



A new invention...

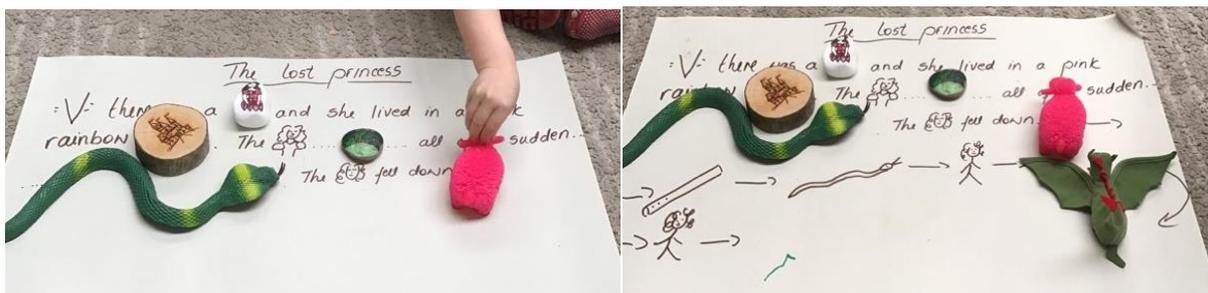
Talk for Writing Trainer Jane Ralphs explains how guided invention can develop young children's independent storytelling

In many ways, Talk for Writing was developed to counteract the myth that children lack imagination which this stops them from being able to make up stories. As Pie often emphasises, 'The issue is usually not a lack of imagination. Too often it is a lack of the building blocks of narrative. Imagination concerns manipulating what you already know to create something new.'



In a recent early years' project in Haringey, Pie and I decided to put greater emphasis on guided invention – in other words, supporting children in inventing their own stories. We modelled for practitioners how to open up the possibilities of what might happen in a story using a whole range of traditional early years props such as small-world toys, story spoons or stones, peg characters or pictures. So, the children aren't left to their own devices to play with the objects but rather teachers and teaching assistants reinforce the structure and language of stories. In other

words, the building blocks of narrative are established, while the direction the story takes is handed over to the children so that they are free to choose the characters, settings and actions and invent their own story. The children are also shown how to map their stories (using a combination of drawing and props) on large sheets of paper or long rolls of paper. These pictorial story maps not only enabled the children to retell and develop their stories long after the guided session had finished but it also recorded children's stories and supported them in following the sequence of the stories, alongside developing their understanding of story structures.

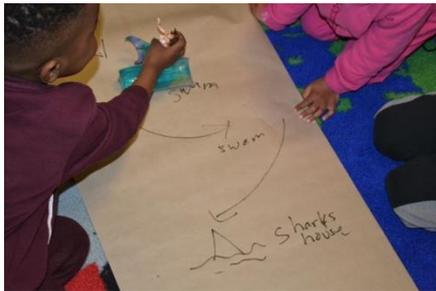


In many ways this exemplified the words of Loris Malaguzzi, the creator of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, when he emphasised that, 'Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen how to learn.'



The intakes of the schools involved in the project are challenging. The families of the children often have to contend with poor housing, low income, mental health problems, few educational qualifications and unemployment. Many have fled their home countries, have no family here in the UK and speak little English. But all the schools felt this guided invention is making a difference. Angela Lenton, Assistant Headteacher at Pembury House, explains, 'We have noticed a direct impact on children's use of vocabulary. They are using the words *suddenly*, *next*, *after that*. Children with English as an additional language

have developed their knowledge of storytelling and it has helped all children to understand story structures, for example, their stories have a beginning, middle and end.'



Evidence of the progress children are making also comes from Woodland Park Nursery School. In December 2018, Daniel said this when asked to make up a story:

There was a friend called Eric and he lived in wonderland and then he found a cat and there was nobody to look after him. Eric kept him and they found a farm it was full of cats and then it finished.

Three months later, daily guided invention alongside modelled invention and imitation has provided him with the story patterns and linking phrases that enable him to tell a much more coherent, engaging story:

*Once upon a time this lived a parrot who lived in a nest.
Early one morning he felt hungry and the only food he was hungry for was bird seed.
He walked in the woods and he walked in the treetops.
He flapped his wings to walk in the train station but there was not one, not two but three bird seeds.
He ate one first, he ate second and the worst one he took home to his bird house*



Daniel's progress in storytelling in many ways sums up the rate of progress the children start making once guided invention becomes part of the daily diet.

Pie Corbett - Guided Inventions with Jane

Last year, I was lucky enough to work with Jane on a project with nursery and reception teachers. Early on, I created a class invention with the nursery children, inventing a story together and mapping it as we went along with the class helping me with ideas and joining in with the story as it developed. It was about a fox called Ronnie who woke up one night feeling peckish and set off to look for a bite to eat.



Later, we watched Jane create a guided invention with a small group. Jane used a short length of lining paper and provided cards with different settings and a story bag with various fluffy toys inside as the characters.

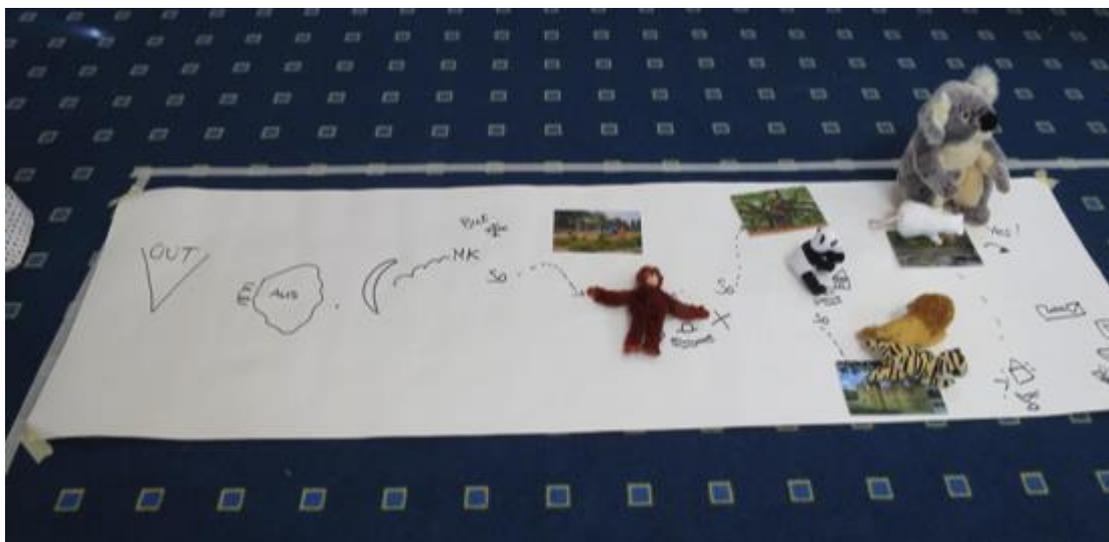
Everyone settled down and a child selected a little koala bear toy as the main character. With Jane's guidance, it was decided that it was a cold day and the koala, called Cookie, would have to go on a journey to look for some clothes as she was shivery.

The children helped Jane make up the story by taking it in turns to choose the next setting card and or take the next character

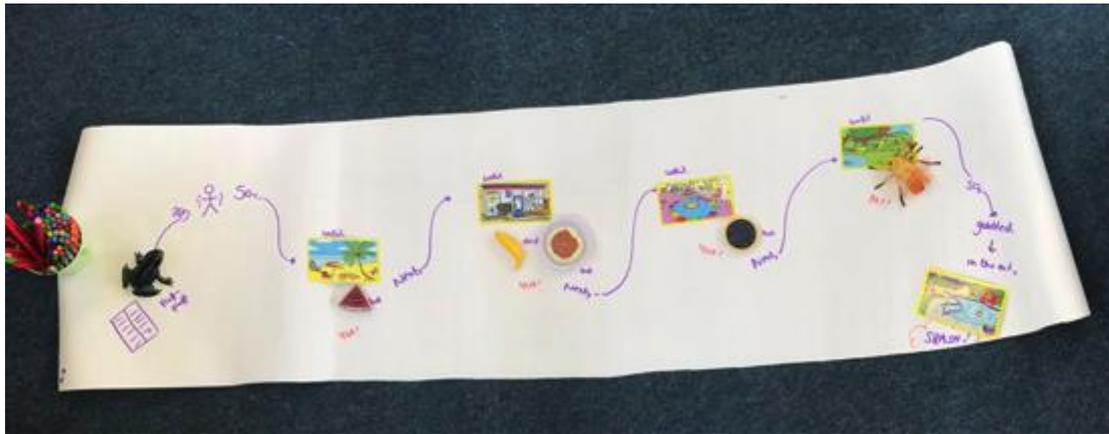
from her story bag. As decisions were made, Jane drew the story map and everyone told the story together. We could clearly hear what was being taught as Jane emphasised story language.

So Cookie walked and she walked and she walked until she came to the slide where she met a monkey. "Can I come into your nice warm house and find some nice warm clothes?" said Cookie.

"No warm clothes here," said the monkey. So Cookie walked and she walked and she walked until she came to the old oak tree where she met a panda bear...



Below is another example created by Maria with a small group in which a character sets off to find food. Working in a small group means that the language can be targeted but also children who may not usually speak up are more likely to participate. Jane's activity was targeted at a group of children who needed to internalise simple journey story pattern and were ready to move beyond relying on 'and then' as their main connectives.



Back in the classroom, the story bag of characters and settings cards could easily be set up with a short piece of lining paper so that the children could invent their own journey stories using the props.

