Exploring multimodal narratives created through play and talk by children in a Reception Class

The stories children imagine

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Abstract

This study looks at the narratives young children create and, using Propp's narrative theory, investigates their structure. The study considers how children create and tell these stories and with what content. It addresses the multimodal approaches children employ to generate and share stories, and the use of collaborative talk in the development of narrative.

This teacher-researcher study is a small-scale ethnographic case study of Reception children in a small city independent school, conducted predominantly during the Covid-19 lockdown period. Data were obtained through observation, record keeping and conversations with the children. This study centred around a small group of children and the stories they created independently and collaboratively. All passionate storytellers, they were keen to weave, elaborate and imaginative stories using a plethora of modes, sometimes telling them to themselves, other times to an audience.

This research found that children can adopt a range of techniques that work alongside the verbalised story, from image to role-play, all of which work together to help tell the complex and imaginative stories children are able to produce. Applying Propp's theory offered some understanding of the content of the stories created and showed that narratives created by children frequently follow the structure he proposed. Through the analysis of these narratives, it was clear that many of Propp's narrative elements were evident in the stories transcribed here. It became apparent, however, that Propp's theory did not allow for understanding or recognition of the multimodal approaches that the children applied to the telling and creating of their stories: Propp only explained part of the story. For these children, creating a drawing alongside, using props or acting out their stories were part of the process of creating a story and held as much importance to the children as the narrative itself.

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Acknowledgements

Dedicated to my Mum. You told me to find something to do so I did!

There are so many people who have helped and supported the creation and development of this study. My study supervisors, John and Michele have been a never-ending source of help and encouragement and I thank you both for all your support over the years. A special mention for Michelle who has not only been with me since the start of my studies but, unwittingly set me on this course way back at the end of my PGCE course with her throw away comment 'I'll see you back for your doctorate'. Well, it took a few years, but we got there in the end.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Early thinking: A focus on collaborative talk and storytelling contributing to the development of early writing

Chapter 1 introduces the current study while examining how the research topic was finalised by detailing early thoughts and ideas. This study began by considering how collaborative talk and storytelling can support and encourage young children to develop and engage in early writing activities. As the research developed, it became apparent that the storytelling dimension of what was being observed was developing into the underpinning focus and it is this that is now reflected in the final research questions. Conducting this research has been made possible as this study was conducted whilst working as a teacher of a reception class. The argument for working as a teacher, researcher is explored in chapter 3. Having working as a Reception teacher for a number of years, I have been fascinated both professionally and personally as to what inspires young children to create stories, what ignites their imagination and how these stories develop and feed into their writing as they progress through their primary years. This study was undertaken within my reception class and focuses on a small group of children that includes one particularly enthusiastic storyteller, Abeo, a four year old boy who was a lively and engaged creator of stories both independently and with friends. Abeo loved not simply creating stories verbally but used a plethora of multi-modal approaches alongside his narrative including the use of props, creating image and applying gesture and movement. These varied approaches to storytelling will be described in chapters 4 and 5 where discussion and analysis of the narratives created in class is held.

Finalising my research and deciding on the questions took time and ultimately a great deal of soul searching. I felt I knew what I wanted to achieve but framing and defining it accurately remained elusive. Over time, and with support, I settled on what my study would become. The initially considered focus of studying developing writing in a Reception class moved to consider what occurs before this, namely what was to feed into children's writing and time spent in class observing with an open mind allowed me to eventually settle on studying the narratives children create and how these are formed.

The initial stages of research and observation led to the posing the following questions:

- How do young children approach storytelling using multimodal means?
- How can Propp's theory be used to understand the narratives created by young children?

The idea of looking at and recording narratives children create evolved over time, predominantly as I developed my own ideas as to how to approach the study. The opportunity to observe children on a daily basis provided the possibility to reflect on what actually occurred in class and as a result, I found I was able to consider more fully the narratives children created. The idea behind the study evolved with the support of my supervisors into a collection of stories created by children and discussion on these. The discussion affords the opportunity to consider these stories created solely by the children in relation to theories of narration whilst looking at how the stories are created using multi modal means, what focus they take and how the stories are developed by the children.

1.2 Background introducing the study group

Whilst in class, the children all listen and respond to a range of stories in class at different times of the day. Stories include 'Traditional Tales', firm favourites and non-fiction books linked to a range of interests shown by the children. Although not unusual, the children in class at the time of the pilot study were passionate about exploring and reading books and this trend has continued in subsequent years. The manner in which teachers portray reading and enjoying books is, I feel, important. As a teacher I enjoy sharing stories with my class and hope to instil a passion for not only reading but exploring and creating stories. This is done through not only offering what one might consider classic stories for this age group such as stories by Shirley Hughes, Michael Bond and Michael Rosen, but including more modern authors including Julia Donaldson, Valerie Thomas, Ian Whybrow and Oliver Jeffers. Alongside this is the opportunity to change or create stories using books such as 'You Choose' (Sharratt & Goodhart 2004) which was a book I first encountered when my own children were young. With this book the possibilities are endless and give the opportunity to sweep a class into a story of their creation through visual prompts with a teacher, or a child, leading the story. Once experienced, this is a book that is always popular in class with children creating stories in small groups choosing one child to lead the story. The concept of 'leading the story' comes up again in the pilot when the children work together as a group producing a story visually.

Looking at books is, therefore, an activity that occurs frequently in class and the children are able to spend time as they choose in the book corner. This remained a popular activity throughout the year when children enjoyed books both socially with others, or quietly by themselves. The choosing of the final story of the day was often a serious matter with a number of favourite stories being chosen and revisited. This activity presents the children in the class with the opportunity to join in with familiar sections of the stories and this participation can be seen presenting itself in later activities. Children are frequently observed re-reading the stories they are familiar with to their peers, whilst other children use these familiar texts in other ways and develop the known story by changing the storyline either whilst 'reading' the book or when acting the story out with puppets. These initial observations of self-chosen activities and interests were useful insights into the likes and dislikes of the children and, along with the pilot helped influence the structure and focus of the final study. One example of this was, after reading 'Farmer Duck' (Waddell 1991) to the class before lunch, it was fascinating to observe how the children took the text of the story into their play and personal narratives. A game quickly developed between a small group who appeared initially to be acting out the story by reciting sections of the story. This story has a repeated phrase that reoccurs frequently; 'how goes the work? Quack', and this was joyously called out by the children. Other children joined and what followed was a blend of the original story developed by some children who led the others into different characters and actions. The children worked collaboratively creating a narrative to their play based initially on the book explaining they were playing 'Farmer Duck', but were able to show their interests and experiences through the suggestions and instructions they gave to others during the game. This was an example of a completely spontaneous play event that really could not have been either anticipated or even adult suggested; the children devised and owned it completely and it was exactly these types of events I wanted to capture. As suggested by Nicolopoulou (2007) children use ideas and themes from each other whilst incorporating elements from a range of other sources including story books. At times throughout the year this game with its familiar phrases would reappear and adaptations continued to occur with the inclusion of storylines heard in different texts or imaginative creations of the child participants.

The classroom is a bright and well-equipped room with direct access to an outside area used as an outside learning and play area. Within the classroom there are well defined areas that the children are familiar with that include a role play area, mark making desk, art and craft table and book corner. There is a large selection of toys including construction, investigation and

small world toys that the children can self-select, along with resources that encourage mathematical and phonic development. The room is adjacent to and has interconnecting doors to a nursery room and most of the children in the reception class attended the nursery on either a full or part time basis.

1.3 The genesis of the research: Narrative and the writing process

The original research proposed was expected to focus on how young children develop writing, and in particular how storytelling and collaborative talk supports and encourages this as they step towards more formal writing techniques. This initial focus altered to look more fully at the narratives children imagine as a forerunner to writing more formally and so understanding writing became part of the research for the study in order to understand the whole picture and journey young children make both verbalising and writing stories.

It appears that writing at this stage of development takes many forms before becoming the formal method of symbols recognised as writing (Kress 1997) and so, I find myself drawn not only to what supports writing development, but to what early writing looks like and the journey it takes as it develops into the writing we, as adults, know. Children use symbolic representation to extend their narratives engaging with different tools such as imagery and props and language as means to convey meaning. McCormick and McIntosh (2020) explain observing adults writing encourages young children to create their own written stories describing how children will 'read' their stories as they show the marks made on a page. In Chapter 5 Story 7 'Carrot Soup' is a clear example of this when Jake created a visual story he was keen to tell. As I engage with children during their nursery and Reception years, it becomes clear that the marks and images presented by them tell a complex story that is frequently detailed in its oral retelling by the child alongside the sharing of their image. Early writing development is certainly not simply about teaching letter formation or phonics; children employ a multimodal approach to expressing meaning well before producing more formal writing symbols and speech is one of the most powerful tools that can be used.

With the original concept in mind, it is clear how this can form part of the actual study and the understanding that storytelling and narrative support a young child's emerging writing development. Examples of work produced by young children, both physical (images and mark

marking examples) and orally produced stories will be explored with the hope that how writing can emerge from storytelling, symbolic play and collaborative discussion with others. It is hoped that the research will highlight how teachers can support and encourage storytelling and ultimately early writing discovery and development.

1.4 A viable area of enquiry

Both storytelling and writing development of children at any age is always a controversial political topic with different strategies floated and proposed often. Research in this area continues with different focus and interest. The DCSF (2008) report, *Talk for Writing*, emphasised the impact of good quality and focused discussion within literacy sessions and this has been strongly supported throughout schools in the UK. However, this is only one piece of the complex puzzle of encouraging imaginative story creation feeding into writing. Emphasis is, quite rightly placed on play within early years and teachers in this field are adept at providing play-based activities linked to any given topic. So it is here that I feel my research will provide some substance and support to any teacher or specialist working in this area. The concept of encouraging verbalised stories that are presented in multiple modes is more in tune with approaches adopted within Early Years classrooms.

Pahl (1999) introduces her book *Transformations, Children's meaning making in a nursery* by suggesting it is a book for three different groups of people: 'anyone who has watched children between three and five years old drawing, writing or modelling, and has found that activity thought provoking…..literacy specialists….(and) policy makers' (Pahl 1999:1). I agree that this field of study has a wide reaching audience and not only that, has the potential to refocus those working with young children to the importance of recognising, understanding and celebrating early writing in all its forms.

On a personal note, this research will be beneficial to me in my role at school within the early years. I hope it will give me cause to reflect on what I am both doing and observing in class, pushing me to use this knowledge to build on the experiences that are presented to the children.

There seems to be a great number of historical studies linked to the study of talk, storytelling and early writing, although most studies focus on a particular area of perhaps talk, play,

imaginative role-play, mark making or working together. I am hoping to draw these discussions together to give a wider picture of what the narratives created by young children look like and how this can be encouraged. Many observational studies looking at young children learning were conducted during the 1980's and 1990's (Paley 1981, 1990, Tizard and Hughes 1984 and Pahl 1999). This study considers stories narrated by children verbally and presented pictorially both with and without gesture. The stories presented were transcribed by the researcher at the time of creation. This along with reflection, observation at the time and photographing work created meant that other forms of recording for both the researcher or the children was not included in this study. Whilst the use of different digital technologies increasing, it was not used here. The children did not regularly use technology to record their stories and this may then have altered the content of stories the children were currently producing. Covid restrictions at the time of researching meant that using IT equipment in class was challenging. How children can benefit from the use technology in their storytelling and play is not, therefore, included in this study.

It is important to consider the importance of this research within the parameters of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (2021). At the end of the EYFS children are assessed against 17 outcomes, the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and these results highlight both reading and writing as areas children perform lowest in. 'The reading, writing and numbers ELGs continue to have the lowest percentage of children achieving at the expected level or above. The largest improvements from 2013 were for Writing and Numbers. Within the communication and language and literacy areas of learning 72.6% of children achieved at least the expected level of development across all the early learning goals up from 72.4% in 2018 and 56.9% in 2013' (Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results in England: 2019).

This has been recognised in the updated Early Years Foundation Stage (2021) with more emphasis now placed on the development of language comprehension and its link with reading and writing with the aim of improving outcomes for children at the age of 5. In the revised EYFS (2021) there is a fresh focus on early language and extending vocabulary. A study considering narratives and story creation will clearly support this revised outlook while giving the opportunity to explore just how children use language in their play and daily lives. Within the revised EYFS (2021) 'Communication and Language' is described thus:

> ‘The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children's language effectively. Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, story-telling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.’ (DfE 2021:8)

I feel that it will be important to look into both the benefit of talk through storytelling and the outcomes this can produce in early years settings and this research will look at how children in a Reception class use language alongside the development of other literacy skills. Kress notes that language ‘comes in two still deeply distinct forms: as speech and as writing’ (Kress 1997:1). Language whether in its written or verbal form, is vitally important to children, both listening to and using as it plays an important role in the child’s interpretation and understanding of the world and is a vital aspect of thought and human development. It gives children a way in which they can communicate with others, primarily in their play, and gives them an opportunity to explain their interests, point of view and existing knowledge. Bruner (1990) suggests that the opportunity to reflect on past experiences and bring what has been learnt to new narratives allows children to make sense of the world. This research aims to link this philosophy into the understanding of how children create narratives independently and collaboratively, using language and writing (in its different forms) in play and discussion.

Others have also linked the role of communication with non-verbal forms. Littleton & Mercer (2013) note that whilst spoken language plays a central role in collaborative thinking and communication, other modes exist such as pictures and actions. Watching young children creating stories and discussing work, one will frequently witness all these forms that clearly

have parts to play. I find that the deeper I delve into the discussion of collaborative talk, the clearer its importance becomes. Listening to children talk gives a fascinating insight into their worlds. However the role of the teacher and researcher is not to simply listen, but to use what children say as a springboard to developing them both linguistically and across the curriculum. Vygotsky (1978) noted the cognitive benefit young children gain when engaged in interactive talk with other young children.

Paley (1981) writes passionately about the stories children create verbally: stories that allow children the opportunity to not only create imaginative narratives, some supported by familiar stories with other invented by the children, but to explore and question the world around them. The joy of creating a story can be supported by others, both through the opportunity of listening to stories or information about a topic, but through interest and the opportunity to discuss and develop the story collaboratively. This is discussed by Littleton and Mercer (2013) who point out the role of collaborative talk is to move on from simply describing an idea to the 'interaction of minds in conversation' (Littleton & Mercer 2013:8). Part of this development naturally moves to the recording of the story. The fascinating part here is how we, as adults, encourage children to record or how the children themselves choose to record.

Paley (1981) further describes how she suggested to a pupil (Wally) that his story may be recorded by offering to write it herself. Once the story had been written, it was acted out. She notes that this resulted in a renewed interest in story writing within the setting that not only continued, but developed and grew. It seems clear that the opportunity to model writing for a purpose took only one part of the desire to create a story – verbalising the story and acting it out socially played their parts too.

In comparison, Bissex (1980) chose to study just one child, detailing his experiences of early writing. Throughout her book, Bissex focusses on print or marking and little attention is given to the wider experiences of the child. She describes and shares examples of Paul's early experimentation with writing. Through the description, it is clear that Paul is encouraged, not necessarily simply verbally but by his environment and the enthusiasm and interest of those around him to write his notes and stories. This is clearly another factor in whether a child feels empowered or enthused to produce writing in order to communicate meaning.

It is worth noting that the research for this study will be conducted in a small, inner city independent school. Many of the children within the study will come from homes where at least one parent is a professional. Some children also come from homes where parents work within either education or research roles themselves. One would assume that the children experience home environments that are rich in print with parents modelling literacy activities (reading, writing and conversing). However here we apply assumption – without enquiring we cannot actually know the full details of the child's experiences at home.

Linking Bissex's study to the context of language development, it is apparent that the development of language is a crucial factor in a child's overall performance and development. In the DfE (2011) report *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes*, the authors note that the opportunity to develop language before starting school impacts hugely on a child's success at school. Whilst a decade old, this is still relevant, particularly post the Covid 19 pandemic. It is clear from this report that many factors can support language development including home environment, resources and experiences. However, it is important to note that these very same factors continue to play a vital role in a child's ongoing development. Nurseries and reception classes offer rich opportunities to explore and develop language through stories, play and discussion and use these activities as a springboard to introduce new concepts such as writing.

It has been suggested that 'early literacy activities rest on a complex sea of play, talk, writing, drawing and modelling' (Pahl 1999:5). It appears that to a young child, it is perfectly natural and obvious that the creation of a narrative or story would not simply require a pencil and paper. Previous studies have considered the role of writing within play, and researchers who spend time within Early Years classrooms will quickly see this for themselves. Staff spend time preparing role-play areas that provide both the opportunity and tools that invite early writing from notebooks and shopping list production to tool belts full of pencils and pads. What does remain important is the role of the adult, both at school and at home by modelling writing, particularly for purpose, encouraging children to imitate and attempt similar activities as they act out scenarios they have imagined or witnessed.

Hall and Robinson (2003) showed the correlation between play and writing and noted how children used literacy within their play, suggesting that what is seen by adults as work, is perceived by young children as play. Pahl notes that what becomes clear is the fact that for

young children 'literacy is meshed in with other activities' (1999:5). Within this notion of play, children are adept at using anything to hand to produce their writing. Kress (1997) suggests that children produce not just 'writing' but meaning in a profusion of ways. His argument for the creation of meaning through the use of image and modelling is important to this study and will be explored in relation to what is seen through the research.

Pahl (1999) notes that, frequently, boys and girls are interested in and motivated by different subjects and this is represented in their play and mark making. This study will not focus on gender or whether narratives created by boys or girls differ. It is hoped that any child will have the opportunity to show the desire to create complex and imaginative narratives within their games and all will often link familiar characters from stories or films with these characters frequently dictating the nature of the game. A Disney princess, for instance, rarely feels the need to climb or chase, whereas it would be impossible to imagine a rescue mission by Batman without one. Needless to say, these differing plots are likely to provide different opportunities to create both individual and collaborative narratives and engage in mark making and image creation in a variety of ways.

Kress (1997) discusses what appear to be stages that representations of meaning seem to go through, from drawing to cutting drawing out and moving to the use these images within play. He considers this may be due to the fact that each method has a natural course to complete. Whilst it would appear children choose to present their meaning in a variety of ways at any given time, they seem to have a favoured method at different times. Children seem to have a natural enthusiasm for developing their meaning which may be enhanced or hindered by the expectation of the adults around them.

Yin (2014) proposes case study is a desirable method to employ when researchers are posing 'how' or 'why' questions, suggesting it can be particularly relevant to studies where the researcher has little control over events as they unfold. The main interpretive methodological approach of generating qualitative data will involve observation of children as a method whilst in class, undertaking their usual activities. Gray (2014) notes that the use of observation is 'often associated with ethnographic methodology' (2014: 413). Callan & Reed (2011) argue in favour of the use of observation noting 'traditional methods such as observation are vital to carrying out research with very young children' (Callan & Reed 2011:27). Conducting observations can, however, prove difficult. The possibility of distraction is high and recording

can be taxing, particularly if attempting to write by hand. Newby (2010) points out that 'observation can deliver worthwhile data but only if it is done well' (Newby 2010: 361). It may be prudent to consider different methods of observing, not simply written but including voice recording, however the ethical implications of this must be discussed with participants and parents prior to the commencement of the research and any observations. Whilst researchers will need to be aware that interesting activities may occur at any point, it will be important to give due consideration to the purpose of the observation. Cohen *et al* would describe the observations conducted in this study as 'semi-structured observations' which have 'an agenda of issues (and) will gather data to illuminate these issues' (Cohen *et al* 2007:397).

The children were observed within an environment they were familiar and comfortable in. Aubrey *et al* pay homage to Bronfenbrenner's work (1975) and suggest observing children in class will provide richer and truer data, arguing 'when the young child is removed from its natural setting valuable information relating to the determinants of its behaviour will be lost' (Aubrey *et al* 2000:49). As the children are used to regular observations taking place in class as one method of assessing development and progress within the EYFS, the observations conducted solely for this study should therefore be no more intrusive or disturbing to the children as any other formal observation.

Whilst I aim to write a thesis that will stand up and be of importance within the academic community, my passion for producing a narrative that will appeal to those working within this field – my colleagues – remains high. I hope, therefore, to ultimately produce a document that is accessible and of interest for both bodies.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

'From the moment of birth, we are storytellers'
Gill (2020:167).

Chapter 2 will explore research relevant to the study of narratives. This will include some discussion on the background to this study, how it came about and how it evolved into the final study. It will introduce and explain Propp's theory of narrative before looking at the importance of play and creativity. A number of multimodal approaches that were employed by the study group to help tell their stories will also be described. The chapter concludes with a look at where children may gain inspiration from for their own stories.

2.1 Inspiration

Inspiration for this study came from many quarters primarily the observation of the children in class followed by research reading and as a result of which, the work of some authors became pivotal to the research. These include Pahl (1999, 2007, 2009) and her studies into young children creating meaning, Paley (1981, 1990) for her passionate discussion on observing and recording stories in class, Bruce (2015, 2020) for her many studies on early childhood development, storytelling and play and Kress (1997, 2010) for his inspired writing on how children move towards writing. To be able to explore narratives created by young children, it is important to consider not just the story that the children create but the background to the story, how it is created, what inspires the child and how the story is told. This became the study that is presented here. When one begins to analyse the content of the narratives created in class, it becomes apparent that many influences come together to aid their creation. Gill (2020) notes that stories can be told in a myriad of ways not only through the spoken word but through dance and movement, drawing, image and music. In class, real objects become props in stories, stories heard or seen through films appear within storylines as does the children's existing knowledge and understanding of life and events. Fox (1993) discusses how children are adept at using familiar objects within their stories either as a simple prop that helps support the narrative or, as in the case of Abeo's story 'The Race', to aid the creation of the narrative. In her explanation of play, Bruce (2015) suggests 12 features of free-flow play which link

closely with the creation of narratives. Bruce notes 'play has the potential to take children into a world of pretend. They imagine other worlds, creating stories of possible and impossible worlds beyond the here and now, in the past, present and future, and it transforms them into different characters' (Bruce 2015:60). This is a statement that will be borne out throughout this research with the narratives presented here allowing the children to freely play with worlds, plots, characters and language both individually and with others through self-directed play and activities.

Stories that children create are boundless and whilst they frequently involve elements of lived scenarios, are not necessarily bound by the conventions of real life or possibility. The stories and films that young children often listen to encourages this imagination and creativity, frequently mixing fantasy into real situations or environments and these storylines can be seen replicated and imitated in the child's own creations. This argument for intertextuality is explained by Fox (1993) who after listening to a number of stories created by her son, noted that themes or indeed language from familiar stories was often apparent in the stories he subsequently created. Bruce *et al* (2020) emphasised a similar point noting that themes and phrases from traditional stories would often appear in not only a child's retelling of a story, but also in stories of the child's own creation. The interlinking of the real world and fiction is discussed by Mar (2018) who suggests that the ability to understand stories relies 'on the same cognitive processes used to understand the real world' (p257). This goes some way to explaining why many stories created by children have elements of fantasy and real life. Mar develops his argument further by noting that 'narratives provide abstracted representations of real-world situations and individuals' (p257).

2.2 Towards narrative: a shift in focus

Narrative study remains an important area of research and is relevant to all ages and stages of development. Narratives are 'fundamental to our lives' Schiffrin *et al* (2010:1), giving the opportunity to not only tell stories but to teach and learn, plan and dream, challenge or support and as such cover a wide range of disciplines. To begin a discussion on narrative, one must first understand what 'narrative' describes. Mar (2018) notes that a narrative is 'a series of goal-centred events arranged in a coherent temporal order, according to a set of grammar or schema' (Mar 2018:455). In their work on narrative and film, Bordwell and Thompson expand this description somewhat, giving a more detailed description of narrative:

> ‘A narrative is a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time. A narrative begins with one situation; a series of changes occur according to a pattern of causes and effect, finally a situation arises which brings about the end of the narrative’ (Bordwell & Thompson 1985:83).

The definition of the term narrative is however problematic, with varied responses. Engel (2005) notes that there are discrepancies in what researchers consider narrative with some suggesting narratives should be a complete verbal story that includes a problem, resolution and completion with others suggesting that a narrative can exist any time stories are created and may not be written or indeed spoken but internalised in an individual’s own mind. Bal (2009) suggests that narrative is embedded within culture and ‘omnipresent’. She argues that whilst not everything is narrative, most has ‘a narrative aspect to it’ (Bal 2009:225). Whilst Bal argues that narratives occur throughout life and include everything from accounts presented in court to the writing of an historical event, she points out that traditionally narratology is connected to storytelling. Narratives can be used to understand the world through the retelling of events and stories and this is particularly powerful to aid a young child’s understanding of the world around them. The construction of a narrative allows all aspects of the story to form a cohesive whole by bringing the different elements, including characters, setting and plot together and, as suggested by Bruner (1987) narrative is not only a necessity, but an important mode of thought for all.

This study will apply Propp’s theory of narrative to data collated and an in-depth study of this theory will be presented. Both Propp (1928) and later Todorov (1970, translated 1975) proposed theories that narratives follow a linear structure: stories have a starting point and this beginning state is then altered by an event causing an effect. The following narrative can be, they proposed, a description of how order is restored or how the event is managed before reaching a conclusion. Propp’s theory will be used throughout this study to analyse narratives created by children in a Reception class. These structuralist plot models aimed to map story plots by seeking out recurring patterns and thereby suggest there are only a small number of different story plots available, with other stories simply being a variation of these.

The structure of a story and the fact that ‘narratives unfold in time’ (Wittenberg 2018:120) has been the focus of much discussion. Todorov (1970) suggested different elements will be

juxtaposed within narratives, namely initially the history of the events held within the narrative (these can be real or imagined) followed by the retelling and recreating of these events. Wittenberg notes that this description enlarges upon the simpler idea of 'content – form' (2018:120) and supported the discussion of what a narrative can contain. Here Wittenberg uses a description put forward by Chatman (1978) who suggests narratives contain a 'what' and a 'way'; the what being the focus of the story with the way its discourse. This reference to story and discourse can be clearly linked to Propp (1958) with the notion that a story will unfold in its telling with early Russian Formalists suggesting the terms 'fabula' and 'sjuzhet' in their description of narratives. Fabula can be described as the meat or bones of a story (the 'what') with the sjuzhet describing how a story is organised and the order in which it is told. Propp analysed the structure and elements of folk tales with the aim of identifying their structure. He argued there are eight different character types that appear within narratives and 31 basic structural elements that he felt occurred within stories in a specific order. Propp's theory focusses on considering the story and events that occur in the order he proposed and although his theory could be considered excessively structured or formal, it does offer an appropriate lens in which to consider the narratives of young children. Bal (2017) suggests narratives can be studied by considering three components or layers namely text, story and fabula. These layers, Bal notes, 'serve as instrumental and provisional tools to account for particular effects the text has on its readers' (Bal 2017:6). Bal explores the concept of both time and sequence in narratives noting their linear nature of one statement or image following another. Like Todorov she expands this by explaining the concept of double linearity, namely 'the text [which is] the series of sentences or sequences; and that of the fabula, the series of events' (Bal 2017:68).

One criticism of the structuralist approach to analysing narratives advocated by Propp and Todorov is raised by Herman (2010) namely the lack of acceptance of creativity within the story creation. Herman argues that the story can be shaped by the 'expressive capacities of a given semiotic environment' (Herman 2010:195) and details what he refers to as *trans-medial narratology*. This approach, he suggests, disagrees with the idea that the story element of a narrative 'remains wholly invariant across shifts of medium' (Herman 2010:196). As a result, later frameworks have built upon structuralist theories, supplemented by more modern concepts that allow for a freer and more creative narrative.

Bruner (2010) takes a straightforward approach in his definition of narrative pointing out that stories need a start, followed by some adventure, he suggests 'something that upsets or runs

counter to the expected – a surprise' (2010:47). This is followed by the action of the story where the problem is righted and concluded with a resolution. This does appear to be a simplified version of Propp's suggested theory. This is, Burke notes a simplistic view and accepts that narratives are now looked at in greater detail. A more detailed description is suggested by Burke (1969) who posits narratives require 5 features, that of an agent, act, goal, recipient and a scene. The story begins, according to Burke, once one or more of these elements clash and it is this conflict that 'launches the narrative' (Bruner 2010:48). Bruner goes on to point out narratives shape how we communicate and experience the world whilst offering the possibility to imagine. He notes narratives not only allow for the development of creative and imaginative storylines, but are also a way for groups and cultures to share and pass on life stories to later generations, a point emphasised by Wright who states that narratives provide 'structure, predictability and coherence to life' (Wright 2007:18).

Bremond (1964) considered events in stories that may never actually occur, but that may possibly be desired by the characters therein. This, Bremond felt, created a 'network of possibilities' […that…] 'encompasses an initial situation and both the actualisation and non-actualisation of the next stage in the narrative' (Hermal *et al* 2005:436). This viewpoint is useful when applied to some of the observations and narratives created by the children when it appears that the narrators own feelings are coming through in the actions and comments of the character within the story. Bremond (1964) suggested that stories can be 'transposed from one medium to another without losing their essential properties' (Herman *et al* 2005:288). Here Bremond is suggesting that narrative may not only be language based, but something that may also be created using signs and other media.

The idea that stories may provide a positive experience is not new with Aristotle (350 BC) theorising that 'narratives can teach us a reality' (Mar 2018:454). Aristotle held the belief that it mattered not that the origins of a story came from an actual past event; it still had the ability to inform real life. Mar explains this by noting 'it is the narrative aspect of stories – the use of language to both represent and evoke experiences akin to the real world – that is essential; any connection to actual past events is immaterial' (Mar 2018:455).

2.3 Propp's Theory of Narrative

A detailed explanation of Propp's Theory of Narrative including a full list and explanation of the elements Propp proposed and taken from 'Morphology of the Folktale' (1958) can be found in chapter 3, however for clarity and ease, key points will be raised here. Propp's (1928) work has, as suggested by Bal (2017) inspired many more recent structural models of narratology. Propp conducted his study of fairy tales with the aim of comparing the plots of the stories by considering the different components they comprised of. He created what he called a Morphology; a 'description of the folk tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole' (Propp 1958:18).

Propp identified 31 elements that can occur in stories after what he referred to as 'the initial situation'. Whilst Propp noted that most stories would not contain all elements, the elements that did appear were usually presented in the same set order he suggested. It is possible to break Propp's theory down into sections that each include a number of elements. This grouping can allow for easier understanding of narratives and can be considered thus:

- The introduction: stages 1-7
- The main body of the story: stages 8-11
- The donor sequence: stages 12-19
- The hero's return and conclusion: stages 20 onwards

Looking beyond the young child, the concept of story structure proposed by Propp appears in the current National Curriculum for England (2014). Within the guidance for reading comprehension for children in Years 3 & 4 there appears the expectation children 'should be taught to recognise themes in what they read, such as the triumph of good over evil or the use of magical devices in fairy stories and folk tales' (DfE 2014:37). Here we can see clear influences and references to Propp's elements with the inclusion of a confrontation between good and evil and, as suggested by Propp, the use of a magical device (element 14).

As a compliment to Propp's theory, Labov (1972) proposed a simple definition of narrative as 'a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered' (Fox 1993:84). Labov suggests that within narratives two things must occur, one after the other. This can clearly be seen in Abeo's narrative entitled 'Under the Sea' (see Chapter 4) with the concept can be presented thus:

1. A tiny fish is spotted and needs help.
2. The two heroes save the fish and all is well.

2.4 Storytelling

Narrative, Bruner (2010) notes, has the ability to shape our experience pointing out that mastering an understanding of storytelling is less about learning stories and more about the exposure to the same. Of course, modern life allows children to access stories in a plethora of ways including books, audio, media (in its many guises), verbalised tales and play. Bruner's view on narrative is that it not only has the opportunity to shape how we communicate and experience the world, but also 'gives form to what we imagine' (Bruner 2010:45). When considering narratology, Chandler (2007) supports Bruner's argument noting narratives appear in all aspects of life, both fiction and non-fiction, and in any mode; visual or verbal. Narratives, Chandler points out, have a beginning and an end and as such allow for the creation of stories that have the ability to weave the strange and amazing into the mundane and normal, a feat Abeo and his peers show through their narratives they appear to have mastered. We are, Bruner (1990) suggests, storytellers with a 'readiness or predisposition to organise experience into a narrative form' (Bruner 1990:80). Turning our experiences into narratives is a 'fundamental feature of the human drive to make meaning' (Chandler 2007:115). Once again this is evident in Abeo's narratives and both his ability and desire to interlink real experiences into fantasy is shown through simple comments within the narrative along with interesting and complex plot twists. Linking this notion to Propp's theory, the concept of real life is apparent in his theory of storytelling where early elements of folktales were usually set in everyday life before a dramatic storyline evolved. In their study of storytelling, Bruce *et al* (2020) describe a number of episodes that evolve initially from the shared reading of a story. These stories, they note, often offered 'universal themes that reach across cultures' (Bruce *et al* 2020:8) with familiar approaches to plot development. These stories, they posit, allowed children the opportunity to explore storytelling in what appeared to be a familiar setting, i.e. that of a familiar story. Within their study, Bruce *et al* presented the children with the same story repeatedly, allowing the children to become familiar with the plot and characters. They noted that as the children became more familiar with the tale they, like Abeo and his peers, began to retell it whilst weaving in their own adaptions and creating individual narratives.

When looking at stories created in class, and those recounted by Paley (1990) and Bruce *et al* (2020), it appears that storytelling can also be enhanced by encouraging children to work together to create their stories. This collaborative approach, Gelmini-Hornsby *et al* suggest not only increases willingness to participate and motivation, but provides the opportunity for children to 'express and question each others' ideas [and] to propose alternatives' (2011:578). The opportunity to reflect and alter narratives is presented when children work collaboratively creating stories, which Gelmini-Hornsby *et al* note, ultimately allows for the creation of more elaborate stories. They point out, however, that appropriate scaffolding of the children is important to ensure discussions remain productive and directed towards the development of the story content.

2.5 Creativity

Creativity is key to this study and runs through the playful activity and engagement of the young child allowing them to move onto future possibilities and imagined experiences. Leggett (2017) notes that within education, more emphasis should be placed on early creative development of young children suggesting that what is needed is a greater understanding of the 'nature of creativity' (Leggett (2017:845). Duffy argues that creativity and imagination are not only vital but that they have 'an important function in early childhood and throughout life' (Duffy 2006:xv). The relevance of creativity to this study is clear: the act of creating and telling stories is and of itself a fundamentally creative process. When discussing Vygotsky's thoughts on creativity, Lindqvist notes Vygotsky felt that 'imagination [will] flourish' through 'an explosion of emotions' and that 'imagination is the central expression of an emotional reaction' (Lindqvist 2003:247). Here Vygotsky is arguing that that the reaction to an experience helps the child recreate the same, whilst creating imaginative twists and scenarios that are supported by a real experience thereby suggesting that imagination is based on reality. Children confidently mix reality with imagined events, happily interweaving fantasy with the mundane and appear to not be constrained by the realms of possibility in the same way an adult would perhaps be. Story plots, particularly those created collaboratively can be imaginative and complex containing elements that may be dismissed as inconceivable by an adult author. Through play, Vygotsky believed children have the opportunity to develop and build on existing language with others while creating imaginative make-believe situations and it is this collaborative communication that Vygotsky felt advanced a child's knowledge and desire to explore more complex possibilities.

Vygotsky argued that 'creativity is essential to the existence of humanity' (Lindqvist 2003:249) and felt that as imagination uses both emotion and intellect it develops creativity. This is an idea that is discussed by Leggett (2017) who agrees creativity is an intellectual activity. Leggett suggests that creativity combines senses with thought to create an experience, positing the resulting activities not only lead to playful learning and development, but support a child's emotional well-being. Play, it appears, is intrinsically linked to creativity with McCormick & McIntosh suggesting that 'children learn through play and first-hand experiences' (2020:38) noting that storytelling and story acting 'creates a perfect platform for play and creativity' (2020:39). This study will look at children using their imagination to explore roles in playful scenarios to create and share narratives.

It appears that a number of factors work together to support creativity: a child's previous experiences and interests, the process of how the story is created; what triggers the story, props used and ultimately the product; what is created be it a story, image, game or playful act. For a young child, these work together to facilitate and develop the creation. Leggett offers the following definition of creativity:

> 'Creativity for young children involves cognitive processes that develop through social interactions, play and the imagination. Creative thinking is a transformative activity that leads to new ways of thinking and doing that are novel for the child or useful to children's communities' (Leggett 2017:851).

What is clear from this definition is how creativity and imagination work alongside a child's storytelling interest and ability. Without the opportunity to imagine, a child is unlikely to create even the simplest of narratives to share and through play these imaginative creations will emerge and form. Paley (1990) shows this point clearly in a recount of a discussion in class when the children were asked to think about helping at tidy up time. The children created a fantastical approach to this, suggesting imaginary trap doors that would lock children in the space in order to help with the cleaning up. In the end, five children work together to create a magical fix to this problem that originates in a classroom but ultimately arrives in an imaginary setting. Paley notes that once again, the children are using their 'intuitive approach' (Paley 1990:17) to solving a problem. She notes that the children are storytellers and prefer to imagine

what they consider a sensible answer to a problem for, as Paley points out, 'it makes for a better story' (Paley 1990:17).

A further factor that has the power to either inhibit or support creativity is the environment in which the child finds itself. A supportive environment and one that embraces and encourages imaginative play, exploration and storytelling is vital to empower children to become creative thinkers with Leggett noting 'integrating imaginative and creative thinking into children's early educational experiences provides rich foundations for children to build future worlds' (Leggett 2017:845). This extends to the ethos within a setting and environments that support and encourage imaginative play are critical to support the development of a playful and creative imagination within a child.

2.6 Play

> Play is 'story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form'
> (Paley 1990:4).

Paley's statement above emphasises just how intrinsically linked play and story creation are and can be supported by Soundy & Genisio's view on the same who note 'the fantasy and sociodramatic play of children can be viewed as a precursor to oral storytelling and story writing' (Soundy & Genisio 1994:20). Play is central to a child's learning and development and offers children the opportunity to make sense of and understand both themselves and the world in which they live. Vygotsky (1967) proposed that play, and in particular role-play, is key to development in the early years and offers a child a way of exploring and practicing 'the art of being human' (Gill 2020:167). When children engage in dramatic play they create roles, scenarios and adventures that enable the development of 'narrative action structures' (Soundy & Genisio 1994:20) and that show similarities to both spoken and early written stories created by the child. It is this engagement with dramatic play that ensures both language and literacy skills develop. The potential play has for promoting and enhancing the learning and development of children is frequently 'underappreciated and poorly understood by researchers as well as practitioners' (Nicolopoulou *et al* 2010:42) and often viewed as an activity children engage in naturally when free time in the classroom allows and with little input from teachers. Paley (1990) challenged this view and created an environment that embraced the conception of storytelling through play, participating and guiding the children she worked with in order to

tap into the potential play based activities that she felt offered the opportunity to develop different skills, particularly emerging literacy skills.

The role of play within any of aspect childhood research is important to consider and in the case of creative storytelling creation, it is pivotal. The opportunity to create and be creative within play is 'a vital dimension' (Samuelsson & Carlsson 2008:636). Children, they posit, are given the opportunity to consider 'what if' through play and can relate this concept as much to learning as their pretend play emphasising the close connection that exists between play and learning. When playing together, or indeed individually, children frequently create narratives linked to their play or produce a running monologue of their play. When one analyses the narratives children produce whilst at play and in particular the manner in which they choose to share or create these stories, it is possible to see how these verbal stories and perhaps the images and marks produced alongside, support early writing and feed into later writing. Nicolopoulou *et al* (2010) explain Vygotsky's view on children's play noting Vygotsky highlighted two components of play he felt were both essential and interrelated: '(a) an imaginary situation and (b) the rules implicit in the imaginary situation' (Nicolopoulou *et al* 2010:44). These two components suggested by Vygotsky are clearly apparent in many of the narratives observed within this study although I would suggest that real life experiences also take a role and can often been seen helping to frame or guide the play. The imaginary situations are easily identifiable while the rules could at times be harder to spot. Rules could be simple and range from 'its *x's* game, you need to ask him' or 'you are the big sister' to more complex rules that begin to be part of the narrative itself. Interestingly, these two components suggested by Vygotsky appear to contradict each other; imagination and spontaneity versus rules and conformity. However, it appears that the existence of rules within play allows for spontaneity and perhaps allows children some level of parameter for their narrative, a 'safety net' as it were. The rules of the games or narratives are frequently imposed by the children themselves and allow for creativity within a safe environment without this being verbalised or perhaps even recognised by the children themselves.

Samuelsson & Carlsson (2008) explain that through play, children not only create and develop knowledge, but 'symbolise and use objects in a way that is meaningful and thrilling' (2008:627). This cooperation and socialisation through play, they suggest, allows children to communicate and negotiate with their peers the roles and storylines acted out through play. This, they suggest, allows children to produce the body of their story by discussing what to do

as they act out their play or story. Here the link forged between play and collaborate talk is apparent and the roles both have within the creation of narrative.

In his study of young children's play, van Oers (1994) describes the views of Egan (1990) who noted in order to fully realise the creative capabilities and to stimulate this development, young children should be involved in stories that mirror Propp's concepts of good and bad, hero and villain along with other opposites children may be familiar with. It is, Egan proposed, that through the solving of dilemmas encountered through play, children develop new storylines. These new storylines and strategies ultimately contribute to their narrative both at the time and in later stories. Here, similarities to Paley (1990) can be drawn in her study of children negotiating and creating stories that not only take into account the needs and interests of the group but develop *because* of the group and its dynamics. The fact that storytelling and play are closely linked and interwoven is stressed by Nicolopoulou *et al* who argue the two are 'mutually supportive in children's experience and development' (Nicolopoulou *et* al 2010:46). Both creative storytelling and pretend play allow the child to express their imagination freely and allow children to develop understanding of narratives and the ability to develop their own. Nicolopoulou *et al* considered Paley's (1990) approach to storytelling practice pointing out that the storytelling seen by children is 'voluntary, self-initiated and relatively spontaneous' (2009:46). They continue by noting that it is the 'combination of story*telling* and the story-*acting* components of the practice that is critical to its operation and effectiveness' (2009:46).

2.7 Looking forward to early writing

Opportunities presented through play to develop in other areas are, of course, not limited to storytelling and can be used to feed into early writing. It is worth, therefore, considering how young children can explore early writing and mark making through play. Two studies that explore early writing and the manner and means children choose to produce this are Andrews (1997) 'Image, text, persuasion: the case of a four year old's graphic production' and Lancaster (2007) 'Representing the ways of the world: How children under three start to use syntax in graphic signs'.

Andrews' case study focuses on his young daughter as she starts school and explores how she begins to make meaning through writing and drawing both at home and at school whilst Lancaster investigates what rules and principles children use as they begin to explore writing.

Through examples of work collected from children, Lancaster considers the relationship between marks made and the story the child is telling before moving to examine how children use these early marks as a step to developing a more formal approach to writing. Both Andrews and Lancaster offer a wide view of children's early writing attempts and experiments and look at how children strive to make meaning through different forms. Linked to these studies is work by Bradford & Wyse (2013) who explore the perception children (and their parents) have of themselves as writers and considers what they consider is their 'capability to express themselves' (Bradford & Wyse 2013:254).

An underlying theme that runs through all three papers is that of play based experimentation in order to express and communicate. Andrews notes that 'while most mark-making will be 'significant', some of it will necessarily and pleasurably be without meaning' (1997:8). This is a valid point to make; one questions whether all work produced by young children has to have a purpose - would an image be produced just for the pleasure of doing so? Lancaster however argues (and supports this argument with Froebel's work) that children apply significance to their work from the moment they begin to produce marks and that they are 'always intentional and purposeful' (Lancaster 2007:125). The inter-correlation between play, narrative creation and image are clear here. Work analysed by Andrews was created whilst at play with both Andrews and Lancaster looking at the relevance of drawing and early mark making. Andrews in particular collected graphic, painting and collage work in order to 'see at close hand the early exploration of the visual and verbal' (Andrews 1997:12). Within her study, Lancaster attempted to interpret meaning and to 'investigate whether children of this age can make purposeful connections between the ideational and the production of graphic marks' (2007:126). Similarly, Andrews focuses on the signs that children produce and what they want to convey with them. To support his argument, Andrews calls on the work of others such as Mitchell (1986) using this to explain the connection between the story the child is telling and the images produced. Andrews concludes his paper by suggesting drawing and writing work together to tell a story with Lancaster suggesting that drawing and mark making are early writing attempts. Both use ideas proposed by Kress (1997) who suggests that children are using marks that they understand to convey meaning. Both these papers lead us on to considering what Wright (2007) describes as 'graphic-narrative play'

2.8 Graphic-narrative play

Wright (2007) explored young children's engagement in graphic-narrative play and considered how image, ideas, gesture and feelings were used by children when they created stories. Wright's paper has many similarities to this study, focussing on the interplay between narrative and image considering in particular how children represent imaginary worlds on paper. The study contained here looks at not only how narratives are supported and enhanced by image, but also considers the use of props and gesture and how these may be used by children when creating stories. Conclusions drawn by Wright will be considered here and used to support arguments in this study. The idea that when creating narratives, children become 'a cast of one, taking on multiple roles' (Wright 2007:1) is proposed by Wright and is evident at times when compared to stories created by Abeo and his peers. Analysis of story construction by Wright (2007) closely links to that proposed by Propp (1928) with Wright noting that the content of stories created by children included 'universal story themes such as good-evil and capturing-defending' (Wright 2007:1) which mirror Propp's (1928) story elements. Samuelsson & Carlsson (2008) describe one child's use of image to express meaning when the concept of poisonous toadstools is discussed. In order to share what she felt was an important message she used the image of a toadstool with a cross through it. This symbolic representation acts as clearly as written language and for its intended audience (other five year olds within the group) would convey the message more thoroughly than a written sign could hope to do.

2.9 Image

Imagery within storytelling, its uses and purposes is relevant to this study with the study group frequently using drawing and emergent writing techniques to form part of their narratives. These images appeared to be used to both enhance and be a real part of the stories created. Drawing and images can act 'as a bridge between the inner world of the imagination and reason and the outer world of communication and sharing ideas' (Hope 2008:11). A clear link between Wright's (2007) work and that of Hope (2008) is the idea that drawing contains ideas and a process that can be presented both verbally within the child's narrative and visually through the image. Hope describes this process as a 'journey' and a means of 'exploiting and developing the analogy' (Hope 2008:11) with Wright suggesting drawing can be used as a powerful means of 'organising experience into a narrative form (Wright 2007:18). Coates (2002) takes an interesting approach by considering the stories contained within drawings,

rather than how drawings support stories. In her discussion, Coates brings the discussion back to include the importance of play within story creation, noting that for young children, making marks forms part of their play and can form an integral link between imaginative creation both verbally and physically. Coates draws on research undertaken by Kellogg in the 1950s who felt that images created by young children were too easily dismissed as meaningless, noting that this assumption was frequently arrived at when work was viewed from an adult's perspective. Coates (2002) suggests that to fully understand the image, adults should listen 'to the child's simultaneous utterances' (Coates 2002:22). Coates felt there were links between the type or style of drawing created either alongside a narrative or to represent a thought or memory, at one stage describing 'a lively combination of scribbles' (Coates 2002:22) to portray a visit to the seaside. As will be seen later when analysing data, this is something that appears within the study group frequently, with children drawing in different ways to show either emotion or action.

2.10 Multimodality

Throughout this study, multimodality and narratives appear to go hand in hand. As noted by Kress (1997) children 'make meaning in an absolute plethora of ways with an absolute plethora of means' (1997:xv), a statement that is clearly borne out in this study. As it develops, the dramatic play of children evolves into a 'cooperative multidimensional activity that produces interrelated action sequences and highly imaginative themes' (Soundy & Genisio 1994:20). The concept of using multiple modes to not only create but to tell their stories seems natural to the children observed for this study, although it became apparent that some children seemed to favour one approach over another. Kress (2010) points out that multimodality is multifaceted and can incorporate image, script, gesture, movement and music in varying degrees of importance. One can then delve deeper into this phenomenon creating a more complex view by considering culture, experiences and environment, which all help to mould and colour not only how work or stories are created and told, but how they are interpreted and understood by those around the storyteller. The production of one mode of communication, for example, the spoken narrative or the image created to tell a story, will be accompanied by 'the signs of speech, of gesture [and] of facial expression' (Kress 1997:33). Clearly the interweaving of different modes work together to enable the narrative to be told more effectively with non-verbal signs supporting the spoken word.

2.11 Language

A child's, and indeed an adult's, ability to communicate with others is a fundamental part of human development. Levey & Polirstok note that 'oral language supports literacy and that there is a strong relationship between oral language, later literacy and academic achievement' (Levey & Polirstok 2011:151). Pahl (1999) stresses the value of talk within early years settings, noting the importance of listening to children not only to observe, but also to engage and participate in discussions and oral storytelling.

Talking and language development are of huge importance to a child's early development. Browne (2009) notes that the ability to be able to both listen and speak is essential to children and their achievements. The role of talking and using language within literacy is stressed by Browne, who argues that the ability to read and write is 'founded upon children's oral language competence' (2009:4). She explains her thoughts by describing how, as children learn language and new words, they build this knowledge into an understanding of how to create sentences, initially verbally and ultimately in written form. Browne (2009) notes that much of this development comes from the opportunity to discuss, question, hypothesise and create stories with both adults and peers. The opportunity to 'share events and describe….emotions' (Browne 2009:4) allows children to find a plethora of ways to express themselves while providing the opportunity to listen to others in order to understand their needs or ideas. Once again, the interplay between talk, storytelling, drawing and indeed mark making is apparent.

The value and role of talking within classrooms has often been a topic for discussion despite the fact that, as Grifenhagen *et al* point out 'decades of research have identified features of classrooms and teachers' talk that are associated with children's language growth' (Grifenhagen *et al* 2016:509). Despite the apparent widespread acknowledgement of encouraging talk and discussion within classrooms (Newman 2017), it is surprising to discover that Grifenhagen *et al* point out their research suggests that this has 'not yet translated to widespread practice in early childhood classrooms' (2016:509). Newman (2017) echoes this and goes a stage further noting that 'productive peer dialogue is a rare feature of classroom talk' (2017:130). In their study, Grifenhagen *et al* looked at how research into talk and its benefits actually related into practice. Encouraging, they witnessed evidence of positive practice and discuss the effectiveness of teacher-child interactions and conversations.

Within Grifenhagen *et al's* study, emphasis is placed upon the environment: both the resources and activities available, but also the ethos of the setting. It is clear that when the staff in an early years setting embrace the attitude of spending time conversing and, more importantly, valuing discussion with children, the children themselves begin to mirror this approach. Newman (2017) emphasised the potential of the teacher to 'activate dialogic pedagogies' (2017:131) and suggests that in environments that allow teachers to interact dynamically and supportively, children are more likely to 'play a more active role' (2017:131). Grifenhagen *et al* note that 'teachers who are tuned in and responsive to children's interests are more likely to create language rich environments than those who spend a great deal of time talking at children' (Grifenhagen *et al* 2016:513). This builds upon work by Piaget (1920) who felt that adults have a vital role to play in a child's language development by providing stimulating environments that encourage learning and exploration. As a side note to this study, as the study was conducted predominantly during the school lock-down period of the Covid-19 Pandemic, collaborative talk was, at times, restricted and so some difficulties pertaining to working closely together were encountered during strict government guidelines and unusual classroom set-ups. It does appear, however, as will be shown later, that Abeo and his peers were quite adept and resourceful at finding ways to work and create collaboratively and took advantage of the class ethos of encouraging and celebrating purposeful and imaginative talk.

Littleton & Mercer (2013) discuss the importance of collaborative thinking. The idea of children not simply interacting with one another, but going further and inter-thinking together is suggested. When one steps back and analyses what can be observed in any role play area in a Reception class, this notion seems sound. At this young age, most children relish the opportunity of interacting with their peers and the idea of inter-thinking seems to be evident as storylines develop within their play. I feel the subtle difference between interacting and inter-thinking is in the collaborative nature of the discussion that is not simply a collection of ideas, thoughts or statements made by one child to another, but more the interweaving of ideas, knowledge and descriptions. The result is a game or storyline that has developed through inter-thinking becomes something made together and not just by individuals playing alongside each other seemingly engaged in the same game.

2.12 Sources of story material

Fox (1993) writes at length about the different sources young children may utilise to incorporate into or initiate their stories and included:

- Autobiography: here a child incorporates aspects of their own life into stories. They may use names of siblings or friends in fictitious scenarios and, Fox notes 'do not recount straightforward autobiographical events' (Fox 1993:16)
- TV and film
- Oral stories
- Rhymes and verses
- Toys
- School
- Drawings
- Dreams
- Books (Fox 1993:19)

Soundy and Genisio (1994) add field trips and influential adults to this list noting these too will 'provide young children with material for the scripts and stories of play' (1994:20), an influence that was apparent in Abeo's early creation 'The Race'.

At the time of writing (1993) Fox argued books were more influential than films however I feel that as time has moved on, so has this point of view. When Fox presented this argument, it was relatively uncommon for children to have easy access at home to multiple film recordings, however these are far more accessible to children now. Children are able to access films not just on DVD's but through streaming services (Netflix, Amazon Prime) easily and so watch their favourite films at the touch of a button often multiple times. No longer does a child have to wait to visit the cinema to watch the latest Disney film! It seems appropriate to revise Fox's original viewpoint somewhat therefore. A popular spin off is the creation of books from films. These books follow characters from popular films in both the story depicted in the original film along with new storylines. Here we can see a blurring of sources; is the child getting their inspiration from the film, the book or both. I would argue it is both. The fact that books related to popular children's films often develop new plots invites the child to do the same by showing that their well-known character can perhaps do something other than that depicted in the film.

Films and television programs do, however, provide a great deal of inspiration and this is shown in some of the stories created and recorded during this study. The repeated viewing of films that children appear to favour helps to cement the plot and characters in the child's mind along with key or repeated phrases or terminology. When one looks at popular characters depicted in television shows, although these characters participate in a different storyline each episode, there are similarities between the plots; the characters act in similar ways and will have a similar experience and so again familiarity reigns particularly along the theme of good conquering evil often with a clear and 'happy' ending. This consistency allows the child to create similar scenarios in their own stories, mirroring stories they have heard or seen whilst incorporating their own interpretations and creativity.

In her study of storytelling by young children, Paley recounts many narratives created that include well-known television and film characters. These characters are expertly woven into narratives invented by children that also include other elements invented and suggested by the children themselves that are engaged in the game. These narratives are referred to by the children as 'playing *x*' for example 'we're playing Superman' (Paley 1990:59). In one such episode, Paley recounts a complex narrative created between four children that builds on the well-known character of Superman whilst adapting this to introduce an additional character of 'Superman Tornado'. These characters are brought into a popular storyline that all within the group add to and adapt as the story evolves thus showing the childrens understanding of character and plot, interpreting this appropriately in order to develop a familiar story into something new.

2.13 Later reflections

It is encouraging to note that research in this field continues and that this area of study remains a key area of focus. In a study by Flynn *et al* (2021) exploring how bilingual pre-schoolers share their emerging stories, key similarities can be seen in both the manner the research was conducted and the outcomes produced. Flynn *et al's* study offers repeated opportunities for young children to engage in storytelling activities within an environment that actively encourages and promotes the same. The researchers describe how story circles encouraged small groups of children to tell and share stories noting that these were 'a valuable way for children to practise using language and to learn from one another' (Flynn *et al* 2021:285). As in the study described here, scaffolding by teachers was initially offered. Teachers began by

supporting the children by modelling the creation of a short story and encouraged the children in the group to listen, question and participate. Over time it was evident that the teachers stories were no longer needed and the children began to create their own stories within the story circle. The researchers describe how, as the children became more confident, the stories often became longer and more complex. Stories, they found were often created in a multimodal manner both independently and with others, mirroring data discussed here. Whilst Flynn *et al*'s study considers the bilingual aspect of the participants story creation, it is interesting to note the similarities particularly in the research approach. They emphasise the importance of listening to children and exploring the content of the stories, finding that even reluctant storytellers can 'blossom' (Flynn *et al* 2021:307) when given the time, space and encouragement to create and refine their stories (see 'Carrot Soup' Chapter 5). Listening to children is discussed in Simpson *et al's* book 'developing Habits of Noticing in Literacy and Language Classrooms' (2020). In her review of the book, French notes that teacher noticing can be used as 'both a tool for educators and as a theoretical lens through which to interpret data' (2022:1). It is pleasing to note the importance of really just listening to children, a point that was highlighted within my viva. This book can be helpful for teachers who not only want to understand how to observe their pupils but also how this can be applied within research by discussing methods of ethnographic note taking and reflections along with the importance of recognising personal bias; all vital to any teacher researcher.

A similar study considering how young children create meaning and messages conducted by Gowers (2022) can be closely linked to my own study. Here, Gowers uses a case study approach and looks at similar theory to explore the multimodal nature of making meaning and 'the importance placed on these by young children' (Gowers 2022:207). As in my study, data was obtained from children in their first year of primary school with the main focus on how children interpret and use image found in familiar environments. Gowers highlights the significance of considering the child's experience with digital content, arguing that children 're-enact characters and scenes from texts which are predominantly visual in nature, such as comics and television programmes' (Gowers 2022:209). This was evident in my own study with children frequently re-enacting stories they had seen from popular television shows and films (see 'Saving the Money Chapter 5).

Jaeger's (2021) recent work on co-composing writing looks at where the focus children within this study may go next, working together to create a jointly authored written text whose origins can be found in the multi-modal stories they narrate and act out.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Methodology introduction

This chapter will discuss and explore the methodological approach that was implemented in the study. The study focuses on how children create stories both individually and with others and considers the multimodal means, particularly play, image and collaborative talk, children use to present and tell their stories. It is worth noting at this stage that the telling of their stories is not always to another person, it can also be a personal experience, i.e. the child is telling itself the story in a monologue or narrating his or her own play. Both methods of story sharing have been witnessed during this research as will be shown. Consideration will be given in this chapter as to how and why the study was undertaken whilst looking at the ethical dilemmas presented when conducting research with young children. A description of the study group and school will be offered along with an explanation of the ethical process undertaken for the study. Observation as an approach will be explored with an explanation of why this approach was utilised here.

In preparation for this study, a pilot study was conducted and its findings, which will be discussed in detail later in chapter 3, were then used to support the ongoing research. Later in this chapter, the role and use of teachers acting as participant observers will be considered more fully. As both a teacher and researcher I find this an extremely useful tool to employ particularly within the remit of this study where the relationship between talk, narrating and story creation will be observed as and when it occurs within the classroom. The opportunities presented by conducting research in one's own environment are many and whilst Hopkins (2014) suggests that it can be difficult to apply findings from traditional education research to the classroom, I feel in the case of this study, the opposite will occur. As I will discuss, the hope for this study is that it will not only prove insightful for the wider academic community, but also for myself and my colleagues. The expectation is that the gaining of a deeper understanding of how children use multimodal means when creating narratives and how rich these narratives can be will enhance how we, as teachers, support and encourage the children in class to participate in and develop these.

The manner in which, and reasons behind, undertaking research are many and why teachers research has been discussed for some time. Carr & Kemmis (1986) suggest a number of possible reasons, citing the desire to understand and debate a particular area of practice and the belief that the undertaking of research enhances oneself and one's practice and is therefore a 'reasonable aspiration for a professional' (1986:1). This argument is supported by Hopkins (2014) who agrees, noting that research conducted by teachers can be justified because 'systematic self-study, particularly the relationship between diagnosis and treatment or action, is a hallmark of those occupations that enjoy the label 'professional'' (2014:41). Bell (2014) points out that teachers have, for some time, been motivated to both investigate and improve their practice. Ultimately, the purpose of conducting research within education is, as Mertens suggests to 'understand, describe, predict or control an educational or psychological phenomenon' (2005:2). When explaining the different aspects of teacher research, Hopkins (2014) explains that research by teachers does not necessarily require the production of research projects such as this, but can be a way for teachers to take more responsibility for how they approach teaching, thus creating a forward thinking and dynamic learning environment.

The role of teachers in research was scrutinised and encouraged by Stenhouse (1967, 1978) who noted that whilst good teachers embrace innovation they do not necessarily depend on others, such as researchers, to tell them what to do. Instead, Stenhouse suggests, teachers understand that for research and ideas to become beneficial and of use, it needs to be owned and developed by teachers who use their understanding of teaching to use new innovations to develop and enhance practice. Stenhouse was committed to the opinion that conducting research empowered teachers and produced ideas that ultimately enriched the day to day practice of teaching. The function of educational research, Stenhouse argued is 'to provide theory of educational practice testable by the experiments of teachers in the classroom' (Stenhouse 1978:10). Of course, teachers undertaking research within their workplace are, in part, governed by the parameters of their school ethos and curriculum and the impact these had on this study will be discussed later in this chapter.

When embarking upon research, one needs to be aware of what use or impact the proposed study may have to both oneself and others, and where it may sit in the existing field. Taking, for example, the contribution this study may have to a particular discipline, one has to look beyond the concept of pure research which Robson (1993) describes as a 'disinterested research for knowledge and understanding for its own sake' (1993:430). The underlining desire for this

research has been highlighted previously. I hope that it will support both myself as a teacher, and my colleagues in the understanding of how children develop and use narratives. I feel that this study will be useful not only in my school, but also in both the wider academic and teaching communities and I hope to produce a body of work that can be accessed by anybody within these groups. This research will open the door to consider how narratives, storytelling, image, gesture and ultimately writing are interlinked, and how these can be developed and encouraged in class. This clearly supports the argument that this study is not 'disinterested' but rather a relevant study to both myself and my colleagues and others interested in narratives created by young children. Wilkinson (2000) notes challenges in accessibility by 'non-experts' attempting to relate to research of this type pointing out that 'university-based research is sometimes referred to as research by academics for academics' (2000:3). The argument that Wilkinson puts forward pertaining to the fact that practitioners do not necessarily read research is troubling. His text is around 20 years old now and after discussing this with colleagues at school and accepting that this provides a small snapshot into this discussion, I would suggest that this view may be changing. Whilst Hopkins (2014) acknowledges the 'lip service' paid to 'systematic reflection' (2014:1), he does note that much has changed over recent years with classroom research being placed within a whole school development context and stresses that teachers who engage in research are 'developing their professional judgement' (Hopkins 2014:42). From discussions shared, I know that colleagues are interested in current thinking and this viewpoint is shared by McDonagh *et al* (2012) who notes that by this later date, there is a 'growing trend in educational contexts for teachers to develop, not just as competent and capable practitioners, but also as generators of educational theory' (McDonagh *et al* 2012:1). Indeed studies such as those conducted by Pampaka *et al* (2016) have highlighted a more recent focus on educational research. Here, the aim is not only to create debate on how research can be undertaken, but also to reveal 'implications for policy and practice' (2016:345).

In describing their book, McDonagh (2012) *et al* detail the development of their study and their views on research, emphasising the passion they shared throughout its duration and their hope that this passion would transfer to both policy makers and researchers alike. This philosophy, I would suggest, must surely be the hope of any practitioner undertaking research. When I consider my reasons for undertaking research, on the face of it, my choices appear straightforward. As I began my research I simply wanted to know what supports young children to engage with and develop early writing techniques in order for me to not only enhance my practice and provision to ensure the children within the class are stimulated to

achieve but also to create a body of work that encourages others to do the same. I was aware that I wanted to particularly research the role collaborative talk took and as the study developed, and following the pilot study, the role of narratives became more important to the research. Of course, once one opens the Pandora's Box that is research, it becomes apparent very quickly that there is no 'simply' about it. As previously explained the main focus of the study shifted from an emphasis on developing early writing to looking at the narratives children create with an understanding that these ultimately feed into writing. This change of focus came as a result of the pilot study and extended research.

3.2 Research Design

This study began for me as a case study using my own class and school as a base in which to conduct the research. The ethical consideration pertaining to this study will be discussed later.

When proposing this research, I felt the study leant itself towards a case study rather than undertaking an action research project as I felt I would be creating a descriptive piece of work that would show what was going on in the classroom, and not one that was chosen predominately due to a concern with current practice. However, when one considers Carr & Kemmis' (1986) definition of action research, it could be argued that it leans very much towards the philosophy and aims of this study:

> *'Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situation in which the practices are carried out'* (Carr & Kemmis 1986:162).

Many other definitions describe the appropriateness of action research, however Hopkins is succinct in his appraisal noting that action research is 'action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform' (Hopkins 2014:58). The problem solving nature of action research has the potential to offer practical solutions or improvements to practice and as such can be attractive to practitioner-researchers that have acknowledged a problem they feel worthy of investigation with the aim of improving practice.

This can be compared to Yin (2009) who describes the case study as:

> '*An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context* (Yin 2009:13)

When one considers both definitions and explanations, it could be argued it would be possible to proceed with either an action research approach or case study. However, the fact that this study was less concerned with making change, albeit with the caveat that deeper understanding would no doubt ultimately result in some form of reform, and more focussed on exploring a particular phenomenon, makes the argument to move forward with a case study sound.

It is worth looking at Ethnography and its relevance as an approach to this study. Brewer (2000) defines ethnography as:

> *'The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'field' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner'* (Brewer 2000:6).

It is clear that there are similarities between ethnography and case study, namely the focus they hold on studying and observing a person or persons in a comfortable or familiar setting. The fact that this study will be conducted within a familiar setting allows for the research to be undertaken in a natural setting, which in this case for a group of Reception aged children is their classroom. This provided the children participates of the study the opportunity to exist and be observed in a familiar environment and one in which they understand the expectations placed upon them. Case studies can be conducted in an ethnographic manner by immersing oneself in the subject, however when relating this approach to the proposed study, it will be more appropriate to look beyond the fundamentally descriptive nature of ethnography and consider why or how the phenomenon is occurring. Therefore by standing back somewhat, the case study approach allows the researcher to not just observe, but to question what they are witnessing.

When one considers earlier studies researching young children, many have been undertaken in a similar manner. Paley (1990), Dyson (1993) and Pahl (2007, 2009) spent time in classrooms

observing and recording what was seen. In the case of Paley, it was, like me, her own classroom that provided the rich grounds for her study. Dyson (1993) argues for the value of conducting research such as this within the boundary of a classroom when she describes a conversation between a child and his teacher. The child describes his friends all having 'houses' and the children all being 'neighbours'. The children are at pains to point out that they understand this is a phenomenon that occurs in school and is 'fake life' (Dyson 1993:1). This idea of neighbours does, however, present a way to become an observer:

> *'because the classroom is a place where people who would not ordinarily be neighbors become so, it is possible for an adult, if respectful, unobtrusive, and patient, to erect a small unassuming house near the children, and from that house try to understand the neighborhoods being built with the tools of language' (Dyson1993:1).*

Two earlier studies that provide background to this study through their similarity in approach and focus were conducted by Fox (1993) and Andrews (1997). These began (and in the case of Andrews, remained) by looking at their own children. Fox used this as a springboard to expand her research by contacting familiar families inviting them to participate in a storytelling study. Fox listed a number of criteria for choosing the participants of her study:

- 'The child should have had the experience of hearing books and stories read aloud….
- The child would need to enjoy telling stories
- The child should not yet be an independent reader'
  (Fox 1993:3)

Her final thought was that the age of the child was less important than the above criteria, but expected to work with children aged 5 or younger. Clear similarities exist between my own study and that of Fox with the criteria suggested by Fox mirroring the children chosen to participate in my study. The methods Fox employed to collect data were, however, different to my study. For stories created by her own son Josh, she recorded these on tapes for later transcription. Josh would then listen to his own stories becoming the 'audience for his own narrations' (Fox 1993:2). For other child participants, Fox hands over the data collection to

the respective parents noting the importance of children telling their stories to their own parents. She does note that in handing over the collection and recording of the stories, she was, of course, not actually present at their telling but was supported by parents sharing contextual information around the story.

Andrews' case study focuses on his young daughter as she begins school and explores how she begins to make meaning through writing and drawing both at home and at school. For his study he collects and analyses work created both at home and at school during her first 2 terms in Reception to consider what children produce as writing.

These studies like mine, use qualitative methods of data collection and analysis and the techniques employed have both strengths and limitations that affect their appropriateness and consideration. This study will investigate how young children in a reception class setting use multimodal means to create narratives. This study will explore how interlinked these different elements are and how they support one another. Discovery and explanation of the phenomena are key priorities to this study and therefore a qualitative approach is logical with studies of this nature giving the opportunity to describe and narrate what is said or seen. There is the added opportunity to consider what led up to the observable event and to consider it beside what has occurred before, with either an individual child or a group. This is the strength of approaching a study such as this through an ethnographic lens. One is permitted the luxury of considering the whole picture of knowing the participants and thus being able to explore alongside them what is new or of interest to them. This works particularly well with the age of the children participating in this study as time is allowed to understand the child at the start of the study before considering what the children are particularly engaged by before attempting to look at how they are using what they know in their narratives and play.

Qualitative research also allows for a more diverse audience and purpose (Denzin & Lincoln 2001) with case studies considered 'more easily understood by a wide audience' (Cohen *et* al 2007:256) and whilst this research is ultimately written to support ongoing research by other academics, it is also relevant to ensure accessibility to the completed text by colleagues and parents. This is a point picked up by Bell (2014) who discusses the difficulties associated with reading research reports noting that 'researchers use terms and occasionally jargon that may be incomprehensible to other people' (2014:9). Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) devote much discussion to the dilemma of research and in particular, the terminology associated therein.

Their argument puts forward the notion that the language used in the creation of research can be 'confusing' and 'problematic' (Mackenzie & Knipe 2006:1). Indeed, discussions and the reading of some texts can leave a novice researcher perplexed as to the way forward and seeing, for want of a better phrase, 'the wood for the trees'. However, I find that these concepts are becoming less alien and more accessible, and that feeling supports both my interest and desire to continue.

Depending on one's point of view, any key feature of either qualitative or quantitative methods has the potential to be either a strength or weakness. If, for example, one considers flexibility within a study it can be perceived by some as unnecessary or in the extreme fundamentally flawed. However, in a study of this nature, the ability to adapt and follow the lead set by the children within the study is vital and therefore a strength and indeed such was the case in this study when the opportunity to alter the focus arose and was taken. Researchers need to have the ability to be insightful and reflect on both the data obtained and how challenges within the study are met and overcome. This is particularly key when conducting qualitative studies whereby researchers seek to gain insight over statistical analysis. Indeed Strauss and Corbin (1990) note that the role of researchers participating in qualitative research is to have the ability to perceive situations 'holistically and be responsive to environmental cues in the field' (Gray 2014:175). This statement fits well into this study as it frequently became important to be able to look at what was unfolding at any point and react to it depending on how the children were developing their stories and what could be an appropriate response to this.

Adaptability in regards to dilemmas such as considering whether it was appropriate to engage with the children during their story creation, perhaps to highlight an issue or to pose a question, or to simply observe became important questions throughout the data collection period with many of these questions raised, considered and ironed out during the pilot study. This approach to pilot study development is not new with Miller *et al* (2012) describing the initial stages of a study and the alterations subsequently made to resources and approaches after the initial introduction to a group of young children. Here the original idea had been to present children with a range of photographs with the expectation that the children would stick a coloured sticker on each photograph showing whether the image was liked or not. Whilst observing the children the researchers noted the activity of choosing and placing stickers appeared more enjoyable than the actual process of choice and therefore this quantitative approach of collecting data with young children was not producing accurate results. Clearly, researchers

can plan the most elaborate modes of collecting data, but what this example shows is that the mode chosen needs to be appropriate and suitable for the participants to engage in. In this case, Miller *et al* (2012) were able to refine and adapt their resources to achieve results, however in the process did note that children repeating the activity often made different choices, again calling into question the validity of the results. It was noted that it was ultimately the 'shared interaction with the child as they engaged in the process that provided the most significant insights' (Miller *et al* 2012:41), showing that both qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used side by side to produce a fuller picture.

The understanding gained here can be applied to this study as frequently I acted simply as an observer or perhaps an 'active listener' and at other times it was useful to question a child about either an image or narrative content. As an active listener, I sat closer to the children and appeared to them to engage in the current activity. This approach encouraged the children to converse with me explaining their story as it developed, rather than simply observing and recording what the children were saying or doing. This questioning allowed a child to explain in more detail by simple questioning techniques and was not designed to present the children with different scenarios or to alter the storyline being developed by the child. It did, however, appear to allow the child to reflect on their story so far as they explained it. This in turn presented the child with options to either continue the story as it was or to alter or deviate from their original idea. Often other children would come to hear or simply overhear the story being told and would pose their own questions to the storyteller. Again options were presented here; the newcomer could participate in the story creation or simply be a listener. These scenarios were not anticipated in the planning of the pilot and only became apparent because of running the pilot study.

As previously noted, this study will comprise a qualitative research paradigm that allows for 'a variety of philosophies, research purposes, intended audiences, methods and reporting styles' (Saracho 2017:16). The appropriateness of producing a qualitative study is supported when one considers the view that qualitative research is not only used to explore and understand an issue, it allows researchers to describe an individual's experiences in a contextual manner. Van Maanen (2011) puts forward the argument that qualitative research can be flexible, once again fitting with this study pointing out that it can involve judgements by individuals and ultimately produce unexpected results and outcomes. Once an appropriate approach has been selected, Bell (2014) points out researchers have the opportunity to deviate and apply methods normally

associated with a different approach noting that it will be the nature of the study and the type of information required that influences the data collection methods employed by researchers. This argument is supported by Saracho (2017) who writes that over recent years, researchers have been 'conducting and writing articles that combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies within the same study' (Saracho 2017:16), describing this as mixed methods research.

Saracho (2017) notes that in order to create a valid and reliable piece of work, a qualitative study:

1. 'provides a profound awareness of a particular society or situation instead of a superficial account of a large sample of a population.
2. Constructs data about members in their social environment to obtain a precise representation of their structure, order and broad patterns.
3. Specifies meaning from the participants by adapting concepts and data collection techniques throughout the research process instead of using interventions, manipulation variables or using the researcher's operational definitions of variables on the participants.
4. Offers an understanding of the way the participants develop meaning from their environment and the way their meaning influences their behaviour.
5. Develops and understanding through actual experience, factual reporting, and quotations of real conversations'. (Saracho 2017:16)

Grieg *et al* describe Hatch's theoretical framework for research that puts forward the argument that the aim of interpretive research is to 'understand the meaning that children construct in their everyday action…in mutually interacting intentional states of the participants' (Grieg *et al* 2007:56). Interpretive research is discussed by Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) who argue that qualitative researchers have a perspective on what is being researched and use this perspective in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Linking this notion back to Hatch's proposed theory, he posits that by using this viewpoint there is the possibility to go beyond just describing what is being performed in front of the researcher and to get 'into an exploration of the meanings and intentions which underlie these activities' (Grieg *et al* 2007:56).

Like any adopted method, there are advantages and disadvantages to case studies. The advantages for this study lay in the possibility of conducting the research 'on my doorstep' and will be particularly relevant to myself and the setting and could be considered 'owned' by these parties. It will ultimately be a snap-shot of life within the class, focusing on the talk and collaborative work or play children participate in and the stories that are created through this. However, therein lies one criticism – the fact that a case study may be viewed as individual and therefore can prove difficult to compare to similar studies, thus proving hard to back up findings and arguments. Denscombe (2007) notes that because of this, case studies can be 'vulnerable to criticism in relation to the credibility of generalisations made from its findings' (2007:45). This is an argument that has been developed by Cohen *et al (2007)* who suggest case studies cannot be readily cross checked and as a result may be 'selective, biased, personal and subjective' (2007:256) with Yin (2009) noting that there is still a belief that case studies are more appropriately conducted during the exploratory phase of any research. However, accepting these arguments and the fact that this study, although may have similarities if revisited in a similar setting is individual, I feel that in this case, the argument for conducting a case study is sound. The flexibility it offers to adapt and alter approaches whilst considering what is happening in front of you at any given time is appropriate for this study. Whist the pilot study gave some insight into what may occur, the fact that completely unique activities occurred spontaneously which allowed the children to express themselves in an unexpected manner ultimately produced equally unexpected outcomes and became the signature of the study. The reality of conducting research of this type with young children is that how the children present and develop themselves will be a result of their particular prior experiences and interests. The research will reflect how the children interact with each other as they bring their own interests and points of view to any collaborative meeting. It is these observations showing how individual the children can be that will be analysed.

It is true that this study will, like many other case studies, be specific to this school, and as a result, potentially difficult (or indeed impossible) to replicate. However, whilst it is acknowledged that this research will describe what is seen, heard and produced in one class, one can surmise that in similar scenarios, many of the behaviours witnessed are likely to be seen in again. McLeod (2010) notes that due to their individual nature, case studies are unrepresentative of the wider community and argues that researchers cannot make generalisations based on findings from the study. However, whilst case studies provide information particular to the study group, the insight it provides can be applied to similar (and

different) situations and cases. Bell (2014) reviews these earlier views addressing this concern concluding that more important than research being generalised is the point that it is relatable i.e. are the data and details of the study similar enough to other teachers that they can relate to the findings. The point is emphasised that provided studies are conducted critically and ethically with a desire to develop both education and educational research then the research is valid and can be explored, considered and related to by others.

Touching again on ethnography, it is important to note that this study will not be undertaken in a true ethnographic manner as the children and I will part company at the end of the school day. Clearly, during the time the children are not at school the opportunity will arise to develop, converse and create and I do not propose to explore work created outside the school environment. For this research, I intend to undertake an ethnographic case study. Many previous researchers have favoured and used case studies and my role as class teacher allows for a teacher as researcher ethnographic approach.

It is prudent to take time to consider the most appropriate methodological approach for research. I have not only looked at what has come before and the approaches used in earlier research, but also considered what would work well in the setting. I feel that one aspect of this research is to be unobtrusive to the act being witnessed and as a result will employ direct observation techniques. This differs from participant observation where a researcher immerses themselves in a group, but rather requires the researcher to adopt an obtrusive position. The reasons for conducting this study within the style of an ethnographic case study are clear. Ethnography, in its simplest form, describes the study and writing about people and is therefore exactly what I propose to undertake: the study of a small group of children within my class. Brewer (2000) offers the following definition:

> 'Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'field' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner' (Brewer 2000:6).

The role of case study as an approach is also clear cut. I will be observing a small group of children within their Reception class environment. I do not propose to compare it to other groups of children within other Reception classes, although one will be able to surmise that the

phenomena observed as part of the study are likely to be replicated in similar situations. This is one criticism of case studies, as due to the individual nature of the study, the results may prove difficult to back up. Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest case studies cannot be easily cross-checked so may be 'selective, biased, personal and subjective' (Cohen *et al* 2007:256). Whilst Yin (2009) seems to support this view, he notes it is important to consider the benefits and limitations of a chosen research method, stressing research is stronger as a result of this discussion. Linking this argument to the data collection method of direct observation, this approach allows a more detached point of view and should allow a more objective account.

There are similarities between the two approaches, in particular the use of studying or observing people in a familiar setting. One additional benefit of embracing a case study approach alongside ethnography is the fact that case studies encourage the researcher to attempt to look beyond the descriptive nature of ethnography and to consider why or how the phenomenon is occurring.

3.3 Using and adapting Propp's theories of narrative to research children's narrative play

Stories that children create are boundless and whilst they frequently involve elements of lived scenarios, are not necessarily bound by the conventions of real life or possibility. The stories and films that young children often listen to encourages this imagination and creativity, frequently mixing fantasy into real situations or environments and these storylines can be seen replicated and imitated in the child's own creations. This intertextuality shows clearly the relationship that can exist between texts and how they can be interlinked and influence one another. Within this study, the term 'texts' refers to narratives found in books, films and spoken stories as all have the potential to shape one another. Fox (1993) discussed the concept of intertextuality. After listening to stories created by her son, she noted themes and language from familiar stories were often apparent in stories he subsequently created. The interlinking of the real world and fiction is discussed by Mar (2018) who suggests that the ability to understand stories relies 'on the same cognitive processes used to understand the real world' (2018:257). This goes some way to explaining why many stories created by children combine elements of fantasy and real life. Mar develops his argument further by noting that 'narratives provide abstracted representations of real-world situations and individuals' (2018:257).

The importance of identifying and using a theoretical framework in a research study is argued by Grant & Osanloo (2014) who point out that one's chosen framework is the foundation upon which the study is built. They note that this framework serves to not only support the motivation for the study itself, but also helps structure and guide the study as it is undertaken. This study will use theory of narratology as its theoretical basis, connecting Propp's theory with other pivotal writers that link to this area of study. An explanation and discussion pertaining to both Propp's theory and Narratology itself will be included by way of justification of its relevance to this study.

A definition of narrative has been offered in previous chapters and it is narratology and its link with storytelling that will form the focus of this study. As previously stated, Abeo and his peers used the narratives they created to not only show their current understanding of the world, but to provide a safe and often imaginative place to question and explore topics both independently or collaboratively. The manner in which a narrative is constructed allows all aspects of the story to form a cohesive whole by bringing the different elements, including characters, setting and plot together and, as suggested by Bruner (1987) narrative is not only a necessity, but an important mode of thought for all.

An in-depth study of Propp's theory of narrative will be presented here. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, was published in 1928 although not translated into English until 1958 and this work provided a guide for later studies in narratology and narrative structure. Finlayson (2016) argues Propp's work is 'one of the most precise formulations of narrative structure to date' (2016:55) offering a compelling structure that is 'invaluable for comparison, indexing and classification' (2016:55). Propp's theory will be used throughout this study to analyse narratives created by a group of Reception aged children and the story structure therein. This study will call on studies of storytelling, narrative theory and multimodality, and consider how these weave together to interpret the stories created in class.

Mar (2018) posits that story creation has wide reaching benefits including supporting social cognition. Through story-telling and creation, children have the opportunity to process both their own behaviours along with that of those around them whilst considering and using information and understanding previously acquired. With the above in mind, it is important to consider where inspiration may come from in support of story creation. Many of the stories created in class take place at least partially in the real world, albeit with the inclusion of magical

or impossible elements. The stories also frequently became a social event involving more than one child working and talking together. As one looks at the different observations contained within this study, it is possible to argue that Abeo's narrative becomes more complex, involving greater levels of detail and more characters, thus showing improvement. One would presume that in the creation of one's own narratives that both experience of real life and that of stories already experienced would offer inspiration. Taking for example a point suggested by Mar 'stories must provide representation of the social world' (Mar 2018:458), the narratives presented in this study will suggest that this concept is apparent throughout the stories created in class. Mar explains this point by arguing that the enduring appeal of stories is because they are a 'direct manifestation of our interests (Mar 2018:459). The more realistic the character or plot representations contained within the stories are, Mar suggests, the more likely the story is to be of interest. When one considers the folktales explored by Propp (1928), it is possible to see links between both Propp's and Mar's thoughts; whilst the fairy tales studied by Propp contain elaborate fantasy, they are rooted in the mundane, often with familiar settings, and so, it can be with stories created in class.

One interesting fact to point out here is that the narratives created in class often involved objects or animals that were used to represent humans. These characters usually then went on to represent or take on the persona of friends. Here, similarities can be seen between the narratives created by children in class and storylines seen in familiar stories and in particular films such as 'Cars' (Disney Pixar 2006). In this style of film, objects (in this case different types of vehicles) take on human characters. Whilst Mar notes that 'stories that lack correspondence to the real-world are readily criticised' (Mar 2018:459), one can see that even in stories where characters are portrayed by different vehicles, the 'characters' still act out human activities and have human characteristics. This was observed frequently in stories created in class through the inclusion of different creatures or objects, some of which clearly gained inspiration from stories or films with parallels with folkloric traditions of different cultures.

Within his narratives, one of the children Abeo frequently chose to use friends to become the characters in his stories. These characters were not always portrayed as humans as can be seen from this short excerpt from his narrative 'The Race':

> ***Abeo:*** *I'm racing. I'm Lightning McQueen*
> ***Isabel:*** *Can I play. Can I race too?*

Abeo: *You can be a car. I'm racing. I'm so fast*

Isabel: *I'm going to be a unicorn. I don't want to be a car. Can I be a unicorn?*

Abeo: *Ok but we can race. I'm fast.*

Here we can see Abeo incorporating a friend into an ongoing narrative that has developed over the course of the day. In this story, Abeo includes a favourite character 'Lightning McQueen' (Disney Pixar film 'Cars' 2006) and is able to adapt his story to include a new character. Whilst he initially instructs this new player to be a car like him, he is able to adapt his story to include his friends interests. The introduction of different characters, albeit quite estranged from the original storyline does not appear to confuse or unsettle either Abeo or Isabel both of whom are clearly content with being non-human characters and who are able to continue the story collaboratively with the addition of new characters.

Whilst the characters in narratives created in class frequently come from known, real friends, once again, links can be drawn to Propp's theory whereby the characters appearing in fairy tales could, one could argue, be derived from real people. Many of these early fairy tales begin with representation of normal life before transforming into fantasy. For example, the character of the evil uncle from the story 'Babes in the Wood' supposedly arose from a landowner living in a hall in the Norfolk village of Griston (a fact proudly depicted to this day in the village sign), who ordered the death of his wards in order to inherit their property.

3.4 Propp's Morphology of the Folktale

The use of Propp's theory as a tool with which to analyse the stories created in class will be complemented where appropriate by ideas proposed by other theorists in the field of narratology. Many of the stories that the children had experienced to date through books and films closely align with the sequence and stages proposed by Propp. Take, for example, two stories that are particular favourites of Abeo; 'The Gruffalo' (Donaldson 1999) and Disney's 'Cars' (2006). A quick analysis of the storylines for these two quite different stories shows they can be interpreted usefully alongside Propp's theory, a detailed summary of which appears later in this chapter. In the case of 'Cars' the main character (the hero) leaves to take part in a race with the villain of the story however after getting lost is challenged to rebuild a road. The character is then 'tested' by being challenged to be able to complete a particularly challenging race proving their worth to the people of the town. Guidance is received from an older, wiser

character and the hero learns and ultimately manages to win the race with the help of extra characters and ultimately defeats the villain. The race theme is clearly important to Abeo and can be seen repeatedly in many of the stories he creates in class.

The narratives used here show that Abeo uses both his knowledge of stories heard and combines this with lived experiences. At times these lived experiences become an integral part of the story, for example within the story 'The Race' (see Chapter 4) where much of the story takes place within a forest; this story was created shortly after a visit to a local forest. At other times Abeo makes reference to experiences he has clearly had or seen for example he talks about 'balloons' going off if you crash a car following a discussion at home about car safety.

Propp conducted his study of fairy tales with the aim of analysing the plots of the stories by considering the different components that comprise them. He created what he called a morphology, a 'description of the folk tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole' (Propp 1958:18). Using Propp's theory in this study will allow the narratives created in class to be studied in a similar way, allowing for understanding of plot and character used by the children and how these work together. In order to apply Propp's theory, it is important to outline this as a point of reference. Propp identified 31 elements that can occur in stories and, whilst noting that most stories would not contain all elements, he felt that the elements that did appear were usually presented in the following order. The following list is a summary of Propp's detailed description taken from 'Morphology of the Folktale' (1958).

1. Absence. One character goes away for example to travel or to work.
2. Interdiction. The action of forbidding or prohibiting something. A character is told not to do something.
3. Violation. The interdiction is violated. This is the point, Propp notes, where the villain may enter the tale.
4. Reconnaissance. The villain seeks something or makes an attempt to obtain information.
5. Delivery. The villain receives information about the victim.
6. Fraud. The villain tries to trick the victim perhaps by taking on a disguise.
7. Complicity. The victim falls for the deception and unwittingly helps the villain.

8. Villainy. This, Propp states, is an important function with particularly points 1,3,5 and 7 above facilitating this next stage of the story. Here, the villain harms a new character connected to the original character, for example by kidnaping a member of the family or steals a magical item. Propp suggests many more possibilities for this function within stories.
9. Mediation. Here the hero of the tale becomes apparent.
10. Counteraction. The point where the hero decides on or chooses what positive action he or she will embark upon.
11. Departure. The hero leaves on his chosen path.
12. Test. The hero is tested in some way to prove their worth for example can they pull a sword out of a stone?
13. Reaction. The hero reacts to the previous test.
14. Receipt of a magical agent. This could be an object that contains a helper such as a genie in a lamp, an object possessing magic (a ring), an animal or a 'power'.
15. Guidance. The hero arrives at the object or place being searched for. Propp notes that frequently the object or place being searched for is a long distance away or difficult to reach.
16. Struggle. There is a battle between the hero and the villain.
17. Branding. The hero receives a brand or wound during the battle.
18. Victory. The hero wins and the villain is defeated.
19. Resolution. This is the point Propp suggests is where the narrative reaches its peak.
20. Return. The hero returns home.
21. Pursuit. The hero is chased.
22. Rescue. The hero is somehow saved from the chase. Propp notes that many folk tales end at this point with the hero arriving home.
23. Unrecognised arrival. The hero arrives home but is not recognised.
24. Claim. From a false hero
25. A difficult task. The hero is set a difficult task that could range from solving a riddle (for example the riddles between Bilbo and Gollum in Lord of the Rings), a task of endurance or strength or an ordeal.
26. Solution. The task set is accomplished.
27. Recognition. The mark, brand or object received earlier in the tale allows the hero to be recognised.

28. Exposure. The false hero is exposed usually as a result of them being unable to complete a task.
29. Transfiguration. The hero gets a new appearance (for example the frog turning into a prince after being kissed by a princess).
30. Punishment. The villain is punished in some way
31. Wedding. The hero marries and may also take up a throne.

(adapted from Propp 1958:24-57)

It is possible to break Propp's theory into sections that show how a story may be allowed to take form thus;

- The introduction – this is covered in stages 1-7 and allow for the introduction of main characters. The scene is set for the adventure to begin.
- The body of the story – during stages 8-11 the story begins and the hero embarks upon his quest.
- The donor sequence – stages 12-19 allow the hero to search for a solution to whatever the problem proposed during the introduction is. Propp suggests that it is possible for the whole story to be covered during these stages.
- The return of the hero – here the hero returns home and the story is completed.

As the narratives produced in class are explored, reference will be made to the different elements proposed by Propp to allow for discussion and examination of how the children structure their stories and whether indeed Propp's theory supports understanding or if it is insufficient to fully analyse what has been created.

3.5 The study group

This study was undertaken within the parameters of my own class – a small reception class within a central city independent school. Participation from the school had been sought and gained from the Head Teacher before approaching parents. The school is a Catholic independent day school for children aged 2 to 11 and has around 200 pupils on role. The school has a strong Christian ethos and welcomes children of all faiths and cultures. As noted in the most recent ISI Inspection (2017) 'pupils come from a range of business, professional and other

backgrounds. Although a majority of pupils come from white European backgrounds, many others come from a diverse number of minority ethnic groups' (ISI 2017:4). The Reception class where the study took place had 20 pupils at the time and presented a diverse group on every level. Most children in the class were 4 years old with a small number already having their 5th birthday. The children within the class came from an eclectic range of backgrounds with the class being particularly multi-cultural. Both family situations and parental professions are diverse although many parents could be considered employed in 'professional' positions. A small number of parents were undertaking professional development personally including MA level qualifications and medical training with other parents in research positions. This eclectic range of backgrounds was exciting to reach out to as a researcher. I found that the parents were interested in the study, enquiring about its development and goals and showed genuine interest at the different stages. Parents with questions were happy to approach me and engage in discussion to support their decision as to whether to participate or not. Throughout the study I was encouraged by the ongoing support I have received from parents, particularly from those whose children have moved on from my classroom but whose input had been previously sought. As a researcher this has been a stimulating and rewarding experience and has carried my enthusiasm through the occasional tough moment! From their ongoing interest, I felt confident that they will remain supportive and be interested in the completed study.

The study children were chosen from the group of children whose parents have given permission to participate. I originally anticipated that I would focus on between 2 and 4 children and would use the pilot study to aid my decision making. That said, Miller *et al* (2012) discuss the possibility of not actually choosing a 'study group' rather, and this is a luxury I had as the class teacher, spending prolonged periods with the whole group, thus allowing 'all children to engage in the research process' (Miller *et al* 2012:43). This prolonged study allows researchers to observe children repeatedly engaged in the same or similar tasks and thus observe the strategies that children may choose to apply to alter or enhance their creations.

Following the change of focus to explore the narratives children create, independent writing became a part of what was being observed and its position within the story making process children were observed engaging in. Whilst considering the narratives created, the research looked at the different methods children choose to create and record their stories. The work and studies including those conducted by Paley (1990), Kress (1997, 2010) and Pahl (1999) will be key in supporting understanding and interpretation of these creations.

3.6 Selection of participants and stories

When considering the choosing of the study group during the pilot stage, I had felt it would be appropriate to choose a child who showed interest in not only stories and creating narratives, but one interested in mark making too. Choosing children that converse with one another was important as whilst many of the narratives were created individually, I was also keen to observe children to ascertain how narratives changed or developed when created collaboratively. Whilst the more fluid notion proposed by Miller *et al* (2012) of not actually picking a study group may have proven appropriate in this study, as previously explained the research coincided with the Covid-19 epidemic and school closures resulted in a far reduced number of children within class. As a result it was this group of children that became the study group and the stories they told became the focus. Whilst this altered some aspects of the study, the resulting data was extremely rich. The children who remained in school were presented with a very different environment. Even in Reception, children were encouraged to distance from each other where possible and group playing inside was limited. That said the children who were in school were able to enjoy a different style of teaching and exploration. The children were allowed more freedom to develop personal stories and narratives perhaps more fully than during a normal school day and as a result of these opportunities became exceptional story tellers, a skill they were keen to share with their peers when they came back into school. This fact highlighted to me as a teacher the importance of allowing the children to develop personal stories both independently and collaboratively. And so the unexpected arrival of a global pandemic did, in fact, help to shape the research. The change in normal routines afforded to both the children and myself for this short period of time the possibility of creating different scenarios and, perhaps, friendships between children. This, building upon the discoveries made during the pilot, enabled me to hone my research and focus on what was occurring in the classroom at that time.

As the study developed it became important to not only listen to the stories around me, but also to choose which stories would be included and analysed as part of the research. When choosing the stories to include I felt it was important to use stories that particularly resonated with me, so the ones that feature here are those that I can still close my eyes and see the children creating or performing. This allowed me to visualise not only what had happened before, during and after the creation of these stories, but how the telling of the story had affected the child telling

it. At times, the children seemed completely lost in their individual story and were almost unaware of their surroundings, at other times the excitement of re-enactment was palpable. I feel that the stories chosen for discussion here were representative of the stories the children were telling and thus showed the wide variety of topics and styles of creation the children chose to use. Reflecting on this enabled me to retell the stories here, hopefully harnessing the passion of the children telling them. Many stories that were expertly created by the children have not been included here although more are detailed in Appendix 3.

Fig 1: A reception classroom set up in line with Covid 19 guidance

The above image shows the Reception classroom set up in line with Covid 19 Government guidance as of May 2020. As can be seen, each child has their own desk distanced from others with a tray containing items for their own use such as pencils, scissors and glue along with small pots of toys such as Lego or playdough. The children were able to use other items and toys from the classroom which were then cleaned before other children were permitted to play with them. The only children in schools at this time were children of critical workers (NHS/ Police) and numbers were limited. A great deal of time was spent outside and the children were encouraged to take their learning and imagination outside as much as possible.

3.7.1 The pilot study

The pilot study became hugely important to the ongoing research as it gave the opportunity to explore the research question in a single activity using observation as its method. The original pilot provided the opportunity to conduct a short study addressing an emerging desire to mark make and narrate within a collaborate activity. I had no view on the child's ability academically at this stage; the pilot was undertaken early in the academic year at the point where all the children were becoming more confident in their environment. They were beginning to look at phonics, becoming more aware of writing in their environment, reading simple cvc (consonant, vowel, consonant) words but most children were not transferring this to writing independently. The children were beginning to show a desire to move on from initial meaning-making through mark-making activities, to a stage of not only introducing a developing understanding of letter forms and words in their work but exploring different and multi-modal ways to show and make meaning. Both the pilot and following study consider the ways children express themselves and choose to communicate their thoughts and stories.

Whilst a key focus of any pilot study is to explore and appraise the methods chosen, it also gives the opportunity to evaluate the main area of study. After considering various options, the actual plan for the pilot came from an observation of two children who were observed drawing together. After drawing for a few moments, one child started explaining his drawing to his friend. It became clear the drawing was linked to a book called 'Traction Man is here' (Grey 2006) that had been read the previous day. The boy had decided to draw the different elements of the story and then proceeded to retell the story to his friend. Not content with simply listening, the friend drew his own interpretation of the story, including elements of the original story but this time, he began to not only narrate the story as he drew 'this is when scrubbing brush was in the bin' but started to develop the storyline by adding a different adventure for the characters. This was immediately picked up by the original child who began a new picture along a similar line this time developing his own storyline.

The pilot concept was fairly simple, allowing a group of children to create an impromptu story following cues from well known stories. It was a study that needed a little time to develop: initially the children were simply observed to note interests and friendship groups. The activities the children chose to engage in were considered along with how these were developed by the children. From these observations, an activity was presented that provided the children

participating with the chance to talk, imagine and create a narrative within the context of playing together.

3.7.2 Drawing a story using toy animals as props

A number of children had been previously observed engrossed in an imaginative game of their creation using model animals. The children were then presented with a paper covered table with a selection of animals, pens and pencils. Initially the children appeared unsure and repeatedly questioned what they should do. They were encouraged to create a story about the animals and with some gentle suggestions and encouragement they began to do this. This acted as a forerunner for the pilot and through this trial it was evident that this activity provided a stimulating experience for the children and created a forum likely to promote collaborative conversation and ultimately imaginative narratives.

Therefore, the purpose of the pilot activity was to allow a small group of children the opportunity to create a story as a group, using animal props as a stimulus. The children were asked to work together to create a joint story although elements of the storyline could be their own. One child was introduced as the leader ('this is x's story') and was involved in the creation of the initial storyline. Through this activity it was possible to observe whether the children were not only able to work together in the creation of a story but whether their conversations focussed on the activity and developed the storyline as they supported one another's ideas.

Whilst reflecting on the above activity, I was aware that to ensure I heard the children's voice throughout and it was their stories that were being told, I would need to consider my role as a researcher and how to place myself both in the minds of the children and physically in the room. The role of participant observer is explained by Denscombe (2014) who explains that the role undertaken by a participant observer can be altered to fit different situations. There are three possibilities for participant observation, namely total participation, participation in the normal setting and participation as observer. As with many approaches, elements of each method could be teased out and used, however through his definition of these different possibilities, participation as observer seems appropriate for me as it allows observers to shadow a group or individual carrying out a task of interest.

Throughout the pilot study activity, it was clear that the children were engaged and keen to create their own story. One child led the activity, explaining the initial story to the others in the group as an 'animal story'. At this point, several of the group began collecting toy animals (fig 2) and began drawing on the paper. At this point, the children were insular in their approach to the activity and not engaging with others in the group. This changed as the children began talking to others around them about what they were drawing and what was happening in their section of the story.

Fig 2: Collecting and arranging the animals

After collecting and arranging a selection of animals, one boy was fixated on drawing pools of water for his animals (fig 3). He talked to the 'leader' explaining what he was doing, pointing out that the animals needed to drink and eat. This allowed for a conversation between the two children with the story leader encouraging the continuation of this storyline and beginning to incorporate it into his own.

Fig 3: Drawing pools of water

Initially the story was fairly disjointed with small splinter groups working on different elements of the story, however as the activity progressed the 'leader' was observed bringing these children closer into the story by asking what they were drawing and allowing them to explain their element of the story. This was then incorporated into the main story and built upon by the leader so that the story became more cohesive.

Fig 4: Flowers and fence 'so the animals know where they can go'

Some children used recognisable letters for ‘signs for the animals’, others chose to draw their story through the use of images (Figs 4,5,6).

Fig 5: using letters and images

Fig 6: Signs for animals

During the creation of the story one child drew some footprints (fig 7). These were noticed by several other children who then began drawing similar footprints – some large some small. Within the story, these served the purpose of ‘showing the way’ for the animals and allowed the introduction of a familiar story character, ‘the Gruffalo’ (Donaldson 1999) whose

introduction into the story refocused the group back to the initial idea of finding something for the animals to eat. These footprints became a familiar addition to many subsequent stories.

Fig 7: Footprints

The pilot brought out some interesting elements though its completion. The concept of owning the 'story' became important to the children. The presented activity became a popular one in class in various guises: frequently small groups of children would create stories together, either asking for large sheets of paper or sticking paper together to create their own giant sheet or booklet. Occasionally children would work independently to create a story which would then be brought to an adult to read to the class. The reading of these stories to the class would inevitably lead to a flurry of new stories created within class that could be shared.

The following day, the children produced a racing story (Fig 8). The production of this involved the child talking to a friend about how fast his car was going. The image he created was drawn in an equally fast manner as can be seen by the circles around the edge of the page to show how fast the car was racing. This incorporation of gesture in this case to emphasise the speed within the story became an important consideration in the study of the multimodal means children use to tell their stories.

Fig 8: A speeding car story

Two weeks later, two boys produced an image that formed part of a complex story (Fig 9). They were fixated on its creation and spent some time discussing and drawing the story of two monsters. In this case, the conversation between the two boys was more developed than that of the pilot and very clearly fed into the story development. As can be seen by the image, the boys sat closely together while drawing their story and this appeared to support the collaborative nature of their story creation.

Fig 9: A jointly created monster story

The process of completing a pilot was beneficial, not just as Kezar (2000) notes to develop the understanding of the topic or to give experience in the process of research, but to have the opportunity to learn lessons and adapt processes. Wray *et al* (2017) note that whilst pilot studies are commonplace in quantitative research they are less used in qualitative studies. This, they suggest, is changing with the understanding that pilots provide researchers with a better understanding of phenomena under investigation. Ultimately the purpose of undertaking a pilot is to not only iron out any challenges and make alterations as required, but also to give an idea of what may occur later in the main study. By preparing the way, the pilot study helped set the boundaries for the actual study and in many ways the final research focus was found through the pilot. The pilot allowed me the luxury of trialling a selection of different approaches even before the final activity for the pilot was chosen, all of which in some way fed into the final choice of study. My action plan became clearer as a result of the pilot and I was able to have a more focused view on what the actual study would look like and indeed what it would take as its main focus. The in-depth study of narratology had not really been at the forefront of my study until this point and it was not until I observed the children working together to create a story and how they then wanted to tell this story that I understood just how powerful this was. It was evident that the children were both excited and inspired by the activities and the opportunities they presented and so this was not only to be a piece of research but something that the children could potentially benefit from both during the study and later.

Undertaking a pilot allowed me to consider carefully the types of activity I would offer and ultimately observe. It was evident that in this study it was a case of 'less is more' with the richest narratives being created 'in the moment' and these were what I wanted to capture. I realised through the pilot that rather than creating activities that required a great deal of adult input and that would perhaps be activities I, as a teacher, would hope the children would tackle in a particular way, I would focus more on the spontaneous creations of the children that they made through the sheer pleasure of doing so. The caveat I add to this is the fact that I continued to read and explore a range stories with the children, offering suggestions and encouraging them to create stories in different ways. I did not expect to be instructing the children to 'make up stories', rather encouraging the development of narratives the children embark on independently by offering suggestions of ways to develop these. The pilot did highlight the fact that the children were stimulated to participate and extend stories simply by their efforts being recognised and applauded.

3.8 Observation as a method

When considering this study, and the setting in which it was undertaken, observation became the main method of data collection employed. The common ethnographic approach of participant observation has already been described whereby the researcher immerses themselves in a group or culture, participating actively in daily life, whilst recording and creating copious field notes. Gray (2014) notes that the skill to undertaking ethnographic research successfully is 'skilfully combining the role of participant and observer' (2014:439). However here it is worth noting the difficulties surrounding participant observation in a classroom where I am also the teacher. Conducting observation in this manner has the potential to alter the dynamics of the group being studied and whilst that is important to consider, this approach will still be useful in this study. The whole class and any focus group were already comfortable with observations being conducted as they already form a regular part of their school day and are used regularly throughout Early Years classrooms, both in nurseries and reception classes as a means of assessment. This ensures that the children are comfortable with the concept of adults noting what they are doing, asking questions about activities and photographing work during and after its completion, thus paving the way to conduct readily accepted observations of group work. This was apparent during the pilot study as the group quickly stopped asking questions and focused solely on themselves and the activity. Observations can be an extremely powerful tool to employ when conducting research and, as already mentioned, are particularly suited to use within Early Years as they give the opportunity to gather data from situations and events that occur naturally.

A similar approach is that of direct observation. This differs from participant observation in the fact that it does not require the researcher to participate instead adopting an unobtrusive position. This approach suggests a more detached point of view as the researcher did not take part but simply watched. Both direct and participant observation have merit and a combination of both were used during this research. The importance of introducing new concepts or offering suggestions, as seen in the pilot, were both useful and important in the early stages of the study, with the opportunity to act more as a direct observer later, once understanding of the process had been gained by the children. Realistically it was not until the moment of observation that it became clear which approach was the most suitable at the time.

The appropriateness of using different approaches and strategies when undertaking research with young children is discussed by Callan & Reed (2011) who suggest some are more appropriate than others, noting that 'traditional methods such as observation are vital to carrying out research with very young children' (Callan & Reed 2011:27). They base their argument in favour of observations on the fact that observations involve the child's 'active participation and considerations of their expressed views (or behavioural responses)' (2011:27). The argument that observation allows researchers the opportunity to gather information in different settings or environments is one championed by Morrison (1993). He suggests that not only can researchers observe an activity but also consider the wider aspect of this and how environmental factors may play a part. This view is endorsed by Denscombe (2014) who, whilst agreeing that a vital aspect of particularly participant observations is to gain an 'overall feel for the situation', arguing that this 'scene setting' is really a 'prelude to more focused observations' (Denscombe 2014:217). This suggests that through observations, a researcher is able to build a bigger picture and gather information in a range of areas. It is important to note that conducting observations is not always plain sailing. The possibility of being distracted is extremely high; either by something else happening in the classroom or by a child desperate for your attention. Whilst undertaking observations, it is not enough to simply 'observe' as it can be argued that there is little to be gained simply by observing, one must look further and consider the 'why' in what is happening. Note-taking or field notes are useful additions to an observation and were used during this study. I found that I was able to take notes whilst observing, initially writing a short descriptions of the event following this with notes of what the children said along with quick notes detailing gesture or any other key response from a child.

Qualitative data analysis involves the ability to obtain and then explain the data. Making sense of this data in relation to the situation and conditions in which it occurred and noting patterns would be important to the discussion of results in this study. The pilot raised the very real issue of recording; recording not only what was being said by the children being observed, but also making note of the situation around them. As noted, the event that became the pilot occurred as a result of previous observations of the children at play. These early observations showed what it was that excited and engaged the children and so encouraging them to talk, work and create together. Pahl, whose work links closely to this study, considered how to study interactions between young children, noting that 'when considering children's meaning making in the classroom, attention needs to be focused on the relationship between their talk and their

multimodal texts' (Pahl 2009:188). The pilot study allowed for some consideration of the co-existence of collaborative talk and meaning making through the use of props, in this case the animals with the story being created on giant sheets of paper. Ultimately it became clear that other methods beyond simply writing an account of an activity would be needed in order to show a fuller image of what occurred and photographing the activity throughout was used as a method of recording.

The understanding that meaning can be created in a range of ways such as gesture, image and talk (Pahl 2009) emphasises the importance of finding some way of noting and recording this. Denscombe (2014) argues that qualitative data is open to interpretation, however one could argue that through repeated observation of similar activities, any interpretation suggested will be appropriate and realistic and a true reflection of the study. An oft recognised feature of qualitative data analysis is that it can be open to interpretation and not so much a completely objective representation of what was seen and it is important to have this in mind when analysing and discussing the data.

Coding events as they occur can produce a 'summary measure of the characteristics' (Silverman 2000:145) and can be useful when showing interactions between groups, noting what the participants are engaging in at any point. In one study, Silverman (2000) notes that the use of coding allowed for the realisation that the 'reality was not in line with ...overall impressions' (2000:145) and thus allowed for subtle changes to be made in both data collection and, as in the case of this study, perhaps activities and resources offered. Ultimately I found that coding as I observed did not work well as the activities were either extremely varied and perhaps did not fit any pre-ordained code, or the activity was of individual children and therefore coding was unnecessary.

Bell (2014) notes that diaries can be useful in an ethnographic approach, describing studies conducted that use diaries to support later activities. Whilst Bell notes that diaries can be particularly useful when devising interviews, the thought process behind observing and recording observations of children and then using these notes and observations to develop and revisit through different activities and questions is sound. The use of diaries allows not only the opportunity to record field notes and observations, but also to document the thought process and reflections of the researcher. The development of thinking and changes in process or ideas can be chronologically mapped, thus giving a greater understanding to the final study. The

concept of reflection is key here with previous studies encouraging teachers to view themselves as learners and enquirers (Kincheloe 2003). When approaching the final write up, the opportunity to reflect on my own thought processes will give a clearer view of any changes and more understanding of the reasons why decisions were made throughout the study.

3.9 Ethical considerations

At the outset, it is prudent to consider my role as a researcher. Taylor (2010) writing in MacNaughton *et al* (2010) discusses her view of her own research in which she took a similar position as myself. She notes that when undertaking research that one is a participant of, i.e. within one's own practice, you naturally immerse yourself fully into the project. She discusses the feelings she had of exposure and vulnerability, however points out that it is precisely this that allowed her to critique and change what she 'thought and did' (Taylor 2010:294). It is clear that from this viewpoint, research conducted within one's own workplace has the potential to allow not only the researcher, but those around, to challenge what they do and to look to new and exciting ideas and opinions.

This raises the question of the role of critical reflexivity. Traditional distinctions split researchers into two groups: that of the outsider or insider. The outsider being an expert in the field, but detached and an observer, whereas the insider is more involved and self-reflective and someone who is contributing – not only to the research but also to what is being researched at some level. Callan & Reed (2011) discuss this point noting that both approaches have merit. One could consider the concept of having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the organisation where the research will be conducted – from the individuals to the ethos of the setting - as beneficial. An outsider would have none of this understanding prior to the commencement of the research. An insider would have access to this knowledge and so bypass any initial settling period and therefore be able to embark upon gaining a deeper understanding, an argument proposed by Callan & Reed (2011). Caution is urged however by others who note the difficulties with being overly familiar with a setting, suggesting researchers who know the staff and setting may face other challenges for example being critical or working without bias.

Before conducting research, it is vital that researchers consider the ethical implications involved in their research, respecting the rights of the participants of the research, in this case both the children and their parents. It will be necessary to ensure participants are aware of and

understand the concept of informed consent, namely the idea that anyone has the right to decide what is best for them and whether they wish to participate in the research. This does, however, open the question of how to ensure children are represented fairly and are still given the right to choose. Legally, children cannot give their consent; rather the child's parent or guardian is able to give consent. However despite this, it still remains good ethical practice to ask the child for their consent and to explain the process of the research to them in a manner in which they will understand.

When viewing the risks and benefits of the research, one could argue the benefits are clear: through developing a deeper understanding of how children develop early writing and the tools they employ, staff will be able to offer resources and activities that actively promote and encourage progression in both language and story creation and ultimately into writing. When considering harm, it is useful to look at how the research will be conducted. I anticipated no harm to the children as they were engaging in usual classroom activities throughout. One area that had potential to be considered a risk is that of humiliation. Will children be embarrassed either now later seeing their work included in the research? These concerns were alleviated by providing clear details of how the data was to be used and discussed. The names of all children have been changed to allow for anonymity. At no point is any work ridiculed, but rather considered and explored within a discussion focused on how and why the work was produced and what role it took in the narrative or game.

Before undertaking any part of this study, ethical approval was sought and gained from UEA Ethics Committee. This lengthy process looked at not only what would be researched, but how the research would be conducted and who would participate in it. The process of applying for ethical approval raised many questions that needed considering and answering before the research could begin.

When discussing ethics within an Early Years setting, Callan and Reed (2011) suggest that for any practitioner working with children 'ethical responsibilities are at the very heart of your role' (2011:19). They strengthen this argument by pointing out that simply by working within an early years role one must focus on not only privacy and confidentiality, but also be aware of both one's own and that of the settings values underpinning practice. Of course, this statement relates predominantly to the process of working with young children, however it sets a bold focus for working and thinking in an ethical manner. The ethical considerations for a

research project such as this go further and underpin all activities and work undertaken as part of the study. Denscombe (2014) notes that social researchers must be ethical and describes a number of principles researchers are expected to adhere to as part of the research process of collection and processing data. A number of ethical considerations linked to research based in childhood studies are put forward by Tisdall *et al* who suggest 'informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality' (2009:14) are key components of ethical research. In their analysis of these three points, they note that specific issues arise as a result of working with young children, naming informed consent as a particularly problematic area.

For this study to be effective, consent needed to be gained not only from parents but from the children themselves. The challenge of undertaking ethical research with children was explored by Harcourt & Sargeant (2011) who suggest 'pro-active strategies need to be taken in order to invite and encourage children to engage with the research' (2011:422). As part of their study, Harcourt & Sargeant consider how researchers view children participants suggesting that 'the lens through which researchers see children can impact on all aspects of the research process' (2011:424). Clearly viewing the participants, whatever age, as integral to the study is vital and certainly in the case of this study their input is important. Certainly, the fact that the children understood I was curious about their stories and keen to hear and share them did enthuse ongoing creation of work and allowed the children to share in the success of their peers.

Full details of the research along with consent to participate was sent to all parents at the start of the academic year. Once these had been returned, the research was explained in an age-appropriate manner to the children. In order to record their assent to participate, the children were invited to place a sticker next to their name in the 'yes' column if they were happy to participate or the 'no' column if they did not wish to participate. It was felt that this interactive method of recording would provide an appealing, age-appropriate method. For fairness, children whose parents had not given consent were involved in the discussion and allowed to record their views but their responses were discounted from my dataset. The importance of trust between researcher and those being researched should not be underestimated and has been key to this particular study. Parents were keen to discuss and raise questions throughout the research process, showing both interest and a desire to participate. This was replicated by the children, without whose input this would not have been possible. Their constant enquiry and desire to explore and develop themselves provided an exciting and stimulating environment in which to conduct this study.

The philosophy of including children in research rather than simply researching them is important to this study. Here, as in Einarsdottir's study, children are viewed as worthy of investigation and considered 'knowledgeable, competent, strong and powerful members of society' (Einarsdottir 2007:198). This view is echoed by Harcourt & Sargeant who note that there is 'increasing recognition of the importance of listening to children' (2011:429).

Tisdall *et al* (2009) note the importance of gaining informed consent from not only parents, but the children themselves detailing four main principles that underpin its process namely:

- Gaining consent involves an explicit act such as verbal or written agreement. In this case the act of adding their name or sticker to a chart was used,
- The understanding that participants can only agree to participate if they understand the research. In this study the aims were explained to the children in an appropriate manner and they were invited to question any explanation,
- Participants must not be coerced into participating and therefore only participated voluntarily,
- Participants should understand that they may withdraw their consent at any time. This point was explained to the children.

These points were addressed through the process of gaining ethical approval, although are important to remember throughout the duration of the study.

3.10 Teachers as researchers

The role of teachers being researchers is complex and has been raised throughout this chapter. There are both benefits and complications to working as a teacher and researcher. The question of bias must be considered and the process of gaining ethical approval supported a deeper understanding of this. When researching one's own class, there is the potential to wish to show the children in the best light, however it is vital to have the ability to stand back from being the teacher in order to analyse what the children are doing and creating. The importance of being able to reflect and discuss honestly and openly what has been seen, and not, perhaps, what it was that was hoped to have been seen, should not be overlooked. Cohen *et al* (2007) suggest

that researchers undertaking qualitative studies must exercise caution for, as they note, 'the analysis and the findings may say more about the researcher than about the data' (2007:469).

In any research it is important to consider the notion of bias. Bias leads to research being skewed and has the potential to allow researchers to choose not to question ideas or ignore results that may call into question their opinion or theory. One could argue that insiders may have more bias as they are more subjective with their approach to the research and outcomes whereas an outsider would be more objective and hence would result in less opportunity for bias. It is important to be aware of any potential bias when conducting research, particularly when in one's own workplace or chosen field. This research considers how children use multimodal ways to create narratives. I did not begin the research with a pre-formed opinion of this, more with a curiosity of how children use different tools and approaches. And I expected, therefore, that the ultimate report would show little bias.

What will support the choices parents make is the understanding of the research itself – what it will entail and the potential benefit. It can be argued that much of the research conducted in this field intends to improve provision and outcomes for young children. However, as Alderson and Morrow (2011) point out, 'research alone seldom brings real benefits without time and effort being spent on disseminating and implementing the findings' (2011:24). It is to address this sentiment that I hoped to produce my findings in a manner that is accessible for a wide audience, from those in the academic field, to my colleagues and the families included in the study. I feel this will go some way in ensuring the usefulness of the study. The aim is for the insight gained to be fed directly back into practice to enhance the learning environment for the children in class.

Throughout this study, reflection became integral to the process. This was achieved through a number of approaches; the use of reflective diaries and discussion with colleagues along with simply reflecting on activities and studies reviewed. O'keefe & Tait (2004) note that reflective practice 'focuses on a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development' (2004:29). Reflection is a useful tool for researchers and teachers alike however, as Callan & Reed (2011) point out, there is little use in reflecting on something that you do not wish to either change or develop. They argue that that by having a critical eye 'invites you to explore alternatives' (2011:57) and this critical view allows practitioners and indeed researchers to

consider 'differing perspectives' (2011:57) and then bring in changes and developments where necessary.

I feel that the methodological approaches adopted for this study were appropriate and that they provide the data required to create and present a body of work that highlights how young children create narratives.

3.11 Limitations of the study

The biggest factor to impact the study was something totally unexpected and unimaginable. Just as the research hit the critical stage of data collection, the world was gripped by Covid-19 and life in school became very different. This impacted particularly on how I had initially planned the study and the data collection as my study group of 20 suddenly reduced to around 5 children. I accept, therefore, that this study is reflective of the group of children observed and whilst it can be surmised that children of similar ages may create narratives in similar ways, this study remains individual to the group I worked with.

As already stated, this study took place within my own Reception classroom during the Covid-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdown periods. Most of the data was obtained from a small study group formed from children who were permitted into school in line with the government restrictions allowing only children of key workers. The opportunities presented by conducting research in one's own environment are many and whilst Hopkins (2014) suggests that an 'unfortunate aspect of traditional educational research is that it is extremely difficult to apply its findings to classroom practice' (Hopkins 2014:46), I feel in the case of this study, the opposite may occur. The hope for this study is that it will prove insightful for not only the wider academic community, but in particular for myself and my colleagues and provide a story that considers and tells the stories young children create simply for what appears to be the joy of doing so. I have learnt through this study that young children have not only vivid imaginations, but they are able to call upon stories heard and experiences lived to make their narratives exciting and rich. Certainly the children within this study genuinely wanted to share their stories with their peers and with me and took pride in what they had created through a myriad of multimodal means. The expectation is that the gaining of a deeper understanding of how children creative narratives, will enhance how we, as teachers, support and encourage the children in class to participate in and develop these both independently and collaboratively.

The research, once concluded will of course be specific and relevant to my setting and one accepts that this in and of itself raises questions. It will ultimately be a snap-shot of life within the class, focusing on the narratives and multimodal work or play children participate in and the stories that are created through this. Unexpectedly the fact that the study group became smaller and more diverse also added an exciting element to the research for a number of reasons. Initially it allowed me to focus on a smaller group, but also allowed for consideration of narratives created across friendship groups. Considering both the age of the children participating and the philosophy allowing for free creation, it seemed highly likely that a completely unique activity would occur, allowing the children to express themselves in an unexpected manner, producing equally unexpected outcomes.

3.12 Future areas of study

I began this study with the intention of looking at how children develop into writers and although I felt as I began to analyse the data the study would not focus on this, through discussions with colleagues and reflection it became clear just how the children were adept at using these narratives to support early writing. Kress in particular writes in depth about what comes before the act of actual writing (as a recognised form of alphabetic written word) and indeed the title of his book 'Before Writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy' (1997) should be enough to make one stop and think that there are many roads to take along the journey of becoming an established writer. So it became clear that as I embarked on this I needed to look at what occurred before writing (as defined by us as adults) came about. This has led to a fascinating journey of discovery into a field of study I wasn't expecting to walk through. The understanding of narratology has ignited a passion within me to encourage story creation and story-telling throughout the early years with the hope that once children discover for themselves this is not only something they can do, but also something they can enjoy and excel at, they will continue doing just this as they progress through school. One initial area of study I would be keen to pursue would to be meet up with Abeo and his friends as they progress through Primary school and to see how his stories have developed, what themes they now include and how they are presented. Indeed whether or not he is still creating stories with the same passion would be something to consider. I hope so, as to watch him while he recreated his stories for me has given me great joy over the duration of this study.

I would still like to look more deeply into how this then transfers into early writing and perhaps linking follow up studies of Abeo and his peers and consider how the narratives they create transfer into and support writing in later years.

Chapter 4
Observational data

Chapter 4 explains the context for the narratives created and after introducing Abeo, begins sharing the stories produced in class by Abeo and his friends. A number of stories created by Abeo will be present here with analysis linking this to Propp's theory. The stories are presented in the chronological order they were told by Abeo.

4.1: Context for children's stories represented in the observational data

This study considers a number of observations conducted primarily of one child, Abeo, with the addition of others within his narration and games, over a six-month period. Whilst different children are included in the observations, Abeo remains constant in all observations discussed, and it is his storytelling and developing narratives that will be analysed.

The joy of observing and reflecting on stories created by young children is explained by Paley (1990) in detail in her books. For Paley, the possibilities presented to a teacher in class to observe and share are endless, and once highlighted, allow teachers to 'observe the scene more closely' (Paley 1990:16). Teachers conducting research in their own classes are, as suggested by Bruce *et al* (2020) able to provide sensitive scaffolding to unfolding play and story creation that can guide, direct and capture the imagination of young children. Along with the need to be aware of the criticism and pitfalls of teacher researchers, this does present researchers such as myself with many opportunities. Bruce *et al* note that close observations and careful listening to children will lead to a 'deeper understanding of the child' (2020:29) and that became clear through this research. Watching a small group of children closely, particularly through the lockdown period of the Covid-19 pandemic afforded me the chance to understand more fully what they were showing through their narratives, imagery and play. Working closely with this small group enabled me to observe how their play and narrative developed and evolved over the period in a variety of scenarios from early morning in the classroom to playtimes outside. This approach did, in turn, lead to the opportunity to reflect on not only what was being seen, but the process of the research itself and I was able to refine and alter as I felt necessary enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of what was being presented to me by

the children in class. As a researcher, I was able to reflect on what I was seeing personally often verbally with colleagues or my University Supervisors. This professional dialogue allowed me to unpick some aspects of my research and highlighted ways to move forward. My supervisors encouraged me to 'step back' and look at not only the minute detail, but how these details built into the bigger picture and into the research as a whole. The process of reflecting allowed time to consider and challenge my own interpretation of events including being critical of my processes with a view to enhancing how I was approaching the research and questioning whether other methods could be employed or different activities presented for observation. Critical reflection can allow alternative perspectives that 'challenge assumed practice and automatic ways of doing things' (Callan & Reed 2011:58). This highlighted the fact that the act of reflecting on what was being observed would not only impact on how the research developed, but also how my and colleagues' practice could be altered through the acceptance of change.

I, like Paley and Pahl (1999) have the luxury of having a ready-made study group in the form of my class. Observations were at times, hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic however, whilst many challenges were encountered, different opportunities presented themselves. The original study group consisted of 20 children from one class all aged four or five of which a smaller focus group would be chosen. Suddenly, class groups changed and new groups consisted of children from different year groups. Throughout this study, the names of the children included have been changed to preserve anonymity. Names still reflect the correct gender of the child and I have tried, were possible, to use culturally similar names feeling that this would retain the child's cultural identity.

This study has always had the conversations children have at its heart, however whilst undertaking preliminary observations, focus altered slightly from the outcome of writing development particularly though collaborate conversations and narratives to exploring the actual narratives children created and how they were created. Here my experiences become similar once again to that of Paley (1990) who suggests that early in her teaching career she was 'in the wrong forest (and) paid scant attention to the play and did not hear the stories' (Paley 1990:5). Even once I had decided to embark on research, I don't think I was myself quite in the 'right forest' but through listening to the children and with the support of my research supervisors, I eventually ended up where I wanted and needed to be. What became clear through the consideration of data obtained is that children are creators of meaning and

became co-constructors of the research through their involvement and interests. The children were keen to show how they understood the world through their stories, making sense of what they saw and answering questions of themselves through their play and narration.

When looking at the stories created during the lockdown period I felt it was important to be aware of how, if at all, these stories included world events or changed as a result of the changes the children were experiencing. In fact very little reference to the pandemic appeared in any narrative. One short story created whilst playing outside introduces zombies for the first time with the comment made by Abeo 'he (the zombie) spits on me and I got saliva on me so I had to wash and wash and wash'. Later in the same story he again references washing and says 'you can't get the treasure if it's not washed'. Another story, 'Off to the Zoo' includes references to dinosaurs becoming sick and visiting the doctors. These comments may be born from the frequent references around the children at the time about washing, illness and doctors. These are the only two references that appear in the body of a story created by the children in class and this storyline with zombies was not revisited.

Through the development of the study, the role of adults in the room was considered with different research approaches applied. On occasions I acted simply as an observer, this was more often when the luxury of additional staff allowed this, other times I became a participant observer offering comments, questions or answers. As individuals interact and negotiate throughout their day, in this case children negotiating play and story creations, the understanding of this is, Scott & Usher (1999) suggest, best understood through participation. A point emphasised by Burgess who notes that it is the role of the researcher to 'interpret the meanings and experiences of social actors. A task that can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved' (Burgess cited in Scott & Usher (1999:99). The use of different approaches has, I feel, resulted in not only a richer interpretation of the child's voice and thoughts, but allowed for questioning, prompting and supporting enabling the children to consider and develop their own narratives.

4.2 Data and Analysis

A full explanation of Propp's Theory (1928) is be found in Chapter 3. I shall now look at Propp's theory alongside observations of children in class looking at how this links into the

narratives created by the children and whether the story structure proposed by Propp matches stories narrated by Abeo and his peers.

4.3 Abeo's narratives: Setting the scene

Abeo is a particularly imaginative and creative boy who was keen to create narratives both independently and with friends. He is adaptable and able to create narratives drawing on known stories for either characters or storylines that he adapted often using whatever was to hand as a prop to enhance his storytelling. Abeo skilfully wove toy figures, Lego, K'nex and outside climbing equipment into his narratives, making use of both inside and outside spaces and frequently enjoyed drawing his stories. Abeo became a key contributor to this study and as his story telling was prolific and often contagious to those around him, features in many observations. As a 'key worker child' he was therefore still in school for the duration of the study. This in itself gave the opportunity for Abeo to explore narrative creation with other children not usually available to him in class and he showed he was happy to create stories with both his peers and children slightly older than him.

This study offers and reflects on a number of observations of Abeo and his friends at play when narratives were created either independently or with others. When considering and analysing the observations, focus has been placed on different areas. For example when considering 'The Race', an in-depth analysis of how the narrative created by Abeo links to Propp's theory is offered. The different elements of the story are discussed alongside Propp's ideas in order to both cement the relevance of Propp's theory in this study and to ascertain where Abeo has shown his self-created story fits in with the order proposed by Propp. The focus of each observation will be made clear at the beginning of the discussion pertaining to each story.

4.4.1 Story 1: The Race

This quite lengthy narrative is useful to set the scene for Abeo's further narratives and was the first story created by Abeo recorded.

This narrative eventually involved three children although created initially by Abeo. The narrative has been presented as three shorter transcripts encompassing Story 1; The Race and Story 2; Rainbow Land, parts 1 and 2 with discussions and analysis after each section of the

story. The narrative starts with Abeo playing independently in the classroom. He is playing with Lego on the classroom floor and at this point there is only one other child in the classroom who is engaged in a different activity. Abeo begins by choosing 3 flat Lego bases that he spends some time pushing around the floor before putting them in a line. This is done with no verbalised speech. After looking at these Lego pieces for around 1 minute, he begins his narrative. Abeo continues creating his narrative independently before being joined by another boy, George (line 35).

Description is show through the use of italics in the transcription. Numbers on the left indicate line numbers. Line numbers have been used simply for clarity and to aid the reader navigate the dialogue and do not represent a unit of meaning or show turn-taking.

1. **Abeo:** Tom made 3 boats. They had a race.
2. *He gets 2 Lego wheels from the box and rolls them. After rolling and*
3. *watching a few times he begins talking.*
4. Tom is winning, it's a race, and Tom is winning. He's so fast and then Abeo
5. was racing and rolled under the bridge.
6. *he rolls one wheel under a chair*
7. So Tom wanted to go under the bridge so he took a short cut but he crashed
8. into a tree stump and he got lost in a forest. He'll get eaten.
9. *at this point he puts a jumper that is on the floor on top of one of the*
10. *wheels*
11. He's in the forest and he's lost. Oh yes, I know I could take a short cut but Tom
12. said no cos he is in the forest. Tom was really small and I was middle and we
13. went fast and I found Tom in the forest so he was happy and we went fast under
14. the bridge. But the dinosaur is hungry.
15. *he rolls both wheels under the chair*
16. Tom wanted to zoom around but I went on a speed bump.
17. *he bounces his wheel up and down and laughs*
18. Then we stopped for some yummy food.
19. *Until this stage Abeo has been continually moving around the room*
20. *rolling the wheels either beside him or pushing them ahead of him. At*
21. *this point he stops and rests miming eating.*

Then after our yummy food we was happy but we got lost in the darkness. Tom said this is the exit. This is the place! I said where is this place, we are lost and I bumped into the tree again and Tom bumped into the tree again and said it's the forest and then he bumped into a tree stump and another tree stump and I bumped into a tree stump and I laughed and then we saw a boat. It's the place.

He moved to where he had put the 3 Lego 'boats' at the start of the story

Look there are 3 boats. George must be here somewhere. My race is round and round and round and then I stopped and I saw George and we had a snack and we saw the boat but then George turned into a tyre too

He finds another Lego tyre from the box

At this point George – possibly hearing his name - joins Abeo on the carpet

George: Can I be a dinosaur

(he roars)

Abeo: You can be a dino tyre

George: A baby T-rex dino tyre that eats everything.

George follows Abeo around the carpet. They both roll their tyres and George makes his face look like an angry dinosaur, occasionally roaring

George: I'm gonna stomp in the forest. Will we get lost?

Abeo: Toms in the forest we can get him and then we can race. You can't win cos you are a baby T-rex but we can have some yummy food with Tom

George: We can have a picnic

Abeo: Yes a picnic and we can find Tom. Tom is eating beans on toast and then he did eat mac and cheese

George: I'm eating meat because I'm a T-rex and they're meat eaters

Abeo: I found you Tom we can race now. Oh no, Abeo is out of the race cos he went out of the building. He's disqualified. Look, it's a donut shop. Oh no, I've missed it STOP. *(shouts).*

The story 'The Race' was created during the morning between Abeo and George. Within this narrative we can see many elements of Propp's theory both the storyline and characters with the structure of Abeo's race narrative following the order proposed by Propp. The following narrative was created later the same day and appears to be linked to 'The Race'. Once again, the narrative is led by Abeo but this time involves a different child, Isabel. The story was created outside and made use of both static and movable outside play equipment.

4.4.2 Story 2: Rainbow Land part 1: outside

Abeo: I'm racing. I'm Lightning McQueen
Isabel: Can I play. Can I race too?
Abeo: You can be a car. I'm racing. I'm so fast
Isabel: I'm going to be a unicorn. I don't want to be a car. Can I be a unicorn?
Abeo: Ok but we can race. I'm fast.
They begin to chase each other around the playground.
Isabel: I know, lets go to unicorn land.
Abeo: No, lets go to rainbow land. I can meet you at rainbow land. That's where the unicorn live.
Isabel: Ok you come to see me. I'm in rainbow land. Its here
she moves to hide under the slide
Abeo: How do I get there?
there are some pieces of balance equipment laid out in other parts of the playground
Abeo: We can make a bridge. You get that. And we need steps. You can go up the steps for the rainbow land. Its up there now.
They work together to bring the equipment nearer to the slide. They ask for help to set it up. I ask how they want it set up.
Isabel: Its got to be a bridge for the Rainbow land
Abeo: She's the unicorn and I'm going to see her and we need to go over the rainbow and that's the rainbow.
We build the balance together, following their direction
Abeo: I'm good a balancing, look
he runs along the balance

Right, now let's make a race. We need to go fast and then on the rainbow and then we can get to rainbow land. Are you there yet?
I'm going to do a party. You can come. We can have crisps and strawberries. I like strawberries. I had ice-cream at the beach. We can have a beach in rainbow land.
Isabel: We can have the party in Rainbow land and there can be a game. I go to the beach. It's hot and you have to put your sun-cream on and then we can make a sand castle and the unicorn can come. I can be the mummy on the beach.
Abeo: I'm racing and I'm gonna win the race. It's a beach race.
Isabel skips beside him in the style of a horse. They continue following the same route around the playground jumping along the balance and round the slide. One of the other children has left a scooter. Abeo runs to it.
Abeo: We can use this in our race.
They ask for another scooter so they can have one each.
They then create an elaborate obstacle race that they take turns completing.

What can be seen when comparing both 'The Race' and 'Rainbow Land' (part 1) is that there are elements in both stories that are similar and continued. Abeo is keen to continue his racing theme but happy to adapt the storyline to incorporate ideas from Isabel. The inclusion of food appears in both stories, both times the food is seen as something good, a reward or treat: In 'The Race', Abeo makes reference to stopping for some yummy food (line 18), later mentioning a picnic (line 47) with party food and ice-cream incorporated into the storyline in 'Rainbow Land' (line 27). The inclusion of food could be seen as a type of magical agent (see Propp element 14). Although the food itself is not magical, it serves a purpose in these narratives to achieve something and the outcome is positive. Similarly in Rainbow Land, Isabel's comments on lines 31-32:

> *'I go to the beach. It's hot and you have to put your sun-cream on and then we can make a sand castle'.*

guide the listener to understanding that the sun-cream helps the characters, in this case possibly to make sandcastles. It is clear here that Isabel is confidently weaving real-life knowledge with

fantasy and using past experiences of applying sun-cream into her narrative to make elements plausible and grounding the imagined scenario of a unicorn race in the real world too.

Returning to Abeo and Isabel's narrative, at the end when the obstacle course is created is one point that I participate more than usual by beginning to add a commentary alongside their race along the obstacle course in the style of a race commenter. I was curious to see whether Abeo or Isabel would be interested in this style of reporting as it was similar to the manner in which Abeo narrated his initial section of 'The Race'. After listening for a short time, Abeo quickly copied this, taking over the role of adding a commentary for both his and Isabel's races. At the end of each race, they were keen to discuss the race, giving each other marks out of 10.

This continues until it is time to tidy up and come inside. The game is sustained for approximately 20 minutes in total.

4.4.3 Story 2: Rainbow Land part 2: inside

This section of the story follows immediately on from the narrative created outside when the children come into the classroom. Once inside, Abeo quickly decides he wants to draw the story. He asks for a large sheet of paper and asks Isabel if she wants to draw the story with him. She is initially reluctant, choosing to watch him instead. Isabel is not in the same class normally as Abeo being one year older and although drawing stories is something Abeo is confident with she appears unsure what Abeo means when he asks if she wants to draw the story. After a short period of watching Abeo as he begins to draw elements of the story and listening to him as he describes his image and relives the story, she chooses to join in. They sit side by side.

1. **Abeo:** I'm doing Lightning McQueen. He's got a lucky sticker on. It shines
2. when he's racing.
3. **Isabel:** I'm doing the rainbow.
4. **Abeo:** This is how you do a rainbow. Look Lightning McQueen says this is
5. how you get to rainbow land and then he sees a unicorn. That's you.
6. **Isabel:** I can draw a unicorn. Don't worry. Shall I draw the party?
7.

Abeo: Don't forget we need to do the race. I'll draw the race. Look it went here and here and that's you on the rainbow and that's me. This is the race.

Isabel: Who's gonna win?

Abeo: I'll do the race track. It leads to rainbow land

Isabel: We need steps for the rainbow. We had those steps. Look the unicorn can go up and sit here and we can have a party.

Abeo: It's a picnic

Isabel: And you can come. And we have ice-cream. Its rainbow ice-cream. Here are the steps by the rainbow

Abeo draws a dinosaur

Abeo: That's George. He's a baby T-rex. He's a car dinosaur and he's got wheels. He's fast but he's not on the beach. Baby T-rex's can't go fast on the sand.

Isabel: I'll make him a rainbow to go on so he can be fast.

Isabel draws the rainbow. The activity stops here as Isabel leaves for the day.

Fig 10: Image created by Abeo and Isabel to represent their narrative 'Rainbow Land'

Whilst the story is presented here in three parts, all of which are short stories in their own right, one can consider all three elements to be part of one larger story. This story, created by Abeo, took place over the course of the day with different children coming to participate, but despite this, the story clearly followed a theme; a race. Different elements and characters added detail and interest to the story. These details were often added by the other children for example the dinosaur by George, an element Abeo reintroduces whilst drawing the story, and later, the unicorn by Isabel and were incorporated with storylines developed around them so they became integral to the main storyline. It was clear that the children were listening to each other whilst composing the story, confidently using each others suggestions to create a collaborative narrative. One clear example of this collaborative work is Isabel's inclusion of going to a beach to eat ice cream; Abeo then changes his race to a beach race and discusses his own experiences of being at a beach. Abeo was also able to share his interest in drawing and illustrating his narratives with imagery. This is an activity he is particularly fond of doing and he frequently chooses to create and share stories in this way, however Isabel is less so, often choosing to draw pictures independently, and often without accompanying storylines. The paring of Abeo and Isabel was an unusual one however allowed both to use the skills of the other to develop their collaborative narrative.

Within this narrative, the drawing of the story begins by being a method of recording what had already occurred, but also gave opportunity for both Abeo and Isabel to discuss, remember and elaborate the existing story. Pahl (1999) notes that within many studies linked to the semiotics children use is the belief that any writing, drawing, discussion and symbolising created by children is ultimately shaped by the context it is created in. Taking the drawing created following the narrative 'Rainbow Land', whilst it is acknowledged this observation is of a narrative created over the course of a whole day in changing circumstances: initially independently and latterly with others, the drawing is created to show one part of the whole. Whilst the drawing is predominantly created to illustrate the narrative created collaboratively by Abeo and Isabel, towards the end of the drawing period, Abeo reintroduces George's Baby T'Rex character, a character that is sympathetically included by Isabel.

4.4.4 Stories 1 and 2: Analysis

I have connected this initial reflection to 'The donor sequence' of Propp's theory covering stages 12-19. Propp felt it is possible for an entire story to occur within these stages and after consideration, this approach and understanding coincides with the story structure and narrative produced within 'The Race'.

The table below shows each stage from 12 to 19 with the section of the story that relates to Propp's suggestions focusing for this stage of the analysis on Story 1: The Race.

Line Number **(linked to narrative transcription)**	**Propp's Elements** **(inc element number shown in brackets)**	**Where this can be linked to 'The Race'**
1	Departure (11)	Tom made 3 boats. They had a race.
4 - 8	Test (12)	Tom is winning, it's a race, and Tom is winning. So Tom wanted to go under the bridge so he took a short cut but he crashed into a tree stump and he got lost in a forest
11- 16	Reaction (13)	He's in the forest and he's lost. Oh yes, I know I could take a short cut but Tom said no cos he is in the forest. We went fast and I found Tom in the forest so he was happy and we went fast under the bridge. Tom wanted to zoom around but I went on a speed bump.
18	Receipt of a magical agent (14)	Then we stopped for some yummy food
22 - 26	Guidance (15)	Then after our yummy food we was happy but we got lost in the darkness. Tom said this is the exit. This is the place! I said where is this place, we are lost and I bumped into the tree again.

		I laughed and then we saw a boat. It's the place.
43	Struggle (16)	I'm gonna stomp in the forest. Will we get lost? Toms in the forest we can get him and then we can race. You can't win cos you are a baby t-rex but we can have some yummy food with Tom
49	Branding (17)	'I'm eating meat because I'm a T-rex and they're meat eaters
50	Victory (18)	'I found you Tom we can race now'.
50	Resolution (19)	'Oh no, Abeo is out of the race cos he went out of the building. He's disqualified. Look, it's a donut shop. Oh no, I've missed it STOP'.

Table 1: Analysis of stories 1 and 2

Each section will now be explored in more depth considering not only what is said, but the actions of the children participating in the story. Whilst the entire account covers three separate observations which show how the different elements of the narrative returned throughout the day, the more in-depth study will focus on the initial observation comprising the race story created by Abeo and George.

4.4.5: Detailed study of Stories 1 and 2

Propp's Element 11: The Departure. Here Propp suggests the hero leaves to begin his quest or adventure. For Abeo this marks the start of his narrative and he collects 2 Lego wheels and after rolling them he begins his narrative. Abeo is clearly setting the scene for the forthcoming narrative in his first statement

Tom made 3 boats. They had a race.

This is quickly followed by:

Tom is winning, it's a race, and Tom is winning.

Our first character, Tom, is set upon his path before straying into a forest. This is an oft repeated scenario from fairy tales and its inclusion could, perhaps have come from a story Abeo had heard or from a trip to a local forest. Tom, however, is quickly tested and becomes lost relying on other characters to assist supported by the inclusion of food and guidance.

Before the narrative begins, Abeo had been playing with Lego for a short while. He has been looking carefully in the box for larger flat pieces and is later heard saying 'these are the boats'. He moves to one side of the classroom and places these three pieces of Lego on the floor side by side. This act initially seemed unconnected to the story, however as the narrative commenced and developed, it is clear this was a conscious decision with the intention to include these within the story at some point. The props Abeo chooses to support his story on this occasion were very simple; Lego and some small Lego tyres. Engel (2005) discusses how children under five develop narratives through initially pretend play relying heavily on objects that support their story creation, before moving more to spoken language with less reliance on objects that allow for re-enactment within their narrative. Children, by the age of four, Engel posits, are 'telling complex stories' (Engel 2005:515) and these stories are, she argues, becoming the child's new way of creating imaginative narratives.

The play takes on the role of narrative play which Engel describes as 'play which is guided by a narrative theme or includes narrative elements' (2005:516) as Abeo begins to tell a story initially independently to himself before including a friend in its creation. The interconnecting nature of play and narrative is apparent throughout this observation. Feldman (2005) suggests play and narrative should be considered together arguing that 'there is a great deal of narrative in play and also of play in narrative' (Feldman 2005:503) particularly when this occurs with young children. Feldman points out that narrative features can be seen in play whilst narratives created by young children often has playful structures. These playful structures are particularly evident in the narrative created outside. Here there is much physical movement, both of the children and of objects. Different pieces of play equipment are moved to allow for incorporation into the storyline is being created by the two children. This section of the narrative is a highly collaboratively created story with both children offering ideas and feeding on the ideas of each other. The children appear to be keen to listen to each others ideas, negotiating where they want to change and incorporating these ideas into the ongoing joint narrative. Take for example lines 1-10 in Rainbow Land Part 1. Abeo begins by informing Isabel that there is a race and she can be a car if she wants to join. Isabel, although wanting to join, has her own ideas:

'I'm going to be a unicorn. I don't want to be a car. Can I be a unicorn?'

This is accepted by Abeo although shortly after, it is his suggestion that is taken when Isabel suggests the setting of Unicorn land:

> *'No, lets go to rainbow land. I can meet you at rainbow land. That's where the unicorn live'*

Isabel is happy to take on Abeo's suggestion and quickly incorporates the idea into her narrative.

The nature of the start of this story fits with what Britton (1970) describes as 'narrative speech'. Abeo begins by recounting what is happening to the characters in his story. Britton argues that whilst he believes narrative speech can present as what Vygotsky (1978) refers to as 'private speech', both narrative speech and interpretative ability is most likely to develop though the use of social speech (1970:72). Abeo can be clearly seen to be using speech both privately at the beginning of this narrative, and latterly more socially when George and Isabel are included in both the creation of and within the narration. In explaining Vygotsky's thoughts, Britton notes Vygotsky felt that once social speech has been discovered, children will use speech to continue to serve their own development and as 'an aid to [their] own development' (Britton 1970:57).

The setting for the story created by Abeo alters a number of times. Whilst the initial setting is not given, one could surmise the story begins by or on water of some kind as the narration begins with the creation of 3 boats. The next image is that of a bridge. Whilst again bridges are frequently associated with water, this section appears to be on dry land as the Lego boats created are carefully placed under a table and small wheels begin to be used as props instead and the narration begins to include reference to tree stumps. Here background knowledge can be used somewhat. The class had recently been enjoying a topic on jungles and woodlands which included a visit to a nearby forest. If one looks at Propp's full list of story elements, he suggests 'absence' as the initial stage of a story and lists 'going to the forest' (Propp 1958:24) as a typical reason for absence within folktales. Britton (1970) posits that narrative speech frequently includes reference to past events. Within their study looking at conversations between children and adults, Tizard and Hughes (2002) note conversations frequently recount previous experiences, surmising this recollection allowed children to relive and understand experiences. Once again, with knowledge of the stories available in class, one can surmise that

it is a combination of lived experience: the visit to the forest, coupled with memories of stories heard that are set in forests that led Abeo to choose this as the setting for his story.

Abeo is able to convey a feeling of urgency and drama in the start of his story. This section of the story is created independently and is original showing Abeo's developing understanding of syntax. The phase *'he's in the forest and he's lost, oh yes, I know I could take a short cut but Tom said no cos he is in the forest'* (line 11) is an unusual inclusion. The mention of a short cut appears earlier in the story but was discounted at that stage after Tom crashed into a tree stump. I know of no stories in class that include the mention of short cuts so this must be a concept acquired from a different or lived experience, perhaps a journey home can be taken in different ways including a short cut. The idea of using this short cut to help Tom who is lost flows through elements 11, 12 and 13 in Propp's theory; being lost could be the 'test' whereas considering a short cut (although this was ultimately discounted in favour of choosing a route under a bridge, line 13) considered the reaction to the test.

In Abeo's story, we see another abrupt change at this point; 'then we stopped for some yummy food' (line 18) which links to Propp's element 14. The purpose of the yummy foods seems a point to relax and take stock both within the story (for the characters) and for Abeo. He pauses in his storytelling at this point and seems to visually relax as if he too is enjoying a rest. It appears that he is living his story along with the characters and his movements mirror what happens in the narrative. Whilst the character Tom is winning his race, Abeo is moving quickly around the room and when Abeo describes being lost he appears to look around him as if he is unsure or lost himself. Later when George enters the story and they dinosaur characters stomp, both boys walk around the room stomping, this is shown through not only their body language but facial features and vocal sounds (line 43).

The story moves on to elements 15; Guidance and 16; Struggle. Abeo actually vocalises the fact that the characters have arrived at the point of their quest by stating '*this is the place'* (line 23). There is some continued drama where the characters bump into trees and get lost, again this is acted out by either Abeo himself bumping into furniture, or him bumping his Lego wheel into chair legs. Is it clear that Abeo has retained memory of the start of his story when he returns to the boats that were created initially. This is clearly where the characters were heading towards and in some senses the story could possibly have ended here had it not been for the arrival of George to participate in and contribute to the narrative. George brings his own

interests to the story namely dinosaurs and is keen to incorporate this into the narrative. Whilst Abeo is happy for the inclusion of a dinosaur in the story, it appears it must still be on his terms and tells George *'you can be a dino tyre'* (line 38). The concept of owning a story has been powerful within class and came partially from my comments whilst observing the children creating stories. I would often ask 'whose story is this?' The children took this idea and became very passionate about owning the story, whose story it was and ensuring those around them knew whose story was developing was important to them. For the children this became a positive thing and often encouraged less confident speakers to either begin or develop storylines. The children worked well together when they knew a story belonged to a particular person and it was often the case that these 'owned' stories allowed for more discussion and questioning between the children.

Returning to 'The Race', Abeo is clearly asserting his power as the owner of this story by the fact that while he allows the inclusion of a dinosaur in his story, it must be on his terms and fit in with the ongoing narrative. He therefore creates a 'dino tyre'. Whilst accepting this, like Isabel, George is still keen to have input into the storyline and adapts Abeo's 'dino tyre' to a *'baby t-rex dino tyre'* (line 39) this being his favourite dinosaur at that time. The story concludes abruptly. The notion of a race is reintroduced briefly however a natural conclusion is presented when Abeo decides he (as the character) has been disqualified. He calls out 'stop' and the race appears finished. Here George leaves and the narrative concludes.

One can look upon the analysis of this storyline more simply. Although unspoken, Abeo is implying that the character should not go into the forest. However, the character does indeed enter the forest, embarks upon a race and as a result gets lost. The villain appears in the guise of a dinosaur. A battle, in this case a race, ensues with the lure of getting some 'yummy food'. This seems to appease the dinosaur as the story takes a gentler tone after this suggesting that food could be considered magical as it calms the dinosaur. Whilst Abeo is creating the story and including himself and his friend Tom in the introduction, they both appear to take the role of the hero at different points. Initially Tom seems to lead as the faster of the two, then Abeo saves him by finding him in the forest. The test appears to be whether or not they can make it out of the forest safely which they all do by using boats which could be the item being sought.

4.5.1 Story 3: Under the sea

The next observation was of a story created around 3 weeks later than 'The Race'. The story is created initially by Abeo and involves both George and Tom. In this story, George takes a more leading role in its creation.

When initially analysing this narrative a simple coding experiment was undertaken. Coding within research can take many forms indeed Sanchez-Algarra & Anguera (2013) suggest that it can be applied successfully to both qualitative and quantitative studies and used to draw attention to one particular aspect of the observation or to code the whole. This has not been shown in its entirety here, however it was able to show some interesting points and considered both the content of the narrative and how it was produced as Hawes *et al* note; Observational coding involves 'classifying and qualifying verbal and nonverbal …. events' (Hawes *et al* 2013:120). The decision to not include this in full was made predominantly due to the fact the other transcripts were not analysed in this manner and therefore it was not possible to triangulate the results offered. It did, however show that in this narrative, there were over 20 instances of story creation and development along with a high number of new characters introduced as the story developed. There were also a high number of instances of compromise between the narrators as they worked together to create and develop the storyline. The use of this coding was able to highlight that the narrative had been created using multimodal means and not simply the spoken word with the occurrences of the use of props, physical movement and sounds to represent movement easily identifiable.

In different observations, props were often chosen by the children as a means to act out elements of their stories. This is clear in 'The Race' where Abeo spends much of the start of the story moving around the classroom rolling a Lego tyre. In this case the prop was simple and appeared to act as the catalyst for the story that Abeo subsequently created. Other items were also used; Lego strips to represent boats along with the furniture within the classroom that became the forest. Props were used more in Story 2 when Abeo and Isabel created their story outside in the playground.

Under the sea was created in class following a group reading of the story 'Winnie Under the Sea' (Thomas & Paul 2012). This observation gives an example of a popular class story directly influencing the creation of a new story as Abeo quickly began a story about a tiny fish that included some of his friends.

The story 'Under the Sea' although treated as one story has been split into three parts. Each part has a different leader: Part 1 is led by Abeo, part 2 by George and part 3 by Tom. Separating this story allows for clearer analysis, however when one looks at the narrative as a whole it shows clear collaboration between the three narrators. There are frequent references to story plots proposed by each other and the inclusion of different characters introduced by others. Elements suggested by Propp were evident throughout all three sections of this story and this will be highlighted after each section. Working together on this story allowed for a complex storyline to evolve that became a shared story and one that was owned equally. Bardai (2020) highlights how stories can be introduced by one child initially then become a joint creation. In a similar scenario to the unfolding story that became Under the Sea, Bardai describes how one child tells a story. After its initial telling, the story moves into the role play area where other children participate in a playful re-enactment of the story before developing the story as a group. This development included the use of props and experimentation. Like the stories created by Abeo and his peers, Bardai notes that here 'the content of the story was fluid and ever changing' (2020:99). This experimentation Bardai suggests allows for not only negotiation but also the opportunity to 'listen to views of the others who were involved' (2020:99). This is something that is evident in narratives created by Abeo and his peers and supports not only the story creation but also imaginative play.

4.5.2 Under the Sea Part 1

Abeo: Me and George saw a tiny fish who needed our help and a shark had come to eat him and then we went down to the dark deep of the ocean and we saw a hump back who wanted to eat us but we had an idea. We worked fast and we took out our sharp swords and chopped him and we saw everyone riding by and they came to rescue me and George and we saw a jelly fish and lots of stars glowing around and the tiny fish and a little man diving. The shark was playing with a dolphin and we went up the round steps, up to the submarine and we were saved. And then we had some hot chocolate and that was the end.

Abeo points to his picture when talking about going up the round steps

Although taken as part of this observation, the initial short narrative by Abeo can be considered a story in and of itself and easily linked to Propp's Theory. There is a clear beginning and a problem, a middle where the action takes place and an end. Most of Abeo's focus here is taken up with introducing characters whilst developing the story and adding details. If one considers the initial part of the whole narrative a story in its own right, a brief application of Propp's theory for this section of the story can be seen thus;

Line Number	Propp's Story elements: Introduction stage	How children's utterances have been interpreted to represent Propp's Theory
1	1	Me and George saw a tiny fish who needed our help
1	2,3	and a shark had come to eat him
2	5	then we went down to the dark deep of the ocean
	Propp's Story elements: Body of the story stage	
3	8	we saw a hump back who wanted to eat us but we had an idea
3	10	We worked fast and we took out our sharp swords
	Propp's Story elements: Donor Sequence stage	
4	18	and chopped him and we saw everyone riding by and they came to rescue me and George
5	19	We saw a jellyfish and lots of stars glowing around and the tiny fish and a little man diving. The shark was playing with a dolphin and we went up the round steps up to the submarine and we were saved.
	Propp's Story elements: Hero's Return stage	
8	22	And then we had some hot chocolate and that was the end.'

Table 2: Interpretation of children's utterances to represent Propp's Theory

The above shows the adaptability of Propp's theory and how it can be applied to even a short story. As Propp himself acknowledges, very few stories contain all the elements he proposed, and this is certainly the case on this occasion. In the act of applying Propp's theory to Abeo's narrative I have applied some leniency to the definitions proposed by Propp. Take for example element 1 'absence'. Propp suggests that folktales frequently begin with a character leaving.

In Abeo's story whilst the character does not actually leave, leaving is implied by the fact that they appear to go to the aid of the tiny fish, and can be interpreted as such. Once again, for elements 2 and 3 which have been grouped together which Propp describes as the interdiction and violation stages whilst nothing is forbidden one can presume that Abeo expects the listener to understand that the tiny fish should not be eaten. This is again implied through the narrative that Abeo does say when he includes reference to needing to help the tiny fish. Abeo is also using his understanding of the real world where sharks eat smaller fish, however here again links to stories that Abeo is familiar with give him the tools to offer suggestions such as helping and hiding. There are several stories in class that Abeo is fond of that include this type of storyline where smaller animals or fish are hiding from larger animals and in need of help or rescue. In this story Abeo casts himself and a friend as the heroes who come to the aid of the fish. He describes how this is done and clearly doesn't want to kill the shark off as the shark character appears later in the narrative but this time in a different character role and one that is described as 'playing with a dolphin'. This abrupt change in character is again a concept that is often replicated in stories and in particular films designed for this age group. A villain may see the error of his ways and after discovering a different way to act will become a kinder and often happier character.

4.5.3 Under The Sea Part 2

This section of the narrative follows immediately on from Abeo's short story and is linked throughout in both character and setting. In this part of the story George is linking his narrative to the book that had been shared making both direct and indirect references. The inclusion of the catfish is a theme from the book where a witch's cat turns into a fish like cat. George is keen to point out that his character is, however an actual catfish. George's narrative is becoming more complex; the story is given a setting (line 1) and he is introducing and describing both characters and plot (lines 2-3). The collaborative nature of George's storytelling is clear as he is keen to include Abeo's character in his plot (lines 9-11 and 14-16).

George: We are in the ocean, me and my friends.I'm spinning and turning into a cat. I'm a powerful one, a powerful cat. It's a catfish and I can swim. It's a real catfish not a cat that's a fish.

At this point George is telling the story, and Tom is actively watching George and listening.

I ask – 'do you mean like Wilbur in the story' –

George: Yes – but his was magic

he looks at the book on my chair

and he wasn't a real catfish. I'm a real catfish. Abeo is a cleaner fish. He's cleaning the sharks teeth. I need to keep him safe cos the shark might eat him. This is me,

here he points to the picture he is creating whilst telling the story

I'm using my powers. I have stripes. Stripes are my power and I have lots of other powers. This is Abeo's power

again he points to the picture

Its fire. He burns stuff. He has lots of other powers too.

Abeo: I can have a wand like the cat fish there

points to the book 'Winnie Under the Sea

and then I can use it for my power and blast the sharks. We could use a submarine too to get to the sharks fast.

Abeo runs to the Lego box and chooses some long pieces of Lego that he sticks together to make a wand.

Abracadaba

He shouts and waves his wand at George

Now you can use your powers too

George then makes a similar wand and they both wave their wands at each other.

At this point the children all move outside for playtime

In this section of the story, George takes the lead in the creation of the narrative. While creating the narrative, George draws what he is saying. He refers back to his image frequently and is keen to show it to emphasise his point. Once again, much emphasis is placed upon story development and adding detail. Here George is keen to describe both his and Abeo's powers.

The book that introduced the storyline is used as a prop in this section of the narrative along with Lego pieces to represent wands.

4.5.4 Under The Sea Part 3

In the final part of the story, the children have moved outside for playtime but choose to continue with their narrative. Another boy, Tom who has been watching and listening to the story inside joins in mirroring the existing storyline and chooses to be a jellyfish in the story. Straight away we can see that Tom has ideas of his own to add to the story in particular a desire to have powers. This results in negotiation with George and they compromise thus:

Tom: I could be a jellyfish. It has powers, it has speed.
George: No I have speed
Tom: We should both have speed then we can be speedy fast and get away from the shark.

Here Tom and George act out swimming. George is quick to reinforce his established role within the story by telling Tom 'I can be the leader cos the cat fish is in charge. You can help'.

At this point Abeo re-joins Tom and George and is keen to introduce his favourite racing theme.

Abeo: My car is going to be a water race car
he moves closer to the other boys showing a car
Tom: The car can be our rescue car. Pretend its got a parachute and air balloons and it can spin.
Abeo: If you crash the car, air balloons go in it. You have a car too. We can smash and crash.
Tom and Abeo run around their cars around making car sounds and crashing
Abeo: The car was broken
he picks up a Lego car and pulls it apart
Pretend you said the car would crash.
Tom: The car is going to crash but it did a flip
He acts this out with the toy car

Abeo: Arggh – he was trying to save the day and save the jelly fish but we fell and jumped and now he's in a tornado

he spins around

Tom: George you can save him

George: I can use my speed and save you

Abeo: I pressed the air balloon button and it saved me cos its actually a parachute but it popped and went bang

George: but I saved you too

Tom: and then we smashed into the sea

Abeo: and there was an explosion and the car didn't break so we went to a car wash and then a meteor came down and I standed on the meteor and it carried me up but I did a flip and went back to earth

Tom: and you went in the sea and me and George saved you with our powers

George: Super speed

he runs away shouting super speed and the other 2 boys follow shouting 'super speed' with him.

Similarly to The Rainbow Land Part 1 which also took place outside, throughout the final part of the story which takes place in the playground, there is lots of movement. The boys move away from each other to act out in role often accompanying this with sounds including sea sounds and movement sounds. Much of their language and movements are mirrored as they watch each other and repeat phrases or sounds. They act out fighting but do not actually touch each other, often posing 'ninja' movements and stances and include sounds/words such as 'high-ya' and 'pow', 'crash'. The narrative does deviate somewhat from the original plot with the introduction of the cars, however Tom seems determined to bring the story back to its original sea setting which he achieves at the end '*you went in the sea and me and George saved you with our powers'.*

This observation takes place one week after a short story created by Abeo and Tom involving a Lego baddie. Although not included for discussion here, there are similarities between this story and 'Under the Sea'. Both Abeo and Tom appear to have tried out some phrases and plots in the earlier story as some language is repeated for example 'super smash' and 'super

speed'. Also repeated is the use of the phrase 'pretend you said...' used to prompt another child in the story. This had not been heard before the Lego baddie story.

This narrative offers a very different mode of story creation to 'The Race'. In The Race, the story was led almost entirely by Abeo with minimal input from others. However, despite beginning the under the sea adventure, the narrative is quickly picked by Tom and George. Abeo appeared quite happy with this, although on other occasions he appeared unwilling to relinquish ownership of the story. There is a clear point in the story where Abeo attempts to take charge again and returns to his favourite storyline of racing although this deviates from the initial plot of the story that follows on from listening to the story Winnie under the Sea'. At the start of this invented story, George and Abeo link their self-created narrative closely to the plot of the story. This approach is highlighted by Fox (1993) who describes the way in which children borrow familiar stories as 'transformations' arguing that children transformed heard stories into their own fantasy stories. Fox notes that children begin to understand how to create stories by listening to and reinventing known stories, a skill that Abeo and his peers seem keen to use.

As noted, the simple coding experiment applied to this narrative showed that story development and adding detail are the most regular features of this story. Whilst all participants of the story creation developed the story somewhat, it is interesting to see that Abeo takes the lead in the story development although Tom's instances of adding detail is stronger in the second section of the story that he leads. There is a short aside while he and George have a discussion about turning 6 and how this will change them:

Tom: I'm nearly 6, then I'll have a cake.
George: but you'll look the same though
Tom: I know that
George: And you'll speak the same
Tom: Yes I know
George: I speak the same and I'm 5
Tom: yes and you have a hair-cut
George: I know.

Here the boys appear to test out their ideas about getting older, applying understanding of what they feel will happen and perhaps raising fears. George asks a number of questions seeking

clarification and reassurance from Tom who appears more relaxed about the prospect of getting older and is keen to return to the creation of the narrative. This is, however, ultimately done by George asking Tom if he wants to be an octopus. Abeo does not participate in this discussion about age but is quick to return to the story once Tom reintroduces the storyline and a new character. The inclusion of questions from young children has been considered by many (Piaget 1926, Isaacs 1930). Questioning of this type is discussed by Tizard and Hughes (2002), who noted that children frequently posed questions whilst in discussions at home with their mothers. Whilst the questions posed by George were aimed at a similarly aged friend, one can presume they are raised to help him with his understanding of growing up. Tizard and Hughes note that differing views of questions can be held: Piaget, they write, suggested 'children's questions reveal their intellectual limitations' (2002:81) whereas the view held by Susan Isaacs disputes Piaget's thoughts by suggesting children's questions are 'an indication of an active intelligence trying to make sense of the world' (Tizard & Hughes 2002:81).

To accompany the narrative, Abeo produces a picture that tells his story. Once again here we can apply the benefit of coding as the creation of the picture enabled Abeo to not only revisit his story but to develop some aspects of the narrative too. This is quite common for Abeo who frequently draws his stories out and a popular activity in class originally designed to show the children how they could present their stories through images. Pahl (2007) notes that print and drawing may be used as a prop by children engaged in dramatic play. The idea of using print to communicate is one proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and later Barrs (1988) who, building upon Vygotsky's work argued that drawing is an important part of writing and therefore communicating meaning. This is clear when one considers Abeo's use of his picture. He chose to draw on blue paper that had been cut into to a circle shape explaining this was like looking out of a submarine window. This links to the story the initial narrative derives from where the main character looks out of a porthole in her submarine. After drawing a selection of fish he adds elements of his narration; the round steps (shown on the illustration) and the little man (who he draws particularly small in relation to the size of the shark) who is diving.

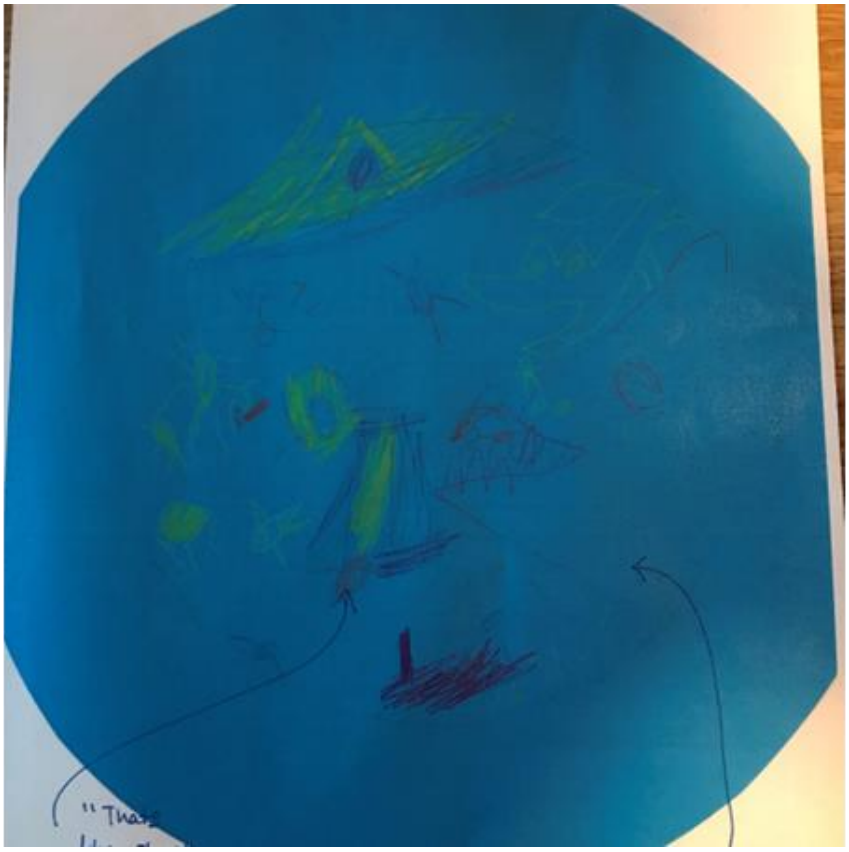


Fig 11: Abeo's illustration to accompany 'Under the Sea'

4.6 Story 4: The spider and the snail

Within the next observation, in order to explore the multimodal approach often used when creating narratives, consideration has been given to the actions that Abeo produces alongside his narration. To allow for ease of reading, these are shown in the body of the narrative in bold italics and so the narrative is presented in a different manner. This story was created independently by Abeo during a quiet time in class when children were able to self-choose an activity and he was happy to simply tell me his story. Abeo references a number of his friends in the story, giving them characters. As no other children were participating in the story creation, the opportunity to ask questions within the story was taken.

You are a snail – ***points at me*** - and I'm a spider. Then the spider, that's me, Abeo said "we will have a race" cos I'm a spider.

- Uses his fingers to show creeping -

So we started the race and then a cheetah came and he eats spiders and even snails so we ran super fast. We all won but the cheetah wanted to eat us so I went up my tree.

- Mimes running and climbing -

I ask 'did we all go up the tree?'

Yes. We went up my tree and got in my web. Isobel's an ant and she was there too. You can climb up my web but you are a snail and so slow. Then the cheetah wanted to break the web cos you were going super slow'.

- He mimes moving slowly -

I ask 'so can you help me?'

I'll give you some super snail fast juice

- He pretends to sprinkle this on me -

So we all got super fast and I was the fastest

- Runs away quickly then back -

I ask did we get away?

Yes, then Essie was a woodlouse and he saved us. No that's not right, he tried to save us but he couldn't so a worm tried to save us but he couldn't cos he was in a hole

I ask ' so what did you do?'

I went whoosh

-he whizzes his arms around quickly -

and shot a web on the cheetah

- Shoots webs out of his hands -

and he scratched his face cos he wanted it off so he went to the vets to get better. Then we said he couldn't eat us so he had to eat a tree instead and I started webbing my tree all the way up, but not all the way up to the sun cos that would melt my web cos the sun is so hot. And now its really hot in the jungle so we all went swimming and the cheetah was our friend now so we all went swimming and I was floating'.

33. - ***He mimes floating*** -

34. *I ask do spiders like swimming?*

35. I think so, this one does and Essie was swimming but snails can't swim very

36. well so you had to watch but you liked that cos you had some coffee and we

37. went swimming and floating and I loved it.

Later Abeo drew parts of his story and told me what he had drawn (Fig 12).

'That's the tree and that's my web and there's you and me. I'm a happy spider look. And that's the cheetah but I've given him tyre legs now so he can be fast. That's Essie and there's the sun and my webs but they can't go up to the sun cos its too hot'.

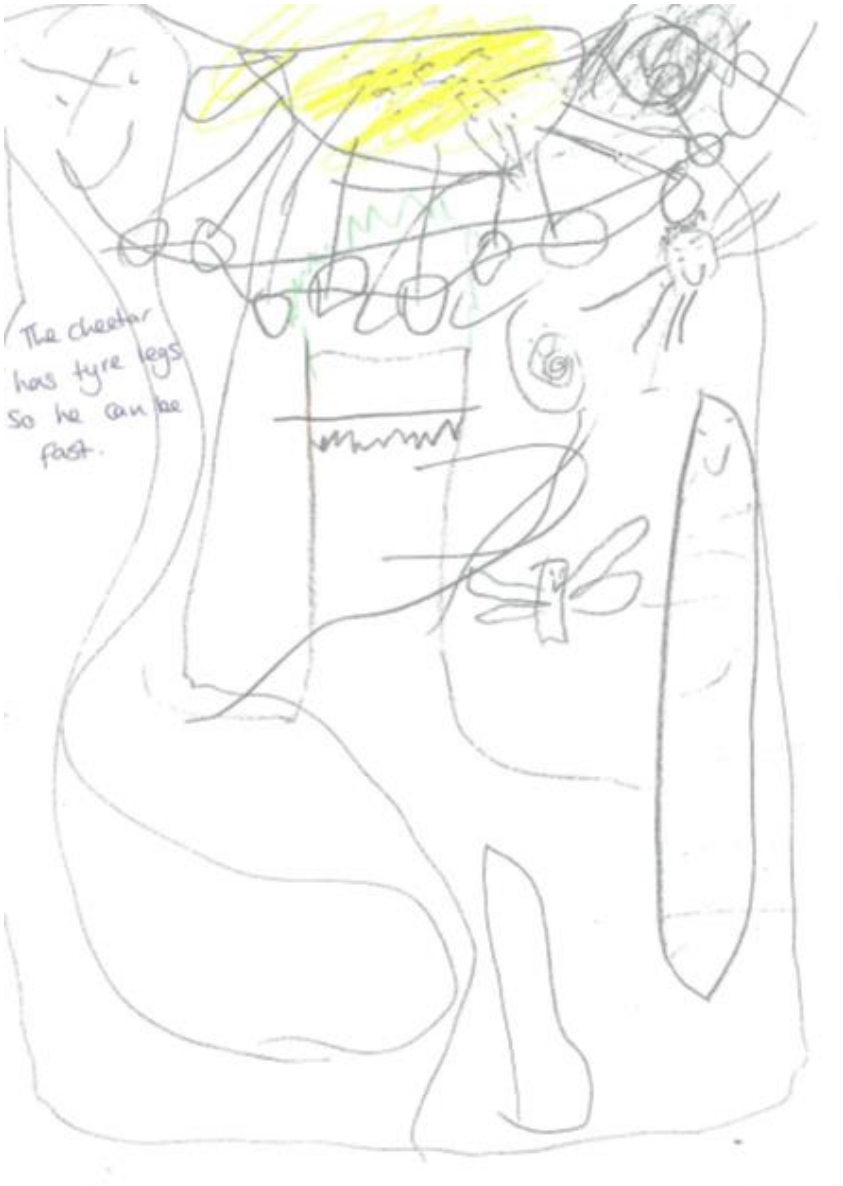


Fig 12: The Spider and the Snail illustration

Once again, we can see how Propp's theory can be successfully used to analyse Abeo's story. This story is shorter than many of the previous narratives created by Abeo, particularly those created in a collaborative manner with his peers however, the content is nonetheless still exciting. Abeo's narrative follows a clear thought process through the story and there are obviously different stages. It begins with a clear start when the story is presented and a briefly outlined (lines 1-2) with the character leaving to participate in a race. There follows a further story linked to Abeo's favourite theme; a race. This is followed (line 4) with Propp's Element 3; Violation when the cheetah attempts to eat other characters. Line 9 produces our hero with line 14 presenting a magical agent, in this case 'super snail fast juice'. Lines 20-31 describe a struggle between the hero and villain (Propp's Element 16) with the victory described on lines 31-33. Unusually he is keen to include me in his narrative on this occasion. Again, we can see the interweaving of understanding of real life: spiders spinning webs and snails being 'super slow', with the introduction of imaginative magical elements in this case the 'super snail fast juice'.

This is the first independent story that Abeo creates that places emphasis on actions and gesture and he uses it well to emphasise different elements of the story. He mimics actions such as creeping and sprinkling with just his hands whilst using his whole body to show running and climbing. As in the 'The Race' where Abeo shouts 'stop' to signal the finish of his narrative, there is a clear ending to this story. Whilst not seen in the transcript, Abeo uses his voice in a gentler and quieter manner in the last statement beginning 'I think so'. He appears happy with his final statement of 'I loved it' and has clearly finished his story at this point. In this story we see the return of the tyre when Abeo describes his illustration of the story. The tyre does not appear in the actual narrative, only appearing when he creates his illustration.

4.7 Story 5: Off to the Zoo

This narrative was created between Abeo and a different child, Ben. Ben is 2 years older than Abeo and was also in school during lockdown. The story takes place outside on the school field during playtime the day before the end of term. It allows for the analysis of a more complex narrative and thus consideration as to how Abeo's storytelling has developed over the 4 month period. This narrative is explored in the same manner as Story 4 showing its correlation with Propp's Theory. The story was loosely based on a story they had heard earlier

in the week called ‘Off to the fair’. In this story three animals head off to the fair but keep getting side-tracked by exciting activities. When they finally arrive at the fair it is closed for the day so they sleep outside and wait until the next morning.

Abeo: Pretend you were spying on the evil Baddie. He thought the evil spider was you. The evil baddie was John. That’s my friend but he’s a monster that can turn into anything.

Ben: Ok but I’m gonna be ant man. I’m taking a leaf.

Abeo: Well I flew to the zoo but it was dark so I couldn’t see where I was going but you can’t come cos you can’t fly. Ant’s can’t fly. You have to crawl. My sister can come cos she was a caterpillar but turned into a butterfly.

Turns and speaks to Ben

Do you want to come?

Ben: Yes

Abeo: Ok, pretend you said ‘Can I come’ and then you can come. Ben wants to have wings so he can be a bee.

Ben: Ok can I come? Can I turn into anything?

Abeo: Yes, no, only two things.

Ben: Ok, I’m gonna be a bee. No, I’ll be a black mouse.

Abeo: You can’t be in the race then.

Ben: Cos I can’t fly?

Abeo: Mmm yes, but you could go in a toy aeroplane.

They run to the car box and find two toy aeroplanes and hold one each.

Abeo: You will have to use this cos mouses don’t have wings so pretend you said ‘we can go in the areoplane’

Ben: Let’s go in the aeroplane

Abeo: And it can be a fast aeroplane and it’s so fast but then the aeroplane smashed and Ben the mouse was like

Abeo acts out being a mouse running around

Abeo: But then Ben the mouse he looked in the bin and drank the water cos that would make him better and that can make him fly cos the aeroplane is smashed and then Ben spitted the water out to make a puddle.

Ben: And then I slipped and fell in the puddle. Pretend you said you needed to help.

Abeo: Ok, I can help

Here Abeo speaks in a different voice

Abeo: And you're like

Abeo acts out splashing with his arms.

They both laugh and run about pretending to splash shouting 'help'.

Abeo: Then they went to the doctors who mended them and they were ok.

Ben: And now it's dark so we can't see where we are going but we want to get to the zoo.

Abeo: You could have a light. Year so you found a light in the puddle and then we could see and we wanted to go home but the dinosaur was eating the house, arghhhhhh.

But then I came as a spider and you was a spider too and you webbed the dinosaur and I webbed it.

They both act out throwing webs at the dinosaur

And we webbed the dinosaurs mouth so he spitted the house up but he catched me in his hand and I was scared so I shouted out and you were coming to help but the dinosaur swallowed the house again but it went the wrong way and he was sick so he had to go to the doctors.

Ben: No the vets cos he's a dinosaur.

Abeo: Ok, he went to the vets and he was going

Abeo makes a choking noise

Ben: And he has to stay there for 100 years.

Abeo: And he was hungry cos he's not allowed to eat houses anymore so I went to the field and I found something for him to eat.

Ben: He can have meat.

Abeo: I gave him some beef and it went the right way and he was better but then he wanted to eat the children. Pretend you went to save them and said 'we can save you but you have to come cos the dinosaur wants to eat you'.

Ben: We can save you.

He uses a different voice

We have to save them. We have to fly. I can web him.

Abeo: So we saved the children. I used my superpower gloves and I went in my robot dragon to fly and we saved the children. Ok so they went into the sky and then we high fived them and you went in your aeroplane and high fived them and they all got in your aeroplane and came back with you and then we went to the zoo. But it was night time so we all went to sleep and then in the morning we went to the zoo and we had fun and we had hot dogs and everything was normal and that was the end.

At this point they run off and begin acting out some parts of the story. There is a play tent on the field and they use this as their home.

This is a lively and creative narrative that doesn't always follow Propp's Theory in its telling. There is a great deal of imaginative story creation from both Abeo and Ben with different storylines interwoven into one complex story. In this story there are a number of grammatical inconsistencies that appear in a higher volume that one finds in Abeo's usual narration. these include 'spitted' and 'catched'. Whilst within the normal parameters for a child of Abeo's age, Abeo's language is usually well formed with less errors. It appears that the excitement and pace of the story here may play a part as the narrative was created at speed with the children batting ideas between each other, developing and altering the storyline as they went. Whilst creating the initial narrative, Abeo appeared to take more of a lead in the story creation. Initially Ben's ideas were produced often more as a reaction to something Abeo had said and less of his own imaginative creation. Once the story had become a lively, chasing game, Ben appeared more confident to offer more of his own ideas into the storyline.

In this story you can see that Abeo has begun to expand his imagination and appears to be working much more closely with Ben in the story creation. Abeo takes the lead in the initial section of the story, setting the scene and introducing the plot, however it is clear that Ben has his own ideas that he wants to share. This initial stage (lines 1-7) fit with Propp's elements 1 and 2. Abeo's character is leaving for the zoo, a statement that is swiftly followed by the Interdiction element where the ant is told it cannot go as it can't fly. Abeo shows that he is still keen to lead the story creation whilst involving Ben's ideas when he allows Ben to choose what he would like to turn into but then states that if he is a mouse, he can't be in the race. Clearly this story has rules that are obvious to Abeo at this point but perhaps less obvious to Ben. A compromise is quickly reached however when Abeo suggests they use a toy aeroplane.

After choosing appropriate props, the aeroplane becomes part of the story for a short period. Whilst there is no apparent villain at this point, it is here that we see our two main characters struggling and needing help matching Propp's element 8. It is at this stage that Ben becomes more vocal in both ideas and solutions to dilemmas posed by Abeo. In this story, collaborative talk is used as a tool and greatly benefits both boys, who appear to enjoy working together to create the narrative, and ultimately gives benefit to the narrative itself. Ultimately the narrative is complex and interesting and uses many different elements in its creation:

- Compromise and discussion
- Introduction of different characters
- Return to characters later in the story
- Showing knowledge of real life and possibly real experiences
- Reference to previous stories created
- Use of appropriate and interesting props.

Many other elements proposed by Propp feature in this story such as the receipt of a magical agent. In this narrative there are two instances that suggest a magical agent; the water to drink (line 27) and later (line 40) a light to see where to go. A struggle between the spider and the dinosaur along with a pursuit (line 43) suggest a villain entering the story which in turn highlights the hero. A struggle then ensues between the dinosaur and other characters which is portrayed not only through the narration but gesture and lively physical movement. There are also clear definitions given to the hero and the villain. In the story Abeo refers to this character as 'the evil baddie' who can turn into anything. The dinosaur that appears later in the story takes on the role of the villain although it is not stated whether or not this is the same character as at the start of the story. Lines 54-59 offer a resolution with the implication that the dinosaur may be ill or hungry and, as in so many of Abeo's stories, there is a clear solution. Line 67 sees the characters finally arriving at the zoo and thus completing their journey. Propp's theory, whilst offering an appropriate theory in which to analyse the different narratives does not allow for consideration of the multimodal approaches employed by the children as they present and create their stories, a point that will be returned to later.

The different stories presented above have been discussed in relation to Propp's Theory and were created predominantly by Abeo. They were, at times created independently and at other times collaboratively with others and show he is able to not only share his ideas for storytelling

but develop storylines either suggested by others or use these to develop his own storylines. Each story was analysed with a different focus and thus provided insight into how Abeo creates and develops stories. Stories 1 and 2 ensured confidence in the choice of theory with which to analyse the stories Abeo created. 'The Race' was linked closely to the different stages proposed by Propp and showed how well Abeo's storytelling linked with Propp's theory. Analysis of Story 3 showed that Abeo used not only verbal means to tell his stories, but gesture and image to enhance this. Story 4 gave the opportunity to involve the observer within the story by the asking of questions to probe and extend the ideas presented by Abeo. The actions that Abeo used to accompany his narrative were considered and how they enhanced the story being told. The final story gave the opportunity to reflect on all the aspects of analysis applied to the previous observations and how Abeo's storytelling had developed and grown was shown. The stories become more complex over the period of approximately 3 months and the accounts discussed here have been presented in the order in which they were created. It is clear that some themes reoccur for instance the concept of a race which appears in all the stories contained here. Abeo is, however, adventurous with his race theme and is able to weave it into different storylines that are at times, posed by others. This is particularly evident in 'Under the Sea' when both Tom and George take ownership of the story for a period. When Abeo's voice returns, he has evidently been listening to the story being created by his friends as he adapts his race to a 'water race'.

Chapter 5 presents a number of additional stories created once again by Abeo and his peers. Where Chapter 4 has focussed on linking stories to Propp, in Chapter 5 more emphasis is placed on exploring the multimodal nature of the created stories.

Chapter 5

Observational Data Presentation and Analysis Part 2: Using a different lens

5.1 Exploring a multimodal approach to storytelling

In this chapter I present episodes relating to narrative development in young children and how these children use multimodal means to create meaning within their narratives. This chapter explores further narratives created in class by the study group and will analyse the findings from these stories. I will present and discuss a number of narratives created by this small study group linking them not only to Propp's (1927) theory of storytelling but also to current research pertaining to the field of study held herein. This will include discussion on the contribution my own research can offer and my aspirations for its ongoing use and purpose. In contrast to earlier analysis, here there will be an in-depth discussion around the range of multimodal approaches used by the children within their narratives with connections made to similar research projects. This chapter will conclude with reflections on the limitations of this study and a view to future follow up studies within this area of research.

As I explored this topic, there appeared to be somewhat of a gap in research addressing children's narration since Paley indeed Nicolopoulou notes that 'there have been relatively few attempts to address children's play and narrative in an integrated way' (2005:495). Many researchers allude to the area of focus (Khan *et al,* 2016; Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Kinnunen & Einarsdottir, 2013; Wright, 2007) however, whilst their studies often explored a different angle, they do support and enhance this study and as such provide valuable supporting data that will be considered. Wright's study (2007) has close links to this study with its focus on interplay between narrative and image and his belief that narratives created by children are fluid and changeable.

This study looks at not only how narratives are supported and enhanced by image, but also considers the use of props and gesture and how children use these when creating stories. Wright's view that many stories created by children include concepts such as good and evil

support Propp's original theory and can be seen in several of Abeo's narratives such as the 'Water Man' tale. In this narrative, there is a clear villain, introduced by Abeo as 'the baddie'. Other elements suggested by Propp that feature in this narrative are the inclusion of a magical agent, in this case represented by 'water power' and the concept of the villain wanting or seeking something, which for this story is money from the bank. Abeo has cast himself and his friend Sid as the heroes of the tale and ultimately good triumphs over evil at the end of this story. A further analysis of this narrative will appear later in this chapter. A further study that links well into this theme and proves useful to the analysis of Abeo's narratives was conducted by Kinnunen & Einarsdottir (2013) and explores how children produce visual narratives and emphasises the importance of recognising drawing as part of a narrative process.

As the study developed, I found the stories the children created and how they created them fascinating and multi-layered and indeed worthy of study and discussion, a view held by Meek (1993) who notes that despite the apparent informality of the spontaneous narratives often created by young children they do, in fact have 'complex formal structures' (1993:vii). As discussed here, the narratives created in class would often follow a theme with similar storylines reappearing as did the format of the story. At times these narratives were created independently, other times with one other or as part of a group, sometimes inside and others outside. The stories were often supported by props and frequently resulted in the creation of something be it an image or picture, a model or a physical object.

5.2 Drawing a story

The narratives discussed here were created by a number of children and often included a particular boy, Abeo. They were all passionate story creators who loved the opportunity to 'tell you a story' (Abeo's words). This would sometimes be changed to 'draw you a story' which was a phrase coined by the children throughout the year of study and shows how they themselves viewed imagery as powerful as both language and written text in its ability to tell a story. It came from the interest held by the group of creating narratives alongside an image that followed the story coupled with the interest placed on both by staff within the classroom. It became clear that this interest from adults supported and encouraged further and continued creation both verbally and visually with staff becoming more comfortable and engaged with the concept of a multimodal approach to storytelling. Activities in class encouraged image and story creation and went some way to introducing the concept to the children. This initial

introduction allowed staff to hand over the responsibility for creating narratives to the children allowing the children to be freely imaginative with their storylines.

As will be shown throughout the narratives presented in this study, multimodality and narratives appear to go hand in hand. As noted by Kress (1997) children 'make meaning in an absolute plethora of ways with an absolute plethora of means' (1997:xv), a statement that is clearly borne out in this study. It appeared natural to the children to produce their stories using multiple modes, although some would often gravitate towards a favoured approach. Abeo, for instance would frequently incorporate image in his narrations whilst others such as Ann enjoyed using objects as props. Throughout the narratives collected for this study, the children made use of not only the environment around them but also various resources including physical props and toys to help tell their stories

Who, for instance, would consider that a solitary Lego tyre could have not only captivated Abeo's interest for such a prolonged period, but also be the catalyst for such an imaginative and complex tale as created in The Race? Kress (2010) points out that multimodality is multifaceted and can incorporate image, script, gesture, movement and music in varying degrees of importance. One can then delve deeper into this phenomenon creating a more complex view by considering culture, experiences and environment which all help to mould and colour not only how stories are created and told, but how they are interpreted and understood by those around the storyteller.

5.3 Inspiration

As already seen, Abeo and his peers were adept at creating stories verbally and through imagery. Their stories are rich and call on experience from books and real life. Evidence of this can be seen clearly in the narrative 'Animal World' through the use of well know story characters, with the addition of reflection on visits to London and use of knowledge about different animals. All of this is represented throughout the imaginative stories told, a point which will be made clear throughout this research. The children in class managed to weave real life and perhaps lived or imagined experiences carefully and expertly throughout the most imaginative narratives, seamlessly blending the two. The manner in which the children present and tell these will be discussed in depth here with careful consideration given to the world around the stories. As noted by Kress (1997) the production of one mode of communication,

in this case it may be the spoken narrative or the image created to tell a story, will be accompanied by 'the signs of speech, of gesture [and] of facial expression' (Kress 1997:33). Clearly the interweaving of different modes work together to enable the narrative to be told more effectively with non-verbal signs supporting the spoken word.

In her work focussing on children's imaginative play and narratives, Paley (1981, 1990) shows how children within their own stories use popular stories and characters. She describes how young children will often develop stories they are familiar with whilst altering storylines or endings as they retell them in their own words. Within the narrative 'Animal World' one child brings a familiar storybook character into a story being created about animals searching for food in a wood. The links the child made are clear; the story of The Gruffalo (Donaldson 1999) that she was familiar with was also set in a wood and so it would appear a natural inclusion into a newly created story. Whilst the original impetus for the story may have been born elsewhere, Paley argues that what follows is then original to the child. She suggests these stories are often recreated in the child's own emerging style and will be 'as unique as their fingerprints' (Paley 1990:40). Later studies have considered how children use and adapt stories that follow the universal themes that Propp (1928) highlighted; good and bad, heroes and villains all of which reoccur throughout narratives produced by Abeo and his peers. The notion of adventure and challenge is particularly evident when one looks at later narratives Abeo produces. The use of gesture and body language to support the storytelling appears to become more evident at this time through the use of movement, in particular fast movements and drawing to represent a fast action sequence in the story.

One short narration created in class, 'Santa's Reindeer', shows the clear link between story creation and play for young children. Here, for instance, the story was born out of a lively carpet game at the end of the day that began as one child pretended to feed her imaginative reindeer with one other child. As other children began mimicking this act the story-telling began and evolved through its narration. Play is an integral element of a young child's storytelling and frequently where they get opportunities to rehearse storylines independently and collaboratively. Fox notes that stories created by children are 'forms of verbal symbolic play' (Fox 1993:25) a view endorsed by Cremin *et al* (2018) who note that research following Paley's earlier studies establishes 'imaginary play as an important semiotic activity' (Cremin *et al* 2018:5). Cremin *et al* (2018) posit 'play and narrative drive young children's meaning making' (2018:15) suggesting both these elements are vital to not only socialisation but that

how, at a young age, story creation is inexplicitly linked to play. The multimodal nature of play automatically leads a child to create stories in a similar manner, drawing on experiences both lived and imagined, and as shown by many of the stories created by Abeo and his peers, experienced through stories heard or seen.

The ability to draw on different sources such as stories or films is raised by Parry (2010) who argues children can use ideas these different areas successfully to develop and create their own narratives. The identification of different sources of story material is, as noted by Fox (1993) a surprisingly complex activity. Whilst some references may be immediately clear, such as a quote from a well know character from book or film, others may be harder to untangle. I would suggest that these were rarely seen independently of one another and would more likely been used in combination. For example, the immediate surroundings may be the initial catalyst for the story development, i.e. small or large space. Elements of a recently heard story or watched film may then be incorporated into the developing narrative, alongside the use of either a toy as a prop or a drawn image.

Not only how, but when children create stories is interesting to consider. Many of the narratives reproduced here were created during free time although that is not to say that the children did not use more formal curriculum times to produce their narratives, for example 'Carrot Soup'. Some stories were born as a result of work within more structured literacy sessions and link directly to stories or activities discussed in class (see 'Under the Sea'). The purpose and benefit of considering how children develop in their storytelling is discussed by Khan *et al* (2016) in their study of story structure. They note that whilst researchers have been able to observe 'a developmental trend wherein children produce more story-structure components overall in their narratives as age increases' (Khan *et al* 2016:1395), there is often a lack of full understanding in the 'order of emergence of individual story components' (Khan *et al* 2016:1395). This, they suggest is particularly evident when considering stories composed by pre-school aged children or those just starting school as in this study. It is at this age, Khan *et al* posit that story structure is making its most rapid development. One would presume, therefore, that the stories discussed within this study should show development and perhaps goes some way to explain why some stories created appear incomplete and do not fit well into Propp's (1928) theory of narrative as Propp' study did not consider stories created by children. This view of narrative development is shared by Cremin *et al*, who suggest that narratives

typically become 'progressively more coherent and better organised during the preschool years' (Cremin *et al* 2018:4).

5.4 Propp's Framework

Chapter 4 gave opportunity to discuss, alongside Propp's theory, the structure of stories created in class. This in-depth analysis of story structure has led to the opportunity to look now at how those stories are created and presented and what the main results of the study were. These considerations will undoubtedly lead to further exploration, for example, when one looks at multimodality within narratives, it will be interesting to explore how the children use gesture, movement, drawing or speech to help tell their stories. When looking at how Abeo's narratives in particular have developed, there will be opportunity to consider the role peers take in his story creation within the remit of collaborative talk, the importance of which is raised by Cremin *et al* who posit that oral language and literacy development is supported by 'shared narrative activity' (2018:4). In light of the analysis of the previous stories created, emphasis will be placed in this section on the study of the multimodal approach children employ when creating narratives. I will explore what children use alongside and to support their verbal story-telling and consider how this develops and alters both over time and when used either independently or with others.

The analysis of narratives produced within Chapter 4 offers the question of whether Propp's framework is sufficient to explain what has been seen within narratives created in this study. The creation of a more suitable theory using Propp's framework as a basis that would be more in line with what has been found upon analysis of the data herein is of course appealing, and an alternative framework building on using later studies such as those by Mar (2018) to inform, that allows for both fantasy and mundane to feature along with a less complex set of expectations or elements would be beneficial. Consideration of these points would allow for the proposal of a complementary framework that explains and describes the narratives created by young children more accurately.

5.5 Playful collaborations supported by environments

Whilst Abeo and many of his peers are keen to share their stories, some of the children in class were more reluctant, preferring to show their creations in different ways such as drawing. All

the children in class would, at some time or other create their own narrative whilst some appeared more at ease being part of stories created by others. Whilst participating in a group story, these quieter storytellers would offer suggestions for ongoing storylines whilst following the lead of others, and it seemed that through group participation, gained the confidence to propose ideas for the development of the story.

The group approach to creating stories was particularly evident when narratives were developed outside during playtime for example in the data examples 'Off to the Zoo' and 'Saving the Money' where the children were observed working together to create and develop the storyline. The nature of these stories frequently involved lots of movement and running with instructions and storylines often shouted to one another. Usually only one or two children would actually lead the narration whilst the story would often involve a cast of many with some roles decided by the story leaders and others picked by the children themselves. The division of roles would, at times, be lengthy and involve discussion and negotiation and often appear to actually become part of the narrative with elements of the storyline played out during the discussion.

The concept of understanding the role of environment was one explored by McInnes *et al* in relation to play and a child's perception of the same. They note that where the activity takes place can affect play suggesting that children 'define play using cues within their environment' (McInnes *et al* 2013:268). It has been shown in this study through the narratives Abeo and his peers created, that children use both the environment and the objects they find therein in their story telling and narrative to great effect and this is a point that will be picked up again later.

5.6 Multimodality: An Overview

The multimodal approach to literacy and of creating meaning seen in the above story has been explored by many (Hope, 2008; Pahl, 2009; Kress, 2010). Here, the focus will be on how multimodality can be, and is, used to support storytelling, and how it allows children to create stories both independently and collaboratively. It is worth considering how young children use signs and media in different ways to convey messages and so the role of semiotics will be relevant to this analysis. Looking initially at how young children appear at ease applying a multimodal approach to their narratives allows the opportunity to explore not only how this is seen within class, but also to consider this alongside research into the same. When one

considers the work and narratives created by the children in this study, it is clear this is created not just through verbal means, but by using the environment and resources to hand. The experience of the child prior to their story creation has a part to play and these concepts, along with the ethos of the class and staff, will be explored throughout this study. Where children get the ideas for their stories and how these then support the creation and presentation of the ensuing narrative links into the discussion around multimodality. Pahl (2007) proposes that literacy and multimodal events occur within a variety of contexts or activities and in order to explore these one must consider where these ideas originated from.

Kress (1997) argues that children make meaning in a variety of modes using both conventional and unconventional means. Kinnunen & Einarsdottir (2013) point out that historically much narrative research conducted with children has focussed on the child's oral or written narratives and 'other ways of narrating are often ignored' (2013:363) going on to suggest that 'drawings as a form of narrative attract less attention' (2013:363). Within this study, Abeo and his peers used different approaches alongside their narratives including the use of props, gesture and drawing. On initial inspection one could consider these in a supporting role and there to enhance the narrative, however on deeper reflection they become part of the narration and ultimately cannot be separated. Take for example the story 'Water Man'. Here the narration and image are created together. At times, the image comes first other times the verbalised telling of the story. To the creator both clearly have equal importance and relevance. In the dramatic telling of 'Saving the Money' not only did the children use drama and movement to great effect within the narrative; the hoops were integral to the storyline as the characters would not be able to teleport without them thus a vital component of the story lost. This narrative offered the group opportunity to use emphasis in their verbalisation of the story. The children used shouted commands along with an urgent tone: they spoke quickly to each other in a dramatic and excited manner, which managed to convey the urgency and importance of what was being told or discussed at that point in the story. When this approach to language was used, it was often copied by other children in the group all of whom quickly adopted a similar manner of speech. Other times the role that other modes take is more subtle, in Santa's Reindeer Betty gently rocking a baby allows for quiet reflection and a moment to act out an observed action for a younger sibling but is still a vital component of the story nonetheless. Children are willing to use 'what is to hand' (Kress 1997:97) when making meaning or developing a narrative often, for the simple reason that Kress gives of 'in a multimodal system, the child has a choice' (1997:97). The data presented here clearly shows this. In stories children

used a variety of items to represent objects or environments, for example blue bricks became water, and play equipment was used to develop a route to a rainbow.

5.7 Story 6: Santa's Reindeer

This narration took place early in the academic year for the reception-aged children towards the end of the autumn term (children predominantly still aged 4 at this point), with stories such as 'The Race' created in the summer term (most children have turned 5). It therefore gives an example of early narrative and an explorative approach to story creation in a multimodal manner. No image was created to support the narrative 'Santa's Reindeer' and unlike many later stories, little of this narrative reoccurs in the body of following stories. One would surmise this is a result of the main action linking closely to the time of the year and activities surrounding Christmas. This narrative was created shortly before the end of term and once the children reunited in January, little was remembered about the preceding term with its focus of Christmas. Actions are shown here in italics.

1. **Alice:** We need to practise gallops. Let's go here, we can have a race.
2. *She points to the other side of the classroom*
3. **Betty**: Ready, Steady, Go!
4. *The children jump and race around the carpet area. One child makes a*
5. *mooing sound and the others copy this. All children move in a gallop style*
6. *movement and raise their hands to their chests.*
7. **Alice:** Ok now stop
8. *The children stand still. Alice walks around the group.*
9. **Alice:** You're a good boy, you can have some sandwiches.
10. *She puts a piece of K'Nex on the floor in front of a child who picks it up*
11. *and pretends to eat it. The Children crawl along the floor and Alice pats*
12. *each child on the head saying 'good boy'.*
13. Now it's time to gallop again. Ready steady Go.
14. *She looks at Charles:*
15. Pretend you are a donkey.
16. *She looks at Betty and Ray:*
17. You can be Mary and Joseph. Let's get the baby, it's just pretend.

They move to the crib that is in the home corner. This has been used for the class nativity play. Betty picks up the baby and cuddles it.

Betty: I'll be Mary 'cos I'm Mary in the play so I can look after the baby. You can all be reindeer.

3 remaining children start galloping around again. After cuddling the doll, Betty puts it down and joins them, copying their actions.

Alice: We need some food

She gets piles of K'Nex and gives some to each child and they pretend to eat it.

This can be our base and we can live here. We need to have a sleigh and deliver the presents.

Charles: I've got a sleigh. You can all follow me and we can be reindeer for Santa. I'm Dasher.

Betty: I'm Rudolph

Alice: You shouldn't be here now. It's time to go. We need to take the presents. You can be Rudolph and Dasher.

She looks at Ray.

Who are you?

Ray: I'm Gerry

Alice: No, Gerry isn't a reindeer.

Ray: My Mum said so though

Alice: Oh ok

She goes back to feeding the reindeer

Now that's snack all done. Now we're going to all the houses. We're going really fast.

The children all run around and make quick movements with their arms before all sitting down.

Ray: I'm tired. Have we finished all the presents?

Alice: Yes, it's time for bed.

The children all lie down and pretend to sleep.

As already mentioned instances of the focus group using a multimodal approach to create meaning in and around their narratives are many. In 'Santa's Reindeer', the children made use

of real objects as props, gesture and physical movement to create and tell their story. The use of not only the spoken word appeared to enhance the experience for the children participating, encouraging participation through mime (with the act of eating and galloping) and suggested content to the narrative. From an observer's point of view, it became more akin to watching a play than just listening to a story being told. The children were using both their imagination and understanding of the real needs of reindeer and both these elements were underpinned by the children's existing knowledge of Christmas stories (for example the discussion around the names of the reindeer).

This use of objects to represent something is clear in the story 'Santa's Reindeer' and this impromptu narration allowed the children to create a story dramatically and collaboratively as whilst Alice took the lead in the creation of the storyline, all participated in its creation and developed the use of props. Prior to creating the story, the children had been enjoying Christmas crafts and activities at school that had been enhanced by a number of stories linked to Christmas and the rehearsing of the class Nativity play. A group of four children were playing with K'nex (a construction toy) on the carpet. Alice is keen to develop the game and begins the narration. The importance placed within this story upon the props is clearly evident: the props (in this case small pieces of K'nex) appear to be a catalyst for the development of the storyline. They allow new themes to be introduced to the narrative, the offer of food when K'nex is used to represent sandwiches, later becoming the presents the children deliver in their new role as Santa's Reindeer. In this short narrative, the environment is used to allow for further props to be introduced with the children using their knowledge of the Christmas story withing their narrative. This section also allows for Betty to take some ownership of the story as she revisits the role she is currently practising for the class Nativity play. Betty used gesture and body language well sitting quietly pretending to nurse and cuddle her baby. She watches the other children for a period whilst rocking the doll before carefully placing it back in the crib and re-joining the group to change roles once again back into a reindeer.

Under the banner of multimodality, several concepts used by the children in class when creating their narratives have been seen to emerge. Whilst these interlink and are oft used by the children together, I will detail these separately.

5.8 Drawing and image: drawing and the inner world

In my observations I saw that Abeo and his peers used drawing and images frequently to develop their narratives and when considering the use of image in storytelling, Wright (2007) notes that 'while drawing often is non-narrative, it also can be a powerful medium for organising experience into narrative' (2007:18). Kinnunen & Einarsdottir (2013) champion the importance of researching visual narratives suggesting narratives created with some element of visual representation hold 'the possibility to engage children in meaningful and relevant self-expression and exploration' (2013:363). As in this study, Wright found that narratives created by children were 'embodied visual-verbal tellings, intimately linked with fantasy-based play' (Wright 2007:18). In their study exploring multimodality in narratives, Binder & Kotsopoulos (2011) examine not only how children use art and image in literacy, but also views on the same. They discuss what they refer to as 'multiple literacies' (Binder & Kotsopoulos 2011:340) describing it as an approach whereby 'meaning-making and communication are represented not only through language but also through other forms of non-textual modes' (2011:340). Here Kress' views become relevant and his argument that a myriad of symbols can be used by young children to communicate and create meaning (1997). Eisner (2003) echoed this idea arguing that while language is the prominent mode of communication, other modes can be used to support or replace this. Children, Kinnunen & Einarsdottir (2013) suggest, draw to 'create meaning and to communicate this meaning with others' (2013:360) arguing that children use multimodal methods to examine and share their life experience and use not only language but play, body language and drawing to do this. They paint a picture of children wandering and 'jumping the paths of reality and fantasy' (Kinnunen & Einarsdottir 2013:360) noting that drawing is a key mode used by children to describe what they have encountered and posit that through drawing children are able to recreate past, present and future happenings both real and imagined. In a study considering how literacy events can be creative whilst working alongside artists and architects, Pahl (2007) noted that children were keen to draw their ideas and experiences alongside narration. The images the children produced often extended their spoken words and gave insight into what the children held dear. Pahl notes that different elements support and encourage their creativity such as examples of drawing seen and can be complex in their creation with image allowing a child to show different elements of a story or event and how they interpret it.

When looking at the pictures and in some cases, models, the children created alongside their narratives, these had a symbolic aspect that linked the thoughts and feelings of the child and enabled them to present them in a manner they themselves could relate to. Pahl (1999) explains that young children use different means, such as play and drawing to explore and then present ideas and concepts. Through this externalisation Pahl suggests a child 'can externalise a thought through a drawing or model' (1999:30). It is possible for ideas to be internalised also, Vygotsky (1986) describes how internalised narratives developed from, for example, a heard story, can become inner speech. This in turn can be transformed into outer speech whereby a child may use ideas gleaned from the story to create something new be it a picture, model or adapted narrative. Vygotsky is keen to point out the different natures of internal and external speech explaining 'inner speech is speech for oneself; external speech is for others' (Vygotsky 1986:225). Vygotsky's study explored the nature of inner speech concluding its use came into force after what Piaget (1959) referred to as 'egocentric speech' noting 'egocentric speech disappears at school age when inner speech begins to develop' (1986:226). Vygotsky's views differ from Piaget's in relation to the rise and fall of egocentric speech with Vygotsky arguing that it leads to inner speech stating 'its development history can be understood only as a gradual unfolding of the traits of inner speech' (1986:230). Pahl suggests that inner speech links a child to the outside world, noting that whilst at play, some children 'talk to themselves in an interior monologue' (Pahl 1999:30). She notes that drawings created whilst children engage in this monologue will capture the essence of what is being thought by the child, at the time of creation. It would appear then that images created alongside narratives are comparable to and work in tandem with one another. The image allows the child to express further inner thoughts that perhaps remain unspoken or become verbalised later. Whilst Abeo finds creating image not only a powerful but useful approach to presenting his non-verbalised thoughts, other children used the creation of modelling or at times 'silent acting' through the movement of toys to what appeared to be a internalised monologue.

The drawings made to support the narratives created by Abeo and his peers clearly had a purpose and meaning attached to them by the creator. Drawing, Hope (2008) suggests 'acts as a bridge between the inner world of the imagination and reason and the outer world of communication and sharing of ideas' (Hope 2008:11). Here the association between Vygotsky's concept of inner speech and the production of image can be seen. In their analysis of children's drawings produced alongside narration, Kinnunen & Einarsdottir (2013) considered drawings that were created spontaneously and note that 'the content of the drawn

stories cannot be perceived without listening, seeing the processes used to create them and understanding the context of the children's narrating' (2013:369). Like Pahl, who advocates the importance of watching the process of creating drawings that can often represent the child's inner speech, Binder & Kotsopoulos (2011) used their study to engage with and observe how young children use different modes to 'navigate the relational landscape of their visual literacy narratives' (Binder & Kotsopoulos 2011:340). In order to describe the link between drawing and story creation, Kinnunen & Einarsdottir adopt the term 'multimodal narrating' referring to the 'integration of graphic, narrative and embodied modes while children draw' (2013:366) and note that examples of this were not confined to simply drawing but included other creative forms such as cutting and painting.

5.9 Drawing and image: drawing as an act of meaning

The use of drawing as an act of meaning and to symbolise writing is closely connected to the previous discussion however here, the drawing element contained in or produced alongside a narrative serves a different purpose. Drawing used to represent writing is evident in the narrative 'Carrot Soup'. This was a story created by Jake, a boy that at the time did not often choose to create narratives to share although would often listen to his friends' narratives. In this account, Jake chose to produce his story in the style of a book that he 'reads'. In his telling, Jake at times acts as the storyteller and at other times as a guide to explain what he is showing or what can be seen on the page. When one considers the presentation of Jake's story it makes sense for children to produce a story in this manner as it is a format many, and certainly so in the case of Jake, are familiar with. Most written stories aimed at children in this age group (4-5 years) fall under the category of 'picture books'; an apt description as they are exactly that, a written story accompanied by an appropriate image that helps to extend the understanding of the written text through imagery. When one couples this with activities in literacy lessons where children are often allowed or indeed encouraged to illustrate their work in the same manner, it is little wonder that children will then choose to incorporate images in their narratives alongside either spoken or written narratives. This is a view that is supported by Kress who, when reflecting on his earlier work notes 'nearly every text that I discuss had a picture with it, and it is quite clear to me that the picture forms a part of the whole text for the child; it seemed to show the same conception expressed in non-verbal form' (1997:xx)

5.10 Story 7: Carrot Soup. A story by Jake

Jake began this activity by sellotaping several sheets of paper together.

Jake: I'm making a book

He then drew a simple picture on each page. He used just one colour per page.

When he had done this, he came to show what he had done.

I've made a book. This is the name of the book. Its called Puzzle.

He points to the image on the first page.

He then turns the page and narrates his story.

This is the person running on the mountain. He doesn't know where to go. He's going shopping but he needs to know where it is. I'll draw it.

He draws the shop on the page.

That's the door but I don't know how to write shop but he will know. The shop sells toys and also carrots and some soup and some food.

I ask about the next page.

That's a black hole cos they are in space.

No other reference or explanation is made/offered to this.

He turns the page.

look this is the bit when he finds the soup.

He points to the paper.

He's running to get the soup

he draws a small person figure

This is the soup. It has bits of cucumber. I like cucumber.

he draws a bowl and colours it in

That looks good soup.

He looks at the picture he has drawn.

Then he wants a carrot but I don't like carrots. So then he can go home but he wants to go on the slide. Oh, I didn't write the carrot or the slide. I'll do that.

He draws a slide and a carrot

Look that's the slide, its big and that's the carrot.

This is the end of his story and he walks away with his book.

When Jake says at the end 'I didn't write the carrot' (line 27) he adds in images to represent the carrot and the slide. Jake is clearly happy with the understanding that writing can be represented in different ways and in this case uses an image of the object to represent his writing. It is not clear when he uses the phrase 'I didn't write the carrot' whether he means he wanted to write the word 'carrot' or draw the carrot. However, the notion of drawing representing writing is an area discussed by Kress (1997) and whilst at the time of creating this story Jake has begun to learn and use initial letter sounds in class, when writing independently it appears that Jake does not make the connection between this learning and recreating print to represent a word and to him there is no difference in showing meaning through either emergent letter writing or image. The importance of encouraging children to create using what she describes as 'three modes of expression: drawing, talking and writing' (Fullerton 2020:134) is evident here with Jake using all these modes in order to create a more complex story than would have been produced through the use of one. Through his choice of language, I would argue that Jake is confidently representing a word through image and is showing what Kress describes as creating signs 'in many semiotic modes' (Kress 1997:10). Kress' theory suggests that 'all signs and messages are always multimodal' (1997:10) and that these different approaches used by young children not only support their journey into grappling with and understanding what us as adults understand as writing but also 'add meaning and are inevitably a part of writing' (1997:10).

Propp's theory of storytelling doesn't explain what is happening in this short story and so highlights the need for a revised interpretation of this framework. Within Jake's story there are a number of occasions when the main character is confused or unknowing. Jake as the storyteller and creator acts as a helper here and as he tells the story he appears to reflect and help by adding extra drawing and saying 'I'll draw it'. There are also times that Jake appears to reflect on the story and image 'that looks good soup' showing perhaps that Jake is still enjoying the process of creating the story as he narrates it. The story is somewhat disjointed with the jump from buying soup to the inclusion of a black hole, however Jake does return to the concept of soup introduced when the main character goes into a shop selling carrots and soup. That said, to Jake and those around him it is still a story with merit and has meaning. There are some elements that coincide with Propp's framework; for instance there is some adventure or challenge: the journey to the shop and finding soup, and an aborted ending 'so

then he can go home', although the man in the story then begins a new adventure by going on the slide. The story was created independently and one wonders if it had been created with other, elements within the story may have been developed and extended. This, of course, is not necessary. Jake is pleased with not only his story but his images that accompany this and this is a step forward for Jake's storytelling journey. The images created alongside the narrative are used to support the telling of the story to an audience and during the telling he takes the opportunity to reflect and alter his illustrations.

In this study, children have used drawings alongside their narratives in many ways that reflect the views highlighted above. What is particularly evident in Abeo's narratives is how he is able to weave real life and lived experiences so tightly with fantasy. Take for example 'The Race'; past experiences of visiting forests and knowledge of what one may find there is expertly interwoven into a fantasy storyline. This will now be considered in more depth.

5.11 Narrative development

Narratives, Kress (1997) suggests are 'not spatial' (1997:136) i.e. they are, as Propp proposes in line with his structural view, linear. Kress points out that the natural medium for narratives is speech and that that the narrative follows an order with one point or action following and leading to another. Garrett (2018) puts forward a number of descriptions of what a narrative is noting that theory emphasises the relationship between 'real or imagined events' (Garrett 2018:15).

When analysing the basic plot components to identify the narrative elements within the story 'Santa's Reindeer', it is clear that this narrative does not fit well within Propp's Theory. Like 'Carrot Soup' it is somewhat disjointed and whilst appears to have some elements that can be connected to Propp's Theory of narrative structure for example the characters all go somewhere directed by one lead character, namely 'the dispatcher' other elements are missing. There are, as suggested by Propp, no clear heroes or villains however the children seem content with the narrative and the roles they all play and perhaps links to Piaget's (1926) view of language development following a path allowing for clear developmental stages. The view Piaget held suggests that a child's intelligence changes as they grow and interact with their environment. This, Piaget felt, allows a child to not only acquire knowledge, but develop an understanding of the world that can then be used, in the case of a child, in play and narrative creation. This

narrative seems to serve a different purpose that allows children to experiment with the creation of collaboratively created narratives with discussion and compromise evident, along with the opportunity for all engaged to present ideas for incorporation within the story. As can be seen through the stories shown in this study, these are all elements of story creation that the children begin to develop and use more readily and confidently as they become keener and more confident storytellers. Both narratives 'Santa's Reindeer' and 'Carrot Soup' were created at the start of academic year when the children had joined Reception and show verbalised narrative creation in its infancy. As the year progresses the children participate in story-time activities, listening to and discussing books both with adults and peers. As can be seen from later narratives discussed here these activities enjoyed both at home and at school encourage children to begin to experiment with and develop their own narratives that they become more confident to voice and share with others. Fox advocates the use of listening to stories to support children invent their own stories suggesting that as a child's own narrative operates through words, it is 'natural for them to use stories told in words as models' (Fox 1993:17).

It is, perhaps, useful to apply a different lens to consider the narrative 'Santa's Reindeer'. Todorov (1969) proposed a simpler, whilst still linear in its understanding of narrative, theory comprising five stages that he felt typical narratives follow:

1. *Equilibrium* here all is balanced, normal and little is happening and is often the start of the narrative.
2. *Disruption* this is the point that something happens and a hero emerges to face the problem.
3. *Recognition* of the problem or disorder.
4. *Solving* an attempt to repair the damage.
5. *New equilibrium* the possible end of the story where a new 'normal' is created and the disruption or problem is solved.

Applying this to 'Santa's Reindeer' could appear thus:

1. Equilibrium: the reindeer are happily grazing and running. (lines 1-13)
2. Disruption: New characters arrive and they have to deliver presents (line 14)
3. Here Recognition and Solving appear merged with the children taking on new characters and working together to deliver presents quickly. (Lines 26-43)

4. Solving: the presents are delivered (line 43)
5. The reindeer characters go to bed (line 44)

Whilst Todorov's theory is oft applied to film it can be used here to show that even what appears a disjointed narrative has some linear structure to it and a sequence of events that flow together to form a story.

5.12 Objects as props

Within their narratives the children used objects in different ways. As can be seen in both 'Santa's Reindeer' and a later story 'Dinosaur play pool' the children experimented with symbolic play. This element of play is, Vygotsky (1978) suggests, a clear link between gesture and written language and can be viewed as a 'complex system of "speech" though gestures that communicate and indicate the meaning of playthings' (Vygotsky 1978:108). He explains that one object can be used to signify another either similar or at times, vastly different object. The similarity of the two objects the real and imagined, does not Vygotsky posits, need to be close explaining this through the use of a description of a game that used a random selection of objects to represent characters in a story: keys represented children and a knife a doctor. And so it is with props used in stories created in class; K'nex is used as food, lego bricks represent ponds and tables become forests.

Some of the richest narratives have been created using minimal props that support the storytelling. In the case of 'The Race' the wheel appeared to not only be part of the story but to actually aid the storytelling. Perhaps the movement involved of physically moving a wheel along the floor aided Abeo in visualising his story moving and the characters moving through the story. It certainly seemed to support the momentum of the story. When Abeo moved quickly or rolled the wheel quickly, so his speech sped up and the story would often reach a climax or cliff-hanger. So it would seem the wheel was more than a character but also a 'crutch' that supported Abeo continue to develop his story. He was, for the duration of the narrative, totally fixated on the wheel and its movement and journey around the room.

In 'The Race' the narrative focussed on the use of a small lego wheel. It is not clear from Abeo's narrative whether or not the wheel represents Tom or Tom's mode of transport but the wheel does accompany the whole narrative. Similarly a collaborative story observed created

during outside play saw Abeo and a small group of his peers creating a story using just hula hoops as a prop. The children used a television show (Pokemon) as the catalyst for their narrative and took on roles and characters from the show. Parry (2010) raised the view that there is concern by some that the overuse of storylines heard has a detrimental effect on a child's own imagination. Whilst this is a valid viewpoint, it is also important to consider that these previously heard storylines can act as a catalyst for a more developed and personally owned narrative. In the following story 'Saving the Money', whilst some elements had perhaps been seen or heard before, it appears that the collaborative nature of the creation of the narrative allowed for this to become personal to the children producing it. For instance, the hoops were used by the children as 'transporters' which enabled them to get from 'home'; a pre-determined section of the playground, to where they needed to get to, would not fit into an expected solution to a bank robbery. At the start of the observation the children were observed gathered together discussing what problem had arisen and how they, assuming the roles of the hero characters, would solve it. The children all took on a role as a character for the story, some roles were allocated by George, other roles were chosen by individuals. Here the ability to negotiate already honed through collaboratively created narratives such as 'Santa's Reindeer' and 'Animal World' were called to play. This negotiation went smoothly with each child content with their chosen or given role. On this occasion, the 'problem' was a bank robbery. Whilst the narrative was predominantly created by three children, several others were participating in the game by following the lead of the story creators (Abeo, George and Tom).

5.13 Story 8: Saving the Money

1. *A group of children are standing together in the playground.*
2. **Abeo:** The bank's in trouble. We need to go to the bank 'cos it's being robbed.
3. It's a rescue and we've gotta save the money
4. **George:** what do we do. It's being robbed.
5. **Abeo:** We gotta go now and fast and save it. Its trouble.
6. **George:** I'm gonna transport there
7. *He throws his hoop to the floor and jumps inside*
8. *The other children in the game follow suit throwing their hoops down*
9. *and jumping inside them. One child make a whirring sound possibly to*
10. *represent movement to another place.*

Tom: We can transport. It's a transportation device

this is said to me as Tom notices me watching.

They all run off around the playground until Abeo and George run to a corner and shout out

Abeo & George together: Look, we're here

shouted

The others in the group then arrive en masse in the same spot. And act out fighting imaginary characters.

George: We've got to save the money so we can get food cos the bank needs more

Abeo: We can chase the baddies and get it back

Abeo and George run to a different part of the playground

Abeo: That's the baddy and he's stealing the money and we've got to get it back for the bank.

The game continues in this manner with the focus remaining a rescue of the money along with the chasing down of 'the baddies'.

This story was a created collaboratively and took place at the end of the summer term. The children had spent a year together experiencing similar activities and stories and had developed firm friendships and groups. The group producing this narrative had similar interests, a fact made clear through the shared story outlined above, and had grown used to playing alongside one another. Shouted commands and story changes were sufficient to carry a storyline between a group of boys through shared understanding of an experience. It appeared all the children participating understood the story and so had perhaps seen the same television show. Gesture and action were a dominant feature of this story and the narrative came in short bursts when the group joined together however this did not seem to detract from either the storyline or enjoyment of participation or deter the children from jointly creating the narrative. Tom was particularly keen later to describe his transportation device to me and why he needed it. This description was done not only through the use of descriptive narrative, but by action and 'acting out' how it worked.

As can be seen from the initial exchange between Abeo and George, there is repetition in an effort perhaps to reinforce the problem. The fact that the bank is being robbed and in trouble is mentioned a number of times. The children were speaking both loudly and quickly and so were able to convey the urgency of the situation to the rest of the group. Body language was used to show meaning in this initial section. Abeo in particular used his arms to gesticulate, waving them wildly at one point and then using them in a pleading manner (arms straight with palms facing upwards) next. The setting for the story seemed to support the creation of this particular narrative. The extra space provided outside on the playground gave the opportunity to move and show through drama different elements of the story that were perhaps not verbalised. The fast movements showed clearly the urgency the children were placing on the rescue as were the shouted commands. Kinnunen & Einarsdottir explore the nature of children's creations noting that the content of stories and manner in which they are told or created is 'tied to the contexts in which they tell the stories and to the purposes for which they tell them' (2013:363). Whilst no image was created for this narrative event, clear similarities are evident in later stories narrated by Abeo individually where his inclusion of bank robbers became a new favourite theme.

This narrative can be compared to a story created for the pilot study earlier in the year by some of the same children. Here the children were inside and had chosen to create a story using animals as props. For the telling of this story, the children used not only small world animals to represent the animals they were using as characters for their story, but also drawing and imagery to support their narrative. The children told their story and drew what they said in a variety of ways. Often the image was created first, possibly with the use of a prop and then it was incorporated into the narrative. A clear example of this was the inclusion of in the initial stages of this story one participant became fixated on drawing what he later described as 'pools'. After collecting and arranging a selection of animals, he spent time drawing pools of water for his animals (figs 2 &3). This story was created collaboratively and as was popular with this group at the time, a 'leader' for the story had already been agreed. The pool creator talked to the leader explaining what he was doing pointing out that the animals needed to drink and eat.

When creating 'Animal World' a large 'story' was drawn by a group of 5 children playing and working independently. The only support given by an adult was the initial question of 'how will the animals know where the berries are?' The activity was then directed and managed by

the children. This transcript appears to show less of a story than some of the narratives produced by Abeo both before and after, however there is a storyline running through this narrative that is clear to all the children participating. For this story, it appears that it's creation is more linked to the imagery produced, and less focus is placed on creating a narrative. The children participating all have elements they want to include, however these all fit in well with the overarching theme of animals on a quest to find food.

5.14 Story 9: Animal World

Tom and Evan (2 boys) begin the activity. They begin by sorting and arranging animals into groups (see photo). A starts drawing circles:

Tom: my animals are going to the wood for some berries cos they are hungry.

Evan: I've made an animal world.

(Adult – how will the animals know where the berries are?)

Tom: The cheetahs know the way cos they can jump.

Evan starts drawing a roadway

Evan: This is the way to the wood.

John joins the table and asks if he can play

Evan: Its my story. We are making animal world. The animals want some food.

John: my animals are going to London. I've been to London. I went on a train. They can go on a train.

J draws a train and track.

Ann (the first girl to join) comes to the table and watches. She picks up a pen.

Ann: Can I play

Evan: Yes, its my story.

Ann looks at what has been drawn and moves some of the animals around. Evan asks her to stop knocking the giraffes over.

Evan: The animals want some berries. The animals found them on the road. The giraffes have to bend down.

Ann: I've made a sign for the animals. It says "no animals to come out".

Evan: No, this can be a sign here *(points to a spot on the paper)* It goes down, look.

Ann: You need to go down and round so it looks like a flower. I'm gonna draw some fruits, some apples and bananas.

She draws a collection of fruit and flowers and moves the animals around 'eating'.

Evan moves back to Tom and asks what he is drawing

Tom: Water for the animals.

He has drawn lots of different coloured pools of water and then put an animal in each pool.

Evan: I need to draw footprints for who dropped the berries.

Sam: I've drawn a Gruffalo footprint.

Up to this point, Sam has been silently drawing images to match the on going narrative between the other children.

Evan: Gruffalo's love berries.

He begins to draw more footprints and more berries with Sam

Fig 13: Final story 'Animal World'

This type of communication is referred to as graphic-narrative play by Wright which she describes as 'a personal fantasy-based experience depicted on paper' (Wright 2007:2). In order

to read or follow the story, one must consider how children construct meaning by using both verbal and non-verbal means. Whilst Wright describes this as an independent activity, it is clear that Abeo and his peers are creating meaning and stories in this manner collaboratively. Within the story 'Animal World' many different modes are called into play; drawing, spoken language, props and gesture (often seen in this example as watching one another). Throughout the narration the children work and create together discussing and negotiating not only the storyline but who was joining and what they would be able to do. Although most of the children were allowed to offer their own interpretation and inclusions within the narrative, Evan did at times use the role of leader to curtail activities for example stopping Ann moving the animals around. Cremin *et al* (2017) scrutinised how young children co-construct narratives noting that this approach allows interaction between children often encouraging narratives to be authored in a multimodal manner.

Wright (2007) argues that, as in the initial section of Abeo's story 'The Race' the child can take on multiple roles within the story creation from author to performer and narrator, and as such there is 'no need to negotiate with other children to take certain roles' (Wright 2007:2). Dyson (1993) expands this belief suggesting that when creating independently the child is free to change plots and direction of stories at will without the need to work collaboratively to shape the content. Some of the children within the study group enjoyed creating narratives independently whilst others predominantly gravitated to create and tell stories with others although that said this was not exclusive and the children studied would, at times, change their preferred choice and, for example, work with others if confident creating stories independently. A small number of short stories authored independently appear here, however many of the narratives created by Abeo and his peers included in this study were developed collaboratively and appear more complex and elaborate as a result. Abeo's initial story 'The Race' began initially independently and was a particularly complex and imaginative tale that appeared to mark him finding his storytelling voice as many following tales incorporated elements first seen here. As with 'Saving the Money' where the plotline of bank robbers became a frequent plot in later stories, so it was with the earlier creation of 'The Race' with elements of races in different guises being central to many later narratives.

5.15 Short stories created by Tom

Tom was another member of the class and a boy who was particularly comfortable creating stories independently. Throughout the duration of the study, he shared a number of short narratives that involved image in their telling. On analysis of these narratives it becomes apparent that elements that are seen in these short stories are then used later, or perhaps before, in collaboratively created tales. For example a short story called 'Baby T Rex' includes the character later used by George of a baby T'Rex. References to sharks are also revisited by Abeo in his 'Under the Sea Adventure'.

5.15.1 Story 10: 'Baby T-Rex'

> 'That's Abeo hiding in the den' (he points to the picture he has drawn). He's scared of the dinosaur but its ok 'cos it's only a baby. It's a baby T'Rex and he's fighting the shark cos it should be in the water. The Mummy is smiling 'cos she really liked the baby and the dragon is coming too. The dragon is happy and it's roaring out fire, all the grey bits are smoke but the Mummy says it's not allowed to roar and smoke so it has to stop and they can have tea'.

Fig 14: Image created to support story 'Baby T-Rex'

This story was followed by a similar short story again produced by Tom. This narrative was created following a visit to a forest and sees the inclusion of the same setting as for Abeo's 'The Race'. The story finishes in a similar way to 'Baby T-Rex' with the characters eating. Links to the earlier story 'Animal World' that Tom was a part of can be seen in the reference to what the animals like to eat.

5.15.2 Story 11: The Rhino

> 'This rhino has escaped from the forest. He wanted to eat something. He wanted to eat a fairy but that's not good so he went to see me and George. The rhino doesn't like carrots so we had to look for something else. I think it likes trees so me and George got loads and loads of leaves and it was happy'.

Once again this short story was accompanied by an image that Tom used in his retelling of the story. He has drawn the different components of the story such as the forest and the fairy which he points to as he talks. Tom was keen to explain the letters on the page as the rhino's name 'he's called Harry and he is happy cos he's got lots to eat. That's what it says'. Here again are links to the story 'Animal World' where several of the group explored mark making to portray words or sections of the story they were narrating. This inclusion of more alphabetic lettering on the page shows progression from symbolising story with just image and a step towards more formally represented writing. Whilst Tom is proud of his written addition to his visual story, it does not alter the narrative he produces alongside the image and is only referred to later when he describes his illustration.

Fig 15: Image created to support story 'The Rhino'

5.16 Story 12: Water Man

This narrative was created by Abeo one afternoon in class and begins with him drawing independently. The image creation commences before Abeo begins to verbalise the story and he continues to draw the whole time he is narrating his story. His drawing mirrors what he is saying throughout with the picture evolving throughout the narration. He has drawn 'Emily the Baddie' before he begins his narrative, but when he gets to the point in his story that he electrifies her, he colours over the picture of her he previously drew to show this (fig 16). This narrative is presented differently. As this story was created and told solely by Abeo, it is possible to show how his actions are guided by and reflect the narrative. There are clear links between the storyline seen here and that created collaboratively several weeks earlier for the story 'Saving the Money'.

Abeo starts by drawing two people.

Abeo: This is me and this is Sid. I'm trying to find a baddie cos the baddie is stealing something from the bank.

I have water power.

He draws lines from his person

That's pink water. That the baddies but mine is blue. Teddy has black water.

Abeo draws another person with pink swirls around it

That hit her

I ask who hit her

the baddie, on the head. It made her go onto the floor.

I'm water man. Sid is lightning man.

He shoots light and electrics people. Teddy is black man.

These are the people who fight for the baddie. Her servants. They fight us.

he draws some people around the original image of the baddie character

But Sid electrics her.

At this point he colours over the baddie character with yellow (fig 16)

Then she walked to the bank to get more money but Sid electriced the servants so they couldn't help but she used her pink light so Sid had to jump on a house.

Here he draws a tall structure and adds a person at the top

And I had to jump on the building and then we will try to find her and destroy her.

he draws another building. (fig 17)

He draws lines from the person that represents his character to the baddie character.

Then she was in the car.

he draws a car

But water beats fire so I melted her and she wasn't happy. So I got on another building and I had a grabber and the real me was here and this is one of my evolutions.

draws hands/claws on the end of a long line from his character

She was in the car and pressed the button that destroys every kind of power and she destroyed the building.

he scribbles on the buildings quickly

Teddy used his black water but she had a shield so we all made more of us and we destroyed the car. And we got the money. So we took the money back to the bank.

So the baddie had tea and got stronger

he draws muscles on the baddie character (see fig 18)

and they got claws

he adds some claws to the image

She was so strong and she picked up the building but then it fell. So I picked up a building and carried it and it didn't drop so I threw it at the baddies car and there was a big explosion and her car was destroyed and we won".

he violently scribbles over the car image (see fig 19)

The following images are presented mirroring the story order and show how the story image developed.

Fig 16: 'Sid electrifies her'

Fig 17: 'That's me on the building'

Fig 18 'The baddie had tea and got stronger'

Fig 19 'There was a big explosion'

Fig 20: Final image of the story 'Water Man'

Throughout the story whenever Abeo referred to different characters such as 'the baddie', he altered the original image he had drawn of this character. This was changed when the character was on top of a building and here a new image was drawn. It was evident he was following the story he was narrating as he often referred back to comments he had made previously such as Teddy with 'black water' power which is mentioned at the start and end of the story. Abeo's stories appear to have developed. The term 'evolution' is a new development and referred to more than once as is the inclusion of servants for the baddie and the storyline appears more complex.

5.17 Play

It is important to consider the role of play within this study. The relevance and importance of play within narratives has been raised in Chapter 2 with the argument that pretend play and storytelling act as complementary modes of a story. Nicolopoulou (2005) notes that 'a major form of children's play, symbolic or pretend, centre precisely on the enactment of narrative scenarios' (2005:495). The narratives created by Abeo are done so in a playful manner both independently and within a group and as such allow him to develop both storylines and his understanding of story structure whilst encouraging imagination and freedom of spirit. McInnes *et al* point out that whilst play is central to both teaching and learning, it is 'considered difficult to define' (2013:268). Whilst one could argue that the narratives contained within this study have been created by the children whilst engaged in play although, as suggested by McInnes *et al,* 'many definitions of play are based on an adult view of the observable act of play' (2011:123). Both play and learning are natural elements to a child's life and in the eyes of the child are 'not always separate' (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson 2008:623) and the benefits of play to childhood development have been championed by many (McGinness *et al* 2014, Siraj-Blatchford 2009). In their study exploring sociodramatic play, Banerjee *et al* (2016) point out much research exists to highlight the link between literacy development in young children and play pointing to the importance of allowing playful activity between children within the classroom. Luckily play is an established element of early years classrooms with educators keen to embrace the philosophy of interweaving play into all areas of learning. McInnes *et al* conclude that 'children who practise a task under playful conditions….show superior performance and behaviours conducive to learning compared with children in formal practice condition' (2011:124).

Whilst at play at school, children invariably play alongside others and are able to develop the play or game in their own way allowing children the opportunity to take control of decisions and narratives. Pramling & Samuelsson (2008) suggest that in play 'children communicate and interpret continuously' (2008:627) and whilst creating or 'acting' out the play children 'produce the content of it by talking about what to do and in what way it should be done' (2008:627). These statements clearly show the interconnection of play and discussion which can lead to the creation of narrative based within the confines of a game.

Looking back at the collaborative produced narrative 'Animal World' the story was viewed by the authors as play, indeed a child asks 'can I play' in order to join. The fluid movement between play, talk and ultimately writing becomes apparent not only to us as adults but perhaps too by the children themselves is evident here. Dyson (2020) elaborates on the journey from play to writing and posits that children's play is 'the foundation of writing' (Dyson 2020:3).

5.18 Talk

The importance of talk and discussion has been raised throughout this study. One would surmise from this study that talk and learning are key participants to the creation of narratives. Hall & Martello (1996) note that as children learn to use talk, they explore their role as speakers, suggesting that whilst conversing with their peers, children question, challenge and 'make suggestions of a hypothetical nature' (1996:5). It is, through these peer group discussions that children learn to use language in different ways. Language, May *et al* (2006) suggest is not just used for communication but 'a culturally value laden vehicle for meaning making' (2006:73). The structure of the group enabling the discussion is, Hall & Martello suggest, important. When groups are composed of participants of an equal status, i.e. a similar age and therefore without adult input, children 'learn to collaborate in order to make meaning' (Hall & Martello 1996:5). The inclusion of adults may alter the nature of the conversation either by inadvertently guiding and offering alternative viewpoints or knowledge or by limiting interaction between children.

In order to understand how talk and in particular collaborative talk can contribute to narrative development, one should consider how and when talking and writing may occur in a child's life. Carter-Smith (2019) introduces the concept of emergent literacy, suggesting that this concept refers to 'the process through which a child develops an understanding of the functions

of language, symbols and print' (2019:8). Cabell *et al* add further detail by proposing that within emergent literacy 'reading, writing and oral language develop in an interconnected fashion within informal social contexts' (2009:3). Once again we can see the obvious interlinking of the various multimodal means that Abeo and his peers use to create their narratives.

5.19 Gesture

When observing Abeo and his peers creating and telling their stories, it was clear that the use of gesture became part of the narration process. Throughout the storytelling process, gesture was used in a number of ways to effectively convey emotions, actions and character within the story that was unfolding. The importance of gesture was discussed by Vygotsky (1987) who offers the following explanation: 'the gesture is the initial visual sign that contains the child's future writing as an acorn contains a future oak. Gestures, it has been correctly said, are writing in air, and written signs frequently are simply gestures that have been fixed' (Vygotsky 1987:107).

The link between gesture and imagery contained within writing or communication is discussed further by Vygotsky and his emerging links to multimodality can be see through his linking of pictorial writing, communication and signs. Herman (2010) suggests that storytellers tend to use two semiotic modes when telling or creating a story: verbal and visual, pointing out that the 'visual' mode can occur in the style of gesture. Taylor & Leung (2020) describe teachers giving an 'oral performance' (2020:3) when reading picture books aloud in class noting that 'the teacher's facial expressions and gestures, as well as auditory cues such as intonation, rhythm, pitch and stress contribute to the interpretation of the picture book' (Taylor & Leung 2019:3). When one looks at this statement using the eyes of a teacher where one acts as a role model, the importance of not just reading but perhaps recreating stories for young children becomes clear.

Chapter 6: Concluding thoughts

6.1 Implications of the research

This study proposed to look at the narratives produced by a small group of 4 and 5 year old children in a reception class whilst at play. The study aimed to use Propp's Theory as a tool to explore these narratives in order to assess their content and how the children created and developed their storylines. The study explored how children used multimodal means to create and tell their stories and how the stories themselves came to be, looking at the creation of stories told both independently and collaboratively. The question of whether Propp's Theory was sufficient to describe the stories produced by the study group of children, particularly in respect to multimodal techniques was raised.

The data presented highlight not only the achievements of the children through their narratives and narration, but also show their interests and experiences. The data and analyses suggest the following key findings relating to the study group:

- Narratives were highly creative and imaginative.
- Children showed they were able to create storylines that successfully wove real life with fantasy.
- The children studied were keen to work with others collaboratively producing storylines that evolved and developed through the input of all participants.
- Narratives showed intensity and concentration, producing complex stories.
- Children revisited popular storylines over time, showing the ability to refer back to previous achievements and characters.
- The narratives produced showed clear story structure that could often be linked to Propp's elements.
- Children were keen to share stories, showing pride in their creations.
- Children used a variety of multi-modal approaches including image, gesture, language and movement in the production and presentation of their narratives both when working independently or collaboratively.
- The different modes used to create stories combined together and to the children these modes appeared to be equally significant.

- Children found inspiration from many quarters, feeding aspects of character and storylines from familiar books or films along with lived experiences into their own narratives.

Key to this was the fact that the children within the study group showed a real desire to create and tell their stories and showed a maturity of thought and creation that was exciting and unexpected. Abeo was a particularly talented and passionate storyteller and often his storylines and enthusiasm ignited the interest of others resulting in either more complex and collaboratively produced narratives, or more personal, individual stories. Abeo's story 'The Race' showed his desire to create not only a complex and imaginative story verbally, but also that he was keen to use the space of the classroom to provide a setting for his story. This use of space became particularly important for stories created outside and this, coupled with physical movement and gesture usually produced faster paced stories. This pace was seen through both the manner children moved in the space whilst altering their language to either a faster or louder speech.

6.2 The application of Propp

The application of Propp's theory in this study offered many insights into the stories the children created in class. Through analysis of these narratives, applying Propp's theory suggests that these narratives not only maintained recognizable structures throughout a story, but that these were confidently revisited at later times when the storyline would be developed further whilst retaining many original features. These storylines were also adapted to become either collaborations if created originally by a sole storyteller, or vice versa; an individual may take part of a joint story to recreate this independently. For the children at this young age, working together and observing how their peers talk to each other to discuss and develop storylines allowed their understanding of the same to occur through enculturation rather than participation in formal teaching of narrative structure. This allowed the children to learn and develop together through shared experiences of stories read by adults, of films watched and of lived experiences that were recounted and explored. The links with social constructivist concepts are evident. Schwandt describes constructivism as meaning that 'human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience and further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience' (Schwandt 1994:125). Vygotsky's social learning

theory suggests that children are active participants in the development and receipt of their own knowledge and argues that learning predominantly occurs in social settings. We can see this in action throughout this study as through social interactions with their peers, the children were able to explore and participate in shared narrations. The social dimension appears important to the narration creation, allowing children to negotiate, develop and build storylines that weave elements suggested by several children into a single story. Acting in my role as teacher researcher, I was able to facilitate and encouraged discussions between children which allowed for interesting collaborations and creative narratives. These, in turn, supported individually imagined stories.

Here, Propp's theory supported understanding and analysis and showed that these very young children were able to structure stories that included a number of elements that Propp asserted appeared in the folk tales he studied. Many of the stories Abeo and his friends created included elements of good and evil, challenge, adventure and quest.

The use of Propp in contemporary research to analyse young children's stories in this manner is relatively rare however its use here provided an appropriate lens through which to view their creations. Whilst Propp's theory was an appropriate tool to apply to the stories created as it formulated a way of looking at the narratives of children, offering insight to content, this study showed that it did not provide the opportunity to consider more than the story's structure. It was not possible to use Propp's theory to consider how the story had come into being or how the children were able to use a range of multimodal approaches to convey meaning and help tell their stories. The data showed that the children were keen to produce their narratives whilst at play through a range of modes, embracing a multimodal approach to storytelling. This leads to the question of whether there is something between narration and play and how do these two elements of story creation work together? Play and creativity appear inextricable linked with McCormick & McIntosh noting that there is 'a unique mutualistic relationship between storytelling and story acting which enriches children's narrative development and enhances imaginative role-play' (2020: 38). The data here suggests that for young children creating a story can be a truly multimodal event with no line drawn between different modes. For the study group drawing or acting throughout a narration simple became the story they told and they appeared to 'play their story' out either independently or with friends. Playing with modes and experiences allowed and encouraged narration that was linked to the activity the

children were engaged in, sometimes leading the narrations, other times being led itself by the unfolding story.

This study encourages continued discussion on the interlinking of children's narratives and play. Nicolopoulou argues that children's play and narrative are 'closely intertwined and often overlapping' (2005:496) suggesting that both 'play and storytelling should be viewed as complementary expressions of children's symbolic imagination' (p496). This act of storytelling and creating whilst at play allows children to imagine fantasies and worlds through actions and words, encouraging negotiation and conversation as children develop storylines together. Abeo seems unwilling to separate verbal narration from other ways of presenting and telling his story often becoming immersed within the story so he becomes an actor within his own tale. Once stories became collaborative ventures, the cast often became many. This was particularly evident in the story 'Saving the Money' when, like actors in a play, the children used gesture and action as much as verbal narration to carry and develop the storyline. In this case, one could not have told the story without the other. The visualisation and dramatization of the storyline helped explain and enhance the plot, allowing others to participate in its development. This is an area that Propp did not explore and so whilst Propp is able to describe many areas of a child's narrative, his taxonomy lacks the capacity to explain other important features such as the significance of social and modal elements.

6.3 Contributions to the field of educational research

This study allowed for a fascinating in-depth study of storytelling within a Reception class and offered interesting and useful findings. Through observation and analysis of the narratives the children produced, it was evident that even children at this young age are able to weave stories that are complex, imaginative and exciting with clear story structure. As a teacher, I felt I had a sound knowledge of the stories that young children produced independently, however the data collected within this study showed these narratives were more complex than expected.

What did become evident through the course of this study was just how adventurous young children can be when creating stories. The study group showed they were able to use both their own imagination coupled with lived events and familiar stories to weave their own narratives.

A child's experiences affects their narratives. This study has shown that many factors support a child's story telling creations, not just the opportunity to hear stories through books and films but also that it is important to ensure that the environment of the classroom encourages, acknowledges and celebrates the stories created by children. I feel that the fact that staff within the classroom made clear their interest in the stories the children offered went some way to encourage their initial and further creation. It was evident throughout that the children were not confined to one mode of sharing their stories, but rather chose a variety, often several at once, to create and tell a story. From the simple 'Carrot Soup' whose verbal telling was prompted more from the image, to 'The Race' which relied on simple props to help tell the story, the narratives the children created were notably varied and individualised.

The richness and complexity of stories produced by Abeo and his peers was remarkable. The analysis of the narratives produced by the children at play and consideration of the manner in which they chose to tell these stories showed how these verbal stories along with images and gestures that formed part of the telling support and feed into later writing. By incorporating Propp's elements with the acceptance of the desire to create a multimodal story, be it visually presented or acted allows for the possibility of modernising Propp's ideas in order to allow for a more contemporary approach to analysing the story structure of young children's narratives.

Storytelling was, throughout this study, never something that the children had to be encouraged to do rather it appeared they were full of imagined scenarios that they were keen to voice. These stories were created both individually and collaboratively. Paley argues that 'stories are not private affairs' (1990:21) noting that even stories that come from the imagination of one can feed into the narratives of those listening around them and this became evident when observing the children at play creating and telling their stories. Whilst the narratives created individually showed particular interests and personal tastes, stories created in groups showed the children were keen to listen to ideas proposed by others and that they were adept at working together to develop these storylines to incorporate suggestions from all. It was interesting at these times to observe how one child would take an idea from a friend and develop it at which point it could then be developed further by another. Rarely would children argue about storylines, rather they offered alternatives and suggested different scenarios or characters. It was clear the children enjoyed both working with others to create stories and happily produce narratives independently. As Faulkner (2017) found in a similar study based around Paley's earlier studies, the stories contained here showed evidence of sociocultural transmission. In

this Faulkner explains, the children are ‘establishing and transmitting a shared understanding of story content and structure, where the same characters, actions and dramatic events… appeared in the stories told by different individuals both within and between sessions’ (2016:86). I feel the time that the staff within the rooms gave the children to listen and praise these stories supported the children both to be empowered to create more narratives and to also instil a feeling of worth and interest. By showing that we, as adults and teachers, were interested in what the children had to tell us contributed to the children being keen to develop their stories for not just themselves but for an audience of their peers and teachers also. Alongside the key findings of how rich stories created by young children can be and how they can follow Propp’s structure, this became an unexpected finding that the study presented.

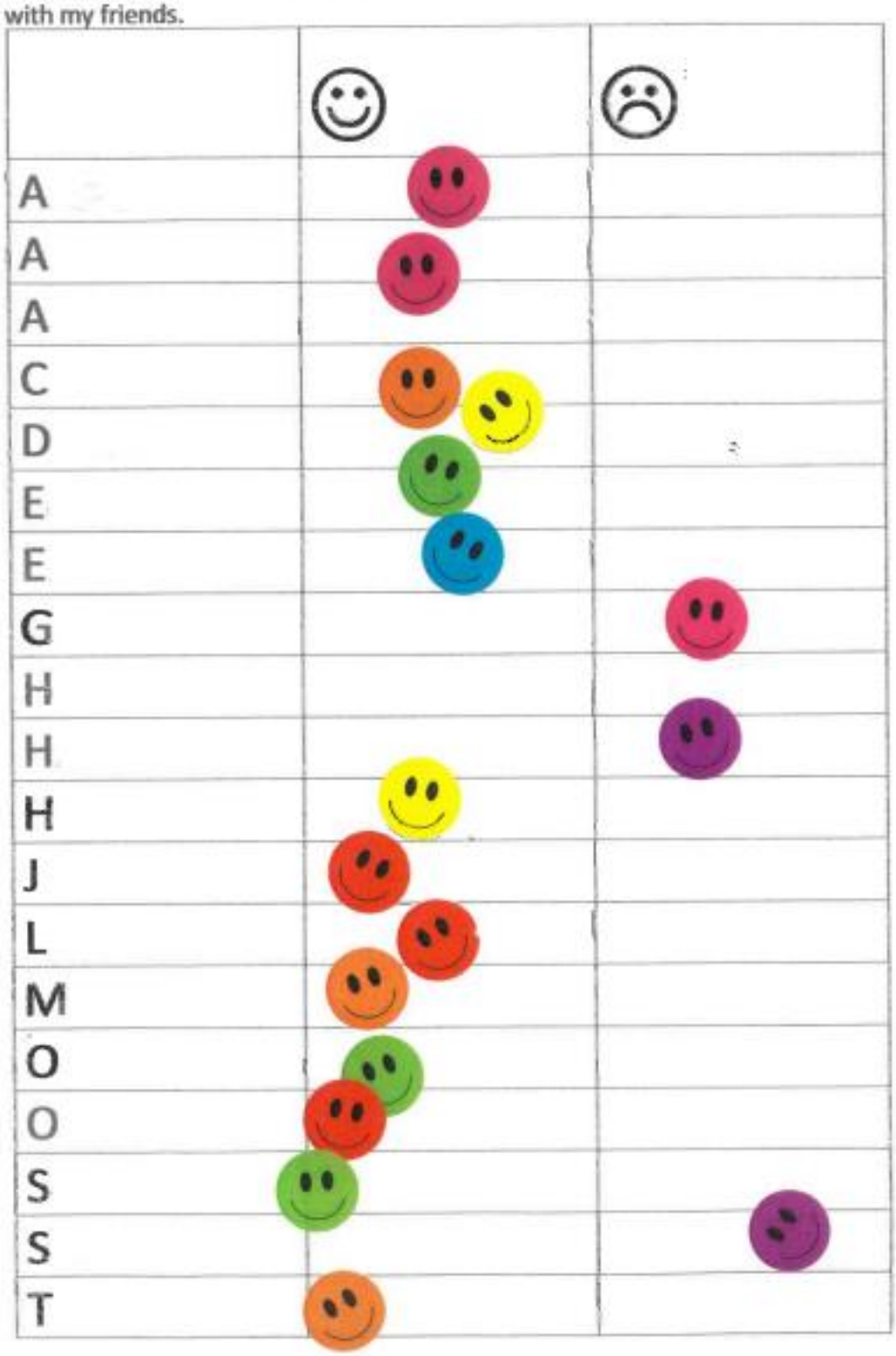
This study has the potential to support other teachers, like myself, who are keen to understand the narratives that young children create. I feel that it can be easy to miss the opportunity to really listen to the stories children have to offer with the belief that these stories are simply play. As has been shown here, young children have keen and lively imaginations and their verbal stories, along with the supporting cast of image, gesture and movement must be acknowledged and heard.

Throughout this study it has been my pleasure to do just that; listen to, acknowledge and celebrate the stories that Abeo and his peers so passionately told.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Copy of form used to gain consent from the children (anonymised)

I am happy to take part in Mrs Campbell's research. She has told me that she will be talking to me about stories I make up and observing how I make these with my friends.



Appendix 2: Ethics approval letter to parents:

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Discovering and developing early writing

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – Information for parents relating to study including their child

(1) What is this study about?

I am writing to invite your child to take part in a research study about how young children develop writing. This information statement gives you, the parent, information about the study to enable you to decide whether or not you are happy for your child to participate in the study. The study will explore how the resources and activities available in class support and encourage children in their first year of school to develop writing, and will look particularly at the role collaborative talk and storytelling activities take. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of what young children enjoy creating, what they view as writing and how we, as teachers, can aid the development and progression towards the more formal structure of writing. Your child has been invited to participate in this study as this study will take place within Pre-Prep. This letter tells you about the research study and will help you decide if you are happy for your child to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent for your child to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your child's personal information as described.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Louise Campbell - Class Teacher
- Professor Richard Andrews – Head of School of Education, UEA

(3) What will the study involve for me?

This study will in no way affect the day to day running of the class or the activities available to the children. It will take place within class with observations being undertaken of the normal activities available to the

children. All children, whether or not they are participating in the research will have access to a range of adult-led and independent writing activities linked to class topics.

The Foundation Stage curriculum expects teachers to observe as part of their daily routine and this study will use these observations to consider how your child uses the different writing tools and activities available, both independently or as a group and how these support and encourage them to explore writing. Ultimately these observations will be used to enhance the provision available within class.

Over the course of the Spring and Summer terms, observations will be conducted lasting between 5 – 10 minutes. I will be looking at the stages your child's work goes through as he/she moves towards more formal writing techniques. These observations will consider all forms of written communication your child choses to make including drawing and mark-making. The observations will be conducted by myself observing and recording by hand what is said or describing what is produced by your child. With your permission, copies of work and writing produced by your child will be taken and used within this study as examples for discussion and interpretation.

You will be able to view any materials collected as part of this study and I would be happy to explain any interpretation made relating to your child's work.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

This research will be conducted within the normal parameters of the class. Your child will be observed participating in both child and adult led activities as they would as part of the Foundation Stage assessment expectations.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and your child does not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with myself or anyone at Notre Dame Prep School or anyone else at the University of East Anglia.

If you agree for your child to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by speaking directly to myself and asking to withdraw.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Observation as a method of assessment is used continually throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and as such, your child will be both used to and comfortable with being observed. The process of observation should therefore cause no distress or anxiety to your child and I do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

This research will allow and support deeper discussion of the topic of early writing development not just within the Early Years department, but the ramifications this has as your child advances through the school. Through a deeper understanding, all participants will benefit from a more focused approach to early writing and an environment rich in resources designed to encourage this.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

All written transcripts of observations will be held securely by myself either in the classroom or my home office. Any photographs will be exclusively of work created and will not include images of children. These will be made on school devices and linked to your child's Learning Story which can be accessed via Tapestry. Parents will be able to view copies of any work or photographs taken at any time by simply speaking to me. I will ask your child for their consent before copies of work are made and they will be able to keep any original work created. Copies will be made of work and writing created by your child and used solely for discussion within the remit of this study. If your child adds their name to any work created, this may be included in photographs of the work if you agree to this.

This study will be published as a student thesis and as such, the information held within it will be accessible by myself and my supervisors. Typed records and copies of work scanned in will be held on a password protected computer. The data collected during this study will be solely for use within said study and is not intended for further use. Wherever possible work will be anonymised.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to me collecting personal information about your child for the purposes of this research study. This information will be used only for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2017 General Data Protection Regulation and the University of East Anglia Data Management Policy (2015).

Your information will be stored securely and your childs' identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may also be published, and whilst every step will be taken to anonymise the data, given the small data set this may not always be possible. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Louise Campbell will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Louise Campbell, Deputy Head and Head of Early Years, 01603 625593.

(10) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one page summary of the findings from the research. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(11) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in UK is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:
Louise Campbell
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

Alternatively speak to me at Notre Dame Prep School.

If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:
Prof Richard Andrews, richard.andrews@uea.ac.uk.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact please contact the EDU Chair of Research Ethics, Dr Kate Russell, at kate.russell@uea.ac.uk.

(12) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and return it either directly to myself or hand the form in at the school office. Please also state that you have spoken to your child about this research and they are happy to participate. I will also read the Child Participant Information Statement to your child in class, explaining in a way they will understand, that I am interested in seeing how they use writing in their games and so will be observing them during class activities and whilst at play. Your child will then be invited to add a smiley face by their name to show if they are happy to participate. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1st Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to my child taking part in this research study.

Name of child ……

I have spoken to my child about the study and understand that Louise Campbell will also talk to my child about conducting observations in class, seeking their permission.

…….. (Signature of Parent)

In giving my consent I state that:

✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my child's involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.

✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and my child does not have to take part. My decision whether to participate in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia or at Notre Dame Prep School, now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time.

✓ I understand that personal information about my child that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about my child will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my child's name or any identifiable information about my child unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

☐ Yes, I am happy for my child to be identified.

☐ No, I don't want my child to be identified. Please keep my child's identity anonymous.

I consent to:

- **Photographs of work created** YES ☐ NO ☐
- **Reviewing transcripts of observations of my childs activities** YES ☐ NO ☐
- **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?** YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

.....
Signature

....
PRINT name

.....
Date

Appendix 3: Stories created

Name of story (Name given by researcher)	Date story created	Used in data set	
		Yes	No
How goes the work	10.19		x
Traction man – adapted (1)	10.19		x
Traction man – adapted (2)	10.19		x
Animals (a collaborate short story)	10.19		x
Animal World	11.19	x	
A tea party for Father Christmas	11.19		x
Pilot study	11.19	x	
Racing	11.19		x
Carrot Soup	12.19	x	
Santa's Reindeer	12.19	x	
Two monsters	12.19		x
Racing	01.20		x
The Gruffalo – adapted	01.20		x
Baby T-Rex	02.20	x	
The Rhino	02.20	x	
The Race	05.20	x	
Rainbow Land parts 1 and 2	05.20	x	
The Zombie	04.20		x
Under the Sea parts 1,2 and 3	05.20	x	
How old are you?	05.20	x	
Water Man	05.20		x
The Spider and the Snail	06.20	x	
Zombies	06.20	x	
Saving the Money	06.20	x	
Off to the Zoo	07.20	x	

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