Transitions: Parents, Teachers and Students
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Dear Readers:

Welcome to the New Year and another exciting year of literacy teaching and learning. We are pleased to present a packed February edition of Practically Primary, with the timely theme of Transitions. The beginning of the school year is one of mixed emotions for all involved. Transitions explores the experiences of children, parents and teachers as they move from the known to the less well known and, in many cases, the very new. Change is often challenging for children and parents alike. This edition will hopefully support teachers as they support parents and their children by making transition easier. The articles within are written from multiple perspectives.

Our contributors, as always, are dedicated teachers, teacher educators, parents and children who generously share their stories. These authors present their beliefs, practices and visions for literacy learning that empower learners to develop independence and resilience as they take on new challenges.

We are proud to include the voices of parents within this edition. Parents have shared with us their hopes and expectations for their children at school in the coming year. Some are parents of children returning to a new school year, some have children beginning primary school for the first time, whilst others are nervously waving their ‘babies’ off to secondary school – their insight into their children’s needs and their hopes and dreams for their child’s education is truly valuable knowledge for teachers facing another year and another group of eager learners. Teachers, too, share their stories of transition and the ways that they support the children in their care; we are fortunate to hear a range of views from a teacher in her very first year to an accomplished Principal now enjoying retirement and many in between.

We trust that you will enjoy your February issue of Practically Primary, but more importantly, feel empowered (even inspired) to share your own stories with us in one of our 2009 issues. Our theme for June 2009 is The Stories We Tell. Our October 2009 theme is Teaching Reading: The process, the purpose and the possibilities. If you have an idea you can contact any member of our editorial team; we are always more than happy to support you along the writing process.

Although each issue of Practically Primary is themed, articles on other topics are also welcome, along with reviews of books, websites and resources. Articles should be between 500 and 2500 words and be appealing and useful to classroom teachers. The aim of Practically Primary is to help K-6 teachers enrich their classroom practices in literacy teaching. We believe every teacher has a story to share and it is our aim to include many of these in each edition.

With warm wishes,
Jessica Mantei, Gloria Latham and Lisa Kervin

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The theme for the June 2009 issue of Practically Primary is The Stories We Tell. The theme for the June 2009 is Teaching Reading: The process, the purpose and the possibilities.

Articles should be between 500 and 2,500 words and be useful to classroom teachers. The aim of Practically Primary is to help teachers improve their classroom practice in literacy teaching.

Contributions can be emailed to Gloria Latham: gloria.latham@rmit.edu.au
Rethinking pathways to print literacy: a multiliteracies perspective

Nicola Yelland, Libby Lee, Maureen O’Rourke & Cathie Harrison

This edition of Practically Primary has the theme of Transitions. This article will consider the transitions that we have made from old learning to new learning as well as recognising the need to rethink literacy in the digital age so that we are enabling children to function effectively in a multimodal world where new technologies have impacted on conceptualisations of literacies that incorporate a multiliteracies perspective. In this article we also reflect on the need for teachers to assist in the transition to school. We report on a study that provided opportunities for teachers of young children to engage in professional learning sessions that required them to share ideas and pedagogies for effective learning in the early years of education. These scenarios facilitated new understandings of the learners over time and made their transition to school, with the associated focus on print literacy, smoother.

As we approach the end of the first decade of the new millennium it is evident that our world has changed significantly and the impact of new technologies has affected every part of our daily lives. Yet in terms of educational practices it is doubtful that we could say the same. We have been mapping new technologies onto old curriculum since the ’80s and there seems to be little evidence to indicate that ways of teaching and learning have been significantly influenced by the use of new technologies beyond their use to reinforce heritage notions of curriculum and pedagogies. The current move towards a National Curriculum is a rationalisation of ideas rather than the reconceptualisation that is desperately needed. The focus remains on what ‘stuff’ should fill the curriculum rather than the generation of new ideas and creating new knowledge from what we already know. It is as if we are focused on knowledge regurgitation rather than knowledge building and re-generation. In this way we are not asking questions such as: What are the ways in which new technologies can support, challenge and extend the range of ways educators interact with learners? The students in our schools, as future workers of the twenty-first century, require skills that are significantly different from those required in the past. New technologies have reshaped the relationship between knowledge and the technological artifacts that we all use. We need to be collaborative, multi-skilled and flexible so that we are able to solve problems and create new possibilities. These types of activities are knowledge based and don’t rely on rote learning. This is, of course, a major shift in the way the world operates and those who are able to make the transition are the most effective knowledge workers of the twenty-first century.

For our children to live meaningful lives in the new millennium we need to have an education system that stimulates students to acquire and practise new skills so that they are able to generate new knowledge beyond that which we already know. We believe that this can be achieved via authentic and engaging activities, by collaborating with others, by seeking out expert assistance and knowledge from a variety of sources and by sharing the findings with a wide audience. The Internet affords the opportunity to do all of these things anywhere, anytime. Web 2.0 is currently transforming the nature of knowledge itself and twenty-first-century educators will need to identify opportunities to harness children’s interest and competence in user-generated content, social networking and the opportunity to publish for a global audience. The new literacies associated with Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are fundamental tools of the new millennium learner. This is indeed a new era in the way educators and students think about knowledge, expertise and learning.

Alongside a global change in the way communications operate, is the emergence of a new generation of learners that are fluent in the use of devices that are an integral part of their lives. In the twenty-first century, in developed countries, young children come to school having used a variety of new technologies in a myriad of contexts. Many have their own email accounts, blogs, subscribe to RSS feeds, discussion lists and are at ease with web browsers, search engines, SMS, Skype, MP3 players...
and console games. The types of media children are using outside of school are often those that incorporate a number of different modes; sounds including music, written and spoken words, pictures and animations. These communication devices enable children to pay attention to many modes at the same time, the visual (graphics) aural (sounds), gestural (movement) and spatial (layout) as well as the linguistic (alphabetic text). Unlike previous generations whose texts were written, paper based, and sometimes illustrated, twenty-first-century children are attending to a lot more information simultaneously and are involved in dynamic and interactive ways with a range of texts. This is the basis of defining literacy in the twenty-first century, it is not restricted to alphabetic knowledge but is multi-faceted and multimodal, hence the term ‘multiliteracies’ has evolved, to describe the ways of knowing of a new generation who have learned to learn in the digital age. The briefest observation of children interacting on Skype shows their ability to use visual and gestural expression via the video facility, type text in the chat facility and select ‘emoticons’ to represent ideas using symbolic and graphical images. As an interactive device, Skype allows users to communicate in a range of modes simultaneously, this multimodal experience is part of the everyday worlds twenty-first-century children inhabit, and fundamentally changes the way they perceive, engage with and experience learning.

What works in classrooms?

In a research project with Australian teachers that spanned three years, we explored the ways in which classroom teachers can take advantage of the new literacies that young children bring to school in the twenty-first century. We have now published the results of this work in a book entitled Rethinking learning in early childhood education (Yelland, Lee, O’Rourke & Harrison, 2008). Using case studies of individual children and learning scenarios, we described how teachers changed from viewing literacy (in the singular) to a multiliteracies perspective and accordingly were able to connect with students who were not succeeding in a traditional learning context with heritage teaching methods. The stories from our research demonstrate how redesigning curriculum approaches and rethinking practices enables teachers to access a wide range of strategies in order for students to demonstrate what they know and can do at school. The following case story highlights the ways one student was able to communicate his understanding using a range of modes. The teacher’s role in providing resources and experiences to elicit his multiliterate responses is crucial. The following case story gives a clear example of the ways the theory of multiliteracies can be incorporated into everyday classroom practices.

Alex in pre-school

Alex loved coming to kindergarten and enjoyed playing with blocks, cars, trains and especially the computer. Alex’s preschool teacher, Cindy, had a very positive image of him as a learner. Although she had clear general intentions for her preschoolers’ learning, she was very open to any direction they chose to pursue and particularly placed value on imaginative and divergent thinking. In this sense, Cindy’s program was ‘emergent’.

Introducing new literacies activities in the pre-school

Cindy was keen to explore new literacies with Alex and, as part of her approach, she introduced the software program Super Dooper Music Looper. This was one way to enable Alex to extend his experience of communicating in multiple modes. This software enables children to record their own vocals, select instruments and compose songs. It is also possible to include sound effects and to email the composition to others. (see http://www.sonycreativesoftware.com/products/sdml/sdml.asp)
To accompany the visual and aural dimensions of the software, Cindy had also set out a range of musical instruments on the floor, including a shaker, drum, piano, triangle and tambourine. Alex was quick to pick up on Cindy’s modelling of ways of interacting with and through technology. He readily made connections between the visual, gestural and aural modes. Cindy’s program and careful planning had afforded Alex an opportunity to be successful and to show his competence with communication. Had Cindy used a rote learning strategy to ‘teach’ Alex alphabetic knowledge, his capacity to generate meaning would have been restricted to his command of the grapho-phonetic and would not have enabled him to make connections and create meaning beyond the words he was able to read, write and spell.

On another occasion, Cindy had used the video camera as a device for documentation of children’s learning. She roamed the classroom recording children’s responses to her prompt to ‘Tell me about this …’. When Alex had a turn with the camera, he approached one child and said, ‘Sandra, wot ya doing?’ Sandra responded to him, then he moved on to the next child, saying their name and prompting them to tell him about the activity they were engaged in. Cindy was excited to see this interaction taking place, she believed that the opportunity to use a video camera enhanced Alex’s repertoire of communication. Alex had picked up the protocols of filming events and was acting in a ‘reporter’ role to document his peers’ learning.

As a follow up to these initial experiences, Cindy extended the work to other children and this included using pictures and the microphone to make a song, drawing pictures of family members, taking photographs with the digital camera and making slide shows. Children were often asked ‘What music would suit your picture?’ to encourage an exploration of mood and aural communication. Cindy found that Alex enjoyed expressing himself through movement to sounds, rhythm and beat. Concepts such as fast/slow, heavy/light, loud/soft were extended through movement to music. Clearly, there are cross-curricular connections to be made in authentic ways by using technologies as an integral part of the program, rather than an add-on or reward for early finishers.

It is clear that engagement of Alex improved when both his interests and preferred ways of learning were identified and used to design curriculum experiences and to deepen his capacity to connect modalities for communicating. Working with Alex using a multiliteracies approach focused on problem solving where teachers were more likely to construct his lack of success as a need to change their way of working with him. This contrasts with deficit approaches that focus on what a child can’t or is not doing when they are not successful in relation to literacy practice.

Alex’s story prompts reflections on how multiliteracies approaches enable a more positive image of the child to be constructed which in turn leads to the development of children’s feelings of self-efficacy and subsequently on their successful learning. In particular, the following arise:

- Multiliteracies theory assists teachers to construct a school curriculum that balances the development of foundational literacy skills with the fostering of children’s ideas, interests and curiosity.
- Foundational print literacy skills be taught in ways that fosters children’s sense of self-efficacy and confidence through the use of multiple modes (visual, aural, gestural, alphabetic and spatial).

Reference

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I write this article as a Grandfather of five children. When I first started writing for ALEA publications I was a young Dad fascinated by the way my two daughters were learning language and growing intellectually as they explored their world; my books and articles are littered with examples from their literacy experiences. Nearly 30 years later I write with the same voice but a richer experience, and a bit more knowledge of how children learn. And 5 grandchildren to observe! The world has changed in the last 30 years and so have some of the early experiences of children, but not much has changed about the fundamentals of preparing a child for school. As a blogger (http://www.trevorcairney.blogspot.com) seeking to answer the questions of young parents and beginning teachers, I have returned to the transition point for school entry time and again. Why? Because the years before school have a significant impact on what can be achieved at school. The influence of parents on school learning is enormous, as I have written many times over the years (e.g. Cairney & Munsie, 1995; Cairney, 1995b, Cairney & Ruge, 1998).

I have a modest goal for this contribution to Practically Primary: I will write mainly for parents, but as I do so, teachers should also be able to see the implications for what they do in preschools or in the first years of primary school. I’ll offer some brief comments at the end specifically for teachers. I would love to explore this in more depth but I will control the urge and focus on some fundamentals. But more interested readers can pick up the conversations on my blog.

How can parents prepare their children for school?

In the rest of this article I want to suggest that there are at least ten key things that parents should do to prepare their children for school:

- Love them and give them time
- Talk to them
- Provide opportunities for play
- Create planned opportunities to learn
- Encourage creativity
- Read to them
- Share new media with them
- Listen to their questions and ask them good questions
- Help to orient them to school – lunch boxes, toileting, interest
- Be a supportive parent when they get there

I’ll unpack each of these points (briefly) below.

1. **Love them and give them time**

Children need the security of family. While we live in an age where families generally fall short of the idealised TV version of family, research does show that the support of families is important. And by this, I mean family in whatever form. We know that ideally children flourish best with a mother and father who are both involved in their lives. But we also know that children in single parent families can also thrive with good support, sometimes with additional help from significant others from outside the family, or extended family. Teachers can also fill gaps in children’s lives when there is only one parent at home, serving as role models and encouragers. For families in general, the key is to try to give priority to finding time to spend with your children. This will include sharing meals, play, structured activities, planning experiences that you share with them, reading to them and with them, watching TV together, involving yourself in outdoor activities that are meaningful and enjoyable to your child.
activities such as sport and so on. While life is busy in the 21st century we need to find time for more than just basic care of our children.

Related post:

http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com/2008/05/its-all-about-timehow-busy-lives-affect.html

2. Talk to them

From birth, children need to be stimulated through language. Parents should talk and communicate with children from birth. In fact, some have argued that we should talk, sing and read to our children in the womb! Researcher Catherine Snow (1993) observed parents from low-income families who seemed to support their children’s learning well, as well as some who didn’t. She found that the most significant contributions parents made were non-print related activities, particularly language interaction and talk. Effective home talk provided direct assistance to children’s learning. They exchanged information with their children, showed affection and support, enforced discipline, kept them on task, and expressed feelings. Snow concluded that these interactions supported children’s early literacy learning.

Sensory experience and talk as part of this is the first and most significant vehicle for learning. Talk is a key way that we express our emotions to our children, it’s how we teach, share knowledge, monitor their learning, reinforce learning and so on. As children grow from babies to toddlers talk takes on even richer dimensions as language is the foundation of all learning; and in particular, for later literacy development and school learning.

3. Provide opportunities for play

Children need to be stimulated. I get into trouble these days for over stimulating my grandchildren, but they love it! Kids are learning machines keen to see, hear, feel, smell and touch new things. Whether it’s digging in a compost heap to find worms, slaters, crickets and other bugs, water play in the bath, making roads for matchbox cars in the yard, or a pillow house in the spare room, inventing stories in the dolls house or playing with puppets, kids love to play – especially with other people. Some children like to play alone and all children need to play with other children, but one of the key sites for early learning for children is the play activities they share with adults, particularly parents (and grandparents!) and care givers. Play can be structured, or completely unstructured and unplanned. It can be adult initiated or spontaneous, and it can be led by adults or by children themselves. The latter is very important.

Psychologists, educators and paediatricians see children’s play as so important to optimal child development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child. However, in a clinical report to the American Academy of Paediatrics, Kenneth R. Ginsburg (2007) concluded, ‘children are being raised in an increasingly hurried and pressured style that may limit the protective benefits they would gain from child-driven play’.

In his widely cited article Ginsburg concludes that some of the benefits of play include the development of their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development and allows children to create and explore a world where they can achieve a sense of mastery.

Rather than being a waste of time in an increasingly ‘time poor’ world, play is vital to children’s development and time is essential to create ‘space’ for play. There are challenges here for parents and teachers. How do we resist the temptation to structure children’s life in and out of school so much that there is little opportunity for play? As well, how do we encourage children to spend time with other children engaging in play?

Related post:

I’ve written a whole series of play posts that parents and teachers might find useful. You can read my ‘play’ posts at:

http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com/search/label/play
4. Create planned opportunities to learn

Life is busy, but children who do well at school have had experience before school with some planned activities. I heard an experienced kindergarten teacher commenting recently that the big change she has noticed in kindergarten children over the last 20 years is that many children arrive at school unable to concentrate on school activities, or even follow a story. There is great diversity in what children can and cannot do when they hit school, but children who do well are those who have had an experience of some planned opportunities to learn prior to school. Some of these can be provided through preschool, but lots can occur in the home. No, parents shouldn’t try to ‘play school’ at home, but some planned activities that require your children to concentrate and stay on task for 5-10 minutes will help. These opportunities can be very simple:

- Playing a game to completion
- Listening to stories right through
- Keeping at a single craft or drawing activity for more than 5 minutes
- Watching a television program right through together
- Spending time exploring a children’s website together (more on this below)
- Being responsible for caring for a pet
- Going to the zoo, a children’s museum or some other key site for learning together.

Related post:

http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com/2008/06/teaching-and-learning-moments-in.html

5. Encourage creativity

Creativity can be stimulated in many ways and can be expressed in many forms. For example, children demonstrate creativity through:

- Drawing
- Singing and movement
- Play (both structured and unstructured)
- And, using language – the language of conversation, books and so on.

Parents can help their children to succeed at school by encouraging their children to take risks, invent, solve problems and seek to explore their worlds.

While not the only way to encourage creativity, play is one vital way to do so. Jones and Reynolds (1992) have argued that:

In play, children invent the world for themselves and create a place for themselves in it. They are re-creating their pasts and imagining their futures, while grounding themselves in the reality and fantasy of their lives here-and-now.

Children need to be encouraged to push the boundaries of learning, to experiment, take risks and test their ideas in varied contexts.

6. Read to them

When parents ask what they can do to help their children at home, my most common first response is ‘Read to and with them’. While people are often looking for more complex answers there is no more fundamental way to support literacy.

Being read to and with an adult offers many opportunities for learning. Mem Fox talks about children needing to be read at least 1,000 books before the age of five to be successful readers. While we could quibble over the precise number, the principle is clear. Being read to teaches much about language (vocabulary, how language works at the sentence and text levels, concepts of print and how it works, the sounds and rhythms of language and so on), knowledge of the world and positive experiences with books.

The key is that reading should be enjoyable and that every child feels successful.

A few basic hints about reading to your children:

- Read early – at least from birth.
- Read often – at least daily.
- Make it special – treat books as if they are precious, anticipate reading as if it’s the most special time of the day and make the text an extension of a warm and loving relationship.
- Choose books carefully – think about the things your children like, talk to other parents about books that kids like, ask your child’s preschool teacher for advice on books.
- Try to read the book with emotion, with invented sound effects, with different voices for characters and the narrator, changes in voice volume and tone.
- Be physically engaged – point to pictures (or parts of pictures) as you read, point to text devices and features.
- Make connections as you read with other books, experiences, TV etc (don’t overdo this) – ‘This is a bit like the story....’, ‘This is a bit like Daddy doing.....’, ‘This sounds like...’.
- Talk after you finish the book – again don’t overdo it, it’s all about response and reflection, it’s not a comprehension test. ’Did you like...?’ ‘Don’t you think this was like...?’
7. Share new media with them

One of the things that has changed most since my daughters were toddlers, is that the new media has had a huge impact on our world. While traditional books still have a vital place, new forms of media also fill children’s worlds. Children who succeed at school and in life will also have had rich experiences prior to school with new media. These include:

- Film
- Video
- Video games
- Television
- Computers

Parents should try to both demonstrate new media use in their daily lives, but also to help their children explore the varied new media in their world. These include:

- Watching films and videos with your children, talking about them, and encouraging response.
- Providing access to computers – this should include demonstrating writing, web search strategies, varied communication forms (email, Facebook etc), children’s websites, sites that provide information and so on.
- Playing computer games with them.
- Demonstrating new media (taking photos, videos, building websites, blogging etc).

If you struggle with new media yourself, the best thing you can do to help your child is to try to become more familiar with it and then explore it with your child.

8. Listen to children’s questions and ask them good questions

Kids ask lots of questions. Sometimes their questions don’t move beyond ‘Why Mum?’.

Professor Michelle Chouinard’s (Professor of Psychology at University of California, Merced) suggests that preschool children ask an average of three questions every two minutes. As well, the findings of Hoetker & Ahlbrand 40 years ago, showing that teachers ask about 2-4 questions every minute, continues to be replicated. But sadly, many of these questions simply test knowledge and recall. Questioning is a critical part of children’s learning, but it needs to be used well. There are two dimensions to thinking about questioning:

- The questions children ask.
- The questions that we ask of them.

Here are a few basic principles about children, questions and learning that are useful for parents (and teachers) to know:

- Children’s questions usually show that they are keen to learn – that there are gaps in their knowledge, new areas of interest. They need answers to things that puzzle them.
- Questions offer us a window into children’s learning – what they are interested in; their learning styles; how well they are learning.
- Questions are also one way that children try to take control of their own learning; where they try to set an agenda and focus for their learning.
- Questions are a way for children to test their existing knowledge, or test their own hypotheses.

In short, parents and teachers should try to ask a variety of questions. While the younger the child the more use you will probably make of simple recall type questions, there is no reason to limit your questions to these questions.

I’ve written a blog post in which I use Bloom’s Taxonomy as a framework for the type of questions we might ask our children. This is meant to show just how varied and rich questions can be.

http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com/2008/08/questioning-key-part-of-learning.html

As you ask better questions of your children, they’ll ask better questions of you. Prepare to be
Kids questions can stretch us. You’ll need to have your wits about you because kids are good at catching you out with their questions. Earlier in the year just after he’d started Kindergarten my grandson Jacob suggested to his Dad that there was a number called a ‘quintillion’. This is how the exchange unfolded:

Dad: ‘There isn’t a number called a quintillion.’
Jacob: ‘Well, when do numbers stop?’
Dad: ‘They don’t, they go on forever.’
Jacob: ‘Well, why couldn’t one of them be a quintillion?’

End of conversation! Well, maybe not, they probably talked for ages about infinity.

9. Help to orient them to school
Parents also need to help orient and prepare their children for school. Thankfully, schools are so much better at doing this themselves than was once the case. If you spend time preparing your children for school it will pay rich dividends. Here are a few suggestions that might help:

• Try to send your four-year-olds to preschool; this is a great preparation for school.
• Help to prepare them (and you) for separation by providing planned opportunities for them to visit others, play at other children’s homes, and take part in-group activities (e.g. mother’s groups, playgroups, play dates etc).
• Make sure that you attend school Kindergarten orientation activities.
• Learn as much as you can about your child’s school before you get there.
• Start talking to your child about going to school well before they are five. This is easy to do if they have older siblings. As you begin to buy clothes, lunch boxes and other things for school make it an exciting experience; create a sense of excitement and expectancy.
• Try to do the things that I’ve discussed in my earlier tips. If your child has experienced a rich learning environment, has been loved and supported, has been read to and so on, then they will have more chance of loving school and thriving.
• Don’t send your child to school too early. There is a great temptation to send children to school even when they are well short of their fifth birthday. Think through whether this is wise in the light of your own child’s development and needs.

Related post:
I’ve written a post on the ‘best age’ to start school for parents who might be interested.

http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com/2008/01/starting-school-is-there-best-age.html

10. Be a supportive parent when they get there
Once your child is at school, the task has only just begun, you now have a different but equally important role. Here are some Dos and Don’ts:

• DO make sure that your child gets to school on time and is always picked up or has a routine way to get home safely. Having your child left at the school gate in week 1 is a sure way to make school adjustment difficult.
• DO meet your child’s teacher and offer to help as your circumstances permit (increasingly hard for working parents but flexible work practices help).
• DON’T be a ‘helicopter parent’ hovering around school all day every day.
• DO try to debrief with your child every day. Make sure that after school care is sound and supportive and if your children have a parent or family member at home to meet them ensure that they are first fed and allowed to relax before interrogating them about the day. Mealtimes are often a good time to chat about the day.
• DO make sure that you go to school, events as much as possible, and if you can volunteer for school-based activities, even if only once per term.
• DO remember that once your child is at school you haven’t handed them over to teachers, you are still vital to their ongoing learning.
A word to teachers: When kids aren’t prepared

Teachers reading this article will probably be saying, if only all children experienced this type of support. We know as teachers that in the real world we face neglected and even abused children, some that arrive hungry, others with disabilities or chronic conditions, many who are tired, and others whose lives are in crisis and chaos. This makes teaching more difficult but it doesn’t really change much about the way we seek to support every child as individuals with particular needs and unique value. Parents are the most vital support that children have and while public schooling was established to do things that families couldn’t do, schools are still dependent on the active support of families. I’ve spent a lot of my academic career thinking about the way we build partnerships with families. If you’d like to know more about this you could read Beyond Tokenism (Cairney & Munsie, 1995) or consult my personal website (http://www.trevorcairney.com) that has some relevant advice and a list of all my writing in this area.

References


Professor Trevor Cairney is Master of New College at the University of New South Wales. He is a past President of ALEA and has written widely on literacy education.
In recent times the purposes of assessment have come to encompass many things. With a growth in state and national testing it is now often used to compare students in districts, states and nationally. In this climate it is useful for teachers to be aware of, and have opportunities to, examine the range of assessment tools and strategies available across Australia.

**NSW**
The aim of this website is to support and enhance professional practice in the assessment and reporting of student achievement across Years K to 12. It has been developed primarily for teachers, although parents and students will also find it useful.
http://arc.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/

**ACT**
Student learning in ACT public schools is supported through the provision of high quality assessment and reporting services including the national assessment program, kindergarten assessment, student reporting, Year 10 and Year 12 certification and appeals processes.

**Queensland**
The Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework aims to improve the quality of schooling and the comparability of assessment and reporting of student achievement right across the state.

**Western Australia**
The CAR (Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting K-10 Policy and Guidelines) policy reflects recent government and Departmental directions. The policy reflects: a continued focus on sustainable curriculum reform that is grounded in meeting the learning needs of students; a recognition of the value of teacher professional judgements in monitoring, evaluating and reporting on students’ learning; and continued support for whole-school approaches to planning, delivering and assessing learning.
http://policies.det.wa.edu.au/our_policies/ti_view?uid=2f8de112e321011603765b65dd147fe2&iview=summary_view

**Victoria**
Assessment is a vital process to provide information about what students know and can do, and to make recommendations for their future learning.

This site supports teachers in designing assessment tasks that require students to demonstrate knowledge and skills at many levels including lower order processes such as basic comprehension and higher order processes such as synthesis and evaluation. It involves the assessment of a variety of forms of knowledge and practice such as reasoning skills, values and orientations.

**Tasmania**
Learning, Teaching and Assessment principles to guide teachers.

**Northern Territory**
There is no one assessment approach or technique that suits all situations, purposes or groups of students. Some approaches are more appropriate than others for different areas of the curriculum and ages of students. Principles of Assessment are found at:

**South Australia**
Five key strategies are described in detail: shared learning expectations, questioning, feedback, self assessment and peer assessment.

Sites accessed 25 November 2008
Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year...

**Name: Angela**
Parent to: Max (5 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

- To enjoy being part of the kindergarten class
- To enjoy the opportunities he has for learning new things
- To interact with his classmates and make new friends throughout his first days
- To learn to read and write so that he can feel success at school
- To be keen to show us his reading and writing at home
- To have fun with each new experience!
- To bond with his new teacher and love going to class each day
- To listen to and respect his classmates and teachers and to be listened to and respected in the same way
- To learn new activities and sports, even if he is not the best
- Overall, what I want for my child is for him to gain a love for learning that he will take throughout his life, and look back on his kinder year with great fondness.

**Name: Clare**
Parent to: Anna (6 years), Elinor (8 years) and Ingrid (7 months)

Ten things I wish for my children in the coming school year:

- To have an accepting and caring peer group
- To learn in a supportive and stimulating environment
- To be challenged and to challenge
- For strengths and talents to be developed
- To be exposed to a diverse range of perspectives and experiences of life and to have their own perspectives and experiences valued and shared
- To experience different ways of thinking and learning
- Be part of a group effort
- To have plenty of opportunities for creativity
- To enjoy the arts at school: acting, writing, visual arts and music and dance
- To come home excited about what they have done today!

**Name: Joanne**
Parent to:
Tjani River (10 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

- To begin 2009 with an inspirational teacher
- To be enthusiastic about going to school in the morning
- To run through the door in the afternoon with an interesting story to tell about his day
- To share growth and laughter with his friends
- To have opportunities to learn about Aboriginality in its past, present and future contexts
• To develop confidence with numeracy
• To read books he just can’t put down
• To be exposed and to embrace cultural diversity and difference
• To have opportunities to be active throughout the day it makes him concentrate more
• To stay focused on school rather than his latest crush!

Name: Lisa  
Parent to: Olivia (6 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

• I hope she likes next year’s teacher as much as she has liked her teacher this year because if a child likes her teacher, they will be happier to come to school
• I hope if she is struggling in an area, it is picked up and addressed and that I will be told about it before it becomes a problem
• If she is excelling in an area, I hope that the teacher will help her to keep excelling and also that I will be told about it
• Olivia has settled well into friendships throughout her first year at school; I hope that this will continue for her and that her teacher will help her to realise the value of having and being a friend
• 2008 was a positive experience for her, she loves her teacher and friends. I feel that it really paves the way when they have a good first year, and I think it gives her the confidence to continue to succeed
• For kids that can think outside the square I would like to see something a bit more challenging that calls for creative thinking and problem solving
• I want my child to be able to manage the set work for the year. She has learned new things easily and I hope that will continue
• I would like a correspondence book to help me to communicate with the teacher. Giving regular progress comments between teachers and parents would be helpful for me to share in my child’s school life and to understand what she is doing in the classroom
• I want my child to participate in a wide range of sports and activities, so that she will be able to distinguish what she would like to continue doing outside school
• I would like the teacher to help her keep the innocence that children of her age have and to try and teach her to be the nicest person she can be.

Name: Lisa  
Parent to: Toby (8 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

• To have engaging, interesting and exciting learning experiences, in and out of the classroom, across each of the key learning areas.
• A safe learning environment and support for the growth of the child emotionally and socially as well as academically and physically
• A curriculum which challenges them to do their best academically and supports them to achieve this
• Activities that promote the importance of health and wellbeing and develop in them the skills and strategies to make good choices throughout their lives
• A teacher who recognises, encourages and celebrates individuality
• The opportunity to be actively involved in the decisions that affect them
• Increasingly greater integration of technology to enhance learning
• A supportive group of peers, who are caring, honest and considerate of each other and who encourage my child to be caring, honest and considerate
• The opportunity to experience and enjoy a variety of extra-curricular activities
• To feel part of a community where diversity is embraced and celebrated
**Name: Nicole**
Parent to: Alanna (7 years), Benjamin (6 years)

Ten things I wish for my children in the coming school year:

- To be as happy as they are now at school
- To be as enthusiastic about learning as they have been
- To be accepted as who they are and not to have to change themselves to fit in
- To have lots of friends
- Good health
- To have a teacher who wants to be there as much as my children do
- To excel
- To always feel safe
- Be kind to other people
- Lots of confidence.

**Name: Michael**
Parent to: Veronica (12 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

- To be safe
- To be happy
- To treat others with respect and courtesy and to be treated in the same way
- To achieve all she is capable of achieving academically
- To enjoy learning
- To be recognised in the classroom by her teacher
- To be appreciated by her teacher and peers
- To make friends
- To enjoy the company of her friends
- To work hard when required

**Name: Wayne and Trish**
Parent to: Tahlia (12 years)

Ten things I wish for my child in the coming school year:

- To settle into the new school feeling comfortable and welcome
- To build self confidence in the new environment both in the classroom and the playground
- To meet and develop new friendships across a variety of social settings and to make good choices about these new relationships
- To increase her personal development as she is faced with more decisions each day
- To apply herself by utilising her junior school learning to learn about new curriculum and subjects
- To be offered wider subject base and for her to expand her knowledge across these disciplines so that she can find out what it is that she truly likes
- To find a sense of independence as a result of travelling to school on a bus/train and use this independence to stay safe and to consider the safety of others
- To increase her application to school work both within and outside school hours
- To identify her natural strengths and further develop these skills
- To be happy and content within herself and to celebrate the person that she is.
Allisse Rae

Years of teaching experience: Working in a two day temp position this year and having a kindergarten class next year.

Current grade: Year 1–2.

Email: amr744@uow.edu.au

Ten ways I orientate students to a new school year:

As I haven’t had any experience with this, I am speaking in reference to what I think I will do next year.

• Get to know the children and allow them to learn about me. Their interests, friends, likes and dislikes are all important in the classroom.
• Get them to know the school and structure of your classroom, work together to have common goals.
• Create a classroom environment that is welcoming and friendly. This needs to be created together so they feel part of the class.
• Have a good routine that the children follow every day. This will help them know what they are doing each day and feel comfortable in their classroom.
• Be organised and get your students organised. This will ensure that they understand how to do things and they get done.
• Make them feel comfortable and communicate that with them,
• Allow the students to be themselves and express their opinions.
• Ensure that you know your students need and begin to devise strategies to allow for these needs in your teaching.
• Liaise with parents about the students to make them feel comfortable with you teaching their child, allowing the parents to communicate positively with their child about coming to school
• MOST importantly, as I have said, get to KNOW YOUR STUDENTS.

Lili Carter

Years of teaching experience: 1 year

Current grade: various

Email: lilimcarter@hotmail.com

Ten ways I prepare for a new school year:

• Get a mentor. Before I can help the children I need to set up a network which can help me. As a casual teacher I didn’t really think about the issue of transition. However, having a mentor brought my attention to this very relevant period in the children’s school year.
• Read books, articles and journals on transition. Access age appropriate picture books to be used in the first few weeks of school.
• Write down your own experiences and feelings when moving from one grade to the next. I am sure sharing my own experiences will help me identify with the students and reassure children of their own feelings.
• Give the children time to talk about their feelings. They will soon realise that many children feel the same way. It can be a very exciting time for children and this energy should be captured.
• READ and take NOTES from the children’s previous reports. Talk to their previous teachers.
You don’t need to wait to day one to get to know the children and their needs.

• As a parent I know that children can forget things from one year to another. I would use lots of concrete materials, drill and practise to re-establish concepts and build confidence in the children.

• Get parents involved as early as possible in the classroom. That way if there are transition problems they can be addressed immediately.

• Ask the children what they loved from their year/s at school. Maybe this can be incorporated into your program of work.

• Set up rules with the children, again give them a say and ownership of their classroom.

• Start with a clear canvas but soon fill it with art works and work done by the class. Make it feel like it really is their classroom.

Margaret Miller

Years of teaching experience: many

Current grade: retired

Email: mamiller9@bigpond.com

Ten ways I orientate students to a new school year:

Probably the most important factor is to create a comfortable, caring environment where the students realise they are respected and valued. We believe that if a new student knew the layout of the school, how to use the timetable and who would be their homeroom teacher their anxiety level could be lowered. To achieve our aim we implemented the following program to help children move comfortably from Primary to Secondary school.

• Regular liaison between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers between our secondary school and the local identified feeder schools. Here, students were discussed as well as the differences and similarities between the different schools.

• Year 6 teachers were encouraged to start positive discussions about high school with their students from the start of the year. Any queries were noted and forwarded to the secondary school.

• At the start of Term 2 past students from that primary school would visit Year 6 to talk to the students and again answer any questions. The Principal and the Year 7 Co-ordinator would accompany these students. We always received many more questions after these visits.

• Mid Term 2 parents and students were invited to the school for an Information Evening. All classrooms were opened. Teachers and students were activity involved in programs
  1. experiments in the Science Lab
  2. cooking in the Kitchen
  3. wood turning in the Work Shop
  4. painting/drawing in the Art Room etc.

• Mid Term 3 a Buddy System was established and the prospective student received a welcoming letter from a Year 9 student.

• An Orientation Day was held early in Term 4. Year 6 students met their Buddy and together they participated in an Orientation of the Grounds and School Hunt. We always ensured that a child from each of the participating Primary School was a winner. The prize was a $5 voucher that could be redeemed at the Tuck Shop the following year.

• The remainder of the session was spent with a combined Year 6/7 group attending 30 minute classes. Each child was given a timetable to follow and attended 2 core subject classes and 2 hands on activity classes. As we were a school of over 800 students the Year 6/7 group had lunch at a different time. If weather permitted this group were allowed to use the swimming pool.

• Year 6 were then given a choice for an afternoon activity: PE, Music, Computers, Drama, Library, French and then they were encouraged to travel home on the school bus

• Year 6 students and parents were invited to end of year activities, for example, the Passing Out Parade, Advent Mass, Prize Giving Evening, Commissioning of Prefects etc.

• As we were a fully Inclusion School any student with special needs attended the last four Wednesdays of Term 4 and the Co-ordinator of students with special needs prepared a program based on the needs of that student.

We were always grateful for the efforts of the senior primary school teachers who were able to join with us to prepare the Year 6 students for a smooth transition to high school through their positive attitude and proactive approach to solving problems and challenges as they arose.
Ten ways I orientate students to a new school year:

- Self esteem in your own capabilities and weaknesses. Both elements compliment each other to formulate an acceptance, knowledge of and understanding of your self.
- Self respect and dignity: Allows the student to make right and just choices whether with or against their peers
- Acceptance of others opinions, beliefs and thoughts to make a socially adaptive and/or assimilated person in a group, community etc
- Understanding that ‘getting up’ after falling/failure can be just as self building, if not more, than success alone
- Creating networks of different ages, sex, knowledge, interests to broaden your ‘worldliness’
- Having a faith/belief. This can be as spiritually motivated as necessary for the individual. Needed in times of despair, fear, anxiety as well as celebration, feeling of belonging
- Learning to love to learn! Learning is not a mark on an exam or a grade on your school report. Learning is ‘massaging the mind and the soul’ to embrace everything that exists around you, living or non-living, fact or fiction.
- Swallow your pride but not your self respect. Don’t be afraid to have to ask, to not know or to need help. People thrive on being your support line. Remember that you, too, can be somebody’s support with your own knowledge and life experiences
- Do your best and nothing less! You’ve already excelled!
- Life is not ‘Home and Away’ or ‘Neighbours’. Listen to your mum and dad and/or people who have been there and just want the best for you.

NB: As a teacher, whether in Kindergarten or Year 6, I have not insisted on brainstorming ‘Classroom Rules’ to transition into a new year. In fact, the ‘rule’ I asked of my student was ‘Be Fair’. It simply meant to be fair to yourself and to others around you. Somehow, all those superficial rules of ‘Put your hand up, don’t talk while someone else is talking etc’ seemed to fit into that category. This way, the rule ‘Be fair’ simply didn’t treat them like a congregation of robots within four walls. It allowed them to be important and make up their own social etiquette rules.

Of course, there was also the ideas of learning to utilise time correctly, enjoy recreation time, organise study time etc to reinforce but developing the self in a person seemed to do that without opening my mouth in most cases.
• I get them to write a sentence or two about themselves or what they like to do.
• I may have a ‘catchy title’ of a book or something related to holidays on the board for them to read chorally – this requires the teacher to carefully watch and note anyone who does not respond.
• Drawing a response is important and may show some flair for Visual Arts and so I invite my new children to draw something they have written about.
• I then ask them to write numerals 1-20 and encourage them to write beyond this if they can. This shows up number reversals and counting issues.
• We then play a game – My name is... and I like...
• Listen to their talk on the first day. It shows who is ‘friends with whom’ and helps with simple things like seating allocation.
• Have a ‘Getting to know you’ task for the first day of school. It may be finding a friend and talking to them or a sheet where they have to fill in names based on specific criteria.
• Play games that allow opportunities to watch the children interact. Drama/Sport/Talking & Listening/Mind Games work well here.
• Relax and listen for the first week; while establishing routines and procedures. I always get the morning up and running as quickly as possible as this, in our location, is the English Block, Maths follows and then Sport Days.

Julia Morgan

Years of teaching experience: 12 years
Current grade: Kindergarten

Ten ways I orientate students to a new school year:

• Kindergarten interview. Parents and the student meet for an interview with the Principal in May the year before they begin school. The Principal informs the parents on the school curriculum, values, mission etc. The student is observed for communication skills with the Principal.
• Parent Information Evening. Where parents are given information about the school’s history, routines, curriculum etc. Parents are given a package with all this information and suggested ideas to help their child get ready for school.
• Kindy Testing Days. Beginning students come to a forty five minutes session, the year before. Students are read a story and a discussion of the story is had. This is to assess listening skills, comprehension skills and self control skills. The students then complete worksheets to see their fine motor skills of pencil grip, cutting and gluing. They also demonstrate writing their name. While working on these sheets the classroom teachers of Kindergarten assess each child individually on things such as: numbers to ten, sequencing numbers to ten, writing numbers, shapes, alphabet, sounds and names of letters.
• Kindergarten Orientation Morning. Students come for two hours the year before to see the classroom. Time is given on arrival to play with classroom equipment such as: play dough, jigsaws, Lego, drawing and felt boards. Once students are settled items are packed away. A story is read and a worksheet of ‘Welcome to Kindergarten’ is completed. Another Christmas story is read and then a Santa is made.
• Buddies have an important role in orientating Kindergarten. A year child is buddied up with a Kindergarten student for the year. In the first few weeks of school the Year 6 buddy is asked to help support the transition by ensuring they have someone to play with and know their way around the school. This further develops into buddy activities during class time such as art, technology, games and sports etc.
• During the first three weeks of Kindergarten we use a program ‘Look around You’. This program includes showing the students around the school; discuss school rules, eating structure, classroom layout and surroundings etc
• Each day of the first week of school I walk the students around the school, so they become familiar with the surroundings and where abouts of the various aspects of the school.
• Kindergarten Information Evening. An evening is held in the second or third week of school where parents are invited to the classroom and the Kindergarten teachers share the curriculum and events of Kindergarten for that year. This gives them an overview of what is ahead, requirements for the year and also allows parents to introduce themselves.
• Students are given Friendship Time during the first few weeks to develop socially. This is both structured activities and free play, to enable the students to interact with one another and form friendships.
• Teaching the curriculum. Finally a very important aspect. I find that the students are very keen now that they are at ‘big school’ so I try and get straight into the curriculum and begin the process of teaching and learning with them. This is the most rewarding aspect of my job!
Macdonald (Mac) Burns is five-and-a-half and starts Kindergarten next year. This is the first foray into ‘big school’ for our family – as his Mum, it seems, I am too relaxed.

Everyone keeps asking me, ‘Are you ready? Will you cope? What will you do with yourself? Are you worried?’ At this stage, I’m not nervous but maybe I should be, maybe everyone else will cope better if I appear more worried.

‘Transitioning to school’ – it sounds very formal, I don’t remember using the term before now. My experience to date had been, go to pre-school or day care and then, when you are four or five, go to big school... THE END.

Well, it seems there is more to it. I do embrace the fact starting school is a right of passage. I acknowledge for some parents it is a tough decision – others find it easy. There are religious, philosophical, social and financial aspects to be considered, again, some easy, some hard. Some even put their unborn child on waiting lists for their schools of choice in the hope by the time their child is ready to start there is a place for them.

My husband, Shawn, and I weren’t that presumptuous – we weren’t even sure if our child would survive his birth or his infancy. School wasn’t a high priority in our thinking when we were expecting our second child.

Our first child, Meg, had died in surgery at just two days of age courtesy of a rare brain hemorrhage – devastating, absolutely devastating. But life, as we know, goes on.

Falling pregnant again was a nervous time so we tried to be as positive as we could – we owed it to the little person growing in my belly to have confidence in him. Imagine our shock at finding out at just 24 weeks gestation that this child was in grave danger. Our Doctor was shattered, we were shattered. Were we really going to have to plan another funeral? How on earth could we ask people to attend another one – were we just going to bury babies?

Further tests revealed things were not as bad as initially thought (unrelated to Meg’s condition this was just another case of bad luck). Sure, our baby was in strife, but he was holding his own. He was severely growth restricted, but this meant he was ‘brain sparing’ – he was sending all his nutrients to his vital organs at the expense of growth - smart kid, tough guy. We owed it to him to make the right decisions – he was fighting for survival, we needed to fight with him.

Mac was delivered a few weeks later. It was decided to get him out of the hostile environment of my womb and give him the best chance at survival. And survive he did. Weighing in at only 496 grams he was tiny, my wedding ring could fit right up his arm. But boy, he was strong, he pulled through some tough times and, after nearly 140 days in hospital, Mac went home. He was still small and would take some time to catch up in his growth, but there were no neurological concerns, he was hitting appropriate milestones. Things were looking up – we were taking our baby home.

When Mac was six months old he caught that year’s flu, I had it first, then Mac. This was not a good development – he was very sick. On his ninth day in hospital he simply ‘crashed’ – it was chaos, it was a disaster. His brain was being denied the oxygen it needed, his whole body was shutting down. He was airlifted to Sydney, we were once again having to face the prospect of saying goodbye, forever, to another child.

Remarkably, Mac survived but it was not without significant collateral damage.

Mac’s brain had been denied oxygen for too long. He had a severe global hypoxic brain injury – his prognosis, while considered conducive with life, would mean a significant disability and impairment. Mac would be profoundly disabled.

Once again, our world was being turned upside down. It was only 15 months since we had consoled ourselves with the notion Meg not surviving with a severe brain injury was for the best. We knew even in Australia, people with brain injuries & profound...
disabilities did it tough. We had contemplated life with a brain injured child and discussed it at length. In Australia people with disabilities are viewed by the government and, sadly, much of society, as liabilities not worthy of investment. They are thought of in terms of the ‘warehousing costs’ of them, not as potential contributors.

So here we were, fighting for our child’s life having removed him from one hostile environment at 26 weeks gestation into the hostile environment of our society that is, for the most part, scared of disability.

The next few years centered around keeping this little boy alive and trying to leave that ‘acute medical phase’ behind us. We travelled overseas to find therapies that worked. We researched, researched, researched, we questioned old ideas and we reminisced about sleep (alas, we still do).

But here we were, finally, amazingly, preparing to ‘transition to school’ and we were excited.

Like most people we hadn’t really considered our stance on ‘special education’ before now. But now we were faced with the socially expected and accepted path of sending Mac to the local special school and had to decide if that was the right choice or not.

Mac had been attending Early Intervention (EI) one day per week and mainstream day care and pre-school two days per week. Interestingly, he really seemed to dislike EI, he wouldn’t engage with any of the staff he was unresponsive to their interactions with him; he was not his normal happy self. This was in stark contrast to mainstream daycare and pre-school – he loved it, it was obvious. He started making sounds in response to the hustle and bustle of other kids and staff, and he would grin broadly when we pulled up in the car park each morning and I announced our arrival at school. This was amazing communication by a child who has little to no vision, no language and no independent mobility or purposeful movement – we owed it to him to pay attention.

Mac loves noise; he needs to be in a noisy environment and around children who can provide an appropriate verbal environment for him. What I witnessed at EI in the special needs environment was that most of his peers with profound disabilities were non-verbal too – they couldn’t really learn from one another and therefore I couldn’t see Mac benefiting from this environment. Sure there was some strength in numbers, support and understanding for, and from, the parents – but it’s not about me, the decisions we were about to make had to be what was best for Mac’s happiness and development.

We talked a lot about what we thought of the concept of special education. Someone had written in an article ‘special education is a service, not a place’… we agreed. And, while I am conscious everyone should be entitled to a choice about the best path for their children, I am not a fan of segregated education and can’t see how it leads to an inclusive or mainstream life post school.

So... what school? Mac is completely immobile, has cortical vision blindness, can eat pureed solids (albeit slowly) but has no ability to drink so has a feeding tube, he has no purposeful movement, can’t shoo a fly from his eye, he can’t talk and he needs assistance for everything. Who would take him?

I trawled through the Australian Government’s 322 page report from the project on ‘Improving Learning Outcomes of Students with Disabilities’ – it helped me understand what is possible, acknowledge it may not all be reality (yet) but it confirmed to me that our choice of mainstream was both valid and viable.

I was still worried, I had heard horror stories from so many other parents about schools not accepting their children with disabilities and some of the underhand tactics used. I was ready for a fight if need be, but had a good gut feeling about my forthcoming meeting with the Principal at our in area school.

We are extremely fortunate, our school, Cambewarra Public, is a gem. There was no regurgitation of DET policy, their commitment to inclusive education is real. Cambewarra is a good size, just under 300 children, with a reasonable number of children with additional needs integrated throughout the school. We’ve had numerous meetings, the school modifications are underway to accommodate wheelchair access – things seem to be going relatively smoothly.

The staff members we have met so far are all
terrific. I like the fact they are both excited but still nervous about providing Mac the best opportunity. Again, it shows their commitment to inclusive education – there is no way known to anticipate exactly what Mac’s needs might be but they are determined to find it. Let’s face it, on paper Mac is a very scary concept – we know that, but in person it is a different story. Mac is a very easy going, happy boy who loves talking and being talked to, noise, rough housing and music. He will sing along to the songs he likes (not well mind you, but with gusto) and ‘chuck a whammy’ with the best of them. He loves ice-cream and chocolate – he is ‘very five’.

Of course he has the ability to make any teacher nervous, he doesn’t come with a ‘manual’, he cannot participate in lessons in the way that other children do and it is impossible after only a couple of meetings to gauge what his ability to learn is, as his physicality is so poor. We know he can learn to some degree, it is just finding the best method for him. I love the enthusiasm and excitement we have seen by the staff for the task ahead and am absolutely confident we will see Mac shine in this environment.

I have enjoyed dropping him off on orientation days and walking away just as the other parents have. I know some of this is to highlight to the others (parents, children, teachers) that Mac is not ‘super precious’ and ‘needing excessive care’. I do it partly for my own selfish reasons to allow my soul the fleeting sense of normality. But mostly, I do it because I can, he is in an appropriate environment and his needs are being catered for – just as they are for the other children.

I did have to stay this week to help the teacher’s aides learn a bit more about him. I kept my distance, but I was in earshot to hear some boys walking past him in the playground declare ‘Mac is awesome’, ‘yeah, he is sooo cool’, that certainly made my heart skip a beat. Oh, by the way, apparently ‘his wheels are mad’.

I know this is the right place for him, this is an environment he will thrive in, he will be immersed in daily interactions with children and adults, he can hear their voices and respond to them. This is an environment where he, in turn, will teach others, because this is a school that wants to learn as well as teach.

So no, I am not nervous yet. I am actually very excited. I am loving getting his uniform organised (even down to the size 2 shirts from the US and the size 5 pre-walker black shoes off ebay) and all the accompanying paraphernalia. I know there will be times when Shawn and I will feel very lonely as parents and sad when he is left out of things – but that is our issue, our feelings, not Mac’s – he will be fine.

Yes, Mac has different, significant needs, but at the heart of it he is just a five year old boy about to start Kindergarten and I am a Mum, who is relishing the opportunity to wave goodbye to him on his first day at the same school gate as the other parents and kids.

So class K-C ... here he comes... ready or not.

The blog INKY ED is following Mac’s journey and can be found here:  http://linkyed.wordpress.com
When teachers hear the words ‘reading and writing difficulties’ their ears prick up and they want to know anything and everything that may help them open the door to successful literacy outcomes for all struggling readers and writers. Peter Westwood an accomplished teacher, author and Associate Professor of Education has much to offer in this area. In his book *What Teachers Need to Know About Reading and Writing Difficulties* he draws on the latest professional research from around the world to explain some of the causes of literacy problems, and gives practical advice on methods and strategies to assist students, and their educators with such difficulties.

The book is aimed at teachers who are wishing to expand, or refresh their basic knowledge in the area of reading and writing difficulties. It is not just a book of ideas for teachers to help struggling students, but it is for those who want to delve more deeply into the theories regarding literacy and its associated obstacles.

The book is clearly set out in concise chapters, each following the same format, beginning with itemised ‘key issues’ and ending with ‘links’ to allow the reader to further research areas of particular interest. Despite the constant referencing throughout, the book is quite easy to read and digest.

Chapter One addresses the most pertinent and current issues in literacy learning and teaching. Westwood discusses the prevalence of literacy learning difficulties, potential causes of these learning problems, and the need for a balanced approach to instruction as well as the effectiveness of the teacher.

In Chapter Two, Westwood offers the reader a ‘simple view of reading’, which involves the main processes; identifying words and comprehending connected text. He then explains the pitfalls children may encounter at the word level when reading, and strategies that can be used to overcome these difficulties.

Chapter Three is dedicated to reading difficulties at text level and explores the nature of reading comprehension and addresses some of the factors associated with students’ problems in understanding text. This is followed in the next chapter by some practical examples for improving comprehension. This is an aspect that is least explored by many of us and Westwood offers some interesting reading to encourage our thinking and knowledge in this area.

Chapter Five outlines the more common issues children face when writing and spelling, followed up by practical advice on how to address some of these difficulties in Chapter Six. Westwood describes strategic approaches to both writing and spelling and explains, ‘if students are to become competent writers and spellers they require explicit instruction and many opportunities to write.’ He summarises the key points of a variety of writing and spelling approaches.

I think the real benefit of this book is that, although it is a brief overview of a variety of approaches to reading and writing difficulties, it does provide relevant and comprehensive literacy links so that teachers can further research areas of interest. It is not intended to provide all the answers but explores a variety of options available to teachers who are interested in furthering their professional teaching skills and gaining a higher rate of classroom success in the critical areas of reading and writing.

Lyn Cronin
Teacher
The texts selected for review in this edition treat a range of issues in different ways. The first is *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins, originally published to coincide with Australia’s bicentennial celebrations of European arrival in Australia, it has been re-released as a 20 year Anniversary Edition. Take a look at the additions to this engaging book that has always had children poring over its pages. The second of the reviewed texts is also a picture book, but with a different flavour. *Tiny, a little dog on a big adventure* by Steve Otton and Jennifer Castles draws extensively on images of outback Australia and the many opportunities there are to participate in community. Our final text is Sandy Fussell’s novel, the first in the *Samurai Kids* series. Through Sandy’s touching writing and Rhian Nest James’ emotive illustrations, we follow the journey of a group of young people endeavouring to discover who they are and where they belong. These three texts hold different possibilities for classroom reading; hear from the authors, some teachers and some children as they discuss these texts.

Six years went by in my own life. Then one night, as I sat doodling little maps just for fun, I found myself drawing the map that you can find on the first page of *My Place*, and writing the opening words that Laura says. Minutes later, I was writing the words that are now on the last page of the book and drawing a picture of a girl sitting up in a tree. At that point, I realised that my idea had turned into a story. Four days later, I sent my rough drafts to Donna.

Of course, that was just the beginning of the book. It took about twelve months of research and writing (and re-writing!) before the text was finalised.

And a note from *My Place* illustrator, Donna Rawlins

I came to designing and illustrating picture books in collaboration with a close friend, Morag Loh, who was a well-known and respected historian. While working on these projects I became progressively fascinated with history, and particularly with the stories of everyday people. This was something Nadia, with her background in history, shared with me.

My work in educational publishing had required a great deal of research which I enjoyed. I spent a lot of time in libraries. That was lucky, of course, because *My Place* would need a lot of it. The text and images were meticulously planned. After all of the initial research which we often did together, Nadia and I spent many hundreds, perhaps thousands of hours discussing every detail of the text and images. The pictures I did in coloured pencil on tinted paper which gave them a feeling of warmth.

*My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins 20th Anniversary Edition

Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins’ book *My Place* is an interesting sometimes unusual yet amazing recount describing families from many different backgrounds in different times.

Interesting and unusual in that it recounts children’s stories in particular timeframes or years that are significant to our Australian story. It is a collection of special events and reveals a page of history through the eyes of a child. It is written in a personal style and intriguing as it retraces events and life from 1988 to early beginnings, possibly creation. Unusual in that the beginning may possibly be viewed as the end of the book and the end of the book actually the beginning of time.
The book is a timeline with a difference. It is what makes us Australia – our past and our future. It is a celebration of time and of relationships, of family and community, of identity and development, of progress and change.

Each turning of a page takes you through time, into a new relationship, a new turn in a family’s life, a detailed look at a community or neighbourhood in a certain time. Each turn of a page is opening into someone’s life, its secrets, treasures, its problems, its members and its highlights. All this so succinctly written! Each turn of the page is interestingly a new chapter and new character revealing personal information. How refreshing to be part of someone’s story and feel like the story is just written for you the reader. More importantly, because it is written in a personal style the reader actually feels like they know the person recounting each story of their family’s life.

The powerful use of drawings means the reader is drawn into the detail and information connected with family and community living. The collections of drawings are authentic and show the authors’ research into identity and cultural differences. It is because of this that the book could be used in many contexts of learning and teaching particularly Stages 2 and 3.

Middle school and upper primary teachers could make use of the many themes the book offers from family, identity, cultures, communities, environments and change as well as more powerful themes of creation, belonging, inclusion, acceptance, tolerance and relationships. Cross-curriculum perspectives are many – citizenship, multi-cultural perspectives, Indigenous Aboriginal perspectives, Australian heritage and society and change. Perhaps the implied messages of conservation and preservation could be applied; certainly the story could be applied to the world at large and challenge any reader to ask: Why did these authors write this book? There is a powerful insight into who actually is asking about life’s questions and who is trying to find the meaning of life at the end of the book.

This book should be used with a small critical literacy reading group, in pairs for literature study, or for individuals researching HSIE topics around identity and cultures and family/community and history or change. It would be ideal even around ANZAC Day celebrations or Remembrance Day for pairs of children to research events in Australia’s history. Because of its detail it would be an ideal book for reference on certain cultures of the world certainly opening up the world to its reader as it moves from the personal to more social perspectives.

Using the three H’s for understanding – what’s here, what’s hidden and what’s in your head would be ideal points for starting critical conversation or discussion around the content and messages for students. After giving time for reading, browsing, looking and re-looking or closer examining of My Place it would be wise to use the Post-it-Note strategy to sustain and support further critical conversation. Questions to ask readers to find answers or find using a post-it-note would be to give them these thinking and writing stems …

- Something important I (we) want to remember (share) is …
- A connection (or important point I/we found) I/we made with the book which I/we want to write about is
- A lasting image for me/us which I/we will remember from reading this book is …

My Place should have students asking how does this book/story work? It will have students thinking and sharing their different reactions to the text. It will also bring about discussion about the authors, who are they and their backgrounds? More importantly it will get students asking under what circumstances was this book written and what was happening at the time? It most definitely will have teachers asking which readers or students would it most suit and why? It will have students saying something is missing and how they could tell the story or add to it. It could have teachers asking students to tell or retell My Place from a different stance i.e. backwards from the beginning of time.

If critical literacy is all about using language and opportunities to change how our students view the world then My Place is an ideal text. If critical literacy is about people in the world, about everyday life in communities and families/relationships, if it involves asking questions about practices, problems, injustices and life then My Place is the perfect text and a MUST for Primary classrooms!

Maria
Teacher

MY PLACE
Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins

My Place is a story about how one area near Newtown, Sydney has changed over 200 years. It is set in a timeline format. Every page you read is going ten years back in time, 1988 to 1788 when the colony of New South Wales was first established. This book tells us about our Australian culture, from immigrants to British convicts. In each previous decade the family tree is climbed right up to some of
our ancestors. Every page contains detailed sketches of the area that are drawn by the children that lived there.

*My Place* is a creative story that includes original, innovative illustrations that catches your eye and prompts your imagination. It really gets you thinking in relation to the distant past and what it was like for those Eurasian immigrants and British convicts. I enjoyed the sketched maps on each page since they had a great deal of detail, which further explained how that suburb was at that time. They all contained the large fig tree and the creek or canal, which however had sewerage problems. I also found it interesting that all of the children who lived there were somehow related to each other, be it either aunty or uncle or second cousin. In each previous decade the family tree was climbed. I also thought that the timeline at the start of the book was different and provided basic text and illustration to provide the reader with an outlook on important milestones in this book.

My favourite character was Sofia as she had a brother Michaelis who was going to the Vietnam War. I also like her because she adventures in the old collapsed brick pits even though she’s not allowed to so she’s mischievous which I like.

However one thing I didn’t really understand was on the blurb, I struggled to understand what this quote meant, ‘Everyone is a part of History, and every place has a story as old as the earth.’ I think it means everyone has a place and the story of that place is as old as Earth.

I think that teachers should use this book when learning about Australian history in relation to Indigenous or European settlement as well as European immigrants in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Also teachers should use this book while teaching about the gold rush that brought many American and Chinese gold miners to our Australian shores. This book should be directed towards people who are interested in Australian history and enjoy sketched maps of an area. An appropriate age is around Stage 2 (middle primary) to Stage 3 (upper primary).

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**Jennifer Castles on writing Tiny:**

Publisher Eva Mills was sent a huge book of Steve’s photos documenting his journey around Australia. The pictures were stunning – glorious landscapes and unique natural features, as well as all the interesting locals he met along the way – but there was no real ‘story’ holding it together.

That is, until Tiny, his little red-heeler companion, began making it her business to put herself in his pictures. Apparently, Steve would set up his camera and as soon as he started to click away, she would bound into view and insinuate herself into the scene any way she could! As beautiful as Steve’s pictures are, once Tiny appeared they began to come alive, and it felt like there was another story in there, tugging at the edges ...

I have never met Steve or Tiny, but as a writer I could ‘see’ a tale unfolding as their journey progressed. Although the central theme of Tiny’s quest comes from my imagination, it is essentially the feelings that Steve’s pictures convey and the very special love that Steve and Tiny have for each other that was the inspiration behind the story.
About Steve Otton and Jennifer Castles

Steve Otton lives on the Clarence River in northern NSW and divides his time between photography and making furniture from recycled timber. But his dogs like it best when he’s walking with them on the beach.

Jen Castles is a writer, editor and actor who lives in Brunswick in Melbourne. She doesn’t have a dog right now, but her little kids are always ‘borrowing’ other people’s dogs, so she’s going to have to get one soon. She’d love to find a dog just like Tiny.

Tiny, a little dog on a big adventure by Steve Otton and Jennifer Castles is a book about bush life, friendship and adventure. It is written from the perspective of a faithful dog following his owner, Steve, who is on a lonely Crocodile Dundee style ‘walkabout’ around Australia. The book is written in the form of a photographic journal and each page contains quite stunning photography of Steve and his dog Tiny roaming the Australian outback and meeting some of its inhabitants. This photography is accompanied by the inner dialogue of the dog that provides a warming perspective of Steve and the happenings throughout their adventure.

In the classroom this book could be used as a springboard into a variety of lessons. For the younger grades, the array of animals could be used to introduce a unit on native Australian Wildlife or the Australian Bush. For the older grades, by studying the photos and the many techniques the author has used to make meaning within them, the students could develop skills in visual literacy.

For example, in a lesson with senior students the teacher could select a number of photos within the book to focus on. As a class, the teacher could then demonstrate the deconstruction of one of these photos in terms of camera angle, shot type, lighting etc with an emphasis on the meaning made using these techniques. From here students could make an attempt at deconstructing a selection of different photos with a friend or in a small group. Following this deconstruction the students could go about finding photos on the Web using similar techniques and identify whether the techniques have the same or different effects and the implications one way or another. In future lessons, by arming the students with a camera and encouraging and supporting them to take photos using these very techniques and principals, the students’ artistic and literate strategies can be built upon further.

Michael,
Teacher
This book is about having friends. Steve didn’t have friends at the start of the book so he decided to go and look for some. He looked around the other States in Australia with his dog called Tiny. Tiny and Steve lived in their campervan and travelled for a long, long time. Tiny liked it when they stopped driving so she could run around while Steve took photos.

Sometimes Steve and Tiny found friends but other times they didn’t find any.

I liked it when Tiny and Steve came home because Tiny had a surprise for Steve. She had 3 puppies and their names were Ramona, Toby and Belle. This is my favourite part because the puppies were so cuddly and small, just how I like them.

People who like dogs would like this book because it is about dogs and it has lots of photos with Tiny in it. It doesn’t matter if you are an adult or a kid because everyone can look at this book.

If my teacher had this book in my classroom, I would like her to tell us that it is a book about being friends and making friends. Then I would like her to read it to us and show us all of the pictures.

Jarod
7 years

Tiny, a little dog on a big adventure
A review by Simone

Tiny is about a small dog who goes on an adventure with his owner Steve. Steve is a photographer who doesn’t have many friends. On their adventure they meet lots of kind people but Steve just won’t put his camera down.

My favourite part is when Tiny tries to find Steve some friends. I like this part because it was funny and entertaining.

I think this is a good book to discuss how important friends are in life. This picture book is different to most picture books because instead of drawings it has photos. I could make a book like this with photos from somewhere I went.

The teacher would use this book to explain that keeping strong friendships in kids’ daily lives is important, because friends ARE important.

I recommend this book to children of all ages. Basically anyone can read it.

Simone, 8 years.
next line – Famous for falling flat on my face – And that was the last of my input because from then on the characters dictated to me and I just followed. But behind all that is a love of Japanese history and culture. I’ve never been to Japan but one day...

Samurai Kids: White Crane

What a lovely story this is! Sandy Fussell works cleverly and sensitively throughout the story of the White Crane to capture the true essence of friendship; our differences combined give us more strength than any individual effort can produce. The characters in this story demonstrate their growing resilience as they learn to accept their ‘shortcomings’ and to value the qualities that they and others bring to a relationship.

A number of themes are treated in this story in ways that are easy for children to understand and relate to their own experiences. For example, each of the Cockroach Samurai children’s perceived weaknesses are physical and therefore immediately obvious, but Fussell translates this to more abstract understandings through the wise words of the Sensei. For example, in one scene Sensei is teaching the children about looking beyond first impressions and understanding your challenges as Niya, a boy with only one leg attempts to ride a horse.

SENSEI If you can ride a horse that does not want you, you can ride anything. Even a Dragon. First you have to find its weakness. What is Mikko’s weakness?

NIYA Shoulder weight thrust off the back foot. It gets him all the time.

SENSEI Very good, Niya. What would a Dragon think?

TAJI (a boy who is blind) That Mikko’s one arm is his weakness.

SENSEI Yes. Foolish Dragon, even blinder than my Golden Bat...a weakness is not always obvious.

(pp. 92, 93)

Samurai Kids: White Crane follows the children as they work toward competing in the Samurai Games against able-bodied opponents considered superior in strength and ability. As the underdogs, the samurai of the Cockroach Ryu are called to look within, to work together and to overcome great challenges through resilience and determination rather than brute force and bullying.

There are some similarities within this story to themes and characters within the recent movie Kung Fu Panda – ‘There is no secret ingredient!’ However, while the movie falls into the trap of ‘Americanising’ the scenario, Fussell’s book does not, providing an interesting compare and contrast opportunity between movie and book with a focus on such themes as transition, culture and friendship.

In the classroom, this fast paced story will engage listeners with its descriptions of Japanese tradition in the context of the Samurai school, the Cockroach Ryu. For those preparing to take on the challenge of secondary school, Samurai Kids: The White Crane provides opportunity to discuss and explore the uncertainty about the unknown that is often more frightening than its eventual reality.

Jessica
Teacher

Samurai Kids: White Crane

The best part of this fun-filled book of adventures was the ending taking place at the Samurai games! My favourite characters were Sensei, Niya-Moto and Taji. The Sensei was so funny because in the beginning when Niya-Moto came to the Temple of the Mountains to learn new Samurai skills the Sensei put cockroaches in his students’ honey desserts. He did this to teach the students a lesson and have a bit of fun too, I think. The students had said cockroach is such a weakling name for a Samurai School. The Sensei had suggested a dragon to which the students whole-heartedly agreed, but the Sensei said if honey pudding had cockroaches in it then the dessert changes from being the most delicious treat in Japan to one that is wasted and
It made me think how things can look and how things can be changed to look better. One very funny part was when Taji one day was gardening and jumping on all the chickens (he is blind you know). He jumped on the chickens to improve his wrestling skills. Then Niya-Moto said ‘you scared the chicken and you made it eggless’. In Chapter 4 it was dull because Niya-Moto heard voices and he was scared of something. Everything besides Chapter 4 was great. The ending was good because the Sensei challenged another master and they ended up fighting. The Sensei won the challenge Sensei using just a wooden stick, meaning you don’t need expensive tools to fight you just need skill and good thinking and more importantly the patience to learn and practise.

I thought that Niya-Moto had good Habits of Mind because every time he does Samurai he persisted. He was the only one-legged Samurai child in all of Japan.

I would recommend any teacher read this book to their class. For their reflection journal, students could write one paragraph about their favourite part, or which character used which Habit of Mind and which was their least favourite part. Maybe students could write how they could model themselves on the Samurai Kid. How can we be like him in our normal everyday life because he was just a kid like us only with a disability, which didn’t stop him from achieving his goal.

Maybe students can sketch their own pictures to go with the story in their way or students could compare this story to others where characters had to struggle hard to achieve what they wanted.

I could see my own Sensei from Kung-Fu (I learn Kung-Fu too). He talks about having patience to learn and how patience brings you to perfection as you practise your skills. He is right, look how the Samurai Kid became the best Samurai he could be.

Aaron
Year 5

Samurai Kids: White Crane and My Place are both available through Walker Books.

Tiny, a little dog on a big adventure is published through Allen and Unwin.
http://www.allenandunwin.com/

Samurai kids: White Crane is a book based around Niya and his friends in Japan. They all train at the Cockroach Ryu (school) with their sensei (teacher). The people who train here all have some difficulties with their bodies; Niya only has one leg, his friend Taji is blind, Mikko who has only one arm and so on. This year the team is going to the Samurai Games and must overcome their difficulties to succeed against the other schools, but their biggest rival is the Dragon Ryu.

My favourite part was when they were at the Samurai Games. It was very interesting to read about what they had to do and what they had to overcome. It is strange that the answer to all the Zen questions is nothing.

I think this book would be good to read to upper primary students. It explains just because people might have a difficulty with their bodies, doesn’t mean they can’t do something just as well. It is a great book that showed that even a humble cockroach can beat a mighty dragon.

Brooke
12 years
Spensley Street has a long and proud tradition as a primary school committed to a multi-age philosophy. One of the key elements of our philosophy is meeting the needs of the whole child. We do this by planning objectives in the five developmental domains, emotional, social, cognitive, and physical and language. In this article I want to show how elements of this planning process have been applied to our year six transition program.

The last year of primary school is a special time for students and their families. I want to make sure that they are ready, not simply academically but in terms of their social and emotional readiness for secondary school. Classroom teachers take responsibility for the major part of this work however I have taken a special interest in helping to prepare Year Six students for the move and I have developed a Transition Program.

Beginning with the students’ perspective
Giving students time and an opportunity to acknowledge what they are thinking and how they are feeling about the move to secondary school is the starting point of the program. This occurs through discussion and personal writing. I ask students to identify the things that they are looking forward to in secondary school, any challenges they are anticipating or fears that they may have.

The responses are pretty much the same each year and most sit within the social and emotional domain; will I make friends, looking forward to extending friendship groups, being the little kid again, the possibility of bullying, and responding to peer pressure. There are always some students who worry about doing ‘harder’ work and getting too much homework. Many look forward to wearing a uniform, having a locker, learning ‘new’ subjects and the excitement of a new environment.

I use the students’ responses to plan a program. I begin with the universal fear of homework and set a homework exercise at each session. In the very first session I explain that it’s the end of parents’ ‘rescuing’ them; if students miss the homework deadline they are expected to see me and provide the reason or if they know they need extra time they must negotiate the extension.

I speak to class teachers about individual students, especially those who have expressed anxiety about coping with the work. In some instances this leads to home group teachers running tutorial sessions or setting up targeted sessions in areas of maths and or literacy with our support teacher.

Knowing where I am going
Because the turnaround time is so short between the date when secondary placement forms are sent home and must be returned we encourage our families to start looking at secondary schools in Year Five. We send out a list of all our feeder schools with information about location, size and contact details. We encourage students and their families to attend open days and information evenings.

For many years students wrote to secondary schools with specific questions about schools however in more recent times students have found that school web sites answer many of their questions.

We also run a special information session for year five and six students and their families. We invite back a student and parent representative from each feeder secondary school in early term two to talk about their experience of high school. It’s such a great evening, our students soak up the information, ask lots of questions and leave with a real sense of differences between the schools. I come away from these evenings feeling very proud of our students as I hear about their experiences and the way they have adapted to their new settings. I am also fascinated to see the choices students make with respect to secondary school, in most cases very different to Spensley Street, yet it’s clear that the students are ready for these differing environments.

You are ready
Expectations, as Cambourne writes, ‘are messages that are subtly conveyed to learners in a variety of ways. They are connected with the confidence a teacher consistently displays in the learners ability to be successful in whatever they are trying to master.’ This is the consistent message I give our students throughout the year that they are ready and they will be successful in the transition to
secondary school. One way I demonstrate my confidence in the students is by placing the responsibility for school tours in their hands. Year Six students are tour guides for all visitors to the school. Their preparation is to write a reflective piece outlining what they would tell new families about the school. Students demonstrate a depth of knowledge and a genuine sense of pride as they show visitors around.

I help them to recognise their qualities as friends so that they know they will extend their friendship group when they move on. We work together in small groups, use role play and short videos. Students are encouraged to talk to adults at home and older friends about peer pressure. Over time they realise that they have a range of strategies to manage the challenges of new relationships.

We spend time learning to read timetables so that they can see the logic in the way they are set out rather than feel overwhelmed by the detail.

A favourite task for the term three holidays is learning how to get from home to their new schools independently. They map it, cost it, time it and return to school knowing that they are ready to go.

Saying farewell

In those last weeks of primary school, when it is often challenging to keep the students focused we devote much of the time to saying farewell. This is done in many different ways. At a special Year Six dinner students write farewell speeches for fellow classmates. They have just a few minutes to speak and I find speeches come in all shapes and sizes, acrostics, poems, songs, and all with good humour and sensitivity to the individual.

Students prepare a photo board of themselves with a photo of themselves when they started school and in their final year. This board becomes a prominent display during the last weeks of school that students and parents enjoy reading.

There is a special Year Six edition of our weekly newsletter in the last week of school. All year six students write a short article about themselves, where they are going in the following year, their hopes and special moments from their primary school years. Many leaving families also write about their time at Spensley Street.

In the last week the students proudly wear their Year Six T-shirt and break times are spent seeking autographs and inviting teachers and students to write farewell messages.

At the start of Year 6:

‘I felt so much older.’ Rachel

‘I was really nervous at the start of the year and sad. I felt really attached to Spensley Street.’ Lydia

‘I wasn’t nervous like most people, I was sad. I didn’t want to leave.’ Bridget

At the end of the year:

‘I’ve had a great time here I am sad to leave.’ Rachel

‘I still feel nervous but excited as well. I am used to the idea and now I know all the people who will be going to my school.’ Lydia

‘Excited because it will be a whole new adventure for me.’ Bridget

So is it worth it? Most definitely yes, the feedback we receive from parents and students tells us that the process is a helpful one. It’s so easy as a principal to get office bound, I find that the time I spend with the students can be the most rewarding time of my week and it is a constant reminder that the essence of primary school is working with students and meeting their needs.

Maureen Douglas has been principal of Spensley Street for the past fourteen years. It is a proud inner city primary school in Melbourne. The school recognises the importance of planning for and meeting the needs of the whole child in an open plan multi-age setting.
This paper will focus on Stan, a 6 year old boy and his transition from being excluded from his learning community to becoming a highly valued member. Stan’s remarkable journey grew out of a study I undertook as a teacher/researcher where I got children to photograph their learning environment as a way to explore child voice and reflection. Stan was a child who came to the classroom with a number of unproductive labels as a learner. Stan’s story shows his journey of meaning making, discovery of identity, ownership of skills developed through using the digital camera, and belonging to a community that included him.

At the beginning of the school year Stan didn’t attend regularly. His mother and I would talk daily about his struggle to want to attend school, the concerns he had about how he was going to be treated by teachers and peers, as well as his awareness around his learning needs. Early in the school year Stan announced:

‘I hate school… no one listens to me, looks at me or takes me seriously, they just laugh at me and think I’m no good. I don’t like it anymore. I just don’t want to be here anymore’.

The study’s focus helped to change Stan’s position in the classroom and his attitudes about learning. Along with Sam, sixteen other children aged 5 to 7 years participated in the study. These children used a digital camera to photograph what was important to them in relation to their learning. I understood that these were children born into a media, technological and visually savvy world where they interpret their world in multiple ways (Moss, 2007) using multiple resources. The ICT used as part of this study – the digital camera – aligned itself with integration into the early childhood classroom (Snyder, 1999) not replacing the role of the effective teacher or facilitator but rather enhancing what an effective teacher can provide in a learning space. The visual method provided another way to understand knowledge and the voices within the classroom setting while connecting with authentic life long learning.

My reflective practice focus led me to query some of the labels associated with learning ability and attitude that had been given to the children. I began questioning how I was going to work with these children to help them disengage with unproductive labels and also provide an environment that was nurturing, inclusive and enabled all students to succeed. I monitored and regulated actions towards achieving these goals. With this study the children were asked to participate in classroom activities as usual and they were invited to use a digital camera as another way for them to reflect on their learning.

One digital camera was used, and a rotation system was set up for the children to use the camera one at a time. This rotation process allowed students to use the digital camera at different times during the day and over the week at 30 minute intervals. The camera was kept on my desk at the side of the room for easy access. In using the camera the following instructions were agreed upon by all participants:

- When the camera was in use the children were asked to not pose or look at the camera as I wanted to capture the natural occurrences in the classroom.
- Each child decided if they wanted to use the digital camera in their scheduled time. If a child chose not to use the digital camera it would remain on my desk with the opportunity for another child to use it.
- No limit was set as to how many images were to be taken.
- After taking the photographs the child photographer would reflect on the images either through conversation with the teacher and/or peer(s) or by reflection using sentence starters provided or with a graphic organiser. This builds on the notion of photo self elicitation (Harper, 2002)
- Photographs were downloaded onto my laptop for storage and viewing enabling them to be immediately deleted from the digital camera and for another child to use the digital camera. Once the photographs were on my laptop they could be viewed or printed off according to the choice of the child as to how they were going to reflect.
- Some of the following triggers were used to assist in reflection if required:
  - Tell me about your photos.
  - Why did you take that shot?
Stan is a kinesthetic and visual learner, however in the past he hadn’t had the chance to explore this way of learning in a school environment. As his attendance became more regular he began to realise that these qualities would be valued. Stan was intrigued that I too valued these qualities and learnt in these styles. He would often talk to me one-on-one about how I had taught him music the previous year but now was teaching him in year one ‘like a real teacher’. The music connection – movement, expression, creativity, and imagination – was an instant connection and one that I used to highlight Stan’s strengths. With the introduction of the digital camera to the classroom these elements were also encouraged in all the children but particularly resonated with Stan.

Stan questioned what I do with the photos I take having seen me previously model taking photographs to the class before the study began:

Stan: When you take photos do you talk about them like you get us to?

Well I do look at them and think about what is happening?

Stan: But you don’t talk about them?

I don’t talk about them every time but I do write notes about the photos and what I see. Sometimes I have lots of questions. I write them down and then I change things with the activity to make it better for you and others in the class.

Stan: So you make changes too? I changed the way I work with my table. I saw a photo that Hannah took and I wasn’t really joining in … you know teamwork. It’s good to be in a team, like for basketball. It’s lots of fun and you get to make friends.

**Engagement and igniting interest**

For some students the possibility to be cameraman, as the participants affectionately called the process, was full of opportunities. The use of the digital camera built confidence and turned some children from quiet, nervous little people into shining lights, passionate, and enthusiastic about learning. The students that stood out in this study were the ones who had been labeled as ‘learning needs students’ or ‘students who found school hard’. For these students the camera became a tool that allowed them to move around the room, interact with peers, talk about what was meaningful to them, and shed unproductive labels. Throughout the process of reflection, many students found they were gaining confidence in expressing themselves. This led to them experimenting while writing about their photographs. Reflection encouraged exploration, confidence and raised self-esteem while developing literacy skills.

Stan connected well with the digital camera – ‘Can I become cameraman? I’d really like to take the class working so well’. Stan became more confident and with his confidence he was able to interact with others and show them skills and share ideas about how he was using the camera. This highlighted metacognitive skills in thinking about what how to compose photographs to support reflection about learning and teaching.
Peer Teaching

The role of cameraman became a strong outlet for Stan. He often communicated his understanding of classroom behaviours through his photographs and subsequent reflections.

Stan praised his classmates through his photographs and reflections acknowledging their behaviours that also showed in his own behaviour. Peers began to accept Stan through becoming productively involved in small group work, being able to contribute to class discussions, providing meaningful answers or thought provoking questions, and most of all Stan was able to work independently. His peers noticed the change. Stan was able to change his behaviour by seeing new behaviour through his digital image making. He was able to distinguish between acceptable behaviour in the learning environment and behaviours that inhibited him and others. Throughout this process Stan became ‘Stan the Cameraman’ to his classmates, and became a valued member of the learning community.

Within the learning community problem solving skills were explored. Spontaneous learning

Figure 3: I put the camera on the table and pushed my hand up a bit higher. I zoomed in a bit closer. Olive is looking down at her pieces. I think it is pretty good. She’s trying hard, she’s only got one arm. She’s a super trier today (Stan).

Figure 4: Photograph taken by Stan – ‘That is Cam’s. He was coming up here [to the desk where we were working]. He was telling you he doesn’t like being called Cameron. So he asked to move. You let him and that’s really nice. I think if he doesn’t want to be called his real name then that’s okay with me. Some people don’t like being called names. You shouldn’t call people names’ (Stan).

Figure 5: Problem solving: Stan and Gemma work together untangling headphone cords.
moments were often captured by the child photographer at the time showing his/her inquiry as well as those around them. A visual narrative produced by Max (Figure 5) shows the story between two peers problem solving to untangle the headphone cords used for the computers in the classroom. Photos taken were interspersed amongst other action in the classroom. The sequence of photographs of Stan and his peer Gemma below demonstrate how Stan’s sense of belonging and becoming were developing.

The children involved in this study used the reflective skills, visual narrative, and use of digital camera skills they had gained in the classroom community and introduced them into their family community. This displayed transformability of authentic learning experiences that were shared with others – parents, siblings, and grandparents. The sharing of their new skills from the classroom learning community was enhanced for several children in the study, particularly Stan.

Stan talked with his father about his use of the digital camera in the classroom and was invited to use his father’s camera equipment at home. From their conversations Stan brought the Polaroid camera into class and proceeded to take photographs of what was important to him building on the reflection process that was being carried out within the classroom as part of the curriculum. A photograph taken by Irene (Figure 6) shows Stan waiting for some Polaroid photos he had taken to dry.

On seeing this image Stan commented:

‘I like taking the photos so much with you that I asked my dad if I can use his camera. He gave me this one [Polaroid]. The photo comes out the front and you shake the paper. It’s like magic and there is the photo I took. Now I can keep my photos and you can keep yours’.

I wanted to create a classroom community where everyone was valued for what they could offer. I wanted to rewrite history for Stan and the other children in association with their schooling. I was determined that my classroom was going to be one where the children and I could re-invent and create future opportunities and experiences. Stan is a shining example of this quest.

References

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The nature of electronic and paper media is increasingly visual with the popularised use of the personal computer, internet, image capable mobile phones and digital cameras meaning the way we communicate, shop, socialise, keep records, gather information, manage our finances and entertain ourselves is highly visual. As these visual texts become more prevalent in our society our notion of what it means to read and be literate is affected. Teachers are beginning to learn more about visual texts and aim to instruct their students in the comprehension and construction of them. I would like to share what I have learnt over the last ten years of explicit teaching about visual texts to children and teachers. My approach applies what teachers already acknowledge as best practice regarding teaching reading with conventional texts to teaching with visual texts.

Pedagogical foundations
My philosophy of reading teaching and learning is grounded in a deep affection for picture books and a strong belief in the idea ‘that ‘real’ books are good reading texts for learners’ (Meek, p. 39, 1988). I believe in the benefits of using picture books across key learning areas and across all primary school grades for teaching about both the verbal and visual text. Lessons learnt within the familiar and comfortable ‘environment’ of a picture book can later be applied to visual texts that may not have children’s best interests at heart.

I think it is important for teachers to note the evolution of texts and their increasingly multimedia nature. (Unsworth, Thomas, Simpson and Asha, 2005) Students are growing up in the midst of new technologies and readily adapt to their use, however they need to be taught to be discriminating readers of the texts that new technologies provide. (Walsh, Asha and Sprainger, 2007).

I encountered Freebody and Luke’s views on literacy teaching and learning early in my teaching career and have adopted their model in my teaching of literacy. The Four Resources Model (Luke and Freebody, 1999) encourages me to incorporate and integrate ‘a broad repertoire of textual practices’ in my teaching of reading, to meet the needs of my students. Using activities and practices that involved students in breaking the code, participating in meanings of texts, using texts functionally, and critically analysing and transforming texts allowed me creative freedom to respond to my students’ needs and interests.

Teachers and students need a way of talking about visual texts
Researchers have acknowledged the multimodal nature of texts (Callow, 2008, Unsworth, 2006) and the way that the visual and verbal interact to create meaning. The use of a commonly understood metalanguage is advocated in order to have a shared way of naming and discussing the meaning making codes within visual texts.

as with the teaching of reading and writing, (when teaching about visual texts) the use of a metalanguage to talk about and critique texts needs to be introduced not only at point of need, when students are constructing their own projects, but also as part of the scaffolding around any literacy experiences where students encounter multimodal texts. (Callow, 2008)

Kress and van Leeuwen’s work on reading images (1998) details a metalanguage of visual texts. Like many teachers, when I first discovered Kress and van Leeuwen’s visual grammar I quickly incorporated it into my classroom use of picture books. Their metalanguage gave my students and me a shared way of talking about what we saw, how we understood and how we responded to visual images. Kress and van Leeuwen outline three categories for describing the meaning making codes
within visual texts. Firstly, the Representational Features, which are the visual representation of the participants or objects involved, the actions they undertake and the setting in which the actions occur in a visual text. The Interactive Features describe how the relationship between the viewer and the represented participant is visually constructed. And the Compositional Features describe how the visual information is distributed and therefore ‘read’.

**The facets of visual literacy**

With the aim of describing the skills of a visually literate reader I have incorporated the principles of the Four Resources Model with the explicit teaching of visual grammar. By attempting to understand how visual texts are read and comprehended my teaching of visual literacy is guided. No single category stands alone and they shouldn’t be viewed as a hierarchical list. However the importance of metalanguage is notable in each of the four elements that follow.

**Breaking the visual code**

using the language of the visuals, the metalanguage specific to visual images.

**Making meaning from visual texts**

recognising visual elements in texts, naming and describing aspects of the visual text using metalanguage.

**Visual Text User**

using knowledge of visual elements to create new visual and verbal texts.

**Visual Text Analyst**

recognising the purpose behind visual choices, recognising that visual images are created by an illustrator with a purpose to generate a response from the viewer in order to serve certain interests.

**Classroom practice**

The best way to describe more fully each of these facets of visual literacy is to outline some classroom activities and illustrate a small number of work samples that are designed to encourage children to using the metalanguage of visual grammar in different settings.

**Breaking the Visual Code of Modality**

This activity was conducted with a Year One class who were learning about fiction and non fiction books. By teaching them the term ‘modality’ I hoped to give them a way of discussing the images they encountered when reading both fiction and non fiction texts. To date they had used terminology such as ‘cartoon like’, ‘photographs’ and ‘real pictures’. By introducing the modality ‘scale’ I was striving for a shared way of discussing the realism of images.

I used a range of picture books and information books from around the classroom to introduce students to the term ‘modality’ and describe what I meant. I used categories such as colour, outline, shading and shape to explain the ways images can be shown as highly realistic through to very abstract. I then laid out the picture books and information books across the floor to demonstrate this modality scale.

Next, I asked groups of children to find pictures in magazines that I provided, showing a range of modality. On completion the children shared the pictures they had found and we created a whole class modality scale using their cut outs. This part of the activity proved particularly useful in consolidating the children’s understanding and confidence in using the new term ‘modality’ as they had to explain and argue their choice of place on the modality scale. Comments like, ‘this picture has realistic shading’, ‘it is lower modality than that picture’ and ‘my picture is very clear, it is higher modality’ were elicited with my assistance.

I was very encouraged to see that children were on the way to using the metalanguage of visual grammar after just one lesson. The children seemed just as excited as I was to be able to talk about pictures in this way. An example of the learning of at least one child came a few days later during a library lesson. The class were seated on the floor in front of the librarian and I was perusing the bookshelves unnoticed by the children. When the librarian whipped out a picture book that she had promised in a previous lesson to read to the class she asked, ‘What do you think of this?’ She was puzzled by the response of one child who yelled, ‘It’s high modality!’.

**Making Meaning from the Visual Text of The Polar Express**

After reading, discussing and generally enjoying the verbal and visual elements of The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg with a group of Year Two students I embarked on an activity to encourage them to use their emerging knowledge of visual grammar to extract meaning from the pictures in the book.

The students had previously participated in lessons introducing them to some visual grammar such as Reading Paths, Modality and Vectors. I distributed copies of the book to small groups of students and asked each group to discuss and record their observations of the images. Each group
was assigned a different image to discuss and they later reported back to the whole class. The group assigned the last image in the book recorded an observation (shown below in Work Sample 1) about the modality of the image that showed both their competency with the use of visual grammar and their understanding of the story told in *The Polar Express*.

**Work Sample 1:**

‘The bell is high modality because Santa is real and the bell is too, it’s from Santa.’

Creating new visual and verbal texts

A personal development lesson using the picture book *The Princess and the Perfect Dish* by Libby Gleeson capitalised on the Year 4 children’s understanding of the visual element of framing. *The Princess and the Perfect Dish* is illustrated by Armin Greder with a combination of strong frames, partial frames and no framing at all. The illustrations combine with the verbal text to tell an unconventional fairytale about a curvy princess who likes her food and knows her mind. The princess puts the culinary skills of her suitors to the test in an effort to replicate a childhood memory of the ultimate taste and find a husband. Aspects of the story are traditional and the accompanying images are noticeably framed. As the storyline deviates from familiar fairytales the images become more ‘out of the box’ and less strongly framed.

After reading the picture book and discussing the images in the manner outlined above I asked children to recall times in their lives when they had acted out of character, when their behaviour was ‘out of the box’. We discussed why people act out of character and the possible positive and negative outcomes of such behaviour. The children then illustrated their recollections using the visual element of framing as a metaphor for their behaviour. The visual and verbal text in Work Sample 2 shows one child’s attempt at this activity. Timid Kayla had recently attended school camp and had taken a turn on a flying fox after much encouragement from her peers and teachers.

For the reader who is unfamiliar with this picture book it is important to explain that *The Polar Express* is illustrated in a soft focused realistic style with the exception of the last image which is shown through photographic realism. In the terminology of visual grammar, the images display relatively high modality with the last image being higher modality still. The verbal text tells a story of innocent belief as a young boy taken on a train trip to the North Pole on Christmas Eve receives the first gift of Christmas from Santa, a bell from Santa’s sleigh.

**Work Sample 2:**

‘This (is) going out of the frame because I do not like flying foxes.’

Kayla and her classmates’ ability to use visual grammar to understand and construct visual texts also allowed them a medium to better understand themselves in the context of this activity.
Visual analysis of election campaign advertisements

The conclusion of a Stage Three unit of work on Democracy allowed my Year 6 class to consolidate their learning of visual grammar and demonstrate their ability to understand the purpose behind the visual choices in advertising material surrounding a political campaign.

Firstly the class viewed and discussed a collection of visual texts associated with a recent election campaign. The visuals of politicians were analysed in terms of social distance, power relations, and contact. The students noted that most politicians preferred intimate or close up social distance to their viewers in the campaign images. By analysing the power relations of the images, the students noticed that the politicians were shown on equal standing, eye level with the viewer. In addition, the visual contact made between politicians and viewers was in the form of a demand with the politician looking directly at the viewer, often with a smile on their face.

This threefold analysis was followed by a discussion of why the campaigning politicians would choose to have themselves shown in this way, what they were possibly trying to say through their visual choices. As well as what was not being said.

Lastly, children created their own campaign poster as part of a larger project in which they were campaigning for the right to be ‘Principal for a Day’ at the end of the term. Sally’s poster shown in Work Sample 3 shows an understanding of visual elements and an ability to make her own visual choices with the purpose of winning over voters. Her understanding of how to manipulate her viewers is also shown through the cunning way she made sure her campaign poster got into the hands of her voters and created positive connections with them.

Work Sample 3:

‘Vote 1 Sally “Principal for a Day”. Colour in my face as best you can. The entry judged to be the best will win a great prize!

Place entries in our (3A’s) classroom.’

Conclusion

The visual text is a dominant part of our society’s information and communication environment. Research shows teachers the importance of metalanguage when teaching about and with visual texts. But teachers don’t need to abandon their established methods for teaching reading, nor is the establishment of completely new processes necessary. By adapting what we already agree is best practice to suit teaching with visual texts we can enrich our literacy programs and help our students to become discerning readers of visual texts.

By engaging children in activities that encourage them to break the visual code, make meaning from visual texts, be visual text users and visual text analysts, teachers will be using the metalanguage of visual texts to add to the literacy repertoire of their students.

References


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What is this object?

Two Year 4 students huddle close to a computer screen eagerly seeking the answer to what the mystery object is.

Thirty minutes earlier… these ‘digital natives’, generations who have grown up with computer technology, (Prensky, 2001) were presented with an image of a mysterious object, made by the Torres Strait Islander artist Ken Thaiday for the National Museum of Australia’s collection. They made a prediction as to what they thought it was and entered it into the computer.

Twenty minutes earlier… they had learnt that the object was from the Torres Strait Islands. They analysed trade routes, inhabited islands and the significance of totems to the various island groups. Would their prediction of what the mystery object is be correct? Would it even be close?

Fifteen minutes earlier… they examined when the object was used and its size.

Ten minutes earlier… they examined the object up close in fine detail (like anthropologists do!).

Just two minutes earlier… they explored what the object could be used for. They quietly discuss what they believe the object is and type on the keyboard their re-examined prediction. These two child detectives, self-proclaimed prodigies, completely absorbed in solving their case, click excitedly on the button ‘What is it?’ Finally the mystery surrounding this object will be revealed.

More revelations were apparent than just the obvious in this online technological investigation. The children had learnt not only about the identity and cultural significance of a weird and unknown object, they had developed a deeper understanding of the Australian indigenous Torres Strait Island culture. They had engaged in literacy and made meaningful cross-curriculum connections using technology; all in thirty minutes…and they loved it.

Making connections

‘Digital interactives’ are computer programs that allow users to actively participate in making decisions. Educational interactives take the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) traditionally used for leisure purposes in video games, and apply them as a tool within the field of education to enhance learning experiences. Rather than being passive viewers of information content, users of educational digital interactives have control of what they explore and engage with, as well as the pace of their learning.
The University of Sydney’s Centre for Research on Computer Supported Learning and Cognition conducted a study in 2008 to explore the impact of ICT on students’ learning. The Learning Federation’s research (Freebody, Reimann & Tiu, 2008) involving surveys, direct observations and interviews, found that the majority of students enjoyed using ICTs to learn as they are interesting, fun and ‘easy to work through’. Students indicated that the most valuable feature of using ICTs to learn is that it allows them to work at their own pace. Freebody and Muspratt (2007) found that students preferred learning objects that:

- allow them to interact with the learning object
- do not look like conventional classroom activities
- are generally game-like.

Freebody, Reimann and Tiu (2008, p. 4) found that there is growing evidence in the research literature that certain classroom uses of ICT increase students’ motivation to learn, engagement in learning and their independence in learning. The benefits of classroom use of ICT identified in the literature are increased levels of students’ collaboration in learning, their higher levels of engagement and persistence in learning, and more on-task behaviour.

Using digital interactives is a great way to make cross-curriculum connections with literacy as they present information in more exciting and engaging ways. Freebody, Reimann & Tiu (2008, p. 4) explain how the advantages of using interactives is ‘particularly strong for technologies that involve a visual element, such as digital video, multimedia, and software involving role-play and immersive elements. Language education has profited greatly from access to video and audio materials.’ By using interactives where the user becomes the active participant, rather than the observer of content and information, allows for greater empathy. This is important as knowledge, skills and understandings are not just taught, but rather experienced by the student.

Interactives are a valuable tool for literacy learning. The story at the beginning of the article is a fine example of how students’ curiosity was aroused within a digital environment. The students engaged with many interactive reading experiences to complete the activity.

Described below are three examples of digital interactives located on the National Museum of Australia website and the ways that they were used in one Year 4 classroom.

The National Museum of Australia website
One of the best websites offering interactive literacy resources is the National Museum of Australia’s (NMA) website which contains a plethora of activities and internet links on an extensive range of historical topics. The activities have been designed by The Le@rning Federation to enhance the learning of outcomes in all Australian and New Zealand schools and meet the technological needs of students who now live in a digital age. This free website is suitable for children in middle to upper primary.

The Le@rning Federation
The Le@rning Federation (TLF) is a collaborative project between the Australian and New Zealand governments. It has been developing digital curriculum content for Australian and New Zealand schools since 2001. TLF has made many interactives for the NMA with topics including National Parks, The Gold Rush, Cobb & Co transport, The Golden Age of Cricket, Refugees and indigenous cultures. The earlier mentioned Torres Strait Island interactive was developed by the TLF. The interactives contain simple directions, help menus, high-quality graphics and often also contain sound and video clips and sequences.

The Gold Rush
The Gold Rush is an interactive where children take on the role of a miner at the Ballarat goldfields in the year 1865. As a miner they will have to buy all the necessary items needed including cradles, pans, food and tents, using a sparse amount of finance. They choose between alluvial or shaft mining, or perhaps try their hand at both. They learn about Australian and British currency conversions and the many challenges faced by the gold diggers. There is just so much for the children to explore, interact with and learn about. The other interactives offer comparative depths in learning experiences and required levels of reading, visual literacy, digital literacy and listening skills.

The interactives can be used in a variety of ways but are ideally suited to small groups of students because they can discuss the content explored and gain different perspectives on the issues from their peers. It is also important for children to keep a reflective journal or record of what they have learnt so they are made accountable for their own learning and so you as their teacher can assess what main cross-curriculum ideas and information they are learning. You could also use a topic information chart where each child records one piece of information or an insight they have learnt through.
the interactive which has not previously been shared by another student. This type of accountability and processing of information could be explored in many other ways such as mind-maps, Plus/Minus/Interesting Facts (PMI) charts, and Hot Seat activities where several members of the class must answer questions from their peers and teacher while in role of a character being studied e.g. gold miner, trooper, child, mother, bushranger within the Gold Rush activity.

Another popular strategy that can be used as an observational assessment of learning from the interactives is a class discussion using the De Bono’s Hats. All children in my class love wearing the De Bono’s thinking ‘cowboy’ hats that develop metacognition. The hats encourage students to analyse information in different ways. The yellow hat, for example, encourages students to find positive aspects of subject matter, while the red hat encourages children to describe how they feel about the subject matter (with or without reason). The hats allow children to unpack what they have learnt within an enjoyable and creative structure.

Everyone loves a good mystery

Children love playing detective, so why not engage children in literacy by allowing them to read information, gather clues and solve a mystery. Ryebuck Media and the National Museum of Australia have co-developed an Australian History Mysteries (AHM) Program, which is an online source for integrating literacy with technology and history. These interactives involve higher-order thinking and engagement with critical literacy. Some of them require previous knowledge on the topic such as the two player Ned Kelly Vs Constable McIntyre race to Glenrowan interactive.

The Kelly Country interactive involves students answering questions about Ned Kelly’s life. The interactive is designed as a map, with players answering trivia questions in the role of Ned Kelly and Constable McIntyre. As they answer multiple-choice questions correctly they move forward to the next location on the map. For each wrong answer they move one place back on the map.

This type of trivia interactive is best used following research and study on a topic. One way to facilitate student centred learning before such an interactive is for students to complete a Bloom’s Taxonomy research grid on a topic before using the interactive. Many Bloom’s Taxonomy grids are available on the web on various topics that offer students choice in their learning and allow them to engage in learning at their particular ability level.

There are also two Australian History Mysteries kits with images and print materials available to purchase which furthermore engage children in open investigation tasks such as ‘Who discovered Australia?’ and ‘Was Ned Kelly a hero or a villain?’ The purpose of these kits is for students to conduct investigations before using the free online interactives.

Another way of linking trivia interactives to the English curriculum is to have students express their newfound knowledge in discussion, debate or creative presentations to further promote and enrich their online critical literacy experience. I have a drama box in my classroom, which my students love using to dress up as all sorts of interesting characters from various plays and books. Children love drama and allowing them to process and unpack digital literacy experiences to it is a valuable innovation.

Win a sausage sanger, pair of thongs or a sheep station!

Australian English is distinctly different from other forms of English as it has developed from many cultural contributions and has evolved through time. Children often encounter language that is distinctly Australian when studying Australia’s past. To give students a deep understanding of the origins and meanings of Australian words and idioms, an ‘Aussie English for the Beginner’ interactive has been made available on the National Museum of Australia’s website. The interactive gives students rich literacy experiences as they explore abbreviations such as mozzie, ute and sanger and language that has historical origins. The ‘Aussie English Guide’ includes many more categories for exploration and is accompanied by great cartoons by David Pope. Such categories include indigenous words, British dialects, similes
and terms associated with values and attitudes.

An interactive based purely on grammar, punctuation and language must be scaffolded further by a teacher and this type of interactive should not be explored in isolation. For example, if children are learning about similes, the teacher should give some examples before jointly constructing some as a whole class. The children could then create their own simile sentences about themselves such as ‘Harry is as quick as a cheetah’, and display these to enrich the environmental print within the classroom. The interactive could then be used within reading groups after these rich literacy experiences to further deepen the students’ understanding of similes. Good teaching practice should always progress from teacher modelling to joint construction to independent construction and exploration.

The rich experiences in exploring Australian literacy are further complimented by a ‘True Blue Aussie Quiz’. This is a great online resource that could even be used as an assessment. You could, for example, use the ‘True Blue Aussie Quiz’ as an assessment after three weeks of exploring the ‘Aussie English Guide’.

Loving literacy without knowing it

Interactives can be effectively integrated into reading group programs. I program my reading group activities so that children rotate through five activities over five days. I involve children in such activities as readers’ theatre, drama where students construct or rehearse plays, grammar, comprehension and listening post, where children listen and track the reading of an audio book and respond to it in various ways. Digital interactives make up one such activity my students experience within an array of engaging and different reading activities.

Using online resources to plan literacy experiences is effective. It is even better to plan these experiences in ways that make meaningful and rich connections across the curriculum. The National Museum of Australia interactives are just one resource available on the internet. Thousands more are just a Google search and the click of a mouse button away. What I have learnt through using such interactives and technology is that technology can be used to develop children’s love for literacy ... without them even knowing it.

It is important to ensure that you carefully select search terms when searching for interactive literacy resources. I would recommend to include precise words on the topic such as ‘gold rush’, ‘Antarctica’ or ‘grammar’ and a variety of general terms including online, interactive, literacy, interactive and learning. The more specific you are the better. Be sure to search sites that are from Australia in your search engine, and if using international sites, be sure to test their suitability to your syllabus. Some websites to get you started are listed below. I offer my best wishes to all the brave teachers, digital immigrants of this new age of learning, who are participating in the digital literacy revolution.

National Museum of Australia

Powerhouse Museum
http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/online/

Australian Government: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Caboolture State School
http://www.cabooltuss.eq.edu.au/Students/virtual/literacy/literacy.htm

References

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People of every culture, all around the world, eat bread. Many different possible ingredients for bread exist, as well as many different ways of making bread. After the dough is prepared, bread can be baked, fried, or cooked over an open fire. And, since different cultures all have their own unique ways of making bread, learning about some of these breads and the people who make them can increase children’s global understanding and knowledge of other cultures.

Children’s books about bread and bread making are excellent tools for helping children examine bread and its multicultural connection. This article features six children’s books about bread, each with a multicultural focus. These books represent both fiction (including a folktale) and nonfiction, and all six books are currently available online in hardcover and paperback editions.

Books about Bread and Bread Making

1. **Bread Comes to Life: A Garden of Wheat and a Loaf to Eat** by George Levenson (Tricycle, 2004).

   This informational book is illustrated with high-quality, full-colour photographs that make the process of bread making practically *jump off the page*. The book begins with six pages of photographs of a wide variety of types of bread, as well as photographs of children from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Then, with a simple rhyming text, the book takes the child reader through the step-by-step process of making bread, starting with sowing wheat in a small backyard garden.

   When the wheat is ready, the sun-dried stalks are rubbed in a simple threshing box to separate the wheat from the chaff. Next, the text and photographs inform the reader about how the wheat is ground into flour and then made into dough. The book continues with pictures of how the dough is kneaded and left to rise. Finally, the bread is baked and sliced. At the end of the book are two additional pages that include information about wheat as well as a recipe for making bread.

2. **Everybody Bakes Bread** by Norah Dooley (Carolrhoda, 1996).

   This book is part of a series of books by the same author that feature people from various cultures preparing the same food item, but in different ways.
The other books in the series are: *Everybody Cooks Rice, Everybody Serves Soup, and Everybody Brings Noodles.*

In *Everybody Bakes Bread*, Carrie, the main character in the story, is sent by her mother on a made-up errand to some of the homes in her diverse neighbourhood. In each home, bread is being prepared in a manner that is unique to the culture of the people who live in that home. At the first home she goes to, Mrs. Ambrose is making Barbadian coconut bread. At the second home, Rajit’s mother is making an Indian bread called chapattis. At the third home, Mark DeLoach’s mother is making cornbread from a recipe from the southern United States. At the fourth home, Nabil’s family is making cloth bread from their native Lebanon. At the fifth home, Mrs. Max shares challah with her since it’s the Jewish Sabbath. At the sixth home, her new neighbour Bernardo from El Salvador gives her a pupusa (a round bread containing melted cheese) that his grandmother has made.

When Carrie returns home empty-handed from her errand, it is time for lunch at her house. She has a few quick bites of Italian bread that her mother made from her great-grandmother’s recipe, but tells her mother she is too full to eat lunch since ‘Practically everybody was baking bread this morning!’ The last five pages of the book contain recipes for the seven types of bread mentioned in the story.

3. *Bread is for Eating* by David and Phillis Gershator (Holt, 1995).

*Bread is for Eating* is a beautifully-illustrated book that features appropriately themed borders on eight of the double-page spreads. The book is written in English, but features the Spanish song ‘El pan es para comer’ (‘Bread is for Eating’) at the bottom of five of the pages in the story. The song also appears at the end of the book. That version has the English translation below the Spanish words, and also includes the musical notation for the song.

The story begins with a mother and young boy in a rural setting who are eating bread at a table. When the boy leaves bread on his plate, his mother tells him that bread is for eating. The book then uses richly-coloured artwork to illustrate the process of making bread, starting with a seed ‘asleep in the ground.’ After being exposed to the sun and the rain, the seed that the farmer planted begins to grow. Later, the harvester cuts the wheat and ‘catches the grain.’ Then a worker loads the grain and takes it to town, where the miller grinds the grain into flour and, later, the shopkeeper sells the flour. At this point, the little boy’s mother tells him to think about how people get the money to buy the flour and his mother says, ‘This song is also for the families working all day to put bread on the table.’

Next, the boy is asked to think about the cook who kneads the flour with water and yeast, and to think about the baker ‘baking bread before dawn.’ After the bread is baked, the following double-page illustration features people who represent a variety of races and ethnicities eating different kinds of bread. Finally, before singing the song once again, the little boy’s mother says, ‘We thank the seed, earth, sun, and rain for the grain, the beautiful grain, and sing for the bread that gives us life again and again and again’.


*Bread, Bread, Bread*, with its limited text and large print, is an informational book for younger children. The book features 29 full-colour photographs showing people from around the world eating bread that is characteristic of their culture or country. The countries included in the photographs are: Israel, United States, Peru, Ghana, England, Indonesia, France, Portugal, India, Germany, Sicily, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Ecuador, and Guatemala.

Children, as well as adults, are featured in the high-quality photographs, which are quite effective in communicating the concept that everybody eats bread. A two-page index in the back of the book contains miniature versions of the photographs. Beside each photograph, the location is noted along with information about the bread shown in the photograph.

5. *Bread Song* by Frederick Lipp (Mondo, 2004).

This heartwarming fictional story is about a little boy whose family recently moved from Thailand to a small coastal town in the United States. Chamnan’s family owns the Thai Mountain Restaurant, and everyone who works there speaks Thai. Across the street from the restaurant is Alison’s Bakery, and everyone who works there speaks English.

When Chamnan and his grandfather walk across Wharf Street to the bakery one morning, Chamnan is expected to step on each cobblestone and count it, in English. Since Chamnan is only eight-years-old, and living in a new country, he thinks the counting is difficult. By the time they get to the bakery, he is counting in a whisper. The people in the bakery all speak English so quickly that it frightens him.

The other customers in the bakery, who themselves are from a variety of backgrounds, greet Chamnan in a friendly manner and ask him what he is going to buy that day. Chamnan is too shy to try to respond. When it is Chamnan’s turn to place his
order, he points to the item he wants and his grandfather supplies the necessary English words.

After work that day, Alison crosses the street to eat at the Thai Restaurant. While she is there she tells Chamnan and his grandfather about how, on certain days, her bread sounds as if it is singing. She invites them to come over before the bakery is open the next day to hear the bread sing.

Chamnan and his grandfather accept Alison’s offer and go the next morning to listen to the sounds the bread makes after it is removed from the oven. Chamnan is fascinated by the popping, snapping, and clicking sounds that come from the bread when it is cooling. His interest in the sounds makes him forget his shyness. He speaks first in Thai, and then in English. When the bakery opens, and the other customers arrive, Chamnan confidently uses English to tell what bread he and his grandfather want that morning.


*Tony’s Bread* is an Italian folktale which has been adapted by Tomie dePaola. The story contains a few Italian words, but the English translation is always provided. In an author’s note, dePaola shares that this tale is one of several that explain the origin of the Italian bread *panettone*. *Panettone* is a cake-like bread made with eggs, raisins, and candied fruit, and is associated with Milan, Italy.

In this version of the traditional tale, Tony is a baker in a small village outside Milano. While Tony is successful, he dreams of having a bakery in Milano and becoming a famous baker. Tony, a widower, has a daughter, Serafina, who is old enough to marry. But, as her three aunts note, Tony does not think any man is worthy of his daughter.

One day, Angelo, a wealthy nobleman from Milano, comes to the village and notices Serafina at her window. It was *love at first sight*. After talking with Serafina’s aunts, Angelo comes up with a plan to give Tony his dream of becoming a famous baker, and also to make Serafina his wife.

Angelo sets up a meeting with Tony, and then invites both Tony and Serafina to visit him in Milano. While in Milano, Tony fears his bread is too plain, and that he will never become a famous baker. Then Angelo and Serafina, who want very much to be married, tell Tony about all the ingredients he could put in his bread to make his bread really special. The bread is a success, Tony is famous, Angelo and Serafina are married, and all is well.

**Conclusion**

Bread has been referred to as the *staff of life*, and can almost be considered a *universal* food. Breads from various cultures may look different, and taste different and have different textures, but *everyone* eats bread.

Multicultural books about bread and bread making are appealing to children since they, too, eat bread. Helping children learn about various kinds of bread from various parts of the world is an informal and *natural* way to help them learn about other cultures. While there may be many differences between and among cultures, there are also things that people all over the world have in common. And one of these commonalities is that *Everybody Eats Bread*!

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