

Reimagining Literary Pedagogy under NEP 2020: A Dialectical Model of Children's Creative Thinking

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Abstract:

Read as a stand-alone fable, the *Panchatantra* tale of the hare who tricks a lion into a well is easily taken as a lesson that brains beat brawn. In its source, the same tale is told by a jackal who is preparing to wreck a friendship. That gap between who tells a story and what it is taken to mean is the starting point for this conceptual paper. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 asks for discussion-based learning, room for critical thinking, storytelling-based pedagogy and formative assessment of higher-order skills, but it does not say how these might come together in a literature lesson. The paper proposes a sequence for the middle stage (Grades VI–VIII) in which students rewrite an ending, retell the story from another character's position and change a rule of the story-world. Each step alters a different layer of the narrative: its outcome, the meaning of its events, and the conditions that made them possible. After each step, a partner offers a counter-reading, and the next step is chosen to test the draft just written. Drawing on dialogic theory and on research into re-storying and classroom talk, the paper calls this a bounded dialectic. Interpretations stay plural in the class, while each child makes a provisional, answerable decision in a draft. A classroom illustration, four process criteria and three testable propositions follow. The framework is offered for empirical evaluation, not as a proven intervention.

Keywords: creative thinking; counter-reading; dialogic pedagogy; re-storying; children's literature; *Panchatantra*; NEP 2020

1. Introduction

In the first book of the *Panchatantra*, a hare saves the animals of a forest by leading a tyrannical lion to a well, where the lion takes his own reflection for a rival and leaps in. When the episode is presented as a self-contained fable rather than through its frame, it reads easily as a lesson about cleverness defeating strength. In the source it has another job. The jackal Damanaka tells it to persuade his companion that wit can bring down the powerful, and then sets about poisoning the friendship between his king and a bull (Olivelle, 1997, Book I). The events stay the same; the teller changes what they mean. A child who never meets the frame receives a moral without learning that a moral was chosen.

This paper is about giving children the means to notice such choices and to make their own. Indian policy already points that way. NEP 2020 asks for pedagogy that is inquiry-driven and discussion-based (Ministry of Education, 2020, para. 4.4), for content to be pared back to make room for critical thinking (para. 4.5), for storytelling-based pedagogy within experiential learning (para. 4.6), and for formative assessment of higher-order skills (para. 4.34). The National Curriculum Framework for School

Education (NCF-SE) 2023 places these aims within a middle stage covering ages 11 to 14 (NCERT, 2023).

What the policy does not do, and could hardly be expected to do, is say how a literature lesson might connect three things: transforming a story, meeting a challenge to that transformation, and revising in response. Nor does it say how a teacher should judge work produced that way. Kumar's (1988) history of India's "textbook culture" shows how the prescribed text came to be treated as the holder of correct meaning. That history cannot tell us how every teacher works today. It does help explain why an invitation to "write a new ending" can quietly lead back to the old moral.

The paper proposes three rewriting operations for Grades VI–VIII: rewriting the ending, retelling from another character's position, and changing a rule of the story-world. Each alters a different layer of the narrative. Each is also chosen to test the draft the previous one produced, and a short partner counter-reading after each step makes that test explicit. Students therefore have to decide, in writing, what to do with a challenge to their own work. Section 3 defends the name I give this, a bounded dialectic. Sections 4 to 8 describe the method, the model, a classroom illustration, assessment criteria and the propositions that classroom research would need to test.

2. Literature review and research gap

2.1 Rewriting and re-storying

Literary theory has long treated rewriting as a form of reading. Genette (1997) called a text that transforms an earlier one a hypertext, and most of what classrooms ask for under the name of creative rewriting (the new ending, the villain's diary, the tale moved somewhere else) fits that description. Literacy research has given the practice a sharper purpose. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) describe re-storying as reshaping a narrative to bring in perspectives that mainstream texts leave out, and they distinguish several ways of doing it, among them shifts of time, place and perspective. Torres and Pytash (2023) took re-storying into teacher education, asking preservice English teachers to re-story canonical texts they would later be required to teach; the work led participants into world-building and into critical reflection on whose stories the canon tells. Critical literacy makes a related move when it names "considering multiple viewpoints" as one dimension of reading critically (Lewison et al., 2002).

This work shows that changing a story's perspective or world can be serious intellectual activity. What it does not generally do is order these transformations, or ask how one puts pressure on another.

2.2 Perspective, counterfactuals and creativity

Psychological research suggests why such tasks might stretch children's thinking. Mar and Oatley (2008) argue that fiction works as a simulation of social experience, in which readers practice occupying minds other than their own. Studies of counterfactual reasoning show that imagining how things might have gone otherwise draws on capacities still developing through childhood (Beck et al., 2006; Harris, 2000). The three operations maps onto these capacities in different ways. A new ending is a counterfactual about outcomes, a changed world-rule is a counterfactual about causes, and a retelling from another position is perspective-taking made explicit on the page.

Two ideas from creativity research complete the picture. Beghetto and Kaufman's (2007) mini-c creativity, the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experience, lets a child's ending count as creative for that child without being new to the world. Craft's (2002) possibility thinking names the shift from what is to what might be, which every operation in this model asks for.

2.3 Talk, revision and creative thinking

Jones-Teuben's (2013) case study of a community of enquiry with children aged five to seven comes closest to the present concern. She found that collaboration and the chance to disagree both correlated with categories of creative thinking. She also found marked power differences: the forum suited some children far better than others. Disagreement is therefore not a neutral resource. Who gets to disagree, with whom and at what cost is part of any design that depends on it.

2.4 The gap

Research on dialogic teaching holds that the quality of classroom talks shapes the quality of thinking, especially when students reason aloud, challenge one another and build on each other's ideas (Alexander, 2020; Mercer, 2000). Writing research has begun to test this. In a quasi-experimental study with 84 Grade 6 students, 25 of them multilingual, Bouwer et al. (2024) gave intervention classes a conversation card, and their teachers provided practice-based support. Peer talk in those classes became more exploratory, with more open questions and shared reasoning. Comments shifted from surface features to higher-order ones, and so did revisions. Tao et al. (2026), studying eight primary language classrooms, found that dialogue which stressed reasoning and linked students' ideas to one another went with stronger creative thinking, though not every dialogic move helped.

NEP 2020 endorses critical thinking, discussion, storytelling and formative assessment of higher-order skills. These commitments give a rationale for creative literary work. They do not specify a sequence that links narrative transformation, structured counter-reading and revision, or criteria for judging how those practices interact. Re-storying research shows what transforming a text can achieve; dialogic research shows how talk moves writers to revise. In the work reviewed here, the two have not been combined in an ordered design where each rewriting is chosen to test the last, a partner's counter-reading makes that test explicit, and the resulting trail of drafts is what gets assessed. Nor has such a design been worked out for Indian middle-stage classrooms. The paper addresses this design problem. It does not claim that related approaches are absent from the field, only that this combination is not specified in the literature examined.

3. Theoretical framework: a bounded dialectic

Calling this sequence dialectical needs some care, because the dialogic tradition this paper relies on has been wary of the word. Bakhtin (1981) located meaning in the meeting of voices that never fully merge, and in his late notes he described dialectics as what is left when the voices are taken out of a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986). Wegerif (2008) drew a sharp educational contrast from this. In his account, a dialogic view treats difference between perspectives as the ground of meaning and keeps it open, while a dialectical view treats differences as contradictions to be overcome in a higher unity. That is one influential way of drawing the line, not the only one. Schwarz and Baker (2016), for instance, treat argumentation, the testing of one claim against another, as a working part of dialogic education rather than its opposite.

The paper uses the term in a limited sense and on two levels. At the social level, the classroom stays dialogic. Interpretations stay plural, nobody is asked to agree, there is no class ending, and the teacher does not announce which retelling was right. At the textual level, each child makes a provisional authorial decision. A draft has to end somewhere, and how it ends is where a writer takes account of a challenge or sets it aside. Bakhtin's own notion of answerability, the responsibility a person bears for the

position they take (Bakhtin, 1993), already speaks to that moment. The model does not supply something dialogic theory lacks. It builds a classroom routine around a moment the theory describes, so that the writer's decision becomes visible and open to discussion.

What, then, makes a revised draft dialectical rather than simply improved after talk? The difference lies in how the sequence is built. In ordinary peer feedback, a writer can take up useful suggestions without meeting any real challenge to the draft's assumptions. Here each step is chosen to produce one. The retelling is likely to unsettle the ending just written, the changed world-rule is likely to expose what both earlier drafts took for granted, and after each step a partner names the tension in plain terms. These tensions are interpretive, not logical contradictions. A lion's-eye account does not refute a hare's-eye ending; it shows what that ending assumed. A revision counts as dialectical in this paper's sense when three conditions hold:

1. a specific counter-reading has been named that challenges an assumption of the student's draft;
2. the student has taken a position on it, by absorbing it, resisting it with reasons, or rewriting so that the draft answers both;
3. the resulting draft becomes the position the next step tests.

Synthesis, on this account, is modest. It does not mean that competing perspectives have been reconciled, or that the student has found the story's true meaning. It means a provisional narrative response to a counter-reading, held until the next one arrives. Nor are the movements a thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula that every story must pass through. They are a teaching sequence designed to make productive tension likely.

From this, the paper takes a working definition. Creative thinking in literary learning is the capacity to generate an imaginative alternative to a given narrative, give reasons for it, test it against competing perspectives and revise it in response. The definition keeps originality, in the mini-c sense, and adds justification and revision. Without those two, classroom creativity tends to be judged by surprise alone. Without originality, the exercise turns into debate practice with a story attached.

4. Method

This is a conceptual study. Its aim is to specify a model precisely enough to be tested in classrooms, not to test it. It works with three kinds of material.

Policy reading. The policy document analysed is NEP 2020, specifically its paragraphs on school curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (paras. 4.4-4.6 and 4.34). Each paragraph was read for three things: what learners are invited to make (creative agency), what they are expected to discuss or argue (reasoned exchange), and how their work is to be judged or improved (revision and evaluation). The aim was to find where the policy gives pedagogical direction and where it states an aim without a procedure. Table 2 in Section 5 sets out the result. NCF-SE 2023 is not analysed provision by provision. It is used to place the model in the middle stage and in language education. The story-completion tasks of the foundational-stage framework (NCERT, 2022) are mentioned only to show continuity, since the middle stage inherits the habit of working with stories and adds the expectation that students argue about them.

Focused critical review. The review was purposive, not systematic, and it drew on two kinds of sources chosen for different reasons. Empirical and pedagogical studies were selected for their learner context. They had to involve school-age or pre-service learners and bear on one of three questions: how readers transform texts, how talk relates to revision or creativity, and how creative work can be judged. Theoretical works, such as those by Genette, Bakhtin, Wegerif, and Schwarz and Baker, were selected

because they supply concepts the analysis needs, whatever population they discuss. Studies were located in October 2026 through keyword searches of the open web and of publisher and university repository pages, including Wiley Online Library, the *Harvard Educational Review* site and university research portals. Representative search phrases were “dialogic teaching” with “creative thinking”, “dialogic writing” with “peer feedback” and “revisions”, “re-storying” with “mandated texts”, and “*Panchatantra*” with “lion and the hare”. Backward citation tracking from Alexander (2020), Wegerif (2008) and Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) added further studies, and work on imagination and counterfactual thinking came from the author’s prior reading. No screening totals are reported because the review was not designed to be exhaustive, and the gap in Section 2.4 is stated relative to this body of work.

Conceptual analysis and illustration. The policy reading and the review were used to identify tensions the model has to hold rather than dissolve: creative freedom against narrative coherence, individual authorship against collective talk, plural interpretation against teacher authority, and originality against the ability to explain a choice. A single *Panchatantra* tale is then worked through the model for a hypothetical Grade VII class. The illustration shows how the model would run. It is not classroom data.

5. The model: three operations, five movements

The model has five movements (Figure 1). In Movement 1, students state the story as given: what happens, whose side the telling takes, what the ending settles on, and what lesson it seems to teach. Movements 2 to 4 are the rewriting operations. Students rewrite the ending, then retell a key episode through a character who was acted upon or overlooked, then change one rule of the story-world, such as who holds power, what is scarce or what is possible. Each operation comes with a driving question (Table 1). Movement 5 is a final round of justification and revision in peer talk.

Disagreement does not wait for Movement 5. After each of Movements 2, 3 and 4 comes a partner checkpoint lasting a few minutes. A partner reads the new draft and names one assumption it depends on. The next movement is chosen to put that assumption under pressure, and the writer notes in a line or two whether they are keeping, changing or defending it. The checkpoints are where the bounded dialectic of Section 3 takes place. Movement 5 gathers the drafts, with the record of each decision, for a last round in which several endings can survive. What is required there is a response rather than agreement: the final draft should show that the writer heard the objection, whether they took it on or argued back.

The sequence is a scaffold, not a staircase. A world-rule may expose a weakness in the earlier ending, and the final talk can reopen any decision.

Each movement unsettles the draft the last one produced

Shaded boxes are the rewriting operations; dots mark partner checkpoints; side arrows are routes back.

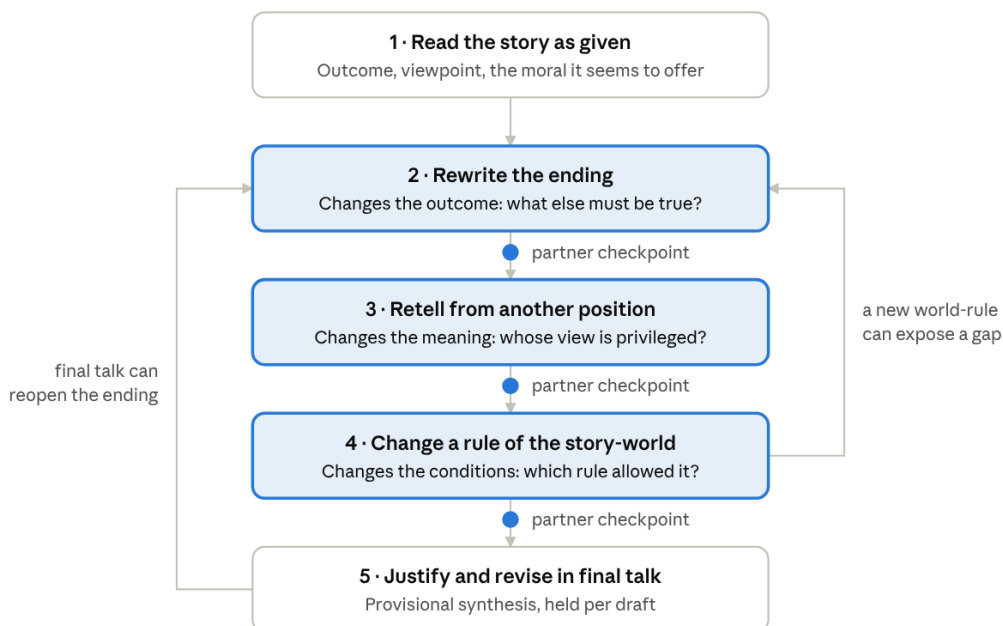


Figure 1. The five movements of the model and the routes back

Table 1 shows why the three operations are not interchangeable.

Table 1. What each operation changes

Operation	Layer of the narrative it changes	Driving question
Rewriting the ending	The outcome	What else must be true for this ending to work?
Retelling from another position	The meaning of events	Who would tell this differently, and why?
Changing a rule of the story-world	The conditions that made events possible	Which rule allowed this story to happen?

The order follows these layers: from what happened, to what it meant, to why it could happen at all. The claim is not that later operations are harder or yield deeper thinking. The paper has no evidence for a ranking of that kind. The claim is that the order creates dependencies between drafts. A child who has written an ending has a stake in it, so the retelling tests something the child has committed to, and the world-rule then tests both earlier drafts at once. Whether this order produces more substantive revision than another order, or than the same tasks done separately, is an open question (Proposition 1, Section 8).

Table 2 sets the movements beside the policy provisions they answer to, and shows what each provision leaves to the teacher.

Table 2. NEP 2020 provisions and the model

Provision	What it asks of pedagogy	What it leaves unspecified	Where the model responds
Para. 4.4: inquiry-driven, discussion-based pedagogy	Learning through questioning and talk	What students should discuss about a story, and to what end	Movement 1, the partner checkpoints and Movement 5
Para. 4.5: room for critical thinking	Less content, more analysis	How analysis enters a creative task	Driving questions in Movements 2-4
Para. 4.6: storytelling-based pedagogy	Stories as a medium of learning	How a story is to be worked on, not only told	Movements 2-4
Para. 4.34: formative assessment of higher-order skills	Assessment that follows thinking over time	What counts as evidence of creative thinking in writing	The draft trail (Section 7)

6. An illustration: the lion and the hare in Grade VII

The source text is Olivelle's (1997) translation of the *Panchatantra*. In class, the teacher would work from a short prose adaptation prepared from that source, keeping three details that a brief retelling might leave out: the animals' agreement to send the lion one victim a day, the hare's deliberate lateness, and the frame in which Damanaka tells the tale to justify a scheme of his own.

Movement 1. Students state the outcome (the lion dies and the animals go free), whose side the telling takes (the hare's) and the lesson they expect (cleverness beats strength). The teacher then reads the frame aloud and asks two questions the tale itself never raises. Who agreed to the daily sacrifice, and who was never asked? Why might a jackal planning a betrayal tell this story at this moment?

Movement 2. Students write new endings. The lion recognises his reflection. The hare's lie is found out. The animals pull the lion from the well. Each ending meets the driving question: what would have to be true for it to work, and is anyone safer at the end of it? At the checkpoint, a partner names one thing the new ending takes for granted, for example, that a humbled lion will keep his word, or that the animals all wanted the bargain ended.

Movement 3. That assumption is what the retelling tests. Students retell the morning of the hare's walk through another animal, perhaps the one whose turn would have come the next day, or the lion himself. A lion's-eye account might present the tribute as an arrangement the animals proposed. If so, was the trick justice or a broken promise? At the checkpoint, each writer notes whether the Movement 2 ending is being kept, changed or defended, and why. Before this movement, the teacher states one principle plainly: representing a character's point of view is not agreeing with it. A student who writes the lion's version is not excusing a tyrant, only finding out how the story looks from where he stands.

Movement 4. Each student changes one rule of the forest. The animals hold a council where everyone votes. The lion is old and cannot hunt, so the tribute is all that keeps him alive. Nobody in this forest can lie. In the last of these, the hare loses his most obvious weapon, though strategy, refusal and alliance remain open to him. The task is designed to bring one point into discussion. The original resolution depended on deception being available, and on the animals' collective action stopping at negotiating a

tribute rather than refusing the arrangement. At the checkpoint, partners ask what the new world means for the ending each writer has kept so far.

Movement 5. Pairs bring the full trail of drafts and checkpoint notes to a final conversation, guided by a short prompt card of the kind Bouwer et al. (2024) used to shape peer talk about writing. The card asks three things. What does your ending need to be true? Whose voice is still missing? What changed in your thinking since your first ending, and what did you refuse to change? Students then revise. The teacher asks for reasons and consistency and does not rule on which ending is morally right. Because Jones-Teuben (2013) found that disagreement suited some children far better than others, pair talk comes before whole-class talk and objections can be written as well as spoken.

By the end, students are back at the frame they met in Movement 1. A tale that a schemer tells to justify deceit, and that a classroom tells to praise cleverness, turns out to carry several meanings. The students reach that point by writing their way to it.

7. Assessing creative thinking without a correct answer

If creative thinking means generating, justifying, testing and revising an alternative, then a single finished story is the wrong thing to assess. Counting endings rewards quantity, and grading only the final draft hides the very revision the model is meant to produce. The unit of assessment should be the trail: the Movement 2 ending, the retelling, the world-rule draft, the final version, the checkpoint notes, and a short reflection in which the student says what changed and why. This fits NEP 2020's call for formative assessment that follows the growth of higher-order skills (Ministry of Education, 2020, para. 4.34).

Table 3 proposes four criteria, each with an indicator a teacher can look for in the trail. They are offered for development and validation, not as a finished scale.

Table 3. Proposed process criteria

Criterion	Observable indicator	Where to look
Originality	Introduces an alternative that departs meaningfully from both the source and the student's own earlier draft	Movement 2 and 4 drafts
Perspective flexibility	Represents another character's interests, knowledge or assumptions in a way the story can support	Movement 3 retelling
Narrative coherence	The ending or world follows the conditions the student has set, or explains a change in them	Movement 4 draft and final version
Reflective revision	Names a specific challenge or counter-reading and explains how it changed, or failed to change, the draft	Revision notes, read against the drafts

One principle governs all four. A story is not marked down because its conclusion departs from the familiar moral. A student who argues that the hare broke a bargain, and builds a coherent ending on that reading, has done more of what this model values than one who restates “brains beat brawn” in new words.

Two risks need guarding against. A student who writes fluently about revision can score well on reflection without having revised much, so the note is always read against the drafts it describes. And confidence in speaking before classmates must not stand in for creative thinking. Where students are writing in a second language, or rarely speak in class, disagreement should be possible in other forms: a written objection, a note made before discussion begins, or a storyboard in place of a paragraph. The criteria judge the reasoning in the work, not the poise of the person who produced it.

8. Limitations and propositions for classroom research

The model has not been tried, and the conditions of many Indian middle schools will test it hard. Classes of forty or more make sustained peer talk difficult to run and harder to monitor. The full sequence needs several periods that a crowded syllabus may not allow, and a shortened version could keep the activities while losing the friction between them. There is also a risk in the model’s own logic. Any routine can harden, and if “what else must be true?” becomes a ritual question with a ritual answer, the model will have replaced the old moral with a new orthodoxy.

Because the paper is conceptual, its central claims are best stated as propositions (Table 4).

Table 4. Propositions for empirical testing

Proposition	Claim	Possible test
P1: Sequence	Moving from ending to perspective to world-rule may produce more substantive revision across drafts than the same tasks taught separately or in another order	Compare draft trails across sequencing conditions
P2: Dialogue	Partner checkpoints and final peer talk may increase how far students take up, resist or develop competing interpretations in their drafts	Compare drafts before and after each checkpoint, alongside talk transcripts
P3: Assessment	The four criteria may help teachers judge creative reasoning, but their reliability and fairness cannot be assumed	First, check whether independent teachers apply the criteria consistently, using an agreement statistic suited to the scoring format. Second, compare criterion scores with independent expert judgements of the same stories, the kind of judgement Amabile’s (1982) consensual

Proposition	Claim	Possible test
		assessment technique was designed to collect

P2 rests on the firmest ground. Bouwer et al. (2024) and Tao et al. (2026) both link structured talk to revision or creative thinking, though neither tested a sequence like this one. P1 is the paper's most distinctive claim and its least supported; a different order might work as well. P3 asks two separate questions, whether the criteria can be applied consistently and whether they track creative quality as experts see it, and a rubric could pass the first and fail the second. A design-based study in two or three schools, collecting draft trails, checkpoint notes and recordings of peer talk, could examine all three propositions together.

9. Conclusion

This paper has proposed a dialectically sequenced framework for middle-stage literary pedagogy. It links rewriting an ending, retelling from another position and changing a rule of the story-world through partner counter-readings, final peer talk and reflective revision. Its contribution is to specify how these operations might depend on one another, to name the tensions that shape their classroom use, and to offer provisional criteria for judging the work they produce. The framework is aligned with NEP 2020's commitments to discussion, storytelling and formative assessment. Whether it works remains to be tested.

At its core is one claim. Creative literary work can be organised around a continuing tension between imaginative freedom and reasoned revision, as long as the teacher does not settle every disagreement. Each child commits to a version and has to answer for it, while the class keeps more than one version alive.

The hare's story makes the point in miniature. Told by a schemer, it justifies deceit. Told as a stand-alone fable, it praises wit. Told again by a child from the lion's side, or set in a forest where no one can lie, it becomes a question about consent and power. A pedagogy that lets children write those versions, argue over them and revise their own will not guarantee more creative children. It offers a provisional way to make aspects of creative thinking visible, for classroom discussion now and for evaluation later.

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