



THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
LABORATORY
OF
COMPARATIVE
HUMAN COGNITION



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Center for Human Information Processing
University of California, San Diego

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE LABORATORY OF COMPARATIVE HUMAN COGNITION

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Introduction

It is with special pleasure that we devote the current issue of the *Newsletter* to the work of Vivian Paley, teacher/scholar of human development. The papers that follow were presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development held in Seattle, Washington, in April, 1991. Our thanks to Frank Kessel for taking the initiative in bringing Ms. Paley from Chicago to present her paper and to all of the participants for creating such a stimulating discussion. As always, continuing commentary, should any of our readers be inspired to follow up on the issues raised, is welcome.

The Editors

Children's Lives, Stories, and Literacy: The Teacher-as-Researcher

Frank Kessel
University of Houston

In this "post-positivist," "post-modern" era there is—in certain segments of the scholarly community at least—animated discussion and debate about an array of conceptual frameworks and modes of inquiry falling under the general rubric of critical, reflexive "human science." Notions of "narrative," "text" and "rhetoric," of "meaning," "intentionality" and "self," of culturally and historically situated praxis, including scientific praxis, are being widely explicated and explored, often in concert with "qualitative," "ethnographic" and "interpretive" forms of systematic study. And as corollary aspects of this emerging point of view, there is a deepening appreciation of the need for conversations across conventional disciplinary boundaries; of the need to reconceive the distinction between research and practice; and—in the educational domain at least—of the need to create constructive space for "the teacher-as-researcher."

What might be the significance, or significances—both substantive and methodological—of these ideas for the developmental research community? In these papers we consider such a question in the specific context created by the work of Vivian Gussin Paley. Who, then, is Vivian

Paley? A short but, hopefully, not altogether superficial answer is that she is a kindergarten teacher (for many years in the University of Chicago Lab Schools) and the author of a series of vibrantly alive, richly textured books on young children's fantasy play, storytelling and conversations—books such as *Wally's Stories* (1981), *Mollie is Three* (1986), *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays* (1988), *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* (1990) and, due to appear shortly, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992).

These are the kinds of books (and there are few such) that some of us—or at least one of us—might read to one's undergraduate "Child Development" class (the class one is teaching for the 717th consecutive semester!) in order to keep oneself, and maybe even the students, engaged. Or they're the books one reads with graduate students in a course on "Play" in order to gain—or, perhaps better, regain—some sense of what it is the abstractions of our developmental theories and studies might, if we did things right, relate to in children's lives. For each of Paley's works is essentially a story, told in episodic form, of one or two individual children captured, or, far better, released by Paley's self-evident, self-critical sensibility, a sensibility which not only locates the particular child in her or his own world as expressed in a particular setting but also, in so doing, conjures up worlds of children beyond the particular. (Such writings reflect, as well, both a specific view of children's development and learning—of language and literacy, for example—and a distinctive mode of teaching and of education.)

"Ah," you might say, "perhaps real works of art; but *not* serious scientific developmental research...Maybe heuristic in a kind-of context-of-discovery way, but no more than that." I would like to suggest, however, a move in the exactly opposite direction: I propose that we take seriously the task of broadening our criteria of scientificity such that penetrating, systematic and, yes, rigorous research such as Paley's can be comfortably entered into the canon. I propose that we designate Paley one of Sigmund Koch's "disciplined connoisseurs, [i.e.,] gifted humanists, artists, scientists, possessors of special skills and forms of connoisseurship in every field (not excluding managers, planners—yes, and salesmen, nurses, and automobile mechanics, too)" (1980, p. 50). And I propose that we carefully consider his corollary, namely, that for certain segments of what he calls "The Psychological Studies"—the plurality being, in his analysis, fundamentally principled in several ways...I propose we consider Koch's argument that for areas of The [Developmental] Studies—such as the dynamic, multiply-layered, patently polysemous world of children's play—the work and knowl-

edge of such a "disciplined connoisseur" be treated as a central touchstone for appraising our efforts at understanding. (I have called this a kind of "ontological validity" [1980, p. 241].)

How, then, to put it more plainly, does Paley's systematic work, her research-as-a-teacher, relate to what conventionally constitutes developmental study and to conceptual notions—regarding play and language and literacy, for example—embedded in such study? It is this question, and related issues, that these papers explore. **Vivian Paley**, speaking in an autobiographical voice, first explicates some of the essential features of her previous, and present, experiences and writing. **Gillian McNamee** tells of taking Paley's ideas into an inner-city black community and traces affinities between those ideas and Vygotskian theory. **Judith Lindfors** presents the perspective of someone who brings Paley's writing to the world of undergraduate education. And **Carol Feldman** relates Paley's writings to current notions of narrative, to the concepts of canon, dramatism, genre, and culture. After Paley's response to these papers, a response that focuses on the possibility of children's stories creating the foundation for culture, **Jerome Bruner** and **Michael Cole** contribute to the conversation, a conversation which ends-but-is-just-beginning with Paley herself.

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Waking Up and Finding Myself in a Classroom

Vivian Gussin Paley
University of Chicago

I became a teacher without having much curiosity about children or classroom life. Teaching, it would seem, got me by default; I couldn't think of anything else to do with my liberal arts degree.

Not being in general a curious girl, I tended to get things out of the way quickly. The process of something seldom intrigued me. I wanted to know the answers and pass the test. Thus, I graduated from college and got married, all before the age of 20. I then took up teaching and, not long after, became a mother. There were not many questions I asked of myself.

The first 15 years of my teaching career was spent accumulating other peoples' answers to two pressing problems: how to get through the day quickly and do it with a minimum of fuss. Oddly enough this made me appear knowledgeable, efficient, and agreeable to a series of principals in Chicago, New Orleans, and New York. Early in life I learned to say yes when asked a direct question by a teacher or principal.

And so the day I was asked to initiate a sex education pilot program, I said yes, despite my discomfort with the idea. Surely this topic required a great deal of curiosity and spontaneity, neither of which I had in abundance, yet I did not hesitate.

Do you remember that controversial sex education program of Dr. Mary Calderone's in the 1950's and 1960's? In my customary fashion, I took the printed materials and put them into place without first finding out what the children knew or how they felt about such matters. I soon received my first serious jolt in the classroom and teaching would never again be the same for me.

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The children watched the slides with solemn attentiveness and I repeated Dr. Calderone's questions much as I had used the questions in a variety of teacher guides. Some of the children already knew the chillingly accurate terms I was forced to use. I, who would never make public mention of one's private parts, could not escape the task during the two 20 minute lessons a week.

This was liberating for me, but the miracle of awareness was to come from another direction. It was not the excitement of saying what I knew, but the euphoria of hearing *what I didn't know*. One day I allowed the conversation to continue beyond the written curriculum and the children leaped into the void with magical explanations of babies and birthing that fairly took my breath away.

I was hearing ideas never heard before and, for once, I did not say, "No, that's not it." In fact, I was experiencing an odd and new feeling, the thrill of being surprised in the classroom, the realization that I was about to uncover a piece of the unknown. Here were five- and six-year-olds telling me that babies grow from watermelon seeds (black makes a boy; white, a girl) and from dreams and wishes, and from old bones and bottles of milk. And I was *not telling* them anything. I was listening and asking for more ideas, repeating their words to see if I'd gotten it right.

Just as I had begun to wonder if the classroom was too confining and dull for me, it exploded with possibilities. I was in my mid-30s, the anxious mother of two, filled with the sort of self-doubts that made me straighten my kinky hair and persuade my distraught husband to join me for ballroom dancing lessons at the Y. I sat at my desk in school and fantasized about Broadway matinees and tea parties at the Plaza.

Suddenly, the revelation that babies came from watermelon seeds lifted me into a whirlwind of expectation I had known in the theater but never in the classroom. Once I found out about watermelon seeds, I knew I must try to learn the other secrets of these unexpectedly remarkable people in my classroom. Overnight, the children had changed from liabilities to resources.

I began a journey of discovery, first trying out every Piagetian experiment I could find, and then making up my own. It became a game. I would do something in the morning kindergarten, then do the opposite in the afternoon session. It would be years, however, before I learned to talk to the children about what I was doing, making them my colleagues in the process.

I started collecting anecdotes, always about events that surprised me. I kept them first on scraps of paper, then

in journals, and before long I was writing in a daily diary and every sentence ended with an exclamation point. I had been asleep in the classroom and I was waking up. But I had been asleep outside the classroom as well.

For nearly 40 years I had managed to walk through life without asking very many questions of my own. Now the classroom opened up to me as the perfect place in which to begin at the beginning. What is all this posturing and playing and talking and not-talking all about? Why are things always not what they seem? What is nature's grand plan? Well, I thought, since I am in a classroom, let this be the place I find out how life works—a small piece of life.

It all came down to stories. I began to write stories about events in the classroom. In each story was a moment of truth that, for me, exposed a fragment of my own condition and therefore of the human predicament. This was the premise that underlay my work. I would come upon a specific behavior in myself that instantly illuminated the behavior of a child; I would come upon the response of a child that instantly shed light upon the behavior of all the children. As I learned to see and hear the one child who differed most from my expectations I was better able to envision something about every child and explain to others what I saw.

However, when I began to explain to the children themselves what I heard and saw and wondered about, in their play and storytelling and conversation, it was then that my own understanding grew.

Writing the books filled out the process for me. I tried to make connections between my voice and the children's and discovered that the children spoke to each other with far more sincerity than to me. My voice, in fact, very often got in the way. I end *White Teacher* with a scene in which a black child and a white child play together and I am the outsider, having none of the knowledge they share.

In *Wally's Stories*, I saw that note-taking was not really reliable enough and I began to use a tape recorder. Listening became my way of life: listening, repeating, recording, and wondering. I wanted to find the universal voice that I knew resided in each individual exchange. But I also wanted to preserve the exact words.

For me, the process of discovery became the method of teaching. To teach the child was to study the child. As I learned something of how children reasoned, the children seemed to benefit from the method by which I

learned. We had conversations that sought to uncover their logic and mine; we examined their internal monologues as they erupted in story and play and brought them into the arena of public view.

There was a basic structure and rhythm that propelled the talk, the play, and the stories—all there in the child's mind, ready to emerge, take shape, and skip about within the social interchange. I was like someone standing alongside a quickly rotating double-dutch jump rope, waiting to enter without tangling the ropes or missing the rhyme.

There was so much to think about, yet always there would be one particular subject on which I wanted to focus. While writing *Wally's Stories*, for example, I came to see that, in all topics but one, I could hardly differentiate the boys' voices from the girls.' Mathematical reasoning and all manner of philosophical discourse seemed to arise out of universally shared conditions, but fantasies and storytelling came in male and female versions. I pursued the notion in *Boys and Girls*, but to complete the book I had to move into the preschool to look at the beginnings of this redundant play that seemed to shout out: I am a boy! I am a girl!

Intending to remain only one year, I stayed for six. Preschool was, for me, a fantasy come true. Every event was new; each observation needed to be tested. *Mollie Is Three*, *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*, and *The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter* flowed with astonishing ease. Since I had little experience with three- and four-year-olds, nearly everything they said and did begged to be reported. I watched private play grow into social fantasies and kept records of the connections the children developed.

Story was everything, more even than it had been in kindergarten. Nothing could be known unless it entered a story and all the stories in a group had to interact for the process to continue and flourish. Even my story.

As the children developed their stories, I became more aware of my own parallel story. It began in *White Teacher* as a morality tale with a simple question: Was I, a white teacher, fair to black children? My story has continued in all the books that followed as I searched for the children who could best explain what I was learning. These were the children whose classroom lives held me accountable. To seek to know each child as I would want to be known seemed to be the rule I should follow, but in *The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter* I wondered if this adaptation of the Golden Rule called for a wider applica-

tion. What are the ultimate questions it poses in a classroom?

All along, I have seen my own responsibilities more clearly than the children's. If the basic rule of fairness for me is: Do not do to a single child that which the child in you would fear—then what rules are the children to live by?

Ten years after *White Teacher* I wrote an epilogue for the paperback edition in which I stated: The children do not ask of each other who are you and where do you come from; they ask what role will you play?

Yet, this is not always true, I have since come to acknowledge. Children often tell classmates they cannot play. And even if children are fairer to one another than we are to them, it now seems to me, they are not fair enough.

Once again, I find myself pursuing a new question. One that emerges out of my life in the classroom and looms as large as any moral issue I know of in school and society. From kindergarten throughout school life, do children have the right to reject others *while in school*? Is it fair to say, "You can't play"?

In *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*, I imagine the existence of 3 F's in the lexicon of children's lives—fantasy, friendship, and fairness—then add a fourth F—fear. Yet, it seems to me I give friendship a higher place than fairness and, in so doing, I allow certain children to be made afraid when they are told they can't play. You are not my friend, you can't play with me, certain children are told again and again throughout their school lives.

What would happen, I asked myself, if a rule existed that stated clearly, "You can't say you can't play"? I have created just such a rule for my classroom this year, and once again my tape recorder is off and running. The new rule is deceptively simple. We keep debating the loopholes:

"But he'll spoil our game."

"We already have enough Ninjas."

"It's too crowded. Okay, he can play but only if he's a bad guy."

"This mouse hole just has two sisters. We don't want her."

I have taken the issue to older children as well; I've begun to tape 30 minute discussions in first through fifth grade, one classroom at each level. It is a hot issue for all the children—for those who are rejected and for those who do the rejecting. Children pass me in the hall and call out:

When are you coming back? I forgot to tell you something. Questions concerning the ever present fact of rejection are urgent and many. The children all have stories to tell.

And what is my story in all of this? To end my ambivalence: Is fairness a higher good than friendship? Can the principle of open access be maintained in social choices? These are difficult concepts, played out daily in every classroom.

In third grade can we support a custom in which Shirley is never chosen to be a computer partner? Shall Lisa, in kindergarten, have the power to determine how many sisters live in the mouse hole just when Clara comes up and wants to play? Must it always be a matter of negotiation between the *owners* of the game and the *outsiders*, or is there a moral law we are bidden to follow without ambivalence or ambiguity?

As I focus my attention on these matters, there is new meaning to all I see and hear. There are the integrating elements of a plot, the cast of characters are in place, and Act III is a long way off. I am in the position I like most, where classroom life is full of surprises and the new book has only just begun to bounce around from child to child, with me, monkey-in-the-middle, running back and forth trying to grab the ball.

Vivian Paley's Ideas at Work in Head Start

Gillian Dowley McNamee
Erikson Institute

In the mid 1970's, I came to know Vivian Paley's work on fantasy play and storytelling at the same time I was studying the work of Soviet psychologist, L. S. Vygotsky. My professional work focuses on studying language and literacy development in young children. For the past nine years, I have worked in partnership with administrators, teachers and parents from an inner city black community to understand how we can provide optimal educational opportunities for their children in Head Start and day care. I will tell several stories of my work with

these people to illustrate how the work of Vivian Paley and L. S. Vygotsky have enlightened our efforts.¹

When we first discussed the possibilities of working together, the program directors and staff made clear their one ground rule: they did not want help coming into their programs as a result of research or consultation that would disappear when the "outsider" left. Any intervention or help had to come with documentation and training that would integrate changes into ongoing program practices. Their stipulation seemed a beautiful articulation of what Vygotsky had in mind for change in a zone of proximal development. They wanted help, but they wanted it in order to become more independent in controlling their interactions with the larger world related to their children's education.

When we began, the Head Start and day care programs had few if any children's story books, no paper or writing tools out for children's use in the context of play, and the reading of story books, poetry and nursery rhymes were not a part of the daily bread and butter of the program. The teachers were struggling to meet the demands of licensing requirements to include language arts activities, science, math, physical exercise, music, art and two meals in a three hour program. They were trying to accommodate the pressures of the local public school to be sure that the children knew the days of the week, colors, numbers, their name and address, and that they could cut and color neatly by the time they left Head Start. The teachers were hard pressed to know how to meet all these demands.

One teacher, Mrs. Stevens, asked me to observe an example of this problem in her classroom. She began the school session with children sitting on a rug as she took attendance. Mrs. Stevens asked the children to respond "Today is Thursday" (or whatever day it was) as she called out their name. This would give the children practice in naming the days of the week while she got another necessary task done - attendance taking. The routine proved unsuccessful however because the children either did not respond at all or else they said, "Yes" or "Here." Mrs. Stevens asked me to help her figure out how to get the children to respond to their name being called by responding with the correct day of the week.

I explained my views on language and literacy development as social-cultural activities where teaching and learning are embedded in interactions among children and adults around books, paper, writing tools, stories, and fantasy play. I began my work with Mrs. Stevens and the other teachers by looking at every aspect of the program

for whether it made sense to the children, and allowed them opportunities to make meaningful connections between what they knew and what they were working on. We stocked the classrooms with story books from the public library, used book stores, donations as well as what the program budgets would allow them to purchase. We filled shelves with crayons and other writing tools placed near a large central table in each classroom which children would pass by as they traveled to the different play areas of the classroom. We introduced the daily reading of story books as well as story dictation and dramatization activities as described by Vivian Paley in her books.

We have found that the children tell stories that are rich in ways comparable to the ones told by Vivian's children, and that they develop many basic literacy skills in the context of these activities. The following stories were told by a boy who spent two years in a Head Start classroom enriched with story dictation, dramatization and fantasy play. This first story was dictated to his teacher when he was four.

It was a little frog named Chuck and he had a dog named Kermie. He walked to school with the dog and then he saw the rainbow monster and then he saw a ghost. He didn't have any eyes. Then he was in the kitchen and the ghoully was there. Then there was a big giant ghoully in the kitchen. Then the fat ghoully was chasing them. And then he was hiding under the table. Then the ghoully turned into a ghost. It was King Kong outside and the monster was in the house chasing after the frog and the dog. The end.

This story portrays the healthy imagination of a boy coming to school—in this case, disguised as a frog—with his dog Kermie and finding monsters and ghoulies there who chase them about; the monsters and ghoulies potentially being teachers, other children and even himself as he chases and then hides from “bad guys.”

When he was six and in first grade, I heard that he was going into the hospital for surgery. I sent him a packet of crayons, pencils, markers, envelopes, and different colored paper to have with him during his time in the hospital. Several weeks later his mother brought me a thank you note he had written by himself using the paper, markers and an envelope that I had given him. What I found on opening the envelope was that he had written a story about me as his way of saying thank you! On listening closely, we can hear a story that he could possibly be telling about himself as he imagines himself into the world of my childhood.

Once there was a little girl named Jill. She wanted two go to the fair but her parents? Wouldn't let her. She was a nice

little girl. She had listen always to her parents. Then her mom and dad had change there mind, for a good little girl she was. Then when she grew up she was still a nice oil lady.

In this second story, a six-year-old boy envisions life as a place where parents (and other adults like his teachers and myself, formerly identified as ghoulies and monsters!) draw limits and make decisions that the child has to live with, but these adult figures are also fair and make adjustments - they allow the girl to go to the fair when she is good.

This child grows up in a community where the life expectancy of black males is low and the school drop out rate is high. And yet here at age six, he has absorbed the message of respect and fairness that his teachers, his parents, and I have held out to him through the stories we read to him, the stories he told daily in his play and those dictated and dramatized with classmates. He can see such a child growing up to be a nice old person. All of this is portrayed in concise, lyrical, literary language at age six.

The children's stories are not the only ones to be told in this work. The following story of Mrs. Stevens shows how she is changing as a result of our work together. We were having a staff meeting toward the end of the year, and as the meeting was coming to a close, Mrs. Stevens said that she had an experience she wanted to share with the group. She said she wasn't sure if it had anything to do with our work on literacy development but she could not stop thinking about it. She said:

I had a number of four-year-old girls this year who were very picky about who they would play with. There was one girl in particular that I worried about. She had a hard time making friends, and usually was left out of this “in-group.” I talked to the class repeatedly about being good friends to one another. I would speak sharply to children when I saw them being unkind or excluding one another from games. But my talking did not seem to do any good. The problems were there day after day.

One day in early May I did something without thinking about it ahead of time. The children were out on the playground, and as I called to them to line up, I noticed that the one girl I often worried about did not have a partner. I asked someone to be her partner, and the child said, “I don't want to.” I was so angry and upset. I took the girl's hand myself and told the class to go inside and sit on the rug.

When they were seated, I said, “I have a story to tell you. It's about me when I was a girl growing up in the South. I grew up in a small town and I loved to be with other children. We would play games and go for walks together in the farm fields. I hated to see another child sad. I always took care of

other children and made sure they were good friends to each other because I knew how bad it made me feel when others would not play with me."

I then said to my class, "You know boys and girls, I love each one of you. You know that I will hug you every day when you come to school, and I let you sit on my lap if you need to. I never push anyone away from me because I care about each one of you. I hope that you will be a friend to each other the way I am a friend to you."

Mrs. Stevens went on to say,

The children sat very quietly as I talked. They listened without moving a muscle, and some even looked a little sad. I did not refer to what had just happened on the playground or to any of the past incidents where the children had been unkind to this child. I let them go back to their play activities, and it seemed like the most remarkable thing happened from that day on. The children who had been such a tight clique seemed to loosen up and play with other children, and I never saw this one little girl left out of activities again. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen happen with one of my classes. The year ended with such a good feeling for all of us.

The contrast between this story and the attendance-taking routine, "Today is Thursday" that she was trying two years earlier was dramatic. When Mrs. Stevens told the children her story of growing up in the South, she spoke in the language of play, the language of zones of proximal development, the language of possible worlds. When she reprimanded the children and told them what they should or should not do, the children maintained a defensive stance and remained closed to learning. When she said in effect, "Let's pretend we are in a world where I used to live growing up in the South," the children became open and receptive to new ways of seeing themselves and others.

This same discovery was made by Vivian Paley just a few short years before this and is reported in her book, *Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner* (1984). She described a boy in her kindergarten classroom, Franklin, who had a great deal of difficulty participating in certain kinds of group fantasy play particularly in the block corner. Mrs. Paley tried to reason with him about his tendency to insist on having things his own way, but he denied having any difficulty.

Mrs. Paley also intuitively decided to tell the class a story one day (which the group acted out) about a boy named Franklin who knew how to share while building

with blocks. The story made Franklin, the other children and his teacher very happy. Mrs. Paley writes,

Suddenly I recognize the difference between telling a child he must share and instead saying, "Pretend you are a boy who knows how to share." The first method announces that a child has done something wrong. "Pretend" disarms and enchants; it suggests heroic possibilities for making changes, just as in the fairy tales (p. 87).

Mrs. Paley and Mrs. Stevens each in their own way had discovered a way of speaking that helped them and their children establish a footing for growth in their classroom zone of proximal development. The zpd for everyone began with the words, "Let's pretend..." and "Once upon a time..."

In these ways, the work of Vivian Paley and L.S. Vygotsky guide the inquiry that I carry on with my teachers. We study how stories create the zone of proximal development necessary for language and literacy development - stories being the embodiment of play between adult and child, and child and child. Stories, we find, allow adults to teach and children to learn while both parties are playing.

Note

¹A more extended discussion of this work is presented in "Learning to read and write in an inner city community: A longitudinal study of community change" in L. C. Moll (Ed.), (1990), *Vygotsky and education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Wally's Stories: A Challenge to Conventional Wisdom

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Whether we like it or whether we don't, public education in this country belongs to all in our society. Everyone has experience of it—personal experience, the

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experience of those close by (family, friends), and constant exposure to the ongoing discussion of educational issues that pervades the media. Everyone is an expert, one who knows what the schools should be and do. It is difficult to imagine a journalist approaching a person on the street, asking a question about the current educational scene, and receiving as a reply, "Oh well, education is not my field—not my area of expertise—so I really can't respond to that question." If the journalist's question related to plumbing or nuclear physics, this would be a likely response. But not education. There everyone *knows*; everyone is an *expert*. Not surprisingly, in this social context, some notions arise that achieve a general consensus, attaining the status of "conventional wisdom," unfortunately often being more conventional than wise. But however that may be, my undergraduate students come into my classroom bringing society's conventional wisdom with them, society's shared notions about how children learn and how adults should help them do it.

Imagine now 20-25 undergraduates in their final semester at the University of Texas, engaged in student teaching all day five days a week, and coming to my reading/language arts methods class every Thursday, 5:00-7:30 p.m. Conventional wisdom is not *all* these students bring to my classroom, of course. They also bring their own rather recent experience of being elementary school students; their continuing experience of studenting at the university; their two years of liberal arts courses followed by a year of study that focused on children's learning and development; and a one-semester observation experience in an elementary classroom, observation which more often than not has served to reinforce their "conventional wisdom" notions, given that they observed the children primarily through that lens; and, of course, they bring their current experience of student teaching.

Now we know how important disconfirming evidence is in research. Fred Erickson (1985) points out that, "A deliberate search for disconfirming evidence is essential to the process of inquiry." I want to suggest today that disconfirming evidence is no less important in education than it is in research. Education also is, or should be, "a process of inquiry." Vivian Paley's work provides for me, as I work with my undergraduates, the eloquent and inescapable disconfirming cases that counter my students' pervasive, deeply-entrenched, typically unchallenged notions from the "conventional wisdom." Vivian allows my undergraduates to hear the counter example in the actual talk of young children. Her works are the ultimate "show and tell": the children show and tell their story, and Vivian comments on that story. We have been

told often enough that "one picture is worth a thousand words." *Wally's Stories*, the work I use most with my undergraduates, gives my students pictures—movie pictures—in living color, with stereophonic sound. Films, not slides. And these brief, vivid film clips force my students to raise new questions, thereby engaging in Erickson's "process of inquiry," the process central to both research and teaching. The single vivid, authentic episode speaks to my students with a power that impressive numbers and significance at the .05 level don't do. Many—perhaps most—of those vivid episodes are disconfirming cases that challenge the "conventional wisdom" that my students hold and have not yet consciously distinguished from "research findings."

Here I select just two examples of notions from the "conventional wisdom," accepted unquestioningly by the majority of my undergraduate students, that are challenged—repeatedly—by Vivian's kindergarten children in *Wally's Stories*. I promise that both of these notions are familiar to you.

The first is this: "Young children have short attention spans and so they can't really stay focused on a particular topic for very long." Enter Wally and his classmates, with a discussion of the compelling question of whether Santa Claus is black or white.

- Rose:** I saw a black Santa Claus and a white Santa Claus.
- Kenny:** He can't be black. He has to be only white.
- Rose:** I saw him at Sears.
- Warren:** Santa Claus is white.
- Wally:** If you're black, Santa Claus is black, and if you're white, Santa Claus is white. But I think he's white.
- Teacher:** But aren't you black, Wally?
- Wally:** I know. But I see Santa Claus and he's white.
- Deana:** There's both kinds. Because we went to Sears and saw a white Santa so the black one must have been sick.
- Earl:** He's very white. My sister said he's a spirit and spirits are white.
- Teacher:** Why can't a spirit be black?
- Earl:** I'm not black so I don't know.
- Tanya:** I haven't seen a black Santa Claus but I know he could be there, because every thing comes in black or white. . .
- Eddie:** No. I know only one color he should be. White. I saw him in the store.
- Teacher:** But Rose *saw* a black Santa.

Eddie: He could have been dressing up like a black Santa.

Wally: Did he talk, Rose? Maybe he had wires.

Rose: He said, "Ho, ho, ho!"

Wally: I think he was real.

Tanya: If he was real that means someone was dressed up like Santa Claus because he lives at the North Pole and he can't come here. Maybe he has other people meet the children while he stays there.

Teacher: Is the Santa at the North Pole white or black?

Tanya: There's two. The white Santa Claus goes to meet the children and the black one stays at the North Pole.

Wally: He's magic.

Andy: Wally's right! He changes colors. That's how it's done.

Eddie: Now I get it! He's a magician.

Tanya: See, someone must be dressed up to be a certain kind of Santa Claus. If they need a white one, *he* comes out. If they need a black one, *he* comes out (pp. 91-93).

This certainly sounds like staying on the subject to me. More important, it sounds that way to my students. It's the disconfirming case, which invites my students to reconsider, to ask a new question.

A second notion from the general wisdom goes like this: "Young children don't think abstractly. They live in a concrete world and think in concrete ways." Those of us who focus on children's acquisition of language are forced to a somewhat different conclusion. However, this is the notion my undergraduates, and many others, hold: Young children can't handle abstract thinking. And now Vivian and Wally and his classmates come along with an extended discussion of the purely hypothetical topic that Vivian introduces when she asks the children this question: "If you were in charge of the world, would you make only one language or many languages, the way it is now?" (You need to know that Warren is Chinese and Akemi is Japanese.)

Tanya: One language. Oh yes! Then I could understand everyone in the whole world.

Eddie: No, let it stay this way so different countries keeps on being not the same. Then you take trips to see what those countries are like and how they talk.

Ellen: I like the world the way it is but I don't like fighting.

Teacher: Is that because they have different languages?

Ellen: Well, if they can't understand each other they might think good words sound like bad words.

Wally: She means like if someone says, "Let's play," in French, then in Chinese they might think he said, "Let's fight."

Warren: Keep it this way because if you're Chinese you would have to learn English.

Teacher: Would English have to be the language everyone learns?

Warren: I don't know what God likes to talk. Wait, I changed my mind. Let everyone say the same language. Then when my mommy and daddy speak quietly I could understand them.

Tanya: I changed my mind too. Better not have the same language. Here's why: whenever this whole world had the same language every one would say they want *their* language to be the one everyone has to have. Then everyone would blame someone else for giving them the wrong language.

Akemi: If everyone speak Japan, everyone have to live there. My country too small for the big America.

Warren: Everyone can come to China. It's much bigger. Let Chinese be the language. No, I changed my mind. Let my mommy and daddy talk English *all* the time (pp. 119-120).

A conversation of ifs and would-bes and what-ifs and maybes. Again, the disconfirming case, played out in living color in my students' imaginations, the episode that compels reflection and reconsideration.

Gil and I speak to you today as the education contingent of this symposium. Carol and Bill constitute the psychology research contingent. Yet Vivian, her person and her work, provides the ultimate demonstration of the blend of the two: the teacher-as-researcher. I have not heard Vivian call herself a "researcher" or "teacher-researcher." I have never heard her utter or seen her write the word "data." She does not speak of "findings," much less of "disseminating" them. But whatever one calls her activity, it is the activity I would wish for my students, prospective teachers. It is what I would want them to do—even more, what I would want them to *be*. Some would call it "reflective practitioner." Others, "teacher-as-researcher." But whatever the label, it's being ever on the alert for the

discrepant case, the disconfirming evidence that is “essential to the process of inquiry.” Teaching at its best is just such a process.

I close with a short letter Vivian wrote to me recently. A new child (I’ll call her Kendra) had just arrived in Vivian’s classroom. Vivian writes:

Dear Judith,

Just a brief note to tell you that *it* has happened again. A new Jeremy has entered my life. Kendra, black, sexually abused, angry, haughty, setting off time bombs wherever she goes—Kendra has arrived to make me reinvent the classroom. And reinvent myself as a teacher.

She is tough: “Stay way from me girl! That ain’t no business of yours!” She is seductive: “I got me a real boyfriend. He say, ‘You so lovely!’” She has my number: “I hate books! Don’t read me nothin’!” She is lost: “If I got hurt and was bleeding all over, teacher, would you cry for me?”

But, now my journals fill with someone I can’t figure out. And she can’t figure me out. The story begins.

Vivian calls it “reinvention”—inventing again. Some of us call it “research”—searching again. But whatever we call it, it is the process of inquiry, the stuff of which both powerful research AND powerful teaching are made.

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On Reading Paley

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Reading Paley’s books has been an eye-opening experience for me. The children’s discourse as revealed by their classroom storytelling, and the ways of thinking

expressed in it, have an extraordinary richness of texture when compared to the picture of children’s talk that has so far been revealed to us by more ordinary scientific means. Moreover, the children’s own ways of thinking, are seemingly made far more accessible by storytelling than by adult structured patterns of inquiry. And what is exposed is not weakness but strength, or at least not barrenness but richness. Paley’s work is more respectful of the children’s own frames of thought than normal research methods are, and it is within these frames—made of stories—that we discover a treasure trove of thoughts, beliefs, ways of looking at things and ways of organizing them. Here we’ve been flogging away for 25 years, in a pre-Piagetian paradigm, a Piagetian paradigm, a post-Piagetian paradigm, trying to get children to tell us what they think about the world. Into this scene, enters Paley, and with a witch’s art for talking to children, which in fact very few people will ever be able to quite match, asks them to tell her how the world looks to them by making a story, and they just tell her.

There are two important ways that Paley’s collection of children’s stories differs from the usual form of data about children’s talk. First, when we look at ordinary discourse, we usually look at children’s conversations with adults rather than at their talk to each other or to themselves, where they have less opportunity to impose their own patterns on the discourse. Second, by looking at the language of storymaking rather than of dialogue, we uncover a much more extended form of utterance. In a dialogue an adult may say *one* sentence, the child says *one* sentence back, and the adult replies with another sentence. The structure of the child’s language then can consist of nothing more than the structures resident in single sentences and in dialogic patterns. In contrast, the structure that is revealed in stories is a structure of narration. These are organizational patterns for how one thing can follow another, how it should follow another, and how it can come out in the end.

These same features are seen in Emmy’s narrative monologues (Nelson, 1989) where a two- to three-year-old child, talking to herself in her crib at night, free of both an adult interlocutor and of the patterns of dialogue, produces long and interestingly patterned discourse. In Emmy’s case we have a sample of dialogues with parents, too, and so we know that Emmy’s storytelling reveals that she has in fact got a knowledge of how things can be put together in language that is much richer, subtle, and more interestingly patterned than is revealed by her dialogic talk with adults.

I want to turn now to the Paley books, and particularly to the two latest books: *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter*, and *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*. It is in these recent books that Paley finally frees herself from the intrapsychic, Piagetian paradigm of the solo-learner, and brings into studies of the classroom a cultural psychology in which the making of meanings is the essence of the matter. Indeed, what happens in these last two books, is that the children's own community forms around the stories that they make. Over a period of time, we follow a story come in, emerge, grow, get enriched, and change. The extreme example of this is in *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter*, where a certain helicopter story is told over and over again, growing as it goes until finally it becomes a different story. But all through these last two books, what this community of children does, is to develop a common definition of who they are and how meanings are made around a shared set of narratives that they are making themselves. These narratives have importations from standard adult stories that Paley reads to the children, but they are essentially *sui generis* constructions, and thus they raise the interesting possibility that a classroom is a kind of a mini-culture that defines its meanings around meaning making forms, such as stories.

For several years now, I have been interested in how people interpret stories, and there are a number of interesting features of adult story interpretation that I was surprised to see precursors for in children this young. It is really a testament to the richness of this collection of stories, that one can find so much in the way of narrative structure already embodied there. What I want to do now is talk about four features of adult narrative interpretation that are given a clear and interesting foreshadowing in these last two books. The first is *canonicity*, the second is *dramatism*, the third is *genre as a mental model*, and the fourth is *culture*.

The creation of canonical forms is a crucial first step for any interpretive process. We could imagine in adult storytelling that the canons are found out there in the culture and that adults simply learn them. But one of the important discoveries one makes reading these books, is that children create their own canons when they are very young, and before they know ours. They don't yet know what a standard folktale looks like, or what a standard mystery story is. Nevertheless, they create and standardize their own story genres. For example, in *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*, there is a series of stories that are told by girls in the doll corner about babies, and there is also a series of stories that the boys tell about bad guys. These are two canonical forms that the mini-culture of this

particular classroom developed *by itself*. What is so powerful about canon? Canon, by standardizing a format, makes possible deviation from canon, and it is in deviating from canon, that a story writer triggers interpretation in the story reader that will discover the writer's intended meaning. Absent a canonical form, there is little guidance for the interpretation of meaning. But when in a literary community there is an orthodox story form, and it is changed, everybody knows that this is a change and that it means something, and they have some equipment with which to interpret it.

Let me give one example. Paley has read the children an African tale:

Hippo is hot, he goes to Negai, God of all creatures and asks to live in the water. No says Negai, because you will eat my fish. I won't, promises Hippo, I'll swish my tail and open my mouth wide, so you can see there are no fish bones. All right says Negai, but you must come out of the water at night. Hippo is content and there the book ends.

But Joseph is compelled to re-shape the issues. His Negai commands Hippo to eat the fish. Joseph rises from his seat as he speaks the words: "Jump in the water hot Hippo, and eat the fish, I hate them all, eat up every animal." Samantha is not pleased. She decides to be Hippo in a story of her own. Now when Hippo asks to live in the water Negai falls dead and Hippo is the new God. Samantha says: "Hippo is the God of the whole everyone, and no bothering is allowed."

In this case, the canon begins with the story told from a book, and of course these are important pieces of equipment. But these kids are making standard forms as they go, and they're getting a lot of power out of it. Part of the power, as I have said, comes from the fact that when there is a given, then there can be an interpretable new; and a canon supplies a narrative given. But there is another generative element here. The deviations, the new versions, eventually become part of the range of the canons. So the canon actually grows. It absorbs what was a deviation into it. We see these canonical stories over the course of the year getting much more complicated, as they take in the variations as optional elements in them. Elements go in, the story gets richer, and a new, if you wish, "zone of proximal development" of possible deviations opens up, which are allowable variations on the newly formed enlarged canon. In this way, a corpus of genres is built. These are story models, on the one hand, and cognitive models on the other, because a story model of

this kind provides a kind of organizational structure within which complex forms of reasoning can take place, supported and scaffolded by it.

So these forming canons constitute the interpretable literary stock of the mini-culture that is the Paley classroom. Meanings thus rendered shareable, and what is also interesting about this is that matters that are difficult when private, can be made public. So a child who has a terror, or has a difficult idea, by putting it into one of the canonical shapes of these standard classroom story types, can make it less frightening both because this makes it socially available and enters it, in a sense, into the comforts of a community, and because its idiosyncratic properties are thereby transformed from the ineffable into the reassuringly familiar, and construable, patterns of their culture.

Finally, canonical forms introduce the possibility of rules. There are things that *must* be done inside a certain kind of a story, and there are things that *cannot* be done. Bad guys can't be in the same story as babies. The book, *Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays*, particularly explores the formation of rules in the context of narrative. I think that these rules are every bit as demanding and abstract as the categorical rules in which we have been interested in Psychology, and it may even be, as I suggested in Feldman (1989), that it is in the context of narrative that the power for logical thinking first emerges. But what is particularly interesting about a rule such as that a story with bad guys in it cannot have any babies in it, is that the children plainly invent it themselves; they are not being impelled from without. Children *want* to create canonical, interpretable narrative forms.

The second element of adult narration foreshadowed here is *dramatism*. Dramatism is an idea that comes from Kenneth Burke (1945), who looked at stories as acted: an author put a certain kind of character, with some goal, into a certain scene, where he undertakes certain actions, with certain instruments. Imbalances in these elements create a plight that is addressed as the story unfolds. Thus, dramatization is not about bare events, or event sequences, but rather incorporates them into constructed patterns of situated and motivated human action. Paley did an interesting thing when she insisted that the children act out their stories, she effectively created a context in which stories would be given a dramatic structure. The effect of this, perhaps, is that their stories embodied dramatic constraints. The children are the authors and they know it. Authors have rights, authors have powers, authors can write a character right out of it if they want to, and they can

make a story come out a different way. So these are not the dull little stories of restaurant scripts, they are not the dull little stories of who did what when, indeed these are not dull little stories of little girls going shopping with their mothers. These are the dramatic constructions of *made* characters in created situations, being made by authors who are these children. In our data, as people grow older, their interpretations of stories become more dramatic. I find it fascinating that these crucial, constructivist elements come into children's story making when they are so young.

The third precursor is *genre as a mental model*, an idea I have discussed elsewhere (Feldman, 1991b). A genre normally refers to something like a folktale, or a detective story. I've lately been interested in the possibility that genres are like formats in Bruner's (1983) sense, formats that can scaffold interpretation or thinking. And that a multiplicity of genres, which is what most people have, is like a multiplicity of tools for scaffolding different kinds of thought. Emmy has a problem-solving story genre, and a temporal story genre, and it was very plain that she could think about different kinds of things within those two genres. She could solve puzzles about why people did things in the problem-solving genre, and she could figure out what happened after something else happened in the temporal genre and what the sequence of events was going to be (Bruner & Lucariello, 1989). Paley's children also have multiple genres, although they are not yet fully formed. This is particularly important because it opens up the possibility of genre selection. Bakhtin (1986) says that the power of genre largely lies in the selection. For, it is in the selection of the genre that the decision about how events will be construed is made. Events themselves are, of course, flexible—they can be given a variety of interpretive patterns. In Paley's classroom, children who come in with something that is puzzling them or bothering them, select a genre in which to frame it: they go to the doll corner and work it out as a mommy and baby story, or they go to the blocks corner, and work it out as a monster and bad guys story. There are choices.

Genres, it is plain, are constructed from the start. This is a relatively new idea among literary critics and has perhaps not yet been widely noted among psychologists. But, it is crystal clear here: these kids are in the process of *making* genres. Theirs will eventually look more like ours, but these early ones don't look anything like adult genres. This is because they haven't yet assimilated enough of the canonical forms of the adult culture to make them familiar looking.

Lastly, the role of *culture*. I want to say just two light things about culture. One is the culture within the classroom, which I saw as a much more powerful element here, than it normally is in the classroom. I think this is because Paley's classroom is a narrativized culture, as all "real" cultures are, and perhaps must be. And most classrooms are not. The children share a system of interpretation, a meaning-making system, and that's the sense in which this classroom is a culture. But Paley's work also raises interesting questions about the role of culture *across* cultures. Are there cultures where children do not create genre patterns that enable them to interpret the meanings of stories? What happens in a place like Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) Roadville, where children are discouraged from making up stories, where fantasy and invention in narrative are considered as a form of *lying*, bad behavior. One child said, it is the kind of thing you do in school, you're not supposed to do it at home. What is lost by a child living in a culture where the consensual reality drives out playful, narrative invention? What happens to us when we become adults in this culture, and the role of *what is*, is given a special prominence, and *what it means* is left unsupported?

There is an extremely interesting set of discussions in these books of the reversal of the pretend-real distinction in young children. When children come into one of these stories, they *are* the character. The character may behave oddly; in that case they are a *pretend* version of it. So what *is*, for these children, is not something in correspondence to some aboriginal world out there, but rather whatever is essentially right for this character in this story. It's a constructivist's view of the world, that comes so early in this narrative context. Indeed, from the beginning, they are makers of possible worlds. That is why these books raise the question of what kinds of losses would be involved in children's lives when these processes were one way or another inhibited, or weren't culturally supported. The protagonist of *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter*, Jason, is very limited in his ability to make stories, indeed produces nearly the same story over and over. But one day, he breaks through and puts his helicopter into somebody else's story. He takes the other story, and sticks a helicopter into the middle of it. It is as if he is freed, at last, to invent possible worlds. We don't really know what difference it makes in Jason's life that he has a narratively rich and supportive environment inviting his inventions, nor what difference it makes for children who don't. All we do know is that adult cultures, even in the absence of writing, often invent "literary" genres, and *texts* in those genres (where the actual words of the utterance matter), and a system for interpreting those oral

texts. The process seems essential in the cultures where it happens for the making of meaning and the making of self. I have written a good deal about this elsewhere (Feldman, 1988 & 1991a).

Finally, there is an interesting suggestion for understanding autistic children. The reader of Paley's books cannot but be impressed by how powerfully impelled is the wish to narrate; the children really *want* to tell stories. Autistic children, who *inter alia* have great difficulties with controlling the narrative features of language, also don't really want to tell stories (see Bruner & Feldman, in press). One feels, reading these books, that an enormous amount of narrative skill is being learned by doing. A child who doesn't want to tell stories, and autistic children actively dislike this task, may miss out on some crucial interpretive skills for a reason that is no more fundamental than a lack of ordinary practice.

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Discussion

Vivian Paley: I want to thank everyone for such interesting commentary about the books and the way you've used them. What comes across, I think, is the possibility of the children's stories creating the foundation for this culture. The one thing that the teacher is looking for is how to connect all the things that are happening during the day. Well, how do you connect, and thereby demonstrate what it is to connect? The reason, I think, that the stories make so much sense to the children, and are such an absolute gift to the teacher, is that you finally have discovered that which of course stories are—a common set of events, a common, commonly known set of ideas and characters which can pull the culture together, in this case the classroom, from day to day.

I'll give a small example. (Of course, everything now on my mind is from the new book I am working on.) I think it demonstrates in terms of discussion, in terms of the power of what storytelling means to children, how it is the platform upon which every idea may be acted, not just with young children. I have spoken to many, many high school teachers in inner-city schools, who copy the same format with classrooms full of drop-out children who want to come to school to tell and act out their stories.

One of the logical inconsistencies that we must now face in the classroom, with our new rule—"You can't say you can't play"—has to do with storytelling. It has been our practice to allow the author of a story to choose the cast. This has become a zealously guarded and powerful social tool and it is not unusual, for example, to hear someone warn: "If you don't let me play, you can't be in my story." Fair enough, it would seem. However, some children are not even given the opportunity to negotiate. Now if we are trying out this experiment, to see if we can live by this rule, where you make room for everybody, then what about these stories, acted out every day, when you name only your best friends to be in the story? Some people are not best friends of anybody; and except for their own story they are ignored; and maybe people say no to being in their story. Now because we have a standard, a context in which to examine everything that happens, continually without end, we immediately have a place to

examine a new rule that everybody understands. Everybody understands it very, very well. They understand it so well, that they try —when people find seats around the rug—to figure out what number we will be on when their story comes, to see which group of children will be in their story. (Imagine, mathematically, what we're involved in!) They try therefore surreptitiously to get to the pile of stories and see where their story is...Well of course, no one can do it. But the trying of it, and the understanding that that's what they're trying to do...the "no fair," "you can't do that"...the moral struggle is never ending.

I am convinced that any struggle we have can be worked out in a culture based upon storytelling. It encompasses all the problems we have, all the decisions we must make about what is fair and unfair, and we all are using the same language. Every day the issue is re-examined. I notice as I go into the older classes to discuss the issue of fairness, they first deal with it distantly, abstractly. As they get closer and closer to telling stories in which they and other characters are participating, in scenes where rejection is taking place, as they can bring onto a stage, children will say, "Well, all right, let's just pretend something. Pretend that I'm a worst friend; and pretend that over here are best friends; and let's see..." and on and on. All that we want to find out about it is there, if we can just get it into narrative form, at all ages. We get the picture of what the scene looks like; where the beginning and the middle is, at least, so that we can keep figuring out every day the ending, perhaps, what possible endings are there. All of you helped me understand how this is done in very different ways.

About a culture in which storytelling is apparently discouraged, here are two very quick stories. One involving storytelling misunderstood by the school, but not by the family, I encountered in Hawaii, with children from Hawaiian families; the other, where storytelling is misunderstood in this particular way, by the family and the school, occurred with Navaho Indian children. I won't go into this but to say one thing on the question of what is lost when such confusion takes place? I think the miracle of it is that nothing may be lost. In both situations—when I entered the classroom in a Navaho school on a reservation, and in a classroom in Hawaii with entirely Hawaiian children—I entered as a stranger, the teacher knowing nothing of what I would do. During the course of a morning I taped a square on the floor with masking tape and, spending an hour with the children, picked one possible story from their conversation and asked if they would tell it to me in the form of a story. (The masking tape was a stage.) Telling this group—who in both cases had

never done this before and teachers who had never done this before—that this was a stage, and that I was going to move around the class, and that the moment I found a story we would act it out—that was all I said. In both instances, the moment a story was acted out every child said or looked as if he/she were about to say; “Oh that’s what you want,” and rushed into a long line waiting to dictate stories. It was there. Never mind that the grown-ups were confused, that the authorities in Hawaii didn’t understand that these children hear stories all the time, and that the Native American children misunderstood what would be considered lying or showing off. The minute they understood that this was to be their own imagination, their own fairy tales, nothing could stop them. And there was nothing primitive about it. In the case of, let’s say, first graders (the Native Americans were first and second graders), it was as if they had been telling stories all their lives. It is there.

The teachers were impressed. They began thereafter to use the stories, because they saw the children and they saw the use of language, a logical event in the classroom, in a different way, in a natural way...in the way that takes place around their own kitchen tables, or on a little farm down south. “Oh, this is what you mean, you mean story. Well I know story, I’ve been doing this all my life. That’s easy. We can all do story.”

Jerome Bruner: What struck me during the presentation is the political depth of the program that Vivian Paley is pursuing with her young kids. After all, the guiding maxim, “You can’t say you can’t play,” is the central principle of the civil rights movement in America. And we know that it has taken a long and hard journey for adults and even for our system of courts to come to appreciate the complexities that arise once one takes this principle seriously. I have been spending a good deal of time this last year working with lawyers on how the legal system works in practice (not just in terms of the statutes and decisions written down in the law books), and it is amply clear that the legal system in practice is not clear about what constitutes a violation of “You can’t say you can’t play.” As with Vivian’s children, much depends upon the stories that people are willing and able to live with. When the schools were desegregated in the Brown vs. Board decision, there had to be a long period of learning how to tell the “desegregation story” and of deciding what constituted an admissible version of that story. And some of the retellings were just as dramatic and full of surprises as what Vivian’s kids produced—even though these were Supreme Court justices and not nursery school kids. There was bussing, there was “maintaining

balance,” there was the flight to the suburbs—all creating new narratives to be coped with in terms of equal rights for all players. And it intrigues me that the excuses your kids gave for skirting the rule are only junior versions of what you can find by way of arguments before the Supreme Court. Not surprising that the Michigan Law Review in the Winter of 1989 decided to give over a whole issue to the issue of storytelling in the law. But what cheers me more than anything else is that you have shown that young kids can be made conscious of what they are doing when they enter the realm of rights, of dealing with everybody’s right to play or, better nobody’s right to say on any basis that others have no right to play. We usually let issues of this kind stay down under the surface where they end up hurting the excluder as much as they hurt the excluded. You know, I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if your kids could do a creditable job arguing cases like Metro Broadcasting vs. FCC where the deep issue (hidden beneath the usual dreary detail) is precisely who gets a turn at running a television station. And on the basis of what you told us, I’ll bet their arguments would be quite recognizable to the august members of the Court who heard a not very distinguished adult version of pleading in the case.

Vivian Paley, you stand accused of getting down to basics with kids very early, and I for one stand ready to claim that this is the best thing happening in town.

Michael Cole: I had a number of thoughts sitting here listening. The first being that, by orders of magnitude, this seminar today has been the most interesting and the most promoting of my own professional development. So I thank all of you.

An observation concerning the spirit of Jerry’s comments about the Supreme Court. We have here the issue of who the “in” guys are, and who the “out” guys are. We have all seen it around us in every waking moment for the last three days. So it doesn’t go away; it’s on display all the time.

Now a question for everybody: In *Boys and Girls*, at one point things spill out of your classroom towards others. And the position other teachers take is something like, “It’s alright if Vivian wants to be crazy in her classroom, but when the craziness starts to spread, it’s a problem.” I was thinking about education in general as Judith talked about students in her classroom using this as a medium to turn it around. But what do they do when they go back into their school and the principal is not going to put up with it? And in a high school it (open inquiry through storytelling and debate) can only be one part of the

curriculum. Where do we ever think of having authentic activity going on in classrooms when there is so much pressure against it? And I think of different cultures—even Gillian's Mrs. Stevens at the beginning; the kids have got a story about that; there is a culture in that classroom. It's not a generative culture the way you'd like it to be; but it's not that it's acultural. It's just a culture with authority and symbols that are mystifications. But we have plenty of those around us too. So it's really a question about the spread of this—to what extent can Vivian's approach be realistically moved into institutions without the institutions themselves undergoing very significant change?

Feldman: I think this is a very radical idea. This is a far more radical and almost dangerous idea than it appears. I think it would have no effect if it's sneaked in anyway.

McNamee: A part answer to this is what we are doing in Chicago. I have this one community with four Head Start day care centers. We also have four Chicago public schools who are in partnership with us at the Erikson Institute, trying out these ideas with their four- and five-year-old classrooms and transitioning into first and second grade. And for the last seven years we at the Erikson Institute have had an ongoing contract with the Department of Human Services, which oversees all the Head Start funding coming to the city—we are now providing all the ongoing in-service training of the Head Start teachers in this whole program of literacy development through play, storytelling and dramatics. So, we are trying to address that institutional problem and the support for Mrs. Stevens, for any one of these teachers—we are trying it in one community, we are trying it in several public schools, and we are trying it massively in Head Start.

Paley: I agree that it's a dangerous idea. Because once the idea of classrooms making logical sense—the way a story is expected to make sense—is suggested, it is both highly desirable and highly threatening. But I might use a comment from a fifth grader who was part of the "You can't say you can't play" discussion in her class, my question to them being, "Could it work? Can you imagine it working?" The children, as they get older are in conflict, but friendship means so much. How can you be with people you don't like very much when you can be with people you do like very much? And then someone said, one of these dangerous thinkers, "But you know, if you got used to saying 'Yes' instead of 'No'...it would take a long time to do it...but if, little by little, you got used to saying 'Yes' instead of 'No', then maybe it would work." And there was silence in this fifth-grade class. It was a good place to end the discussion.

Everyone understands this issue, all along the grades. I've already visited all the grades twice, and I have pinpointed the third grade as the turning point in terms of the children's feelings on these moral issues. (I'm going to go back in that grade to speak to small groups.) But all of them, as they get older, agree that this rule is fair and feel, essentially, it's unworkable...Fair but unworkable...It should be workable, but it isn't...And so on and on in their discussion. But this was the first child who said it's possible if you can figure out how to do it. So it is dangerous; nobody wants to get too close to that idea.

Review Article

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H. W. Stevenson and J. W. Stigler, *The Learning Gap*. New York: Summit Books, 1992

For many years Harold Stevenson has been a leader in forging cooperative links between American and Asian psychologists. During the 1980's, in collaboration with psychologists from China, Taiwan, and Japan (among whom Jim Stigler has been especially prominent) Stevenson has documented the "learning gap" between American elementary school children and their Asian peers, particularly in mathematics. The present volume summarizes the past decade of this research in concise and readable form, providing a rich picture of the multiple social and cultural factors that give rise to the gaps in academic achievement.

I have often thought of Stevenson and Stigler as characters in the Philadelphia "Inquirer" advertisement where a person tries to warn passengers on a subway that a fire is burning, but no one looks up from their newspaper: Not only do American parents seem to ignore the well documented cross national differences in children's achievement—they persistently voice satisfaction with the education their kids receive.

It is unlikely that *The Learning Gap* will receive more public attention than prior writings on this subject; after

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all, the failure of American parents to understand the message that Stevenson and Stigler are bearing is an essential systems characteristic of contemporary American society. But for those who are interested, their book offers an excellent tool for understanding how the differences in achievement arise from the differences in educational practices, school organization, family socialization, and national/cultural variations in the role of elementary schools in society.

The major issue can be summarized quite simply: The performance of the top 5% of American children is matched by the top 50% of Japanese children and the performance gap grows with every passing grade. Nor has it diminished in the past decade; rather, it has grown.

An admirable feature of the manner in which Stevenson and Stigler approach their topic is their steadfast refusal to give in to simple "one factor" explanations of school achievement or to assign blame. The causes of the performance differences, they argue, are systemic. The sequence of chapters in *The Learning Gap* provide an excellent guide to different systemic factors that need to be considered: the everyday lives of children in the different countries, the forms of socialization for achievement characteristic of each culture, ideas about effort and ability, parental expectations, the organization of schooling, the profession of teaching, and the practice of teaching are all described in clearly comprehensible and economical prose.

A sampling of some major findings provides an antidote to popular misconceptions. For example, American children spend less time watching television than Japanese children; Japanese children have more recess periods than American children; Japanese and Chinese teachers present their children with 3-5 times more lessons that are built around real-world problems and are about

three times as likely to build upon students' answers (right and wrong) than their American counterparts.

Perhaps the biggest impression that I came away with is that Asian elementary school mathematics teachers routinely engage children in a "sense making" curriculum despite the fact that they teach at roughly a 40:1 ratio. Several factors converge to make whole group lessons work; modes of socialization that promote good student behavior are one source; frequent recess breaks are another; long hours spent by teachers at school combined with no more than 3-5 hours of classroom teaching are still another.

As an advocate of activity-centered education, I was grateful for the reminder that high quality teaching-learning interactions can occur in whole group lessons. At the same time, I found it difficult to imagine what combination of changes in the United State's childrearing practices, folk psychology of education, parental expectations and support of education could bring about desired changes domestically.

Stevenson and Stigler provide their own prescriptions for change. Many of their ideas strike me as reasonable, if not fulfillable. I was particularly struck by their suggestion that teachers be given the option of teaching to larger classes but few hours per day. Of course, this would have to be accompanied by increased recess time and at least some of the other features of Chinese and Japanese classroom interactions. And it might well fail. But it would be interesting in any event.

It is, of course, far too much to demand of such research that it solve the problems of United States education; Stevenson and Stigler's achievement in documenting the processes at work in differing societies with different traditions of education is enough to recommend *The Learning Gap* to this *Newsletter's* readership.

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