Chapter 6
Storytelling Practices of Preschool, Primary and Secondary School Children and Youth with Adults and Peers: Section Introduction

Maryanne Theobald, Binh Thanh Ta, and Anna Filipi

Abstract The focus of this chapter is on storytelling practices with preschool, primary and secondary school children and youth. The chapter introduces the studies in this section which demonstrate the social process of learning for children and adolescents and second language learners. Using the interactional practices of questioning, prompting and responding, caregivers, educators and peers actively support storytelling. The criticality of such practices for participation, shared identities, interactional and intercultural competence is highlighted.

6.1 Background to the Studies

Storytelling is valued in preschool, primary and secondary contexts. It is because telling and listening to stories is both enjoyable and useful that storytelling is included in educational activities (Lucarevschi, 2016) and regarded as important for language development (Riley & Burrell, 2007; Stevens et al., 2014). In preschool, primary and secondary contexts, attention turns to how storytelling practices support learning.

Sociocultural perspectives (Lave, 1997; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) emphasise that learning is a social process rather than an individual endeavour (Melander & Sahlstrom, 2007). As a social process, learning is best "studied in context" (Bateman, 2015, p. 11) and as a continuous process (Bateman & Church, 2017). A sociocultural perspective is helpful to theorise the role of storytelling in learning settings. However, it does not offer a robust set of research methods that enables researchers

M. Theobald (✉)
School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
e-mail: m.theobald@qut.edu.au

B. T. Ta
Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

A. Filipi
School of Curriculum, Teaching and Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

A. Filipi et al. (eds.), *Storytelling Practices in Home and Educational Contexts*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9955-9_6

to empirically demonstrate how storytelling functions at a microanalytical level, and there lies the benefit of this volume. The data-driven approach of CA details, using empirical evidence, *how* opportunities for learning, and displays of knowledge (Bateman & Church, 2017) are created through storytelling practices. The actual interactions important to supporting storytelling practices can be then observed.

Caregivers, educators and peers actively support storytelling to be launched and maintained. Such support includes questioning, prompting and responding, with these interactional practices more emphasised with young children or second language learners. In educational contexts, this interaction may be labelled as "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1975a, 1975b, 1983; Wood et al., 1976). The predictable, sequential organisation of a story with a beginning, climax and conclusion makes storytelling a useful and familiar pedagogical tool in educational and community contexts (Cuff & Hustler, 1982). Explicit actions of requesting a story, using physical objects, such as storying shells, and gaining intersubjectivity help to demonstrate that storytelling is favoured and actively pursued by educators (Bateman & Carr, 2017) with implications for learning and participation.

Storytelling practices accomplish social actions, consequential for participation in preschool, primary and secondary contexts. Within and outside of the classroom, children find opportunities to insert stories into their activities as they use them to negotiate group settings, manage relationships and make friends. For example, in a Swedish preschool, displays of affect, vocal and embodied responses to telling fairy tales were promoted by the educators, and these helped children to become accepted participants (Cekaite & Björk-Willén, 2018). Theobald and Reynolds (2015) identified how storytelling enabled children to bid for group membership. Attention to the affective displays and assessment proffered by children as young as five as they enacted storytelling in a round of stories highlighted a simultaneous competitive and collaborative group dynamic at play. The children's status within the peer group was elevated as a response of appreciation for a newsworthy item was gained. Storytelling or telling tales can be used also by children to exert control over peers in preschool and school settings. While the teacher did not intervene in Theobald and Danby's (2017) study of children telling tales, being *seen* to tell was effective in securing playground items.

Storytelling activities that promote the sharing of one's own experiences foster the linguistic expertise for L2 learners in classrooms (Satriani, 2019; Sert, 2017). As Theobald (2019) showed, it was the educator's responsiveness to the contributions of a L2 learner in an Australian preschool, as well as the child himself picking up on the educator's support, that guided the child to create a fictional story. Lucarevschi (2016) confirms that storytelling can increase L2 learners' motivation to learn language, but calls for more research demonstrating storytelling with adolescents and adult learners.

Storytelling can play an important role also in children's mental health and well-being because storytelling permits accounts of shared (upsetting or traumatic) events to emerge as routine and everyday talk. Examples of this work in CA are offered by Bateman and Danby's (2013) study of the shared remembering of young children interacting with their teachers in the wake of an earthquake in Christchurch. Children

were invited to tell stories about their experiences, and these co-experienced and co-remembered tellings assisted their healing. While it is clear that storytelling practices are useful in supporting engagement in learning, the aim of this collection is to provide an important contribution toward this. This section presents studies that occur across preschool, middle school, language classrooms and after-school settings.

6.2 The Contributions in This Section

The studies analyse the interactions of children and young people, from very young children (Bateman, current volume; Theobald et al., current volume), primary school aged children (Watanabe, current volume), to adolescents (Kim & Carlin, current volume; Kupetz, current volume; Sandlund, current volume). The studies focus on how these young participants initiate, respond and co-produce storytelling in various situations, including classrooms, after-school, language tests and focus groups. The findings from these studies provide important contributions to a growing, but still understudied, body of knowledge on how children organize and co-construct storytelling.

Using longitudinal data that follows one child's storytelling practices over three years, Bateman's study argues that positive encounters and responses to storytelling attempts lead to an enduring interest and strong disposition to storytelling. Bateman identifies how a teacher's responsiveness (Koole & Elbers, 2014) and the incorporation of physical objects such as story shells, books and puppets support a young child's competence and joyful engagement in storytelling.

Peer-to-peer storytelling is the focus of the study by Theobald et al. Set in a preschool classroom in Australia, this chapter reveals what children talk about during teacher set activities that focussed on sharing "culture". Analysis reveals that the children's talk was on task by relating their story to the concept of the activity. Their stories of the concept differed from the teacher's expressed definition of culture, however. The children also took opportunities to tell about their lives outside of the classroom. Findings highlight the importance of opportunities for storytelling to establish commonalities with peers and build a local shared culture that ultimately promotes belonging.

Like Filipi (current volume) and Waring (current volume), Watanabe is focussed on change in interactional competence. Watanabe's study is located in a Japanese primary English as a Foreign Language after-school program over three years, where she traced the changes in a student's second position telling, launched in response to an invitation to tell. Like Theobald et al.'s study, the telling is characterised as a small story. It involves the routinised question and answer pair—what did you do at the week-end? This routine at the start of the lesson is familiar to many teachers of foreign languages. In Watanabe's context, it is kept constant across the three-year period providing a defensible and empirically grounded approach in tracking change (as per Pekarek Doehler et al., 2018). The changes noted are longer tellings, smoother relevance to prior talk and more extended linguistic resources to relate past events.

In parallel, changes were noted in the teacher's interactions as she adapted to the student's displays of competence over time.

Sandlund investigates storytelling in an examination context in Sweden. Test-takers were students in their final year of compulsory school. The task involved speaking in pairs or small groups on given topics. Sandlund's findings show that test-takers desisted from personalising the topics and treated personal perspectives as irrelevant to the task. Instead, they spoke on topics in very general ways. The presence of storytelling that drew on personal experience was therefore largely absent. Sandlund argues that if storytelling is important to interactional competence then it follows that it should be included in testing. She also engages with the question of task design which largely steers away from providing opportunities for personalising topics, instead favouring opinion giving as the more frequent communicative function. Sandlund calls for test tasks that allow for greater personalising of content for storytelling to emerge more naturally and spontaneously.

Using a gestalt-contexture approach, in which analysts take the context and background of the participants into account, Kim and Carlin (current volume) offer a unique methodological contribution to storytelling research. The chapter examines longitudinal data between two adolescent Korean boys and an older American student, mentoring them in English as their second language. The gestalt-contexture approach provides insight into how the rich topics (Sacks, 1979) of cars, computer games and pranks become the basis for achieving intersubjectivity. This study's observations align with Theobald and Reynolds' (2015) study of second stories, as the storytellers work at gaining appreciation for their story contributions to achieve interactional competence.

Kupetz examines tellings in a focus group and identifies how adolescent Syrian students use small stories about attending school in Germany after fleeing war. Kupetz shows how the students invoke personal experiences to achieve affiliation with peers and project a common identify within the interactional event of a focus group. This important study provides the perspectives of young refugees, whose voices are often overlooked in research and social settings.

The analysis of the initiation of stories by children, adult responsiveness, peer interactions within and outside of the view of adults and longitudinal aspects presented in these studies fortifies the importance and critical shift from understanding storytelling as literacy attainment, to understanding how storytelling practices offer opportunities for participation, shared identities, interactional and intercultural competence.

References

Bateman, A. (2015). *Conversation analysis and early childhood education: The co-production of knowledge and relationships*. Ashgate.

Bateman, A., & Church, A. (2017). Children's knowledge-in-interaction: An introduction. In A. Bateman & A. Church (Eds.), *Children's knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 1–12). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1703-2_1

Bateman, A., & Carr, M. (2017). Pursuing a telling: Managing a multi-unit turn in children's storytelling. In A. Bateman & A. Church (Eds.), *Children and knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 91–110). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1703-2_6

Bateman, A., & Danby, S. (2013). Recovering from the earthquake: Early childhood teachers and children collaboratively telling stories about their experiences. *Disaster Management and Prevention Journal, 22*(5), 467–479. https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-10-2013-0177

Bateman, A. (current volume). Enduring storytelling dispositions in early childhood education. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Bruner, J. S. (1975b). From communication to language. *Cognition, 3*(3), 255–287; *Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(74)90012-2

Bruner, J. S. (1975a). The ontogenesis of speech acts. *Journal of Child Language, 2*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000900000866

Bruner, J. S. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language.* Oxford University Press.

Cekaite, A., & Björk-Willén, P. (2018). Enchantment in storytelling: Co-operation and participation in children's aesthetic experience. *Linguistics and Education, 48*, 52–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.08.005

Cuff, E. C., & Hustler, D. E. (1982). Stories and story-time in an infant classroom: Some features of language in social interaction. *Semiotica, 42*, 119–145. https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1982.42.2-4.119

Filipi, A. (current volume). The shape and functions of pretend play in interactions with a parent at ages 15 months and 3. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Kim, Y., & Carlin, A. P. (current volume). Story appreciation in conversations for learning: Stories and gestalt-contextures. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Koole, T., & Elbers, E. (2014). Responsiveness in teacher explanations: A conversation analytical perspective on scaffolding. *Linguistics and Education, 26*, 57–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.02.001

Kupetz, M. (current volume). Invoking personal experience and membership categories: Syrian students' tellings in focus groups. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Lave, J. (1997). *Cognition in practice.* Cambridge University Press.

Lucarevschi, C. R. (2016). The role of storytelling in language learning: A literature review. *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria, 26*(1), 24–44. https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/view/15309

Melander, H., & Sahlstrom, F. (2007). In tow of the blue whale: Learning as interactional changes in topical orientation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 41*, 1519–1537. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2007.05.013

Pekarek Doehler, J., Wagner, S., & González-Martínez, E. (Eds.). (2018). *Longitudinal studies on the organization of social interaction* (pp. 67–102). Palgrave Macmillan.

Riley, J., & Burrell, A. (2007). Assessing children's oral storytelling in their first year of school. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 15*, 181–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760701289136

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.

Sacks, H. (1979). Hotrodder: A revolutionary category. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 7–14). Irvington.

Sandlund, E. (current volume). Telling in a test: Storytelling and task accomplishment in L2 oral proficiency tests. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Satriani, I. (2019). Storytelling in teaching literacy: Benefits and challenges. *English Review: Journal of English Education, 8*(1), 113–120. https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v8i1.192

Sert, O. (2017). Creating opportunities for L2 learning in a prediction activity. *System, 70*, 14–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.08.008

Stevens, J., Raban, B., & Nolan, A. (2014). *Storytelling and storymaking in the early years.* Teaching Solutions.

Theobald, M., & Danby, S. (2017). Co-producing cultural knowledge: Children telling tales in the school playground. In A. Church & A. Bateman (Eds.), *Children's knowledge-in-interaction: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 111–125). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-1703-2_7

Theobald, M., Busch, G., Mushin, I., O'Gorman, L., Nielson, C., Watts, J., & Danby, S. (current volume). Making culture visible: Telling small stories in busy classrooms. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Theobald, M. (2019). Scaffolding storytelling and participation with a bilingual child in a culturally and linguistically diverse preschool in Australia. *Research on Children and Social Interaction, 3*(1–2), 224–247. https://doi.org/10.1558/rcsi.37294

Theobald, M., & Reynolds, E. (2015). In pursuit of some appreciation: Assessment and group membership in children's second stories. *Text and Talk, 35*(3), 407–430. https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2015-0006

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.

Waring, H. Z. (current volume). Participating in storytelling at ages 3 and 8. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Watanabe, A. (current volume). The collaborative emergence of storytelling in an after-school foreign language primary classroom. In A. Filipi, B. T. Ta, & M. Theobald (Eds.), *Storytelling practices in home and educational contexts: Perspectives from conversation analysis.* Springer.

Wood, D., Bruner, S. J., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17*(2), 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x