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Overview of Personalized Books: Self-Made and Commercially Produced Personalized Books

In this chapter, I offer a niche perspective on personalized education by focusing on personalized books. Personalized books and stories are an important site of innovation for personalized education in early childhood. I provide a systematic overview of the key types of personalized books currently available for young children. The review is divided according to the origin of the books/stories. This was a deliberate choice to compel the consideration of authorship, agency and authenticity of the final product. These considerations give rise to a more refined understanding of the key dimensions characterizing personalized resources developed for young children's learning. I outline these dimensions towards the end of the chapter and use them to chart possible future developments for commercially produced personalized books.

Self-made personalized books

Self-made personalized books are home-made self-created or self-authored books, produced by someone for their own or someone else's pleasure. The term 'home-made' may misleadingly imply that all home-made personalized books are produced at home. This is not always the case – homemade books can be also produced in a school or a local club. The key distinguishing feature of self-made books is that they are not mass produced and that each copy is unique. Self-made books can be digital or paper based, and the choice of the content and format is up to the books' author. When produced with digital tools, self-made personalized books become digital or multimedia stories, based on autobiographical content. Unlike oral stories, digital stories have a specific form and format and can be stored in libraries or audio, video and pictorial archives, and this more permanent form can be used to share the books with others. The extent or depth of personalization embedded in self-made books ranges from highly personal to lowly personalized books. In the examples described next, the books were based on classic stories, which the children reproduced with their own drawings or texts, or they were their own stories written in their home languages. The next section comprises the summary of my research regarding the

learning potential of these kinds of self-made personalized books for young children's literacy, learning, identity and related socio-emotional outcomes.

Educational research with self-made personalized books

Several early childhood studies have used self-made personalized books in their research, although not always explicitly referring to them as such. For this overview, I selected studies that focus on identity and language benefits associated with self-made personalized books. The books were authored by the child and the child's authorship, agency and authentic contribution were key themes across all the studies.

The impact of self-made personalized books on children's identities

The value of creating and sharing personalized books was recognized by Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth (2005), who studied British primary school children composing their own texts. The researchers focused on the children's creativity and writing and noted that the activity supported children's identity formation and the experience of alternative identities: 'Through telling personal tales children can voice their emotional, imaginative and interpersonal awareness which can motivate them to use language for intrinsic means, not external schemes, and investigate their identity in the process' (Grainger et al., 2005, p. 125). From this perspective, self-made personalized books could be considered to be crafted identities in a physical artefact. The creation and sharing process of text-making enables children to construct and negotiate their perceived identities. These processes are related to the notions of autonomy and authorship and have been studied in detail by researchers who are interested in the socio-cultural 'funds of knowledge' that children bring to schools. This line of research has been guided by the theoretical and empirical work of Louis Moll and his colleagues at the University of Arizona.

Back in the 1990s, Professor Moll and colleagues provided an alternative perspective on what children bring to school from home and what they can achieve by drawing on their household's knowledge (the knowledge they gain from within their households, specifically their social practices and cultural traditions). Moll and his colleagues (Moll & Cammarota, 2010; Moll & Greenberg, 1992) coined the term 'funds of knowledge' to describe the 'essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive' (Moll, 1992, p. 321). Their approach to studying children's own creations and contributions to the classroom stems from a deep acknowledgement of the diversity of families' practices and children's skills.

The incorporation of funds of knowledge into children's books has been studied in detail by a number of scholars, including Professor Sudia Paloma McCaleb (2013) or Moll's colleague, Professor Kathy Short, who also works at the University of Arizona. Professor Short is known for her outstanding contribution to the study of children's literature and curriculum as an enquiry process, from which I pick out her contribution to the authoring cycle. Together with other researchers working

with her in this area (e.g. Maria V. Acevedo, Dorea Kleker and Lauren Pangle), Short understands children's personal stories as a 'way of knowing', as a process which provides space for authentic engagement with others and self. Nested in a qualitative research tradition, Short et al. have documented the importance of children (and students) critically 'reading the world and the word' (Freire & Macedo, 2005) and understanding others through personal cultural identities: 'When students recognize the cultures that influence their thinking, they become more aware of how and why culture is important to others. They no longer see culture as about the "other" and as exotic, but recognize that it is at the heart of defining who they are as human beings' (Short, 2009, p. 4). Using the thinking tools of Dewey (1938), Short adapts the notion of 'tension', necessary for children to participate in authentic, child-driven (not predetermined by adults) storying. Such storying can be supported both at home and in schools, as long as children are engaged in an authoring cycle where reading and writing are explored through enquiry. The close link between reading and writing and its beneficial impact on developing children as readers and writers is well known in early literacy literature. Equally, the notion of enquiry, that is, engaging children in deeper thinking and in reflection through problem-posing and problem-solving, is important for developing readers' and writers' identities. The notions of agency and authenticity are embedded in this process. In their project with Mexican American families from challenging economic backgrounds, Short et al. invited the children's family 'storying' by producing story boxes and story backpacks prepared with socio-culturally sensitive resources. These often invited spontaneous and unique response, with children and families telling, writing and drawing their own stories. In another example, a boy originally from Iraq recounted his story of travelling from Iraq to the United States with pictures that had been drawn by his mother in his journal.¹ Through a careful analysis, a number of positive outcomes for children who participate in such 'storying' were identified: communicative and language skills, as well as identity and social awareness for the child; recognition and active participation in meaning-making with local communities and inviting cultural and linguistic practices into classrooms.

The impact of self-made personalized books on children's language

A more quantitative account of the benefits of self-produced personalized books comes from the research conducted by Professor Judith Bernhard in Canada. Professor Bernhard's expertise lies in studying migrant families who move from Latin America to Canada and the United States. Her research includes large-scale studies with immigrant populations and refugee children, with a deep appreciation of the cultural, social and human capital these families bring with them (see, for example, Bernhard, Winsler, Bleiker, Ginieniewicz, & Madigan, 2008). The Canadian approach to self-created books had a particular focus on the tension immigrant children experience between the space provided for learning at home and in classrooms, with emphasis placed on celebrating children's own identity and sense of self in the schools.

In the 'Early Authors Program', Bernhard and colleagues studied the benefits of children's book authoring in thirty-two early childhood centres across Canada,

with more than 1,179 children from 800 families participating in the programme. Children participating in the programme were encouraged to create their own books in two languages: English and their home language (which was mostly Spanish or Haitian Creole). The focus of the intervention and of the evaluation was on ‘highly meaningful language interactions’ (Bernhard et al., 2008, p. 76). Rigorous evaluation of the programme found that in contrast to the control group, children in the Early Authors Program group scored significantly higher on a range of language measures after the intervention. During my Masters studies, I met with Professor Bernhard to learn more about these books. She explained to me that the content and format of the books were not fixed and that children were free to create any book they wished to share with others or take home from the school. From the perspective of personalization, it would be therefore too ambitious to claim that the success of this intervention was driven by personalization – other factors were in place too. The intervention was a rich holistic approach to children’s literacy learning, and we do not know whether the positive results came about because children could take ownership of their learning by personalizing their literacy materials or perhaps because of the sensitive guidance of the adults supporting children’s text-making – or because, most likely, the combination of these elements.

In another strand of Bernhard’s research, children’s participation in early authoring of their own books has been discussed in terms of the effects on children’s sense of self in a new classroom environment. Here, Cummins (2004) argued that children appropriate artefacts (or objects of creative work) and through this appropriation they can better reflect on their own identity: ‘The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light’ (p. 91). Cummins’s use of the term ‘identity text’ reflects the importance of the books for children’s identity.

In addition, Cummins and Bernhard explored the use of the so-called ‘dual-language books’, that is, books written in two languages: the child’s native language (or language spoken at home) and the language of instruction (or language used in the school). Dual-language books can be created by children and their families but also can be commercially produced. In Cummins and Bernhard’s studies, the dual-language books were created by dual-language learners, that is, children whose native language was not the dominant language of instruction (also known as children with English as an additional language). This body of work (see, for example, Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008) is a prominent approach within the multiliteracies literature and documents a range of positive outcomes for the children, both in the social and language domains.

Self-made personalized books and community effects

In addition to child-related outcomes, self-made personalized books can connect school and homes and act as a powerful bridge in community-based projects. The latter has been picked up by Shuker and Terreni (2013), who investigated self-made personalized books in New Zealand preschools. The researchers looked at preschoolers creating their own stories using the Microsoft PowerPoint tool. They

argued that the opportunity to connect print and digital personalized stories teaches children not only about community but also about digital literacy: 'Self-authored books present an opportunity for early childhood professionals to develop a partnership between ICT and reading' (p. 19).

Whether studied from a qualitative or quantitative perspective, researchers agree that the autonomy and agency in self-authored books, as well as their highly authentic character, contributes to children's identity formation and expression, to empowerment and positive community relations. However, not all children and not all parents or caregivers can always participate in book-making. There might be socio-cultural milieus in which a parent's active participation in their child's education or literacy is not desirable. Also, there might be practical barriers to creating or co-creating books and multimedia stories. Some children, parents or teachers may not feel competent or knowledgeable enough to produce a self-made book and many adults simply don't have the time to do so. This is where the appeal of commercially produced personalized books resides.

Commercially produced personalized books are widely used but are not widely researched. To my knowledge, there has been only one attempt to empirically evaluate commercially produced personalized books: by Demoulin and his colleagues, who were also involved in the books' production. They were involved in the development as well as evaluation of the so-called *I Like Me!* early literacy intervention in US kindergartens. The initial purpose of the books' development was not for profit, but to support children's self-esteem and positive identities. This approach thus sits somewhere in-between the mass- and self-produced personalized books; therefore, I placed it in a separate section.

The *I Like Me!* Books personalized books

Demoulin and colleagues (1996, 1999 and 2001) outlined the rationale, deployment and evaluation of the *I Like Me!* personalized books in three main articles. These articles state that the intervention consisted of schools participating in a twelve-week 'I like me' programme, run by Kindergartners Count, Inc. The intervention consisted of each child receiving an *I like me!* book. Based on their online description, the books could be categorized as low- or semi-personalized books. The books were mass produced with a cost of \$9 per book and given to each child in the kindergarten. The books were customized for each child by substituting the main character's name by the child's name and by replacing names of places by the names familiar to each child. Unlike the personalized books in my doctoral study, these books did not contain new words and were not designed with the purpose of teaching children new vocabulary. Instead, the stories were 'hero stories', aimed at making children feel good about themselves and raising their self-esteem. The website dedicated to the *I like me!* programme states: 'Each child receives a hard-bound personalized book to keep – making each child a hero in his or her own life' (<http://www.ilikeme.org/programfacts.html>). Research evaluation of the programme by Demoulin and colleagues found that children reading personalized books had greater levels of self-esteem and positive interactions with

parents than control group (1999). Furthermore, the website states that ‘the use of the personalized I LIKE ME! reader improved reading comprehension and recall in kindergartners by an average of 46.8% over children using non-personalized readers’ (<http://www.ilikeme.org/programfacts.html>). In addition, a pretest and post-test comparison of children participating in the programme found that, on average, children gained 7 per cent higher scores on tests of self-esteem and self-efficacy. In a follow-up evaluation there were also learning gains: books, which were customized to each child and built around the child’s positive self-esteem, enhanced children’s focus time, recall and motivation during learning to read (Demoulin, 2001).

Unfortunately, from the short description of the study design available in these publications it is not clear whether the ‘non-personalized book’ used as a control was a book carefully matched to the personalized book or whether the non-personalized book was simply any book in the classroom, which would be, by default, non-personalized. Without a careful control of the level of personalization that goes into the book production, it is difficult to establish whether the reported positive effects were due to the fact that the books were personalized or because of the overall intervention. In addition, details about how often and under which conditions the books were read and how the entire intervention was executed in the classrooms (e.g. Did parents take part? Did the teachers speak to children about their achievements and hero stories?) are necessary to determine the actual effect of personalization in the ‘I Like Me’ studies. Overall, though, they indicate a possibility for future development of children’s personalized books by bringing together academic research and commercial design.

Mass-produced and commercially produced personalized books

In a blog for the BookSeller (which is ‘the central source of industry information for publishers and booksellers in the UK’) I wrote that ‘the year 2016 was predicted to be the year of personalization and personalization is exactly what we are seeing in a number of products and services worldwide, including the book industry’. The blog was followed by a number of emails from children’s book publishers and my informal online conversations with them. These conversations allowed me to get a good overview of what was available for young children in terms of personalized reading materials in the first half of 2016. I purposefully do not provide an in-depth market analysis of personalized books in this chapter as it could become quickly obsolete, especially if we consider the rapid developments in the digital production of children’s books. Instead, I limit my review to a detailed consideration of personalized books from three publishers: Nosy Crow, Mr Glue Stories and Lost My Name. I had the opportunity to view, test and discuss the products of these three publishers/designers at a greater depth at two public workshops organized in 2015 and 2016 and consider them illustrative of current possibilities. I describe in more detail the personalization options in each product to gauge their potential for supporting children’s learning. It is important to note that as yet, there is no academic research on the efficacy or effectiveness of these personalized books/stories.

The ‘Lost My Name’ books

If you google the words ‘personalized books’, it is likely that the first title that comes up in the results list is that by the UK-based children’s publisher ‘Lost My Name’. In 2014 Lost My Name reported sales of more than 132,000 copies of their personalized books in the United Kingdom alone and, in 2015, 700,000 books in 150 countries. In 2015, *Telegraph* reported that Lost My Name had sold 700,000 books in 150 countries (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/11880745/Dragons-Den-backed-Lost-My-Name-launches-new-space-book.html>), and their sales are still on rise. When I accessed the Lost My Name website on 30 July 2016, it listed that they have inspired 1,675,685 children in 178 countries.

I describe two titles offered by the publisher. The first title is about a girl or a boy who lost his/her name. The story plot revolves around a girl or a boy (depending on the book’s recipient gender), who looks for the letters of his/her name. For instance, if your name is Karl, then your story would be about a boy who met a kangaroo, then an ant, then a rhinoceros and, finally, a lizard. Lost My Name produces their books digitally but the final product is a professionally designed printed book with high-quality illustrations. The second title produced by Lost My Name is entitled ‘The Incredible Intergalactic Journey Home’. This book offers buyers the option to personalize the dedication page and the character’s name, which then appears written in the stars inside the book. The story follows the main character travelling through space (this is the standard part of the story plot for all children). The personalization elements include a country’s flag on the space ship, an ‘epic landmark’ printed as a photograph on the page (e.g. the picture of Big Ben for a UK version of the book), a Google Earth image of the child’s home (based on the postcode supplied by the buyer) and the door number printed on a standard door. The story finishes when the main character returns home after his/her space journey. While the first title ‘A boy/girl who lost his/her name’ follows a customization principle, the second title could be considered to be more personalized because of an increased number of personal data necessary from the buyer, as well as the use of pictures and textual modes to personalize the book content. For both titles, the publisher follows a simple principle: there is a template, which needs to have a general appeal to children of a preschool/lower primary school age. The template is gender-, race- and background neutral (the use of animal characters) and contains a good, engaging story. This template is then customized with the child’s personal data: name, gender and postcode. The *Incredible Intergalactic Journey* is one of the first, if not the first, children’s book title, which uses geographical and personal data to personalize their printed books on a mass scale.

In addition to selling their books, Lost My Name encourage their customers (who can be former buyers of their books but also subscribers and website visitors) to take part in several personalized activities (summarized on its blog site ‘Clever Ideas’). These activities are all based on the customization principle inherent in their books: there is a template and the adult only needs to supply a few personal data about the child. For example, there is an activity in which parents are encouraged to send their child secret mail from the ‘Frog’. The Lost My Name website provides templates of

envelopes and letters parents can download, print out and populate with the child's name. For some activities, parents can add a personal flavour to a traditional game – for instance, there is the option of a personalized snap card game, in which the cards contain the child's name and characters from the *Lost My Name* book. The child's authorship and involvement in these books and activities is minimal – the child is positioned as the recipient, not maker of the personalized experience. However, from the audience's perspective, the parent can make a generic product unique for their child with a few simple clicks. In comparison to the self-made personalized books presented earlier, the *Lost My Name* books are perhaps more accurately described as personalized *gifts*, which are likely to excite and entertain children and introduce them to the world of books. The *Lost My Name* titles received rave reviews and extensive coverage in most popular media outlets including TV coverage on BBC and articles in the *Guardian* or *Telegraph*, and enjoyed great popularity among children and their caregivers worldwide. Without a doubt, the company's success lies in the ingenious idea of targeting busy urban adults and offering them a bespoke but affordable solution for their child's entertainment.

The Mr Glue Stories

Mr Glue Stories is a digital personalized book producer, considerably smaller in scale than *Lost My Name* in terms of company size and turnover. At the time of writing, it has one main title, which is a digital story as well as a printed book, with the following options for story customization: children can add speech or music to one of the story templates, and they can share the finished story online. In addition, the finished digital story can be also ordered as a glossy paperback, which comes with the child's name printed on the book cover and with the children's own drawings added to the book illustrations. The story characters are hand drawn and purposefully non-professional drawings, so that, as the developer says, children don't feel daunted and are encouraged to add their own drawings. Carrie Gregory-Hood, co-founder of Mr Glue Stories, explained to me that the idea of child's active participation in the book production was a key driver for Mr Glue Stories. The publisher was keen to encourage children's autonomy and active input in the book production process. This is also why the story templates for Mr Glue Stories are original stories crowdsourced from freelance writers and why all the illustrations and sound effects have been produced with a 'home-made feel'. Such an approach to personalization is, the producers believe, more likely to inspire and encourage children's authorship participation and engagement with the app.

Given that the final customized stories can be shared digitally, as well as published as printed paperbacks, children are taken through the entire publishing book cycle: they can see how their participation in the story-making process can alter the text and illustrations of a book and how it can be then printed and delivered home. In terms of child's ownership and creativity, Mr Glue Stories offer several options, although these are not open-ended but restricted by the story template. Critics might question whether such personalization is genuine (or authentic) or whether it encourages pseudo-authorship based on borrowing elements from a predesigned template. I

believe that the learning potential of the Mr Glue Stories lies in the bridge between the printed and digital format of personalized books and in the authoring options of touchscreens to encourage child-driven personalization.

Nosy Crow apps/books

Nosy Crow is an award-winning UK children's book publisher and app designer. Unlike the Lost My name or Mr Glue Stories examples, Nosy Crow does not focus on personalization or personalized books. Yet, a review of their app titles reveals a number of sophisticated personalization options embedded in the publisher's digital stories (book apps available for smartphones and tablets). The personalization features in these apps are one of the key reasons for the wide popularity of the Nosy Crow titles among young children. Indeed, independent reviews of the apps often refer to these features as the 'best feature' or as something the child especially enjoyed when reading the book (see, for example, the Apps Playground reviews by the UK app editor and the *Guardian* writer, Stuart Dredge). For example, in the Cinderella app developed by Nosy Crow, the child can add his/her own picture in one of the pages of the book. Using the front-facing camera, the child's selfie can appear with a quick tap in one of the magic mirrors in Cinderella's room. With another app by Nosy Crow, Pis and Posy (based on the same named children's printed book), the children can add their own faces to imitate various facial expressions of Pis and Posy in front of a mirror. The activity is based on the idea of a photo booth where children can make faces and save these as digital photographs. The funny faces of Pip and Posy provide a template and the child is encouraged to imitate the face, take a picture and share it with others. This feature is very similar to what is possible in a printed book titled *Making Faces* by Jacky Bahbout. In this book, children are encouraged to try out various facial expressions and they can also pretend to be specific characters. For example, they can tear out a picture from the book and pretend to wear a crown or an astronaut helmet. Multiple options are of course much easier to design in a digital format than in a paper book. While the book arguably offers 'many hours of fun', a digital format could offer limitless options. Unlike in the Cinderella example the mirroring faces feature is not part of a story plot (narrative) and there is no follow-up activity other than saving the picture and sharing it with others. Parents and teachers can of course use the pictures as impetus for talking about emotions or to begin a story but this is not part of the app's activities. Some might say that in respect to personalization, Nosy Crow has simply leveraged the touchscreen front-facing camera and capitalized on children's natural interest in human faces. Others might celebrate the publisher's novel way of igniting children's interest in classic stories and encouraging children's more active participation in the storytelling process. Overall, the personalization options in Nosy Crow apps add a layer of playfulness, relevance and immediacy to the reading activity.

In addition to personalized books and digital stories, children's books publishers use personalization for reading-related products developed for young children, which is summarized next.

Personalization in reading-related products developed for young children

A review of commercially produced personalized books needs to include reading-related and literacy-related personalized products, which are sometimes advertised as personalized stories, sometimes as digital stories, and sometimes simply as ‘fun stories’. These are touchscreen apps that combine the elements of drama, story and personalization. For example, with the Puppet Pals app, developed by Polished Play, the child can insert his or her name into a story about Harry Potter and customize the character’s appearance by replacing Harry’s picture with the child’s own photograph. There are story templates and story props for children to choose from and multimedia options for authoring the content. Such digital personalized books are currently enjoying great popularity among parents and their preschool-aged children, with download figures in the range of millions (http://www.ehow.com/how_7815808_create-potter-puppet-pals.html).

Another example of a currently very popular personalized resource designed to support children’s literacy is the Me Books app. The digital library of Me Books offers the option to add users’ own audio files to accompany classic tales. The app, developed by the company Made In Me, includes a number of classic tales from the largest children’s book publishers. What makes the child’s reading experience different – and personalized – is that the children can add their own audio recordings (or those of their family members and friends) to selected pages of the classic tales. So, for example, when reading Little Red Riding Hood, the child can add his own voiceover to the text or the parent can record a new story to accompany the book illustration. On their website, the app developers write that: ‘Me Books incorporates award-winning and patented technology that allows the reader to personalize their favourite books in a unique way. By incorporating rich audio content and letting young readers add their own voices, Me Books provides a wonderfully new way to support language and literacy development’ (<http://www.madeinme.com/me-books/>). To date, the app has had more than one million downloads worldwide. Even though the depth or sophistication of personalization is quite basic, the opportunity to add an audio recording to a classic narrative seems to be appealing to a large number of people. One could imagine the app being particularly successful in families where parents audio-record their voices and the child can listen to their voices in their absence, or for bedtime reading sessions, when the child takes the lead and personalizes a classic narrative with his or her own story ideas.

In addition to personalization embedded in a specific app, publishers and children’s digital producers are increasingly interested in personalizing a wider range of reading products. This includes children’s digital libraries, where personalization happens at the point of choosing and recommending a title to a specific child. There are also personalized subscription services, which provide the subscribers with personalized choice of titles on a regular basis. Although developed more for the school than home market, these services are similar to the personalized books because of their production model. For the experience to be personalized, parents or teachers need to add the child’s age, gender and their reading interest (typically chosen from a set of options such as fiction, non-fiction and fairy tales). These data

don't generate a personalized book, but a personalized reading list for the child. It is questionable whether the reading list and the child's reading experience as a whole are personalized or simply customized to suit the publisher's template (and business model). This is even more questionable with the type of personalized reading services that base their recommendations on the child's reading performance (in addition to or instead of the child's reading interests). For instance, with the Lexile measures offered through Improve My Reading (www.improvemyreading.co.uk), parents and teachers can generate a 'Lexile measure' for the child, which is based on individual measures of a child's performance of reading a graded text. The measure then leads to a 'personalized' recommendation of texts based on the child's reading ability. This model is similar to an adaptive courseware system available for adult learners, which I described in the previous chapter.

Taken together, this short review of commercial personalized books indicates that in many respects, research lags behind industry developments. The *Lost My Name*, *Mr Glue Stories* and *Nosy Crow* products are likely to engage children in reading, which is an important contribution. However, although some publishers pride themselves on supporting children's reading, writing or creativity, their claims are not based on peer-reviewed independent research. Even if some publishers of mass-produced personalized books commission an evaluation study of their books, the evidence generated through this research is mostly based on a sample of enthusiastic users of the books and does not always adhere to the criteria of rigour and validity as academic research does.

Another key consideration related to commercially produced personalized books concerns the security measures around children's personal data collected by the publishers. Many publishers of personalized books hold the children's full name, address and picture (which is mostly of the child or of someone close to the child). Each country has different laws about the possession and distribution of personal data in digital and physical resources. The customers of personalized books, however, can be from any country in the world, with some countries requiring extra permissions for parental concern (e.g. the United States). The situation is complicated and, at the moment, gives an advantage to the publisher, but not to the consumer, who, at the end of the chain, is the child. I raised this concern in 2014 and have since organized several meetings with the industry and UK parliamentarians, which will, hopefully, lead to a national guidance ready for implementation in 2018. In the future development of children's personalized books and stories, it is essential that there is more transparency and clarity around the storage, confidentiality and later use of children's personal data.

So far, we know very little about the different kinds of personalization embedded in the commercially produced personalized books and how their personalization elements might influence children's outcomes. They differ from self-made personalized books on a number of dimensions, impeding a direct comparison. The first step towards a better understanding of their impact is to develop an accurate description and a precise consideration of their personalization features. I list here a set of personalization dimensions that future research, design and practice need to consider; these are based on the present review of self- and mass-produced personalized books for young children.

Key personalization dimensions for future research and design of children's books

As we consider more examples and varieties of personalized books, more nuances and complications regarding the levels of personalization come to fore. While in self-produced book the content was unique and authentic, in mass-produced books there were only a few elements that were unique to the child – the most part of the book was a generic template. There are differences based on the author – the book has a different educational potential if the author is the child or the parent or the provider, or all three together. There are also differences if the final product is designed to serve an educational purpose or if it is intended to be a gift for someone's pleasure. The rationale for the production of a self-made personalized book is based on a community, identity or literacy narrative, whereas for the commercially produced personalized books the impact on community relationships is often not considered at all.

In the previous chapter, I outlined a basic rubric for the level for personalization embedded in personalized books based on Kucirkova (2014). In addition to the consideration of the level of personalization possible within personalized books, this review revealed that we need to specify a number of additional dimensions relevant for the book's audience, purpose and themes. These dimensions need to be periodically updated and refined as new technological options become available. They include:

- The level of involvement of the micro/meso and macro systems in the book's production (ranging from the child's authorship through parent's/caregiver's input to an entire school or community book co-production)
- The range of multimedia options available in the book or story (includes audio, text, drawings, videos, static visuals)
- Presence or absence of templates for the storyline (includes story props as well as reliance on classic or original stories)
- The availability of digital, printed, virtual/augmented reality formats and transmedia products
- Socio-cultural relevance/diversity of the themes represented in the book (includes presence or absence of child's home language for the main story as well as individual story elements).

Future models of personalized books will also need to consider the level of personalization in relation to the different types of stories (picture books, fairy tales, concept books, fantasy books), genres (poetic books, chapter books, board books, novels, short story collections), presence or absence of a narrative, types of illustrations (watercolour, photographs, line drawings) and different literature elements (characters, plot, setting). These dimensions could be part of evaluation criteria of personalized books not only for research and design purposes, but also for innovation and literacy awards. The United Kingdom Literacy Association Digital Book Award already incorporates some of these elements (see <https://ukla>).

org/awards/ukla-digital-book-award). The choice of individual dimensions and their combination depends on the context and purpose of an evaluation or activity or research focus. In my own research, as explained, I have been mostly interested in the level of personalization embedded in personalized books and the impact different formats of personalized stories have on parent–child interaction and on children’s outcomes. Different research studies foreground different dimensions of personalization, as the reader will note in Chapter 6, in which I consider the key themes of personalization research. In the last section of this chapter, I chart possible developments in commercially produced personalized books by imagining various combinations of the aforementioned dimensions and their potential learning benefits for the children.

Future models of personalized books/stories for children

First, the current models seem to be geared towards either template-based digital story authoring or fully produced paper-based personalized books. Publishers could innovate their products by bridging the two formats and combining publisher’s and user’s book authoring. The latter could lead to a more dynamic dialogue between the publisher and the reader, which would give children authentic opportunities for authorship and the publisher a deeper insight into children’s ideas. An attempt in this direction has been made by the start-up Dream Letters Ltd. When parents purchase the Dream Letters package, the publisher sends the child a personalized letter. The letter encourages the child to produce a story that they post back to the publisher, who sends it back to them, and based on the child’s response sends the child another letter and, in this way, continues the cycle. It would be exciting to see how children’s authoring changes if more child authors are brought together in the authoring cycle and if they can exchange their ideas. Products designed for shared and collective authoring might be an exciting future avenue.

Second, I expect more publishers of personalized books to consider the options of multimedia personalized books, where various elements, including the audio, images/illustrations and a text can be determined by the user. With the use of multimedia, publishers could draw on children’s reading, writing and digital literacy skills and encourage children in more active and meaningful book authoring.

Third, personalizing books with children’s names seems a universally attractive technique to engage children in book reading or motivate them to pick up a book. However, this approach is based on the assumption that *all* children will be attracted to seeing their name in print. What about children who don’t like their first name? Although very young children might not have fully developed an awareness of their name, for many adults this is an issue. When I googled the phrase ‘I hate my name’, 329,000 results were returned, including discussion threads at Yahoo, Reddit and Quora listing the difficulties people have had with their names when they were young. Here, the digital version of a book might offer a more flexible way of personalizing a piece of text. Unlike printed books, a digital book designed for a specific name can be flexibly changed to accommodate personal preferences for nicknames or changed

names. Alternatively, it is likely that the future of personalized books will be peppered with other, not name-oriented, personalization features. Some publishers are already experiencing with alternative personal data such as the child's home address (see *Lost My Name* mentioned earlier). There are also other options that could be used to individualize a child's book, such as their favourite colours, animals or foods. Given that neither name nor address is decided by the child, it is worth considering categories determined by the children themselves. If we are to support more autonomy and child-driven personalization, we definitely need to see more children-driven choices of personalization.

Fourth, the focus on selfies and child's own face might shift towards the inclusion of friends and others' faces. There are already apps which encourage children to insert pictures of others, but these are developed for children with special needs and do not focus on storytelling. For instance, the app 'Look At Me', developed by Samsung in 2014, targets children with autistic spectrum disorder as it aims to improve children's ability to respond to the people around them. The app was developed in collaboration between the Korean branch of Samsung and Autism Canada. Although it focuses on the use of the front camera, it is aimed to encourage children not to take pictures of them, but of those around them. This is to encourage the child to make eye contact with the people they photograph and gauge their facial expressions for predefined templates (e.g. a template of someone having fun in the sea presupposes a happy face). I could not find a peer-reviewed journal article documenting these findings, but on their website, the developers claim that 60 per cent of children using the app fifteen to twenty minutes a day for eight weeks showed increased ability of expressing their emotions. In addition to pictures co-produced with others, it is likely that future photo-oriented personalization features will be enhanced with virtual and augmented reality options. Considering the global and unprecedented success of *PokemonGo* and similar virtual reality games, it is likely that publishers of digital personalized books will experiment with augmented reality features and devices' GPS capabilities to encourage alternative ways of children's physical and whole-body participation in a story.

Fifth, collaboratively produced elements of personalization would enable children achieve more in groups than they can achieve on their own (see Vygotsky's take on this described in Chapter 1) and they could enhance the quality and enjoyment of a personalized book. The future is likely to bring a merger between the self- and mass-produced models of personalized books, with more professional authoring possibilities for children and parents. With the rise of advanced self-publishing possibilities and the increasingly wider acceptance of self-publishing as a legitimate route into publishing, it is possible that we will soon see some professionally produced personalized books.

Sixth, the combination of personalization and transmedia is likely to rise in the future. In their report 'T is for Transmedia', Herr-Stephenson, Alper, Reilly and Jenkins (2013) define transmedia as 'any combination of relationships that might exist between the various texts (analog or digital) that constitute a contemporary entertainment media experience' (p. 2). In the present example, transmedia would mean the combination of various texts brought together through one personalized narrative. This is already happening for popular characters and classic stories: for instance, *Cinderella* is offered

as a film, doll, app, book or personalized book and digital personalized story. While a personalized version of a classic story is in the current models used as an addition or extra hook to tap into the transmedia chain, in the future it could be the driver for a transmedia production line. Notably, there could be transmedia products based on user-generated storylines and story characters. The merger of smaller publishers of personalized literacy products and a transmedia approach is likely to generate sustainable business models, targeting a range of children's skills.

Last but not the least, personalized books serve as a starting point for children to get hooked on story creation with themselves as heroes. However, with traditional, non-personalized book titles, children were taught to understand and feel empathy for others' viewpoints and behaviours, not to focus on their own achievements and ideas. As outlined in the previous chapter in relation to emotion talk, the book reading context encourages children and parents to talk about others' emotions (rather than their own) more than the play or reminiscing context. So that books don't lose this important value, parents and teachers need to optimize children's exposure to personalized books with non-personalized titles. Publishers can facilitate this process by developing school- and community-oriented authoring options and designing digital spaces where collaborative production challenges children to consider who they are in relation to others.

Summary

A review of the range of personalized books currently available for young children can elicit a number of dichotomies: free books versus paid books; books which are time consuming to produce versus those which are quick to buy; books with authentic personalized content versus books with tokenistic representations of socio-cultural diversity. This chapter streamlined the range of personalized books and stories to two main types: personalized books authored and self-produced by the user (who could be the child or the child's main caregiver) and those produced by the book publisher or digital developer. Self-made personalized books follow a different production process and research tradition than commercially produced books. Yet, in terms of design of the books, there are some noticeable parallels between the *I like Me!* personalized books used by Demoulin and mass-produced personalized books. Given the similar mechanism for the books' production and distribution to the children, it is therefore perhaps not unreasonable, or not fully unjustified, to expect children's positive engagement and some learning benefits with commercially produced personalized books.

Overall, the review highlighted the variety of personalization options in a specific product and a number of additional dimensions necessary for a full evaluation of personalization in children's literacy materials. I pondered some potential interactions of these dimensions in the future of commercially produced personalized books and suggested merging the boundaries between self- and commercially produced models of personalized books. All told, the dimensions identified in this review add to the Kucirkova's (2014) rubric – which is concerned with the level of personalization – the

notion of the book's origin and a number of additional elements, which might have an impact on the child's outcomes. The next chapter takes up the subject of personalization variety and theoretically broadens the scope from personalized books to personalized education.

Note

- 1 How to best describe such a journal with hand-drawn pictures telling an autobiographical narrative? I call it a homemade personalized book; Short et al. use a more encompassing term of 'family stories' or 'family narratives' or simply 'storying'.