



## Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

### **Dr Mick Gowar**

Mick Gowar is a university teacher, an author, an editor of children's books, a storyteller and workshop leader. Since 1980 he has written or edited more than 120 books for children and young people, many of them re-tellings of folk and fairy tales. He is at present senior lecturer in Contextual Studies and a University Teaching Fellow at Anglia Ruskin University. He is leading the *World Wide Story Web* a project to encourage children to tell, re-tell and share digital stories online.

### *Dispatches from the Literacy Wars*

The means by which children are taught to read has become a battleground. In the UK, successive governments have helped construct a system in our primary and secondary schools, to the dismay of a majority of teachers, which Michael Rosen the former Children's Laureate has summarised very cogently as comprising "synthetic phonics, genre, story-structures, poetry units, worksheet comprehension exercises, closing of school and class libraries, fetishising of ITC, structuring 'recount' writing, lack of attention to provision of books/reading for pleasure/home reading/role of parents in literacy and literature by official inspection." Synthetic phonics is the required method of teaching reading in English schools which demands the teaching of letter sounds in isolation - ie without clues from pictures or from the context in which words appear. That means stories are now seen by many current experts in early years education as a hindrance to the proper and prescribed method of instruction: 'phonics first, fast and only.'

This provocation will be a preview of *Dispatches from the Literacy Wars* a research project led by Prof Lissa Paul of Brock University, Canada, and Dr Mick Gowar which has been collecting reports from battle fronts in the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK. It will examine briefly, through the experiences of colleagues in those countries, the profound impact the present



system has on the abilities, expectations and potentials of our pupils and students, and the possible future of stories and storytelling in our schools.

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### **Dr Lisa Sainsbury**

Lisa Sainsbury is Director of the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature in the Department of English and Creative writing at Roehampton University. Lisa's current area of research is philosophy and contemporary children's literature and her book, *Ethics and British Children's Literature: Unexamined Life* (Continuum-Bloomsbury) is due for publication in 2013.

#### *A Story and Several Other Things: Thought Experiments and Stories Telling Stories*

Conducting a series of experiments that unite philosophy and children's literature, Lisa Sainsbury considers the philosophic potential of stories within stories. The thought experiment is a device common to science and philosophy, but it also has a role to play in books written for children as will become clear during discussion of stories told within/without a range of texts, including Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-47), *Lyra's Oxford* (2003) by Philip Pullman, and *A Monster Calls* (2011) by Patrick Ness.

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### **Donna Schatt**

Donna Schatt is a librarian, storyteller and researcher. She directed the library and storytelling programs at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools for 23 years. She recently completed an MA at the University of Chicago. Her research interests are the long-term effects of oral story listening particularly on emergent literacy and flow states. She is co-founder of a literature and education consulting company based in Chicago.

#### *Why Quantify a Dream*

Donna Schatt will be talking about an on-going study in which she is examining a storytelling practice supporting literacy and literature, which has been running continuously since the 1890s



in a private American school founded by John Dewey. She is able to show, through primary source materials, that early practitioners of this storytelling program had an awareness that oral, aesthetic, and socio-cultural experiences provided by listening to stories were foundational to “real reading” in which the developing reader moves beyond decoding and where the mental simulations of reading and thinking become intertwined. She will then present alumni interviews in which the meaning of this program, as currently experienced, is discussed showing how the early thinking about this storytelling programs is unknowingly being internalized even now. She will then touch on how the observations of these early practitioners and the experiences of the alumni who participated in the storytelling program connect to current research on the development of proficient reading skills and learning states.

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### **Liz Weir**

Liz Weir is a storyteller and writer from Northern Ireland, who tells her stories to children and adults on all five continents. As a children's librarian for the city of Belfast in the 1970s, she learned about the healing power of storytelling. Formerly a part-time lecturer on Library Services to Young People at Queen's University Belfast she is the author of two children's story collections and *When Dad Was Away*, a picture book about a child whose father is in jail.

#### *The Rarest Kind of Best*

Liz Weir will consider how an early exposure to children's books of the best quality can create better listeners and establish a lifelong love of story. Based on her experience working in Northern Ireland, she will look at how the right story at the right time can help dispel anger, create dialogue where none existed before, and help children confront fears. Both picture book sharing and oral storytelling work together to develop emotions and build relationships between teller and listener. And, of course, pure enjoyment must never be forgotten.