
Story in the Early Years: *Behappening*

Viewer's Guide



Overview of Part 2, *Behappening*



Embracing unusual connections and thinking about other possibilities.

Your goals (remain the same):



- Knock loose old ideas about story.
- Become more aware of children's stories.
- Develop your own collecting, connecting & nurturing techniques.

Why connect stories?



- Children's heads are full of ideas, some accurate, some not.
- Using questions to connect those ideas to a curriculum is an effective teaching technique.
- Helping children connect their ideas to the ideas of others will help them play and work with others.

How do I connect stories?



- Look for patterns.
- Ask questions.
- Talk about the connections you see: ("That reminds me of what my grandma used to say!")

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Where Do Stories Come From?

Lunchtime Conversations

What Are You Talkin' About?



*"We be loud
and he was quiet
and he wasn't trying to talk
with us.
That would be okay."*

Connections and Rational Discourse

We encourage young children to sort, identify patterns, and learn the names of colors. As they get older, they will be expected to infer, apply and relate. When adults collect stories, they get a clearer view of children's thinking and of misunderstandings that may exist. As they talk to children about connections (and corrections), adults lay the foundation for later inferring, applying and relating.

In the Appendix to her book, *Wally's Stories*, Paley wrote:

The skills involved in rational discourse require much practice. The teacher, therefore, must use material that children want to discuss and dramatize. Fortunately, such topics are easy to come by, for anything that affects the child's status in the classroom, with particular emphasis on friendship and fantasy, will receive his attention. But that attention can be fleeting, appearance and form changing with the twirl of a Superman cape. The teacher must help the child see how one thing he knows relates to other things he knows.

Viewing the Clip: Reflections

It can be challenging to follow children's conversations, whether they occur during play, or while adults are preparing food or wiping tables. Setting aside a formal time for story dictation and story acting offers opportunities to focus and reflect on ideas, misunderstandings and stories.

On page 216 of *Wally's Stories*, Paley wrote:

Any sudden switch in topics is a challenge for the teacher, who must try to find a common element between the new idea and the ongoing discussion. This is done not to soften the children's non sequiturs but to demonstrate logical connections. In Deana's case, the connection is fairly obvious, but even when the teacher's reasoning is incorrect, the children witness the process by which such inferences are made. To dismiss a statement as being "off the subject" forfeits a valuable teaching moment.

As the children talk, how many "sudden topic switches" do you hear?

Many adults would call a halt to the conversation as soon as they heard the first use of the word "poopy." Yet as they tell stories about their poopy pets, in what ways are the children practicing rational discourse? What questions do you hear them asking and why?

Notice that the clip begins with one of the girls telling the other, “You got to say louder more,” and ends as they attempt to figure out why their friend (one of the boys from the Spiders section of *Befalling*) reacted the way he did. What do you think of the teacher’s intervention? What inference did she make? What was the girls’ reaction? Is this a case of missing a valuable teaching moment?

Throw it Away!

Is this or isn't this funny?



*“You know what, Hopie?
You’re talking about the B word,
bubble, and I want to talk about the B
word, banana. Can you talk to me
about a banana for a minute, instead
of a bubble?”*

A Story about Unintended Consequences

At the beginning of this clip, you will see a calendar-based activity that was an attempt to help the children think about how many days food can safely be stored in the refrigerator. (“Why?” you ask. The answer is s a story for another day!)

As the clip continues, the children are having a snack later in the day. The backstory continues to be about food safety, and another teacher is trying to get the children to answer a question to which she already knows the answer. Not only is the adult asking, *What should I do before I eat this bruised pear*, she also wants to know, *How can you show me that you understand what we’ve learned so far about keeping food safe?*

Again we see examples of a “sudden switch in topics,” and of an adult trying to make logical connections between the children’s new ideas and what she keeps hoping will be rational discourse about peeling a pear.

Viewing the Clip: Reflections

On page 218 of *Wally’s Stories*, Paley wrote about using a tape recorder to help keep track of “the sudden insight, the misunderstood concept, the puzzling juxtaposition of words and ideas.”

I began to tape...in an effort to determine why some discussions zoomed ahead in an easy flow of ideas and others plodded to a halt, and I was continually surprised by what I was missing in all discussions.

Now that cameras are more commonly found in classrooms, even more information about children’s discourse can be made visible. In order to make sense of it all, questions are critical. Paley wrote: “The teacher learns to watch for inexactness in her questions, to repeat a child’s inaudible comments, to ask for clarifications and additions.”

In how many different directions do the children take the pear-peeling conversation? How many connections do they and the teacher make? (Did you hear anything to add to your brain's *Great Story Ideas Within* compartment?) Did you find any examples of inexact questions, repetition of inaudible comments, or requests for clarifications and additions?

(A story within the food safety backstory: In Part 3, *Becoming & Was*, in the clip, *Fragility of Play*, one child, a non-native English speaker, is on the fringes of the other children's play. The clip you just watched (*Throw it Away!*), took place after *Fragility of Play*. Here the child happily joins the other children in yelling out, "Throw it away!" In *Part 3*, we also talk more about unintended consequences.)

Collecting, Connecting & Nurturing Stories

Vivian Paley

Story Acting



“Last but not least, he had a very nice lion that was the king of the animals. No, where's the lion? Show them the lion that's the king of the animals.”

Connecting Stories, People and Ideas.

In this clip, Paley demonstrates story acting. On page 220 of *Wally's Stories*, she writes:

My role as scribe is never passive; whenever possible I enlarge the scope of the story, looking for points that need clarification or asking questions that might lead to new twists in the plot. My goal, however, is as much to give children practice in exposition as to improve their stories.

Viewing the Clip: Reflections

Following are the same stories (with different titles) that the children dictated in *Befalling*. We have left room for your notes about questions and connections. How many examples can you find of plot twists or points that need clarification?

In *Befalling's Viewer's Guide*, we talked about improvisation. Here we see a demonstration. As the story acting session opens, one child, Aaron, has set up a zoo in the middle of what is supposed to be an empty stage. "If you let one do it, they will all want to do it," is a commonly held belief about children (and even sometimes about adults). Paley explains, and the children accept, that only Aaron can be in the middle of the stage.

Bubby's the Brother

When Paley took dictation, she asked the author of each story to choose the character he or she would be during story acting. During story acting, she goes around the circle and asks each child in turn if he or she wants to be one of the characters in the story.

I got a toy. And a Power Ranger. And when we get back home I watched Bubby play games. And I play them. That's all.

Singing and a Pause for Thinking.

Here Paley and Darion find an answer to the question that came up during story dictation: "Do you want to wait until we act out the story and then you decide?" Notice the questions Paley asks as she tries to understand.

About the eensy bitsy spider.
Curious George. He went to the jungle. He ran away from the man. He was trying to find him.

She Put His Stories Together.

Here Paley lets *all* of the children in on the storytelling tip that she pointed out to Ashley during story dictations: “Look, listen to what she did. She took the eensy weensy spider story that we had from Darion’s first story. Then she put George into the eensy weensy spider story.”

The eensy weensy spider went up the water spout. and then
George was in the water. And George ran away from the man
with the yellow hat. And George went back in the water again.

Pause to Find Our Focus

This is another example of improvisation, one which all teachers will recognize. About 8 minutes into the session, some of the children decide they need to now sit next to a different friend. This is only the second day that Paley worked with this group, and she did not know all of the children’s names. To complicate matters even further, some of the children were absent on the first day. Aaron’s presence in the middle of the stage makes it difficult to see all of the children and Paley, like all teachers, must think on her feet and use a variety of techniques to re-engage the children. Notice how she stops the activity to talk briefly about squishiness, to remind the children of their agreement about Aaron, and then returns to the stories.

The Dog Likes to Stay Outside

In the *Introduction* we mentioned that Steve Elm's storytelling techniques come in handy when children act out their stories. Notice that Paley made a place for Aaron in the middle of the stage by saying "pretend he isn't there." Steve does something similar when he tells the children not to step in the (imaginary) river.

In this story, where Paley says, "*Show us how you're painting,*" Steve might have asked *all* of the children to show him what they think painting looks like, and then chosen one for everyone to imitate: "*Let's all do that.*"

Me and my mommy have so much fun. And my daddy brought my doggy to school. And my dad didn't want to bring him in because he doesn't like the school. He wants to stay outside.

Everybody Can Be the Store

As you become more familiar with Steve's techniques, and watch the Head Start teachers making his techniques their own, think of other ways to include all children in the story acting. Here we see how Paley's techniques connect to Steve's. She has everyone take part in the story by telling them, "Everyone here is the store. Put up your hands so that you're all the store. And the store walls cannot move because Makayla and her mommy are going into the store."

Notice the improvement in the children's level of engagement when all of them use their arms to be first the house and then the zoo. Another good example of improvisation.

As the trip to the zoo continues, Paley finds a way to connect Aaron to the story: “And it's a good thing that Aaron has all his little animals there. You can look at the animals, but you know in the zoo, you don't touch the animals. So, look around. Look at Aaron's animals.”

Me and my mommy went to the store. And me and my daddy went to the zoo. Alexis and Ashley came to my house.

Putting Story into Words.

As the children continue to be preoccupied with who is sitting next to whom, think about which of Steve's other techniques - children on their feet, movement, song, dance and repetition - might help with story acting. (It also helps if you're not asking children to focus for an extended period of time because the camera crew's schedule requires filming to continue!)

What do you see in children's faces when action and sounds are added to words? What ideas capture their imaginations and bring their attention back to the story? How can you use these techniques when you read books to children or tell them stories written by adults?

Any thoughts about The End?

Steve Elm

Interactive Storytelling



“Ok, hold your juice and climb.”

Juice for the Monkey and Pats for the Baby Elephant.

As the children continue their trip to Kenya, Steve keeps asking questions. Like Paley, he also helps the children make connections.

Viewing the Clip: Reflections

Continue making notes about the buttons, and about open-ended (especially problem-solving) questions, call-and-response, music and imitation. What connections does Steve help the children make? What misconceptions or misunderstandings are revealed as the story unfolds? How does Steve use humor?



Steve: Hey, look, katitis up there. Look, Taviuous, there’s some monkeys up there. And look! They’re so hot. If we climb up there, how can we make the monkeys cool off?



Steve: Everybody, Tavius, give everybody some juice. Take some juice from Tavius. Thank you, Tavius. The monkeys are going to be so happy.



Steve: And then they talked to the monkeys. Let me hear you speak to the monkeys.



Steve: Look, over there. It's a big, big, big elephant. Everybody, get down. Tavius, look. Look at the elephant. Can you show me what the elephant is doing with its trunk?



Steve: Oh, katitis, come here. Taviuous, oh look, Taviuous, is that a big elephant or a baby?

Kids: A baby.



Steve: Eli, can you take the elephant and put him back? And you help. Ok. Oh, my goodness. Everybody, the elephant is leaving, so let's say "kwaheri."



Steve: What do they like to eat?

Boy: People.

Steve: Some spiders might like to eat people. What other things do spiders like?



Steve: So, katiti, when I count to three...
Uh-oh, katiti, you have to listen to old Sungura. Ok, katiti, ears up! Katiti paws like this. When I count to three, I want you to look around at all of the trees, and the grass, and the bushes, and catch your bugs. But when you catch them, just hold them in here. Don't tell anybody what you have. It's a secret, ok?

Jackie Dailey

Make it Your Own



Teacher: *I bought fruit, and vegetables, and bread, and milk, and all kinds of things I put in my cart. And I brought them home and I set some of them up on my kitchen cabinet and I set some of the on my table... and you know what?*

Children: *The monkeys.*

There's a Monkey in my House and We Talk to Him with Sign Language.

Jackie Dailey was another Head Start teacher who joined Steve Elm for a weeklong residency. When classes resumed in September, the connections she made were between sign language and the techniques Steve had demonstrated. This is a story that she and the children made up together and had acted out several times before we filmed. Which of Steve's techniques does Jackie use? What curriculum connections does she make? Does the clip give you ideas for a story that would allow you to make curriculum connections of your own?

Viewing the Clip: Reflections

How many examples can you find of 1) open-ended questions and answers that are added to the story; 2) repetition and imitation (call and response) and 3) music that helps the children focus? We've included 2 examples of each button in the clip. Here you can jot down your thoughts about the buttons we added as well as the ones you would have included.



Self-regulation



Communication



Making Friends



Curriculum

Kristin Eno

Multimedia Story



*“Lo había puesto
en el tree.”*

Connecting Indoors to Outdoors (and to Curriculum)

Paley wrote her books with the help of a tape recorder. As she transcribed the children’s stories and conversations, she found herself returning to the children to ask them about things she had missed. Kristin Eno gives the children the opportunity to reflect and records the comments they make as they watch a videotape of their play or stories.

Viewing the Clips: Reflections

What connections did Kristin and her colleagues and the children make? Once again, we have included interesting tidbits and ideas from each of the sections. As you make notes, continue thinking about which ideas you will add to your personal list of collecting and connecting techniques.

The Stories Grow and Expand

Once the Coffey Park footage had been edited, with the children’s voiceover narration telling their collective stories, each class had a whole-group screening of all 4 of its respective videos. This was the first time children were able to see what had happened in other groups’ Coffey Park adventures.

Backdrop Making: Stories in Another Setting

As we transitioned to part 2, or to the second video of the year, we made a collective effort as a planning team to try to bridge the outside and Coffey Park to the inside at PS 27 itself, into the classroom. The way we did this was to have the children create a backdrop out of fabric that included aspects of Coffey Park from their memories, of the videos, and from their memories of their play itself.

Children's Connections

Here is Kindergarten student Justice's first story of the year

The tiger drinks water and it swims in the water and swims with his legs. It gets cold and it runs back to his home and the king comes and he talks to him...the tiger. And the king said, you are a good monster and you're a good tiger and a brave turtle and he turns into a turtle and you swim in the water.

Justice's story, four months later:

There's a squirrel going up the tree. I saw him. He went in the grass. He got on the bench. Then he got on the grass. And I come. You, Ms Kristin, were there. Now the squirrel went up and got stuck. The sun came up. It was raining. The sun came down. It was raining a lot and a lot and a lot. It was raining and the sun came up and that was a lot and a lot. And I found him and you found him and I found him and you found him...

The sun came up, all the way up to the sky. He got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. He had twelve hearts there. Hearts is red. This is the heart. Now it's red. You can color it in. That's for the sun. And this is for the rain. A heart. After the rain, the sun came out.

Maryory's first story:

Hay un animal de El Salvador. Se llama Marcela. Ella conoce a Marjory. It is an animal from El Salvador. Her name is Marcella. She knows Marjory.

Maryory's story, after Coffey Park:

Estaba haciéndole así al tree. Y después, él pasa. Chiqui lo había puesto en el tree. Entonces después en la noche lo sacó y lo puso en el otro lado. Lo puso allí. Entonces después lo puso en él. Lo pusieron allí, después lo sacaron. Y que se cortaron la hoja de esas....

Esto es ya cuando lo puso allí en el porque jugando plane. Después yo lo voy a meter al tree, después me fui de allí para my house. Plane play for my house play.

KE: Did you say "I went on the plane to my house?"

M: Yes.

KE: Do you want to say that, "I flew in the plane to my house"?

M: I flew on the plane to my house.

After the Coffey Park play, three of the children bring the outdoors back inside by converting a table into a tree house. Here are their stories:

Itsy: Brandon go in the tree and we run. Yadlynd and me too.
That's it. He run over there. He going that way. Faster.
Jumping on the bed is me and my daddy and my mommy.
Mommy says no jumping on bed and making noise.

Brandon: I was chasing Yadlynd and Itsy. We was going in the trees. Itsy was on the tree and we come down and we was running again. We was running and running and running. We was going next to Ms. Pavis. When we was staying for a little while and then we came out and we was running and running a lot.

Yadlynd: I was chasing Itsy and Itsy said, "It's a bear!" And Brandon was catching me. And then I went under the tree. And then we moved and we moved over again. And we stay under the tree. There were little ants there.

When the children brought their play indoors, they added owls and a monster.

I see some owls. Hey, come in for Christmas
C'mon, let's come with Itsy.
That's my tree.
He say, "Do you want to play in the park with...
"Yes, I do."
So go go.
A monster comin'.

Monsters are common in children's stories:

Anastasia: These are all of the leaves. Nick was walking in the leaves and he saw something. He saw a monster. He got it from the monster tree. It's a monster tree that grows and grows and grows when it gets there. It's gonna play with us and it does, kinda, and it gets tired. She was play in the leaves because she wanted. It's raining because the leaf is putting up to the sky. It's raining. The monster had so much leaves and I can't see it. Then we had some ice cream. Then we went back home, then we slept in Coffey Park. And then the monster came and that's Swiper. He was happy that we built a monster castle.

(Notice how the curriculum, *What is Essential for Life*, has found its way into the monster story.)

Some children, like Steve, find ways to connect story and song.

Coffey Park is my favorite.
And we love Coffey Park.
And then we say Anastasia go down.
And I grow the plants up
and it's bigger than us.
I love Coffey Park.
I love myself.

Next Steps

Acting Out Stories on Your Own

Choose a Story for “Story Acting”

Will it be a story told by a child, or a folktale or story from a book that you memorize? (For more storytelling tips and techniques, including how to memorize stories, click [here](#) for information about our DVD, *Far Ago and Long Away: Innovative Storytelling*.)

Which techniques will you use: call and response? repetition? rhythm and music?

Jot down some ideas for opportunities you will offer the children for standing and moving during the story.

After you try story acting, make some notes here. What worked? What didn't work? Do you have a colleague who can help you think about ways to tweak the things that didn't work? (In Part 3, *Becoming & Was*, you will see a demonstration of what story acting might look like for the first time. The good news is, everyone survives!)

Part 3, *Becoming & Was*

Where else can you make way for stories? When children are waiting, or standing or walking in line, do stories help make the transitions easier? How can you use the time to encourage thinking, rather than to have them practice being quiet? (In Part 3, we address the issue of children who stand on their heads.) We also talk about *nurturing* stories.

See you in *Becoming & Was*!