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Dominika Herranen

# How to enhance children's creativity through storytelling?

Handbook for early childhood education practitioners

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<p>The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how storytelling methods can be used to enhance children's creativity. Creativity is regarded as one of the most important skills in today's world. It is considered as an effective tool to face uncertain future and to cope with challenges in life. Creativity positively affects one's self-esteem, inner strength, adaptation abilities, and, as consequence, one's well-being and mental health. Thus, the aim of early childhood education should be to create opportunities to promote and foster children's creative talents. This can be accomplished not only by commonly known and used methods such as visual arts, music or drama, but also through storytelling activities.</p> <p>Every child has creative potential. Every child has potential as creative storytellers. Stories enables children to express themselves in an uninhibited manner. And this spontaneous and unrestrained opportunity creates a space for the creativity to flourish. As a method enhancing creativity, storytelling can be viewed as a social pedagogical tool which builds the foundation for participation, empowerment, trustful relationship, holistic learning and overall well-being.</p> <p>Hence, I have decided to conduct a theoretical research on how to enhance children's creativity through storytelling. I explored the concept of creativity and the meaning of storytelling method, and I investigated how to apply storytelling techniques in practice in order to foster creativity. The outcome of this research is a handbook for early childhood practitioners, in which I included a brief presentation of theoretical approaches as well as practical suggestions for implementing storytelling activities in early childhood education settings.</p>	
Keywords	creativity, storytelling, early childhood education

Tekijä Otsikko	Dominika Herranen Miten voidaan kehittää lasten luovutta tarinankerronnan avulla? Käsikirja varhaiskasvatuksen ammattilaisille
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<p>Tämän monimuotoisen opinnäytetyön tavoite on tarkastella, miten tarinankerrontamenetelmiä voidaan käyttää kehittämään lasten luovuutta. Luovuutta pidetään yhtenä tärkeimmistä taidoista nykymaailmassa. Sitä pidetään tehokkaana välineenä epävarman tulevaisuuden kohtaamiseen ja selviytymiseen elämän haasteista. Luovuus vaikuttaa positiivisesti itsetuntoon, sisäiseen voimaan, sopeutumiskykyyn ja sen seurauksena hyvinvointiin ja mielenterveyteen. Varhaiskasvatuksen tavoitteena tulisi siis olla mahdollisuus edistää ja tukea lasten luovia kykyjä. Tämä voidaan saavuttaa paitsi yleisesti tunnetuilla ja käytetyillä menetelmillä, kuten kuvataiteen, musiikin tai näyttelemisen, mutta myös tarinankerronnan avulla.</p> <p>Jokaisella lapsella on luovia mahdollisuuksia. Jokaisella lapsella on potentiaalia luovina tarinankertojina. Tarinan avulla lapset voivat ilmaista itseään estämättömällä tavalla. Ja tämä spontaani ja rajoittamaton mahdollisuus luo tilaa luovuudelle kukoistaa. Tarinankerrontaa voidaan luovuutta edistävänä menetelmänä pitää sosiaalipedagogisena työkaluna, joka rakentaa perustan osallistumiselle, vaikutusmahdollisuuksille, luottamukselliselle suhteelle, kokonaisvaltaiselle oppimiselle ja yleiselle hyvinvoinnille.</p> <p>Siksi olen päättänyt tehdä teoreettisen tutkimuksen siitä, miten lasten luovuutta voidaan kehittää tarinankerronnan avulla. Tutkin luovuuden käsitettä ja tarinankerrontamenetelmän merkitystä ja tutkin, miten tarinankerrontatekniikoita voidaan soveltaa käytännössä luovuuden edistämiseksi. Tämän tutkimuksen tulos on varhaislapsuuden harjoittajille tarkoitettu käsikirja, johon sisälsin lyhyen esityksen teoreettisista lähestymistavoista sekä käytännön ehdotuksia tarinankerronnan toteuttamiseksi varhaiskasvatusympäristössä.</p>	

Keywords	luovuus, tarinankerronta, varhaiskasvatus
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Appendix 1. How to enhance children's creativity through storytelling? Handbook for early childhood education practitioners

## 1 Introduction

Children have an enormous ability and eagerness to tell stories. Sometimes they share real stories which are based on experiences from their everyday life. Sometimes their stories are make-believe, produced by their vivid imagination. Sometimes children do both by smoothly shifting between real and not-real worlds and creatively combining actual events with imaginative ones. Children are natural and spontaneous. They express themselves in an unconstrained manner as they are not afraid to make new, and very often surprising for adults, connections. And this is where children's creativity lies. But what does it actually mean to be creative? How children are creative? Can their creativity be fostered and cultivated?

In this paper, I will explore children's creativity and children's storytelling as a method enhancing their creative abilities. In general, creativity is a vast subject. It has been studied by great number of researchers from various fields. This is why, I will attempt to narrow down the topic and select the most significant and relevant concepts. From the general definition of creativity, I will shift my attention into the realm of children's creativity since it is believed that children are creative in a different manner than adults. Moreover, cultivating creativity is crucial for children's learning and growth. Therefore, I will try to investigate how practitioners in early childhood education can support the development of children's creative competences. There are multiple approaches and techniques in this matter, however, my focus will be placed on storytelling methods. Like creativity, storytelling appears to be a broad topic. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I will briefly present the main ideas related to children's storytelling. I will explain what a story and a narrative is; how do children develop narrative and storytelling skills; why is it important to encourage children's storytelling; and what are the practical aspects of storytelling method. Taking everything into consideration, in the last part of my paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that storytelling, as a method supporting children's creativity, can be regarded as a social pedagogical tool.

The goal of this multiform thesis is to create a basis for a creative handbook for early childhood education professionals. The handbook will constitute a concise manual providing information on how to enhance children's creativity through storytelling method. It will contain brief presentation of theoretical approaches as well as practical suggestions for implementing storytelling activities in early childhood education settings.

As a practitioner working with preschool children, I strongly believe that creativity is one of the most important abilities to cultivate in early years. I have observed that, in general, many preschool teachers include creative methods into the curriculum and daily routine. However, most of these methods are based on visual arts, music or drama. Storytelling techniques seem to be used rather randomly. Hence, I have noticed the need for highlighting the importance of fostering children's storytelling and creating the handbook that, I hope, will inspire early childhood education professionals to try out storytelling methods with children.

## **2 Working life partner and the development assignment**

The handbook on how to enhance children's creativity through storytelling will be created for my working life partner, The International Childcare and Education Centre (ICEC). It is the private early childhood education and care provider which has altogether eight centres situated in Helsinki, Espoo and Inkoo in Finland: Kilo, Westend, Meilahti, Mäntytie, Töölö, Herttoniemi, Vuosaari, and Degerby. The ICEC provides services for the children aged between 1 and 7. Despite various locations, each school belonging to the ICEC is English-speaking and multicultural, and follows the same curriculum, mainly based on the HighScope method.

HighScope method provides children with the opportunity to plan their own activities which are set out in the environment of the schoolroom. Teachers create active learning environment by arranging the classroom with various materials, according to several areas, essential for HighScope method. They are all labelled and they include: 'drawing and writing area, painting easel, home corner and shop, role play, construction, design and technology, maths and science, nature table, games and puzzles, book/library corner, pet corner, sand and water, sticking table' (ICEC 2020).

The main objective of the ICEC is 'to foster a child's natural delight in exploration and discovery which results in their gaining knowledge and understanding' (ICEC 2020). The ICEC aims at promoting children's interaction and independent learning as well as their freedom to explore. Supporting creativity and self-expression builds the foundation of the ICEC philosophy. Indeed, I have observed that, in practice, children attending the ICEC have plenty of opportunities for creative self-expression. However, those opportunities usually lie in the realm of visual arts and crafts, music, play and physical education. When

it comes to storytelling, this area seems to be somehow neglected and practiced not as often as, for instance, arts and crafts. For this reason, I have decided to focus my research on storytelling as a pedagogical method that enhances children's creative abilities.

### 3 Creativity

#### 3.1 Defining creativity

David Bohm begins his book *On Creativity* with the following sentence: 'Creativity is, in my view, something that is impossible to define in words' (Bohm 2004, p. 1). Indeed, creativity is not the easiest concept to explain. Throughout decades researchers has been trying to grasp the essence of one of the most mysterious human phenomena. These attempts have resulted in great number of studies, books and articles, and have led to develop a vast amount of ideas and theories. What makes defining creativity so challenging is its complexity and incapability of measurement. Creativity can occur as 'the subjective experience of the moment of a private, minor insight by an ordinary individual as well as the greatest achievements of human genius throughout our history' (Kozbelt et al., p. 21). What is more, the conception of creativity might vary in different cultural circles and in different moments of history. Therefore, creativity is not only a 'scientific concept', but also 'a culturally and historically specific idea that changes from one country to another, and from one century to another' (Sawyer 2006, p. 36). To make the matter more complicated, the concept of creativity also transforms along with the change of perspective. It is commonly believed that creativity belongs to a realm of psychology. However, it has also become an important subject of discussion and analysis in other disciplines, such as history, sociology, and even economics. Thus, the definition of creativity depends on an angle from which it is analysed.

During the 1950s, at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California, Berkeley, Donald MacKinnon and the team of scientists conducted the study on creative personalities. They tested 'particularly creative people' in order to 'scientifically determine the traits of the creative personality' (Sewyer 2006, p. 44). The results of the study showed that creative individuals are equipped with extremely high intelligence, alertness, attention, eagerness to experience and

preference for complexity. What is more, according to the research, creative people have balanced personalities, meaning, they have balanced level of femininity and masculinity, and they have had experienced happy and comfortable childhood. (MacKinnon cited in Sewyer 2006, pp. 44-45.)

The interesting part of MacKinnon's study is the fact that it failed to prove the very common stereotype of the creative person, that is, 'a genius with an I.Q. far above average; an eccentric not only in thinking but appearance, dress, and behaviour; a Bohemian, an egghead, a longhair ... a true neurotic, withdrawn from society, inept in his relations with others' (MacKinnon cited in Sewyer 2006, p. 44). Robinson shares the same opinion and questions the image of 'troubled creative genius', 'being set apart from the rest of us by their extraordinary natural gifts' (Robinson 2001, p. 112). He claims that creative people do not belong to 'a special breed' which act and perform only in particular areas, such as the arts or the science. In fact, he states:

Scientists, technologists, business people, educators, anyone can be creative in the work they do. Creativity is not exclusive to particular activities; it's possible wherever human intelligence is actively engaged. It is not a specific type of activity but a quality of intelligence. (Robinson 2001, p. 113.)

Therefore, Robinson emphasises the egalitarian aspect of creativity. Bohemian or bourgeois, eccentric or down-to-earth, introvert or extravert – anyone can be a 'creative person'.

Bohm also argues that creativity is neither an exceptional feature nor a special talent. He notices that 'there are a tremendous number of highly talented people who remain mediocre' (Bohm 2004, p. 4), who do not show any sign of creativity in their personalities or activities. What they lack, according to Bohm, is the creative state of mind.

Therefore, Bohm switches the focus from creativity as a single personal trait into creativity as a whole cognitive process. He compares the creative state of mind to the attitude of a child who learns 'to know his way around the world just by *trying something out and seeing what happens*, then modifying what he does (or thinks) in accordance with what has actually happened' (Bohm 2004, p. 4). However, this process requires sensitivity, openness, awareness, as well as full attention and total interest in order to see something new and different. By noticing and acknowledging this difference an

individual is able to develop a new perception or idea. (Bohm 2004, p. 5-6.) As Bohm explains, creative state of mind is:

'(...) one whose interest in what is being done is wholehearted and total, like that of a young child. With this spirit, it is always open to learning what is new, to perceiving new differences and new similarities, leading to new orders and structures, rather than always tending to impose familiar orders and structures in the field of what is seen' (Bohm 2004, p. 21.)

If the creative state of mind is a general human quality and everybody can cultivate it, then why such a small number of people is capable of being 'creative'? Bohm answers this question by indicating that most of us has 'a conformist, imitative, mechanical state of mind' (Bohm 2004, p. 20). And this "negative" state of mind has been shaped by the society since our childhood. As Bohm observes, 'we have generally been conditioned to mediocrity and mechanicalness' (Bohm 2004, p. 27). However, there is a possibility to reshape the state of mind. Bohm explains the process of this reshaping in the following way:

It seems that, in some way, each person has to discover what it means to be original and creative. After all, generally speaking, the childlike quality of fresh, wholehearted interest is not entirely dead in any of us. It comes in a small burst, and then it gets lost in confusion as all the old special interests, fears, desires, aims, securities, pleasures, and pains come up from the past. These twist the fresh clarity of the mind in a mechanical way, so that the capacity for originality and creation are deadened and gradually "go to sleep". (Bohm 2004, pp. 27-28.)

In order to awake 'the capacity for originality and creation', the mind itself must to react and catch the moments of potential "waking-ups". The more occasions are caught by the mind, the more chances emerge that the mind will gradually transform from a mechanical mode into a creative mode. All in all, every human mind has creative potentialities as every human mind is equipped with imagination.

The notions of creativity and imagination might seem to be identical and interchangeable, but in fact, they represent two different concepts. Imagination refers to the ability of forming in mind something that cannot be perceived or experienced by senses, 'to conjure new realities and possibilities' (Liu & Noppe-Brandon 2009, p. 19). To imagine means 'to detach oneself from the tangible world and move beyond concrete situations'; 'to separate action and objects from their meaning in the real world and give them new meanings'; and 'to contemplate what is not but might be' (Duffy 2005, p. 21).

Liu and Noppe-Brandon suggest that the concept of imagination, creativity and innovation are linked together as elements of a continuous whole. They explain it in the following way:

If imagination is the capacity to conceive of what is not, then creativity, in turn, is imagination applied: doing something, or making something, with that initial conception. But not all acts of creativity are inherently innovative. In our view, innovation comes when an act of creativity has somehow advanced the form. (Liu & Noppe-Brandon 2009, p. 19.)

In other words, 'while imagination is the ability to picture what does not exist, the creative element is in turning what we imagine into reality' (Duffy 2005, p. 22). Therefore, creativity, as imagination applied, includes the process of imagining.

From Vygotsky's point of view, imagination is a creative activity of our brain that processes and combines elements of our past experience and 'uses them to generate new propositions and new behavior' (Vygotsky cited in Eckhoff & Urbach 2008, p. 181). In other words, imagination functions as a meaning-making process (Vygotsky cited in Kangas et al. 2011, p. 67). This definition is based on Vygotsky's four laws of imagination. The first law indicates that creative products of imagination always derive from one's life experiences. The second law states that the process of imagining is influenced by social experiences of other people which can be found, for instance, in books, artworks or personal stories. The third law refers to the fact that emotions can have an impact on imagination. And the fourth law indicates that imagination constitutes 'the building block of a new, external product, or an invention'. (Vygotsky cited in Eckhoff & Urbach 2008, pp. 181-182.)

While discussing the nature of creativity, it is essential to mention the common division of this concept into two categories: the big 'C' Creativity and the small 'c' creativity. The big 'C' refers to cultural (or historical) creativity which produces new, original and valued by society ideas. As Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura observe, cultural creativity 'changes the way we see, understand, and interact with the reality that surrounds us', 'it is the energy that propels cultural evolution' (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura cited in Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 239). The small 'c' creativity signifies personal creativity, that is, new and original ideas which occurs in everyday life to any person and do not need to be noticed by the society. At first glance, small 'c' does not seem to be as significant

as big 'C'. However, Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura negate this assumption by saying: 'although this form of creativity does not change the culture, it does make a vast difference to the quality of one's life – without it, existence would be intolerably drab' (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura cited in Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 239). In fact, there are suggestions to extend the classification of creativity by adding 'mini-c' creativity, which precedes small 'c' or big 'C' creativity and manifests in young children, and 'pro-c' creativity, which is placed between small 'c' and big 'C' creativity and characterizes people who have enough motivation and skills to contribute creatively to the society, but not at the level of big 'C' creativity (Kaufman and Beghetto cited in Hargreaves 2012, p. 28).

### 3.2 Children's creativity and the importance of cultivating it

Today's world is extremely challenging. People face constant changes triggered by massive global trends: climate crisis, rapid developments in science and technology, economic crises, growing populations, global migrations, rising social inequalities, and so on (OECD 2018, p. 3). We cannot predict what tomorrow brings, however, we can get prepared for the uncertain future. Thus, in the field of education and education policy there is an emerging need to provide young people and children with possibilities to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in order to manoeuvre in a complex and changeable reality (OECD 2018, p. 4). Schleicher metaphorically calls for supporting young people in developing a reliable "compass" which can help 'find their way through an increasingly uncertain, volatile and ambiguous world' (Schleicher 2019, p. 12). This type of compass includes various skills and competences which can be put under one name – "fusion skills". "Fusion skills" combine creative, entrepreneurial and technical skills and relate to flexibility, openness, and adaptability (Berger & Frey cited in OECD 2019). Some educators highlight the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, especially four of them, commonly called the four C's. They include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication (Stauffer 2020).

Creativity, in particular, has been given large attention. There are many opinions that view creativity as one of the most effective tools to face uncertain future and as one of the most important skills to learn by children (Beghetto 2010; Eckhoff & Urbach 2008; Robinson 1999; Schleicher 2019). Robinson argues that creativity is as fundamental as literacy and numeracy (Robinson 1999, p. 13). Developing creative capabilities, which lie deep inside every person, can help present and future generations to cope with the

challenges that our changing world is constantly generating (Charman 2019; Robinson 1999). However, it can also unfold new opportunities. Creativity can positively influence individual's inner strengths and adaptation abilities, and 'have an enormous impact on self-esteem and on overall achievement' (Robinson 1999, p. 6). Through creativity, an individual can find and realize own unique potentials and talents, what positively increases his or her well-being and mental health (Sawyer 2006, p. 11).

Similarly, Duffy highlights the particular importance of enhancing children's creativity. She argues that children need to develop creative competences so that, as adults in the future, they could 'deal with the unexpected and extend current knowledge to new situation; (...) use information in a new way and experiment with novel concepts; (...) or 'modify and monitor their world' (Duffy 2005, p. 6). Creativity, according to Duffy, can enhance the ability of coping with challenges, flexible thinking, empathy, responsibility, openness to different worldviews and possibilities (Duffy 2005, pp. 6-7).

According to Charman (2019), creativity is vital in children's development and learning because it is strongly linked to three domains: curiosity, play and change. Curiosity constitutes the heart of creativity and the trigger for understanding our inner and outside world. As a result, it 'opens up the space of imagination', thus, 'a space of possibility and potential, a space to play with ideas, with things' (Charman 2019, p. 6). Play is particularly important in young people's lives as it allows them to explore, to experiment, and, consequently, to learn. Through play, children exercise their creativity and gain an ability to adapt to change (Charman 2019, p. 6). However, in Charman's view, creativity can help children not only to cope with constantly changeable world, but also to trigger a positive change which 'becomes materially manifest and expressed in the world through language and behaviour' (Charman 2019, p. 7).

Nevertheless, children's creativity differs from adult's creativity due to few reasons. Firstly, children and adults are at different stages of cognitive development and they are equipped with different amount of life experience (Eckhoff & Urbach 2008, p. 184). As Vygotsky states in the second law of imagination, creative process of imagining is dependent on social experiences. Children's social experiences are not as rich as adults' life experiences. Therefore, their creative capabilities are not the same.

Secondly, when considering creativity as a process with 'outcomes that are original and of value' (Robinson 2001, p. 118), one might argue that children's and adults' creative

outcomes are not similar either. It is believed that adult's creativity can generate some new and original results, such as artworks or innovative solutions, while children's creativity seems not to produce any prominent outcomes. However, this does not mean that children's creative abilities are diminished in the shadow of adult's creative superiority. On the contrary, children's creativity manifests in different forms, such as 'imaginative play, self-expression, or a new understanding of the world' (Runco & Cayirdag 2013, p. 102), thus, their creative outcomes are limitless. Runco and Cayirdag describe children's creativity in the following way:

Children are creative when they pretend, for example, and when they express themselves in an uninhibited fashion. Play and the construction of meaning (which is necessary for self-expression) provide children with a grasp of what is possible. Because children do pretend and do express themselves in an uninhibited fashion, the range of possibilities is enormous. They can think about, explore, and act on both the realistic and the imaginary. In that sense, children have larger repertoires than adults. Children are more playful and less inhibited; they have fewer routines, make fewer assumptions, and are often more spontaneous than adults. Each of these allows children to think broadly, divergently, and imaginatively. (Runco & Cayirdag 2013, p. 102)

What is more interesting, the researchers argue that children at different ages, thus, at different developmental stages, do not have the same creative potentials. For instance, preschool children's creativity differs from creativity of older children who attends school. Pre-schoolers' creative abilities are pre-conventional, meaning, they are not influenced by conventional thinking. Instead, they are triggered by authentic self-expression. (Runco & Cayirdag 2013, p. 103)

## **4 Supporting children's creativity in early childhood education**

### **4.1 Emotional, social and physical contexts of supporting creativity**

It is crucial to underline that supporting creativity in early childhood education is based on the statement that every child has capabilities to develop creativity as every child has creative potential. Creativity is not reserved for gifted, well-behaving or smart children (O'Neal & Runco 2016, p. 19). It is neither a "special" talent nor a "special" feature which characterizes "special" individuals (Bohm 2004; Robinson 2001). As Robinson argues:

Creativity is not a separate faculty that some people have and others do not. It is a function of intelligence: it takes many forms, it draws from many different capacities and we all have different creative capabilities. Creativity is possible in any activity in which human intelligence is actively engaged. (Robinson 2001, p. 111.)

Therefore, creativity can be exercised, nurtured and developed by every child as every child has creative talents. It is during children's early years 'that these talents blossom or wither' (Dowling 2010, p. 146). Dowling points out that 'like any learning, growth in creativity does not just happen, but is crucially dependent on key factors which include the curriculum and the role of the adult' (Dowling 2010, p. 146).

There are numerous writings on how to promote and support creativity, how to increase it or stimulate it. Scientists (and not only) from various fields have suggested many models, frameworks, recommendations and opinions in terms of developing creative abilities. Some of them have broad and general context, some of them refer to university students, school-aged or preschool children. As already mentioned, children at different ages and different developmental stages are equipped with different creative prerequisites. Thus, approaches and methods of supporting creativity should be appropriate to the developmental stage of a child.

According to Rogers, psychological safety, along with psychological freedom and stimulating experiences, are the foundations for nurturing and developing children's creativity (Rogers 1993, p. 14). Psychological safety arises from an environment which consists of 'acceptance, empathy, and nonjudgmental facilitation' (Rogers 1993, p. 15). This leads to psychological freedom, which signifies 'a complete freedom of symbolic expression' (Rogers cited in Rogers 1993, p. 17).

Thus, psychological safety, or emotional safety, is provided by supportive environment and loving relationship. When a child feels safe and secure, he or she is more eager and comfortable to experiment and to take risks (Duffy 2006; Robson 2012). And when experimenting and taking risks is encouraged and appreciated, then the space for creativity opens.

If we wish children to be creative we need to ensure that all children feel valued and accepted for themselves. Without this children will not feel sufficiently secure to take risks or make mistakes and these are crucial in the creative process. (Duffy 2005, p. 132.)

In other words, positive experiences and positive emotions bring the possibility for creative thinking. Negative emotions, on the other hand, cause stress and pressure which can narrow the capabilities for generating creative thoughts (Duffy 2005; Robson 2012).

Emotional safety can be seen as a basis for developing motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, which triggers creativity (Robson 2012, p. 41). Beghetto explains the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in supporting creativity in the following way:

(...) creativity generally flourishes under conditions that support intrinsic motivation (signified by enjoyment, interest, involvement, and focus on personally challenging tasks) and can suffer under conditions that stress extrinsic motivators (such as promising rewards or incentives for creative work), competitions, social comparisons, and expectations of judgments from others. Indeed, concerns about comparisons to others and evaluation pressures can cause anxiety that undermines students' willingness and capacity for creative expression. (Beghetto 2005, p. 456)

Therefore, early years practitioners should ensure that the environment in which children participate supports trust, acceptance and positive emotions. As Duffy points out, 'children do not require us to be perfect but they do require us to be committed' (Duffy 2005, p. 127).

Runco argues that 'a child growing up in a family that encourages creativity, in a culture that values creativity, with teachers who support creativity, has excellent chances of fulfilling his or her creative potentials' (Runco 2013, p. 109). All individuals involved in supporting creativity, especially the closest ones to the child, should 'model creative behaviour, provide opportunities for children to practice creative self-expression, and ensure that rewards rather than punishment is given for original thinking' (Runco 2013, p. 109).

In Runco's view, 'modeling is a social learning method that describes the demonstration of original behaviors' (Runco 2013, p. 109). Adults' behaviour influences children's development as children tend to imitate and copy adult's actions. When adults are creative themselves, children are more likely to imitate their creative behaviour and to gain confidence that creativity is accepted. As Runco summarises, 'children will therefore learn both from the adults' overt display of creativity, and they internalize a value system that appreciates originality and creativity' (Runco 2013, p. 109).

However, modeling creative behaviour might not be enough to fully support the development of children's creativity. Children learn and develop not only through imitations but also through interactions with environments and other people. As a reciprocal relationship, interaction between a child and an adult might be very beneficial in terms of creativity, especially when 'sustained shared thinking' occurs. Sustained shared thinking can be defined as 'any episode in which two or more individuals "worked together" to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc.' (Robson 2012, p. 41).

Creative collaboration between children and adults might not be successful without adult's scaffolding. The notion signifies a 'support without constriction' (Dowling 2010, p. 147), where adults need to tune to children's abilities and be mindful of their learning directions. Scaffolding means focusing on children's intentions and responding to children's comments, interests, and needs (Duffy 2005, p. 120). As Dowling puts it, scaffolding 'requires the adult to make a sound judgement of what the child knows now, an accurate diagnosis of the next step in learning and provision of suitable support to help the child achieve it' (Dowling 2010, p. 147).

Nevertheless, children's creativity might flourish not only from their relationship with adults, but also from their interactions with peers. Several studies bring evidence that children are better problem-solvers when they act in collaboration with other children and by 'scaffolding one another's understanding' (Robson 2012, p. 42). Robson points out that this successful performance in problem-solving results from playful interaction between children and confidence that they gain while 'mimicking another child' (Robson 2012, p. 42).

When supporting the development of children's creativity, such aspects as space, resources and time must be also taken into consideration. They play a significant role in a creative process as they provide opportunities for creative expression. Without sufficient space and accessible resources children's creative potentials might not fully flourish (Duffy 2005, p. 132). Their creativity is dependent, in particular, on resources, or, as Duffy indicates, their 'creativity is resource led' (Duffy 2005, p. 133).

Creativity is about making meaningful connections, using ideas and / or materials in new way. Our organization of space and resources will largely determine whether children can do this. (Duffy 2005, p. 133.)

In addition to this, creativity, as a process, requires time. Thus, children should be provided with enough time in order to engage in creative process. They should not be rushed, but rather encouraged to take time to experiment, explore, play, try new ideas and modify them. (Duffy 2005, p. 140)

#### 4.2 The role of the adult – theories in practice

In her book on supporting creativity in early childhood education, Duffy creates a comprehensive list of practical implications for early years practitioners in order to enhance children's creativity and imagination. The list begins with, perhaps, the most important issue: to be empathetic, which is understood as 'seeing the world through the eyes of the children' (Duffy 2005, p. 124). Empathy is the foundation for trustful and secure relationship. And, as already mentioned, emotional security establishes the solid base for nurturing creativity.

According to Duffy, early years practitioners should play a role of facilitators who support children in being independent and using their own abilities to gain new skills; in being self-confident and using their own voice and style; in being curious and exploring the possibilities; and in reflecting and being critical. (Duffy 2005, p. 124.)

Supporting children's creativity might appear with various faces. On the one hand, teachers should be engaged in children's creative process, collaborate and act as partners, what requires being available, interested and involved. But sometimes teachers should be also able to stand aside and let children follow their creative intuition, to let them speak, communicate their thoughts and freely express themselves. The art of supporting creativity is about recognizing the right moment – either for encouragement and inspiration or for simply being silent. (Duffy 2005, p. 125.)

Nevertheless, Duffy emphasises the importance of inclusion and participation in the process of supporting children's creativity. Creative process might be purely individual, but, as previously mentioned studies indicate, creativity also flourishes in collaborative activities where children work, play, or create collectively. Thus, it is also essential to help any child who wants to be involved in the creative process. (Duffy 2005, p. 125.)

Moreover, being simply genuine and honest creates an environment which strongly supports creativity. Duffy indicates that 'praising every child's every representation is not being honest but offering constructive feedback and encouragement is' (Duffy 2005, p. 125). Honesty, truthfulness and authenticity lie at the root of good communication – both verbal and non-verbal. Thus, teachers must be mindful not only of the language that they use to communicate with children, but also of their tone of voice, face expression, or body language. (Duffy 2005, p. 125.)

In addition to this, Duffy highlights the importance of planning, implementing, observing, recording and assessing children's creative activities (Duffy 2005, pp. 160-178). Teachers need to ensure that activities are planned in accordance to the needs and interests of children. Also, planning creative experience includes determination of teachers' own role – either as a facilitator, a work partner, or just an observer, or other. Planning and implementing an activity also depend on the decision for whom creative experience is aimed – a group of children or just one child. Assessment brings the view on how an activity contributed to the development of children's creativity. (Duffy 2005, p. 161.)

Children's creativity can be supported in multiple ways. Any method that allows children to awake their curiosity, explore different possibilities, try out or construct something new, and foremost, freely express themselves, can be suitable in the repertoire of practices that enhance creativity. In fact, this repertoire is quite large as it embraces various creative areas, such as visual arts, crafts, music, dance, physical exercise, drama, narrative play, or storytelling. All these fields offer numerous methods which allow children creative self-expression. Taking visual arts as an example, this domain provides great amount of creative experiences. Children can practice diverse painting techniques, use different drawing tools, explore textures and materials, build creative constructions, make sculptures, and so on. There are limitless choices. However, visual arts are clearly resource-based. Without resources it is impossible to create any visual artwork. But there is one creative area where children do not need any materials or equipment in order to express their creativity. This area is called storytelling, where children's only tool is their own imagination.

Austring puts storytelling, or oral narrative in general, 'on top of the pile of possibilities' which 'stimulate the child's innate need for and ability to express itself' (Austring 2016, p. 1). He emphasises the importance of enhancing children's self-expression as follows:

Children are not just empty containers that need to be filled with culture. They are individuals with their own experiences, projects, instincts and needs and last, but not least a need to mirror themselves in the world and develop their own identity. A basic way of processing one's impressions of the world is to actively express them and receive a response, i.e. alternately listening and talking. In this way, the child enters into a dialogue with the surrounding culture. Impressions create a need for expression, which in turn creates a need for new impressions etc. (Austring 2016, p. 1.)

In Austring's view, this specific dialogue between an individual and a surrounding world is especially intense during childhood. This is why early childhood practitioners should focus on supporting children's needs for self-expression by various methods, perhaps by storytelling techniques in particular. (Austring 2016, p. 1.)

## 5 Storytelling – theoretical and practical approaches

### 5.1 What is storytelling?

According to McLeod, sharing stories is a basic human activity (McLeod 1997, p. 37). Okri simply states that we are homo fabula – storytelling beings (Okri cited in Parkinson 2009, p. 23). Stories are present in all areas of our lives. Or, in other words, 'life can be perceived as stories moving at different levels, such as stories of experiences and events through which we interpret life and ourselves' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1110). However, as in case of creativity, the notion of story might not be easy to define. Researchers are not consistent on how to specify a concept of a story (McLeod 1997, p. 53). Some studies focus on qualities of a story, such as being dramatic or entertaining. Other writings emphasise the importance of 'grammatical' structure of stories and propose various models of story grammar. (McLeod 1997, pp. 53-55)

The simplest definition of a story might be the one that regard it as a description of a series of related events which are either true or imagined (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). However, this definition lacks the social aspect of a story as it is always told (or written) by one individual to another one. McLeod states that 'a story exists in a space between teller and audience' (McLeod 1997, p. 45). Similarly, Rose indicates that a story 'involves

a symbiotic exchange between teller and listener' and he adds that this exchange can be learned already by infants:

Just as the brain detects patterns in the visual forms of nature – a face, a figure, a flower – and in sound, so too it detects patterns in information. Stories are recognizable patterns, and in those patterns we find meaning. We use stories to make sense of our world and to share that understanding with others. They are the signal within the noise. (Rose 2011)

Some writers make an attempt to distinguish features that are specific for a story. Niemi proposes three fundamental characteristics of a story. According to her, a story is intended, what means that a story becomes a story at the moment of teller's decision 'to convey a specific communication containing experiential or imaginative content for a specific audience' (Niemi 2012, p. 20). Second characteristic of a story constitutes the fact that it is chosen and shaped by its teller. And the third one refers to the idea that a story has a meaning which is very personalized. In fact, Niemi argues that a story has three meanings: the personal meaning for a teller; the meaning for an audience at the moment of hearing a story; and the meaning that audience derives from a story some time after hearing it. (Niemi 2012, pp. 20-22.)

McLeod, following Bruner's views on storytelling as a tool for conveying meaning (Bruner cited in McLeod 1997, p. 41), suggests different set of fundamental features of storytelling. First of them is sequentiality which means that each story is built from a sequence of events. The event itself might not have any meaning, but the way how the event is placed or positioned within a story already have. McLeod indicates that:

This aspect of narrative communicates a sense of experience as a process (every action is preceded by something, and leads on to something else). The sequentiality of the story as a form of communication carries a sense of 'nextness': each bit of the story, each segment of action or feeling, somehow points toward and emerging future. (McLeod 1997, p. 41.)

Second feature of storytelling constitutes accounting for departures from the ordinary. It means that stories do not tell about ordinary, expectable events or routines, but rather about the events that go beyond the standards of everyday life. Consequently, the meaning of a story derives from 'the tension created between the exceptional events that are being recounted, and the ordinary routines that have been breached' (McLeod 1997, p. 42).

Although the events told in a story are 'out-of-ordinary', they take place at a specific and concrete time and place. They might be real, partly real or totally imaginary, what indicates the ambiguity of storytelling (McLeod 1997, p. 42). However, not only stories appear to be ambiguous. A storytelling performance, that is, an event in which a person tells a story to an audience, also has an aspect of ambiguity. There is not only one way of telling or reading a story, and there is not only one way of interpreting it. As McLeod points out, 'different audiences will interpret a story differently according to their interests and point of view' (McLeod 1997, p. 43).

Nevertheless, a story is not only a simple sequence of events. It also encompasses 'the inner world of the storyteller or the person(s) about whom the story is being told' (McLeod 1997, p. 42). Thus, the meaning of a story has foundations in a storyteller's identity, intentions, feelings and beliefs. This feature of storytelling is called communicating subjectivity. (McLeod 1997, p. 42.)

While discussing the concept of storytelling, there is a need to explain the difference (or connection) between a story and a narrative. It is not uncommon that the words 'story' and 'narrative' are used interchangeably. The distinctive line between a story and a narrative is almost invisible. Both notions seem to have the same characteristics and functions. However, despite many similarities, these two terms refer to two different things. In McLeod's opinion, 'a story is an account of a specific event', while a narrative 'is a story-based account of happenings' that 'contains within it other forms of communication in addition to stories' (McLeod 1997, p. 39). Similarly, Austring views narrative as an entity that incorporates a story along with other elements, such as acting characters, time and place, goals and means (Austring 2016, p. 9). Some authors define narrative as 'a mode of thinking', that is, 'a continuous account of a series of events or facts that shapes them into an emotionally satisfactory whole' (Kangas et al. 2011, p. 66). Engel explains the distinction between a narrative and a story in a following way:

A narrative is an account of experiences or events that are temporally sequenced and convey some meaning. A narrative can be of an imagined event or a lived everyday event. But, unlike a story, which is told or communicated intentionally, a narrative can be embedded in a conversation or interaction and need not be experienced as a story by the speaker. (Engel cited in Bredikyte et al. 2017, p. 12.)

Therefore, a story is considered as an intended verbal communication while a narrative can take the shape of verbal as well as non-verbal expression. In the context of early childhood education, a narrative can be visible not only in children's stories, but also in their play, drawings or body movements (Bredikyte et al. 2017, p. 12). As Bredikyte and her colleagues highlight, what does matter in the child's narrative, either verbal or non-verbal, is 'the child's personal view of the events, a personal sense or personal "theme" – *the child's own authentic narrative voice*' (Bredikyte et al. 2017, p. 12).

## 5.2 Children's development of narrative skills

As children grow and develop, they naturally gain more narrative skills. This phenomenon is strongly related with the process of language acquisition (Faulkner 2011, p. 58). Children's first narrations appear with their first words and sentences (McLeod 1997, p. 40). The more language competences children acquire, the more narrative skills they develop (Agosto 2013, p. 56).

At 24 months, children create narrative by combining events from real life, mostly of themselves. Their narratives do not have fictional aspects, clear storylines or cause-effect structures. However, when children are 30 months, their stories become more fictional and include more action. Moreover, they use more movements and variable intonation and volume of voice. (Cattanach 2008, p. 65.)

The narrative development milestone occurs at the age of 3, when most of children start to 'demonstrate the ability to use a sequence of events in a related logical way within familiar activities' (Cattanach 2008, p. 65). From this point until the age of 5, children increase their skills of event sequencing and even problem-solving. As 5-year-olds, they are able to join and position events in order to form a logical story theme and to use causality. And at 6 years, most of children fully develop the basic narrative abilities. (Cattanach 2008, pp. 65-66.)

Austring argues that narrative competence of kindergarten children 'almost explodes' as their language and imagination skills have significantly evolved (Austring 2016, p. 7). This is the consequence of being constantly surrounded by narratives created by parents, family members, friends, but also media (Curenton 2006, p. 80). Children gain narrative skills through social interactions, or, as Curenton points out, through 'repeated verbal exchanges with important people in their lives' (Curenton 2006, p. 80). Similarly,

Dowling suggests that 'with increasing use of language children starts to place their world into an understandable framework by using social scripts to describe daily events that they experience' (Dowling 2010, p. 213).

The influence of a society, its culture, norms and values, seems to be enormous in the development of children's narrative skills. Curenton demonstrates that the way how children tell stories strongly depends on a cultural framework. For instance, U.S. and European children's stories seem to be based on European storytelling tradition, where stories have a structure of a beginning, middle, and end, and they are topic-centered, meaning, they focus on one central event and one main character. Contrary to this, children with African American and Latino American background tell stories that are theme-centered and contain several events and several main characters which relate to the story theme. When it comes to Asian American children, their stories seem to be 'very concise and minimal in detail' (Curenton 2006, pp. 78-79). Other studies show that children's storytelling is influenced not as much as by the cultural background, but rather by the context in which children perform their narratives. For instance, Pinto and her colleagues indicate that children narrative competences vary significantly whether they are telling stories inspired by a prompt, such as picture or video, or whether they are telling stories by their own without a prompt. In addition to this, researchers prove the difference between the stories expressed face-to-face and stories told through a telephone. (Pinto et al. 2018, p. 145.)

Thus, children's stories manifest in different shapes. As Curenton argues, 'oral storytelling is an art; therefore, just as with finger painting, no two children's stories will be the same' (Curenton 2006, p. 87). They might be very short, created with just few words or sentences, or they might be extremely long. They might lack grammatical structures or logical coherence. Sometimes they tell about real-life events, sometimes they are purely imaginative, and sometimes they are both. But, despite their form and content, children's stories always convey the meaning. They act as open gates to children's inner world. And this world is extremely rich and resourceful, full of imagination and creative potential. Therefore, in children's storytelling, an outcome is not actually important. It is the cognitive process of creating a story that matters the most (Curenton 2006, p. 87).

### 5.3 Why storytelling matter?

As seen in the previous chapter, the link between the development of language and the development of narrative and storytelling skills is undoubtful. Language and storytelling seem to be interdependent. Storytelling would not exist without the language. While language would not develop so richly without storytelling. Through storytelling, children have an opportunity to practice their language abilities, to experiment with words, to exercise language structures, and to increase memory skills (Davies 2007, p. 6). In other words, narrative competences 'provide the appropriate context to organize oral (and written) information' (Curenton cited in Pinto et al. 2018, p. 143).

Children's practice of narrative competence builds strong foundation for developing their future skills in schools. Researchers agree that storytelling practice has beneficial impact on reading skills, writing skills and school achievements in general (Curenton 2006; Davies 2007; O'Neill 2015; Pinto et al. 2018). Curenton emphasizes the importance of practicing storytelling as it gives a possibility to use 'decontextualized talk'.

Decontextualized talk is about objects, feelings, and ideas experienced in the past or expected in the future, whereas contextualized talk is only about the present. Decontextualized talk is important because it promotes higher-order thinking such as reminiscing and planning. Regardless of whether children relate their fantasies or real-life personal experiences, their stories tell of events that either have happened or may happen. Decontextualized talk is specific and grammatically sophisticated talk that sets the foundation for school achievement and literacy. (Curenton 2006, p. 81.)

Producing (and listening to) decontextualized speech has also another function: it enhances comprehension skills (Curenton 2006, p. 81). Davies indicates that 'storytelling aids in the development of children's ability to interpret and understand events beyond their immediate experience' (Davies 2007, p. 5). Similarly, Pinto and her colleagues points out that 'the practice of telling stories allows young children to derive meaning from experiences, and to discuss and organize these experiences into meaningful episodes' (Pinto et al. 2018, p. 143).

Storytelling might be viewed as an excellent tool for social and interpersonal development (Davies 2007, p. 5). It helps children to gain the ability to empathize, to try out how others might feel and think (Zipes 2004, p. 19). As Curenton states, 'storytelling allows children to reason socially, to get inside the mind of imaginary characters and

think about what the characters might think, want, or believe' (Curenton 2006, p. 83). As a consequence, storytelling enriches children's imagination and enhances their creativity (Davies 2007, p. 6). Zipes indicates that 'when children tell stories they often reveal gifts and talents that have gone undiscovered with traditional approaches to learning' (Zipes 2004, p. 19).

Apart from language, comprehension, social and creative skills, storytelling plays an important role in the development of child's self-identity. Curenton indicates that 'through stories about past experiences, children learn to create autobiographical narratives, explicit stories about events that occur in one's life' (Curenton 2006, p. 82). Stories act as elements of construction of children's self-portrait (Engel cited in Cattanach 2008, p. 21). Children can observe this self-portrait, reflect on it, think about it as well as change it (Cattanach 2008, p. 21). Creating self-identity through stories, whether they are real or imagined, might be very empowering, as Cattanach explains in the following statement:

Telling stories and playing stories can be a way of controlling our world and what happens to us in that world and for a child who lacks power it can be an enriching experience. For once the child can say, 'I'm the king of the castle, and you're the dirty rascal,' and not live the consequences in their reality world. (Cattanach 2008, p. 24.)

Storytelling seems to be a powerful mean of self-expression as it enables to communicate 'who we are, what we have experienced, and how we make sense of the world' (Zipes 2004, p. 208). As Zipes metaphorically describes, 'the world of story is a world of wonder and wisdom, connecting the world inside us with the world outside' (Zipes 2004, p. 208). Contrary to adults, children are not always able to name and contextualize what is happening in their 'inner world'. This is why storytelling is so significant in their lives. Through storytelling, they can communicate their feelings and emotions (McLeod 1997, p. 47). Using Curenton's words, storytelling is 'a vehicle for processing emotions' (Curenton 2006, p. 82), as it helps children to resolve their internal conflicts, dilemmas and tensions (McLeod 1997, p. 43).

The benefits of storytelling are not only visible in the context of an individual. The meaning of storytelling expands by strengthening community and promoting engagement and collaboration. Zipes argues that stories connect storytellers and their listeners in a particular way, enabling them to establish a community 'evoked by the issues, information, ideas, and attitudes embodied in the story' (Zipes 2004, p. 208).

The group acts as the source of wisdom for each individual. The stories that emerge (...) reflect what is of personal importance to the author(s). Sharing stories allows what is inside and private to become public and part of the collective knowing, establishing each person as someone with something of value to say, a validation that enhances participants' sense of self-worth. (Zipes 2004, p. 208.)

Surrounding environments, in which children participate and interact, affect the development of their own personal voice and the creation of their own personal history:

Narrative models and influences in early childhood help to transform the episodic memory system into a long-lasting autobiographical memory for significant events in one's own life, and thus a self-history" (Nelson cited in Bredikyte 2017, p. 12).

Through storytelling, children express not only real experiences that happened in their lives, but also imaginary ones (Bredikyte 2017; Curenton 2006). This allows them to understand their surrounding world, to make sense of their experiences, to interpret events, as well as to process their thoughts and emotions (Aerila & Rönkkö 2015; Bredikyte 2017; Curenton 2006).

## **6 Children's storytelling in practice**

### **6.1 General practical implications**

There are multiple strategies of incorporating storytelling into activities with preschool children. As already mentioned, storytelling does not require any special equipment. Every teacher is able to use storytelling techniques in his or her practice. To begin with, perhaps the easiest method is to initiate children's autobiographic narratives. Teacher can simply invite children to tell stories about themselves, to describe themselves, or to share what they were doing the previous day or during the weekend (Curenton 2006, p. 83). This storytelling activity might be very suitable in group sessions as it 'promotes not only the teller's skills but also the listening skills of the other children' (Curenton 2006, p. 83).

In general, working with a group of children have a lot of advantages in terms of creative storytelling. In a group, children can be encouraged to share their own stories and then to discuss them with other children. They can ask questions about the stories, give feedback or even add something new to other stories (Curenton 2006, p. 84). Another type of co-narration is a group-authored story – one story created by the whole group. In this process every child contributes to the story-making by taking turns and adding own piece to the story (Curenton 2006, p. 84). Thus, producing co-narrations in groups allows children to practice collaborative creativity. By sharing experiences, connecting and exploring, they ‘tune in to the same imaginary world and take turns building on each other’s creativity’ (Curenton 2006, p. 84). Consequently, collaborative storytelling strengthens children’s cooperation skills and sense of community.

Whether in case of a group of children or one individual child, sometimes teachers might need to support the child’s storytelling by asking questions. Curenton emphasises that ‘it is adult attentiveness and active engagement via questioning and feedback that help children become better storytellers’ (Curenton 2006, p. 85). Mindful listening, appropriate and thoughtful responding as well as asking reflective questions can encourage children to develop their stories and share ‘more details about the setting, the plot, and the characters’ emotions and thoughts’ (Curenton 2006, p. 84). In this context, reflective questions refer to open-ended questions which do not produce “yes” or “no” answers. Open-ended questions stimulate children ‘to reflect more deeply on their circumstances, leaving them room to pursue their ideas’ (Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al. 2019, p. 6). Faulkner states that ‘asking genuinely open questions and giving children plenty of thinking time allows children to offer extended comments and explanations indicative of high-order thinking’ (Faulkner 2011, p. 49). Open-ended questions might encourage children to rethink (“Is there another way...?”); to recall (“Did you notice what happened when ...?”); to predict (“What would happen if ...?”); or to reason (“I wonder why that happen? What do you think...?”). (Parkinson 2009, p. 30.) However, open-ended questions, such as the “why” questions, do not only seek an explanation. They also communicate to the children that teachers ‘genuinely do not know the answer and thus children are willing to enlighten them’ (Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al. 2019, p. 6). They show children that teachers are ready to listen them attentively; that teachers are interested in what children have to say.

Moreover, open-ended questions signal to the children that there are not right or wrong answers (Parkinson 2009, p. 30). All ideas are respected and accepted. Nothing is

rejected. This approach also indicates that an adult should not correct the reasoning of children either challenge their opinions (Faulkner 2011, p. 49). Quoted by Faulkner, one early childhood education teacher commented that 'it's about seeing every idea as a stepping stone to another, potentially better idea' (Faulkner 2011, p. 49)

In addition to this, children's storytelling can be supported by providing them various prompts. Prompts act as storytelling triggers. They can inspire children and give the foundations for their story. It can be just one picture or set of related pictures or the whole picture book that sets a story in motion. Also, puppets, dolls or any other toys can be used to encourage children to create a story. In a sense, these items function as magical tools for children, allowing them to use their imagination and pretend-play skills (Curenton 2006, p. 85).

To enrich children's oral storytelling experience, teachers can facilitate arts and crafts activities. Children can be asked to draw or paint a picture inspired by their stories, or to use different craft making materials to create story-related characters or items. Drawing and craft making provide not only playful and entertaining elements to the storytelling process, but also more possibilities for self-expression. In other words, combining oral storytelling with visual storytelling allows children to express themselves in many diverse ways. Moreover, it might be beneficial especially for children who have not gained enough language skills.

Another method that uses storytelling as its core element is narrative play. Introduced by Hakkarainen and Bredikyte, narrative play is 'an imaginative, collaborative role-play activity where children jointly construct a storyline' (Bredikyte 2017, p. 11). In narrative play, children do not simply act out a known story but rather they collaboratively build a "lived" narrative by improvising and re-creating the events. In a sense, they interpret the story by using their own voice and own point of view. And like in any other storytelling method, also in narrative play children incorporate both real-life and imaginative events. (Bredikyte 2017, p. 11.)

## 6.2 Storycrafting method

There is one approach that certainly stands out from the rest of storytelling strategies – it is a method called storycrafting. It started to develop in the 1980's when researchers observed the 'need for a method that would allow for listening to children's thoughts as told by themselves' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1111). The storycrafting method seems to be very simple: a child is asked to tell a story of his or her own choice, while an adult, called a 'storycrafter', writes down the story exactly as it was told (Aerila & Rönkkö 2015, p. 91). When the story is finished, a storycrafter reads it aloud in order to allow a child make changes or corrections (Aerila & Rönkkö 2015; Karlsson 2013).

The way how storycrafter approaches a child and asks to tell a story has a significant meaning. Riihelä and Karlsson proposes the following introduction:

Tell a story that you want. I will write it down just as you will tell it. When the story is ready I will read it aloud. And then if you want you can correct or make any changes. (Riihelä, Karlsson cited in Karlsson 2013, p. 1111.)

This straightforward instruction indicates that a storycrafter is ready and willing to listen to the story, whatever that story would be. A storycrafter does not request a child to tell a story by saying "would you like to tell" because this type of request gives two options: a child might agree on telling a story or simply answer "no" (Karlsson 2013, p. 1111). Thus, a storycrafter should make explicit instruction. As Karlsson points out, 'in storycrafting everything is said aloud and done openly' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1111).

In storycrafting method, the adult's role is not only as an active listener, but also as a "silent" listener. While a child is telling the story, an adult is writing down or recording every word that a child says, even along with misspellings or mistakes. A storycrafter does not make any changes, he or she does not 'ask questions, or demand further explanations, or suggest improvements', or 'evaluate the child or his or her abilities (Karlsson 2013, p. 1112). Karlsson stresses that 'the narrator's own tale is fine and interesting just as it is, in the way he/she presents it' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1112).

After finishing the story, a child is asked if he or she wants to do any corrections to the own story. And again, only a child decided about any changes in the story; a storycrafter cannot guide the child in any manner. As Aerila and Rönkkö indicates, 'if there are errors or inconsistencies in the story, according to the storycrafter, they are to be left there if

the child is happy with the story' (Aerila & Rönkkö 2015, p. 91). Similarly, Karlsson argues that:

Storycrafting is always based on interaction and willingness of the storycrafter to listen to the teller. It is up to the teller to decide how the final product will be used. He or she has the copyright of the story. (Karlsson 2013, p. 1112.)

It is significant to underline that, in the storycrafting method, stories created by children do not need to have any particular structure, characteristic for some certain narrative or genre. They do not need to be traditional stories or fairy tales, or reports from the child's life. As Karlsson points out, 'the stories can consist of a couple of words, or they can be books with several pages, they can be poet-like, or dialogues, or illustrated with pictures and melodies' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1112). It is the child's decision on how the story is told. Thus, storycrafting is 'a flexible and free way of expression' (Karlsson 2013, p. 1114). Riihelä emphasises that 'with storycrafting method, children can be heard the way children want to be heard: children can choose the words, drawings, and acts they want to use to express themselves' (Riihelä 2001, p. 2).

Taking everything into consideration, one can distinguish several principal elements constituting the storycrafting method. The first one is the freedom of narrative which allows children to express what is meaningful for them. The second one is the opportunity to make children's tacit knowledge visible and inner voice heard. The third aspect of storycrafting refers to fact that children are viewed as producers of information and culture. They create products of culture by incorporating and structuring their real-life experiences into the narrative. And the last core element of storycrafting is the reciprocal encountering which empowers and activates both a child as a narrator and an adult as a storycrafter. (Karlsson 2013, p. 1114.)

## 7 Children's storytelling as a creative social pedagogical tool

### 7.1 What is social pedagogy and the Diamond Model?

The discussion on creativity and storytelling as a method of enhancing creativity demonstrates that these issues are deeply rooted in the social pedagogical context. Social pedagogy is a complex and broad field of practice (Storø 2013, p. 11) which is guided by values and ethical guidelines, and grounded in several theoretical perspectives (Storø 2013, p. 16). In the most general way, social pedagogy can be described as empowering practices intending to support the growth, development and well-being of an individual in a holistic manner. Social pedagogical practices are based on a principle that 'each person has inherent potential, is valuable, resourceful and can make a meaningful contribution to their wider community' (ThemPra 2020). In other words, social pedagogy is about helping people to gain the skills and abilities which allows them to lead a happy and purposeful life.

In the context of early childhood education, social pedagogy is 'concerned with the whole child: a physical, thinking, feeling, creative human beings in relationship with other people and already contributing to our society' (Petrie cited in Charfe 2019, p. 9). In order to define social pedagogical practice, Cameron and Moss use the metaphor of a 'thriving garden for children' which is 'a fertile environment conducive to their well-being and learning, developing their inherent resources and connecting them to their surroundings' (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 33).

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of social pedagogy is embraced within the concept of the Diamond Model (Fig. 1). Introduced by Eichsteller and Holthoff, the Diamond Model constitutes a framework which provides the core elements of social pedagogy and presents how they are related and influenced by each other (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 38). The Model has a 'shape' of a diamond because 'diamonds, like humans, are not always shiny and polished but all have the potential to be' (Gardner 2019, p. 47). In order to support individuals to recognize and develop this potential, four underlying principles must be taken into consideration: well-being and happiness, holistic learning, relationships and empowerment.



Figure 1. The Diamond Model (ThemPra 2020)

At the heart of the diamond lie positive experiences, meaning, experiences that lead to a 'successful everyday' (Grunwald & Thiersch in Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 38). Positive experiences function as the means to achieve all core elements of social pedagogy. Through positive experiences individuals gain the abilities to build self-confidence and self-worth, and as a result, they reinforce the feeling of happiness and the state of well-being (Gardner 2019, p. 76). Moreover, positive experiences contribute to the development of strong relationships, learning and capacity-building. Consequently, this can 'take a person nearer to a sense of ownership, pride and empowerment' (Gardner 2019, p. 49). Using Trevithick's words, positive experiences are 'energizing experiences' which develop belief in one's own potential (Trevithick in Gardner 2019, p. 49)

Gardner argues that promoting happiness and well-being is 'the overarching aim' of social pedagogy (Gardner 2019, p. 48). However, it is important to underline that there is the difference between the notions 'happiness' and 'well-being' Happiness refers to a present emotional state of an individual, while well-being signifies 'a long-lasting sense of physical, mental, emotional and social well-being' (ThemPra 2020). Similarly, Ryan and Deci indicate that well-being 'consists of more than just happiness. It lies instead in the actualization of human potentials' (Ryan & Deci in Cameron & Moss, 2011, p. 39.) Each person's potential is unique, therefore, for each person the meaning of well-being is unique as well (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 39). In other words, well-being and happiness are very individual and subjective (ThemPra 2020).

In a social pedagogical context, holistic learning occurs 'at all stages and in all aspects of life' (Gardner 2019, p. 48). Holistic learning is particularly important for children. It encompasses 'knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, sensory perceptions, bodily experiences and thinking' (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 23). Children are active agents in the process of learning (Cameron &

Moss 2011, p. 40). Thus, the aim of social pedagogy is to provide learning opportunities (ThemPra 2020). As Gardner points out, 'the role of the social pedagogue is to facilitate individuals in accessing a sense of potential and walking alongside the individual as the learning takes place' (Gardner 2019, p. 48).

Promoting well-being and happiness as well as supporting holistic learning would not happen without positive relationships. In terms of social pedagogy, relationships between practitioner and, for instance, children should be based on empathy, warmth and genuineness (Gardner 2019, p. 73). Cameron and Moss state that trust is a crucial component of social pedagogic relationships:

As trust can only be nurtured gradually and carefully, building strong relationships takes time and is a joint process, requiring both parties to trust the other person and to be trusted by him or her. Placing trust in children, in their competence and responsibility, can be an empowering experience for them, not only strengthening the relationship but also their self-confidence. (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 43)

Therefore, trustful relationships create 'the framework for empowering approaches towards children's rights, lifespace, participation and life-world' (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 44).

The concept of empowerment is one of the main pillars of social pedagogy. In general view, it can be defined as 'a progression that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases the capacity of people to act on issues that they themselves define as important' (Luttrell & Quiroz 2009, p. 16). In the context of early childhood education, 'empowerment highlights children's human rights, their active involvement in decisions that affect them, and the emancipation of human beings at an individual and collective level' (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 44). Therefore, in the social pedagogic relationship 'power is used not as a form of control but as responsibility' (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 44). This relationship intends to strengthen an individual's sense of coherence which 'is developed through the feeling of being able to make sense of and influence our circumstances, of life appearing comprehensible, manageable and meaningful' (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 45).

Although not included in the Diamond Model, the concept of participation plays an important role in the social pedagogic practice. In this context, participation can be defined as 'a value-shaped dynamic process leading to action and change' (Simpson

2019, p. 84). When it comes to children's participation, this process is based on taking part in some activity and, particularly, in decision-making (Thomas cited in Simpson 2019, p. 84). In Lansdown's view, children's participation is 'an ongoing process of [children's] expression and active involvement in decision making at different levels in matters that concern them' (Lansdown cited in Simpson 2019, p. 85). Children's participation is rooted in dialogue and mutual respect between children and adults, as well as adults' full consideration of children's views (Lansdown cited in Simpson 2019, p. 85). Cameron and Moss describes the process of participation as follows:

In particular, the right to meaningful participation in decisions affecting people's lives is a cornerstone that enables people to empower themselves by gaining more ownership and feeling respected. Meaningful participation in a social pedagogic relationship is always a social and inclusive process, about engaging in dialogue as equal human beings exploring different perspectives. (Cameron & Moss 2011, p. 47)

Participation is about 'people's voices being heard' (Simpson 2019, p. 84). Creating opportunities for children's participation means respecting their rights to be heard. As stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the United Nations, children have the right to express their views freely and to be provided the opportunities to be heard (the United Nations 1989). In this context, it seems that storytelling methods might be the excellent opportunities for children's self-expression.

## 7.2 The Diamond Model of storytelling

After brief presentation of the most essential concepts of social pedagogy, it is clear that children's storytelling can be regarded as a creative social pedagogical tool and analysed within the framework of the Diamond Model. Children's storytelling can be viewed as a positive experience which energizes children by strengthening their self-worth and reinforcing the development of their potential – particularly, creative potential. And as already mentioned, identifying and actualizing one's own potential lies at the bottom of happiness and well-being.

Moreover, storytelling is a learning process. As a creative method, storytelling helps children to develop not only language and narrative skills, but also imagination skills and creative abilities, which build the foundation for future life-management and well-being. Practising storytelling, therefore simultaneously exercising creativity, allows children to

increase self-confidence and self-esteem – essential features that are necessary to cope with uncertain and changeable world.

Since children's development and learning occurs in interactions with other people, it is of high importance that relationship between a child-storyteller and an adult-listener is based on empathy, respect and mutual trust. Placing trust in children and their skills is very stimulating and empowering. Trust builds the feeling of security. When children feel secure and comfortable, they are more open to share their stories, self-express, use imagination and simply be creative.

Using Rothuizen and Harbo's concept of meaningful belonging, it might be said that storytelling opens the space for the process of 'bonding and bridging' (Rothuizen & Harbo in Gardner 2019, p. 75). Bonding refers to fostering self-confidence, self-respect, sense of belonging and participation (Gardner 2019, p. 75). When children gain enough self-belief they move further, through the "bridge", to explore and try out other activities and to join groups of other children. In other words, they move towards 'being part of an inclusive community' (Gardner 2019, p. 75).

Therefore, as a method which enhances creativity, storytelling is clearly empowering. It gives a sense of control over one's own words, one's own story, thus, over self. It gives an opportunity to be heard and to be included. Children have a valuable and meaningful voice and they have the right to use that voice.

## **8 Handbook for early childhood education professionals**

### **8.1 The process of creating the handbook**

Investigating the field of creativity and children's storytelling led me to create a handbook which constitutes a concise manual providing information on how early childhood education professionals can enhance children's creativity through storytelling method. During the developmental process, I have collected a wide variety of sources from scholarly literature, including books, journals and articles, and selected the most relevant information for creating the handbook. Thus, the choice of information was dictated by its usefulness and practicability. In other words, while creating the handbook, I was

focusing on how certain theoretical data can be used and/or applied in early childhood education practice. My goal was to find and use the most practical implications for creatively implementing storytelling in the work with children.

Therefore, I included brief presentation of the concept of creativity and underlined the approach that every child can develop creative capabilities as every child has creative potentials. In addition, I explained why cultivating creativity is important in early childhood education and what are its benefits on children's development. Then, I emphasised the most significant elements of an environment in which children's creativity can flourish, as well as the most essential aspects of behaviour and attitude of early childhood education professional who wants to support children's creativity. The following part of the handbook is the presentation of storytelling as one of the methods that enables children to freely express themselves and, thus, enhances creativity. Moreover, I briefly listed the main positive effects of storytelling on children's growth and learning. Then, I proposed several practical implications for implementing storytelling activities in the work with children. I presented six examples of storytelling activities and explained how they can be applied in practice. These include autobiographic narratives, group authored story, narrative play, storycrafting, storytelling with art activities, and storytelling with prompts. In addition, I suggested what early childhood education practitioner should and shouldn't do when a child tells a story. I depicted my suggestions in the form of the list of "dos" and "don'ts" for teachers who use storytelling activities with children. And in the end, I gathered several issues that should be taken into consideration before implementing storytelling session, such as time and space, cultural and social context, children's interests, planning and preparing, and teacher's role in the activity. The handbook is attached to this paper as an appendix (Appendix 1).

## 8.2 Evaluation

The handbook can be regarded as a brief presentation of theoretical approaches as well as practical suggestions for implementing storytelling activities in early childhood education settings. Its form is very concise as it contains the most relevant issues related to the concepts of creativity and storytelling. For instance, despite the fact that the subject of creativity is enormously vast and there are numerous theories on the matter, the handbook constitutes only a small fragment of the large picture of creativity studies. Thus, it is not sufficient and comprehensive enough to deepen the knowledge on the concept on creativity. The handbook has more practical nature and is designed for early

childhood education practitioners as well as anybody who works with children and would like to use storytelling methods in their practice. It includes many suggestions on how to implement storytelling activities in order to enhance children's creativity. The suggestions are grounded on the theoretical investigation as well as verified by me and my work colleagues through our everyday practice in early childhood education settings. Nevertheless, the handbook lacks precise description of an example of storytelling session and detailed presentation of how this type of session might look step by step. One of the ICEC's employees, who requested to stay anonymous, commented that the handbook could have even more practical or functional nature and include more examples from "the field". Thus, this might be a suggestion for developing the project by conducting more storytelling sessions, carrying out further investigations, and, as a result, creating more thorough handbook.

## 9 Conclusion

Taking everything into consideration, my investigation and development assignment was successful as I achieved the goal of creating the handbook. I have collected enough material to find the answer to the question on how to enhance children's creativity through storytelling. I explored various definitions of creativity and determined the importance of cultivating it in early childhood education. I investigated in what contexts and environments children can develop their creative potentials and what is the role of an adult in this process. Moreover, I established the meaning of storytelling as a method enhancing creativity and determined what an early childhood education practitioner should take into account when implementing storytelling activities. Therefore, I concluded that storytelling can be regarded as a creative social pedagogical tool which builds the foundation for participation, empowerment, trustful relationship, holistic learning and well-being.

Both concepts, creativity and storytelling, are broad subjects. Thus, the biggest difficulty of my developmental process lied in selecting the most relevant information and constructing theoretical basis for the handbook. Moreover, I found out that there is a small body of research that connects children's storytelling with the concept of children's creativity. Most studies focus on enhancing creativity through arts and crafts, music, play or drama, but there is little attention directed towards storytelling methods through which

creativity can be cultivated. Thus, I strongly believe that further research on this matter can be very beneficial for the professionals in the field of early childhood education.

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## How to enhance children's creativity through storytelling?

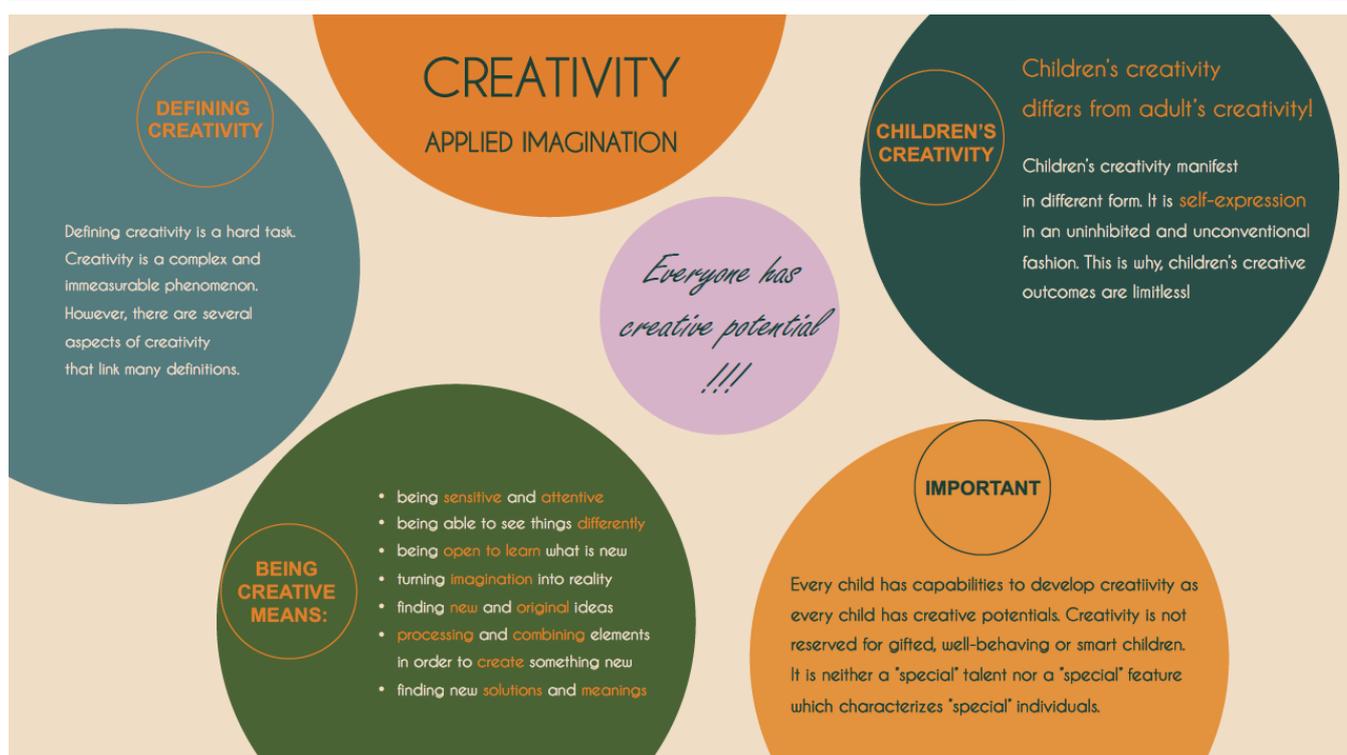
### Handbook for early childhood education practitioners

The author of handbook's content and design is Dominika Herranen. The handbook is grounded on theoretical research on how to foster children's creativity through storytelling.

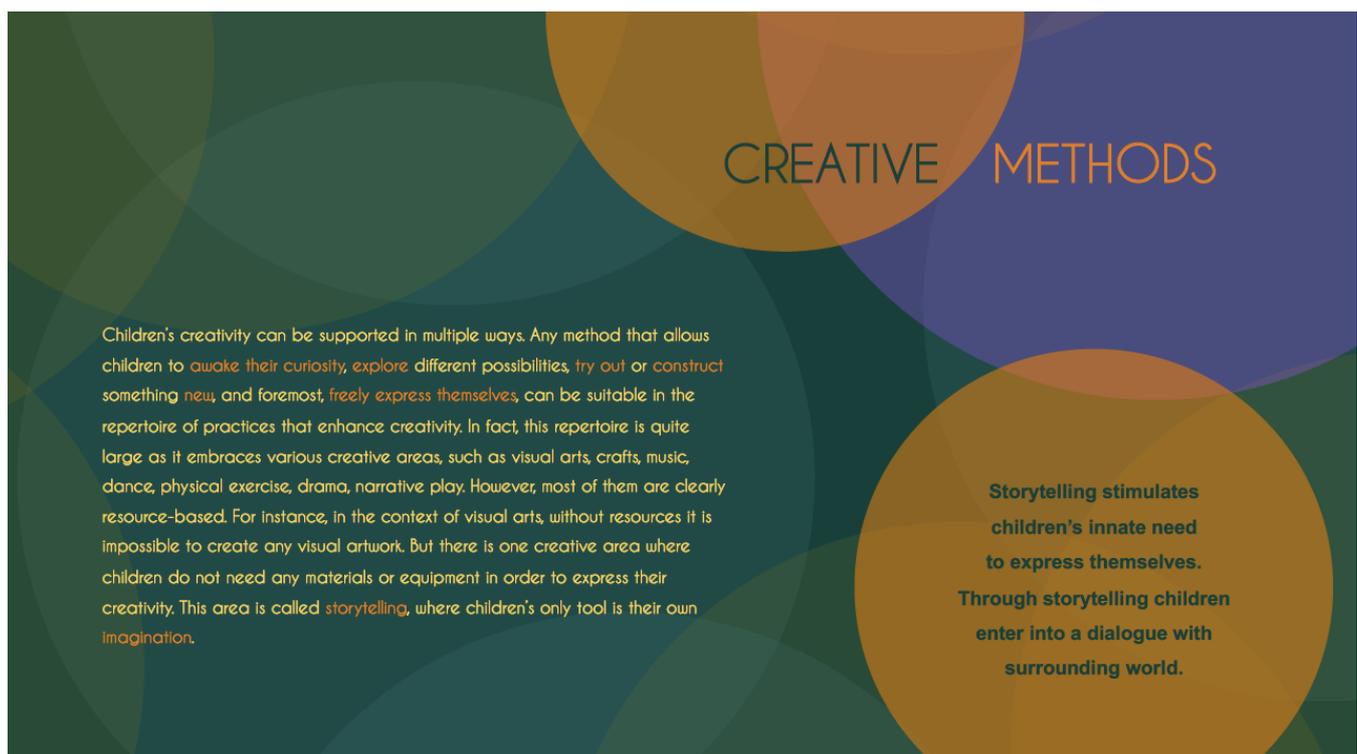
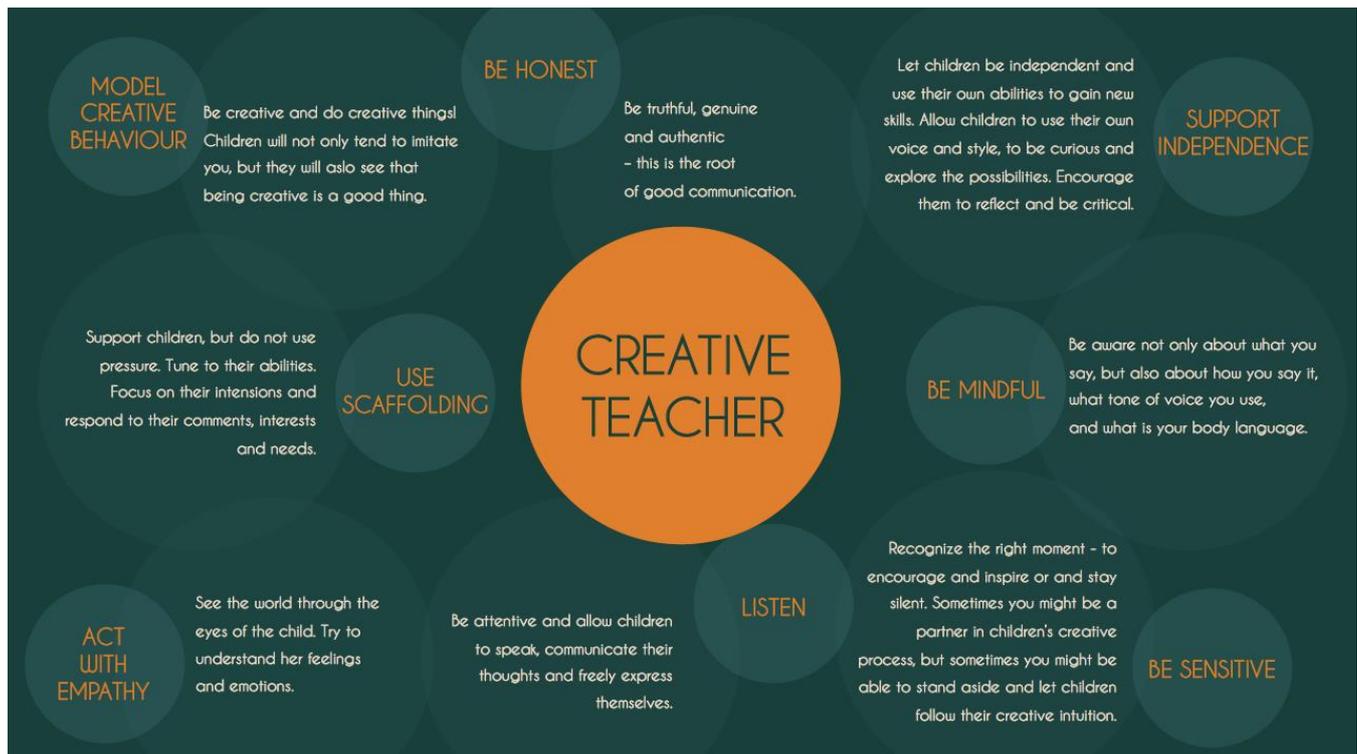


## In this handbook you will learn:

- About creativity – what it is and why it matters?
- How to create creative environments?
- What to do to support creativity as a teacher?
- What is storytelling?
- How storytelling is beneficial for children's development?
- How to use storytelling in practice?







**STORYTELLING**

Storytelling is a form of communication of one's experiences. It is a tool for conveying the meaning. Story encompasses the inner world of the storyteller. The meaning of the story is rooted in a storyteller's identity, intentions, feelings and beliefs. As an intended verbal communication, story is one of many elements that build wider entity, called a narrative. Narrative can take the shape of verbal as well as non-verbal expression.

As children grow and develop, they naturally gain more narrative skills. This phenomenon is strongly related with the process of language acquisition. Children's first narrations appear with their first words and sentences. The more language competences children acquire, the more narrative skills they develop.

Children's stories manifest in different shapes. They might be very short, created with just few words or sentences, or they might be extremely long. They might lack grammatical structures or logical coherence. Sometimes they tell about real-life events, sometimes they are purely imaginative, and sometimes they are both. But, despite their form and content, children's stories always convey the meaning. They act as open gates to children's inner world. And this world is extremely rich and resourceful, full of imagination and creative potential. Therefore, in children's storytelling, an outcome is not actually important. It is the cognitive process of creating a story that matters the most.

*Children's storytelling is about expressing their own authentic narrative voice.*

**STORYTELLING HELPS:**

- to practice language skills
- to experiment with words and language structures
- to develop reading and writing skills
- to enhance comprehension skills
- to increase memory
- to develop interpretation abilities
- to derive meaning from events
- to increase social and interpersonal skills
- to gain the ability to empathize
- to try out how others might feel and think
- to develop self-identity
- to create autobiographical narratives
- to create empowering and enriching experiences
- to self-express
- to communicate beliefs, feelings and emotions
- to process thoughts and emotions
- to resolve internal conflicts, dilemmas and tensions
- to understand surrounding world
- to make sense of experiences
- to strengthen collaboration skills

*As a result, storytelling enriches children's imagination and enhances their creativity!*



