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Advances in Theory and Research, Implications
for Practice

Volume 16

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Kelli Jo Kerry-Moran • Juli-Anna Aerila
Editors

Story in Children's Lives:
Contributions of the
Narrative Mode to Early
Childhood Development,
Literacy, and Learning

 Springer

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ISSN 2543-0610

ISSN 2543-0629 (electronic)

Educating the Young Child

ISBN 978-3-030-19265-5

ISBN 978-3-030-19266-2 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19266-2>

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This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

Some years ago, teacher scholars living on different continents were introduced to one another through a mutual acquaintance who thought they might want to write together about stories. The scholars exchanged email messages, slowly at first, and then video calls. They talked about stories together and reflected on those conversations afterwards with friends and colleagues in their home countries and abroad, they explored stories with children, and they read and wrote about stories and children. They observed children playing, making, and living stories. Stories are powerful agents in every aspect of young children's development and context of their lives. This book is a testament to the might of stories and a call to action for teachers and families to more fully harness narrative forces to strengthen young children.

Story in the Lives of Children: Contributions of the Narrative Mode is premised on the power of stories to support children in all contexts of their lives. Much has been written about the importance of narratives for language development, cognition, reading readiness, and comprehension; however, less is understood about the role narratives can play in encouraging growth in other contexts and domains such as identity, fine and gross motor skills, memory and self-concept, social relationships, or even developing a sense of humor. No single volume can hold the endless ways narratives contribute to young children's lives, but this book addresses a gap by exploring innovative ideas and applications of stories beyond typical school-based practices. The chapter authors elaborate on the strength of narratives in supporting the whole child in diverse contexts from young children on the autism spectrum improving their social skills at school to 4–5-year-olds developing historical thinking to children who are refugees or asylum-seekers dealing with uncertainty and loss.

These varied perspectives on the narrative mode come from a diverse group of scholars and practitioners. The chapter authors represent accomplished teachers, researchers, specialists, and teacher educators from several countries and backgrounds. They include an array of disciplines such as health and physical education, social work, performing arts, and early childhood education.

Furthermore, this work approaches narrative from an international, cross-disciplinary, and inclusive perspective. While narrative forms are shared across

cultures, societies and groups use and delineate narratives differently. The book's authors define story broadly to include multimodal texts, narrative accounts, movement, storytelling in all its forms, and children's self-made stories. Scholars and practitioners increasingly recognize that children engage with stories in a variety of ways and that what "counts" as story includes far more than book-based narratives.

Finally, this book is written for generalist teachers, practitioners, and families. Consequently, the book has a strong practical focus with each chapter, including research-based recommendations for practices of stories in early childhood settings. It provides practical recommendations for making curricular and environmental transformations that are necessary to increase the use of stories among young children, educators, and families. The readers do not need to be previously well-versed in literacy or narrative studies. *Story in the Lives of Children: Contributions of the Narrative Mode* will inspire new ideas about narrative modes and effective applications of story in the varied contexts of young children's lives.

The Organization of the Book

The narratives nurture and develop children holistically. The chapters in this book have implications for children's growth in a variety of contexts and domains. The book is presented in three sections that highlight how stories can help children's voices to be heard, how the diversity of stories can be better recognized and exercised, and how stories can influence children holistically.

The first section, *Hearing Children's Voices*, includes chapters that elaborate on how stories can elevate children's voices and perspectives. It begins with **Mary Jalongo's** chapter, "Personal Stories: Autobiographical Memory and Young Children's Stories of Their Own Lives," describing the role stories (Chap. 2) play in developing children's capacity and skills for memory, especially for shaping memories of the early years of their lives. **Liisa Karlsson, Minna Lähteenmäki, and Anna-Leena Laastikka**, in the next chapter (Chap. 3), describe the use of the story crafting storytelling method with children who are refugees seeking asylum. These authors discuss the implementation of the story crafting method and its aims in helping adults understand children's feelings and perspectives.

According to **Anna-Maija Puroila** in "Who Am I: Young Children's Narrative Identities" (Chap. 4), children's identities are shaped in the interaction between children and their social and cultural environments using performative narratives. These narratives help children to make sense of their lives and give adults the opportunity to understand the different identities of each child. In Chap. 5, **Eleni Loizou and Anthia Michaelides** focus on children's humorous stories, which provide a picture of what is important, meaningful, funny, and enjoyable for children. Humor and stories are important to children, and they empower children to express themselves. **Erin Flynn** (Chap. 6) describes work with boys who are members of racial and ethnic minorities that have historically been disenfranchised in the United

States. She presents story circles as tools for bridging gaps between home and school and for helping children's voices to be heard by their teachers. **Jonna Kangas and Jyrki Reunamo** (Chap. 7) have implemented the action telling method, which helps children develop social skills as they explore possible reactions and consequences to common social problems in early childhood classrooms.

The emphasis on the second section, *Recognizing and Applying Stories*, highlights how broader conceptions and usage of stories can expand their benefits for children across content areas, developmental domains, and various contexts of children's lives. The section begins with **Marilyn Narey's** chapter, "Understanding Stories as Multimodal Experiences in Young Children's Development" (Chap. 8), on stories as multimodal texts that engage and instruct children through image, movement, sound, and other modalities. In Chap. 9, **Anu Kajamies, Janne Lepola, and Aino Mattinen** continue the theme by demonstrating how scaffolding story comprehension creates new opportunities for children to achieve higher levels while increasing motivation.

The chapters written by **Laura Arias-Ferrer, Alejandro Egea-Vivancos, and Linda Levstik** (Chap. 10) as well as by **Vince Natthapoj, Juli-Anna Aerila, and Sari Yrjänäinen** (Chap. 11) describe how stories enhance the development of areas other than reading and writing. According to Arias-Ferrer, Egea-Vivancos, and Levstik, stories can be a format for learning logical and historical thinking, for considering evidence, and for making inference based on multiple perspectives, including prior knowledge or personal experience. Their chapter uses wordless picture books as tools to develop historical thinking. Natthapoj, Aerila, and Yrjänäinen describe a framework for stories that go far beyond story problems in teaching mathematics concepts. The second section ends with a chapter, "Using Stories to Encourage Optimal Physical Development" (Chap. 12), by **Jennifer Butz and Stanton Hancock** who argue that story-based learning can increase motivation and engagement in physical activity.

The aim of the third section, *Holistically Supporting Children's Wellbeing*, is to highlight how stories permeate all aspects of childhood and create frameworks for all learning and growing. In Chap. 13, **Christan Coogle, Jennifer Ottley, Sloan Storie, and Anne Larson** describe how preschoolers with autism spectrum disorder use social narratives as an effective tool for learning social skills. **Jaana Pesonen** concentrates in Chap. 14, "Children's Stories Supporting the Development of Critical Literacy and Intercultural Sensitivity," on children's literature and its possibilities for empowering children and enhancing their moral development through increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity. Using stories to teach compassion and develop empathy is vital from the perspective of coping in an ever more diverse world.

In Chap. 15, **Pirjo Suvilehto, Kelli Jo Kerry-Moran, and Juli-Anna Aerila** focus on using stories in developmental bibliotherapy to help children increase social and emotional skills. **James Bowyer and Ben Munisteri** demonstrate in Chap. 16, "Move Me a Story: Sharing Stories through Creative Movement," how children explore and develop stories through movement. Arts-based and holistic education is the emphasis of **Juli-Anna Aerila, Marja-Leena Rönkkö, and Satu**

Grönman (Chap. 17), who highlight how stories can be used to make the thoughts and learning of children visible. In their chapter, they describe a preschooler's journey to a museum and how stories are present in many forms and developed through traditional Finnish craft techniques.

The book ends with **Kelli Jo Kerry-Moran's** chapter, "The Tales that Bind us: The Role of Family Stories in Young Children's Development" (Chap. 18), about family stories. Family stories mean sharing and creating the history of family and community. Everyone's family has stories, but not all families realize the meaning of these stories for children's identity and healthy development.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to many individuals who contributed their time, expertise, and support in making this book possible. Mrs. Kimberly Kosky and Mr. Jacob T. Grantz spent several hours editing and formatting chapters; this project would have been far more difficult without their help. Dr. Mary Jalongo, who introduced us and suggested a book focusing on stories with young children, mentored us through much of the proposal writing process, and put us into contact with several of the chapter authors, was the initiating force behind the book. This book would not have been written without her support. Dr. Marilyn Narey provided sage advice in preparing the book proposal and editing chapters. We often drew upon her experience in finding solutions to the many challenges we faced in the project. This book would also have been impossible without the contributions of the chapter authors. These authors represent a formidable body of expertise and experience far greater than we could have provided on our own.

Finally, we are grateful to our friends, our families, and the many children we have been privileged to associate with over the years. Their love, optimism, and zest for life inspire us every day.

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