



Story-Making with iPad Apps: Baking Stories in the 21st Century

by Natalia Kucirkova

Recently, there has been a call for researchers to adopt a balanced approach, which recognizes that new technologies bring about a step change in children's learning, and that their influence depends on how, when, and most importantly, for what purpose, they are used (Flewitt, Messer, & Kucirkova, 2012; McPake, Plowman, & Stephen, 2012). Adopting the vision encapsulated in the NAEYC position statement that 'technology and media offer opportunities to extend learning in early childhood settings in much the same way as other materials' (NAEYC, 2013, p. 7), I have been researching the potential of new technologies to enrich the language and literacy development of preschool children and the role of teachers in this process. It is against this backdrop that I became interested in stories created and shared with new technologies, such as iPads and smartphones.

Stories created with these devices are, in comparison to traditional (or monomodal) story practices, innovative and transformative (Thomas, 2011). They respond to the needs brought about by the digitization of contemporary texts and images (Jewitt, 2005, 2008), and as such, foster children's skills, which are necessary for their active and full participation in both in-school and out-of-school communication in the 21st century (Carrington & Marsh, 2005; Wohlwend, 2011). Many of the stories created with iPads provide children with opportunities for 'multimodal experiencing of sounds, colour changes, images and words', which 'combine to create a fundamentally new kind of literacy experience' (Flewitt, 2009, p. 362). In this article, I outline how you can enjoy and shape such new literacy experiences with children in your class.

Author Note: I focus on iPads and the Our Story app, but the patisserie metaphor is applicable to any other tablet or smartphone story-making application.

iPads and Story-Making Apps

iPads are portable, light-weight, touch-screen personal computers that have recently become an integral part of many children's homes, as well as preschool environments, notably in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Harrold, 2012). In contrast to previous technologies, iPads are coveted by young children and adults alike, and used for both structured (school-related) activities as well as play. This is mainly credited to the easy-to-navigate user-interface of iPads, and the availability of a wide range of free or low-cost apps (software programs). These facilitate a number of activities, including capturing, editing, and sharing self-made multimodal stories.

Self-made stories are quicker to create with iPad apps than with mono-functional technologies (e.g. cameras and dictaphones) as several technologies are built into the device. Stories can be created anywhere and anytime, reducing the weight and number of necessary resources. In comparison with traditional story-making tools such as paper and scissors, the iPad allows you to add sounds, type text, and digital pictures that give your stories one neat look.

I started my research with paper-based books and also have been supporting teachers' story-making with PC programs (Harrison & Kucirkova, 2011). In the past two years, I have been involved in the design, research, and evaluation of an app called Our Story. Our Story supports story-making on iPads, and other tablets or smartphones, and is available as a free public download. The app has been designed with



Dr. Natalia Kucirkova currently works as Lecturer in Developmental Psychology at The Open University, England. Her research concerns innovative ways of supporting shared book reading, digital literacy, community engagement and the role of personalisation in early years. Natalia's doctoral research inspired the development of the Our Story tablet/smartphone app.

She has been commended for her engagement with teachers and parents at a national and international level. You can follow her work via <http://open.academia.edu/NataliaKucirkova> or Twitter @NKucirkova



Photograph by the author

in supporting children's story-making with iPads is no different from their role with more traditional resources, such as paper and scissors.

It is essential that you actively support child's interaction with the device and with others using it, and that you remember that while children can often add some new and often surprisingly delicious ingredients into their stories, they need you to guide their choices. What is different with iPads is that children and adults now use a tool which, potentially, has many opportunities for meaningful interactions, but as yet, no established 'user guide' for how to facilitate them.

To help guide educators in supporting young children's story-making with

iPads and other similar technologies, I have developed a patisserie metaphor. Whether you are just contemplating the idea of using iPads or are already using them in your classroom, the metaphor can help you evaluate the best practices in adult-child multimodal story-making.

young users in mind (there are large buttons and little text used for navigation) and is open-ended (e.g. there are no pre-set story templates). The user-interface consists of a gallery of pictures and a 'filmstrip' down at the bottom, where users can drag down pictures that they can annotate or enrich with their own audio-recordings.

I have been able to document some of the uses of Our Story in home (Kucirkova, Messer, Sheehy, & Flewitt, 2013) and school settings (Kucirkova, Messer, Sheehy, & Fernandez-Panadero, 2014), which enabled me to gain insight into adult-child interactions and advantages arising when iPads are used for story-making with preschoolers.

When I talk to practitioners about using iPads and Our Story, I encourage them to reflect on the 'value-added' of using the iPad rather than other resources available in the classroom for story-making (Kucirkova, 2013). With iPads (and many other new technologies), teachers are often surprised at the ease and proficiency with which children can use them. This is even more the case during story-creating and story-sharing, where the boundaries between who is the master and who is the apprentice become blurred.

Teachers need to be reminded that their role is indispensable in accommodating and stretching both the form and content of children's stories (Bruner, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). In this respect, their role

The Patisserie Metaphor

Stories created with iPads resemble cakes, which are more likely to be found in a French patisserie rather than a rural bakery. As many gourmet cooks know, rural baking can often offer more authentic and healthier cakes than the ones produced in urban patisseries. However, nicely decorated cupcakes have their charm, too, and children will crave

Photograph by the author



stories that represent their ideas in attractive forms, including sound, picture, and text. How can teachers ensure that stories created with iPads don't just 'look' but also 'taste' nice? There are three major ways in which teachers can apply the patisserie metaphor to reflect on the ingredients, procedures, and the final cake, in the story-making process with iPads.

Ingredients

There are no 'standard recipes' for multimodal stories; the finished stories will be based on the taste and aesthetic preferences of their creators, in this case the teachers and the children. However, each story requires some basic ingredients, which make the story 'hold together'; in the case of multimodal stories, the basic 'flour, sugar, and eggs' are audio, pictures, and text. Just like in traditional baking, you can mix all-purpose flour with some wheat flour to add extra flavor, so you can enrich the app-made stories with some creative ingredients:

- Digital pictures in children's stories can be supplemented with scanned illustrations or children's drawings made on the iPad.
- Spoken audio recordings can include short music extracts downloaded from the Internet or produced by children in the class.
- Story texts can be enriched through some simple rhymes, which you provide to match children's sentences (or simple words they can write).

All ingredients for multimodal stories can be 'prepared' in advance or gathered during the process of story-sharing. For the latter, some fresh ingredients can be 'thrown in' spontaneously, when, for example, you use the iPad built-in camera to take pictures or record animal sounds during a school trip.

Procedure

The iPad's attractive visual display represents a major motivating factor for children to participate in the story-making activity. This can sometimes backfire; children might be tempted to perceive their stories as finished even though they are still 'raw' inside. To ensure that children's final story

is 'edible' and not just a random mix of ingredients, it is necessary that children understand the rules around sequencing and mixing. Story sequencing is particularly important with iPad stories as in the digital medium, it is often difficult to say where a story starts or finishes (Erstad, 2010; Kress, 2009). The filmstrip available in the Our Story app might fit this purpose particularly well as it allows you to drag down pictures on the storyboard in a particular sequence.

As for mixing the story ingredients, it is best to start with the mode that requires less advanced skills and children feel most comfortable with. As the child makes progress in, for example audio-recording their narrative, you can introduce concepts of colours, different kinds of audio, and so on. Gradually, children will learn to appreciate the individual and complementary value of text, pictures, and sounds, and thus become better equipped to fully participate in the literacy opportunities around them (Carrington & Marsh, 2005; Marsh, 2006).

Photograph by the author



Final Cake

Patisseurs typically don't bake cakes for themselves, but for a wide range of audiences. As a practitioner, you can facilitate or inhibit this process to make children more audience-aware. Although young children are unlikely to fully comprehend how their story travels from their hands to Granny's hands in Australia, they might show different motivation levels and make different choices when they know that their

finished cakes are not just for them to eat.

So, why not try this new kind of 'story-baking' with iPads? Multimodal stories can enrich the literacy experiences you co-create with the children in your class, and with the patisserie metaphor, you can personalize them with your own royal icing.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all my colleagues from The Open University, Milton Keynes, England, involved in the development of Our Story, and all the parents, teachers, and children using and enjoying the app.

References

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, Possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carrington, V., & Marsh, J. (2005). Digital childhood and youth: New texts, new literacies. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(3), 279-285.

Erstad, O. (2010). Weaving the context of digital literacy. In A. L. S. Ludvigsen, I. Rasmussen, & R. Säljö (Ed.), *Learning across sites: New tools, infrastructures and practices* (pp. 295-311). London: Routledge.

Flewitt, R. S., Messer, D., & Kucirkova, N. (2012). The iPad: a new direction for early literacy in the digital age? Research Report. Faculty of Education and Language Studies: Open University.

Flewitt, R. (2009). Reading transformations. In Maybin, J., and Watson, N. J. (eds.). *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories*, pp. 352-366. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harrison, C., & Kucirkova, N. (2011). RealeBooks: Let your students design and publish their own books! *Deutsch Differenziert*, 10(4), 39-44.

Harrold, R. (2012). The iPad effect: Leveraging engagement, collaboration, and perseverance. Retrieved 10/1/2012 — The International Educator, www.tieonline.com/view_article.cfm?ArticleID=100

Jewitt, C. (2005). Multimodality, 'reading,' and 'writing' for the 21st century. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 26(3), 315-331.

Other digital storytelling/story-making apps:

- My Story
- Story Buddy
- Story Creator
- StoryMaker
- Book Creator
- Doodlecast
- Draw and Tell
- Feltboard
- Sock Puppets
- Toontastic & Toontastic Jr.
- Educreations
- Explain Everything
- Show Me

Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 32, 241-267.

Kress, G. (2009). *Multimodality: Exploring contemporary methods of communication*. New York: Routledge.

Kucirkova, N., Messer, D., Sheehy, K., & Fernández-Panadero, C. (2014). Children's engagement with educational iPad apps: Insights from a Spanish classroom. *Computers & Education*, 71, 175-184.

Kucirkova, N. (2013). iPads in early education. *Early Years Educator*, 14(9), 24-26.

Kucirkova, N., Messer, D., Sheehy, K., & Flewitt, R. (2013). Sharing personalised stories on iPads: a close look at one parent-child interaction. *Literacy*, 47(3), 115-122.

Marsh, J. (2006). Emergent media literacy: Digital animation in early childhood. *Language and Education*, 20(6), 493-506.

McPake, J., Plowman, L., & Stephen, C. (2012). Pre-school children creating and communicating with digital technologies in the home. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(3), 421-431.

McPake, J., & Stephen, C. (2012). *Ar stòiridh: Report of pilot project on the use of the 'our story' iPad app in gaelic-medium nurseries*. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde.

National Association for the Education of Young Children & Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media (2012). *Technology and interactive media as tools in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8, Joint position statement*. Washington, DC & Latrobe, PA: Authors.

Thomas, A. (2011). Towards a transformative digital literacies pedagogy. *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*, 6(1-2), 89-101.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wohlwend, K. E. (2011). Playing their way into literacies: Reading, writing, and belonging in the early childhood classroom. Language & literacy series. New York: ERIC.