

**Report to Saide African Story Book project
Book-making with children from Sophiatown Community
Psychological Counselling Services**

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The icy, dry Johannesburg wind blows in through the door as the children arrive, bundled in layers of old jerseys and ill-fitting coats. Some huddle around the two gas heaters we lit earlier to warm the room, others sit close together squashed on to the sofa's and chairs that line the room. They are silent and watchful, unsure. They sit in family groups, the little one's feet dangling vulnerably above the floor in their scuffed shoes. Patience and Ena come through from the kitchen with cups of warm tea and plates heaped high with scrambled egg on toast. They greet the children they know from family counselling. The older ones begin to eat, still silent but some of the little ones sit, overwhelmed, and have to be gently encouraged to begin, which they do, fixedly concentrating on the food. The room begins to smell damp, warm and toasty as I squeeze myself onto the end of a sofa and smile at the two boys sitting together on one chair. I watch as they eat, thinking about how the subdued feeling in the room reflects their vulnerability, my mind focused on the need to work within this vulnerability but not be bound by it. I know that each of them has a story that they can tell, a story that can help them in some small way to make meaning from the difficult circumstances evident in their scuffed shoes, old coats, wary faces and their need for the toast, eggs and tea. I think about how, this time, they will be able to share their stories with the wider world, a world in which they are so often "victims of other people's accounts" (Achebe, 2003, p. 4), where they are so often represented as 'foreigner' 'refugee', 'migrant', 'unaccompanied minor', 'traumatised'. I reflect on the fact that this work is for me an activist venture, by facilitating a process in which the children can tell their lived and inner narratives in their own way it will allow observers to "apprehend the precarious character of lives lost in war... [and the] apprehension [may] coincide with an ethical and political opposition to the losses war entails" (Butler, 2009, p. 13).

1. Context

1.1 Being a refugee in the Bertams/Yeoville area of Johannesburg

The 24 children who participated in the book-making workshop ranged in age from seven to 13 years with the majority eight to 11 years old, 16 of them were girls and eight boys. Most were refugees from the war in eastern DRC and economic collapse in Zimbabwe and one child was from South Africa. All lived in the Bertrams/Yeoville area of Johannesburg.

The area is characterised by abandoned, run down houses and blocks of apartments which often have no services. Most of the children lived with their mothers or both parents in single rooms rented from landlords who charged exorbitant rents for a small room with a shared kitchen and bathroom (Walker, 2015). The families struggled to pay rent and eviction at the end of the month is a constant threat and often a reality. Parents struggled to find jobs and the meagre amount they made selling vegetables on the street, or acting as security guards, for example, was often not enough for food and rent. Most of the children were at school and they all spoke English, a few had arrived recently and spoke only Lingala or French. The children from DRC had often been through traumatic experiences in the war and all of the children, wherever they came from, had lost homes, loved grandparents and familiar places, many had also been through family and domestic violence. The Bertrams/Yeoville area is characterised by high rates of violent crime and verbal and even physical abuse against foreigners was a daily threat on the streets and in school (Monama & Landau, 2016). This meant all of the children lived with high levels of everyday stress (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010) which was often made worse by their parent's anxiety and fear caused by previous war experiences (Ibid. 2010).

None of the families had legal documents making them vulnerable to police harassment and endless bureaucratic abuse as they sought to access refugee

papers or renew asylum seeker status (Amit, 2015). Aside from this precarity their lack of legal status meant they could not access health services and education easily. These were children who lived in a landscape of past and present trauma (Kistner, 2007) something we needed to be aware of as we worked with them in the book-making process.

1.2 Sophiatown Community Psychological Services (SCPSS) Families on the Move Programme

The SCPS Families on the Move Programme is a psychosocial support programme operating from a house in Bertrams, Johannesburg. The focus is psychological counselling but, because of the lack of services available to families on the move the centre also provides social services such as helping families access schooling, health services and also economic support to some extent. The programme is staffed by a clinical psychologist with the support of social workers, a lawyer and trained lay counsellors and offers individual, family and group counselling. All of the children at the workshop had at least one member of the family in individual counselling, a few of the children were also receiving counselling.

SCPS holds regular school holiday programmes over five days for the most vulnerable or needy children. The book-making process reported on here was one of these holiday programmes. I had developed the book-making workshop process in response to a request from SCPS for a programme that was fun and suitable for vulnerable children who were not receiving ongoing individual counselling. After I piloted the process with SCPS staff in 2016, I trained counselling staff to run the workshop which they had done a few times since. In the process reported on here I was supported by a senior social worker and three experienced lay counsellors. The workshop was held at a house close to the Bertrams centre with a large garden used for retreats and workshops by SCPS. Two members of Saide's African Storybook initiative also attended the workshops to observe and document the process.

Within the broader therapeutic work of the Families on the Move programme, the children's caregivers were invited on the last day for a presentation of the books and a family lunch. The aim was to celebrate the children's achievements and allow them to tell their parents, through the books, stories they may not have shared before. In past programmes the parents often talked in later counselling sessions about learning important things about their children through this process. The description of this event in the day-by-day outline of the programme below illustrates how much parents and children gain from this interaction.

1.3 South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide) African Storybook (ASb) Initiative

Saide's African Storybook initiative provides access to openly licensed picture storybooks through its website in many African languages as well as tools for storybook translation, adaptation and creation for young children. SCPS was asked to run and document a book-making holiday programme with the aim of sharing knowledge with ASb. ASb hopes to be able to adapt the approach to face-to-face and digital story book creation with groups of children in schools, libraries and youth groups. This report is part of that process. In addition to documenting the process we hoped to produce a set of story books, written and illustrated by the children who attended the programme so that migrant children and their experiences could be represented in the ASb story collection.

2. Reflecting on theory

The book-making process was informed by a number of different theoretical frameworks that are discussed below. The theory influenced the process directly,

from the format and content of the stories used as inspiration for the children's own writing through to the use of different media for the children's drawings. Note that although the theory section focuses on what informed the development of the book-making as a psycho-social support process, I suggest ways about how the theory is also applicable to non-therapeutic workshops with children in schools and libraries designed to collect stories for ASb.

2.1 Art making as an ethical approach

The holiday programme workshop was developed to allow the children to make some measure of sense out of the changes and trauma of their lived experience. The children were not in ongoing therapy so this process had to be done without digging too deeply into traumatic events as this could have broken down the defences the children had created for ongoing psychological survival (Schachter, 2011). This need to work 'lightly' prompted our use of an art making approach. Johnson (1987) helps us understand how art making can create distance from traumatic or unsettling memories.

The need to disown and deny the affects and memories of the trauma, and to remain in control of them, are more effectively accomplished when these images arise on paper, in a dance, or in playing music ... the creative arts ... modulate the directness and intensity of expression ... Instead of the discussion of a feeling, one has a discussion of a picture of a feeling, a less threatening situation ... because the picture is concrete and external to the self. (p. 11)

Using art as the main process in the holiday programme was, therefore, a useful way of allowing the children to make some meaning of their present and past experiences with emotional distance and psychological protection built in. Of course, using art did not mean that other measures (such as having experienced counsellors on hand and the opportunity to refer a child if necessary) did not also have to be put in place to ensure the emotional wellbeing of the children.

2.2 Book-making as meaning-making

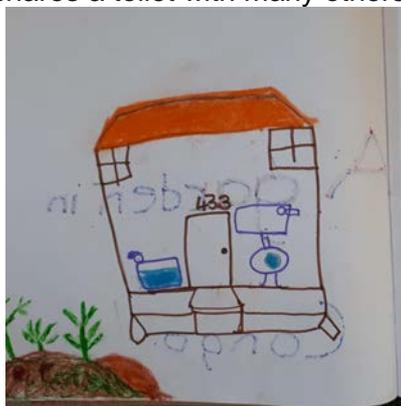
In the previous paragraph I suggested that the book-making was developed to help the children "make some meaning of their present and past experiences". My use of the term 'making meaning' was deliberate. The term is taken from the anthropologist, Finnström (2008) who writes of his work in war-affected Northern Uganda where thousands were displaced. He describes how people who were displaced sought to "make meaning of their experiences by engaging with each other, trying to make their situation comprehensible by articulat[ing] and mediat[ing] experiences and stories among one another" (p. 7). It is just such a meaning-making process that we hoped the book-making would be. We hoped that as the children articulated stories in their books and read them to others they could be helped to "engage the logic and structure of [the] violence" (Zarowsky, 2004. p. 204) they had experienced. We hoped they could make some sense of what had happened and was happening to them through a formal, logical narrative that had a beginning, middle and end just like a storybook usually has.

This meaning making needs to happen with past and present experience.

[Displaced children] often experience a series of fractures in their past, present and future lives ... At the point of arrival [in a new country], their sense of being in charge of their lives is seriously jeopardized. The challenge ... in these situations is to help the ... child find ... a sense of direction and a safe road to travel along in their journey of belonging, in a way that allows

them to take charge of their past, present and future experiences. (Kohli & Mather, 2003 p. 203)

Looking at some of the books produced in this workshop we can see the children attempting to make meaning of past and present. For example Cara's* story is about comparing the house she used to live in, where her family had their own bathroom and toilet and she had a vegetable garden, with the one she lives in now where she shares a toilet with many others and there is no garden at all.



This house is in Congo. I like this house. We had our own toilet and our own bathroom.



I planted tomatoes and spinach. I did it alone

Noah tells his story, of his parent's relationship from when they met, wished for a son and then his father's cruel and disturbed rejection of them and how they had to run away.



My mum and dad were happy when they got their first born – me.



The door was locked. We knocked and knocked. My father didn't want to open for us. We slept outside. My father said I was not his child. I cried.

The story is Noah's attempt to make sense of his father's inexplicable and cruel behaviour, trying to make meaning of the painful past and changed present.

At this point I would like to reflect on the question of whether the process we followed might be applicable to general ASb book-making workshops given that the children we worked with were extremely vulnerable. In discussion with ASb staff the point was made that creativity relied on feeling safe and able to take risks and that a

* All names changed.

workshop with 'normal' children could focus more on the imaginative because of this. While agreeing that all children need to feel safe in the creative space I worried that the common misperception that children who have been through traumatic experiences are 'damaged' in some way, different from 'normal' children had influenced ASb thinking. This misperception is understandable because it is so pervasive. It dominates the media and research around war-affected and displaced children. This dominant understanding of trauma exists firmly within a pathological paradigm where the war-affected are seen as suffering from PTSD (Bracken, Giller and Summerfield, 1995; Young 1997)

There is, however, a growing body of research and psychological theory that now challenges this approach (Summerfield, 2000; Zarowsky and Pedersen, 2000; Hamber, 2009). The book-making workshop reported on here exists firmly within this new thinking. In fact, the focus on 'meaning making' as opposed to 'healing from damage' grows directly out of an alternative to the old PTSD approach. What is useful about the idea of 'meaning making' as opposed to 'healing from trauma' is that it removes the child from 'damaged subject' to someone who is creating resilience and recovery through personal agency – meaning is something the individual *makes* themselves within their own agency. This is exactly how we saw the children who participated in the book-making process. We saw them as agents who have already, over time, developed their own strategies for coping with difficult experiences and the bookmaking gave them the opportunity to explore and make obvious these strategies through their art-making and storytelling thus alerting them to their agency and strength as opposed to their 'victimhood'. As such they had as much, maybe even more, ability to create and access imaginative resources.

ASb also seemed concerned about the need to have trained counsellors if one was to encourage children to tell stories about their own lives. This is important to consider. All of us are to some degree vulnerable, and certainly many of the children ASb works with could be considered vulnerable and many would have experienced traumatic events. It is possible, and in fact common within the discipline of childhood studies to explore difficult events if one applies a set of (widely accepted) safeguards. These are described in Box 6 below.

2.3 Narrative therapy

The approach was also informed by the work of narrative therapist, White (2005). White suggests that it is important for those who have experienced traumatic events, loss or grief to acknowledge that they are more than 'victims' – he describes the victim narrative as a "thin" story. For the children in the holiday workshop who faced deprivation and precarity daily it would be easy for them to see their lives as "problem-saturated with a negative view of the future... lacklustre with a prevailing sense of being trapped and paralysed" (p. 2). He suggests that a focus on narrative can help people see that "life is multi-storied, not single-storied". Even if there are only "thin traces" of it there is another story beyond the loss, trauma and grief. "As therapists our task is to make these traces more fully known ... We need to establish appropriate contexts for people to develop thick stories" (White, 2003, p. 2). This is what we hoped the book-making would be – a process to identify narratives of strength and hope (to add to the problem/victim narratives) and thus make their life story 'thicker'.

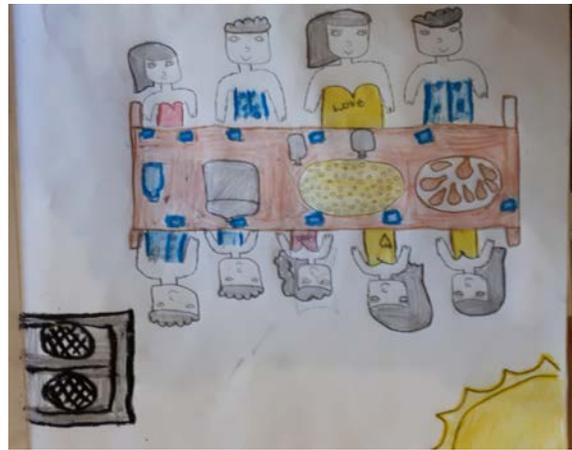
Central to this process of thickening a story is the accessing of what White calls "subordinate stories" (p. 13) hidden in the many narratives children uncover. These subordinate stories are usually linked to significant others in a child's history. "As the contribution of these figures becomes more visible, new opportunities are presented

for children to connect/reconnect with their relational/social/ community networks (White, 2005, p. 13)".

Looking at the books the children made one can identify a process of uncovering subordinate stories peopled with mothers who meet them from school, kind aunts and special friends.



My kind aunty



My aunty gave us a wonderful dinner



My lovely dogs, Blackey and Royalty.



Denis is a good friend to me.

"Accessing these subordinate storylines helps children move from the thin stories that hold only the negative consequences of trauma to the thick stories that include the knowledges and skills they used to cope with the traumatic event/s" (White, 2003, p. 2)". Finding this agency and power is part of what Finnström (2008) would call "meaning-making".

2.4 Illustrating the stories - working with images

The other theoretical frame for the development of the work, particularly the fact that we start with images and then use them to move into narrative, relates to the concept of the image. Of course what constitutes an image is complex, for example, we can see the world around us in a concrete sense but we also see images with our eyes closed or in dreams (Weber, 2008). The images the children drew are concrete (the bus I travelled in, my friend's dog, our house, my lost rabbit) but, clearly, they represent more than what we see. For this reason the theory around image and sense-making is useful.

Weber describes how scholars, mostly semioticians, have written much on what he calls “the slippery question of how images mean” (2008, p. 42). We do not have space here to go into this theory but what is relevant for this work is the fact that images have an external and an internal reality. Barthes (1981), one of these scholars of semiotics, helps us understand this idea further by saying that all images have a meaning beyond the denotative or literal, they have connotative (implied or suggested) meanings too. Barthes explains what this means by telling the story of sorting through photographs soon after his mother’s death, looking for one that contains her “being” (p. 66). He finds a photograph of her as a child in a winter garden standing with her brother. When he finds the photograph he is deeply moved. “For once, photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance” (p. 70). He points out that for us the photo “would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’”. At most we would see it as an interesting product of its context “period, clothes, photogeny; but in it for you, no wound (p. 73)”.

Applying this idea to the book-making process the images made by the children are a reflection, not only of what the children saw, but of an inner reality. They are also a reflection of emotion; how the children felt about the image they made. Many of the images produced by the children were objects of remembrance that carried “wounds” just as Barthes’ photograph of his mother did for him. It is with this theory in mind that we use the story book *William Gordon MacDonald Partridge* which tells a story of a small boy who tries to help an old lady remember by bringing her evocative objects such as a sea shell and an old war medal. The story focuses on concrete objects that carry emotional significance.

It is important to point out that the “remembrance” or the “wounds” evoked by the images they draw are often felt in the privacy of the child’s thoughts, perhaps even hidden deep below the surface and not articulated to the self. There is in fact no need for them to verbalise why they are important because in the act of drawing them and including them in a narrative they acknowledge their power in their lives, even if it is only at a subconscious level. This relates to the ethical issue discussed above – in a one-week holiday programme, it would be unethical to ask a child to articulate the “wound” evoked by the loss of home, or a frightening journey.



This is the yellow bus that brought us from Zimbabwe.

2.5 Reflecting on different narratives

In writing this report I searched for a way to link the theory I had used to inform the development of the book-making workshop for SCPS to the work that ASb wanted to

do to develop stories in a non psycho-social support context. One of the observations made by a Saide team member seemed important to consider.

For narrative therapy purposes it makes sense to focus on the child's life and happenings. But for the purposes of storybook development, that approach can really limit imaginary possibilities, it can limit storytelling. (Treffry-Goatley, Field notes, p.2)

As a past teacher of English writing in Primary and Secondary Schools the idea of limiting "imaginary" or storytelling possibilities resonated. I began to think about the idea of different narratives. I thought about imaginative stories that took children to new places outside their experience. I thought about the stories we hear from our personal language/cultural stock such as folk tales or stories that we read as children. For each of us this stock of tales would be different. Some of what ASb aims to do is to delight children with imaginative possibilities as my children were delighted by *Charlie and Chocolate Factory* and *Charlotte's Web*. Yet, I love the emotional resonance of stories like *Wilfred Gordon Macdonald Partridge*, *Grandma Nana*, *Ashraf of Africa*, stories about everyday with no imaginative element and I also love the stories they inspire in the children about their everyday lives. Don't we want children to produce many kinds of narratives, ones that reflect their everyday lives, ones that repeat folk tales their grandmother told them, ones that have spiders that talk and magic chocolate factories. I also wonder if the best stories aren't those that are rooted in a universal human emotion (like the ones we experience in real life so we can relate to them) but fly off and take us somewhere new.

In thinking through this issue I came across Ha'ninen's (2004) work which describes a number of different narrative forms and how they work together (see Figure 1 below).

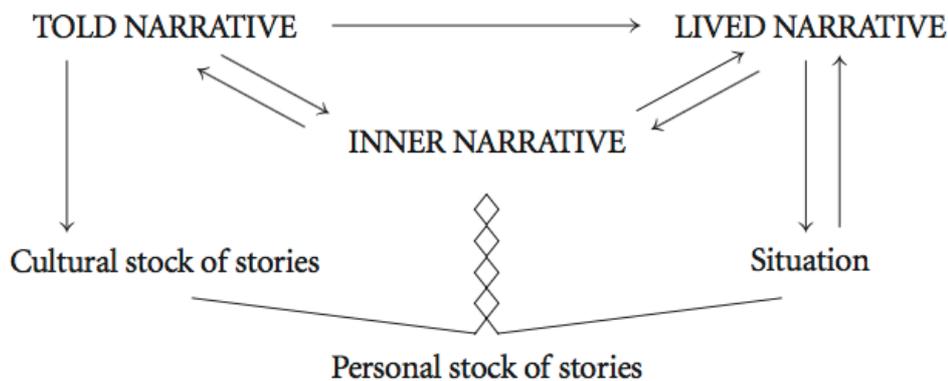


Figure 1

The model of narrative circulation

Ha'ninen suggests that the narrative form can exist in three modes: firstly, the *told narrative* which is most often verbal (but can be written, e.g. an autobiography) and describes a chain of human events; secondly, the *inner narrative*, which is very much what I have described above. In fact Ha'ninen refers to narrative psychology, saying that the inner narrative is a way of giving coherence to experience, "a way to help us make meaning (p. 73)". *Lived narrative* is the idea that, "Human life consists of

interlocking narrative-like episodes which have their relative beginnings, middles, and ends” (p. 73).

Alongside these narrative forms there are also the *cultural stock of stories* – all the narratives we hear in the course of our life e.g. stories from radio, TV, novels fairy-tales, real-life stories. This will of course vary between cultures to sub-cultures but there are always some stories that are “powerful and normative” (p. 73). *Personal stories* are narratives we store in our memory, such as ‘the time I fell out of a tree’. In the figure above Hañnininen also includes the term *situation* which refers to the way “possibilities, resources and restrictions of action” affect our story, for example, refugees often tell a story to officials that will bolster their claim for asylum.

Apart from making the point that the arrows between the different forms of narrative are not causal but rather ways in which meanings are transferred I will not discuss Hañnininen’s theory of relations between the different narratives. What is interesting in the context of the development of stories for ASb is that the figure helped me to resolve the issue of what kinds of stories ASb may want children to tell. I began to wonder if we could adapt this model to guide our development of stories for the ASb. If we can find a process that helps children describe their *lived* experience in a way that resonates with their *inner* narrative and also draws on the *cultural and personal* stock of stories we could produce wonderful, imaginative stories that touched children’s hearts. Or we could focus in some situations on working with cultural stories, at other times on personal stories etc.

3. The book-making workshop

What follows is a day-by-day description of the book-making process which is essentially descriptive. The description is interspersed with reflections on the process, reference to some of the theory that informs it and thoughts about how the process could fit into ASbs future book development with children.

3.1 Day one: Introduction to story books

After breakfast each child was given a cap and apron donated by the Soul Buddyz Clubs. This was exciting but they still had wary smiles and spent time looking at each other to make sure they were not doing something wrong. They were subdued and quiet. It was time to play some games.



Wary but expectant faces

The games at this stage of the workshop were chosen specifically, therefore, to help the children relax. It is important to choose simple, non-threatening games that do not involve competition or singling anyone out. Everyone should play, even the grown up as the children need to know that the adults are not like teachers but there to support and have fun with them.



Everyone plays Shake Shake Banana, notice Ena, one of the facilitators

Box 1: Introductory games

These two games are particularly good for the start of a workshop, they are fun, don't need much explanation which can take time when working in translation, can be played with different ages and they involve body and voice.

Balls and names

Stand in a circle. Throw a ball or bean bag or small soft ball to someone else in the circle. As you throw call out the name of the person to whom you are throwing. They then throw the ball on to someone else while saying their name aloud and so on. Introduce more balls as the game goes on. There is much laughter as balls are dropped. Participants start mostly with soft voices, quiet voices, but they do get louder and bolder. The game encourages the children to vocalise which creates a sense of self power and sets them up to speak out later as we work with narrating stories.

Shake Shake Banana

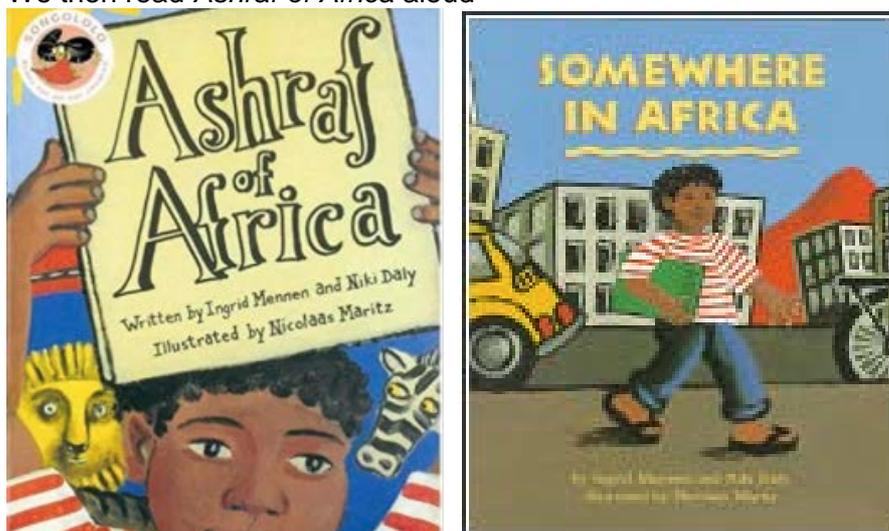
This is an adaptation of the game 'Simon Says'.

Play in a circle. The leader says. "When I say the word *Orange* touch your head, When I say *Apple* touch your toes. When I say *Shake shake banana* put both hands on your waist and shake your hips." The leader then calls out "Apples" etc. At first do the same action as you call out but as you go on call out one word and do the action for another. Children will get confused and there will be much laughter. Keep the atmosphere light and non-competitive. Use fruit that children will know. This is a crazy game which sets a fun tone and also shows the children that facilitators are fun and can play – not like teachers.

Explaining the purpose of the holiday programme

Everyone sat in a circle in the lounge and we explained the purpose of the work we would do together during the week. "To make a story book to share with our parents. You are going to be writers and illustrators this week. First we need to find out a little about story books so we will read one together."

Reading the first story
We then read *Ashraf of Africa* aloud



https://books.google.co.za/books/about/Somewhere_in_Africa.html?id=1SeV1VwiJwMC&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y Note that the book has been republished with a new title.

Box 2: Reading picture books together



Lot reads *Ashraf of Africa* aloud stopping to make sure the children follow the story and see the illustrations

We use a *picture story book* as the starting point for the book-making for a number of reasons:

- It shows the children in a very concrete way what we mean by a picture book – we choose a book that has few words and large illustrations. Even though the book we choose may be intended for a younger readership than the age of the participating children, the form of 'large picture and few words' is important to illustrate as this is what we are encouraging them to make.
- We choose this form as it does not put pressure on children to write LOTS of words, something they may not be able to do especially as new English

learners. Also the picture book format is a little like poetry with its emotional depth represented in a few words and pictures that 'speak' too. So in this way it suits our work to help the children access inner narratives.

We use the story of *Ashraf of Africa* to start the workshop because:

- It is a story about a boy who lives in a city – just like the children in the workshop do. Ashraf is someone they can relate to and identify with.
- It is not a serious book – it is just a simple story of a boy who walks along the street to renew his library book and it shows us the things he sees on the way. So it is non-threatening.
- It also follows a cinematic format i.e. it is made up of different scenes, the book he is reading at home, the shop he sees on the way to the library, the fruit sellers he sees at the market and the song they sing, the library, the mountain in his city.
- It is also about a loved book which links to the idea of books.
- It is a reflection of what Ha'ninen (2004) calls 'lived experience' – a story about a child's everyday life – it gives the children the idea of different scenes from a person's life.
- The first activity we ask the children to do is draw a scene from their own lives so it mirrors exactly the first activity the children will do.

Introducing the drawing activity

The narrative below is how we introduced the drawing activity to the children after reading the story.

GC: What do you know about Ashraf and his life?

Children: He knows the streets where he lives; He loves reading books; He loves his city.

GC: Yes each page tells us something about Ashraf's life. It is a little like we are looking through a window at different parts of his life, we cannot see his whole life just a small window into his life. You are going to go and draw a picture about something from your life to tell other people about your life – a small window into your life.

Note

The 'window into your life' did not work well as a metaphor during this workshop (though it has worked very well in other contexts). The younger children took it literally and drew a window. It may be better to simply say – 'draw a scene from your everyday life – one thing that happens to you almost everyday or every week'.

Isiah's book illustrates how the form of *Ashraf of Africa* leads to the creation of a child's own story. It is a perfect example of the simple charm of a book that emerges from this process.



This is a small Shop near my House.



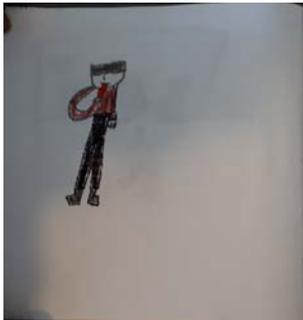
The owner is a fat man with a little voice.



I open the fridge and choose strawberry Kingsley cold drink.



I give the man my money.



The strawberry Kingsley tastes sweet.

Introducing the art materials

Every time we introduced a new story book we taught the children how to use a different art medium. At this point we illustrated how to use oil pastels. We demonstrated what an oil pastel can do, it can outline, colour-in, paint, smudge etc.



Box 3: The importance of varied and quality art materials

The use of a variety of art materials and of quality of art materials was inspired by the work of Diane Welpering, an artist that I worked with in a previous project. She describes her approach here.

I offer the children a wide range of art-making options so they can “lose themselves” in the process. At an important point – where I feel creativity worked at its optimum – the children no longer feel self-conscious, and dialogue in close relation to the materials at hand, absorbed in the free-flowing dynamic of their own ideas. (Diane Welpering, notes for draft of Clacherty & Welpering, 2005)

Diane also taught me how to interact with the children while they are working.

I dialogue openly and simply with the children as their work develops, never embellishing their stories for them, never assuming that I knew what was behind the drawing, nor expecting them to enlighten me. I say things like, “That is a very detailed drawing,” or “Those colours are exquisite,” or “I like that texture there.” Simple things, like, “You are working well today,” or “Wow, you are an art-making factory!” I leave all judgemental or qualitative comments out of my dialogue. I never layer my interpretation onto their work, never make the children feel as if I was observing them. My main concern is to encourage the children to be confident in their ability to communicate through their art. I never judge their ability to draw, and I respond to everything they produced, validating it as an effective means of communication. I never allow them to throw away anything, and I am meticulous with the collection and packing up of all their work. By giving absolute value to each child’s endeavours, I hope to reinforce a sense of their own value. I consolidate a respect for each child’s uniqueness and individuality. (Clacherty & Welpering, 2005 pp. 157-165)

The children were then allocated to smaller groups and went to a separate room with their facilitator to draw.

Box 4: Keeping children engaged

During this first drawing session some of the children were engaged and drew for some time. Others drew quite quickly and then asked to play outside, which we let them do. The counsellors and I discussed this in our reflection session the next morning and came up with some reasons for this. I have summarised them here as they are useful things to keep in mind when running a similar workshop.

- Two of the groups were working in the same room, close together, and the counsellor talking in one group disturbed the children and counsellor in the other. We subsequently moved the one group to another room. It is important to make sure the children work in a quiet, undisturbed place.
- It could have been related to their vulnerability – they did not want to have to draw and think for too long because they may have to think about things that made them sad. We notice that as the children begin to trust the environment they become more engaged in the book-making and get immersed in it. It

takes time for children to trust the drawing and book-making process – over time they realise that the counsellor will not ask them to tell a sad story if they don't want to or probe too much so they feel more confident to sit and draw. This is why it is important to work over a period of at least two days and more if possible.

- We have found that rich art materials create immersion – the paint, for example, keeps them engaged for longer, some children in this holiday programme painted many pictures for over two hours in one session.
- Once the children realise that they will produce a product that they must present to their caregivers on the last day they become motivated, in fact even the very 'jumpy' boys who sat still for a very short time in the first session spent a long time producing detailed drawings later in the process.

Mati's book is a perfect example of how a child can become engrossed with the process over time. On the first day he was the first to want to stop drawing and play outside with the ball. By the third day he was working on detailed drawings that he drew with great visual skill referencing a visual tradition that he had obviously been exposed to through comics and graphic novels. The maturity of the visual images in his book are in fact astonishing – notice the use of change of scale and use of the page frame and comic frame which are sophisticated visual conventions used in graphic narrative art works. The counsellors and I are quite sure that it was the process of creating a safe environment and the step-by-step structure of the book-making process over a sufficient period of time that allowed him to take the risk of telling a story that meant a lot to him at an 'inner' level (Denis, his friend, really cared about him) and that drew on his cultural stock of stories and imagery.

This is a wonderful example of a story that reflects lived narrative (a story of an everyday event), an inner narrative (a kind, caring friend who supports me) and draws on the cultural stock of stories and imagery (Ha'ninen, 2004).



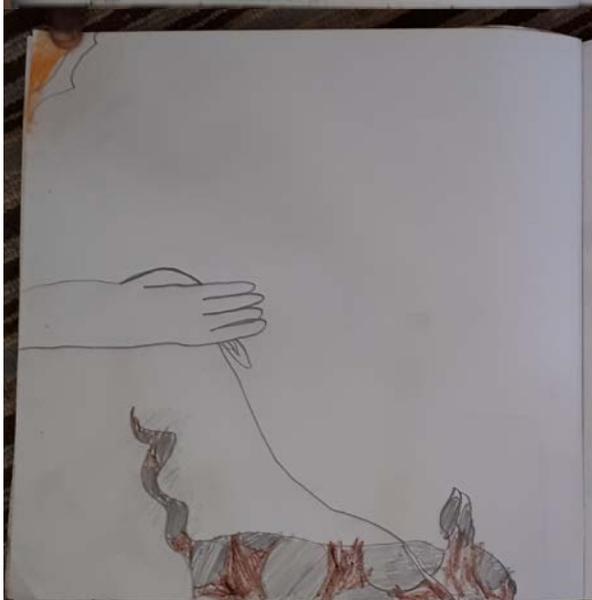
My friend Denis from next door called me some see my new dog.



It had black spots and a big head and it frightened me. I felt worried it would bite me.



We took the dog for a walk. Just Denis and me.



The dog wagged its tail.



It barked.



And then it peed on me. On my foot.
Yeeeeuck!!



Then Denis took a tissue and wiped off
the pee.



I feel like he was a good friend to me.

Reading the second story

After playing, Refiloe the social worker read *Our Village Bus* with lots of energy and hand actions keeping the children engrossed. This is a simple story of a bus journey to town set in a rural area. The bus gets stuck in the mud and the passengers push it out. We use *Our Village Bus* at this point in the workshop because

- it follows an archetypal narrative form that has an introduction, an event and then a resolution (in contrast to the scene by scene format of Ashraf in Africa);
- it tells the story of a journey which we hope will resonate at an inner level for the children who have all taken journeys that were sometimes traumatic and all of which displaced them.

The second reason relates to the psychosocial support nature of the work we were doing but the first is relevant to any book-making workshop.

The narrative below is how we introduce the next art activity once the story has been read.

GC: What was the story about?

Children: A bus. It got stuck in the mud. The children and their granny who went on the bus. The rain.

GC: Yes, a story about a bus, that goes on a journey and about a happening – the bus got stuck in the mud when it rained! Then the people had to push the bus out of the mud and they finally got to town. You are going to make a drawing now. You can decide: it can be about a journey you made or about a happening, something that happened to you.

Introducing the second art medium

Then I introduced them to wax resist. The box below describes the wax resist technique.

Box 5: Wax resist

Use wax crayons to draw a picture and then use food colouring as a paint over the wax. The crayon lines will shine through.

Some tips:

- Good quality wax crayons work best

- Make sure the food colouring is not too dark – you may need to water it down
- Use small brushes or children tend to soak the paper
- Set up a separate space for ‘painting’ such as table outside with brushes, water to wash brushes and the food colouring.

The children then went off to their groups to draw a journey or an event.

The fact that this drawing evoked unpleasant feelings for many of the children was confirmed when two or three of the children complained of headaches or stomach aches after the drawing of a journey. These physical ‘ailments’ are a common response in our holiday programmes and usually a result of the drawing evoking an unsettling memory. The ‘headache or tummy ache’ are the only way the child knows to express the deep disquiet they feel.

Box 6: How drawing can evoke emotion

During the afternoon after the children had listened to two stories and drawn two illustrations, we agreed that the story we had planned about a special family member may be too sad for them especially as they would go home immediately after they had drawn so we decided to do something fun. We made a ‘refugee ABC’.

“We’re going to make an alphabet book about you. We can make a book to tell others about your life here in Jo’burg. Think about your life. Think of words beginning with A.

Suggestions from children:

A is for ... acorn, ant, Africa, area, Ascott Rd...

B is for ... breast, Bertrams, Bez Valley, bus ride,

F ... friends

G ... girls

H ... house

J ... for Jeppe

T ... for toilet

W ... water

Each child then volunteered to paint a letter with an illustration.

Emil drew a tap with water. As we went back into the large room to lay out the finished paintings to make the alphabet book I noticed he had squeezed his rather gangly 13 year old body into a corner and crouched down with his head hanging. One of the counsellors went and sat close to him. I found out afterwards that he had spent the evening the day before helping his mother scrub sewage from an open sewage pipe at their home. The task was part of the landlord’s ‘rent’ that the family paid to stay in a horrible run-down outside room. The evening before the mother had reached her limit and refused to do it so Emil had done it alone (in the freezing cold night air) until she joined him as he was so afraid that the landlord would evict them. He had arrived the morning of the holiday programme chilled and very upset. The tap he chose to draw had evoked that memory and now he knew he had to go back home to that same situation.

This issue refers back to the discussion on page 7 of how ASb may deal with the issue of book-making evoking emotions in vulnerable children. Any one of the children ASb works with may be vulnerable emotionally but that does not mean we

should be afraid of asking children to write stories and make books that connect with their inner narratives for fear of what this process may evoke. It is possible to work ethically in this regard even if you are not trained as counsellor or psychologist. Here are simple rules (and processes) I apply as a non-psychologically trained research professional who works with extremely vulnerable children for research purposes. Many of these ideas are widely accepted by other research professionals who work with vulnerable children.

- Children (and adults) create psychological defences if they have experienced trauma or grief or loss. These defences allow children to carry on with everyday life.
- We can trust children to maintain these defences IF we do not push them to tell a story or probe details of part of a story they tell. We must accept just what they choose to tell.
- It is important to create an environment where this choice of what to tell is completely acceptable. I always tell children before we start working together that whatever story they choose to tell, that is fine – it is their choice. I sometimes even get young children to practice telling me that they don't want to tell a story because it makes them sad – this legitimates that it is their choice.
- If a child does begin to feel sad or even cry, don't be afraid or tell them to stop crying. You do need to acknowledge the sadness by placing a hand on their arm, passing a tissue or a drink of water, saying "I can see this story makes you sad." Then sit in silence for a little while as part of the acknowledgement.
- Do not tell them that things will be better – they may not! Mostly this kind of statement just makes us as adults feel better but it actually reduces the enormity of the issue for the child to something trifling.
- If other children are with you say "This story makes Jenna very sad" so you are acknowledging that seeing their friend sad could make them sad too. If it seems appropriate you can ask the other children "Can we say something to Jenna to make her feel better, what about telling her the things she is so good at?" Let them do this then move quietly and slowly on to the next activity.
- Play a game after some time – games that make children feel safe are good at this point. Here is one of my favourite as the children's bodies are close but it is fun.

Where is the ball?

Stand close together in a circle with hands behind. One person stands in the middle of the circle. Pass a small object such as a cloth ball around the circle behind you – hide it from the person in the middle by standing very close together. The person in the middle must try to guess who has the ball. If they point at someone in the circle the person must show their hands and if they have the ball they become IT in the centre.

- Watch the child for signs of ongoing distress. If the child is particularly distressed you do need to follow up. The first place is the teacher, but you should, if you are running workshops with children who you know may be vulnerable have a local social worker or NGO available to refer children to.

3.2 Day Two: Telling our own stories

After breakfast and a reflection session with the counsellors and a few games outside we began by reading *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*. An ASb staff member made the following comment which I think raises an interesting issue.

I was surprised by how engaged children were by this very British storybook (in terms of names and the significant objects), and how much they remembered in the question/discussion session. Although it doesn't deal with memory objects, the ASb storybook *My Happy Place* (also set in an old age home) could be used to introduce the idea of memory, and memories associated with objects.

We chose the book because it deals directly with objects that evoke memory. As the theory section earlier discusses in the work of Barthes (1998) thinking about an object or an image is one way to help children connect with an inner narrative. *Ashraf of Africa* is useful at the beginning of the workshop as it makes the children feel safe with a recognisable character but by this point in the workshop we feel it is more important that the book resonates at an emotional level. I do recognise that we want all children to recognise themselves in a book but I also think that children anywhere will relate to a book that reflects a universal human experience.

This is how we introduced the next drawing activity:

GC: You are going to make a drawing of an object that reminds you of someone or something or some place. It's your own special thing that you remember.

The children used paint for this activity.

Writing a story based on drawings

At the point the children took each of the drawings they had made and working with their counsellors chose one drawing that they wished to make into a story book. They then told the counsellors what the story was. Counsellors wrote the story down.

Box 7: Why the facilitator writes the story the child tells

We feel it is very important that the facilitator writes the story while the child speaks. The reason for this is that the story then does not rely on the child's written ability. We also need to be able to read the stories in order to structure them into a picture book later.

The potential drawback can be that facilitators too actively shape the written text, either by imposing their interpretation, or because they themselves do not have much imagination for the story. The facilitator's own sense of story and storytelling (and language creativity) is an important factor in the quality of the final storybook. (Notes from ASb staff member)

In this workshop the counsellors are instructed to record what the children say EXACTLY as they say it. In the training they learn that there is poetry in spoken speech – clumsy correction of sentence construction, for example means we lose this poetry. This is how researchers are trained to make notes of speech so it is a common practice and not that difficult to teach.

It is at this point that the facilitator can ask prompting questions. These prompts are designed to add detail and texture to the story and not probe a child's life experiences or inner narrative.

- Tell me about that (pointing to something in picture)
- What did he/she say? Asking this question, often gives wonderful rich detail for a story.
- What did he/she do next?

- What were you thinking?
- Ask for details about elements in drawing e.g. “I see a curtain here, what is that for?” “Who planted that flower?” “What colour was the curtain?”

Here is an example from a transcription of Isias’s story presented earlier of how the story was created through interaction. Isias was very shy and so his story needed to be drawn out with questions. Some of the children told long stories without any questions. The underlined words became the final story.

GC: What did you draw here Isias?

This is me going to the shop to buy cold drink.

Where is the shop?

Near my house.

GC: Who do you find there at the shop?

A fat man.

GC: tell me more about the fat man.

He has a little voice.

What do you do when you get to the shop.

I give money and he gives me cold drink.

Where is the cold drink kept?

In the fridge.

So what do you do first? Pay or get the cold drink?

I open the fridge and then I pay.

What kind of cold drink do you buy?

Kingsley Strawberry.

What do you do outside the shop?

I drink the cold drink and put the empty back into a box outside the shop.

GC: Tell me about the cold drink.

It tastes sweet.

I could have asked where he got the money and that would have led us into another story.

At the end of the day the children played some happy games and had tea.

3.3 Day 3: Making our own books

Before the Day 3 process could begin I had edited and typed out each story overnight into a storybook with text on each page. The box below outlines some of the principles I apply in this process.

Box 8: Editing the child’s story into a book

The child’s story is not changed.

I look for the core of the story in key sentences. So for example

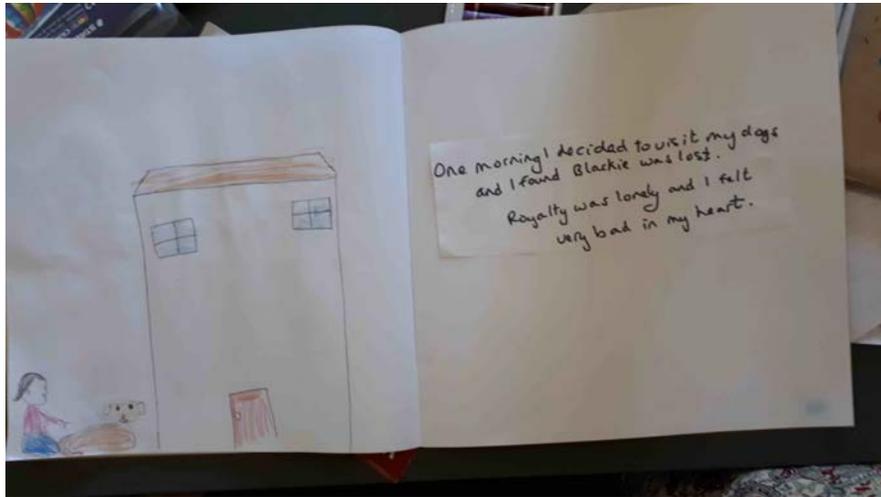
The child told me:

“My Lovely Dogs is the title of my story

We were living in Bez Valley. The first day we lived in Bez Valley there was another man who was selling puppies – they were cute – my mum decided to buy them.”

The title and first page of the book used the underlined text. To illustrate further the words of the last page are underlined above.

“One morning I decided to visit my dogs and I found Blackie was lost and Royalty was remaining. Royalty was remaining. Royalty was lonely without Blackie and I felt very bad. I felt very bad in my heart. I thought Blackie had died.”



Isais's story in Box 7 is another example of this editing process.

Day 3 began with breakfast and games and then the children returned to their groups. The counsellors read each child the typed story I had edited and checked that they were happy to have the story told in this way. This is an important step as the stories belong to the children and we need to honour that. To illustrate how strongly the children feel about their stories one little girl of eight when asked if she was happy about what I had done with her story told the counsellor she was “cross” because she had told the counsellor a long story and she pointed to the A4 paper where the counsellor had written the story but I had reduced it to a very short story. The counsellor explained that I had taken out the key points in her story and showed her this by drawing a circle around the pieces I had extracted. We could add the rest in if she wanted. After asking the counsellor to read the extracted pieces from the original paper and comparing them with the words I had extracted she decided I had retained her words and she would turn the shortened version into a book.

The children were then given drawing books, pasted the words into the books and began to draw the illustrations. We encouraged them to use the drawings they had done previously if they fitted the story because this saved time and the original drawings had a spontaneity that the redrawn illustrations often lost.

By the end of the day each child had an illustrated book.

3.4 Day 4: Sharing our books with caregivers

Caregivers had been invited for lunch so the children spent the day finishing their books and practising their reading of them. There was a warm hum of anticipation and a real commitment to making their books beautiful for their caregivers.

Caregivers were seated in the garden and the story reading began. Each child read their story aloud. On reflection, the process would have worked better in the main room of the house as we could not all hear what the children read.



Caregivers were delighted to hear their children's stories. The psychologist who worked with the parents asked them to comment on their children's stories after each

child read. One granny said she thought so much about how much trouble her child was, that she needed to find food for her and school uniform and she had forgotten to take notice of her and just love her. She thanked us for reminding her of this. The small boy who had written the story about his friend's dog read his story so proudly and kept glancing at his mother. When she got up to speak she told us that he was a difficult child, with too much energy and she spent most of her time telling him he was naughty, now she wanted to tell him that she was proud of him for making such a wonderful story. His face lit up as she spoke. He had been chosen to give the vote of thanks at the end and he thanked us for "letting the children show their parents that they could do something like make a book." Another mother whose two children wrote very sad books about their present situation was moved to tears but also said the stories helped her understand her children better and she was proud with how they coped.

These little glimpses suggest that the process can create communication between caregivers and children. It is also a wonderful opportunity in lives that are most often dominated by stress and daily worries to celebrate children.

We explained to the children that the books would be made into books for the ASb website and then we would return them to them. They each laid their book carefully in a box and presented it formally to an ASb staff member, asking her to look after it carefully.

4. Conclusion

The process of incorporating the production of books for the ASb and thinking about the applicability of our SCS process to an ASb situation has been challenging. It has provoked important reflection for us on why we do things the way we do and an opportunity to articulate the theory that underlies our process. There is still much thinking for us to do about this joint process but I hope that this report both assists in the production of a manual for the development of books in other contexts and helps ASb to add to the theory that informs their own process. The collaboration has been a rich one.

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