Understanding the psychology of a trickster tale: 5-year-old Japanese kindergarten children collaboratively retelling a *kitsune* story

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Abstract

How children understand the psychology of a story (i.e., the intentions and experiences of its characters) is pivotal to comprehending its point. In this study we investigate empirically how 5-year-old children in a Japanese kindergarten manage mental state verbs and adjectives when collaboratively retelling a tale heard. The tale, an example of a *kitsune* trickster story about anthropomorphized foxes interacting with humans, contains a number of critical events concerning expected and actual discrepancy between intentions/expectations and outcomes of actions. The empirical data consist of collaboratively retold stories. These have been recorded and transcribed. Theoretically, the study is informed by a sociocultural perspective, emphasizing the appropriation of the intramental function of cultural tools (importantly, in this case, of mental state discourse) through intermental communication, such as joint storytelling. The findings show how the children make use of mental state verbs and adjectives denoting psychological (intellectual and emotional) processes when retelling the story as well as afterwards for rendering their impressions of the story.

Keywords

Collaborative narrative; retelling; understanding; mental state verbs; kindergarten

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Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to investigate empirically how children in a Japanese kindergarten, when retelling a story they have been told by their teacher, manage features of mental state. How the children in their retelling manage mental state terms is seen as being indicative of their understanding of intentions and how these may differ from actual outcomes of actions, which are integral to understanding the psychology of people (or anthropomorphized agents), central to the story retold. Understanding the psychology of a story denotes realizing the intentions of the agents (protagonists and antagonists) and how these intentions, expectations and desires may be discrepant with those of other agents as well as with actual outcomes of actions. Reading stories in such terms goes beyond merely remembering and repeating a series of actions and events. Rather, actions and events come to be read as indicators of intentional agency and their potential clash with the actions of one's own (as in the case of making a mistake) or others (having other will) and how events unfold. In fact, as cogently argued by Bruner (1996, 2006), narratives are the means through which we render the world intelligible in human terms, that is, as governed by our intentional actions.

Words for psychological phenomena, such as "intention", "expectation", "wants", and "know", are somewhat differently labelled in the research literature, including mental state (Symons, Peterson, Slaughter, Roche, & Doyle, 2005) and cognitive state language (Adrián, Clemente, & Villanueva, 2007). Using such language—what they refer to as "internal state language"—Curenton and Gardner-Neblett (2015) argue, "is a fundamental tool to master when narrating because internal state language is instrumental for understanding thoughts, feelings, desires, and emotions … and creating a meaningful and interesting story" (p. 297). The use of these kinds of words is also conceptualized as social cognition; Curenton and Gardner-Neblett further arguing that "narrative thinking … provides the foundation for children's social cognition (i.e. their understanding of themselves and of other people's behavior and internal states)" (p. 294). In the present study, we align with this premise. However, building on Bruner (1990), we would rephrase the latter quotation; substituting "behavior" for "action", in that the latter term implies intentional acts while the former does not.

The study is inspired by the Canadian *From 3 to 3* project (http://www.from3to3.com/; cf. Pihl, Peterson, & Pramling, 2017), where stories containing mental state descriptions are read to children and then retold by them, with a particular interest in the facilitation of the development in children of understanding others' mental states (see also Theory of Mind, e.g., Adrián et al., 2007; Kidd & Castano, 2013). What is referred to as Theory of Mind (ToM) denotes the ability to understand others' subjective mental states, critical to interpersonal understanding. ToM is sometimes analytically distinguished into affective and cognitive ToM, with the former referring to "the ability to detect and understand others' emotions" and the latter "the inference and representation of others' beliefs and intentions" (Kidd & Castano, 2013, p. 377). While children generally appropriate this ability in early childhood, Kidd and Castano suggest that "Cultural practices … may function to promote and refine interpersonal sensitivity throughout our lives. One such practice is reading fiction" (p. 377). In the present study, the children listen to and then retell a fictional story.

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Trickster tale

The story told and retold can be seen as an example of a trickster story, since it contains a fox that is (partly) *transformed* in order to *trick* someone (into seeing something *as* something rather than *as something else*, and through this achieve an outcome in line with the character's intention). The protagonist—a fox—is a well-known and important figure in Japanese culture (Goff, 1997). However, it occurs in stories throughout the world, albeit its ascribed nature differs. In the Western world, fox stories date back to Aesop's fables. The fox is often given the role of trickster, being able to metamorphose itself. The fox is generally presented as cunning, crafty, or sly. In fact, in English there is a word to denote this sly quality more generally: "to outfox" someone. Japan is a country rich with folk tales handed down orally through generations (Yanagita, 1952) and, in the nature of cultural processes, these folk tales later become inspiration for written stories such as the one providing the template for the retellings we will analyze. Stories with foxes are often referred to as *kitsune* stories; the Japanese word "kitsune" meaning "fox".

Purpose and research question

The purpose of the present study is to investigate empirically how children in a Japanese kindergarten, in retelling a story they have been told by their teacher, manage features of mental state discourse. How they do so is theoretically premised to be informative as to how they understand the psychology of the story. Hence, our research question is: How do the children in their collaborative retelling use mental state verbs and adjectives?

Theory

In this study, we take a sociocultural perspective, founded on the pioneering work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Central to his theory is the law of sociogenesis, explained thus:

> [S]peech, being initially the means of communication, the means of association, the means of organization of group behavior, later becomes the basic means of thinking and of all higher mental functions, the basic means of personality formation. … This same general theory may be expressed in the following form: every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two forms—at first as social, then as psychological; at first as a form of cooperation between people, as a group, an intermental category, then as a means of individual behavior, as an intramental category. This is the general law for the construction of all higher mental functions. (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 169)

According to this reasoning, children are introduced to, and start taking over, accumulated experience in the form of cultural tools (e.g., the concepts and distinctions of language) and practices (e.g., narrating) through participating in mutual activities with more experienced participants. Gradually, the child takes over—that is, appropriates—these culturally important tools and practices. The concept of appropriation is used in Neo-Vygotskian theory (Wertsch, 1998) in place of "internalization" (Vygotsky, 1998), since the latter, contrary to its theoretical grounding, implies receiving and storing information from the outside. By contrast, appropriation denotes how, through taking over cultural tools and practices, the learner can increasingly use these tools and

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participate in these practices in a more voluntary manner. Thus, there is no dichotomy between "inside" and "outside", in terms of knowledge. Instead, from being part of practices where tools are used to communicate (intermentally), the child becomes increasingly familiar with and can take active part in these practices and use its tools, also to communicate with him- or herself (i.e., to think, intramentally). This learning includes how to speak about and conceive of oneself and others as psychological beings with intentions and wants that may differ from one's own. Developing these kinds of insights has been conceptualized in terms of ToM (e.g., Nelson, 1996), and some forms of literature (Kidd & Castano, 2013) have been suggested to facilitate this development. However, our intention with the present study is not to contribute to ToM research particularly. Rather, from our theoretical point of view, the ability to identify and consider the perspectives of others is understood as a situated ability, contingent on communicative mediation (Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2014). Hence, children may be able to do so in storying without necessarily being able to do so when interacting with their peers in other activities or being tested in a laboratory setting (Donaldson, 1978). In the present study, we adopt a sociocultural perspective to analyze how children in their retelling, manage matters of psychology (mental state and emotions). Taking the theoretical position from this perspective, understanding the psychology of a story is not conceptualized as something "behind" (to use a common spatial metaphor) reasoning—as understood from a cognitivist position (Edwards, 1997; Pramling & Säljö, 2015). Rather, such understanding is considered contingent on the appropriation of cultural tools. Hence, it is through their use of mental state verbs and adjectives in context-relevant ways that children indicate that they understand the explanatory and communicative functions of these concepts. This position allows us to study their understanding of these important features of stories through how they retell and talk about a story.

Method and methodology

The empirical data for this study were generated in a kindergarten in a small Japanese town. Ten children (four boys and six girls), aged 5 years and their teacher participated. The teacher read the story to the children (who were not shown the book as such with its illustrations), after which they were asked to, collaboratively as a group, retell it. The children's collaborative retelling activities were video-recorded. The recordings were reviewed, transcribed in the original language (Japanese) and subsequently translated into English, paying particular attention to mimicking the nature of the participants' speech. We have transcribed the entire data set consisting of 10 storytelling episodes. In our findings section, we provide our analysis of one retelling as an exemplar. This retelling was chosen since it is one of the more extensive ones, providing rich data on how the children with their teacher collaboratively retell and understand the story. Our analytical interest requires in-depth analysis of evolving collaborative activity. This makes it necessary to focus on one exemplar, rather than mapping, for example through categorizing, many stories. The analytical approach: documenting activities, transforming data into text in a turn-by-turn format, selection of episodes for closer analysis, and analytical procedures is informed by Derry et al.'s (2010) work, building on Interaction Analysis (IA; Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

The activity to be analyzed in detail has been chosen from the data set since it provides illuminating examples of how the children retell the story they have been told and how

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they manage mental state verbs and adjectives in doing so. The episodes are represented in the form of transcripts containing both the original Japanese utterances and the English translation. According to the principles of IA (Jordan & Henderson, 1995), data transcribed as subsequent utterances, operationalized as turns of actions (including verbal actions) are analyzed as sequentially unfolding collaborative action; in the present case with an analytical focus on how the participants use mental state verbs and adjectives. That is, every utterance/turn is analyzed as a response to previous utterance/turn (Wells, 1999). In the present case, this means that the children's retelling is understood not as a stand-alone competence but as inherently responsive to the communicative mediation established between participants.

The children were not familiar with this kind of task; the studied activities constituted the first time for them to engage in this kind of task. Since a usual group size in Japanese kindergarten, as in the present setting, is 28 children with one teacher, retelling stories is not a common activity in Japanese kindergartens. Perhaps as a consequence of this unfamiliarity with the activity, the children when first asked to retell the story individually did not tend to do so. Rather, the retelling was quickly abandoned or not initiated. Therefore, a collaborative form of retelling was orchestrated. The teacher was told to narrate the story as she would normally do when telling stories, and to try to let the children retell the story as they wanted. The group provided some dynamics, as will be seen in the transcript, in the sense that the children cut in and collaborated in retelling the story. The ethical guidelines of the Japan Society of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education have been followed. This means that we have carefully considered the effect of the kindergarten's activity on the children who participated in the studied retelling activities, and that all participants' caregivers agreed for their child to participate. The names used in the transcripts are pseudonyms.

The particular tale retold

In the present study, the tale told and subsequently retold by the children is called *Tebukuro wo kaini* (English: *Buying Some Gloves*), written by Nankichi Niimi (1943/1988). The story as told is transcribed in the Appendix. Very briefly, the story recounts how Little Fox, whose paws are cold from the snow, is sent to town by Mother Fox to buy some gloves. In order to carry out this task in town, where humans live, she transforms one of his paws into a human hand, which he is to show the shopkeeper in order to buy gloves rather than being captured, as feared by Mother Fox. When in town, he accidentally shows his fox paw instead of his human hand, but despite this is allowed to buy the gloves. On his way home he hears and sees a human mother singing to her baby. Realizing that this is similar to what Mother Fox does to him, he returns home and tells her that humans are not as bad as she thinks on the basis of her previous experience with them. One reading of the story suggests that they (humans) are like us (animals/foxes), with both being concerned for their offspring while also having a less generous side. The story is quite complex and extensive given the young age of the children of this study. It consists of a series of interrelated events with a transformation, a critical turn of events and an ending which concludes with the moral of the story. It includes many mental state verbs (Adrián et al., 2007), such as "understood", "thought", "remembered", "didn't like the idea", "know", "will try", and "worry", and adjectives such as "surprised", "was too afraid", and "felt sorry". The use of mental state verbs are particularly important to investigate in research with an interest in how children understand stories, since these

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terms constitute intentional actions (and per implication often their discrepancy to outcomes). Like the adjectives used, they clarify the characters' psychological and emotional processes and thus concern a level of understanding other than those of observable events. There are also paradoxes in the story, particularly concerning the relation between light/illumination and blindness. Light and bright snow, generally illuminating, on two occasions in the story have the opposite function, blinding the protagonist. The story could be read as being about perception and particularly the dynamic relation between perception/appearance and reality. Things are not as they seem.

Findings

In this section, we present our findings through an in-depth turn-by-turn analysis of the unfolding situated activity. The activity is initiated by the teacher saying, "Let's try to remember the story together again. It was a story 'Buying Some Gloves'. How was the beginning?" After the children have made some initial comments about how something got in Little Fox's eyes, confirmed by the teacher ("right"), she asks them to elaborate:

Excerpt 1: Noticing surprise

Turn	Speaker	Original Japanese utterance	English translation
31	TEA	それで子ぎつねはどうした？	And what did he do?
32	Children	子ども：ビックリした！	Was surprised!

The teacher asks for the protagonist's response to this event: "and what did he do?" (turn 31). Several children respond in unison that he "was surprised!" (turn 32). Hence, the children use this adjective, stating the psychological reaction of the protagonist to the occurred event. Having continued to render the evolving events of the story, a child introduces the critical mistake made by Little Fox:

Excerpt 2: The protagonist making a mistake

Turn	Speaker	Original Japanese utterance	English translation
66	Haruto	間違えてこっちの手を出しちゃったの。	He made a mistake and held out his other paw.
…			
69	Nana	まぶしくて、反対の手を出しちゃった。	It was too bright and he held out his other paw.
70	TEA	なんで子ぎつねだけで行くことになったの？	Why did only Little Fox go to town?

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71	Yuka	お母さんが友達と町に行って、危険だから行かない方がいいって。	His mother went to town and knew it was dangerous so she thought she should not go.

Continuing retelling the story, Haruto suggests that "he made a mistake and held out his other paw" (turn 66). The use of "mistake" is of particular interest to our present analytical concern, since it constitutes a gap between expectation or intention and outcome (cf. to be surprised, as talked about on other occasions during the retelling activity). Nana elaborates on the event: "it was too bright and he held out his other paw" (turn 69). However, even with this additional information, the teacher asks for further elaboration on what happened before this happened: "why did only Little Fox go to town?" (turn 70). The teacher thus asks for a reason why something that according to her telling almost happened did not happen (i.e., Mother Fox going in to town). Yuka responds to this request for clarification through explaining that "His mother went to town and knew it was dangerous so she thought she should not go" (turn 71). Yuka here uses mental state terms, "knew" and "thought" in social reasoning of one of the protagonists of the story, accounting for her actions in terms of psychology.

Excerpt 3: Promising and knowing

Turn	**Speaker**	**Original Japanese utterance**	**English translation**
81	Hiro	こんにちはって言った。	He said hello.
82	TEA	お母さんと子ぎつねは約束事をしなかった？	Didn't his mother make Little Fox promise something?
83	Yuka	した！絶対にキツネの手を出しちゃだめって。	Yes, she did! To never hold out his fox paw.
84	TEA	なんで？	Why?
85	Hiro	手袋売らないから。	Because people will not sell him gloves.
86	Yuka	キツネって分かるから。人間にキツネが捕まるから。	Because people will know it's a fox and will catch him.
87	TEA	そうか、捕まるからか。お母さんは嫌な思い出があるもんね。	I see. People will catch him. His mother has a bad experience with humans.

Continuing telling what happened after Little Fox found the hat shop, Hiro says "he said hello" (turn 81). Through her response, "didn't his mother make Little Fox promise something?" (turn 82), the teacher signals that there is first something important to establish in order to understand the importance of coming events. The mental state term "promise" is the key term here, constituting an anticipated relation between intention and expected outcome. Yuka readily responds to this request for additional clarification: "yes, she did! To never hold out his fox paw" (turn 83). The teacher asks her to further clarify

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"why?" (turn 84). Another child, Hiro, explains that "because people will not sell him gloves" (turn 85) before Yuka says that "because people will know it's a fox and will catch him" (turn 86). While Hiro focuses on not being able to buy the needed gloves, Yuka's explanation resides in the mental state ("know") and the dangers posed to the protagonist (risk being caught). The teacher elaborates on the latter suggestion, and in this way subtly communicates that this is more informative for understanding the story than the first suggestion: "I see. People will catch him" before adding: "His mother has a bad experience with humans" (turn 87) and in this way re-establishes the relationship between the Fox's promise to his mother and her experiences (again residing in a mental-state descriptor as an explanatory principle: "bad experience").

Excerpt 4: Establishing why

Turn	Speaker	Original Japanese utterance	English translation
88	Erika	それで、間違えてキツネの手を出しちゃって。	And then, he made a mistake and held out his fox paw.
89	Kento	まぶしくって	Because it was too bright.
90	TEA	まぶしくて間違えてキツネの手を	It was too bright so the fox…
91	Yuka	出しちゃった。それで	Held out his paw.
92	Erika	帽子をくれてん。	He gave him a hat.
93	Yuka	先にお金くださいって言った。	The man said, "First give me money".
94	TEA	なんで先にお金くださいって言ったのかな？	Why did he say so?
95	Kento	葉っぱで買うと思ったから。	He thought that fox would pay with leaves.
96	TEA	キツネって分かって葉っぱで買うと思ったから、先に	He knew it's a fox and thought that the fox would pay with leaves, so he said "First…
97	Yuka	お金くださいって言った。	Give me money.
98	Hiro	お金をカチカチした。	He checked if it made a good sound 'kachi-kachi'.
99	TEA	なんでかな？	Why?
100	Children	葉っぱかなーと思って。	Because he thought they might be leaves.
101	TEA	それでどうやった？	How was the sound?
102	Yuka	お金の音。	It was a coin sound.
103	Kento	本物のお金やった。	It was a real coin.
104	Yuka	それで、子ども用の手袋を渡した。それで、人間ってどんなかな	So the man handed him gloves for children. And thought about how humans are and looked in.

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って思ってのぞいた。

After the children's and the teacher's elaboration on the psychology of the event retold, Erika returns to the plot: "and then, he made a mistake and held out his fox paw" (turn 88). Using "mistake" indicates an understanding of the discrepancy between intention and outcome, and hence of the psychology of the story. Kento adds: "because it was too bright" (turn 89). This attempt at explanation ("because…") does not clarify in a manner intelligible to a listener who has not previously heard the story (which in this case, they all have) how "too bright" relates to making the "mistake". However, no such request for clarification is raised. The teacher restates this suggestion, "it was too bright so the fox…" (turn 90), allowing the children to continue the retelling: "held out his paw" (turn 91). Erika continues with the unfolding plot: "he gave him a hat" (turn 92) and Yuka adds: "the man said, 'first give me your money'" (turn 93). In this way, Yuka adds something she appears to perceive missing from Erika's account. The teacher picks up on this added information: "why did he say so?" (turn 94). In his response, Kento explains, using a mental state term ("thought") that "he thought that fox would pay with leaves" (turn 95). In her response, the teacher says "he knew it's a fox and thought that the fox would pay with leaves, so he said, 'first…'" (turn 96), reusing "thought" as well as adding "knew". This pairing of terms is in itself of interest to our present analytical concerns, in that the former ("thought") constitutes tentativeness while the latter ("knew") establishes a more firm position (Dewey, 1910/1997) as to the relationship between intention and outcome. In her response, Yuka gives voice (cf. Pihl et al., 2017) to one of the characters of the story, the shopkeeper: "give me money" (turn 97). Hiro continues: "he checked if it made a good sound 'kachi-kachi'" (turn 98), using onomatopoeia to enact the action. Asked by the teacher to explain "why?" (turn 99), several children at the same time state "because he thought they might be leaves" (turn 100). Both the use of the mental-state word "thought" and that the money "might be leaves" imply a gap between appearance and reality, central to understanding the story. The teacher picks up on the onomatopoeia of the children's utterance: "how was the sound?" (turn 101). This is answered by Yuka in terms of "it was a coin sound" (turn 102), that is, in terms of *what kind* of sound it was rather than *how* it sounded (which the onomatopoeia already provided), and Kento concludes that "it was a real coin" (turn 103), in effect commenting on the appearance–reality issue, not on the sound made. Yuka further elaborates on the unfolding plot: "so the man handed him gloves for children. And thought about how humans are and looked in" (turn 104); the second part of this utterance is more opaque, and implicitly relates to another part of the story.

Excerpt 5: Why surprised

Turn	Speaker	Original Japanese utterance	English translation
117	Erika	子ぎつねが、人間って全然怖くないよって言ったの。	The Little Fox said that humans are not so terrible.
118	TEA	お話ししたの？	He talked to her?
119	Yuka	あらそう？ってお母さんきつねが	Mother Fox said "Really?"

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		言ったの。	
120	Erika	びっくりして。	She was surprised.
121	TEA	なんでびっくりしたの？	Why was she so surprised?
122	Erika	人間って全然怖くないよって言ったから。	Because he said that human beings are not so terrible.
123	TEA	なんで人間は怖くないって子ぎつねは分かったの？	Why did Little Fox know that humans are not so terrible?
124	Ami	手袋くれたから。	Because the man gave him some gloves.

An important event in the story, "the Little Fox said that humans are not so terrible" (turn 117), is retold by Erika. Subtly prompting the children to continue telling, the teacher asks "he talked to her?" (turn 118). Rather than answering this question more directly, Yuka elaborates on what was said: "Mother Fox said 'really?' " (turn 119), that is, what the response in the story was to Little Fox's utterance. To this elaboration, Erika suggests that "she was surprised" (turn 120). The mental-state concept of "surprise" is integral to the logic of the story (see the summary above and in the Appendix). The use of this term is readily picked up by the teacher, asking "why was she so surprised?" (turn 121). Erika responds that this was "because he said that human beings are not so terrible" (turn 122). Having established *what* was said as explanation to the response of the mother in the story, the teacher asks for clarification on "why did Little Fox know that humans are not so terrible?" (turn 123). Asking this why-question in relation to the mental state concept of "know[ing]", a kind of account other than what has already been provided by the children is asked for. Ami responds that this was "because the man gave him some gloves" (turn 124).

Excerpt 6: Reflecting on the story

Turn	**Speaker**	**Original Japanese utterance**	**English translation**
143	TEA	みんなはどんなところが一番思い出に残ってる？	What was the most impressive part for you?
144	Yuka	キツネが帽子屋さんで手を出して、びっくりした。	When the Little Fox held out his fox paw, I was surprised.
145	TEA	他には？	Anything else?
146	Sakura	お母さんの声を聞いたところ。	When the Little Fox heard mother's voice.
147	TEA	どんなふうに思ったの？	How did you feel?
148	Sakura	寂しそう。	Lonesome.
149	TEA	寂しそうって思ったのね。他には？	You thought it was lonesome. Anything else?

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150	Haruto	葉っぱと石で人間の手に変えたところ。	It was transformed into a human hand with a leaf and a stone.
151	TEA	葉っぱと石で人間の手に変えたところね。	I see. When it was transformed into a human hand with a leaf and a stone.
152	Erika	まぶしくて何か刺さったと思ったところがなんか寂しかった。	When the Little Fox thought something went into his eyes because it was very bright, I felt lonesome.
153	TEA	寂しかったのね。	Oh. You felt lonesome.
154	Yuka	キツネの手を間違えて出しちゃったところ。	When he made a mistake and held out his fox paw.
…			
157	Ami	お母さんの歌がきれいで、お母さんに会いたくなった。	The mother's song was beautiful and I missed my mum.

Having in effect retold the story, the teacher initiates a new form of conversation, asking "what was the most impressive part for you?" (turn 143). The talk now initiated concerns the children's impressions of the story, rather than retelling what happened in it. Yuka offers: "when the Little Fox held out his fox paw, I was surprised" (turn 144). She thus takes over and uses the concept of "surprised" to talk about her own impression, from its previous use in talking about the psychology of the characters of the story. Asked by the teacher for "anything else?" (turn 145) having made an impression on the children, Sakura responds that "when the Little Fox heard mother's voice" (turn 146). The teacher follows up through asking about the emotional reaction of the child: "how did you feel?" (turn 147). "Lonesome" (turn 148), Sakura says. The teacher acknowledges this response, and opens up the communicative floor for additional responses: "you thought it was lonesome. Anything else?" (turn 149). Erika takes the floor, stating that "when the Little Fox thought something went into his eyes because it was very bright, I felt lonesome" (turn 152). Like the previous responses, the child uses psychological/emotional terms ("I felt lonesome") to account for the impression made by the story. The teacher subtly marks out that emotional response to stories are noteworthy: "oh. You felt lonesome" (turn 153), with the initial "oh" signaling something paid particular attention to. Yuka adds, "when he made a mistake and held out his fox paw" (turn 154). Finally, Ami says that "the mother's song was beautiful and I missed my mum" (turn 157), establishing an analogical relation between two of the characters of the story and the child and her own mother. The fictional story thus implicitly emerges as illuminating everyday relationships and emotions, indicating a potential to gain perspective on the latter (one's own experiences) through the former (fiction). With this, the activity is concluded.

Discussion

In this study we were interested in analyzing how the children in collaboration manage issues of mental state in retelling a story. How they do so is theoretically premised to be

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indicative of how they understand what we refer to as *the psychology of the story*. Terms for such psychological phenomena as intention and expectation are often referred to as mental state (Symons et al., 2005), cognitive state (Adrián et al., 2007) or internal state language (Curenton & Gardner-Neblett, 2015). Such terms are integral to communicating about (the intermental function of cultural tools) as well as to think about (the intramental function of cultural tools) others' and one's own psychological (intellectual/emotional) experiences. To align with our theoretical perspective (Vygotsky, 1998), we suggest these terms be referred to as intramental state concepts. Managing such terms in storying, including their critical contrast to actions and outcomes, is arguably pivotal to understanding the psychology and thus, in a sense, the point of a story such as the present *kitsune* story. Managing matters of appearance–reality and expectations/intentions–outcomes discrepancy (e.g., Excerpts 2 and 3) takes storytellers and listeners beyond the mere description of a series of events and into the realm of human psychology. Previous research indicates that some kinds of literature have potential to foster such social reasoning (ToM): "We submit that fiction affects ToM processes because it forces us to engage"—metaphorically speaking [our comment]—"in mind-reading and character construction. Not any kind of fiction achieves that though. Our proposal is that it is literary fiction that forces the reader to engage in ToM processes" (Kidd & Castano, 2013, p. 377). In their elaboration, Kidd and Castano emphasize two features of such stories: (1) their ability to "expand our knowledge of others' lives" through "helping us recognize our similarity to them" (p. 377; e.g., Excerpt 6), and (2) its ability to "disrupt our expectations" (p. 378; e.g., Excerpts 4 and 5). The story retold by the children in the present study contains a recognition of the similarities between us (in the story: Little Fox and Mother Fox) and others (in the story: humans) as an implicit theme. As seen in the children's elaboration on their impression of the story, this theme is something they pick up on (Excerpt 6). Concerning the ability of fiction to "disrupt our expectations", the moment of surprise is integral to the story retold and to ensuing the rendering of children's impressions of it.

Conclusion

In this study, we have shown how young children in kindergarten pick up and manage concepts for understanding the psychology of characters in a story. These concepts critically allow children to consider matters of discrepancy between the intentions and outcomes of human actions (as rendered by anthropomorphized animals). Participating in narrative practices where such terms are used thus constitutes important experiences for young children; experiences that have reach well beyond the realms of a fantasy story.

The children make use of the intramental terms of the story when intermentally communicating about it with the teacher (see Excerpt 6). We do not suggest that they necessarily have appropriated (Wertsch, 1998) these terms during the course of this particular activity. However, the fact that they make use of these terms when rendering their impressions of the story, suggests that they see the relevance of these terms to speak about this matter. Seeing how concepts are useful in making sense of certain matters is in itself an important part of their appropriation. These concepts mediate (Wertsch, 2007) our experiences of ourselves and others as psychological (intellectual/emotional) beings (Bruner, 1996). An important implication is that fostering such insight into the expectations, intentions and plights of others constitutes an important part of early

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childhood education that, as we show in this study, can be nurtured through engaging children in collaborative (re)storying activities.

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Appendix: The teacher's telling of the tale

Mother Fox and Little Fox lived in a hole in the forest. It was winter in the forest, and it was very, very cold. One morning, Little Fox went out of the hole. But he ran back to his mother. He was holding his eyes. "Something got in my eyes. Please take it out!" Mother Fox was surprised and looked at Little Fox's eyes, but she saw nothing. Then Mother Fox looked outside the hole. The sun was high in the sky and shining on the snow. The light from the snow was very bright. It hurt Mother Fox's eyes. Now she understood. It was so bright that Little Fox thought something has got in his eyes and it hurt. Later the same day, Little Fox went out to play. He ran around in the soft snow. Then, suddenly, the snow above Little Fox made a big sound and fell down on his head. Little Fox was surprised and ran away as fast as he could. When he stopped and looked back, some snow had fallen from the tree. That's all. After a while, Little Fox went back inside. "My hands are cold. My hands are really, really cold," said Little Fox to Mother Fox. Little Fox held out his little hands to show her. Mother Fox blew on Little Fox's hands to make them warm. Then she held Little Fox's hands in her own hands to warm them up. "They'll get warm soon," said Mother Fox. Mother Fox felt sorry for Little Fox. Not having chilblains, Mother Fox decided to go to town that night to buy some gloves for him. Mother Fox and Little Fox came out of their hole. As they walked along, Little Fox stayed under his mother. His eyes were bigger than usual. Little Fox looked around and around. After a while, Mother Fox and Little Fox saw a light ahead. Mother Fox remembered one night when she and her friend went to the town. The friend wanted to take a duck from one of the farms. Mother Fox didn't like the idea, but her friend didn't give it up. But the people at the farm saw them and ran after them, around and around and around. Mother Fox and her friend were very lucky to get away. "What's wrong?" asked Little Fox. "Let's go." But Mother Fox couldn't move. She was too afraid. "My Little Fox must go into town alone," she thought. "Give me your paw," Mother Fox said. She held Little Fox's paw in her hands for a while. When she opened her hands, Little Fox's paw was now a little human hand. Little Fox looked at the human hand. He opened and closed it. He smelled it, too. "What is this? What is this strange thing?" asked Little Fox. "That's a human hand," Mother Fox said. "Now listen to me. When you go to town, there will be many houses. Find the house that has a picture of a hat. When you find that house, knock on the door and say, "Good evening." The people inside will open the door a little. When they do that, hold out your hand—the human hand—and say you want some small gloves. Understand? Don't hold out your fox paw. Hold out the human hand." "Why do I have to do that?" "Because they won't sell you the gloves if they know you are a fox. In fact, they will try to catch you. Human beings are like that. They are terrible sometimes." "They are?" said Little Fox. "Don't hold out your fox paw. Show them the human hand. OK?" Mother Fox then gave Little Fox two coins. She out them into Little Fox's human hand. Little Fox started off toward the light coming from the town. When he got to the town, Little Fox saw that all the houses were closed up. A warm light came from the windows and fell on the snow in the street. Little Fox walked down the street and looked for the house with the picture of a hat. Finally Little Fox found the house with the picture of a hat. It was a picture of a black hat, and there was a light above it. Little Fox knocked on the door and called out, "Good evening." Little Fox heard sounds inside the house. Then the door opened, a bright light came out into the night and fell on the snow. Because of the light, Little fox couldn't see for a minute. And when Little Fox held out his hand, he held out his fox paw, not the human hand. Little Fox said, "Give me some small gloves." The man behind the door was a little surprised. "This is a fox paw," he thought. "A fox has come to buy some gloves. It may pay with

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leaves." So the man behind the door said, "First give me the money." Little Fox did as he was asked and handed over the two coins. The man behind the door hit the two coins together. They made a good sound. "This is real money, no mistake," the man thought. He went back in the house and got some children's gloves. He gave them to Little Fox. Little Fox said, "Thank you," and left. On the way back, Little fox began to think: "Mother said that human beings are terrible sometimes. But the man behind the door saw my real hand, and he didn't do anything terrible." As Little Fox passed one window, he heard a beautiful voice. Someone was singing. Sleep, my baby, sleep. Go to sleep in my arms. Sleep, my baby, sleep. Go to sleep next to my heart. "That must be a mother singing to her baby," Little fox thought. Little Fox's mother sang to him in the same way. Suddenly Little Fox wanted to see his mother. He ran back to her as fast as he could. Mother Fox was full of worry. She thought, "When is my baby coming back? When is my baby coming back?" When Little Fox did come back, she held him in her warm arms. Mother Fox and Little Fox returned home to their hole. "Mum, human beings aren't so terrible," said Little Fox. "Why do you say that?" asked Mother Fox. "I held out the wrong hand, but the man behind the door didn't try to catch me. And I got these nice, warm gloves!" Mother Fox just said "Oh, no". But in her heart of hearts, she kept asking the same question: "Are human beings really good? Are they really good?" (original story, *Buying Some Gloves* (*Tebukuro wo kaini*), written by Nankichi Niimi; here transcribed as told).

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