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► **To cite this version:**

Anna Klerfelt. Narratives and their significance for children's communication about their world. part of Kaleidoscope research report D13-02-02. 2005. <hal-00190634>

HAL Id: hal-00190634

<https://telearn.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00190634>

Submitted on 23 Nov 2007

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NARRATIVES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR CHILDREN'S
COMMUNICATION ABOUT THEIR WORLD

Published in *Kaleidoscope*, TENLEs, 2006, pp. 5-22, (Deliverable D13-2-2-F)

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Abstract

In this article I will give a description and a definition of narrative through historical review. This forms a background to my other purpose, to describe and discuss the importance of using storytelling as a tool for meaning making for the individual. In this text I will also raise the significance of stories as a tool for society to mediate culturally important messages to the individual and thereby shed light upon the dialectics between the individual and the collective.

Keywords: Narrative, reconstruction, socionarratology, self

2.1 Introduction

From a sociocultural perspective (Säljö, 2000), how knowledge constructs and brings into society and inversely, how knowledge is taken back by its citizens, is a central question. The institutional pedagogical practices are founded with the purpose of housing processes where both appropriation and externalisation are supposed to happen. The activities in the educational practices aim at maintaining knowledge created by the collective at the same time as the participants by their actions continuously contribute to the common stock of

knowledge by recreating the sociocultural patterns. I look upon stories as a tool in these dialectic processes where the children participate as appropriators and reconstructors of knowledge. Stories are a tool for transferring culturally meaningful messages to the individual at the same time as they are a medium for the individual for expressing new significations to others in their time. As Bruner (1990) wrote, “[I]t reiterates the norms of the society without being didactic” (p. 52). In this way stories become a forum for organising conversations for mutual and joint thinking between several people. This shapes the dynamic between the actual stories about life, the possible stories about a potential life as well as an infinite combination between the two.

In the following section stories will be discussed as a tool for interaction with others beginning with denominations and definitions together with a description of the story in the light of history.

2.2 Denominations and definitions of narratives

There are a number of different definitions for narratives within narrative research and these definitions are dependent upon how the researchers look upon the structure of the story. If you regard narrative as a series of events sequentially oriented in time – this follows a temporally dominated definition, “...any sequence of clauses which contains at least one temporal juncture” (Labov & Waltsky, 1967, p. 28). If, on the contrary, the content in the story is stressed, a definition that puts weight on its thematic structure is emphasised (Gee, 1991). Polkinghorne (1988) emphasises both temporality and content in a narrative for the story to have a meaning making function and gives the definition of narrative as “...the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative is a cognitive process that organises human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (p. 1).

The socionarratological approach emphasises narratives as shaped in interaction between humans and as a tool for interaction. Within this and nearby disciplines, such as 'narrative psychology'¹ and 'discursive psychology'², narrative is accentuated as practice. A practice that affords fundamental patterns which give shape and meaning to our experiences (Bamberg, 1997). Narratives are viewed as collective products and social actions bound in time and place

¹ 'Narrative psychology' can be viewed as a discipline aiming at exploring the character of the narrative discourse and its function in human life, experience and thinking (Bruner, 1986; McAdams & Ochsberg, 1988; Rosewald & Ochsberg, 1992; Sarbin, 1986).

² Within 'Discursive psychology' questions about mind, memory, cognitive and language development are moved from being viewed as inner, individual processes to be placed within a broader cultural and discursive context (Harré & Gillet, 1994; Edwards, 1997).

(Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Within this perspective narratives are regarded as interwoven with a broad cultural setting of fundamental discursive forms which determine who tells which story, when and where, why and to whom (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). I myself consider the socionarratological definition as an appropriate definition of narrative when studying children's storytelling. I look upon narrative as a discursive genre that borrows content and form from nearby narratological forms as myths, legends, and folktales, as well as from contemporary fiction and from personal experiences. In this text I use the denomination narrative alternately with story when I discuss stories made for, or by, children.

2.3 Narratives – from contempt to making of meaning

In Aristotle's days the knowledge of how to construct stories for bringing forth a message in an effective way was well known. But the ways the common people and the children told their stories were not highly valued and the well to-do classes simply despised them (Meletinsky, 1974). At the end of the 19th century the interest for the form of the stories grew and in Germany attention was drawn to Olrik's (1909) findings that narratives, in the form of tales, legends, myths and songs, followed epic laws. His analysis showed that the form of a story was marked by a clear beginning and a clear end. In the beginning, people, milieu and time are presented and in the middle, a problem which reaches its solution in the end of the story is introduced. Also, in Russia research about the art of common people's storytelling was conducted in this time.

In his work "Morphology of the Folktale", published 1928, Vladimir Propp showed, in intense polemic against his contemporary colleagues, that folktales possessed a complex structure which could be found in tales all over the world (Meletinsky, 1974). This work was relatively unknown and it was not until 30 years later that it was translated to other languages and spread all over the world. Propp's work became one of the most well known works about folkloristic literature. Before Propp the literary history was dominated by the atomistic conception of the tale, which considered the motif as the fundamental principle to govern the tale. Through his systematic analysis of the structure of tales, Propp showed that the special character of the folktale is not based on motifs, but on certain structural units around which the motifs are grouped. He discovered 31 constant recurrent elements and their functions. All functions are not necessarily found in every tale but a story is built upon a proper alteration between the above mentioned functions and subordinated to a seven-personage scheme. Precisely by shifting the analysis from motifs to functions, Propp

demonstrated the necessity to change the atomistic conception of the tale to a structuralistic one.

Propp's work was neglected in Russia during the 1930s and 40s, although it did receive a favourable reception from researchers like Zelenin (1929) and Perets (1939). Others, however still held the story as a "simple form" (Jolles, 1929). His work was not seriously attended to until 1958, when his work was published in USA. The reason for this was the success of the structural linguistics and the anthropology. Unfortunately, Propp was incorrectly labelled as an orthodox and active Russian formalist by Pirkova-Jakobson in her preface to the American edition 1958 (Propp, 1958). According to Meletinsky (1974), the French researcher Lévi- Strauss also levelled criticism against Propp from an incorrect perspective when he, viewing himself as a structuralist, criticised Propp for being a formalist. Although Lévi-Strauss rates Propp very high in general, he criticised him for separating form from content, tale from myth, ignoring the ethnographic context and accordingly not regarding folktales as a specific phenomenon differing from all other linguistic phenomena. Meletinsky (1974) claims this to be the explanation for the reduction of the folktale to a simple basic scheme. This unfortunate misunderstanding has, in my opinion, contributed to the fact that linguists and psychologists use a simplified schematic system to study the occurrence of functions in tales in quantitative terms instead of looking to the meaning that is created by stories. This misunderstanding may also be the reason for assessing children's cognitive abilities by simply noting to what extent their story contains for example beginning, middle and end (Nelson, 1996).

Another way of regarding the structure of a tale is given by Bruner (1986) who employs Kenneth Burke's (1969) classical pentad: "...Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose" (p. xv). In Burke's analysis, the characters in the story acts towards a goal and the construction of the story is structured around the five questions who, what, where, why and how. Bruner emphasises the importance of breaking the ordinary, the canonical, for the purpose of charging the story with excitement, "trouble is what drives a narrative" (Bruner & Lucariello, 1989, p. 76). A "good" story is thus, according to Bruner, built around a problem and a solution of this problem. This definition has, in my opinion, dominated the rhetoric around stories during the latest decades. To use this definition as a starting point for understanding children's stories could help to recognise a child's story even if it does not explicitly reveal this structure.

Today narrative theories have widened their discipline by distancing themselves from the "grand narratives of structuralism" with their focus on

unchangeable rules, structures, clauses and dualism, towards viewing stories as an expressive form for our experiences, as a way of communicating and as a means to understand the world and ourselves (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Also the accepted form for telling a story has widened from solely text to seeing all symbolic systems which organise meaning around narrative threads as narrative, thereby including visual, auditive and three-dimensional symbolic systems such as dance, sport, social rituals and public ceremonies, fashion and landscape architecture. The narrative theories have come to constitute a discipline which includes oral and written genres of language, pictures, dramas, events and cultural artefacts such as “tell a story” (Bal, 1997). Stories are understood in their cultural context, a context where the story gives “voice” to social relations and locally imbedded cultural significance’s (Hymes, 1996).

2.4 Breaking the border between fantasy and reality

One of the features that characterises a story is the possibility of mixing fantasy and reality. Animals act as human beings, monsters and ghosts, princesses and frogs which perform actions not possible to realise in any real world. In this way stories give children access to different worlds.

The possibility of having access to descriptions of different worlds through stories is not controversial, but the question is “access to which worlds”? Brockmeier and Harré (2001) maintain that a widely spread delusion asserts that there exists just one and only one human reality that all stories in the end must be in accordance with. They hold that this delusion derives from drawing too close a parallel between the material and the social world. They call the assumption that there is a unique and separate human reality presented in stories “the representation fallacy” (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001, p. 48). Neither language nor stories should be viewed as representations of some sort of inner or outer reality but as products created by human beings.

Bruner (1991) considers stories to be a *specific* way of constructing and constituting reality and a way for people to understand their experiences. Dolezel (1999) holds that language does not give us direct access to any reality and maintains that “[T]he only kind of worlds that a human language is capable of creating or producing is possible worlds” (p. 253). ‘Possible worlds’ (Kripke, 1980; Cresswell, 1988) can be of two kinds, physical possible and directed by the same physical laws as the natural world or the physical impossible. The physical impossible are termed ‘supernatural’ or ‘fantastic’ and the physical possible ‘natural’ or ‘realistic’. Dolezel (1999) emphasises that neither the physical possible nor the physical impossible variant of ‘possible worlds’ awaits discovery

freely floating in a supernatural world, but they are products constructed by human mind and human hand.

Eco (1994) argues that every fictive world extracts something from the actual or real world by using it as a background. The readers, in turn, are dependent of their knowledge about different worlds to be able to understand what is a correct background or not. The very idea of the notion of 'possible worlds' is the uncertainty between the cosmic and the human existence and this gives the story makers unlimited possibilities to wander around in an endless universe of possible worlds and choose or create one for their story. The construction of a specific world then makes the conceivable actions of the characters dependent on the laws that steer that world. This is, according to Eco, what makes stories fascinating. Eco declares that the reader stands with one leg in the actual world and with the other one in the world of narrative discourse. From my view, this gives us the possibility to go beyond our own experiences and broaden our experiential sphere.

History shows that stories and the making of stories have been viewed from different perspectives during different epochs. The socionarratological definition emphasises the story as created by humans in interaction and as a tool for interaction. Making this a point of departure I will continue to discuss the significance of storytelling for the individual and for the collective.

2.5 Narrative as practice

Several researchers (Stern, 1991) refer to the significance of stories for children's selfidentity, but Nelson (1996) also points out the significance of story making for children to become members of society.

Storytelling for interactivity and community

Both Bruner (1990) and Donald (1991) hold that human beings, as opposed to animals, are predisposed to a readiness to strive to tell. In the moment a child is born, culture steps in. The interplay with other people is necessary for the child to develop this inherited ability to learn to tell (Vygotsky, 1978). From this follows that we learn to tell stories that our social world appreciates and our stories add to the social construction in society (Nelson, 1996). Bartlett (1932) shows that people from different cultures listen to stories, especially myths, and then retell these stories in a way that better fits their own cultural pattern. In other words, people capture narrative structures and "fill" it with verbal material in a way that fits in that context. Nelson (2003) maintains that narrative constructions made together with adults organise and structure children's memories of their own experiences. This perspective suggests that narrative has

two important functions for children: as a discursive genre for organising a mutual participation in conversations and as a form of thinking. Donald (1991) describes narratives as the natural product of language that precedes and is the source for theoretical thinking. Besides these functions, narratives contribute with their social and cultural function to create and mediate culturally meaningful messages and thereby help children to adapt to their society (Bruner, 1986, p. 183). This socialising function is also emphasised by Miller (1994), who views narratives as means for learning how to live together with others in a specific sociocultural community.

Understanding others

Mead (1934) maintains that sociality is the competence to be able to see the world from the perspectives of others. Narratives can contribute to understanding of others in two ways: On the one hand, it increases children's understanding when they listen to stories and hear other people's descriptions of life. On the other hand, it also fosters their understanding when they by means of their own imagination shape characters when making their own stories and alter between the characters' different perspectives to form the story.

The fact that each of us views life from a slightly different angle than others may represent a certain originality. One main thesis in the pragmatism of Dewey and Mead is that the intersubjectivity constitutes the subjectivity, or in Mead's formulation: "We must be others if we are to be ourselves" (Mead, 1932, p. 194). The intersubjectivity can be viewed as an area or meeting place where individuals exchange experiences with others by participation and communication. Language has a universality that makes it possible to establish a universe of communication which goes beyond the concrete situations. This gives access to a manifold of perspectives and constitutes the foundation of what Mead calls to take someone else's perspective. This opens up for taking different perspectives, for comparisons of perspectives and for altering perspective or with other words, reconstruction of perspective. To create a story often demands alteration between different perspectives and this is supposed to contribute to the development of the competence to take the perspectives of others. Learning is tied to meaning making by means of symbols and languages within different groups of people that comprise concrete and generalised others. According to Mead it is a question of understanding socialisation as a process of learning with the purpose of organising perspectives. Here the symbolic function of the language becomes important and that people understand and share semiotic systems.

The strong emphasis on the importance of mastering symbolic systems is caused by the fact that absence or shortage of this knowledge is problematic in the complex society of today. To live as a young child who has not yet appropriated the cultural symbolic system implies that certain cultural knowledge is lacking. This knowledge mediates verbal conversations within specific discursive practices and written text, which are executed and stored in institutions like libraries, schools and museums to which young children do not always have access (Nelson, 2003). However, other cultural knowledge constitutes a part of their everyday life. The growing access to media, such as pictures, stories, movies, TV, video and computers, thereby becomes an important upholder of culture in the world of the children (von Feilitzen, 2004).

According to Nelson (1996), capturing knowledge about the symbolic system is a collective process of construction, "...representations are from the beginning constructed in collaboration with social others, adults and peers" (p. 350). This collaborative process of construction embraces both individual and social constructions. Nelson describes children as both being in a condition of deepest dependency to others and at the same time incapable of receiving help from others to construct meaning by their experiences and, in my understanding of Nelson, also left to themselves for their own meaning making. Here I find a contradiction within Nelson's theories about children's meaning making. I would support those theorists who emphasise the meeting between people when it comes to individual meaning making. Through this perspective "the own" in meaning making needs to be more closely scrutinised. Nelson discusses the balance between the individual and the social and argues that an unstable balance between individuality and society is an inevitable product of the process of enculturation. On the one hand she holds that it is the faith of the human individual to step into a cultural environment, complete with all its social institutions, symbolic forms, artefacts, activities, interpersonal scripts, rules, expectations, technologies, fashions, and moral structures (Nelson, 1996, p. 325). On the other hand, she points out that every human being has the possibility to create its unique in spite of the uniforming processes of the society:

"It is precisely because the human mind is so open to experience that it retains its individuality in the face of the overwhelming pressure to become a replica of society's mould. Each individual's experiential history dictates a different perspective on new encounters." (Nelson, 1996, p. 326)

Also, Harré and Gillett (1994) emphasise that it is our being born into the special cultural cradle that gives us our unique individuality, and that every human being

stands in a unique crossroad of human discourse and human interaction and to be standing in the crossroad is a prerequisite and a possibility for individuality. It is rather like this that I view the question of “own” meaning making. Thus interaction with others and collaboratively constructed meaning are preconditions which support the development of individuality and identity and at the same time intersubjectivity. They are not uniforming processes decreed by faith that mould people into copies of the society.

To be a part of the culture

Crapanzo (cited in Nelson, 2003) pointed to culture as a ‘third voice’, that shows its presence, for example, in dialogues between children and parents. The third voice is the voice of the culture, of the social environment, the society that speaks through the adult. This voice watches over and censures what the parent says and how the parent forms the child’s understanding of a situation.

Nelson (2005) created the concept of ‘Community of Minds’ as a metaphor for the process of how a child becomes an active participator in a cultural community. The term ‘community’ emphasises that children’s understanding of others happens together with others, and ‘community’ affords a myriad of sources for different convictions, doubts, conceptions regarded as incorrect or considered as unmoral. Children’s ‘minds’ interact with other children’s ‘minds’ and, in a common negotiation, the understanding of what it means to be human in a human community and how everyone shall act in collective activities is shaped. The human being appropriates a commonly shared system of beliefs when it comes to human goals, strives, motifs, systems of knowledge and systems of values. Participation in a ‘Community of Minds’ ensures children an understanding beyond her or his own private concerns and convictions and opens up the possibility of understanding others.

Narrative as a cultural practice

Carrithers (1991) maintains that narratives tie groups together not only in present time but also across generations and across social hierarchies. He argues that it is only within public storytelling and myths that social characters can be defined, understood and maintained by individuals within the community. Donald (1991) goes even further and holds that language was developed early in the human history with the aim of expressing cultural insights in myths that served the purpose of explaining the world and the humans to themselves. In that way narrative was the ‘natural product’ of language.

Nelson (1996) asserts that children may have an idea of theoretical conceptions and systems of conceptions by listening to stories in early

childhood. She mentions conceptions concerning time, space, geography, religion, sex roles, biology, socio-economic conditions and ethical reasoning and episodes. Stories have an obvious importance for children's processes of learning how to understand other people's actions and intentions and reflections about themselves. Stories are also regarded as an important source for gaining abstract conceptions of feelings, attitudes, roles, striving towards goals and resisting evil, and understanding underlying significances, sayings and moral messages in myths and legends in our culture. Nelson holds that the likelihood of children of gaining this knowledge from narratives depends on how the story affords an organisation of the content that facilitates its recall. In this way narrative constitutes an effective tool for organising the human thinking.

2.6 The significance for children to be able to tell about their world

In this section the significance for children to be able to tell about their world will be discussed. It begins with accentuating how intertwined the linguistic and the narrative competence is with the discursive context in order to continue with enlightening the personal function of story making.

The linguistic and the narrative competence may be seen as more or less intertwined, and one cannot be learned without the other. Within a sociocultural perspective these competencies are developed when humans make use of the discursive context for interpreting the language (Bruner & Lucariello, 1989). Children try out their understanding of words by probing them against how people in their neighbourhood react to what the child says. Accordingly the child uses the word first in a well known context where it has heard the word being used, but since the word is limited to the context it is collected from, the child lacks a general understanding of the significance of the word. Then the child continues by probing the word in different contexts and closely observes the responses of others to this probing. Nelson (1996) argues that the process of learning words is a question of making conclusions based on the contextual relevance in discursive situations (p. 140.) The context becomes a tool for the child to learn words quickly, usable in the setting where the child lives, but context bounded significance is at the same time a weakness. It is this process that Nelson has labelled with the term 'use before meaning', from which 'meaning from use' gradually arise (Nelson & Shaw, 2002). Shared meaning originates from shared cognitive contexts and the mutual interpretation of relevance of that context by speakers and listeners, teachers and learners. 'Use before meaning' alludes to the fact that the use of a term that is closely connected at first to a certain discourse and a language context in which the

child has been able to observe from other people, and later extended to use in other contexts after acquiring significances derived from the careful observation of how other speakers use the term.

The personal function of story making

Nelson (1996) proposes that small children's special liking for listening to the same story over and over again would serve the function of learning to understand a story. To take the perspective of others and to understand messages in stories told by others is a complex process that needs time to learn. Nelson declares that this process starts when the little child manages to describe 'mental events representations' (MERs). These 'mental events representations' are events the child has experienced herself and the retelling takes place by the child naming herself and a few words that represent what happened. These episodes are often daily recurrent events, such as meals, bath time, going to bed, around which children construct stories which they tell over and over again. Through telling these stories in this way the child secures her memory of what has happened and captures a feeling of self by denominating herself and telling about herself. These episodes are expressed with a few words. They do not contain any event, main character or object. Nonetheless, they constitute a complex situation, which is told and extended as the child acquires an increasingly complex language and extended memory functions. The next step in narrative development is reached when a child is able to listen to a story, an episode or a conversation retold by another person and combine with its own story. The situation becomes even more complicated when the child is confronted with a story that cannot be embedded in her own storytelling which is based on the child's own experiences. In this case, the child has to use experiences and scenes accessible in her MERs as bricks to invent a new story. Nelson argues that in order to be able to reach this competence the child must have been involved in a context, pre-school as well as home, where stories have been told everyday. Then the child learns to both participate in a narrative discourse and in the making of meaning to understand the world we live in. By establishing a narrative way of thinking, representations of universally specific values are confirmed in the socially and culturally shared worlds within which the individual lives (Nelson, 1996, p. 218).

Nelson (1996) holds that a narrative construction builds on 'events', both in its canonical and deviant form and she explains that pre-school children master the canonical form and use it for telling routinised events and are able to mark the deviant form as doubtful and accidental. This constitutes the base for children's play and story making, although, according to Nelson, they cannot

produce problem oriented stories or consciously make up their minds for a break of canonical events. There are several researchers who argue from a perspective that is opposed to the one taken by Nelson. They assert that children develop an early competence to produce problem oriented stories and conscience breaks in a story based on canonical events (Trabasso & Stein, 1997). From my theoretical point of view, the explanation of this question should be located within the individual childhood. Children who are accustomed to both canonical and deviant structures for stories would probably have a wider competence to consciously use problem oriented strategies and conscious breaks. This means that one cannot generally state what children can or cannot understand when it comes to storytelling. On the contrary, one always has to view children from within the discursive context in which they participate.

Individual autobiographical memory and the development of a cultural self by means of narrative

The connection between the development of memory and an increasingly refined ability to tell has been discussed earlier and will now be further considered. Nelson especially emphasises the growth of the autobiographical memory, as she considers this as one of the keys for a development of self. There are different ways of regarding the development of the autobiographical memory. The social-interactional perspective suggests that children learn to remember in a new way and for new purposes during the pre-school years, and as a result of this the memory takes a new form. The context for this process of learning is conversations with adults about events in the past, the present and the future. The narrative and verbal forms guide the child to a narrative understanding of self. The point is that by participating in these experiences they serve as a frame for the child to be able to re-construct its own memory, to share with others or to set aside for the self. This leads to the establishment of the autobiographical memory and thereby to the retaining of memory beyond time.

Nelson proposes distinctions between levels of self-understanding, and views the onset of the autobiographical memory as both a reflection of the capturing of a new level of selfunderstanding and as a contributor to further development of self. During the later period of the pre-school years the autobiographical memory enters and becomes an integrated part in the process of developing self-understanding. Here episodes and the child's mind are integrated to a whole self and a new consciousness about herself in past and future days establishes. Participation in narrative discourse supports this development by the child's learning to distinguish other people's stories about their past and future experiences. When the child manages to retell a coherent

story about its life, this story can be put into a cultural frame. In the early school years the autobiographical memory enters, culturally framed and being filled with events and meanings for the self. The child is able to distinguish between the ideal self and the actual self and strives to obtain a more ideal self. Nelson calls this 'cultural self consciousness' (Nelson, 2005).

Nelson holds that it is the autobiographical memory that uniquely integrates the social and the cultural with the personal. The child's transformation to a 'cultural self' depends on the experiences of language in social use, but the effects are personal in the sense that they embrace the child's social and cognitive consciousness and capacity for new mental representations and reflexive thinking.

To sum up, the autobiographical memory results from the child's talk about the past, the present and the future. In the end, the autobiographical memory is highly personal but it can never escape its social and cultural boundaries. What the individual might do is to challenge these borders and the myths that defined them.

2.7 Pedagogical implications

For children to develop their narrative abilities, they need to be embedded in listening to stories, as well as having possibilities to retell experienced events. To this we have to add the fact that children today live in media cultures where the use of the computer is wide. No matter what we think about this, it is the factual situation or in other words, the social and cultural boundaries of today and what we can do is to challenge *these* borders and *this* myth. Let us start with in what way it challenges our roles as teachers.

Narrative Learning Environment

Teachers working in educational settings have a long tradition when it comes to constructing a Narrative Learning Environment by a number of activities to support children's narrative ability. The problem every teacher has to face is the gap between the children's belonging to a media world far from the educational culture. To many teachers, not all, this constitutes a dilemma. To some teachers the computer still is enclosed by fears for commercialism and violent activities and this constitute arguments for rejecting the computer. And yet, for narratives to take place children need to be able to use their own experiences and inspiration from modern fiction. How then could the teachers retain their traditional guiding-stars of a creative and ethical defensible learning environment deeply embedded in the educational setting and combine with the use of

computers for storytelling? To several teachers and researcher this is even an impossible start to set out from. For me it is the possible startingpoint.

Technology Enhanced Learning Environments

Why turn a Narrative Learning Environment into a Technology Enhanced Narrative Learning Environment? The arguments for rising this question are already given in the text above. Children need to use both the intellectual and the physical tools available in their surroundings to be able to develop their own individual skills and to be able to be a competent member and re-structor of the society.

What is needed to turn a Narrative Learning Environment into a Technology Enhanced Narrative Learning Environment? The answers to this question are much more complicated and differs from child to child, from educational setting to educational setting, from culture to culture, but I will try to discuss some possible answers well aware of my own belonging to a western society.

If stories are means for the children's striving for understanding the world around it is a question of open up the educational setting to the world around. It is a matter of breaking the preconceived ideas of the use of the computer and turn it into a "Storytelling machine" (Klerfelt, 2004) with all its possibilities to express the children's stories through it's technical possibilities to draw, write, record sounds and animate. This is a question of both knowledge and a will to let the children drag their knowledge about their media cultures and their willingness to learn more about media making into the pedagogical culture. This could lead to a change of the passive use of computers and support children's own making of stories and let the computer be a tool in the process of narratives as the natural product of language that precedes and is the source for theoretical thinking (Donald 1991). This leads to a change in the role of the teacher, from mediating knowledge to let the children have access to different tools as resources for learning.

If stories are tools for exchanging culturally constituted knowledge in our society and tie people together also the computer have the potential to tie people together both in present time in the educational practice and other practices and in that way become a tool for both producing and distributing narratives between people to support the children to be able to join the 'Community of Minds'.

Finally, I want to summarise by concluding that stories are tools for exchanging culturally constituted knowledge in our society. With the means of stories the children strive for understanding the world around. When gradually

appropriating the language, combined with an increasing ability to tell about themselves, they increase their participation in discursive contexts. In the process of learning to tell, their language ability develops and also their autobiographical memory. Through appropriation of knowledge, values and moral identity processes that lead to a 'cultural self' are shaped. By getting in contact with a number of worlds through the story populated by different characters the child develops the ability of taking different perspectives and in that way achieves insight into other people's situations and gets a chance to reflect on how other's actions might be understood. Educational settings are institutional practices where children from early ages interact with others. In these settings, a capacity to interact with others is demanded, thus affording the potential to develop intersubjectivity. The creation of stories in educational settings signifies in itself a participation in a constantly ongoing dialog with both peers and pedagogues. And one of the tools for doing this among other tools in our modern society is the computer.

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