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The phenomenon of children's storytelling: acquiring and creating culture

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Abstract

Context and relevance. Constructing developmental education requires an understanding of the patterns of child development and an analysis of those childhood activities that constitute the intrinsic value of childhood and enable children to solve age-related problems. This article analyzes the phenomenon of children's storytelling — the creation of stories by preschoolers within the framework of educational practices, in which adults write down stories created according to the child's idea and then act them out or listen to them together with other children. **Objective.** To determine how storytelling relates to the key activities of preschool age. **Research questions.** How are play and storytelling related? How are experimentation and storytelling related? What is the uniqueness of storytelling as a childhood activity of intrinsic value? **Methods and materials.** Theoretical analysis of Russian and international sources and its correlation with examples of children's storytelling. **Results.** The analysis revealed similarities between storytelling, play, and experimentation in terms of supporting children's ideas and initiative, as well as the opportunity to experiment in a safe space. At the same time, storytelling creates unique opportunities for the transformation of experiences and for the construction of the child's identity as a subject of action through experimentation with narrative structures: the “landscape of consciousness” and the “landscape of action”. **Conclusions.** Children's storytelling, which includes play and experimentation with speech but is not reducible to them, unfolds within the child's zone of proximal development. The narrative form becomes a unique cultural tool for transforming experiences and constructing one's identity as a subject of action. Storytelling creates conditions for the emergence of prerequisites for artistic creativity, allowing the child to simultaneously master cultural norms and create something new.

Keywords: storytelling practices, narrative form, story, play, experimentation, artistic creativity

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Феномен детского сочинительства: освоение культуры и культуротворчество

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Резюме

Контекст и актуальность. Построение развивающего образования требует понимания закономерностей детского развития и анализа тех детских деятельностей, которые составляют самоценность детства и позволяют решать задачи возраста. Статья посвящена анализу феномена детского сочинительства — создания историй дошкольниками в рамках образовательных практик, когда взрослые записывают истории, созданные по детскому замыслу, а затем разыгрывают или прослушивают их совместно с другими

детьми. **Цель.** Определить, как сочинительство соотносится с ключевыми деятельностями дошкольного возраста. **Исследовательские вопросы.** Как соотносятся игра и сочинительство? Как соотносятся экспериментирование и сочинительство? В чем уникальность сочинительства как самоценной детской деятельности? **Методы и материалы.** Теоретический анализ отечественных и зарубежных источников и соотнесение его с примерами детского сочинительства. **Результаты.** Анализ показал сходство сочинительства с игрой и экспериментированием в отношении поддержки детского замысла и инициативы и возможности совершать пробы в безопасном пространстве. При этом сочинительство создает особые возможности для трансформации переживаний и построения ребенком своей идентичности как субъекта действия за счет проб с нарративными структурами: «ландшафтом сознания» и «ландшафтом действия». **Выводы.** Детское сочинительство, включающее игру и экспериментирование с речью, но не сводящееся к ним, разворачивается в зоне ближайшего развития ребенка. Нарративная форма становится особым культурным средством для трансформации переживаний и построения своей идентичности как субъекта действия. Сочинительство создает условия для возникновения предпосылок художественного творчества, позволяя ребенку одновременно осваивать культурные нормы и создавать новое.

Ключевые слова: практики сочинительства, нарративная форма, история, игра, экспериментирование, художественное творчество

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Introduction

Developing educational environments requires an understanding of the mechanisms of child development. L.S. Vygotsky's proposition that culture creates nothing beyond what is given by nature but transforms nature in accordance with human purposes (Vygotsky, 2025) implies the importance of analysing those forms of children's activity that are intrinsically valuable in childhood and enable children to address age-related developmental tasks. Such analysis provides a basis for designing educational practices and identifying children's zone of proximal development. One important developmental task of the preschool years is considered to be the child's construction of identity as an agent of action (Smirnova, 2022; Elkoninova, 2014; Erikson, 2024). Within this context, the phenomenon of children's storytelling is of particular interest, since stories created by children have become the subject of dedicated scholarly attention over the past four decades. J. Bruner described narrative construction as a distinct mode of thought, different from formal-logical thinking, through which people organise and make sense of their experience, as well as generate possible worlds and hypotheses (Bruner, 1968). The concept of narrative is sometimes understood broadly as any organised account of events from a particular point of view; in this sense, narrative may form part of everyday conversation or play. Following S. Engel and other authors, however, we distinguish stories as narratives that are intentionally told (Engel, 1999; Nicolopoulou et al., 2022).

Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, practices aimed at supporting children's storytelling (hereafter

referred to as narrative practices, NP) emerged almost simultaneously in different countries (see Paley, 2016; Backman-Nord, Staffans, Nyback, 2023; Zhuravleva, 2015). Despite considerable variation, these practices share several essential features: storytelling is voluntary and takes place during children's free activity; adults regularly write down children's stories as dictated by the child (in individual notebooks or shared books); and the recorded stories are then re-enacted or listened to collectively within the preschool group.

Children's storytelling as supported within narrative practices is, in some respects, a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, without sustained adult participation – recording stories, creating conditions for children to listen to one another, and so forth – storytelling does not typically become a stable spontaneous practice within a children's group. On the other hand, when adults provide such support, children engage in storytelling actively and with great enthusiasm, as though this mode of action were already familiar to them. This is evidenced by a substantial body of research, including ethnographic studies drawing on teachers' diaries, video observations, and other materials (Backman-Nord et al., 2023; Cremin, ed., 2017). As the Finnish researcher Liisa Karlsson observed metaphorically, adults have discovered "...a bubbling spring of children's narrative culture" (Riihelä, 2002).

Thus, children's storytelling may be understood as an activity that is organic to the preschool years while, like other culturally mediated ways of acting, requiring certain forms of "scaffolding" that enable this capacity to become visible (Wood, Bruner, Ross, 1976). In this case, such scaffolding includes a responsive adult who trans-

lates oral text into written form; the presence of listeners — a “community of storytellers”; and the opportunity to hear or re-enact one’s story together with others. “The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 37). These words of M. Bakhtin capture an essential feature of the social situation of children’s storytelling.

On this basis, we considered it appropriate to focus our analysis not on the educational conditions that support the production of children’s stories, but on the psychological content of children’s storytelling itself as it emerges within narrative practices, in order to understand which developmental tasks it helps children to address.

Materials and methods

To address the research questions, we conducted a theoretical analysis of literature and considered its findings in relation to examples of children’s storytelling. The examples include children’s stories presented in published sources, as well as stories created in preschool groups where narrative practice forms part of everyday life. In these groups, there is an established tradition whereby children, during free activity, may choose to invent a story and dictate it to the teacher. The child first draws the story and then dictates its content to an adult, who writes it down. Subsequently, some of the stories are re-enacted, while others are read aloud in the group circle, according to the children’s wishes.

Results

Storytelling as acquiring narrative form

Children are immersed in the world of narratives — adults’ stories, fairy tales, and animated films — from almost the very beginning of life. Gradually mastering the principles of narrative construction, they begin to create stories of their own.

J. Bruner distinguishes between the “landscape of action” and the “landscape of consciousness” within narrative (Bruner, 1968). The landscape of action reflects the sequence of events constructed by the author; this sequence forms the plot of the story. The landscape of consciousness represents the points of view expressed within the narrative — the perspectives of the narrator and the characters through whose eyes reality is perceived.

Research on the effects of narrative practices of this kind, conducted over the past forty years in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Nordic countries, Russia, and elsewhere, suggests that children’s participation influences not only the development of narrative abilities (in particular decontextualised speech) and emergent literacy skills (including phonological

awareness, letter knowledge, early reading, and writing words), but also the development of readiness for written language as a holistic means of addressing another person through text (Nicolopoulou et al., 2022; Pesco, MacLeod, 2024; Broström, 2002; Nicolopoulou, Cole, 2009; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). In addition, such narrative practices have been shown to support the development of play and imagination, social competence, and self-confidence, fostered through the experience of being heard by others (Backman-Nord, Staffans, Nyback, 2023; Iakshina, Smirnova, 2024). G. McNamee emphasises that re-enacting stories is an important part of the practice: storytelling combined with dramatic enactment has a stronger effect on language development than storytelling without enactment (McNamee et al., 1985). The practice of story dictation and dramatization has also been described as an approach that helps overcome the false dichotomy between play and learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024).

Analysing the effects of narrative practices from the perspective of oral and written language development is entirely justified. However, in order to understand the contribution of storytelling to the developmental tasks of the preschool years, it is important to consider it in relation to two key forms of preschool activity: play and experimentation.

The aim of this study is to determine how storytelling relates to the key forms of activity in the preschool years.

The research questions are as follows:

- How is storytelling related to play?
- How is storytelling related to experimentation?
- What is unique about storytelling as an intrinsically valuable form of children’s activity?

Play and storytelling: points of convergence and distinction

It is no coincidence that L. S. Vygotsky’s works on the development of psychological systems and on play appeared at the same time: play activity emerges as a space for meaning-making. “In play, the child learns his or her own ‘I’: creating fictive points of identification — centres of the ‘I’; hence the social nature of the self. This is the basis of freedom” (Vygotsky, 2025, p. 228).

Play and storytelling are not identical, and the difference lies not only in what is immediately visible. In play, the process itself is of primary importance, whereas in storytelling the text begins to emerge for children as a meaningful outcome (Cremin et al., 2016). Play does not require — and sometimes does not welcome — an audience, while storytelling is fundamentally addressed to a listener (Novlyanskaya, 2010; Paley, 2016). A. Nicolopoulou points to the different developmental roots of play and storytelling: although both have a narrative basis, the development of character and plot unfolds differently in play and in stories. On this basis, Nicolopoulou proposes the possibility of a productive interaction

between mature play and storytelling, in which each enriches the other (Nicolopoulou, 2007).

At the same time, comparing play and children's stories reveals important shared characteristics. First, as in play, stories reflect children's *perezhivanie* as their inner relation to a situation (Vygotsky, 2025), and they allow generalised desires to be enacted within a field of meaning (Ryabkova, 2024). The themes children address in stories concern the most significant aspects of preschool children's relationship with the world and are likewise reflected in children's play themes: belonging and identity, power relations, danger and protection, care, and friendship (Kucirkova, 2017; Broström, 2002).

Whereas J. Piaget understood play, like other symbolic activities, primarily as a means of assimilating reality — one whose significance diminishes with the development of formal intelligence — the cultural-historical tradition emphasises the creative and transformative power of play. In stories, as in play more broadly, experience is not only reflected but transformed. Ethnographic studies and case analyses (Paley, 2016; Cremin et al., 2017; Lee, 2022; Bruce, McNair, Whinnett, 2020) show that children develop alternative possibilities for events within stories, using storytelling as a means of working through emotions. The following series of stories created by Polina (3 years 6 months) provides an example:

16 January: "This is a maze. It is difficult to get through." 17 January: "This is a maze. It is not difficult to get through. And this is a person who is not afraid of monsters, not afraid to go all the way round." 31 January: "This is a maze. It is unclear how to get through it. The end!"

Moving through the maze symbolises some difficult situation unknown to us but experienced by the child. We can see the child reinterpreting this experience and constructing a new relationship to it. V.F. Vasilyuk emphasised the role of verbal description in transforming the *perezhivanie* that underlies a situation (Vasilyuk, 2024). Composing and recomposing stories, selecting words, and using expressive means allow children not only to create an imaginary situation in which *perezhivanie* emerge, but also to regulate their intensity.

Second, both the expression and transformation of experience are mediated through symbolic means: as in play, children create an imaginary space within stories in which action unfolds.

"Once there was a little man. And he was very big. And he wanted to become small. And then he became a little king" (Alyosha, aged 4).

L.S. Vygotsky's words that "the child cries in play as a patient, but rejoices as a player" (Vygotsky, 2025) can, to a considerable extent, also be applied to children's stories. For example, when creating frightening stories, children often laugh, as storytelling becomes an active process of overcoming fear (Shiyan, 2022).

At the same time, the possibilities created through play are not merely reproduced in stories but acquire a

new quality through a specific medium — language and narrative structures. These possibilities are connected above all with the "landscape of consciousness" created within stories. In imaginative play, children identify with other characters or even with objects; through transformation they may begin to walk, speak, or act differently (Kravtsov, Kravtsova, 2019). In stories, explicit descriptions of characters' feelings and thoughts emerge relatively late, around the ages of five or six (Nicolopoulou, 2007). However, stories offer children another distinctive means of constructing character — personification.

From a very early age, beginning around three or four, children turn all kinds of objects into protagonists of their stories. Play also involves a form of dual subjectivity, where the child enters another consciousness while creating a role. In stories, however, these possibilities expand because language as a symbolic tool offers greater flexibility: it allows children to personify objects and phenomena of many different kinds and transform them into agents — beings who act, and therefore beings with whom relationships of cooperation or confrontation become possible.

"Once there was lava, and it met a cross" (Alyosha, 2 years 11 months).

Even numbers may become characters: "Once there was 1 December, and it met 2 December" (Polina, aged 5). Or phenomena: "Once there was a sleepover. And the graduates slept there" (Polina, 6 years 3 months). In storytelling, unlike in play, the child does not need to act physically; it is enough to name the characters. This makes the child's position even more distanced from the immediate situation than in play and gives greater freedom to the child as author-director, strengthening what M. M. Bakhtin termed *outsideness* (Bakhtin, 2020).

J. Piaget interpreted animism as a manifestation of immature thinking. Yet when children personify objects and phenomena, transforming impersonal forces into agents, they are mastering the position of an acting subject, similar to the director's position in highly developed dramatic play (Kravtsov, Kravtsova, 2019). At the same time, personification reveals early forms of an artistic relation to reality, bringing children closer to artists (Melik-Pashaev, Novlyanskaya, 2022).

Personification in children's stories is only the first step towards the creation of an artistic image, since newly invented characters often act in non-specific ways — that is, they do what their authors do in everyday life: meteors, kittens, or little boats meet, visit one another, and so forth. In imaginative and especially role play, by contrast, children often attempt to act as the character would act: moving, speaking, or behaving in a distinctive manner. In this context, a phenomenon found in children's stories becomes particularly interesting — one that resembles what occurs in play but also represents something qualitatively new because it is created through language. This is the case in stories where characters act in accordance with their image.

“There was a mummy rainbow and a baby rainbow. It was almost seven, because it didn't yet have one of the rainbow colours... And when it becomes seven, it will become a grown-up rainbow” (Polina, 6 years 3 months).

“And then they met a family of rainbows. And together they built a rainbow castle. The rainbows separated colours from themselves and built the castle like that” (Polina, 6 years 4 months).

In this example, the actions of the rainbow characters are determined by what is, for the child, their defining feature — having seven colours. As they grow, they acquire more colours; they use colours to build a castle. The child experiments with unfolding this image in different ways, as though discovering a new mode of action. This illustrates what has been described as the “semantic realism of imagination” (Kudryavtsev, 2022). The poetic quality of children's speech has been noted repeatedly by researchers and has given rise to the hypothesis that artistic giftedness may be a developmental characteristic of the preschool years (Melik-Pashaev, 2014; Chukovsky, 2023).

Thus, possibilities for constructing an artistic image emerge in storytelling when the child meaningfully connects the “landscape of consciousness” with the “landscape of action”.

Experimentation with narrative form and language as a component of children's storytelling

Researchers note that a child who produces a story close to a “classical narrative” today — with a beginning, climax, resolution, and ending — may produce a much simpler chronological narrative tomorrow, or even a story consisting of only two sentences (Lee, 2022). The same unevenness can be observed in children's descriptions of characters' feelings and thoughts, their use of expressive language, and other narrative features. This suggests that children's storytelling includes experimentation as a way of acting with language and narrative.

N. N. Poddyakov defines free experimentation as disinterested exploration, “aimed at discovering connections and relationships independently of solving any practical task”, in which the child formulates problems and seeks ways of solving them autonomously (Poddyakov, 2021). A study by J. Bruner and K. Sylva demonstrated that experiences of safe experimentation — in which children engage independently with materials, set themselves problems, and search for solutions without fear of making mistakes — positively influence their ability to develop purposeful strategies for solving problematic situations (Bruner, 1986a).

Children acquire language and speech not passively but through active experimentation with the semantics, grammar, and syntax of their native language (Slobin, Green, 1976; Chukovsky, 2023). Within the context of this study, it is particularly important to consider what opportunities for experimentation are created by the normative space of narrative — J. Bruner's “landscape of action” and “landscape of consciousness” (Bruner, 1986).

Experimentation with the “Landscape of action”

In the stories of children aged three to four — often consisting of only two or three sentences — one can identify entire series of stories structured around the same actions (“once there was...”, “they met”, “they won”, “they became friends”), while either the characters or the setting change:

“A kitty lived. And it went for a walk.” “Once there was a tiger. And it went for a walk.” (Bogdana, 4 years 2 months)

T. Lee describes a girl who, over a period of six months, repeatedly told the same story about getting lost and being found by her father; each time, however, the events took place in a different location — in the forest, in a supermarket, or on the street (Lee, 2022). In some cases, the characters themselves seem absurd and clearly mismatched with the actions:

“Once there was an oval, and it went for a walk. Then it went on a picnic.” (Alyosha, 3 years 6 months)

In this case, the three-year-old storyteller was probably inspired by his own drawing, in which an oval may have appeared accidentally.

Behind these apparent absurdities — reminiscent of Daniil Kharms, though in fact surprisingly difficult for an adult to invent — lies the child's experimentation with narrative structure. Children are effectively discovering that stories require certain invariants, such as a character and a sequence of actions that happen to that character. Young experimenters use a strategy close to G. Rodari's “binomial of fantasy” (Rodari, 2022), as if observing the emergence of meaning through placing unexpected words within a narrative framework.

This process can be compared to how children explore object function in play: when a child rides a stick, a chair, or an upside-down bucket as though it were a horse, we see them grasping the meaning of riding. The difference is that here the invariant is not the meaning of action with an object, but the structure of story-making itself — at minimum, a protagonist and an action.

Of particular interest are situations in which children create transformations, reversals, and “stories the other way round”. K. I. Chukovsky observed that at the heart of “absurd nonsense” lies not humour alone but a cognitive attitude towards the world (Chukovsky, 2023). Sometimes this reversal occurs in relation to a familiar fairy tale:

“Somebody killed Goldilocks, and they didn't live happily ever after.”

This story was told by a child after hearing the story of Goldilocks (Bruce, 2020). Here the child is clearly experimenting with alternative possibilities for the development of familiar events:

“Once there was a cat, and it stood on water. It was an upside-down cat. Everyone asked it why it walked upside down. It was an upside-down cat.” (Polina, 4 years 5 months)

In *The Birth of a Storyteller*, T. Lee presents the following story told by six-year-old Noah:

“Once there was a school. And there were lots of people there. And it was a school for adults. And children went to work.”

When the adult asked, “What did the adults learn at that school?”, the boy replied:

“They learn how to play.” (Lee, 2022)

K.I. Chukovsky suggests that through such reversals children affirm a norm they have already mastered (Chukovsky, 2023). At the same time, they experiment with reality itself, constructing what Bruner called “possible worlds” (Bruner, 1968). This resonates with N.E. Veraksa’s idea that transformation and creativity constitute one of the child’s ways of engaging with culture (Veraksa, 2024).

This becomes even clearer when analysing several stories created by the same child in sequence. In the three maze stories cited above, one can see the child trying out different — including opposite — ways in which events might unfold.

In this case, the child is experimenting not so much with language itself as with the possibilities of the situation. Yet it is narrative structure that makes such experimentation possible.

The linguistic tools through which these alternative possibilities are developed are antonyms and negative constructions — in this case, “difficult / not difficult” — which shape different outcomes of the same situation. P. Wason argued that negation is used specifically when a person wishes to emphasise a discrepancy between what is perceived and what is expected, whether by oneself or by others (Wason, 1961). In this way, negative constructions and antonyms become tools of mental experimentation, enabling the child to construct different possible developments of a situation and thereby estrange reality, creating another possible world (Bruner, 1968).

The presence of contrasting versions of events in children’s stories supports N. E. Veraksa’s idea of dialectical structures — including dialectical structures of language — as psychological tools for transforming reality and generating something new (Veraksa, 2024; Barinova, 1997).

Reversals also include comic stories in which characters behave paradoxically and which children create deliberately, anticipating the audience’s reaction. T. Lee notes that such clowning reflects not only children’s explorations of language and humour but also their emerging ability to anticipate listeners’ responses and orient their storytelling towards those responses (Lee, 2022).

Experimentation with the “Landscape of consciousness”

At the same time, the analysis of children’s stories shows that, when storytelling, children do not always imagine themselves in desired circumstances (Osorina, 2010); rather, the situation is more complex. Narratives typically involve a protagonist — the main

character — and an antagonist — the one who opposes them. In children’s stories, it is possible to observe that the same character may appear as a protagonist in one story and as an antagonist in another; in some stories the character triumphs, while in others they are defeated.

“Once there was water. And it was friends with a sweet shop. And one Halloween children came into the shop and ate all the sweets.” (Lada, 5 years 5 months)

“Once there were sweets. And they went for a walk. When they came back to their shop, they saw that someone was buying them, and it turned out that children were eating and drinking them at a party in the nursery school.” (Lada, 5 years 5 months)

In exploring one of the dimensions of storytelling — the “landscape of consciousness” — the child creates a kind of experimental psychodrama that allows the same character to be placed in different positions. Most significant here is that storytelling allows the child to become the “demiurge” of this world, varying the character’s degree of agency, activity, or success.

Discussion

Our analysis shows that children’s storytelling contains features characteristic of the key forms of preschool activity: play and experimentation. In creating stories, the child acts actively — expressing and transforming lived experience while exploring different dimensions of narrative form. In this sense, storytelling becomes significant for addressing the core developmental tasks identified by L.S. Vygotsky: the generalisation of experience and the construction of the self as the “basis of freedom”.

Our analysis shows that children’s storytelling contains features characteristic of the key forms of preschool activity: play and experimentation. In creating stories, the child acts actively — expressing and transforming *perezhivanie* while exploring different dimensions of narrative form. In this sense, storytelling becomes significant for addressing the core developmental tasks identified by L.S. Vygotsky: the generalisation of experience and the construction of the self as the “basis of freedom”.

At the same time, the verbal material itself — narrative structures, the presence of action, protagonist, antagonist — creates distinctive possibilities for projecting the events of one’s life in different ways. Narrative becomes a specific cultural tool for transforming experience and constructing identity as an agent of action.

Moreover, children’s stories reveal early foundations of artistic creativity. While this article has focused on children’s experimentation with narrative form and symbolic imagery, the range of children’s linguistic experimentation is considerably broader: it includes experimentation with rhythm, rhyme, hyperbole, and other expressive devices. A.A. Melik-Pashaev argues

that preschool children possess an important precondition for artistic development: the readiness to embody personally meaningful experience in image. Children's storytelling, which includes play and experimentation with language without being reducible to either, may be understood as a possibility — a promise of creativity — that can come into being if, reflected in the surprise and interest of adults and peers, the child comes to recognise these experiments as artistic expression (Lobok, 1996).

It may therefore be concluded that children's storytelling, as it exists within the narrative practices described here, unfolds within the child's zone of proximal development and creates conditions for the amplification of age-related developmental possibilities (Kudryavtsev, 2022). On the one hand, the adult "responds to the child's initiative, leaving space for the child's initiative" (Tsukerman, 2007, p. 42), thereby creating a space for children's intentions, play, and experimentation with language. On the other hand, through the practice of recording stories, building a "community of storytellers", and engaging in shared reading and dramatic enactment, the adult supports children in mastering narrative form as a specific cultural tool.

Storytelling becomes a meeting point of all three forms of development characteristic of the preschool years: learning (through mastering the conventions of narrative), play, and creativity (Veraksa, 2024). In this sense, practices of children's storytelling dissolve the opposition between cultural acquisition and creativity (Novlyanskaya, 2010).

In the Prehistory of Written Speech, L. S. Vygotsky wrote that schooling often begins with the technical aspects of writing, while its meaning — the possibility of communicating one's thoughts and feelings to another person — remains absent for the child (Vygotsky, 2025a). Storytelling practices offer children an experience of meaningful story creation that may fill this gap and create the conditions for writing as a way of addressing another through text.

At the same time, the creative, "laboratory-like" character of children's experimentation may appear chaotic to adults, although, as K.I. Chukovsky noted, quoting Shakespeare, "there is method in this madness" (Chukovsky, 2023, p. 156). This may be one of the indirect reasons why such practices remain relatively

rare in early childhood settings. A kind of vicious circle emerges: educators may fail to recognise the value of children's stories because they seem chaotic or illogical; as a result, children's experimentation is not supported, and children have fewer opportunities to develop storytelling competence.

Conclusion

Children's storytelling as a distinct phenomenon still awaits close scholarly attention. It is important to undertake qualitative analyses of children's experimentation with narrative form in order to understand the logic and variability of this process; to examine the interaction between drawing and verbal text in story creation; and to explore the role of play in the development of storytelling. It should be noted that this kind of experimentation becomes visible precisely within narrative practices, where children have the opportunity to create stories from their own ideas not occasionally but on a regular basis (Bruce, McNair, Whinnett, 2022; Lee, 2022; Iakshina, Ereemeeva, 2025).

At the same time, practices that support children's storytelling — as an example of work within the zone of proximal development — require a high level of competence from adults. During the processes of dictating, recording, listening to, and re-enacting stories, "points of transition" and transformation are created: from the child's intention to oral speech, from oral speech to written text, and from written text to dramatic enactment. During such transitions, or translations, situations of "understanding and misunderstanding" inevitably arise (Isenina, 2025), enabling thought to "come into being in the word" and then in play action.

These situations require adults, on the one hand, to be responsive, attentive, interested, and emotionally engaged; and on the other hand, to ask questions that help reveal and work through moments of misunderstanding (Cooper, 2007; Pramling et al., 2024). These competencies are essential for creating situations in which, in the precise words of A. A. Melik-Pashaev and Z.N. Novlyanskaya, "...learning moves towards development, as if from the possible future of the developing person" (Melik-Pashaev, Novlyanskaya, 2022, p. 28).

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Olga A. Shiyan — research ideas; writing and design of the manuscript; research planning.

Igor B. Shiyan — research supervision, annotation.

Anna N. Iakshina — data collection and analysis; writing and design of the manuscript.

All authors took part in the discussion of the results and agreed on the final text of the manuscript.

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Шиян О.А. — идеи исследования; написание и оформление рукописи; планирование исследования.

Шиян И.Б. — контроль за проведением исследования, аннотирование.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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