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The articles in this special issue are united around the topic of emergent literacy, and particularly new directions for this field of research. Typically an editorial for a special edition starts with a definition of the topic on which it focuses, in this case literacy. However, our work is primarily focused on the difficulties involved in interpreting literacy both in relation to young children and to contemporary forms of making meaning and communicating.

Both now and historically literacy education is given great emphasis and importance within early childhood education. In recent years ideas and theories around literacy are being reconsidered largely as a response to evolving digital technologies. These are leading researchers and educators to consider the role of digital technology within young children’s learning practices. The same technologies also bring about new forms of research which make it possible to capture and record children’s interactions and ways of communicating in a wide range of places, and through various verbal and non-verbal means.

In thinking about literacy and in using these technologies, we are interested in understanding children’s reading, writing and speaking as part of a much wider, complex set of communicative and social practices which begin from birth. These includes ephemeral modes of communicating, such as gesture, gaze and moving around. In addition, young children’s communication does not operate in a vacuum, but is situated within the social and cultural environments of the child. These can differ across educational settings, home and public environments. Finally, communicating is about much more than the giving and receiving of information, but has important affective, sensory and embodied aspects.

In addition, the word “emergent” in relation to early literacy signals a sense of trajectory, which requires critical consideration. By using the term “emergent literacy” there is a risk of focusing on literacy as an ultimate goal. Such a narrow focus may result in undervaluing the complex and sophisticated ways in which young children make meaning before they are reading or writing. Both before and after children are competent readers, it is important to think about how other means of communicating come about, particularly in relation to digital technologies. For example image plays an ever-increasing role in screen-based practices.

In the same way that we no longer consider children to be not-yet adults but give importance to childhood in the moment, we argue that the future direction of literacy research is seeing how reading and writing in a traditional sense tie with other communicative practices. Therefore this special edition of the journal will focus on new directions of research on emergent literacy. The chosen topics of the papers push the boundaries in terms of what can be defined as literacy. The strands are space and movement (see the first two articles, by Hackett and Cowan), images (see third and fourth articles by Yamada-Rice and Azzopardi) and digital technologies (see article three).

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Movement and emerging literacy

Abigail Hackett

A group of 3-year-old children enter an art gallery, and press a button to start music playing. They dance with abandon to the music, in wide circles filling the room, arms waving in the air. They have done this on several previous visits to this art gallery.

After asking the researcher and his mother to leave the room, a four year old boy solemnly shuts the living room door, stands in front of the cartoon ‘Tree Fu Tom’, and begins to replicate the tai chi moves of the main character.

Crawling inside a cardboard den at a busy family event, a four year old boy emerges ‘inside’ the cardboard turret of the castle, and begins to spin round on the spot, watched by his peers.

Through a series of research projects over the last four years, my research has focused on how young children make sense of places. Moving around places has been a central aspect of these studies, and an important way in which the children make meaning in places (Hackett, 2014).

As the three vignettes above illustrate, this movement is diverse. It has ranged from fast running and dancing, to careful stepping, climbing and repeated walking of the same connecting route between two locations in a room. The purpose and intent that the children put into their movement promotes consideration of the relationship between children’s movement and their other meaning making practices, including emerging literacy.

Why does moving around seem so important to young children’s experience of place?
> How is movement communicative?
> How do children create a sense of knowing and sharing using their moving bodies?
> As children explore places with their bodies, how are these bodily movements related to their emerging literacy?

In this article, I will focus on the first of the three examples above of children dancing together in an art gallery. This was a practice, which a group of 2-6 two-year-old children established as a ‘tradition’, something they did each and every time they visited this same art gallery, over a series of four visits over four months. Dancing around the art gallery seemed to achieve three things; it enabled the children to discover a place by moving around it, it reinforced learnt knowledge (for example of how to start the music) and it demonstrated and shared that way of knowing with others (both their two-year-old friends, and the adults who were with them, watching them dance). In the discussion, I will draw out some key points about young children’s literacy practices in current research.

Writing and speaking are related to other methods of communicating

Research has established how writing and speaking are two forms of communication among many, which young children employ in combination with others as they participate in their communities. The diagram below illustrates some of the different methods of communication researchers have identified.

The key point of similarity between emerging literacy and these other communicative practices is that this meaning-making is an intentional act, driven by the interest of the individual doing the communicating (Kress, 1997). Kress argues that children are making meaning long before they could be described as ‘literate’. Therefore, “in learning to read and write, children come as thoroughly experienced makers of meaning.” (Kress, 1997, p.8).

Meaning-making that uses many methods is the context through which children begin to speak and write. In this sense, by failing to fully recognise these other methods of communication, adults may fail to notice young children’s competence, creativity and capacity to make meaning (Flewitt, 2005).

In the example of the children dancing in the art gallery, the children assigned a specific interpretation to their personal experiences in the museum. For them, the meaning of the art gallery was a place that made them want to dance and move in wide circles, with friends. If they were older, perhaps the children would have chosen written or spoken words to explain this. However, in this case, they chose dancing as their primary method of meaning-making.

Literacy is a social practice

Much contemporary research stresses that literacy is a shifting set of social practices, rather than fixed set of skills. Finnegan (2002) presents a vision of communication that goes beyond an exchange of information, by stressing the affect human communication has on others:

‘Human beings interconnect with each other...through the resources of our bodies and our environment. (Finnegan, 2002:3)’
From this perspective, the children’s dancing in the art gallery was not so much about exchanging information about the place. Rather it was about ‘interconnecting’ with each other using the best resources available to them – in this case, the music in the art gallery and their own dancing bodies.

Rasmussen and Smidt (2005) suggest that these forms of knowing about the world involve “something other and more than mere words” (p.88). Much of how we experience the world is difficult or impossible to express in “mere words”, and young children’s choice to use non-verbal methods to connect with each other and to make sense of places reflects this. Again, research here cautions adults from privileging young children’s speech over their other methods of communication. While the children could have expressed how they felt about the art gallery verbally it would, arguably, not have been as effective a method of interconnecting as the dancing.

Literacy and place

Leander and Sheehy (2004) urge researchers and educators to pay more attention to the relationship between place and literacy, arguing “when we use words, we are always situating ourselves.” (Leander and Sheehy, 2004:3). This emphasis on literacy as related to place builds on the message that literacy is not a fixed set of skills, but a social practice which depends on context. Certain forms of communication are appropriate in certain places. This can depend on both who is there, and what the environment is like. One example of this is the ‘initiation, response, evaluation’ model of questioning which is mostly seen in school and nursery settings, rather than communication in the home.

When the children danced in the art gallery, they were appropriating the resources of the place (such as the music, the wide open space of the room, the other people they were with) and using them to make meaning. The meaning the children in the art gallery made through their shared dancing was specific to the place in which they made the meaning (the art gallery). Essentially, dancing in the art gallery was communication about a place, which only made sense in that place. It created a new way of knowing about and experiencing that place.

Emphasising the relationship between literacy and place prompts consideration of children’s communication in settings as just one, place-specific, example of how they communicate. It is well documented that children speak less in nursery settings than they do at home (Flewitt, 2005). In addition, as literacy depends on place and context, children are likely to employ a range of different methods to communicate or interconnect in a range of different ways in the different places that form the context of their lifeworlds.

Suggestions for practitioners

- Consider how children can and do move around their educational setting, and how they are prevented from moving. This may depend on both the physical environment and the rules adults have introduced. How do these rules constrain meaning making, and are they essential?
- Create opportunities for children to move more freely during their time spent in settings. View these opportunities as more than a chance to ‘let off steam’. They are a core aspect of how children make meaning and interconnect with each other.
- Read Kate Cowan’s article (this issue) for ideas on how to incorporate children’s movement, as part of their emerging literacy, into assessment practices.

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References


Multimodality: observing and documenting with video in nursery

Kate Cowan

“Come on, let’s run!” called Charlie, setting off through the twisting paths of the woodland with a group of several other three- and four-year-old children following him close behind. During the weekly woodland visits I coordinated as a Nursery teacher, some children repeatedly chose to run fast and far, through prickly pathways, across the wide open grass, and to the very edges of the woods. However, the attention of the accompanying practitioners and parents tended often to focus on children engaged in quieter, more settled exploration, with a suggestion that these other children were “just running” without real focus or purpose. Amidst concerns that the children might get lost, get hurt or run away, and with practical difficulties as to how to observe something so fast-paced and far-ranging, the children’s movement-based exploration posed several challenges. Yet the children ran with skill, enthusiasm and absorbed persistence. Could this be an important act of meaning-making worthy of closer attention? If so, how might practitioners and researchers recognise, value and interpret it? Drawing upon this woodland project and my research analysing video recordings of child-initiated play in Nursery, I suggest ways video offers possibilities for observing and documenting young children’s communication beyond language.

Expanding literacy

It is increasingly recognised that language is just one means of communication among many, and that privileging reading, writing and speech in education risks ignoring the many complex ways young children create signs and make meaning in other modes. Motivated by their interest, and using what is available, children engage in social sign-making (Kress, 1997), drawing upon multiple modes which might include movement, gaze, gesture, facial expression, mark-making and use of objects, as well as language. The multimodality of young children’s literacy has been researched in relation to a range of activities, including drawing (Mavers, 2010), model-making (Stein, 2003), construction (Pahl, 1999), role-play (Wohlwend, 2011), movement (Hackett, 2014), gesture and gaze (Flewitt, 2006), calling for a broadened perspective on communication and learning, “where not only language but also images and physical activity can be viewed as socially organised, sign-making activities and as key components in the construction of meaning” (Flewitt, 2006, p.27).

Examples of the many modes children use to represent and communicate were abundant during the woodland project. For instance, I was asked by four-year-old Zack, “Do you want to see my magic trick?” and was instructed to wait at a particular place where paths intersected. He ran out of sight, behind dense brambles, along a winding pathway, before reappearing where he began. Back in the classroom, he also drew his magic trick and the routes his friends had taken, explaining, “That’s me, and that’s me, and that’s my magic trick. That’s Joey’s magic trick and that’s Martha’s magic trick” (Fig. 1). In his running and his drawing, Zack communicated sophisticated understanding of a complex natural environment, showed knowledge of the differing perspectives of runner and watcher, played with the idea of disappearing and reappearing as illusion and represented his “trick” graphically. Far more than “just running”, Zack’s movement and mark-making can be understood as important aspects of literacy, comprising ways he made and expressed meanings in his woodland exploration.

If we are to acknowledge that early literacies take forms beyond language, then the pressing question for practitioners and researchers alike is what can be done to support, recognise and value these?

Observing with video

In exploring this question, my research has involved returning to the Nursery School where I formerly taught to closely analyse the ways children communicate through multiple modes in their play. Using a small handheld video camera, I recorded a range of child-initiated play episodes, such as role-play, running games, construction play and computer play over one week. Video offered particular possibilities for observing and interpreting play by creating a fine-grained, detailed, real-time record which could be watched repeatedly and in different ways. Video analysis enabled a close and detailed focus on children’s communication in multiple modes, supporting insights into the complex organisation of play which is often fast-paced and seemingly chaotic, such as the running games described at the start of this article. Close multimodal analysis of such games revealed how sophisticated messages like “chase me” and “truce” were subtly communicated and interpreted by children through their direction, speed, movement around objects, gesture, posture and gaze as well as language.

Figure 1: Zack’s “magic trick”
approach also helped to make visible children who found it difficult or preferred not to speak, recognising the ways modes such as facial expression, gaze and manipulation of technology were used to invite, negotiate and sustain play frames with others (Cowan, 2014).

In this research, the representation of video became a particular interest. Experimenting with different transcription styles, such as written descriptions, video stills, timelines and maps, highlights that different forms of representation will differently re-present the original encounter, and that consideration of how researchers and practitioners document, as well as flexibility in documentation styles, is important for how we generate and make available different insights into learning.

New technology available for documenting children’s learning offers exciting new possibilities in terms of what and how we document, with some mobile applications now permitting the embedding of video clips directly into digital documentation portfolios. Although current Early Years Foundation Stage assessment guidance encourages a range of forms including the use of video (Standards and Testing Authority, 2014), exemplification material is not provided, calling for further consideration of what video might specifically offer in relation to more traditional written and photographic observations. There is also clearly a need for settings to ensure that video is used sensitively, responsibly and ethically.

Suggestions for practitioners
Digital devices for recording video are increasingly affordable, portable, high-quality and easy to use, and are becoming available in more and more education settings. What follows are some suggestions as to how video might be used to focus on multimodal aspects of young children’s literacy in nursery:

- Try using digital devices (eg. cameras, tablets) to record video observations in the classroom, particularly if the children are engaged in play which is difficult to capture through writing or photographs.
- Choose an interesting section of the video to re-watch in different ways, for instance with or without sound, sped up or slowed down, with colleagues or the children themselves.
- Use this close re-watching to focus particularly on the ways children communicate in non-verbal modes, for instance through their posture, facial expression, gaze and body movement, in addition to or in the absence of talk.
- Consider using these video recordings as part of digital documentation, to sustain projects and share insights into learning with parents and other practitioners.

The possibilities seem rich and exciting for using video to observe and document. As well as expanding literacy to consider young children’s communication in multiple modes, using video to recognise young children’s communication capacities beyond language might also help to develop a more respectful, empowering and inclusive means of understanding meaning-making in its many forms, and in its rich complexity.

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References:
This article discusses the increasing importance of images to children’s emergent communication practices. The history of western communicative practices provides an understanding of how images have become so important in both adults’ and children’s lives. In chronological order of emergence the history of human development traces the changes in modes of communicating over tens of thousands of years. This history can loosely be seen as: word of mouth, drawn and painted images, writing on bark/parchment, in books, photographs, movies, television and digital media (Yamada-Rice 2012). Some of those media allow communication to take place predominately through one mode, for example, the use of the visual mode in painted images, or written scripts on parchment/bark. Others combine multiple modes more fully such as films, which use sound, image, music and gesture. The culmination of the communicative timeline is contemporary digital media such as tablets and smart phones. Recent research I have undertaken has looked at how even the youngest of children, 0-3-years, can use tablets in their literacy practices.

Understanding how young children use digital media is of importance to emerging literacy practices because digital media combine multiple modes but also foreground screens as the key site for communication and meaning-making (Kress 2003; Bezemer & Kress 2008). This therefore challenges the previous held assumption in education that meaning-making predominately takes place through books. Whereas books necessitate the need to be able to read and write, new abilities are needed in relation to digital communication practices because as Kress (2003) states, screen-based media rely on the “logic” of visual rules. These visual rules use the properties of “space, size, colour, shape [and] icons of various kinds - lines, circles” and so on (Bezemer & Kress 2008:171). Therefore because of the properties named previously images conveys information and meaning in different ways than writing.

To understand this better imagine everyday practices for older children and adults using digital media. Smart phones are used to send and receive images via texts or Twitter, images and locations are mapped and uploaded to Facebook. Items are purchased online after browsing photographs. Indeed, even the telephone hardware is built to preference image by placing the screen above the alpha/numerical keypad, which is usually hidden behind, or less dominant, than the phone’s screen (Kress 2010). It is already known how children gain some of their first understandings of reading and writing by observing adults carrying out everyday literacy practices (Hannon 1995). Thus the digital communication practices listed above also form part of the communicative landscape young children are observing today. These practices and new variants of them will also form part of young children’s future communication practices. Indeed, the Ofcom (2012) report shows the extent to which young children are already using screen-based media through digital gaming and TV.

Contemporary communication practices, creativity and design
The evolution of communication described above in relation to digital technologies and images further changes the kind of skills needed to communicate in contemporary times. As described, contemporary digital technologies allow communication to be constructed through multiple modes to an extent previously unknown. Meaning-making across a range of modes allows messages to be fine-tuned to define and convey knowledge in new ways. Therefore the design process has become an important part of contemporary communication practices. Design is realised in even the simplest ways from media selection, choosing which mode communicates the message best and arrangement. Further, “the interconnectivity of the internet [has] changed modes of distribution, the nature and availability of audiences, and created incredible new opportunities for collaboration” (Woolsey 2005:5).

Woolsey uses the terms “Absorb”, “Create”, “Present”, and “Share” to show how various media engage audiences in different ways. Following Woolsey’s four categories, books would fall under the category of “Absorb” in that they are made by an author for consumption by the reader. By contrast many contemporary communication practices...
would come under the “Share” category, meaning that the possibility to participate in communication practices as either giver or receiver of information is no longer fixed. This can be seen through examples of consuming and then uploading videos to file-sharing site such as YouTube. Marsh’s (2010) work on young children using the virtual world, Club Penguin, also suggests young children participate in file “sharing” through the production of Machinima which are narratives created by a mash-up of images from the virtual world with sound and music, and then posted on YouTube.

Kalantzis & Cope (2000) write that “schooled literacy was an assimilating business [with] few individuals ever getting to voice...authority” and thus able to have an impact on their social environment. (p.142/3). By contrast, contemporary communication practices allow individuals to be “the remakers, transformers, of sets of representational resources” (Kress 2000:160). Remaking and transforming representational resources happens as a collaborative process usually through digital media that emphasise user-created content, such as in the above example of Club Penguin.

**Extending young children’s engagement with images**

So far I have aimed to show how as a result of digital technologies communication practices are changing. So whilst writing and reading remain important parts of children’s literacy learning and education there are also other modes that need attention too. In particular children’s engagement with images has increased through digital media as described above. Therefore as with learning to read, children need opportunities to have their knowledge of images recognised and extended. Children need opportunities to talk about images, to know how they can be used and also to critique their use and understand that they can be used in multiple ways. For example, the next article in this special issue describes children’s interactions with the picture book “Where The Wild Things Are”. This is one way in which images have a long history of being used to tell a story, which educators are very used to talking with young children about. However, another example of how images are used is in advertising, where through digital manipulation they are nearly always curated and altered to distort reality. Thus children need opportunities to talk about the images they see in their wider environments. How they think they were made, and why they are there. The last section provides some practical ideas for how this can be achieved.

**Suggestions for practitioners**

It is already known that children’s exposure to print in their home and local environments feeds children’s emerging literacy knowledge (Freire & Macedo 1987; Cronin et al 1999; Nutbrown 1997a &1997b). Extending this I conducted a 9-month study that considered the impact of increasingly visual means of communication on young children’s emerging knowledge of communication practices (Yamada-Rice 2013). Specifically, it looked at a group of seven young children’s (between the ages of 3 and 6 years) interaction with and comprehension of images. The data were collected using children’s photographs of images that interest them, video recordings of environmental walks, interviews and mapping. They were analysed using content analysis, stop-motion animation and thematic analysis. The data illustrated how young children primarily make meaning of images through their knowledge of and interest in the physical world. It also showed how some of their comprehension of images emerges through interest in fictional visual texts such as comics, animation and gaming. With this knowledge in mind I worked with a nursery school in the North of England to suggest ways that adults can help support young children’s comprehension of and engagement with images as one part of their wider literacy learning.

Parents were invited to join their 4-year-old child on a walk from the nursery school into their local neighbourhood.
The children were asked to photograph images in the environment that interested them. The children used devices already available in their homes to do this such as cameras on mobile phones. Building on research by Hannon (1995) parents were encouraged to provide Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Motivation (ORIM). Hannon (1995) has shown how the four strands that make up ORIM can help adults to aid children’s emerging literacy practices. In this activity the walk became the opportunity. Parents were encouraged to recognise what their children already knew about images by giving stickers to their child and praising them when they articulated knowledge of images. In relation to this parents were given a set of questions that could be used to interact with their children about the images they saw on the walks. These included: “How do you think it is made?” “What is the picture of?” “Why do you think it is here?” “Do you like it?” “Why is it so big/small/red/etc?” These questions were used to engage children in opportunities to converse about images and also model to children the importance of understanding and critiquing images. This example is included as a practical idea to show how easy it is foster children’s engagement with, interest in and understanding of images.

Further ideas for building on this suggestion include:

- Mapping the location of images and discussing them. Maps can be drawn or made out of art materials to make them three-dimensional.
- Allowing children to photograph images from their lives and value them by collecting them in photo albums.
- Making Memory Games using photographs of images that children have taken. Encourage children to talk about the images each time they find a matching pair.

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This paper focuses on the individual and group responses of five Year 3 children to Sendak’s classic picture book “Where The Wild Things Are” (WTWTA). Carried out at a girls’ school in Malta in 2013, the study also argues the importance of introducing children to the world of authentic children’s literature. This concern stemmed from observing an orientation toward a narrow and technicist literacy curriculum that often privileges phonics and graded readers over real books.

The five participants, all third-graders, were Danielle, Lucy, Nina, Sarah and Maria. Pseudonyms have been used to safeguard anonymity. The project was carried out in two stages. The first phase comprised individual reading sessions in which each participant was asked to read and talk about the selected book. This was followed at a later date by a group reading session which involved all five children engaged in reading and discussing the story. The children were also asked to draw a picture and write a letter to the fictional protagonist. All interviews and discussions were audio recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Children’s selves: voice, talk, seeing and being

Several interesting characterisations emerged from both research phases. The most striking was the rich variety of responses offered, arising from the children’s highly individual ways of constructing meaning. This accords with the findings of Martinez et al (2003:226) who found that children respond in highly individualistic ways and “develop their own preferred styles of response”. Response styles ranged in complexity from a broad perspective (Danielle), playful performativity (Lucy) and a literal reading of text (Sarah) to Nina’s impulse towards control and order and Maria’s free association of ideas.

What also emerged was the significance of identity. The way the children constructed meaning was closely linked to their own mental representations of themselves as readers, learners and family members. For example, Nina, who stated that she liked to read because “I can teach my little sister words” seemed to be a little girl who identified closely with the adults in her life. Her reading of WTWTA reflected this stance: she expressed outrage at Max’s rumbunctious behaviour and declared “No watching TV for a whole week”.

Danielle took a completely different approach. Despite not being a strong decoder of the printed word, she nonetheless demonstrated a remarkable ability to make text-to-life connections. She pointed out that “Max stopped being the king, like Pope Benedict” and then went on to give detailed information about the various types of dinosaurs and plants, information gleaned from books, television, internet and other media. For Danielle therefore, the book was a text to be connected to the interesting world surrounding her since that was where her real interest lay.

Many of the children’s responses reflected their experience with other texts, especially those associated with popular culture. This was especially true for Maria and Lucy, who made numerous references to pop songs, TV programmes, cartoon shows and films as in the following quotes.

“This is just like Pi with his tiger and hyena.”
(Maria)

“Max will now turn into an animal sailor, a bunny I think just like the bunnies in Max and Ruby.”
(Maria)

“It’s like a video game.”
(Lucy)

“Da-da-da-da! That’s the music on Nickelodeon Channel.” (Maria, humming the first few bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in response to the rumpus illustrations)

These references served to cement the children’s participation in a shared culture, one readily understood by all of them. Also, they blurred the boundaries between school learning and out-of-school experiences and demonstrated the power of popular culture to motivate children’s learning, especially literacy learning.
Many of the children’s responses flowed from the world created by Sendak’s illustrations. Particularly striking were the pictures of the forest growing in Max’s bedroom and the rumpus images. The former had a tactile appeal and made the children reach out to touch it while the wordless rumpus pictures elicited a number of performative responses including dance and song. This could be due to the absence of frames in these pages. Doonan (1993:81) states that illustrations which extend to the edge of the page suggest “a life going on beyond the confines of the page so that the beholder becomes more of a participant in than a spectator of the pictured events.”

As anticipated, the children responded to WTWTA with interest and enjoyment. Their enthusiastic, sometimes exuberant behaviour did not distract them from reaching insightful understandings. Indeed, it can be argued that it was these spontaneous responses - creative, critical and emotional - that drove them forward. Albeit unknowingly, many of the children’s responses were shaped towards the requirements of an advanced English curriculum: they delineated character traits, gave a sequentially correct retelling of the story, described context, commented on story structure, identified thematic trends, pointed out linguistic features and even grappled with ambiguities in the text. This intellectual labour flowed from their active engagement with the story combined with a mode of questioning that purposely embraced a dialogic style and avoided the “IRE” paradigm described by Dombey (2010) as a pattern of discourse that relies on Initiation, Response and Evaluation and is the dominant teaching style in Malta, where a high value is placed on formal learning.

Suggestions for practitioners
In contrast with the structured, goal oriented and teacher-directed activities they were accustomed to, the participants of this project were left free to explore and negotiate their own response to literature. Through non-prescriptive, open-ended approaches, it is possible to foster a reading culture of curiosity, possibility and purpose. As teachers and educators, we can:

- provide opportunity. Time and space needs to be carved out of busy schedules and classrooms. Book clubs, literature circles, reading partnerships, read-alouds etc. are all ways we can structure our reading times.
- model our own reactions to texts in ways which are thoughtful and intentional yet spontaneous. This entails approaching a well-known book as a first time reader and becoming a co-inquirer with our young students.
- value the multiple modalities children use to respond to texts. Talk, gesture, body language, facial expression, song, dance, dramatic improvisation, mime and movement are embodied ways of self-expression for young children.
- extend children’s talk in ways that stimulate thought and enrich language. Emergent readers will rely on labeling of pictures as a first line of response. They can gradually be nudged toward forms of higher order thinking.
- invite children to respond to books through art and writing. (Figure 1 represents Nina’s letter to Max.) Reluctant writers can be supported through the use of graphic organisers and story maps.
- organise group response activities such as a wall display, group collage, puppet activity, digital media presentation or class blog. This will create a repertoire of shared experiences surrounding texts while strengthening the class as a community of practice.
As these recommendations suggest, young children in the early stages of acquiring literacy do so as integrated beings who use both their minds and bodies. My own experience of exploring literature with young children has led me to broaden my vision of literacy so as to encompass cognitive, affective, aesthetic and creative dimensions. While code-based skills should not be neglected, it is these broader authentic contexts that engage children in reading for meaning and enjoyment.

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References

Dear Max, in your story book I saw your advenger with the strange monsters it was really intresting but Max please be very good and do sleep tight good night sweet dreams.

From Nina
We are saddened to announce that Margaret Roberts, a Vice President of Early Education, passed away on 25 September 2014 at the age of 98.

Margaret Roberts began her teaching career in Oxfordshire and London where from 1937 to 1948 she taught in Nursery and Infant Schools. This was followed by a post of Lecturer in Education at Goldsmiths College, London, from 1949 to 1953. Then a first period in Australia, where she was Principal of Adelaide Kindergarten Training College from 1953 to 1957. She returned to London for two years from 1957 to 1959 and worked as a remedial teacher in Tottenham. She then taught at Maria Grey Teacher’s Training College, London, from 1959 until 1963 when she returned to Australia as Senior Lecturer in Child Development at Hobart Teacher’s College, Tasmania. She held this post until 1967. In 1967/8 Margaret followed Dorothy Gardener as senior lecturer in charge of ‘The Early Years Course’ at the Institute of Education, University of London.

She was also a key figure in OMEP (the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education). Dorothy Eiddona Selleck of OMEP writes that “Margaret gave outstanding leadership at a time when OMEP was in danger of collapsing in 1978 because of financial difficulties. At an Extraordinary General Meeting in Vienna, Miss Roberts was elected as interim President and after a trying and difficult time, OMEP was able to continue its work.”

For many years she was a Vice President of Early Education, still attending our AGM even last year at 97. She also spent much time in her final years working on a book she planned to call ‘The Shaping Spirit of Imagination in Childhood’ after a quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Dejection: An Ode:

“.... each visitation Suspends what nature gave me at my birth, My shaping spirit of Imagination.”

We send our thoughts and condolences to Margaret’s family, friends and former colleagues.

A personal reminiscence:
I first met Margaret Roberts in or around 1976 when, as Training Officer for London Adventure Playground Association, I needed someone to lecture on Child Development to an audience of trainee and experienced play leaders and voluntary community managers of playgrounds and play schemes. A friend suggested the head of the Diploma in Child Development Course at London University Institute of Education. I approached Margaret with some trepidation, fearing that my play leaders course would be regarded as insignificant to someone who as President of OMEP commanded international respect. I asked if she could recommend someone and she volunteered herself. I worried that her lecture might be above the heads of some of my group, but needn’t have worried. Margaret was warm, approachable and informative, many people regarded her sessions as the highlight of their year.

I knew that Margaret Roberts was nearing retirement, so in 1978 I left my job in order to study full time for a Diploma in Child Development in her final year. It was exciting and fulfilling and changed my life.

A few years later I attended a local United Nations children’s event for One World Week. The organiser, known and admired locally as Peggy, turned out to be the now retired Margaret Roberts. The inevitable forgetfulness of her great age made it difficult for her to put together the book she wanted to publish as her gift to an education system which she and I both believed was losing its way. I volunteered my services and whilst working together was treated to fascinating anecdotes from her life in education in England and Australia.

Jan Loxley-Blount
We must value his wholeness 
Defend his integrity
And learn from him
As we teach him.
from
‘Infant’
by
Clive Sansom

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