Children’s Literature and ComDev

Ian Muller
Abstract

What role can, or do, children’s literature play in development communication? Recently, neotonous childlike curiosity and creativity has become a research and development strategy and a trendy corporate culture for companies like Google. Including children in decision making and in the search for development solutions – PDC & PR4D – is also being advocated by the U.N. and Plan International especially with regards to issues that affect children.

This paper will explore how children’s books open spaces for dialogic communication with children by examining how we define them, how we speak about them, how we speak for them, how we speak to them and how they may talk back through children’s texts. The aim is to relate elements of traditional storytelling to modern forms of dialogic communication and, by extension, to development goals: “helping adults understand children’s issues through their lens” (Commissioner for Children, Tasmania).

Keywords: children’s literature; storytelling; global child; child decision-making; child participation; participatory communication; ComDev; PDC; PR4D; libraries; cultural imperialism
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. p.3
2. Methodology: The Construction of Childhood ......................................................... p.4
   2.2 Socialization & Identity: ‘Kids Don’t Count’ ......................................................... p.6
   2.3 “Who is a child?” ................................................................................................. p.7
   2.4 Appropriate Places: School & Work ................................................................. p.8
   2.5 The Global Child: Human Capital/Consumer ................................................. p.9
3. Children’s Books ......................................................................................................... p.11
   3.1 Storytelling ......................................................................................................... p.12
   3.2 Pictures and Narratives ...................................................................................... p.13
   3.3 Ideology and Children’s Books .......................................................................... p.15
      3.3.1 Individualism & Interdependence ............................................................... p.16
      3.3.2 Folktales & Fairytales ................................................................................ p.16
   3.4 Children’s Texts & Cultural Imperialism ............................................................. p.18
4. Analysis: Voices of Future Generations .................................................................. p.21
   4.1 Alfons och Soldatpappan ................................................................................... p.21
   4.2 The Water Princess: an Adult-Child’s Voice ....................................................... p.23
   4.3 VOFG?: Child Authors and the Development Industry ..................................... p.26
   4.4 Children Authors: AfricanStorybook.org .......................................................... p.28
5. Discussion ..................................................................................................................... p.29
   5.1 Child Participation ............................................................................................... p.30
   5.2 PDC4Children: Add Children and Stir ............................................................... p.31
   5.3 Child as Storyteller .............................................................................................. p.32
   5.4 Glocal Storytelling: Talking Back in the Museum ............................................. p.32
   5.5 Glocal Storytelling: Talking Back in the Shopping Mall ................................... p.33
   5.6 The ‘Outdoor Voice’: Playground as an Appropriate Space .......................... p.35
   5.7 Libraries ................................................................................................................ p.36
6. Conclusion: Why We Are Speaking in the First Place ............................................. p.37
7. References .................................................................................................................... p.39
Appendix ........................................................................................................................... p.46
“The Clubhouse” ............................................................................................................. p.50
1. Introduction

Children’s books are used to teach the rudiments of language and its referent system; issues of knowledge and power would relate to the larger society and culture than just the child’s place within it. ‘There cannot be a narrative without an ideology’ (McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p.359). There is much uncontroversial evidence regarding children’s books efficacy in teaching social norms (Trepanier-Street, & Romatowski, 1999, p.159; Diekman, & Murnen, 2004, p.373; McCallum & Stephens, 2011). Yet somehow, “too often children’s literature is waved away because its primary focus is considered to be entertainment alone” (Mitsch, 2010, p.155). Children are often a marginalized and ‘voiceless’ group. Everything about them is under construction, so to speak (Harter and Pike, 1984, p.1970). Therefore, how we define them informs how we speak about them, how we speak for them, how we speak to them and how they may speak back through children’s texts. I will begin by looking at the various discourses of childhood and how the global child is constructed through common interpretive repertoires and the spaces which are deemed appropriate for them. I will also discuss how children’s texts further reinforce their spatial identities and analyze several examples of children’s books. Lewis, Rodgers, & Woolcock in The fiction of development: Literary representation as a source of authoritative knowledge, reason that, “fiction is arguably to a large extent frequently about the very issues that at a basic level are the subject matter of development studies” (2008, p.201); “storytelling as a narrative form and research method has long existed within the social sciences” (p.209).

Included in my discussion will be an examination of the elements of traditional storytelling elements and forms of dialogic communication and how they are, or can be, related to participatory communication for development (PDC) and participatory research for development (PR4D). I will attempt to address the questions: What is the current and potential relationship between ComDev and children’s texts? How are the various constructions of the global child and their spatial identities reinforced by texts written for children? How can or does this help or hinder children in participating or ‘talking back’ through storytelling?
2. Methodology: The Construction of Childhood

Identity is formative, according to Stuart Hall, “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990, p.222). This starts, of course, in childhood and is a crucial part of a person’s development. The acquisition of language, with all its inherent power relations, chimeric meanings, and cultural specificities, is integral to the process of identity formation. In addition, Gooden & Gooden add that during this period of their lives, “books are often the most frequent interaction that young children have with others” and “are often the primary source for the presentation of societal values to the young child” (2001, p.90-91).

The various interpretive repertoires of childhood function to position the child’s spatial identity within perceived ‘appropriate spaces’ created for them by adults. “A main purpose of a discourse of the other is always this sort of self-definition: we characterize the other as other in order to define ourselves. […] We need children to be childlike so that we can understand what maturity is - the opposite of being childlike” (Nodelman, 1992, p.32). This seems like a recursive paradox when we consider that adults were children once. But the recursion can be broken by a critical constructivist approach which recognizes there are certain positivist aspects of nature, and thus children, that are not subjectively constructed. “Critical constructivists realize that because of the social construction of knowledge, their interpretations and infrastructures are a part of the cosmos, but they are not always in the cosmos” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.42). “We can never apprehend the world in a “true” sense, apart from our selves and our lives” (ibid., p.43). In other words, it is a reflexive, relational-materialist dynamic rather than a relativistic one (Law, 1994). In addition, there are also essential and ‘inescapable’ aspects to the dynamics of discourse itself which anchor it with ‘practical consequences’ (Potter, 2012; Wetherall & Potter, 1988). “Thus, children's subjectivities (their senses of themselves and their own possibilities for action) develop along with their symbolic resources and cognitive capacities” (Dyson, 1999, p.371). Therefore, the developing cognition, physical traits and self-image of children bumps up against adults’ discursive constructions of them, and the various interpretive repertoires are thusly rooted in social psychology as well as in discourse. Wherever the moving and permeable frontline on the ‘nature v. nurture’ debate lay at any given time, as it pertains to this paper, these ‘scientific’ views will still work as a function of essentializing identities which also works as a device in narratives. The various definitions are offered as the rationale for societies’
handling of children and the definitions of their appropriate spaces as well as how they are depicted in books and also the manner in which these texts are written.

Adapting Ien Ang’s thesis in Desperately Seeking the Audience (1991) to children’s books, the global child can also be seen as an ‘audience’ which exists as an “abstraction constructed from the vantage point of the institutions, in the interest of the institutions” (p.2). They are a ‘socially-constituted and institutionally-produced category’. Because they are ‘hidden behind the closed doors, unmanageable and inaccessible to the outsider’ they are publicly produced by ‘invisible fictions’ which allow institutions to ‘know’ and ‘enter into relations with’ them (p.3). They must continually be ‘reconstructed’ in response to the dynamic complexities and contradictions of, in our case, the global transnational lived realities of cultures [and children] which do not ‘hold still for their portraits’ (p.41). These reconstructions and dynamics ebb and flo, produce and are produced by texts, in an increasingly globalized world, where cultures “interact, transgress and transform each other” (McEwan, 2009, p.65). Though not explicitly mentioned, Ang’s purely constructivist approach still implies the essential qualities of children and childhood that are the root and focus of the societal fear, loathing and fetishizing surrounding them. The extent to which children can participate in the ‘transaction, transgression, and transformation’ of culture depends upon the spaces wherein children, as we define them, are allowed to ‘talk back’.

The essential attributes of ignorance, impressionability, and credulity combined with their dependence upon adults for survival also makes children perfect receptacles for culture and its prevailing discourses. “Children have relatively less knowledge of real-world limitations, less ability to counterargue information effectively, and less differentiation between fiction and reality” (Diekman, & Murnen, 2004, p.373). This has been the logic behind education and indoctrination campaigns historically. As we will see, the level in which children can participate in truly horizontal communication depends upon adults’ conception of their agency, autonomy, and spatial identity. Examining certain interpretative repertoires (such as innocent, pure, vulnerable, and impressionable; human capital and consumer; innovative savior) compared to how and what children themselves write can hopefully give us insight into the place of children’s texts in participation and development.
2.2 Socialization & Identity: ‘Kids Don’t Count’

After watching a small child ‘virtuoso’ shred on an electric guitar in a YouTube video, a guitarist friend of mine casually remarked, “yeah-well… kids don’t count.” This illustrates his attitude not that kids are un-worthy of consideration, but rather his estimation of children that is simultaneously reverent and dismissive; fetishized like some ancient hieroglyph that probably contains profound knowledge but is unfortunately beyond our ken. The astonishing, often savant-like, capability young children seem to have, their ability to absorb and assimilate information, to embody forms of physical discipline, to learn techniques and languages (i.e. culture) is astounding and enviable to adults whose ability to internalize and express new knowledge and information is comparatively slow in speed, limited in bandwidth and painful in process. According to Ann E. Berthoff (1978), in Tolstoy, Vygotsky, and the Making of Meaning, Tolstoy “learned to teach by trusting the powers of what he called "the uncorrupted soul," by recognizing the fidelity of the children to "artistic truth"” (p.249). “Tolstoy's pedagogy is only another version of Romantic child-worship” (ibid., p.252). Writing ironically in The Wisdom of Children, Michelle Vandenbos comments on this fetishization and inadvertently addresses the debate on child participation and decision-making.

“Children, psychologists have discovered, are actually wiser than adults, and do not need any input or discipline from their parents at all. Due to their superior wisdom and selflessness, children are in fact more capable of knowing what is best for them than their parents, and should therefore be granted the right to govern their own households” (2016, p.42). “It can readily be seen that children are pure and upright, possessing a wisdom that escapes their older, less enlightened relations. Kids take good care of their bodies through proper nutrition and good grooming habits, are courteous and well mannered, noble, and are industrious, hard workers. Excellent behavior is proof of sterling character. Therefore, children should no longer be stifled by demanding, bothersome parents, but should instead be elevated to their rightful positions of authority in homes all across America” (ibid., p.44).

The pedagogic and dominant relationship adults have with children presents obstacles to true participation as does the condescending and dismissive regard adults often have for children’s agency. In Researching Children's Experience, Sheila Greene & Diane Hogan write, “Children in most societies are valued for their potential and for what they will grow up to be but are devalued in terms of their present perspectives and experiences” (2005, p.3).
Socializing children often involves the ideology of making good citizens who are inhabitants of a geographical community or state with obligations and duties to that society, as well as to themselves as an individual, to act as an agent in a political community (Harju, 2007, p.94). Identities can thusly work as a resource that strengthens people’s ability to act in public either as a member of a community or defiantly in the face thereof (ibid., pp.96-97). On the other hand, identities can also be used to manipulate, marginalize, or minimize power (Carpentier, 2007, p.89), especially by creating narratives and ‘othering’ discursive regimes which claim to represent and define knowledge (McEwan, 2009, pp.62,121-122; 2014, pp.137-140). As the liminal state of an unformed identity is dangerous, the innate impressionability of children helps, as a function of constructive discourses, to mitigate this fear. “We show children what we “know” about childhood in hopes that they will take our word for it and become like the fictional children we have invented - and therefore, less threatening to us” (Nodelman, 1992, p.32).

The various discourses of children function to create interpretive repertoires of children. Thus, their impressionability and ability to learn, their purity and creative wisdom, work as functions both of their identity as human capital and as innovative saviors of the future, but their innocence, vulnerability and under-developed state justify their marginalization. “We tell them that their true happiness consists in pleasing us, bending to our will, doing what we want. We plant the seeds of our wisdom in them. And we get very angry indeed when they dare to gaze back” (Nodelman, 1992, p.30). Better seen than heard; speak only when spoken to; yakkity-yak, don’t talk back.

2.3 “Who is a child?”
Despite recognized physical and psychological stages of child development, there is no universal definition of childhood. “Who is a child? The UNCRC [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child] established that a child is a human being under the age of 18 years” (IAWGCP, 2007, p.6). However, in many countries, the voting age is 16 and there are various ages of consent for marriage and military, and varying ages of reason and responsibility under penal codes. WSJ’s The Best Children’s Books of 2016 were all written for readers under the age of thirteen (Gurdon, 2016). The definition of a child as someone who is not yet autonomous by virtue of their age, as opposed to other attributes, seems widely accepted regardless of the various life millstones such as puberty, graduation or first hunt, for
example. The implications of this, especially regarding penal codes, has been and will continue to be an ongoing heated debate. All age limits are, by definition, based upon the essentialized identity of the vulnerable impressionable child. According to Harter and Pike (1984), *The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children*, children begin reading alone by the 1st and 2nd grade; this group will have the most relevance to picture books and group readings with adults. Any essential metrics used to define children still face the tempering power of discourse.

### 2.4 Appropriate Places: School & Work

In *Coach Bombay’s Kids Learn to Write: “Children’s Appropriation of Media Material for School Literacy”*, Anne Haas Dyson (1999) writes that the organized space and schedule of classroom and school year as well as curriculum “exerts control over how children experience an important part of their own childhood” (p.370). Education is, ultimately, an overt recognition of the possibilities of discourse. In the west at the end of the 19th century progressive reforms lead to a modern concept of children with various stratified stages of appropriate scholastic development (grades), socio-economic demographics and future vocation (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Then as now, the meanings attached to ‘appropriate public spaces’, such as city streets, factories, and mines, [dare I add, breadlines? warzones? voting booths?] also inform children’s spatial identities (Lloyd-Evans, 2014, p.210). This relational dynamic can make a vulnerable child into a dangerous child depending upon the setting, such as a city park at night. Thus, education and learning as a method of socializing and constructing identity is also strongly tied to socio-economic status as well as geography and dominant culture.

For instance, according to Radhika Menon, Managing Editor, Tulika Publishers, the storyteller was a highly respected central figure of learning in pre-colonial India where children grew up in large families, “very much part of the adult world, with stories and songs quite clearly blurring the lines between the two worlds. Yet, they also maintained and reinforced class, caste and gender hierarchies” (n.d.). So, girls were educated at home; the lower-caste received vocational training. The stratification and ordering of children along with their spatial identities according to contemporary values in the west is illustrated by the Superintendent of Schools of Cleveland, Ohio U.S, writing in the late 19th century:

> “It is obvious that the educational needs of children in a district where the streets are well paved and clean, where the homes are spacious and surrounded by lawns

...
and trees, where the language of the child's playfellows is pure, and where life in
general is permeated with the spirit and ideals of America - it is obvious that the
educational needs of such a child are radically different from those of the child who
lives in a foreign and tenement section” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.192).

The adjective ‘pure’ with regards to children now is linked to ‘ideals of America’ and
‘foreign’ which essentializes and bifurcates children’s spatial identity along racial lines as
well. Despite entering a supposed ‘post-racial’ era, utilitarian, rational ideological views of
children and education can still be seen today. The idea that all children have equal potential
also functions in the narrowing construction of a ‘global child’. Towards that end, Alan Pence
and Hollie Hix-Small, in Global Children in the Shadow of the Global Child, add that, “There
is still strong support for an image of childhood manifest as global diversity, yet, at the same
time, the power of a much more singular and uniform image of a ‘global child’ is stronger
than it has ever been in the past. ECCD [Early Childhood Care and Development] ‘science,’
as supported by the international donor community, is complicit in this press towards
uniformity, this stripping away of diversity” (2007, p.95).

2.5 The Global Child: Human Capital/Consumer

We believe that children are the future: something to invest in as a resource with an expected
return on investment. Children are estimated as future workers and their development is
monetized. “The Western-driven image of the child that dominates media, science and policy
today is not valued for who she or he “is”, but what he or she can “become” as part of a
broader, global, economic agenda” (Raby, 2014, p.84). “Education should be viewed as an
economic investment with the goal of developing human capital or better workers to promote
economic growth” (Springer, 2014, p.3). According to Elaine Unterhalter (2007) even the
Women in Development (WID) feminist-oriented movements which were critical of ‘human
capital theory’, eventually evolved into a rationale by development planners to simply
increase the ratio of women in school in order to make them better mothers and “more
efficient producers of human capital.” i.e. children (p.39). The “get the girls in” approach,
(p.40, 42) or ‘add women and stir’, meant, by extension, ‘add children and stir’.

Still, this critique, which evokes the vulnerable child, discounts the emergent needs of many
families as they consider the cost and benefit of putting their children in school and ignores
the realities of children who work out of necessity (Basu, & Van, 1998), or who are already
head of household due to unfortunate circumstance (McEwan, 2009, p.133). The child as
human capital is engaged with not via dialog, but rather via the neo-liberal market which in turn has its effects upon children’s texts. “English is associated with modernity” and is a marker of status and education, notes Dr. Anita Pandey in *Kaki No Be Leda: The Oral Bases of Child and Youth Literature in West Africa.* (2002, p.19) It has a high cultural capital value. As a result, the global child is pressured to enroll in English speaking schools in order to be competitive in the global economy. They are subsequently identified as ESL (English as a Second Language) and classified according to their dialects or other markers of deviation from ‘proper English’.

In turn, this neo-liberal construction also functions to define ‘self’. In western cultures, ‘self’ is often defined by one’s patterns of consumption (Raby, 2014, p.79). The transition of childhood into adulthood is often described as reaching the ‘age of independence’. The term ‘independent’ actually applied to groups rather than individuals, even in the west, up until the 18th century when it also described a person’s financial status (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p.313). Economic independence is now strongly tied to one’s identity as ‘individual’ in the west and neo-liberal institutions. A report from the World Bank, *Does Child Sponsorship Pay Off in Adulthood?*, (Wydick, et al, 2016), after a lengthy analysis of projected income and wealth impacts - ownership of consumer durables such as motorcycles - prescribed that, especially for girls in Indonesia, “living in a home apart from parents is desirable after a certain age” (p.15), and it is a positive indicator of development, as per the western model of the nuclear family that encourages children to ‘leave the nest’. As an after-thought they also calculated “higher levels of happiness, self-efficacy, and hopefulness based on a quantitative analysis of children’s self-portrait drawings” (p.16; my emphasis), nearly glancing over the child’s voice. Almost a decade earlier, Pence and Hix-Small relevantly observed that,

“to a significant degree, international research has become a major international industry with millions of dollars directed towards questions and issues that often have their source in Western-dominated globalization agendas that are impervious to the voices and values of the local. […] Such narrowing processes are consistent with the image of the ‘global child’ and the technologies and ‘industries’ that serve that construct. They do, however, take us ever further away from the complexities of childhood and away from supporting the growth of capacity at local levels” (2007, p.94).
These industries in western culture, writes Stuart Ewen (1976), have created childhood and adolescence as “a period of time with none but a consumptive relationship to civil society” which turned them from a traditional financial credit to their family into a debit (p.137). The shopping mall became another public space deemed ‘appropriate’ for children. Similarly, in *Children's Participation As Neo-Liberal Governance?*, Rebecca Raby asserts that in the west, concerns of safety, which also serve to construct the child’s spatial identity, have limited their autonomy in the public sphere. Instead, she writes,

“their autonomy and influence have increased within the home and the realm of household consumption. Children have come to have an increasing role in family and personal decision-making around purchases […] as preparation to become consumer-driven, decision-making subjects” (2014, p.79).

The spaces where children can talk back and make decisions will be reviewed in the next chapter and then returned to in the discussion.

3. Children’s Books

In *The other: Orientalism, colonialism, and children's literature*, Perry Nodelman (1992) asks a series of questions that are at the heart of this paper and the discursive elements of children’s books.

“What claims do specific texts make on the children who read them? How do they represent childhood for children, and why might they be representing it in that way? What interest of adults might the representation be serving? Perhaps above all, how does it work? How does children's literature make its claims on child readers? What are the strategies by which texts encourage children to accept adult interpretations of their behavior? And can we devise ways of helping children to be more aware of those strategies themselves, to protect themselves from the oppressions of the other?” (p.34; *original emphasis*)

In this chapter I will explore how the discourses of childhood which were visited in the last chapter of this paper relate to children’s literature. Exploring the various elements of children’s texts, narratives, and the immediacy of pictures and roots in traditional storytelling, will hopefully give a better understanding of how they can be used in truly participatory communication as well as answering Nodelman’s final question in the remaining chapters.
“Contemporary picturebooks are filled with new forms, images, and intersections, and are vital spaces for collaborative imagination and inquiry; they should be central to the future work of teaching, learning, and research” (Driggs-Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007, p.280). From its roots in storytelling traditions to modern picture books, children’s books share common elements. They are co-creative group activities that mix pleasure and pedagogy, but how do they work? In lieu of first-hand ethnographic fieldwork to study the mechanics of storytelling, bedtime readings and school or library group readings, I will rely on the available literature and ethnographic studies that approach these elements of children’s literature and storytelling.

3.1 Storytelling
At its heart, storytelling is co-creative. It involves traditional knowledge which is constantly recontextualized dialogically. “Historically, our culture evolved through a collective process of collaboration and elaboration. Folktales, legends, myths, and ballads were built up over time as people added elements that made them more meaningful to their own contexts” (Jenkins, 2003, 556). “The storytelling tradition is presented as a bonding or community-building experience” (Pandey, 2002, p.23). As a form of indigenous knowledge (IK), storytelling can therefore also be used to ‘bridge identities across difference’ and counter the ‘knowledge production that valorizes status quo economic, gender, racial and cultural inequalities’ by literally including ‘local voices’ (McEwan, 2009, pp.154, 198). IK “affords the possibility of providing a rich, sustainable and culturally rooted basis for endogenous development” (Clammer, 2012, p.103), and storytelling in particular it is more likely to motivate as a participatory communication strategy than government pamphlets, academic papers or policy reports (Lewis, et al., 2008, p.207).

Christine C. Pappas’s (1993) study of kindergarteners in the Journal of Reading Behavior, supports this the idea. Although “children were just as successful in sustaining co-classification in the information book/genre as they were in sustaining co-referentiality in the story book/genre,” they editorialized and personalized their retelling of informational texts in the form of story (pp.111-114). In other words, storytelling is a way that children can talk back. Her study also illustrates the playful, pleasurable aspect that storytelling adds. “Jean especially enjoyed reenacting these pages, as her frequent laughter and comments in the second reading indicate: "I like that part," she reports, and she is extremely pleased with

---

1 See appendix
herself in the reading of the tunnel parts - "I did all of those" (p.124). In this way, children “are just as successful in reenacting or taking on the discourse properties of the information books as they are of stories” (p.125), but they use the intuitive, playful aspects of narrative style to digest, interpret and retell the different types of text. “In the true manner of our oral tradition, children should be encouraged to learn and tell” (Pandey, 2002, p.24).

What are some of the elements of storytelling? Traditional African storytelling, for example, includes oral elements such as, song and verse, call and response, Q&A, borrowing, code-mixing (the use of two or more languages in the same sentence) and code-switching which are “potent discourse strategies” that refer to local communication practices such as town criers or idioms, proverbs, metaphors, similes, folklore, and drums (Pandey, 2002, pp.16-21). It is co-creative and participatory. “African folk and other songs are generally sung in groups, so when African artists choose to reproduce them in writing, they capture the very essence of the oral tradition” (p.20). Adding call and response, meter, tempo, and repetitive chorus, songs serve as a bonding device and even ‘a call for communal intervention’ (ibid.); they invite, co-construct and emphasize togetherness and a shared communal experience. As noted earlier, this style of storytelling also makes readings more enjoyable - which is not inconsiderable in itself - and therefore more memorable and easier to recall; they teach and entertain, bringing together the worlds of spirit, man and animal (p.21). As relates to ComDev, Andrea Cornwall (2007) adds that “talk of ‘pleasure’ takes us beyond monochromatic representations of abjection, reminding us of the humanity of those whose lives development agencies would wish to improve. Pleasure-based approaches suggest more prospect of enhancing well-being and saving lives than current development models” (p.480). Pleasure and play will also be discussed later.

3.2 Pictures and Narratives

It would be hard to imagine children’s books and literature without illustrations in them. Indeed, even comic books have long since become an adult genre and even a respected art form. According to Carol Driggs-Wolfenbarger and Lawrence Sipe, in ‘A unique visual and literary art form: Recent research on picturebooks, “In well-crafted picturebooks, the author, illustrator, and book designer work together to make the book’s opening pages and changing visual cues both engaging and suggestive for readers’ interpretations” (2007, p.274). Along with the oral elements in traditional narrative storytelling, there is also body language, facial expression, and other interactive participatory engagement. Not only can and do illustrations
in storybooks attempt to simulate the immediacy of traditional storytelling, but the use of visual media itself also has its roots in traditions of storytelling. For example, bibles and other religious texts have traditionally been elaborately illustrated along with stained glass for those who were illiterate. The paintings in the caves at Lascaux from 17,000 - 25,000 years ago are examples of pictures and storytelling in what must have been a dialogic and pedagogic practice with immediacy of representation in a pre-literate culture. They can be linked to the earliest known storytelling cultures.

(Ancient stories in dialogue with the animals, the rocks, each other and with us.)

How do illustrations supplement the linear logical format of the written text though? Driggs-Wolfenbarger and Sipe, state that, “In a picturebook, words and pictures never tell exactly the same story. It is this dissonance that catches the reader’s attention. Readers work to resolve the conflict between what they see and what they read or hear” (2007, p.274). The illustrator then becomes another interpreter adding their voice to that of the author and the group of readers. According to Children's Literature and the Pleasures of the Text, meanings change depending on place and on time with regards to the site of the reading (Touponce, 1995, p.180). The varying points of interpretation make the meanings, the signs and thus the ideologies of more slippery. On the other hand, in ‘What could I say?’ A critical discourse analysis of the construction of race in children’s literature, Rebecca Rogers and June Christian (2007), an inter-racial team of professional educators, took steps to prepare themselves for their fieldwork study, including participating in a series of anti-racist workshops (p.28). Yet despite this training, they still ended up with ambiguous and contradictory conclusions regarding the characters in the story. “Rebecca thought the Cobras were a Black gang instead of a White supremacist group. June thought the Pickwells’ were a Black family when they were a White family” (p.29). Therefore, the pictures in children’s books may actually necessitate participatory dialogic group readings in order to stabilize
them. As a result, with whom books are read and the spaces in which books are read are politically and ideologically defined as well. The possibilities of subversive, clandestine practices of reading open them up for alternate interpretations and meanings. For example, in Germany during WWII, according to Jack Zipes, children’s books which were updated for the purposes of propaganda, were not always read in the presence of ‘Party teachers and functionaries’ which allowed children to use them as a means of escape from the harsh realities of the war (2006, p.143).

3.3 Ideology and Children’s Books

According to McCallum & Stephens (2011), in *Ideology and Children's Books*, there is no narrative without ideology; ideology is inherent in language itself. Ideologies define and sustain group values and supply meaningful organization of social attitudes and relationships which constitute narrative plots. These ideologies can establish and maintain social dominance as well as organize dissent and opposition. They also function most powerfully when authors and readers are unaware. Invisible ideologies work by implicit naturalized assumptions and positions. These *narrative discourses*, become visible when they are placed in information books rather than stories (pp.359-361). From *Male and female characters in illustrated children's books or how children's literature contributes to the construction of gender*, Bruegilles (et al., 2002) add, “Halfway between fiction and pedagogy, [children’s books] facilitate the socialization process and the internalization of norms, […] present everywhere from birth and the privileged medium for the acquisition of socially acceptable sex-role models, and through these, of social hierarchy” (p.240). But, as Diekman & Murnen have stated, children have less ability to differentiate between fiction and reality (2004, p.373). The effects of narrative ideology upon impressionable children is uncontroversial. As I have discussed, ideologies are part of identity construction. “Interacting with literary fiction creates relationships that should be considered real experiences that are part of a person’s history and dynamic interactions with the world” (Medina, 2010, p.42). It could be asserted that this sort of ‘relationship’ may be even more profound when considering that children may read and re-read the same books over and over again.

The widely-accepted view of children as ‘impressionable’ and an implicit understanding of how effective propaganda works makes literature for children a highly charged moral battleground. Dominant ideological structures are ‘organized and defended on the ideological frontlines of the publishing houses’ as well as public spaces, according to Gramsci (2009,
p.16). “Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of streets” (ibid.).

3.3.1 Individualism & Interdependence

Ideologies of selfhood, individualism, and community, independent and interdependent, are culturally informed as well (Clammer, 2012, p.21; Dogra, p.50). This is the root of much of the binaries associated with colonial texts. In western cultures, ‘self’ is often defined by positioning oneself against a constructed ‘other’ (McEwan, 2009, p.122) and rights focus on the individual (Dogra, 2013, p.50). Conversely,

“the interdependent view is exemplified in Japanese culture as well as in other Asian cultures. But it is also characteristic of African cultures, Latin-American cultures, and many southern European cultures. […] these divergent views of the self - the independent and the interdependent - can have a systematic influence on various aspects of cognition, emotion, and motivation” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p.225).

For example, North American Indian as well as many other indigenous peoples practiced rituals of puberty where adolescents were placed in the wilderness and left alone to survive and develop a sense of power and where they also were expected to become aware of “the absurdity and desperation one would experience by leaving the social order” (Zipes, 2010, p.5). Thus, the knowledge of one’s own power, the agency needed to participate in decision-making, is tied to one’s culturally informed view of independence, interdependence, self, and community. This knowledge is not only embodied through physical ordeal (Campbell & Moyers, 2011, pp.15, 101), but also through folktales and storytelling. “The family-first or communal manner of communicating is emphasized even in animal fables” (Pandey, 2002, p.22); the idea of sharing and including everyone in one’s thoughts is “typically African” (p.23), for example.

3.3.2 Folktales & Fairytales

As mentioned previously, according to Jack Zipes (2006), in Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion. The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization, fairytales and folktales had been reworked, recontextualized, and pressed into the service of both Fascists and Marxists during the pre-war period in an attempt to ‘clean them up’ and ‘raise their ideological quality.’ Nazis also discouraged the writing of new folktales because the originals
were considered “holy or sacred Aryan relics” (pp.140-141). Kiera Vaclavik, in Damaging Goods? Francophone Children's Books in a Postcolonial World points out that fairytales and children’s texts have created anxiety among adults throughout history and across different cultures precisely because of the ideologies and narratives of religion, gender, race and morals contained within them. Puritan Christians have targeted fairytales as morally corrupting including the Harry Potter series today. Academics have criticized fairytale portrayals of class, gender, and race as harmful and anti-social. These fears are founded on the adults’ understanding of the vulnerability of children. So, when “Rousseau affirms and reaffirms the deleterious effects of virtually all forms of reading on the young” claiming that “reading is the plague of childhood” (Vaclavik, 2009, p.231), his cynicism appears to be based upon the idea, like Tolstoy’s, of a corruptible childhood purity. In their ironic critique, Instructions on How to Become a General in the Disneyland Club. How to Read Donald Duck, Dorfman & Mattelart (1971), also invoke the ‘vulnerable pure child’ while addressing the discussion on fairytales and morality.

“Since animals are also exempt from the vicissitudes of history and politics, they are convenient symbols of a world beyond socio-economic realities, and the animal characters can represent ordinary human types, common to all classes, countries and epochs. Disney thus establishes a moral background which draws the child down the proper ethical and aesthetic path. It is cruel and unnecessary to tear it away from its magic garden, for it is ruled by the Laws of Mother Nature; children are just like that and the makers of comic books, in their infinite wisdom, understand their behavior and their biologically determined need for harmony. Thus, to attack Disney is to reject the unquestioned stereotype of the child, sanctified as the law in the name of the immutable human condition.” (p.124)

The use of animals in fairytales allows for essentializing characters within them to clarify the moral messages. Nodelman reminds us that the inherent ideological nature of narratives is problematic precisely because it requires essentializing and objectifying in order to create subjectivity.

“Theory teaches us that all discourse is in fact a discourse of the other. According to linguists, it’s an inherent characteristic of language that any given word can be meaningful only within a field of differences - only by being other than other words. The very act of making meaning requires us both to evoke an other (what we don't mean) and to marginalize it (make it less significant than what we do want to say). Furthermore, we wouldn't speak or write if we didn't imagine an other less than
ourselves in at least one important way: an audience that doesn't yet know what we wish it to understand. […] We can try to operate as if the humanity children share with us matters more than their presumed differences from us.” (1992, p.34; original emphasis)

3.4 Children’s Texts & Cultural Imperialism

Nodelman’s observations have profound implications when considering the extent of western culture globally. Clare Bradford (2001) in *The end of empire? Colonial and postcolonial journeys in children's books*, adds, “To read children's books of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is to read texts produced within a pattern of imperial culture” (p.184); “colonial texts are by and large organized through such binary oppositions as self and other, civilized and savage, white and black” (ibid., p.185). Writing books for distant others presumes a knowledge of them and their preferences and cultural references thus creating and reinforcing and identity which is embedded in a culture or ethnicity that is defined by an outsider. The distinction between truth and fiction and between self and other is blurred when information about one’s identity is presented as knowledge (Medina, 2010, p.43). Information or ‘learning books’ thus become more problematic precisely because their ideological narratives are ‘hidden’. Heather Scutter (1997) in *Hunting for History: Children's Literature Outside, Over There, and Down Under*, adds that although they may be hidden, their function is not always unintentional. “Overall, there is an appalling gap as far as the imposition of English-language literatures upon subject peoples in the name of assimilation. The historical impact of master-literatures upon infantilized races and cultures cannot be so breathtakingly ignored” (p.27).

This can be illustrated in a study presented in *Availability of books as a factor in reading, teaching and learning behavior in twenty disadvantaged primary schools in South Africa*, (Nassimbeni, 2011),

“It was not possible to gauge from the findings the extent to which the children appreciated that the majority of books were in their mother tongue. In the focus groups, they spent more time talking about how the books were helping them with their English. The reading competitions were also in English. The prominence of English in all the schools is consistent with what other researchers have found, viz. the pressure to opt for the ex-colonial language associated with its economic power and prestige, manifested in teachers’ preferences and parents’ and children’s demands. (p.101)
The effects of which are that, just as the global child is constructed as human capital and consumer by globalization, colonialism and neo-liberal globalism have left their marks on the industry of children’s literature as well. “Profitability requirements impose extreme standardization, as children's books are "products" that can be exported to numerous countries, the word "product" being all the more appropriate now that books are often no more than one object among others (toys, games, stuffed animals, cartoons, etc.) in a "universe"” (Brugeilles, et al., 2002, p.239). In fact, often they are part of what has been coined ‘Entertainment supersystems’: “The process may start with any media channel, but a successful product will flow across media until it becomes pervasive within the culture at large - comics into computer games, television shows into films, and so forth” (Jenkins, 2003, p.553). As a result, writes Clare Bradford (2011), in *Children’s literature in a global age: transnational and local identities*,

“the marketing strategies deployed to sell, for example, the Harry Potter books in many languages and locations are apt to crowd out children’s books produced locally. This is especially the case in nations where publishing for children is a relatively new industry, such as Singapore, where imported books flood the market, and Indonesia, where publishing for children is dominated by translations of Western books” (pp. 25-26).

An example of this can be seen on Kidnesia.com, an Indonesian website where children can write and upload their own stories. A sample of the website shows a rather Disney-esque selection of white prince and princesses, and the ubiquitous smiling furry animals.
In Promoting children’s literature: The challenges and possibilities of using the Internet in a developing society, Franci Greyling (2004) comments on the erosion of local culture via language and ICTs and by invoking the innovator and human capital repertoires, “It is also important to keep in mind that a child who has already accessed the Internet is a possible future leader (reader) in the process of forming an own identity. Surely this child cannot be deprived of that which is at the heart of humanity: stories in the mother tongue” (p.281).

The child as human capital and the distinction between story- and ‘learning-books’ in India is one that Radhika Menon, in Negotiating the Space for Children’s Books in India, dismally comments on in TulikaBooks.

“Though the marginalised status of children’s literature is a lament one hears everywhere, including in the UK and USA, children’s books in India seem to belong outside the realm of literature. They are more in the category of textbooks whose role is to inform and hone skills. And in a country where the textbook culture in schools is a continuing legacy of its colonial history, and has a strangle-hold on the education system even today, children’s books are accepted only as an extension of text books.” (n.d.)

Greyling continues adding that “children’s books in South Africa receive little attention. Few publications review children’s books and major book stores mainly stock and promote international publications (mainly British). […] Despite numerous attempts by publishers to produce and market children’s books in the other indigenous languages, booksellers seldom keep them in stock and the books are left unsold in warehouses” (2004, p.271).

In the remaining chapters I will analyze a selection of children’s books with relevant themes of development, migration and social justice. I will then discuss how the ‘Voices of Future Generations’ may participate - talk back through glocal storytelling - in the ‘appropriate spaces’ constructed for them: the museum and the shopping mall, the playground and the library.
4. Analysis: Voices of Future Generations

In this chapter, I will look at a sample of children’s texts and use a semiotic visual analysis to explore how classic stereotypes of the global south are perpetuated and how development topics are approached and presented. As child participation is the link between children, storytelling, and development, I will compare books written by adults for children as well as stories written by children themselves. “Children's literature does not hide its ideological agenda and therefore provides a good basis for this type of analysis” (Brugéilles, et al., 2002, p.238). Is this entirely true? If so, what are some of these ‘ideologies’ and how are some of the discourses outlined so far present in child books? Veronica Davidov asserts that if stories are influential in “shaping public knowledge and understanding of development issues” and therefore an “important site for the study of development knowledge”, then it is even more important to study them in formative pedagogic contexts (Davidov, 2013, p.403).

Relative to ComDev, there are numerous organizations and reading lists dedicated to literacy, to children’s books with diversity and social justice themes, websites with books written by kids, and websites to help write children’s books. “In other words,” adds Nodelman with ironic tone, “children are essentially and inherently imaginative, and so we must provide them with books which will teach them how to be imaginative” (Nodelman, 1992, p.33). This chapter will try to find the supposed ‘voice of the future generations’.

4.1 Alfons och Soldatpappan

Following the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, the Swedish state radio offered summer reading tips on children’s books about the migration to Sweden. When the refugee children arrived in Sweden, 30,000 copies of Swedish children’s books translated into Arabic were waiting for them (Bladh, 2016, March 9). Written by adult author Gunilla Bergström, the Alfons Åberg series of Swedish children’s books have been popular since 1972. In Alfons och Soldatpappan (2006), we meet his new friend, Hamdi. The narrative is laden with the binaries of “western values of secularism and scientific, rational and materialist traditions” (Dogra, 2012, p.44), and the ‘naturalized’, religious, and essentialized global south, as described by McEwan, Dogra and Scott previously. During the war in his unnamed homeland, Hamdi’s father is under attack by technology from above (bomber-planes). He gains wisdom from nature while facing down on the earth and meditating on the activities of an ant which he likens to a

---

2 [weneeddiversebooks.org](http://weneeddiversebooks.org) & [ala.org/alsc/unitykindnesspeace](http://ala.org/alsc/unitykindnesspeace)
3 [write4kids.com](http://write4kids.com); [kidnesia.com](http://kidnesia.com); [AfricanStorybook.org](http://AfricanStorybook.org); [VOFG.org](http://VOFG.org); [storiowerf.co.za](http://storiowerf.co.za); [kidpub.com](http://kidpub.com); & [icdlbooks.org](http://icdlbooks.org) which includes a downloadable app called ‘Storykit’ to help kids write their own stories.
‘stubborn guerilla soldier’. He brings this natural wisdom with him to the modernized west. The binaries of the two worlds, modern-west/naturalized-south, are further bridged by signs of technology. For example, the TV parabolas which connect Sweden to Hamdi’s homeland via “strange foreign TV programs”, as Alfons describes them. Also, the bomber-planes, which terrorized Hamdi’s homeland, are offered as a toy in a Swedish Christmas catalog. Even the religious reference of the Christmas catalog is balanced by descriptions of Hamdi’s family praying to their god (also unnamed) before eating, which Alfons does not do in his secular western home.

The binaries are further reinforced by essentializing descriptions of Hamdi as athletic, which Alfons is enjoined to emulate just as he is enjoined to learn from his Hamdi’s father. The father uses binaries to simplify the terror and chaos of the war where the modern and naturalized worlds collided. “Who is the enemy? Who is a friend?”, he asks. The wisdom he received from nature, and the moral of the story, also comes in the form of a binary: ‘there are two types of people, those that build up and those that bomb down’. The father then applies this narrative to the local vandals who destroy the football goals he built for the neighborhood kids to play where he lives now in Sweden. The father stoically rebuilds them together with Alfons saying that they should be like the ants.

It has elements of traditional storytelling such as essentialized characters, references to the purity and wisdom of nature and animals, and man’s place in relation to them. It also has an
Aesop-esque morality to it which speaks of communal ideologies through the binaries of ‘us and them’. What about the child’s voice?

4.2 The Water Princess: an Adult-Child’s Voice
Written by Susan Verde & Georgie Badiel, (Illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds), it is an autobiographical book written by an adult in her childhood voice.

“Based on supermodel Georgie Badiel’s childhood, a young girl dreams of bringing clean drinking water to her African village.” “Instead of a crown, she wears a heavy pot on her head to collect the water. After the voyage home, after boiling the water to drink and clean with, Gie Gie thinks of the trip that tomorrow will bring. And she dreams.” (https://www.amazon.com/Water-Princess-Susan-Verde/dp/0399172580)

According to the jacket cover, one fourth of Burkina Faso’s population has no access to clean drinking water. The women walk an average of 4 miles to the nearest source. In the illustrations, Gie Gie is portrayed as part of the African landscape: embedded in nature, in the sky, part of - and ‘swaying with’ - the tall grass, kneeling face-down against the earth. According to Rose (2012), nature, magic and time are referent systems that use binary principles (p.129). Childhood also symbolizes the third world (Dogra, 2012, p.38). Nature is the field that the she both inhabits and represents (Rose, 2012, p. 93). She becomes a synecdochal sign of the entire continent which also ‘attempts to overcome the distance between us and the distant suffering through a fetishizing of the body’ (Scott, 2014, p.141).

Silhouettes of women and girls, the same color as the earth, almost grow like plants out of the soil. The book focuses entirely on Gie Gie, her mother and the other women of her village. Similar to the naturalization and feminisation of poverty in INGO messages (Dogra, 2012, pp.31-32). “At its most extreme, a logic of appearances presents events as naturalized, or simply as ‘the kind of thing that happens over there’ (Scott, 2014, p.144). “First, the graphic and shocking nature of many images of women works as a spectacle which places their plight ‘within the realm of “nature”’, with occasional subhuman or superhuman features, safely removed from the “human” and political spheres’” (Dogra, 2012, p.40), and “the crises are naturalised through raw portrayals of physical and emotional bonds between mothers and children” (ibid.).
Of the 16 total illustrations, there are just 5 with her eyes clearly open and only 2 where she is looking at us: both times in connection with water. Describing the child’s gaze, Dogra writes, “The issue of eye-contact with the camera (and thus the viewers) is a blurry area. On the one hand, it can convey ‘need’ via an appeal through the eyes […] on the other hand, it can suggest the faith the photographed subjects show in their photographer” (Dogra, 2012, p.33). Similarly, the title ‘Water Princess’ evokes a noble, childlike feminism that awaits rescue from a fairytale prince: in other words, Us. The book is part of Georgie Badiel’s campaign to bring access to clean drinking water to Burkina Faso where she grew up (georgiebadielfoundation.org/).
Living in New York now, she returns in the end of the book as a celebrity, like Madonna, surrounded by the children of the African village. The book has the appearance of a campaign of deliberate positivism (Scott, 2014, pp.149-153), “sentimentalised with elements such as the soft expressions of those photographed and depictions of their ‘goodness’ through their deeds and prayers” (Dogra, 2012, p.43). Gie Gie sings, dances, and prays for water. “A common way of projecting poverty in INGOs’ messages is through ‘naturalisation’, which shows nature as its cause. This is aided and abetted by the heavy use of children and women, who have ‘no politics’ and are ‘closer to nature’” (Dogra, 2012, p.84). The children are portrayed as both innocent, helpless, and powerless and appealing to viewers’ parental instincts of care and protection (Scott, 2014, p.143; McEwan, 2009, p.133) yet their daily toil portrays them as not entirely ‘passive’ (McEwan, 2009, p.138), which adds to their virtue making them worthier of our help (Scott, 2014, pp.143, 148; Dogra, 2013, p.88). Another characteristic of deliberate positivism campaigns is giving the object of the story, Gie Gie, subjectivity by writing in her voice first-person. Similarly, we see photos of her at the end as she appears now: grown up, westernized, ‘more like us’ (Scott, 2014, pp.149-153). In a reverse of the ‘Heart of Darkness’, she leaves the Dark Continent where she ‘goes native’ in the west and returns as a modern ‘civilized’ woman.

The Water Princess, shares the structure of every magic fairytale which conforms to a quest: “The hero lacks something and goes in search of aid (intermediaries) to achieve happiness” (Zipes, 2010, p.4). In this fairytale narrative, the little princess grows in a field of grass, leaves home to conquer the western as super-model and returns home a super-hero bringing elemental water and western technology to the helpless natives, just as she took the heroic journey every day to fetch the water as a child. Although Georgie gains voice and subjectivity via her super-hero’s journey, it is only as an adult at the end of the story; little Gie Gie, the vulnerable helpless child, still has no subjectivity thus no true voice with which to participate, or talk back. Furthermore, ideological narratives of the super-hero focus on “actions by individual actors, rather than the socio-political field,” writes Veronica Davidov (2012, p.406) in ‘Pedagogical’ and Ethnographic Fictions and Meta-narratives of Development: I World Manga. Davidov asks,

“Is it ultimately beneficial to familiarize young readers with vulnerabilities facing people in developing countries, or is it harmful to do it in a way that reproduces narratives of development that promote a neoliberal individualist approach rooted in crypto-ethnocentric universalist humanism, rather than an ontological, systemic
analysis of how global inequalities are produced and sustained? And even those questions engage with just one aspect of the series - they are questions about the books’ existence as pedagogical tools for young adults in the West (or the Global North).” (p.407)

The hero’s journey brings Georgie back as a western celebrity like Madonna. The ‘water princess’ became beauty queen, Miss Africa 2004. She later appeared in Playboy France Black Issue as ‘Playmate of the Month December 2010-January 2011’. Fetishized again, dressed in animal skins and African-esque clothing, the exotic, sexualized “colonial subject, eventually turned development subject” (Davidov, 2012, p.404) is turned back into ‘wild, animal-like’ sexual object. A super-model and a pin-up model are extreme artefacts of consumption and gender; in this case objectified further by race as well. Although she left the ‘private maternal sphere’ of Africa for the ‘male public sphere’ of the west (Dogra, 2012, p.40-41). At the end of the story, just as the front cover of the book, she is still confined to ‘the male gaze’ (Nodelman, 1992, p.29-30) where she talks back as an adult with the voice of a child.

4.3 VOFG?: Child Authors and the Development Industry

What about children authors? The Voices of Future Generations initiative is a program to empower children in promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the rights of children as per the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The book series is authored by children for children where they can,

“enter into effective communication with experts and global leaders who are affecting positive change in the fields of children’s rights and sustainable development. Dialogue is facilitated through intergenerational events such as children’s summits, learning circles and interactive mentoring events that take place in key cities around the world. These allow children to engage effectively with world leaders and exchange ideas and solutions to issues that affect current and future generations.” (www.vofg.org/about-us)

Still, one example, The Epic Eco-Inventions by Jona David, contains two forewords, two prefaces, two outlines of the CRC and the ‘Declaration on the Future We Want’, two pages of “thank you’s” and “special mentions” for the various organizations and members involved all of which make it appears as more of a publicity/marketing tool aimed at adults. There are 51
illustrations (not including the cover), some of them full-page to assist the 40 pages of story written by the child. All ten books are in English, three of them are also available in Spanish. Three of them are *Epic Invention* books by Jona David. Here we can also see images of childhood constructed by discourses of the passive feminine naturalized third world and active male scientific modernized west function with the repertoire of the innovative savior child. One replants and reforests the desert, the other will save the environment with technology and science.

The effects of technology are often racified and gendered in very real ways as well. Historically, technology is something that has often been *done to* rather than *shared with* the global south and from fairly racial origins (Sengupta, 2005), or towards gender in countries like India, where “innovative technologies made sex selection easier, and without the regulations to control the use of such technologies, these technologies began to be misused for sex-selective abortions” (Library of Congress. [https://www.loc.gov/law/help/sex-selection/india.php](https://www.loc.gov/law/help/sex-selection/india.php)). In addition, developing countries often supply the raw materials and cheap labor to manufacture the west’s technology and subsequently acquire jobs from the west that technology has either made obsolete, underpaid, or dangerous (McEwan, 2009, p.133). In the west, children’s books with dystopian themes are becoming more popular (Dystopier och 50-tal i fjolårets barnböcker, 2011). From, *New world orders in contemporary children’s literature: utopian transformations*: “Works of fiction employ utopian and
dystopian themes and motifs in a way that has a transformative purpose: that is, they propose or imply new social and political arrangements by imagining transformed world orders” (Bradford et al, 2008, p.6). For many children of the global south, any dystopian stories might pale in comparison with their daily lived reality. Utopian stories might seem shallow and empty of meaning as well. What types of stories might have more relevance?

4.4 Children Authors: AfricanStorybook.org

*My Village* by Agoro Christine, is also a story which is written by a young girl ‘water princess’ from the Serere District in Eastern Uganda. Unlike Gie Gie’s book, in this story there is only one illustration and two pages of text. The author does not present a fairytale, rather she thanks the president of the country for building a police station which saved a local girl from ‘killers that followed her when she went to fetch water’. The book is from [http://www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org): a site dedicated to children authors which invites multi-lingual people from the world over to translate the books into different languages. There are traditional folktales that deal with respect for, and interdependence with, the land, with animals and with each other. There are morality tales adapted from fabulist Aesop and other narratives of cooperation, fairness, obedience, greed, and joy.

There are also more contemporary tales. Some of them are co-created by an entire class of school children. Rather than categorizing the books according to the age or grade of the child, and thereby further stratifying them, the books are instead labelled by levels of comprehension (e.g. First words, First sentences, Longer Sentences, First paragraphs, etc). Simple illustrations, clipart and photographs are often reused in different books. There are stories of a day at the park, in the village or in the city, a cautionary tale about internet safety and about government breadlines.

The co-creative aspect of the site leads to various alternative interpretations of the same story. For example, *The Hare and the Hyena* is adapted from Aesop several times. The two agree to cooperate and grow food. In diverging narratives, they switch roles and the hare outsmarts and cheats either the hard-working hyena, the alternate lazy hyena, or the oppressive exploiting hyena. There are also fairly sophisticated versions with narratives of labor exploitation and equitable wage negotiation. Folktales get recycled and re-contextualized in storytelling this way. Often the original meanings remain but the details change to fit a contemporary context. Conversely, the details may remain similar at times, but the meanings
and narratives will change. It is a recursive process where the audience and moral narrative shape each other. This freedom to adapt and retell in a space that can be accessed and re-contextualized by children globally opens possibilities to both defeat traditional binaries of colonial texts and engage in more horizontal participatory communication with adults.

A similar initiative was started by a group project for a Spanish language class at a high school by students in Sweden. Students translated books into Spanish and donated them to an orphanage in Bolivia and even wrote their own original storybooks. (www.vt.se/nyheter/insats-for-barnhemsbarn-i-bolivia-7501963.aspx) It would be interesting to see the stories that the orphans might write and send back to Sweden.⁴

5. Discussion

Are all these narrative-ideologies and slippery signifiers too complex for small children? The dialogic co-creative elements of traditional storytelling are also present when adults read books with children. Children’s books “will be looked at and handled often, read aloud by an adult” (Brugeilles, et al., 2002, p.241). Similar to traditional storytelling, the visual elements lend themselves to cross-generational group reading, as noted by Sandhya Rao,

“This is why picture books are crucial to the experience of a child, not simply in relation to reading, but to living. Japanese illustrator Satoshi Kitamura says quite simply, “Because I like pictures, I like stories.” He believes that there ought to be a holistic culture which does not “divide adults from children” and he sees his picture books as being created for everyone, not for children alone. In fact, he makes no distinction at all between children and adults.” (n.d.)

Swedish children’s book author Barbro Lindgren agrees. “A really good children’s book will be just as good for adults as for children” (Barbro Lindgren-tema i Barnradion i P4, 2009; my translation from Swedish). The Swedish children’s book author, Kristina Ohlsson also encourages adults to read children’s books for their own benefit as well as their child’s

⁴There is encouraging evidence from the use of pen-pal programs to suggest positive outcomes from this thesis with regards to participatory communication strategies. “students express a strong desire for connectedness as they gain an appreciation for both the similarities and the distinctions that define their native cultures. The classroom teachers involved have not only taken advantage of this opportunity to extend the knowledge of their students and themselves, but also they have taken the initiative to expand the project to include parents, administrators, other teachers, and the surrounding community in various ways. They effectively used the pen pal project as a tool to motivate, instruct, and model attitudes toward learning, culture, and people.” (Barksdale et al., 2007, p.66; my emphasis)
Kristina Ohlsson uppmanar vuxna att läsa fler barnböcker, 2016), and the Swedish state radio service offers some ‘practical tips’ on how to read with your kids including ‘talk about what you have read’ and ‘let the child decide’ (Bladh, 2016; my translation from Swedish). Considering these are read by, and with adults, I would therefore argue that their complexity is a feature not a bug because it is precisely the complexity which can initiate conversation and inquiry.\(^5\)

In this chapter, I will place the discourse of the child and their spatial identities into the context of PDC/PR4D, child decision-making and the various spaces where they may ‘talk back’. Just as “knowledge is created through conversation” (Lankes, et al, 2007, p.17), Sam Harris, Cognitive Scientist and Philosopher has often noted with regards to morality and ideology, ‘all we have is conversation; conversation and bullets.’ The defense against cultural imperialism and mallification, or the museumification and fossilization of culture is dialogic participatory conversation. How do children’s literature and storytelling fit in?

### 5.1 Child Participation

First, let us look at participatory communication and development. “A new research paradigm - participatory research for development (PR4D) - has also emerged, emphasizing the shortfalls of traditional research techniques. The importance of substantive participation is no longer in doubt; precisely what this entails and how to achieve it remain much more ambiguous” (Hinthorne & Schneider, 2012, p.2802). “PDC [Participatory Development Communication], from a research perspective, has the rare capacity to prompt constructive conversation between an inclusive range of development stakeholders, including representatives of donor organizations, development practitioners, local government officials, traditional authority figures, and community members” (Hinthorne & Schneider, 2012, p.2804). Good horizontal participatory communication for development is more than simply ‘persuading people to change their behavior.’ It should focus on human rights and empowerment as both means and end (Srampickal, 2006, p.3-8; Manyozo, 2012, p.155). The process of communicating empowers children and treats them as equals. It is not just a tool, or a means to an end; it is the end goal in itself which ensures that all members of all communities contribute to sustainable equality (Scott, 2014, p.49).

---

\(^5\) In a copy of The Princess and the Musician (a Persian Saga) by Fiona French, found in a Malmö library, someone crossed out every instance of the word “Shah” and scribbled in “king”: a future conversation starter?
5.2 PDC4Children: Add Children and Stir

As relates to children, Plan International and the U.N. advocate the inclusion of children in decision making especially in issues that affect children (Shier, 2001). Plan International adds an important note here.

“The child-to-child approach recognizes children as effective agents of change, since they often communicate and share more than adults, are more literate than their parents and are responsible for younger siblings. When children learn about the harmfulness of FGM/C they will educate other children” (Harmful Practices and Plan’s Vision, n.d., p.8, footnote).

From the Commissioner for Children Tasmania:

“Children’s participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It’s about listening to them, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality. It is also about providing them with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them and at the same time helping adults understand children’s issues through their lens” (Ashford, 2011, p.3).

There are numerous government and INGO pamphlets that concur and use similar language. But, are there similarities to the “problematic history of a liberal cosmopolitan feminism that positions Western women as saviors” (Dempsey, et al., 2011, p.204), is it possible that campaigns like Plan International’s ‘Because I Am a Girl – I’ll Take It from Here’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gy7N2G_Hz_Y), or Ryan’s Well, another clean water development organization with whom Georgie Badiel cooperates in her efforts which was started by a teenager (https://www.ryanswell.ca/), are putting undo pressure on savior children to solve the problems of the world that they did not create? Additionally, Rebecca Raby points out that even though we must “challenge discourses which conceptualise young people as incompetent”, we must also “accept that some young people may not wish to participate” and include an ability for young people to disrupt established ways of doing things - including introducing antidemocratic ideas and actions as part of the democratic process” (2014, p.86). There are many obstacles to true participation including ‘tokenism’, ‘manipulation’ and ‘decoration’ (Carpentier, 2007, p.89; Manyozo, 2012, p.157; Scott, 2014, p.62; Shier, 2001, p.108-110). How can this be mitigated through children’s books and storytelling?

---

5.3 Child as Storyteller

‘Storytelling constructs personal narratives, identity and a sense of belonging’ (Medina, 2010, p.43). The use of children’s books like Water Princess as fundraising campaign, or M4D and top-down awareness campaigns can stimulate conversation and, hopefully, action eventually. But projects like The AfricanStorybook.org and the Swedish Spanish class students engage global children as cross-cultural storytellers themselves giving them a voice to talk back if we listen. An example from Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis: Orders of Indexicality and Polycentricity,

“In our own research on asylum seekers’ narratives, we often found that ‘truthful’ accounts by the applicant were interpreted as ‘implausible’ (i.e. untruthful) accounts by the interviewers, because describing the chaotic and often paradoxical realities truthfully, often iconically, resulted in a chaotic and paradoxical story, and whereas interviewees oriented towards ‘the truth’ as defined by situated, densely contextualised realities in e.g. Africa, interviewers oriented towards a particular textual (bureaucratic) ideal of decontextualizable coherence, linearity and factuality” (Blommaert, 2007, p. 119).

According to Anita Pandey (2002), in West Africa, children’s and young adult literature stem from Africa storytelling traditions (p.14). Although many authors have tried to re-create it in writing, this art form is being eroded by the influx of pop-culture. However, Medina (2010) in “Reading across communities” in biliteracy practices: Examining translocal discourses and cultural flows in literature discussions, asserts that there must be support for an openness to multiple discourses to coexist and for texts to travel better and to be reinvented and for new texts to emerge across cultural contexts’ (p.58). Hybrid forms which creates new knowledge, ‘Glocalization’, is “a rich space for the reinscription of discourses as they coexist, emerge, and are reproduced and coproduced” (Medina, 2010, p. 41). She reminds us that social experiences and cultural identities are constantly transforming each other through oral traditions and storytelling (ibid.). The global north and south have always existed in relation to each other (McEwan, 2009, pp.212-213). What spaces may the child participate in this transformation?

5.4 Glocal Storytelling: Talking Back in the Museum

John Clammer observes that “the intensifying effects of globalization ensure that contemporary culture is not a museum but a crucible” (2012, p.73). Pieterse reminds is that
“culture is an arena of struggle” (Pieterse, 2009, p.64). Roderick McGillis (1998), in *Introduction: Internationalism and Children's Literature*, adds that culture, “is something distinctively national and transportable. Openness is necessary to any culture that hopes to breathe vigorously and grow”; there must be a willingness to ‘translate, appreciate, integrate, and import outstanding foreign works’ (p.49). In other words, in a museum you may ‘look but don’t touch’. As stated in the previous chapter, traditional education in India, though based on rich storytelling traditions, was highly caste- and gender-differentiated. Radhika Menon’s description of the dwindling cultural capital of India’s children’s ‘literature’ as compared to English books and text books as well as the increasing global ‘market share’ that imperialist pop-culture continues to gain with its low-valued cultural capital, reminds me of a modern *Fiddler on the Roof* narrative.7 Radhika also discounts the relatively high cultural capital value of India folktales and storybooks in the west where they are considered ‘exotic’.8

### 5.5 Glocal Storytelling: Talking Back in the Shopping Mall

Anne Haas Dyson, commenting on pop-culture and media texts points out that, “As cultural capital in the knowledge economy of school, media texts are of low value” (1999, p.371); they are also unstable. But, is this a bug or a feature? Contemporary pop-culture is divergent, participatory and co-creative, according to Henry Jenkins (2003),

> “The pervasiveness of popular culture content has made it a particularly rich basis for forming social ties within the geographically dispersed population of the internet. People who may not ever meet face to face and thus have few real-world connections with each other can tap into the shared framework of popular culture to facilitate communication” (p.556).

R. H. Mitsch (2010), in *African Children’s and Youth Literature at the dawn of the 21st Century*, adds that, “in Botswana, a country with two official languages, Setswana and English […] recent decisions to begin promoting books in big stores have brought increased visibility to children’s titles - Baffour-Awuah presents data for Disney readers (Snow White,
Peter Pan, etc.) - and may be part of the country’s solution to producing “an Educated and Informed Nation” by the year 2016” (p.156).

In a sense, Disney’s modern adaptations of old fairytales, such as the Grimm brothers’ which were often quite gruesome gothic cautionary tales which are now sanitized and made into the colorful musicals that Disney was known for, are a continuation of effective dialogic storytelling traditions by re-contextualizing folklore. They are modern folktales that have been taken out of ‘the museum’ and brought into ‘the crucible’ of the shopping mall; in other words, into a modern western context. Pop culture can also be a form of participatory communication; a dialog with global children. John Clammer points out that, “exposure to external pressures and stimuli stimulates creativity within the local” (2012, p.108). As endorsed by development organizations, participatory communication strategies involving children, especially in developing countries, must include ‘local’ meanings. Hybrid forms “appropriate the language of the colonizers to ‘write back’ from the margins and reclaim postcolonial cultural identities” (McEwan, 2009, p. 44). They are “cultural forms that are reflexively, or self-consciously, mixed – that is, syntheses of cultural forms or fragments of diverse origins. It opposes multiculturalism seen as nationalism writ small” (Eriksen, 2014, p.123). Dyson (1999) also answers Radhika’s lament:

“Children can use these materials to construct their own identities as well as to establish intersubjectivity (shared worlds) with others as kids, girls and boys, children of a particular cultural group, and, as they progress through school, as students. In this way children participate in popular culture - in the production and circulation of meaning based on the use of readily available texts or practices, particularly those of commercial media” (pp.370-371).

But Jenkins’ critique of the ‘privatization of culture’ and concept of ‘intellectual property’ in Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars? Digital cinema, media convergence, and participatory culture. Rethinking media change: The aesthetics of transition (2003, p.556), has problematic implications for the possibilities of real participatory communication across cultures trans-nationally and for new forms of glocal-storytelling by children. One is not guaranteed the right to free speech in a shopping mall where ‘money talks’. For example, Dr. Larrick records that the increasing consumer purchasing power of the ‘Negro market’ in the U.S. in the 1960s enticed commercial interests to fill the void in texts left by publishers who did not know how to represent African-Americans in children’s books.
“The market that most publishers are avoiding is being cultivated by – of all corporations – the Pepsi-Cola Company, which has produced an excellent LP recording Adventures of Negro History. This has been made available to schools through local soft-drink distributors. The first pressing of 10,000 copies was grabbed up almost immediately, according to Russell Harvey, director of Special Market Services. After a year, 1000,000 copies had been distributed and a second record is being made.” (1965, p.84)

Perhaps Jack Zipes’ interpretations of Hans Christian Andersen are fitting. Zipes (2006) contends that Andersen did not actually challenge the class system but rather embraced it. His abdication of the proletarian roots of the ducks and aspiration to the wealthy upper-class of the swans in *The Ugly Duckling* seem to mesh with the Disney global market ethos (pp. 81-103): a culture of consumer material wanting which is void of class conflict. Where can the child use their ‘outdoor voice’?

### 5.6 The ‘Outdoor Voice’: Playground as an Appropriate Space

In *Getting Back on Track: The Importance of Play and Storytelling in Young Children’s Development*, Vivian Gussin Paley (2013), writes

> “I found out that observing, listening, recording, re-observing, re-commenting, and writing it all down was the same thing as teaching. I discovered that it was this ongoing narrative that in fact matched the child’s own discovery of an ongoing narrative - call it play, dramatic play. […] All I needed to do was listen to the children while they played, and join the conversations engendered by play” (p.44).

In addition, the benefits of play and neotonous childlike curiosity in the workplace (Starbuck & Webster, 1991) have become a corporate strategy for companies like Google among others (Corbis, 2012; de Vries, et al, 2012; Brown, 2008; Henig, 2008; Kadlec, 2009). In, *Playing with Purpose: Using Serious Play to Enhance Participatory Development Communication in Research*, Lauren Leigh Hinthorne and Katy Schneider write that “serious play is particularly good at enhancing critical reflection, encouraging knowledge exchange, and promoting innovative problem solving” (Hinthorne & Schneider, 2012, p.2806). Muller and Druin (2003), in *Participatory Design: The Third Space in HCI*, assert that storytelling and play in participatory research function as triggers for conversation, analysis, or feedback; “it is necessary to do more than “just add users and stir” (p.3). Hinthorne and Schneider (2012) note that this is an ideal form of PDC.
“The active participation characteristic of play correlates directly to the PDC principles of active, horizontal, and dialogical communication.” “In some sense, all research is a process of re-presentation and storytelling. […] Emphasizing narrative building by participants is another aspect of play that lends clarity to how a researcher might go about integrating PDC into the research process. […] sharing spaces of serious play creates opportunities to exchange knowledge that can be instrumental in developing awareness of complex themes, issues, or perspectives.” (pp.2807-2808)

The Leka Tre by Carin & Stina Wirsén (En bok för alla. www.ebfa.se), and Alla Tre by Maria Nilsson Thore (Bonnier Carlsen), are a series of books which are good examples of children’s texts designed to be read [performed?] in groups. The books have very simple text for beginning readers and feature mostly gender-ambiguous characters. They present scenarios of children playing together and dealing with the usual conflicts of inclusion, fairness, taking turns, mutual respect, and joy. The Malmö central library⁹ has free copies, to keep, of Alla Tre Gräver en Grop [All Three Dig a Pit] and the librarian said they are routinely used. The ideology is clear and is presented in the title. Fairness and respect – communality - in a kindergarten setting where there may be limited adult supervision and many children with limited ‘subtle moral perceptions’. That the book is offered free, to keep take home into the family and, as such, engage parents in conversation and storytelling.

5.7 Libraries
Nassimbeni in the South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science, of 24699 schools in South Africa, only 7.71% had “functional libraries” including space, materials and librarians (p.96). In one of the schools where the books were appropriately displayed in the classroom, the children were forbidden to touch them” (p.100). David Lankes, Joanne Silverstein, and Scott Nicholson, uncontroversially, believe this sort of museumification should be fixed. In Participatory Networks: The Library as Conversation, they assert that, “Knowledge is created through conversation. Libraries are in the knowledge business. Therefore, libraries are in the conversation business. Some of those conversations span millennia, while others only span a few seconds” (2007, p.17). “The library is both participant in the conversation (what we do to promote early literacy) and facilitator of conversation

⁹ Malmöstadsbibliotek has a large space co-designed with children like a playground with books where the librarians wear ear-plugs. See the appendix.
(what we do to promote public discourse)” (p.18). Development of libraries as strong community centers, like Malmöstadsbibliotek, and projects like AfricanStorybook.org, are both means and end with respect to PDC.

6. Conclusion: Why We Are Speaking in the First Place

I hope I have made the case towards adding children’s books to Martin Scott’s list in *Media and Development*.

“It matters not just how NGOs or news bulletins represent the global South, but how other parts of the world appear, or not, in other – often far more popular – media contexts, such as in literature, feature films, documentaries, travel programmes or even reality-TV-style programmes may actually offer far greater opportunity for the appearance of counter-hegemonic discourses than brief news bulletins because of their capacity to humanize distant others, thereby disrupting conventional hierarchies of human life.” (2014, p.191)

In *The other: Orientalism, colonialism, and children's literature*, Perry Nodelman (1992) points out a commonly referred to problem in development studies. “In the act of speaking for the other, providing it with a voice, we silence it. As long as we keep on speaking for it, we won't get to hear what it has to say for itself - and indeed, that may be exactly why we are speaking in the first place” (p.30). Eriksen adds that “global democratization of communication must arguably include not only equal access to technology but also a fair distribution of the right to speak and the right to be heard” (2014, p.122). Clearly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for engaging the diversity of children around the world that attempts to defy the narrowing functions of the discourses of global children. How can we expect someone that is voiceless to participate or communicate in any substantive manner and contribute to the conversations their own narratives or save the world?

Further research might include richer ethnographic studies of participatory reading and storytelling as play with groups of children and adults in schools, libraries, and homes. In addition, a more comprehensive study could be done on open-source repositories, such as www.AfricanStorybook.org, where children can write their own narratives free from the limitations of the discursive repertoires that I have described.
The advocacy of more and better libraries globally would seem uncontroversial. But it is also in these spaces that development agencies could engage in true horizontal communication with children. If the global child is silenced in the museum and the shopping mall, then we are obligated to continue making the schools and the libraries appropriate spaces for children where they can talk back using their outdoor voices.
7. References


Appendix:

Fieldwork Study Proposal: Co-creative Interactive Children’s Literature

The benefits of investing in libraries is not really disputed. Not only as repositories of knowledge, but increasingly as community centers and “promoters of active citizenship, cultural diversity and democracy” (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. http://www.ifla.org/node/11226) “IFLA’s consistent position is that access to information is essential in achieving the SDGs, and that libraries are not only key partners for governments but are already contributing to progress towards the achievement of the 17 Goals” (ibid.). “Libraries are key institutions for achieving the Goals. Over the last few years, IFLA has been actively involved with the creation of the UN 2030 Agenda, advocating for the inclusion of access to information, safeguarding of cultural heritage, universal literacy, and access to information and communication technologies (ICT) in the framework” (http://www.ifla.org/libraries-development). “While a library may seek to expand or change the community, it does so from within.” (Lankes, et al, 2007, p.31)

More than simply promoting SDGs, libraries can be a perfect potential site for PDC and PR4D with children. In addition, using children as participant designers help construct co-creative spaces for bridging age, education and knowledge gaps into the future. (Muller & Druin, 2003) Not only children’s books, but games, storytelling, community theater, arts and crafts and other activities can be found in modern libraries like Malmöstadsbibliotek. Story-collating and story-telling practices serve multiple purposes including co-creation of new ideas and children’s articulation and self-advocacy. It requires a ‘third space’ to occur for “preservation and expression of new meanings, relationships, conflicts, multiple perspectives, and “heterotopia.” (Muller & Druin, 2003, p.27-28)

Ethnographic studies by Christine C. Pappas (1993), Karen Gallas (1994), Nina Mikkelsen (1990) all illustrate the ways in which children use storytelling to interpret and relate even informational texts. Storytelling is a way for children to assert some ‘authorship’ in the ideological conversations of their community. (Dyson, 1999, p.373-374) It is a physical, tangible engagement with, and negotiation of, socio-ideology – norms, issues and identities that they are expected to internalize – from a position of some authority themselves. In other words, they can digest what they are being taught and communicate their re-interpretations back to adults from a position of some power.
“As they move into the adult world of signifying, spoken language does begin to take precedence, but in essence children do not naturally limit the forms that their expressions take.” (Gallas, 1994, p.xv; original emphasis) Their narratives, the stories they tell, take the form of dramatic play, drawings, movement and spontaneous song and Gallas contends that we ought to consider this an asset. (ibid.) Even ‘bad boys’ and ‘underperforming’ students are storytellers. “When their muse hits them, they burst out with the most lyrical and poetic writing or language and poems.” (Gallas, 1994, p.55) “They dance, paint, sing, draw, write poems, speak in make-believe languages, and adorn themselves with flowers.” (Gallas, 1994, p.68-69)

Carmen Medina (2010) notes children’s ability to bridge cultural gaps through storytelling’s ability to bridge gaps between ‘reality/truth’ and ‘imagination/falsehood’. “As the students elaborate their ideas in the interview, they make sense of the role of stories not only as imaginative but also in relation to how oral traditions are connected to making sense of the human conditions.” (Medina, 2010, p. 56) It is “happening-truth,” being replaced with “story-truth” (Calloway, 1995) or, “narralogue”: an “argument about experience rather than facsimile of it.” (Hemer, 2012, pp.29-30)

**How to Study This First-hand?**

I propose to build on some encouraging work that has been done with co-creative digital reading/writing tools by Cordero (et al, 2015). “Over the past few decades, book publishers and digital media developers have been trying to re-invent the book. [...] Few, however, open a dimension of interactivity that didn't exist before. Interactivity, co-construction and multimodality have long been present in children's books.” (Cordero, et al, 2015, p.487)

Their study was conducted in Santiago, Chile and San José, Costa Rica using iPads to draw pictures about what they had read. The researchers found that drawing pictures “encouraged students to reread their text and revise their work many times” and students felt that creating their own visual images helped them to assimilate what they had read.” (ibid., p.489) For logistical reasons, for cost and convenience and for a wider applicability of findings, I propose a similar but fully low-tech, traditional paper and pencils, analog version of this study.

1. A simple and short book will be drafted with an SDG or Social Justice theme for the storyline.
2. The children will then be asked to illustrate the book themselves. The drawings can either be collectively made, the book can be divided among the children, or the children can choose individually to make as many or as few drawings as they choose.

3. An additional, complimentary study will involve sorting and choosing from possible endings based on some of the team’s findings. Another short book with a story with several versions of the final page and ending to the story. If they do not like any of the endings, they are free to make a new one.

   “despite having been instructed to write about what they had read, close to 40% of the participants ignored these instructions and chose to create stories that exhibited the introduction of original content unrelated to the text they had read. [...] the narration was carried out through writing rather than an audio recording.” (Cordero, et al, 2015, p.492; my emphasis)

The hope is that this sort of engagement with a book, similar to the Leka Tre series, will help them to engage with the narratives within their local culture and environment, help them envision positive change, engage them in SDGs in a participatory way and provide some feedback for us when this technique is used in the developing world. Analyzing the results will depend heavily upon the interpretations of librarians. As they will most likely be familiar with the subjects (the children) their observations regarding the outcome (any impressions or effects upon the children) will be necessary in any case and will also, hopefully, tackle the problems of effective Monitoring & Evaluation.

   “The results of these conversations, what Pask would call “cognitive entanglements,” are books, videos, and artifacts that either document, expand, or result from conversations. So, while one cannot converse with a book, that book certainly can be a starting point for many conversations within the reader and within a larger community.” “For example, much of library evaluation has been based on numeric counts of tangible outputs: books circulated, collection size, reference transactions, and so on. Yet this quantitative approach has been frustrating to many who feel they are counting outcomes but not getting at true impact of library service. Librarians may ask themselves, “Which numbers are important . . . and why?” If libraries focused on conversations, there might be some clarity and cohesion between statistics and other outcomes.” (Lankes, et al, 2007, p.18)

A sample of an original book is attached below. Other research tools would be considered as well.
References


Pat and Sam wanted to build a private clubhouse. A place that is just for them to play in. They got some help from their parents. When they finished building it, they celebrated. They made a special sign for the door:

“Members Only.”
The other kids thought it looked like a fun place. They wanted to see the inside. But, Pat and Sam said, “This is a special clubhouse.” “Only members of the club are allowed to play inside.”
Pat and Sam decided who could be members. Everyone waited to be chosen so that they could come inside and play. Pat and Sam picked them one-by-one. Soon there were many members.

“No more members allowed.”
There were still a lot that were not chosen to be a part of the club. They were not members so they were not allowed inside.

“That’s not fair!”

“When is it our turn?”

“We want to be members too!”

Pat and Sam would not let them. They were left out.
All the kids that were left out felt alone.

“How can I be a member?”

“Why didn’t they pick me?”

There were many of them.
Soon, everyone that was not a member of the club gave up. They went away and played together with each other. They forgot about the clubhouse. Many of the members of the private club saw them playing. “They’re having more fun outside.” “We want to go play with them.” It ended up being more fun to be outside. They were all welcome to join in again. “Everyone is a member!”

The End.
Some of them that were left out gave up. They decided to start their own private club.

“We want to have fun just like them.”

Soon, they had their own clubhouse for ‘members only’ just like Pat and Sam.

“No more members allowed here either.”

The End.
Everyone that was left out got very sad. But, they didn't give up. They wanted to be members of the private club. They didn't think it was fair. They went home to tell their parents. They hoped that it would help.

“I want to be a member too!”

The End.