This chapter explores the relationship between symbolic play and narrative in the process of development. There has been a great deal of developmental research on each of these subjects, and in fact both have attracted increasing interest in the past several decades—not just for their own sake, but also in terms of their connections to broader issues of socialization and development, including cognition, imagination, social competence, and education (e.g., Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1992; Fireman, McVay, & Flanagan, 2003; Nicolopoulou, 1993, 1997a; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). For example, a growing body of research has argued convincingly that the mastery of narrative skills by children in their preschool years serves as one crucial foundation for emergent literacy and long-term school success (e.g., McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Tabor, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). Other lines of research have linked children’s play to their learning and development in the domains of cognition,
language, morality, social understanding, and social competence (for one overview, see Saracho & Spodek, 1998). However, there have been relatively few attempts to address children's play and narrative in an integrated way, and to examine the relationship between them concretely and systematically.

The prevailing mutual isolation between developmental research on play and narrative is both unfortunate and surprising, because theoretical considerations and existing empirical research point toward important affinities and interdependence between them. A major form of children's play, pretend play, centers precisely on the enactment of narrative scenarios. One body of research, reviewed later, has found that children's participation in sociodramatic play improves their narrative skills. Research dealing explicitly with the effects of children's narrative abilities and development on their play has been more rare, but a good deal of work has strong implications for this relationship. For example, Wells and others have argued that the experience of narratives—both listening to stories and telling them—helps to bring home to children "the symbolic potential of language: its power to create possible and imaginary worlds through words" (Wells, 1986, p. 156; cf. Bruner, 1986; Wolf & Heath, 1992). Children's developing ability to produce and understand stories also enables and encourages them to appropriate the rich array of genres and other symbolic resources available in their culture, and to use these flexibly and creatively for their own purposes (Cohen & MacKeith, 1991; Miller, Hengst, Alexander, & Sperry, 2000; Miller, Hoogstra, Mintz, Fung, & Williams, 1993; Rowe, 1998, 2000; Wolf & Heath, 1992). Constructing possible and imaginary worlds through the creative appropriation and reworking of cultural elements involves precisely the kinds of cognitive and imaginative capacities expressed in and promoted by children's pretend play. For these and other reasons, more systematic examination of the dynamic interplay between play and narrative in development can help enrich both areas of research and, in the process, contribute significantly to our larger understanding of the development of cognition and imagination.

Pursuing this examination effectively requires theoretical and empirical approaches that can do justice both to the similarities and interdependence between children's play and narrative and also to their differences. Building on previous research in this area and on my own ongoing studies of preschool children in naturalistic contexts, I argue that the active interplay and cross-fertilization between children's pretend play and narrative can significantly advance their development in a range of domains, but this active interplay is neither given nor automatic. Rather, young children's pretend play and their storytelling seem to start out as mostly separate and parallel activities, and the potential for fruitful coordination and cross-fertilization between them is a developmental achievement that children first need to master. I thus propose a model that sees children's pretend play and storytelling as distinct but complementary modes of their narrative activity, which offer children complementary challenges and benefits, and suggest some ways that they begin to come together in the course of development.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES: NARRATIVE IN PRETEND PLAY AND STORYTELLING

Some researchers have usefully explored the connections between pretend play and narrative in children's experience and development (e.g., Engel, 1995; Fein, Ardila-Rey, & Groth, 2000; Goldman, 1998; Sutton-Smith, 1984a, 1984b). One key point of intersection between them is that a central element of pretend play is the enactment of narrative scenarios, and recognition of this fact has informed work on children's "play narratives" (e.g., Pellegrini & Galda, 1990; Wolf, Rygh, & Altshuler, 1984). In fact, for a number of purposes it is useful to see children's pretend play and storytelling as complementary modes of their narrative activity, on a continuum ranging from the discursive exposition of narratives in storytelling to their enactment in pretend play (Nicolopoulou, 1997a, 2002).

This insight has perhaps been formulated most vividly by Paley (1990), who has consistently argued that "play...is story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form" (p. 4) and that children's "fantasy play and storytelling are never far apart" (p. 8). Paley has further asserted "that this view of play makes play, along with its alter ego, storytelling and acting, the universal learning medium" (p. 10). Following the lead of Paley and others in this respect, I have argued that we should approach children's play and narrative as closely intertwined, and often overlapping, forms of socially situated symbolic action—and that Vygotsky's sociocultural analysis of children's play, for example, offers valuable theoretical resources for grasping the interplay between the two from this perspective (Nicolopoulou, 1997a; Vygotsky, 1933/1967). Both play and storytelling should be viewed as complementary expressions of children's symbolic imagination that draw from and reflect back on the interrelated domains of emotional, intellectual, and social life.
The Research Focus: From Pretend Play to Storytelling

These ideas offer useful starting points for further developmental research, but so far they have only begun to be followed up. Most research that has systematically explored the relationship between children's play and narrative has focused on one aspect of this relationship—the ways that pretend play (i.e., enacted narratives) can help promote the skills necessary for the production and comprehension of stories (i.e., discursive narratives). Various studies have found that children's participation in dramatic storybook reenactment (e.g., Galda, 1984; Martinez, Cheyne, & Teale, 1991; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982, 1993) or spontaneous sociodramatic play with peers (e.g., Smilansky, 1968) improved children's abilities to remember, reproduce, and comprehend stories—not only the enacted stories themselves (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982), but also other stories that were neither enacted by nor familiar to the children (Silvern, Taylor, Williamson, Surbeck, & Kelley, 1986). Furthermore, this research found that the children's narrative skills were promoted not only by their participation in the play enactment itself, but also by the "metaplay" communication and interaction surrounding it, which included conversation and negotiation in setting up the play and conflict resolution within the play episode (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Williamson & Silvern, 1990, 1991, 1992).

An emphasis on the developmental priority of play also predominated in Kavanaugh and Engel's (1998) perceptive overview of this and other research on pretend play and narrative as distinct but interconnected expressions of children's symbolic thought. They argued that pretend play, both solitary and social, emerges first and helps lay crucial foundations for discursive narrative skills. For example, in joint pretend play between 2-year-old children and adult caregivers, the adult often brings out and elaborates the "implicit narrative structure" (p. 92) of the child's pretend gestures, thus providing "a thematic structure that gives meaning and coherence" to the child's initially fragmentary actions (p. 88). As one illustration, they offered a play interaction between a mother and her 2-year-old daughter using two small action figures, Lantern Man and Spider Man.

As the child begins to move the figures about, her mother supplies a thematic narration, saying, "Oh look, Lantern Man is chasing Spider Man. Oh no, he is pushing him down. Spider Man says, ...Help, Lantern Man is grabbing me.' Look, Spider Man is getting away." (p. 88)

"[T]he acquisition of the child's own storytelling abilities. Long before children can construct their own narratives," such playful interactions "foreground the stories they will tell in the preschool years and beyond" (p. 88). For slightly older children, collaborative pretend play with peers, especially role play, "encourages children to imagine the world from someone else's point of view" (p. 85) and to explore their own inner thoughts and feelings and those of others. It thus promotes children's abilities to represent and coordinate multiple points of view—skills that are important for story production and comprehension and for the broader development of social cognition (pp. 84–88, 92–93).

These analyses are generally convincing and illuminating, but a one-sided focus on the priority of play would seem to capture only part of the ongoing interplay between children's pretend play and storytelling. As Kavanaugh and Engel (1998) themselves acknowledged, "fledgling" forms of narrative discourse emerge very early and are promoted by various types of adult-child talk in addition to pretend play interactions (pp. 89–91). Other research has found that even 2-year-olds use discursive narratives, both factual (e.g., Nelson, 1989) and fictional (e.g., Miller et al., 2000; Miller et al., 1993), to work over and make sense of their experience, and that they have already begun to develop rudimentary narrative strategies for these purposes. Furthermore, one could plausibly infer from Kavanaugh and Engel's (1998) approach that young children's enacted play narratives should be more advanced and sophisticated than their comparable discursive narratives. One study of 4- and 5-year-old middle-class children by Benson (1993) explicitly tested a hypothesis along these lines, independently of Kavanaugh and Engel but in accord with their basic model, and did not find support for it. In two play tasks, the children were presented with character figurines and other props and asked to play with them; in two storytelling tasks, the children were presented with drawings of the same characters and asked to make up a story about them. Contrary to Benson's expectation, the plots of the discursive narratives that the children composed in the storytelling tasks were more complex and sophisticated than those of their play narratives.

Toward a More Dialectical Approach

Thus, I propose that the contributions of the research just reviewed can usefully be incorporated into a less one-sided, more reciprocal, and more complex approach to the developmental relationship between pretend...
play and narrative. As I go on to explain more fully, there are both theoretical and empirical grounds for treating young children's pretend play and storytelling as initially parallel and complementary modes of their narrative activity, with at least partially distinct origins and developmental trajectories, that children are only gradually able to integrate effectively. As this integration is achieved, it allows for an increasingly complex and mutually enriching interplay and cross-fertilization between pretend play and storytelling. The key tasks are therefore to delineate the processes by which this occurs and the developmental dynamics that underlie them.

**YOUNG CHILDREN'S PRETEND PLAY AND STORYTELLING: INITIAL THEMATIC DISJUNCTION AND GROWING CROSS-FERTILIZATION**

My own research on 3- to 5-year-old children in a range of preschool classes (e.g., Nicolopoulou, 1996, 1997b, 2002; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994) provides evidence that supports this proposed model. In these classes, a storytelling and story-acting practice pioneered by the teacher/researcher Vivian Paley (e.g., 1986, 1988, 1990) was a regular component of the preschool curriculum. During the period allotted each day to "choice time," any child who wishes can dictate a story to a designated teacher, who writes it down with minimal intervention. This storytelling is a voluntary activity, and each story dictation is typically child-initiated. Later that day, during "group time," each of the stories composed that day is read aloud to the entire class by the teacher, while the child author and other children, whom he or she chooses, act out the story. This is an apparently simple technique with complex and powerful effects, as all children in the class typically participate in three interrelated roles: composing and dictating stories, taking part in the group enactment of stories (their own and those of other children), and listening to (and watching the performance of) the stories of the other children in the class. There is strong evidence that these conditions lead children to produce narratives that are richer, more ambitious, and more illuminating than when they compose them in isolation from their everyday social contexts and in response to agendas shaped directly by adults (Nicolopoulou, 1996, 2002).

Eleven of the classes studied were in preschools serving children from predominantly middle-class backgrounds, and seven were in Head Start programs serving poor and otherwise disadvantaged children. For all these classes, I obtained the entire corpus of spontaneous stories composed by the children during the school year. For most of the classes from middle-class preschools, my assistants and I also visited the classrooms regularly (at least twice a month) and wrote detailed field notes about the conduct of the storytelling and story-acting practice and about other classroom activities, including the children's unstructured free play. So far, only two of the Head Start classes have been studied for an entire year in this manner (a large-scale multiyear study of preschoolers in a metropolitan Head Start system is currently in preparation), but I visited all of them several times and wrote detailed field notes for each visit.

In constructing their stories, the children drew themes, characters, images, plots, and other elements from each other's stories; they also incorporated elements into their narratives from a wide range of other sources, including fairy tales, children's books, TV (and popular culture more generally), and their own experience. However, they did not simply imitate other children's stories, nor just passively absorb messages from adults and the larger culture. My analysis has shown that, even at this early age, they were able to appropriate these elements selectively, and to use and rework them for their own purposes—cognitive, symbolic, and social-relational.

**A Puzzling Disjunction**

Given this pattern of narrative appropriation and cross-fertilization, which includes an ongoing interchange and reworking of themes between different children's stories, one would also expect to find extensive thematic interchange between the children's storytelling and pretend play. In fact, preschoolers often do use common themes in their stories and play scenarios. However, to my surprise, I have consistently found that among the younger preschoolers, and those with weaker narrative and play skills, the overlap of themes and other symbolic elements between their discursive narratives and the narrative scenarios they enact in pretend play is at first minimal or absent. At that stage, as I have suggested, the children's pretend play and storytelling appear to operate as parallel activities with surprisingly little thematic interchange or mutual influence. The integration between them, as expressed by the use of common themes in both activities, takes some time to become established. Research findings from middle-class preschools and from Head Start classes can help to illuminate different aspects of this overall pattern.
Middle-Class Preschools

In Paley's accounts of her preschool classes, one encounters numerous examples of children using (and reworking) similar themes in their play and storytelling. In my own studies of middle- and upper middle-class preschoolers, I have also observed frequent continuity of themes between children's play and their stories. However, there is at first a sharp disjunction between the themes that children use in these two activities, and the thematic continuity between them has to be developed over time.

To provide one illustration of this pervasive pattern, I use a middle-class preschool classroom studied during the 1999–2000 school year. This mixed-age class included 17 children (9 girls and 8 boys). My examples come from two time periods (in December and May) in which the children's classroom play was observed and audiotaped for 2 consecutive days. In both observational periods, the children who told stories also engaged in pretend play episodes. However, in December, as in previous months, the extent to which they used common themes in their pretend play and storytelling was minimal, whereas by May it had increased substantially.

During the first day of the December observation period, we did not see much sustained pretend play, but the next day 5 children, later joined by 2 more, participated in a joint play episode lasting over an hour that centered on “fire truck” and “firefighter” themes. This play episode seems to have been at least partly inspired by props that the teacher brought into the classroom (i.e., she placed tires next to a large block structure on which children could sit), and during the play she actively but gently scaffolded it (e.g., adding hoses once the firefighter theme was established). Different children took on the firefighter paradigm and actively elaborated it in their own way, responding only intermittently to the teacher's suggestions. The children engaged in the play episode developed and recycled a cluster of loosely connected themes: putting out a fire, helping a dead person, washing the fire truck, driving the fire truck around, and putting gas in the fire truck.

Later in the day, two of the dominant children in this play episode dictated stories to the teacher, but their stories showed barely a trace of the central play themes. There was no mention of fires, fire trucks, or firefighters. One story did mention “a hose”—“Ben blew on the hole of the hose” (Jason, 1; 5; 0)—which may have been a reference to the hoses used to put gas in the make-believe fire truck. In the other story, told by Rhys (5; 1), there was mention of a “dead person”—a role that this child had played briefly during the play episode. In both stories, these were no more than brief (and ambiguous) references to isolated elements from the play episode, with no effort to incorporate and elaborate the central themes of the pretend play narrative. This lack of sustained thematic interchange was a pattern we observed consistently in this class throughout the fall semester.

By May, in contrast, themes from the children's pretend play appeared frequently in their stories and vice versa, and there was often a fluid continuity between the narrative scenarios in the two activities. For example, two boys, Tillian and Jason, played together with the themes of Power Rangers and fighting. Later that day, they coauthored a story using the same themes:

A story about fighting.

One day there were two men. Then there was a Power Ranger. Then one man punched the other man. And then that man fell down a mountain. And then he climbed back again. And punched the guy back. Then the Power Ranger chased those fighting guys out of the world forever. And then came the end. (Tillian, 5; 2 & Jason, 5; 6; 5/25/00)

That same day, Holly, one of the youngest children in the class, was playing with figurines of various farm animals, arranging and rearranging them in different configurations. At one point she announced to a teacher and a nearby child that she had created a “horse school.” This other child joined her briefly in playing with the figurines. Later that day, Holly told the following story:

A toy story.

Once upon a time there was a big horse. And then there was a little sheep. And there was a goose and a chicken. They both had babies, two babies and three babies. And then there was a little horse and a little goat. And there was a black cat. They played candy land. The end. (Holly, 3; 9, 5/25/00)

These examples capture the larger pattern indicated by the analysis of pretend play and storytelling of children in the middle-class preschools studied. At first, the use of common themes in these two modes of narrative activity was minimal, and tended to include only isolated elements. (The main exceptions were children in their second year of preschool who began the school year already having participated in this storytelling...
and story-acting practice the previous year.) By the spring, however, thematic continuity and cross-fertilization between their pretend play and storytelling was considerably more frequent and comprehensive.

Head Start Classrooms

This initial disjunction between the thematic content of children's stories and their pretend play scenarios has been even more striking in the Head Start classes I have studied. Here is one example from a Head Start program in a large city, a few weeks after I had introduced the storytelling and story-acting practice in this class. I was playing with a group of children at a waist-high sand table with figurines representing animals, cars, and superheroes. What follows is an excerpt from my field notes (2/28/03):

At one moment I was playing with some kids at the sand table. I noticed that the children were rather imaginative in their play, taking on the role of a character/superhero flying around, hitting others, etc. I pretended I did not know what to do with my character and some of the kids were directing me. A regular volunteer in this classroom, an older woman from the community, urged me to take down a story from one of these children, Dasai, because she mentioned he was very imaginative. I had noticed his imaginative engagement in the sand table play (that is, having his action-hero character perform various stereotypic actions). After he lost interest in the sand table and was looking around for another activity, I asked him whether he wanted to tell me (i.e., dictate) a story. He was eager to do that, and I thought that he would tell me a story that followed (or had some elements of) his sand table play. However, his story just recounted some simple ordinary events, and resembled a number of stories I was getting from the children in this and other Head Start classrooms.

Dasai: Me and my brother played outside. We went to the store.

AN: (Because he stopped, I asked): What kind of store?

Dasai: Gumstore. That's it.

This pattern was brought out especially well in a more intensive study of a Head Start class of 17 children in a semirural area in the northeastern United States conducted during the 1997–1998 school year (Nicolopoulou, 2002). These children came from backgrounds of poverty combined, in most cases, with family difficulty or instability. The teacher introduced the storytelling and story-acting practice into the classroom that year with my assistance. In addition to monitoring its operation, for a 2-day period each month an assistant and I conducted systematic observations of other classroom activities, including the children's free play.

11. Play and Narrative

The children in this class began the school year with significantly weaker narrative skills than corresponding middle-class children or even children in some other Head Start classes I have studied. For example, they showed less familiarity with the basic conventions for telling a free-standing, self-contextualized story—such as marking beginnings and endings, explicitly relating events in temporal sequence, and constructing a complete narrative scenario—and less mastery of the relevant language skills. Their narrative skills improved significantly during the year, but even in the spring these were still less advanced than those of equivalent-aged children in middle-class preschools I have studied. Early in the school year the children's pretend play was also rather limited and fragmentary—generally restricted to a small range of stereotyped roles, with minimal scenarios and very little play-related communication. Both the quantity and quality of their pretend play increased during the school year but, again, it remained relatively weak in most cases.

Thus, although the children immediately displayed great enthusiasm for telling stories, at first they had some difficulty doing this effectively. In their early attempts at storytelling, they simply listed a string of characters (and sometimes mentioned other potentially relevant elements), usually without providing actions, descriptions, or plots. After several weeks of this protonarrative groping, one child, April, produced a story that met the minimal standards for a free-standing fictional story:

Wedding girl and wedding boy, and then there was a baby. And then there was the person that brought out the flowers. And then there was some animal that wrecked the house, the church house that people were getting married in. And a person was listening to a wedding tape. And that's all. (April, 5; 1)

This story was not very complex, but it did include a relatively coherent and explicit scenario, a set of interrelated characters, and a sketchy but readily discernible plot. It also introduced and combined a set of organizing themes that were to prove powerfully appealing to other children in the class: first, a wedding, featuring the two linked characters of wedding girl and wedding boy; and second, animal aggression.

The dynamics of the storytelling and story-acting practice then set in motion a process of narrative borrowing and mutual cross-fertilization. A few weeks later another child, Anton, who had acted as the wedding boy in April's story, composed a story using these themes and adding his own elaborations. In Anton's story, the wedding couple got married and then went on to have children (an event that, incidentally, happens very rarely in boys' stories). Shortly afterward, April told a slightly reworked
version of her story. Over time this story paradigm was gradually taken up and reused, with variations and elaborations, by other children in the class, until it became pervasive in the children's storytelling. By the spring, all the children in the class told at least some stories that included this bundle of themes, and more than half of them used it in most of their stories. This narrative paradigm became a cultural tool that was shared and elaborated by the classroom peer group as a whole (for more details, see Nicolopoulou, 2002).

Given the extent to which this cluster of themes captured the children's attention and imagination, and the enthusiasm with which different children appropriated it for their own storytelling, one might have expected these themes to appear in their pretend play as well. However, this was not the case for most of the year. In fact, not until May did we observe a play episode in which three girls, who had used these themes profusely in their stories, enacted a wedding girl–wedding boy scenario. The classroom teacher confirmed that this was the first time she had noticed the children using these themes in their play, although the same girls subsequently used them in a few more play episodes. Nor did the characteristic themes in the children's play appear in their stories. In short, there was a striking contrast between the rapid and pervasive thematic cross-fertilization in the children's storytelling and the relative lack of thematic cross-fertilization between their storytelling and their pretend play narratives.

COMPLEMENTARY EMPHASES IN EARLY PLAY AND STORYTELLING: CHARACTER REPRESENTATION VERSUS PLOT

These and other findings support the proposition that young children's pretend play and storytelling start out as relatively distinct and parallel symbolic activities, and that the ability to engage in flexible coordination and cross-fertilization between them is a developmental achievement that requires some time and effort to accomplish. The explanation for this developmental pattern still needs to be worked out, but it is possible to offer some informed hypotheses to help orient research on these questions.

As noted earlier, a key point of contact between pretend play and the production and comprehension of stories is that both involve constructing and understanding narrative scenarios. However, fully developed narrative combines a number of different elements. It seems plausible that, at least in their early phases, these elements—and the skills associated with them—develop in partly independent ways, tend to be linked unevenly to different activities, and need to be integrated to achieve full narrative competence. I argue that young children's pretend play and storytelling require and promote somewhat different but complementary clusters of narrative-related skills, build on different strengths, and pose different challenges for the children. This complementary relationship between the two activities is an important reason why their coordination and cross-fertilization can be beneficial, but it helps explain why bringing them together requires significant effort and development.

DIMENSIONS OF NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE COMPETENCE

What are the elements into which a well-formed narrative can be analytically decomposed to pursue this hypothesis? As a conceptual starting point, I propose that we draw on a useful suggestion by Bruner (1986), who argued that successful narrative must simultaneously construct and effectively integrate two landscapes: "a landscape of action" that links sequences of actions and events in physical settings, and a "landscape of consciousness" that portrays "what those involved in the action know, think, and feel" (p. 14). These two landscapes are analytically distinct, but it is their integration that gives successful narrative its full power and coherence. To reframe this distinction somewhat, fully developed narrative must coordinate actions and events in a coherent plot, which must simultaneously be integrated with a rich and effective representation of characters, including the portrayal and coordination of their subjective points of view.

This model dovetails with Harris's (2000) analysis of "the work of the imagination" in cognitive and language development. Harris argued that there are "important continuities" (p. 51) between the cognitive capacities that underpin the production and comprehension of narrative scenarios in pretend play and in stories. "The key concept for linking the two functions is what has become known as the situation model" (p. 192), a concept initially developed by cognitive psychologists to capture the ways that adults process oral or written narratives (Zwaan, 1999; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998). To create or understand a narrative scenario, children and adults must construct a mental model of the narrative situation being portrayed—one that is independent of their actual spatio-temporal context but is internally coherent—and then transform it appropriately as the narrative unfolds. For our purposes here, what is striking is the extent
to which the key features of the situation model identified in this analysis correspond to the elements of narrative just emphasized. Constructing and transforming a situation model requires both (a) the ability to link actions and events into a coherent plot, including the recognition and imputation of causal connections within the imagined narrative situation, and (b) the ability and disposition to enter into the point of view of characters within the narrative. This account once again poses the questions of how young children develop these complementary abilities—and the ability to integrate them effectively.

Complementary Narrative Emphases in Early Pretend Play and Storytelling

From the beginning, of course, young children struggle with both plot construction and character representation in both pretend play and storytelling, and these two aspects of narrative can never be entirely independent. However, I would argue that, in the earliest phases of development, the two activities tend to emphasize and promote different dimensions of narrative and narrative skills. In comparative terms, early pretend play emphasizes increasing depth and richness in character representation, whereas early storytelling emphasizes increasing complexity, coherence, and sophistication in plot construction.

For example, there is considerable evidence (summed up by Kavanaugh & Engel, 1998) that pretend play, especially sociodramatic role play, highlights and fosters children's abilities to understand and coordinate multiple mental perspectives. Children's identification with characters whose roles they enact heightens their interest and emotional engagement in the activity. At the same time, this role playing has an important cognitive dimension. It pushes the child to see the world from the point of view of the character being represented—which involves constructing a relatively consistent perspective for this character—and also to coordinate this imagined perspective with those of other protagonists in the play scenario. Thus, it promotes the ability and inclination to understand people's actions in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, and other internal mental states in addition to externally observable phenomena—in short, to construct a "landscape of consciousness." For example, Wolf et al. (1984) found that, in pretend play with figurines, even 3-year-olds began to explicitly attribute to characters emotions, cognitions, obligations, and moral judgments; this is at least several years earlier than the great bulk of narrative research has found such mentalistic descriptions in children's stories (e.g., Berman & Slobin, 1994; for an overview, see Nicolopoulou & Richner, in press). There is also ample research suggesting that children who participate more frequently in role play and other forms of joint pretend play demonstrate greater understanding of internal mental processes, including the role of false beliefs (e.g., Astington & Jenkins, 1995; Schwebel, Rosen, & Singer, 1999; Taylor & Carlson, 1997; Youngblade & Dunn, 1995). My own observations suggest that young children's play narratives often begin to portray vivid, substantial, and reciprocally coordinated characters before they develop complex, sophisticated, or even minimally coherent plots.

By comparison, in their storytelling, young children initially show a greater preoccupation with constructing, elaborating, and extending coherent plots. As indicated earlier, some children may start out with a prototopy phase in which they simply list characters to act out, but as soon as they grasp that the character's actions have to be described explicitly, they begin to construct sequences of actions and events that become increasingly extended, complex, and imaginative. My observations accord with Benson's (1993) finding that the plots of preschoolers' stories are usually more complex and sophisticated than those of their pretend play narratives. For some time, however, this increasing sophistication in plot construction is usually not matched in the development of character representation. Young children are certainly capable of including a range of characters in their stories, and some of them (particularly girls) begin quite early to link characters in family or quasi-family relationships. However, at first these characters tend to remain generic types, described with little detail or psychological depth. They are portrayed largely in terms of their actions, especially by boys, or in terms of their social ties, especially by girls (Richner & Nicolopoulou, 2001). Only later do the children's stories begin to portray individuated characters with more detailed characteristics, perspectives on the world, and internal mental states (Nicolopoulou & Richner, in press).

Integrating the Elements of a Complete Narrative Scenario

In both their pretend play and their storytelling, young children gradually master the ability to construct a full narrative scenario, and, correspondingly, a coherent cognitive situation model. That is, they achieve the capacity to routinely produce and understand narrative scenarios that effectively combine coherent and complex plots with rich and substantial
character representations, including portrayal of a "landscape of consciousness." I would suggest that achieving this level of development in at least one of their two central narrative activities, pretend play or storytelling, is a key factor that accelerates active and fruitful narrative cross-fertilization between the two activities. We still need to determine how much the attainment of a full narrative scenario takes the form of a gradual and self-reinforcing process or a more sharply defined developmental breakthrough, but in either case it constitutes an important developmental threshold that serves as a basis and impetus for further development. One reason is that the ability to produce and understand a full narrative scenario, if only in minimal form, integrates the two crucial elements of narrative emphasized by early pretend play and storytelling, respectively, and helps enable children to build cognitive bridges between them.

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES IN STORYTELLING AND PRETEND PLAY: DIFFERING ROUTES IN CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

To flesh out the model just proposed and assess it systematically, we still need to map out the processes by which the narrative scenarios in young children's pretend play and narrative converge to an extent that enables active interplay and fruitful cross-fertilization between them. Drawing on relevant findings from different lines of research, I highlight some of the developmental patterns that appear to be especially significant.

The discussion that follows is necessarily exploratory, especially with respect to pretend play. It is also important to note that the developmental trajectories outlined here should not be expected to unfold in uniform or automatic ways. The developmental pathways followed by individual children are complex, uneven, and diverse, in narrative as in other domains, and they can be significantly shaped and promoted by differing social contexts and interactions (for some elaboration, see Nicolopoulou, 1996, 2002). However, some broad developmental tendencies can be discerned on the basis of existing research, and they accord with the pattern of narrative complementary and convergence I have suggested.

Storytelling: From Plot to Perspective

Addressing these issues is complicated by the fact that most developmental research on children's story production and comprehension during the past several decades has tended to focus heavily on linguistic or plot structure, with considerably less attention to character representation (for more extended discussion, see Nicolopoulou, 1997a; Nicolopoulou & Richner, in press). As I indicated earlier, it is necessary to develop approaches that can effectively capture both of these aspects of narrative and the relationships between them. It is also important to recognize that the processes by which narratives are constructed and used are simultaneously processes of cultural appropriation. In constructing their narratives, children, like adults, necessarily draw on a range of cognitive and symbolic resources from the culture around them, including themes, images, characters, and genres. As Feldman, Bruner, Kalmar, and Renderer (1993) and others have argued, narrative genres provide constitutive mental models for ordering and interpreting the world and our own experience, in ways that are both constraining and enabling, and therefore provide us with crucial tools for thought and action as well as communication. However, children must develop their abilities to master and appropriate these genres and other narrative resources to use them flexibly and creatively.

From this perspective, one revealing feature of young children's earliest storytelling efforts is the difficulty they experience in mastering the narrative resources they try to use. As indicated earlier, some children may start out with protonarratives, merely listing characters, although they soon move beyond that. On the other hand, 3-year-olds from middle-class families have usually been read a great many stories by adults before they arrive in preschool, and they often begin by using some of their favorite stories as models for their own storytelling. However, their first attempts to reproduce these stories tend to be fragmentary and not very coherent.

It's about a thunderstorm and Bambi and fire.

There is a thunderstorm and some fire. Bambi's trying to call her mama and they are fawns. They go home and saw some good little friends. The end. (Daphne, 3:3, 9/14/93)

Other children, in both middle-class preschools and Head Start programs, become able to retell fragments of stories they have heard in considerable detail, sometimes displaying an impressive memory for disconnected story elements. However, on close examination, it is clear that they are repeating stories rather than constructing them—or, to put it another way, that they are imitating narrative models rather than genuinely appropriating them as resources for their own storytelling.
Over the course of the school year, children's stories almost invariably show significant improvements in quality and complexity. One strategy that some children use is to focus on a few basic story paradigms or plotlines—or even a single paradigm—for an extended period, returning to them over and over and reworking them with incremental variations. In these cases, adults often feel that the child's stories are becoming monotonous, and teachers occasionally complain that these children are "stuck in telling the same stories." However, if one follows the pattern of these stories over time it is clear that the children are methodically working through narrative possibilities of the material and gradually producing more complex and effective stories (for further discussion, see Nicolopoulou, 1996). At first, these advances are manifested primarily in improved plot structure. Later, this begins to be combined with increased depth and richness of character representation.

Some illustrations can be taken from the stories of Joshua (4; 8), who began by telling stories organized around three elements: Ninja Turtles (characters often favored by boys), fighting, and eating. Here is his first story of the school year:

Ninja Turtles. They fight. Then they eat pizza. And then they fight again. Then pizza again. And then they ate cake and ice cream. And then they fight again. And that's the end. (Joshua, 4; 8, 9/08/93)

Somewhat unusually, but usefully for illustrative purposes, Joshua stayed exclusively with this single story format for more than a semester. His stories gradually became longer and more complicated, primarily by adding more characters (drawn largely from the Ninja Turtles cartoons) and more actions:

Ninja Turtles eat pizza. And then they fight the foot soldiers. And Bebop and Rocksteady and Shredder came and the Ninjas fought them. And then they go on the Turtle van. And then they fought with the foot soldiers 11 times. And then Donatello throw Bebop to the river. And then Donatello throws boulders on top of Bebop's head. And then boulders come tumbling down on Bebop another time. And then Ninja Turtles eat chocolate cake, ice cream, and hot chocolate and candy bars. And then the Ninjas swim in the pond. The end. (Joshua, 5; 2, 3/24/94)

Toward the spring semester, although Joshua's stories were still organized around the alternating themes of fighting and eating, he now used characters drawn from a wider range of sources, and his plots included a wider variety of actions, with more continuity and causal connections in action sequences. Furthermore, the characters began to be described in more detailed, specific, and differentiated ways, although still without much depth:

The good knights fight the bad knights. And then the bad knights climbed up the castle wall. And the good knights shot them off with bows and arrows. And then the good knights came and put three more of the bad knights in the prison. And then they gave the bad knights some water and food. And then the bad guys escaped from prison. And the good knights fight them again with bows and arrows and swords. Then the good knights went swimming and then they ate chocolate cake and ice cream. Then the good knights go to bed. And in the morning they rode their horses into battle and then the good knights shot the bad knights with bows and arrows. The end. (Joshua, 5; 3, 4/4/94)

Unlike Joshua's stories, which tended to become increasingly sprawling, the following story by another boy, Mickey, offers an example of a more tightly organized narrative depicting a conflict and its resolution. The characters (a man, a woman, and two dinosaurs) are well coordinated with each other within the plot, but none of them is portrayed in detail or with any inner mental life.

Once upon a time there was a man and one girl. They found some dinosaurs in the stick house and they were Tyrannosaurus Rex and Packiasefalasaurus. They rode on them and the man was bad and the woman was good. The woman was on Packiasefalasaurus and the man rode Tyrannosaurus Rex. And they fought while they were on the dinosaurs. Packi bited Tyrannosaurus with his head. And Tyrannosaurus bit him with his teeth. And Packi won the fight. (Mickey, 4; 7, 12/1/88)

Other stories by preschoolers achieve a more sophisticated integration of plot complexity with depth of character representation. These stories by Nora, who was in the same preschool class as Mickey, offer a good illustration. We can compare a relatively early story, composed in October, with two stories from the next semester.

Once upon a time there was a bunny and a duck and they played in the park on the swing. And then they went back to their house and there was another monster. And then they were into their room there was another monster. The end. (Nora, 4; 9, 10/18/88)

This was Nora's fourth story of the school year. At the end of January (after composing another 10 stories in the meantime), she told the following two stories in sequence:
Once upon a time there was a mom and a dad and a sister. They lived in a house in the forest. One morning, the sun came up and they weren't awake yet. But then a fox came looking for food. But then the sister woke up, and she heard the fox. And then the fox came knocking in her door. Then the sister peeked out the door. And then she slammed it closed. And then she ran to tell her mommy and dad. They opened the door and the fox ran away. (Nora, 5; 0, 1/26/89)

Once upon a time in a forest there was a tiger and a bunny. They played hide and seek. And then they found a person and they thought it was a stranger. They ran and then got up a tree, and then the person ran away. They were all scared. And then came a whole family. Then they took the bunny back to their house. And they had dinner there. And then all went to bed. And then in the morning, they woke up. And then they looked out the window. And they saw snow falling down. (Nora, 5; 0, 1/29/89)

This contrast brings out some key developmental advances. The first story is brief, and each character performs a limited number of actions that are described in generic terms (e.g., they played, they went back home). The later stories have considerably more specificity and complexity: A background is established, and then an interrelated sequence of actions is initiated and elaborated (with the second story combining a general and a specific temporal marking device, "once upon a time" and "one morning"). Overall, the plot structure is more complex and sophisticated. In the second and third stories, for example, a series of dramatic problems are posed (the fox goes looking for food, then the sister hears the fox at the door, etc.), which are then resolved. In the third story, which has a looser form than the second, elements from two episodes are nevertheless coordinated into a continuous story. In addition, the characters are more fully developed, with a number of specific actions attributed to each, and the relations between the characters are more clearly and carefully worked out. Furthermore, we see the attribution of motives and the depiction of "internal" points of view, with incidents in the story being related from the perspective of one or more of the characters (e.g., the girl hears, then sees, the fox; the tiger and bunny think the person is a stranger and are scared). (For a somewhat more extended analysis see Nicolopoulos, 1996, where Nora's stories are also discussed.)

In each of these later stories, in short, complexity and coherence of plot structure is effectively integrated with depth of character representation within a fully formed narrative scenario. However, this completed narrative scenario with its successful “dual landscape” is a developmental achievement, not a starting point.

11. PLAY AND NARRATIVE

Pretend Play: From Intersubjectivity to Plot

With respect to young children's pretend play, I cannot draw directly on my own research, and only a limited number of studies have systematically addressed the issues raised in this chapter. However, findings from several lines of developmental research, when considered in combination, also lend support to the model I have proposed. That is, in their earliest phases young children's play narratives seem to focus primarily on increasing depth and richness of character representation, and only later begin to generate more complex and coherent plots.

As noted earlier, a good deal of research has shown that pretend play, especially collaborative play, engages and promotes children's abilities to represent and coordinate multiple points of view and to understand the role of internal mental processes—skills that are critical for constructing a "landscape of consciousness" in narrative. This is true not only for children's participation in play enactment itself, which involves portraying and identifying with characters, but also for the "metaplay" communication and interaction used in setting up, negotiating, and managing play collaboration. In fact, a number of researchers have argued, explicitly or in effect, that these metaplay processes should be treated as an integral component of play (e.g., Farver, 1992; Goldman, 1998; Göncü, 1993a, 1993b; Sachs, Goldman, & Chaille, 1984; Sawyer, 1997; Tiawick-Smith, 1998). For example, Göncü (1993a, 1993b) suggested convincingly that a key dimension in the development of pretend play during the preschool years is the achievement of increasingly effective intersubjectivity—that is, children's abilities to establish and build on understandings and to organize and maintain play collaboration. This line of analysis has also been pursued and elaborated, using somewhat different terminology, by Sawyer (1997) and others.

As Sawyer (1997) himself recognized, these analyses of intersubjectivity in metaplay interaction still need to be coordinated more fully with developmental analyses that focus on the structure and symbolic content of the enacted play narratives themselves. However, existing play research already offers further evidence for the developmental priority of character representation in young children's pretend play narratives. For example, according to the extensive body of developmental research on social pretend play synthesized by Howes, Unger, and Matheson (1992),
young children begin by acting out vague and generic roles in relatively disconnected ways, with a tendency to repeat a few stereotypic actions. In later phases, the characters are increasingly fleshed out, individuated, and portrayed with psychological depth. In addition, roles are more tightly linked with each other and role enactments are increasingly coordinated, in complementary or even directly reciprocal fashion. This greater richness and depth in character representation develops in tandem with children's increasing skills in achieving successful intersubjectivity and extended play collaboration. However, for some time the plots of their play narratives remain rudimentary, with little complexity or coherence (in this connection, the findings reported by Howes et al., 1992, are strongly reinforced by the perceptive analysis of Sachs et al., 1984). It is not until later during the preschool years, usually after age 5, that children begin to construct and enact well-articulated plots in their pretend play, thus moving toward the effective integration of plot and character representation in their play narratives.

CONCLUSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

This chapter has proposed an approach to understanding the developmental relationship between pretend play and storytelling that treats them as initially parallel and complementary modes of children's narrative activity, with at least distinct origins and developmental pathways, that young children are gradually able to integrate effectively. Children's play and narrative should not be artificially separated or studied in mutual isolation, but should be viewed as closely intertwined, and often overlapping, forms of socially situated symbolic action. The active interplay and cross-fertilization between pretend play and storytelling can significantly promote children's learning and development in a range of domains. However, children's ability to engage flexibly and fruitfully in this active interplay is neither automatic nor simply given. Instead, it is a developmental achievement that, in turn, serves as a foundation and impetus for further development.

Some empirical support for this model is provided by my findings of initial thematic disjunction and increasing thematic cross-fertilization between the narrative scenarios in children's storytelling and their pretend play. However, this developmental pattern still needs to be delineated and explained more fully. I propose that part of the explanation lies in the tendency for children's pretend play and storytelling, at least in their earliest phases, to emphasize and promote different but complementary dimensions of narrative and narrative skills. The earliest phases in pretend play emphasize and encourage increasing depth and richness in character representation, whereas the earliest phases in storytelling emphasize increasing complexity, coherence, and sophistication in plot construction and comprehension. Building on these complementary strengths and challenges, in both of these activities young children gradually master the ability to integrate these elements so as to produce and understand complete narrative scenarios—ones that effectively combine coherent and complex plots with rich and substantial character representations, including the portrayal of what Bruner (1986) termed a landscape of consciousness that conveys characters' inner mental states, motives, and perspectives on the world. Achieving this capacity to produce and understand a complete narrative scenario is a key factor enabling active and flexible cross-fertilization between the two activities.

Of course, this does not imply that at any point there is a sharp and rigid separation between these two modes of young children's narrative activity. And as I noted earlier, the developmental pathways followed by young children are complex, uneven, and diverse, so the patterns outlined in this chapter will never be entirely uniform in practice. For example, it seems clear that even very young children can sometimes experience vivid identification and deep imaginative involvement with characters in stories they hear and tell (e.g., the 2-year-old described in Miller et al., 1993; see also Miller et al., 2000). However, as I have argued in this chapter, there are both theoretical and empirical grounds for believing that the model presented here captures some fundamental developmental patterns.

This analysis, in short, has been offered as an orienting framework and working hypothesis for further research. To the extent that it can be followed up, confirmed, and refined, the developmental model of narrative complementarity and convergence suggested here can potentially have significant implications for both research and practice. In theoretical terms, for example, I would argue that whereas the concept of a cognitive "situation model" as used by Harris (2000) and others is extremely valuable and illuminating for narrative research, children's ability to construct and employ a coherent situation model is itself a developmental achievement, so that the effective integration of its different elements cannot simply be taken as given. It also seems clear that the developmental dynamics of children's pretend play and storytelling, and children's abilities to benefit from the active interplay between them, can be powerfully facilitated, shaped, and encouraged by different social contexts and practices, including adult–child interactions and peer-group
activities (important starting points for research along these lines include rich ethnographic studies such as Paley, 1986, 1988, 1990; Rowe, 1998, 2000; Wolf & Heath, 1992). More systematic and theoretically informed investigation of the complex interplay between play and narrative can help us better understand and more effectively encourage the potential value of children's symbolic activities for promoting the development of cognition and imagination.

REFERENCES


