead of thinking your future and your school lessons, you are just sitting all day, in front of a computer, watching videos with people who are doing that “shlam” or whatever is called with their sprays. In a few years you’ll be adult. What are you gonna do with your life?” said his mum and pounded her hand on the table.

“Mum just zip it. I’m bored with this stuff.” he answered. “And by the way, it’s called “slam*” not “shlam”! Oh! And just to know, I’m not 12 anymore! Last month was my birthday and I turned 13! Wake up! You’ve got a son Mrs Brown, and that’s me. Hellooo!” Bandson said with ironic tone.

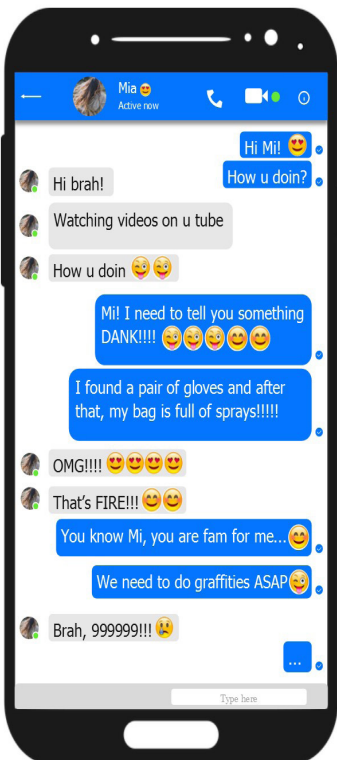
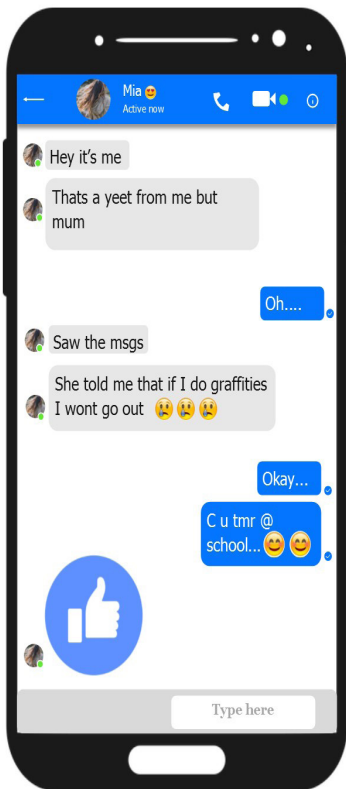
“Lunch is ready and is on the table,” his mum replied quietly, swallowing her annoyance as she turned to sit on the couch and watch her TV series.

Bandson put a portion of food into his plate and went upstairs into his room. He was waiting the whole day to get home, go into his room, open his backpack and see those magnificent gloves. Bandson opened his bag and then murmured, “Unbelievable!”

The bag was full of sprays! Red, green, purple, silver, black, every colour was in there. Bandson couldn’t understand what was happening. He couldn’t understand why his bag was full of sprays, he was speechless. But he knew one thing, he had to use those sprays.

I need to tell it to Mia! These are great news! She will get so excited! I can tell her to come and do some graffiti together tonight, Bandson thought and then he took his phone to text to Mia.

Message texting



Bandson, this 13-year-old boy, always acted the “tough guy” of the school. He looked to feel so strong, so brave. However, that was not the truth and the idea of leaving his house and doing some graffiti without his best friend was really scary for him - he just couldn't admit it. His teacher was yelling at him, the same with his mum. That was the only chance for Bandson to show what that he worth people's attention.

Bandson waited in his bedroom for the sun to come out. He was waiting for hours but even the hours seemed to be ages for him. Finally, the right time came, and he was ready to spray the city. He walked across the city and after a while he found the right place to do his first graffiti. A clothing shop window would be the victim of his first trial. He quickly took the sprays out of his bag but... he couldn't spray!

“I'll try once again; this stuff has to work in a way,” Bandson said and pushed with all his strength the button and again nothing happened. He tried a couple times, shaking the sprays well to see if they had some paint in them (they did) but nothing changed. “Those things are rubbish!” he said, throwing all the sprays on the ground, kicking them. Keeping his gloves on, he headed back home.



All of a sudden, one spray seemed to be glowing in the dark. Bandson was trying to understand what was happening, so he bent over, took the glowing spray from the ground in his glove and he tried to push the button of the spray again. And that was it. The spray worked. Now he could understand what was going on - he needed to wear the gloves to use the sprays. He started spraying and spraying and the shop window was becoming colourful along with his soul. His first graffiti after a few minutes was done.

That was what he wrote, because that what he wanted to express that night. Then he decided to do more graffiti. He was moving from shop to shop graffitiing. As he was moving he saw at some moments a shadow behind him. He felt afraid that someone might whistle it to the police that he was doing graffiti along the city so after doing a bit more graffiti, he headed home. Bandson stopped at the edge of a building and two thoughts passed of his mind. *How would his life have been if he hadn't found those gloves? And what happen to him if someone discovered that he was responsible for the graffiti?*

Glossary

*Slam – When you are doing a graffiti in a public or high-risk place.

Cray – Crazy

*BB – Bye Bye

U – You

9 – Some parent is watching

*Brah – Good friend

Dank – Awesome

OMG – Oh My God

Fire – Amazing

ASAP – As soon as possible

Yeet – Yes

Tmr – Tomorrow

C – See

*Me – my

Fam – Very good friends

BBF – Best friends forever

Critical reflection

The idea of producing a creative writing piece, made me feel nervous since the beginning of the module. During the sessions with Tom Dobson and Daniel Brown, I started feeling more comfortable with writing and I understood that writing a short story is not only about the final product but is also about the process.

Through the workshops, I had to make a lot of decisions about my protagonist and his backstory. For instance, my first draft was about an old man who liked to do art and his grandson taught him how to create graffities. Additionally, my story included the idea that this old man was Banksy (the famous graffiti artist). However, many things changed since the moment I wrote my first draft.

This short story reveals a social issue - bullying. More specifically, the story is written from the bully's perspective. Many stories that talk about bullying are showing the backstory of victim of the bullying. Take "The ugly duckling" story for example, where the protagonist is a duck whom the others bully and where the story provides the duck's perspective. Thus, I felt it was necessary to show the backstory of the bully, to show what were his motivations and why he started to be a bully.

In addition, research (Chung, et al., 2018; Cho & Lee, 2018) shows that the social background of bullies can affect their behaviour. Because of that, I selected to present the protagonist in a non-supportive environment which inspired by a theatre script written by Andrew Payne called "Shut up". The story of this script describes a teenage boy who has aggressive behaviour, so his parents take the decision to move him to another school. This boy decides to remain silent through the story.

Apart from the above, I took the decision to illustrate my short story and I got inspired by the poem of Malaguzzi, which says: "The child is made of one hundred. The child has... a hundred ways of thinking..." (Edwards, et al., 1998, p. 3). What the poem means is that children think and act in many ways and every child is different. Based on this, I selected to put some dialogue and some images to give the children the opportunity to read the short story and choose the parts that suit them.

While I was writing my short story, I had some beneficial discussions with colleagues. Along with the support of my colleagues, I managed to explore my short story from a different perspective and to realise how the other readers see and understand my short story. The importance of discussing with other people through the writing process is also mentioned by Cremin and Myhill. According to Cremin and Myhill (2012), writers can get multiple outcomes during the discussion, since they have the opportunity to hear and analyse other ideas, other perspectives and they have the chance to say out loud their thoughts and ideas.

Related to the idea of Cremin and Myhill (2012), Lodge (1992) analyses the importance of other readers and how they can help the writer. From my perspective, through the process of writing I realised how important it is to share a writing piece with other people as a writer can gain a lot of different ideas. For instance, my colleagues mentioned that they found the idea of magic gloves interesting and, as they said, this was a nice hook for the reader. In addition, the story's dialogues are interesting according to them, as they provide the reader with a clear image about the protagonist of the story. Due to this, I decided to keep the dialogues as well as the magic gloves. Furthermore, reading my story out loud to a community, helped me to find some mistakes and I did not notice them as I was writing my short story.

Moreover, I believe that being a part of a community of writers can be also beneficial. To explain further this idea, shortly after Tom shared his idea of adding some text messages to his own short story, I understood that putting some non-fiction genres into my story could be a valuable addition. To explain further, non-fiction genres can help to give the story a clear context. Moreover, as Wray (2006) supports, electronic texts are increasing and it is important to add them in literacy teaching. Related to this, I thought that if I want my text to be realistic and up-to-date, I should add some non-fiction texts.

As I was writing my short story, I had the opportunity to discover my multiple identities; my identity as a teacher, as a reader, and as a writer. During the process of writing, I experienced how it is to write from the point of view of the writer. Cremin and Myhill, and Cremin (2012;2016), argue that teachers have many advantages by being writers and sharing their ideas with their students. In my opinion, this experience allowed me to explore my 'writer' persona and to spot the struggles that the writers might face and consequently I enriched my skills as a teacher.

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“Pretend”

By Charlotte Farnell

To Michelle Scally-Clarke – for giving me my poetic license. Thank You.

Pretend to pretend that we're not pretending.

Building a fence in defence, to offend those who can ill-afford to be offended.

Extending your hair, extending your face, extensions on your credit card, ascending in to space.

Extensions on your mortgage, extensions on your pensions, extensions on your sentence.

The extension of life itself.

Ever-expanding, Increased heating,

Heavy polluting, Over-eating.

iBaths, iCars, iTrains, iBars,

Digital connections – millions, or more –

Yet less connected than we've ever been before.

Insta-food, Insta-gym, Insta-work, Insta-die!

When will we? Or will we ever....stop living a lie?

We can all pretend to pretend we're not pretending,

So we can live without guilt, with the truths that we are bending.

Re-editing, re-checking, re-wording, re-defining the meanings of the messages we are sending.

Raw beauty never perfect so photoshop the imperfections and continue the lie of 'beauty without rendering'.

Filtered faces, contoured spaces,
Is beauty only reserved for those with airs and graces?

Headlines, vlogs, tweets and hashtags,
Reducing people down to social trash bags.

Where's the love, where's the empathy,
Where's the real truth behind what we are saying?
Instead we find 'truth' in the lies and continue playing,
Hiding from the irony that it is only us who will be paying.

Paying tabloids, paying taxes, paying in friendships,
And paying in real lives lost.
For allowing the media, politicians, bankers and the 'elite'
(who interestingly are the only ones not paying the costs)
To plant false truths in the lies which have become a real part of our fiction -
Because we say it's not our job, not me, not in my jurisdiction.
But it is because of this ignorance that we are causing more friction.

Brexit, exit, leave, remain,
One thing is clear – the leaders are to blame.
Corruption, divide, politics and greed
Are saddeningly the only real truths behind our newsfeed.

But we can always pretend to pretend we're not pretending,
Because X Factor is on, and it's the auditions.

Creative Possibilities: The Foundations of Story Makers Press

by Lisa Stephenson

The recent Youth Strikes 4 Climate Change by children was one of the most hopeful collaborative political acts that I have witnessed. As adults, we are constantly telling children to take responsibility for their actions and yet I feel partly ashamed that as adults, we are clearly in denial about the likely ecological disaster that is unfolding in front of us. Our schools currently favour accountability and testing, which means that children are often given information through a transmission model of teaching. They are told what to do and how to be by adults. This single act of protest was built on a value system held by these young people which was clearly questioning the social norms; it was an act of critical agency (Sen, 1993). Their determination gave me some renewed hope.



The idea of child agency is rooted in a 'capability approach' to learning and childhood. This view positions children as capable political, social and active agents with a recognition that they are not just a homogenous group but are able to express their values, views and aspirations linked to a flourishing life. It acknowledges that they have cultural values that matter to them individually and collectively. Children need to be given opportunities to make choices about the things that matter to them so that they can be successful and develop the skills or capabilities that they need to actually carry those choices through. This requires a large shift from current neo-liberalist educational policy which favours a 'back to basic approach' to a recognition of children's potential as social agents and responsible choosers (Baraldi, 2014).

In the Youth 4 climate change protest, children were exercising their right to 'agency freedom,' which they did collaboratively. Sociology of childhood studies focuses more wholly on children's social participation than individual capabilities. Of key importance to our work in the Story Makers Press and Story Makers Company, this view promotes the importance of specific kinds of social participation which highlights children's right of choosing and making decisions.

Our own research (Dobson and Stephenson 2017) highlights the role that drama and creative writing processes can have in promoting opportunities for collaborative *agentic* learning. The construction of specific scenarios through ‘dramatic enquiry’ positions children as decision makers within complex fictional social situations. Within story worlds children co-create narratives with an artist educator. They use their own collective experiences to create characters, settings and backstories. Events within the story are negotiated and children have power over ethical decisions made within this world. These creative explorations often reveal the complexities of human situations and characters with no obvious ‘right’ answer. Children are exposed to a range of multiple viewpoints.

This requires a series of complex social and emotion literacies such as recognising emotions, negotiation and active listening. Community, belonging and self-understanding is nurtured, and difference is approached through the facilitation of a shared understanding. These co-created narratives can be performed, filmed, written or spoken. We suggest that this creative process can support and improve children’s capabilities for a 21st Century world, as it promotes their participation beyond their right to speak and to be heard to a wider concept of ‘*active citizenship*.’ In other words, not only having a voice but a right to choose or *practice* agency collaboratively. Crucially, story or fiction spaces are ‘safe spaces’ for children to engage in these complex unpredictable social processes which are so important in navigating a constantly changing world. It is also a space of imaginative freedom.

This view of literacy as socially constructed, critical and child centred is embedded across all our ITE Primary Courses through drama processes and this was shared recently with other Universities at a United Kingdom Literacy Association presentation.

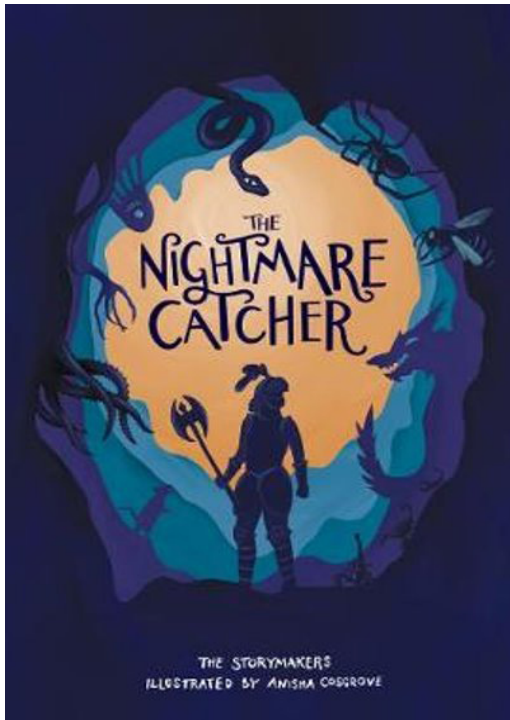
According to a report by the National Children’s Bureau and Young Minds 2018, ‘we are facing a growing mental health crisis in our schools’ (Cowburn & Blow, 2017). Whilst there is increasing guidance and advice for schools which advocates the development of whole school preventative factors to support children by fostering a sense of belonging and control (Department of Education, 2016), there is little or no support in how to implement this. The long-anticipated Government Paper on Mental Health (2017) advocated a more widespread implementation and ‘iterative learning methods’ to inform best practice including a multidisciplinary approach to supporting schools. They cited a narrowing curriculum and exam pressure as contributing factors to mental wellbeing. Our research (Stephenson and Dobson, in press) draws from children’s experience to suggest that drama and creative spaces can offer important sites for *practicing* agency and developing capabilities linked to their positive flourishing and wellbeing. It is ‘holistic’ teaching. (Ofsted 2019)

At Story Makers we work with children to make stories that matter, our work **creates spaces** both in and outside school to facilitate this opportunity for more children. We support and nurture artist facilitators, bringing them together to share and create work.

The Story Makers press, our new publisher is focused on encouraging children’s voices and creativity. We aim to publish underrepresented narratives and issues and make sure that every child can see themselves in the books they read. We use drama and storytelling with children in order to get them to explore different narratives with us, which we then transform into engaging fiction books. The Press team includes Dr Tom Dobson, Lisa Stephenson and Ana Sanches de Arede.

At Story Makers we work with children to make stories that matter. As a critical response to ‘muddlesome’ educational policy (Ball, 2018), our work creates spaces both within and outside school to facilitate this for more children. The Story Makers press, our new publisher is focused on encouraging children’s voices and creativity. We aim to publish underrepresented narratives and issues and make sure that every child can see themselves in the books they read.

We use drama and storytelling with children in order to get them to explore different narratives with us, which we then transform into engaging fiction books. Our first story the *Nightmare Catcher* and accompanying *Explorer’s Guide* has been developed with children.



The story centres around a dual narrative and will be set around two different worlds: reality and a fantasy world. Seen through a child's eyes, the fictional story and related activities explores issues related to friendships, gaming and emotional resilience.

The process draws from collaborative expertise: Tom Dobson's PhD research into co-authoring stories with children, my own PhD research into using drama processes to co-create and explore 'difficult' stories with children, and our Press Editor Ana Sanches de Arêde's extensive knowledge of publishing literature. We feel that the processes used, created a story that mattered to the children that co-created with us. It allowed them to practice agency within the co-creation of the story at each phase of the editing. The accompanying Explorer's Guide identifies key parts of the story to explore safely through drama and creative writing activities and provides a step by step explanation of how to do this for teachers and artist educators. Furthermore, the book and guide were co-created through collaboration and research with schools, CAMHS professionals, teachers and outreach educators who confirmed that schools need more support in creating meaningful opportunities for addressing areas of emotional literacy through fiction. The Guide facilitates the development of emotional literacy skills, imaginative freedom and a sense of community through the drama and free writing activities. It is a non-judgemental space which actively nurtures children's capabilities such as Sen's (1993) notion of 'critical agency' and Baraldi's (2014) notion of 'active collaborative citizenship.' We look forward to developing this further with colleagues from The School of Education. Our next story will be a modern South Asian Fairy-tale, co-created with Year 5 girls and our book launch and Story Makers Festival, Story Rebels, will be Saturday 8th June at Leeds Beckett University.

Book through: www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/events/school-events/story-rebels-a-new-type-of-hero

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