CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

... The teaching of literacy requires social and cultural analyses of literacy in contemporary society and, crucially, of how it is part of the lived experience and futures of children and their communities (Luke, 1993).

The collected articles in this portfolio act on Luke’s imperative by investigating the social and cultural dimensions of children’s everyday literacies and their impact on literacy curriculum and pedagogy. In brief, the articles, based on qualitative research using case study and theoretical-conceptual methodologies, constitute a reconceptualizing of both literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy for the purpose of social justice, in the context of early childhood education.

In relation to literacy curriculum, the research investigates the scope of an extended definition of literacy, one that incorporates the wide range of social and cultural practices which engages young students in making and taking meaning in their everyday lives. The articles document how current everyday practices increasingly involve visual texts, in combinations with oral and written texts and how together these practices comprise multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). A strong case is made for acknowledging multiliteracies and incorporating them into the preschool and primary school literacy curriculum. The inclusion of critical perspectives in the literacy curriculum is also advocated in order to develop students’ critical awareness of how everyday texts operate. The reconceptualisation of literacy curriculum is underpinned by a concern for social justice in education. The current literacy curriculum, it is argued, has detrimental effects on the literacy achievements of some students and has implications that extend into the ‘futures of children and their communities’ (Luke, 1993). How the reconceptualisation of literacy curriculum is treated in the portfolio articles is theorised in Chapter 2, the Overarching Statement.
While the articles examine the case for extending the literacy curriculum, they also address the concomitant need to consider how new literacies are learned and taught. This means that investigating literacy pedagogy is the other major theme of the portfolio. In particular, the majority of articles explore the use of drama pedagogy for learning and teaching literacies. Drama, in this context, is process-oriented role-play through which teachers and students collaboratively explore ideas and situations related to the school curriculum. Besides drama, the other key pedagogical strategy represented in the articles is that of explicitly teaching knowledge about language to young students. These two strategies for teaching literacy, the use of drama and the explicit teaching of language knowledge, provide the pedagogical focus for the portfolio articles. They are explained in detail within Chapter 2.

The use of the term ‘acting on’ in the title of this portfolio is meant to convey a number of dimensions of the work. In one sense the term ‘acting on’ signals the intention to take social action, to do something about, preschool and school literacy practices by advocating for two-fold change, firstly, in the way that literacy is defined and, secondly, in how it is taught. A second connotation of the word ‘acting’, its being almost synonymous with drama, is intended to acknowledge the strong emphasis on drama in the portfolio. Finally, in the drama lexicon, ‘acting’ is the highest level of identification with a role, one that can involve both presenting and performance (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p 34). In this sense, the use of the term in the title alludes to my role as re-presenter of the discrete works in this portfolio as one integrated product, after each has been previously published (presented) independently. The requirement to comment on my previously published work also explains the use of the first person perspective throughout the portfolio. The organization, explanation and presentation of the articles in this portfolio constitute one performance among the many possible ways that this work has been and could be performed.
1.1 Structure of the Portfolio

The portfolio is structured into five chapters as follows.

**Chapter 1: Introduction.** This chapter provides an overview of the portfolio content and its organization. Firstly, the structure of the portfolio is outlined to identify the contents of the five chapters and the additional supporting material. Next, an overview of the eight articles is presented in table form (Table 1). The origins of the themes in the collected articles are traced through a personal, professional history, before the themes are summarised in a diagram (Figure 1) and related to the articles in which they appear. A table that maps the themes across the eight articles concludes the introductory chapter (Table 2).

**Chapter 2: The overarching statement.** This chapter presents a detailed synthesis of the themes treated in the published articles that constitute the body of the portfolio. In summary, the synthesis encompasses the major themes and related issues, their relevance within the portfolio and to the broader education community. Consideration is given to the contributions the research makes towards building a new field of knowledge at the intersections of early childhood literacy education and educational drama.

**Chapter 3: Methodology.** This chapter explains the qualitative methodologies and methods employed in the research informing the articles, specifically, those of case study and theoretical-conceptual research. A table (Table 3) identifies the case studies undertaken for the research, noting the sites, participants and research methods used for each case study. The table also includes a summary of the theories and concepts that inform the articles and relates these to the articles in which they are employed. The specific methods of data collection and analysis used in the portfolio research are explained in this chapter.

**Chapter 4: Articles 1, 2 & 3** (See Table 1, page 6). The first three articles of the eight that make up the portfolio are grouped together in this chapter because their themes are conceptually different from those in the remaining five articles. While each of these three articles addresses an aspect of literacy, specifically,
multimodality, writing and spelling, they do not include the use of drama as do the remaining papers.

The first article explicates a framework of current, sociocultural perspectives on literacies in early childhood that informs all of the articles in the portfolio. It is concerned with rethinking literacy curriculum and explains how literacies are multimodal and are situated within social and cultural practices. The second and third papers in this chapter primarily address literacy pedagogy, specifically the strategy of explicit teaching of language knowledge. They emanate from a single case study in which beginning writers’ perceptions of learning to write were investigated.

The grouping of these three articles in one chapter reflects the taxonomy of the portfolio themes as they are classified and organised in section 1.4 of this chapter and, consequently, the order in which these themes are addressed in Chapter 2.

Each of the three articles in this chapter is preceded by a contextualising introduction that outlines: publication details; context; specific focus and significance of the article’s content; research methods and contribution to the field.

**Chapter 5: Articles 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8.** (Refer to Table 1, pages 6 and 7). The five articles that constitute the last chapter of the portfolio investigate literacy pedagogy, specifically the use of drama pedagogy to develop dimensions of literacy. Drama as a productive pedagogy is a major theme of two papers in this section and other themes examined through drama are: the four practices/resources literacy model; connecting home and school literacies; multimodal literacies; and critical and visual literacies.

Each of the five articles in Chapter 5 is preceded by a contextualising introduction that outlines: publication details; context; specific focus and significance of the article’s content; research methods and contribution to the field.

A list of **References**, for all portfolio sections excluding the published articles, follows Chapter 5. **Appendices** conclude the portfolio. Appendix A presents a list of the author’s recent publications as a requirement of the portfolio degree. The
remaining appendices, B to H, consist of documentation about the publication of the articles and their contribution to the field.

1.2 Summary of articles in the portfolio

The following table, Table 1, summarises information about the eight articles in this portfolio. The articles are ordered as they appear in the portfolio rather than according to their date of publication. This order follows the taxonomy of themes as outlined in section 1.4. It foreshadows the order in which themes are discussed in Chapter 2. Information presented in the table covers: the name of the article; details of the publication in which the article is published and the publication date as referenced in the portfolio; the focus of the article and the article’s significance as a contribution to the field. As I am the sole author for all articles, the author’s name is omitted from the table. All of the articles were refereed and the two book chapters were invited contributions, reviewed by both academic and commercial editors and selected from among competing invited contributions. All of the articles have been published, except for the final one (Martello, 2005) which has been accepted for publication (See Appendix G).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of article</th>
<th>Publication/date</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. 'Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood.'</td>
<td>Chapter 3 in <em>Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice.</em> Makin &amp; Jones Diaz, 2002a.</td>
<td>A socio-cultural approach to reconceptualising literacies in early childhood (EC) as multimodal and constituting everyday social practices. Extending the definition of literacy and the implications for teaching practice.</td>
<td>The chapter was an invited contribution to a groundbreaking text now used as required reading in teacher education courses. It was one of three chapters setting the theoretical framework for the book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. 'Talk about writing: Metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers.'</td>
<td><em>Australian Journal of Language &amp; Literacy.</em> Volume 24, Number 2, 2001a.</td>
<td>Reports on research with beginning writers and presents evidence that more competent writers have more metalinguistic awareness than less competent writers. Draws implications for teaching practice.</td>
<td>This article was published in a refereed, pre-eminent literacy journal in Australia. It continues to attract interest from other researchers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. 'Precompetence and trying to learn: Beginning writers talk about spelling.'</td>
<td><em>Journal of Early Childhood Literacy.</em> Volume 4, Issue 3, 2004a.</td>
<td>Traces the construction of ‘precompetent’ identities in beginning spellers through syllabus documents, teaching strategies and two students’ own explanations about spelling. Critiques pedagogy.</td>
<td>This article has been published by a new and prestigious international, refereed journal in early literacy studies. The journal encourages the reconceptualisation of early childhood literacies.</td>
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<td>4. 'Four literacy practices <em>rolled</em> into one: Drama and early childhood literacies.'</td>
<td><em>Melbourne Studies in Education.</em> Volume 43, Number 2, 2002b.</td>
<td>Maps key elements of drama onto the ‘productive pedagogies’ framework and explores drama contexts for developing four literacy practices. Investigates drama as productive pedagogy.</td>
<td>This was an invited article for a refereed, themed (Drama and learning) edition of the journal. It represents the early childhood perspective in the edition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of article</td>
<td>Publication/date</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Significance</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. ‘Drama: A productive pedagogy for multiliteracies in the early years.’</td>
<td>Chapter 2 in <em>The state of our art. NSW perspectives in educational drama.</em> Hatton &amp; Anderson (Eds.), 2004b.</td>
<td>Applies the productive pedagogy criteria to stages in a drama lesson with young students. Positions drama in this dominant discourse. Reviews the EC literature for multiliteracies through drama.</td>
<td>This was an invited chapter, placed second in the book because it suggests and enacts viable strategies for drama advocacy. This is a prestigious publication of the state drama body.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. ‘Drama: Bridging the gap between home and school.’</td>
<td><em>Playing betwixt and between. The IDEA dialogues, 2001.</em> Rasmussen &amp; Ostern, (Eds.), 2002c.</td>
<td>Addresses social justice concerns about lack of congruence between students’ home and school lives by illustrating how drama links home and school, validates student identities and promotes literacies.</td>
<td>This article was one of 32, of 87 submitted, to be published in the refereed anthology of research articles from an international drama conference (IDEA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ‘Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years.’</td>
<td><em>Australian Journal of Language and Literacy.</em> Volume 24, Number 3, 2001b.</td>
<td>Argues that drama is a critical pedagogy by linking key elements of drama to principles for critical literacy. Proposes early childhood drama activities as examples for critical awareness and literacies.</td>
<td>The article was invited for a themed edition (Critical literacy in early childhood) of a refereed journal. It is used by other tertiary educators and has attracted the interest of researchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ‘Connecting literacies: Multimodal and critical literacies through drama in the early years of school.’</td>
<td><em>The International Journal of Learning</em> 2004 Learning Conference Proceedings. 2005 (In press).</td>
<td>Explains the need for visual and critical literacies and investigates the use of drama to heighten young students’ understanding of images and their critical awareness of the illustrator’s intentions.</td>
<td>This article was presented at an international conference and accepted for publication after refereeing. It will receive an international readership online.</td>
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</table>
1.3 The emergence of themes in personal, professional experience

The understanding that there will always be new and changing views on what constitutes literacy and on how literacy should be taught is reflected in my own changing perspectives throughout the duration of the publications in this portfolio. The research shifts from a narrow focus on one particular mode of linguistic representation, that is, the written mode, to broader considerations of literacies in general, including the non-linguistic mode of images or visual representations.

Similarly, in the discussions about effective teaching strategies, I investigate both the explicit teaching of linguistic knowledge and the broader strategy of embedding literacy practices within meaningful drama experiences, as ways of developing students’ literacies. These are not presented as mutually exclusive approaches but represent the view that balance is important between the explicit teaching of new knowledge and the provision of learning contexts that are meaningful to young students. In moving between these different facets of literacy and literacy teaching the articles indicate the scope of my interests within this field, from the wide-angled view of curriculum definition to the closer focus on classroom practice.

While the different lenses adopted for the articles document changes in my research orientation over the period of writing they nevertheless reflect a consistent and coherent philosophy of education whose development can be traced through particular professional experiences. The educational themes that permeate the portfolio articles have their origins in teaching and scholarship that encompass changing approaches to literacy over the last thirty years, together with the emergence of drama as a teaching/learning method.

In constructing a dynamic (Anstey & Bull, 1996, p 52), personal theory of literacy, particular approaches to literacy have been seminal. Through studying educators like Britton (1976) and Barnes (1977) early in my teaching career, I developed an enduring conviction that spoken language has a central role in learning. The ‘whole language’ approach to literacy, informed by the work of Smith (1978), Goodman (1986) and Cambourne (1988), was influential in my theorising and teaching because in moving away from purely cognitive constructions of literacy (Anstey & Bull,
1996), construed then as reading and writing, it acknowledged the significance of children’s prior knowledge and social experiences. My adoption of whole language approaches indicated an early understanding that literacy teaching practices required social and cultural relevance if they were to be meaningful, and therefore effective, for students.

An approach associated with whole language, the ‘process’ approach to writing (for example, Graves, 1983), became part of my teaching practice because it also placed the students’ construction of meaning first, with writing conventions being addressed later through the processes of editing. However, research by the Australian genre theorists’ (for example, Christie, 1987; Martin, 1985; Rothery, 1989) was convincing in raising concerns that the process approach was inadequate for teaching a range of text types to meet a range of social purposes. Genre theory constituted a further movement away from purely cognitive theories of literacy by explaining the social functions of language and locating literacy texts in their sociocultural contexts. The genre approach to writing, and later to reading, also promoted the explicit teaching of metalinguistic knowledge as a necessary component of literacy education. Genre theory has informed my adoption of sociocultural approaches to literacy while accommodating my belief that explicit teaching is a necessary part of teaching even the youngest students, as long as it is at an appropriate level and embedded within meaningful contexts.

The provision of meaningful contexts and effective strategies for teaching literacy have been my long-term interests as evidenced in the major research projects I have undertaken. In one project, reported in a dissertation for the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy in Education Studies (Martello, 1980), I investigated literature, drama and media studies as contexts for primary students’ writing. Research for a Masters degree (Martello, 1989) examined genre-based approaches to teaching writing in terms of how they might complement, not replace, the process approaches that were prevalent in early primary schooling at the time. My interest in balancing approaches to literacy, and particularly to teaching writing, was the motivation behind funded research into students’ perceptions of learning to write in the first years of school. This case study research is reported on in the second and third articles in the portfolio, ‘Talk about writing: Metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers’
(Martello, 2001a) and ‘Precompetence and trying to learn: Beginning writers talk about spelling’ (Martello, 2004a).

Complementing the specialisation in literacy, my teaching and research have also been driven by a commitment to educational drama. This accounts for the major theme of drama pedagogy in the portfolio. My enthusiasm for drama was sparked off initially in a workshop given by Dorothy Heathcote, arguably the foremost pioneer in this field, when she visited Australia in the 1970s. It was later fuelled by opportunities to work with her while studying in the United Kingdom for a Bachelor of Philosophy degree. Heathcote is widely recognised as the instigator and inspiration behind the educational uses of drama now commonly referred to as ‘process drama’. This is drama where teacher and students improvise roles and situations together, with the emphasis on learning through the process rather than any product that might be developed. O’Neill explains that

... the primary purpose of process drama is to establish an imagined world, a dramatic “elsewhere” created by the participants as they discover, articulate, and sustain fictional roles and situations (O’Neill, 1995, p xvi).

Process drama has been a valued part of my teaching in preschool, primary school and tertiary institutions and I have researched it from a number of perspectives, as evidenced in the five portfolio articles that involve drama pedagogy for developing literacies.

One of the main attractions of drama for me is its ability to engage all students and optimise opportunities for learning. As well as appealing to my desire for student engagement in meaningful contexts for literacy learning, this inclusive quality of drama resonates with my concern for students who are disadvantaged in, and by, institutional education. This latter motivation was noted in my very first teaching report and is one that continues to motivate my teaching and research. I consider drama to be a powerful means of making education accessible to all students, but particularly to those whose out-of-school experiences and language clashes with the expectations of institutional schooling. My sensitivity to the injustice of inappropriate curricula and teaching methods propels me to seek educational strategies that accommodate the life experiences of all students and are accessible to
all. This accounts for the emphasis on social justice in education (Connell, 1993) that permeates the articles in this portfolio.

My interest in critical theory, particularly as applied to critical literacy (Knobel & Healy, 1998), stems from its contribution to social justice in education. A recurring theme in the portfolio articles is that of developing critical awareness with early childhood students about how texts are constructed to achieve the particular purposes of their authors. I associate critical literacy with social justice because it can alert children and adults to the attempts of others to manipulate them. Those who understand how words, images and sounds are chosen to portray a particular view of the world and to influence readers/viewers/listeners, are less likely to be manipulated by texts that are constructed to do just that. Research in the portfolio demonstrates that there are appropriate ways to introduce even very young children to a critical awareness about how texts work to achieve their creators’ purposes. Researching critical literacy has also rekindled an interest in visual literacy and led to the last article in the portfolio which investigates teaching young students about the grammar of images. This is a new research direction that has emerged during the period of writing for the portfolio.

Working with many early childhood and primary teacher-education students and academic colleagues, as I have done for many years, facilitates the collegial exchange of ideas about the interests and research recorded in the portfolio. While teacher-education students may benefit from my research, perhaps incorporating ideas into their own teaching practice with young children, they in turn contribute to my own knowledge and understandings. And in my own teaching and research with young children, the children offer much more than data for research. These interactions also enhance my connections to children’s current interests, their popular culture and to developments in information and communication technology. The portfolio themes owe a debt to the contributions of all of these students and colleagues.

The theoretical positions adopted in the portfolio articles, such as the sociocultural construction of literacy, critical literacy and drama pedagogy, are ones that open up possibilities for social action, in relation to both curriculum and pedagogy. In the
articles, I argue that these theoretical positions contribute to educational reform and to educational justice. By combining interests in literacies, in educational drama and in social justice, the portfolio of articles promotes literacy curriculum and teaching practices that can improve literacy outcomes for more young students. The articles touch on a range of educational issues but through all of them there is a strong central thread woven from the two themes of literacy curriculum reform and effective literacy pedagogy, realised especially through drama. These themes are located within the context of early childhood education and are propelled by a concern for social justice in education.

1.4 Outline of themes in the portfolio articles

In this section, the themes that are woven throughout the articles in the portfolio are identified and mapped onto the articles in which they are primarily treated. The themes reflect the personal and professional research interests described above. This section begins with a diagrammatic representation of the major and constituent themes that are integral to the whole portfolio (Figure 1). The diagram presents a statement of the aims of the portfolio which contains the two major themes of literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy. Each of these major themes is constituted by further themes (constituent themes) whose interrelationships are indicated in the diagram. The themes are attributed to the purpose of social justice in education and located within the context of early childhood education. Following the diagram the discussion outlines how the themes relate to the individual articles. A detailed synthesis of the themes and explanations of the concepts/terms used in this outline are presented in Chapter 2.
Figure 1: Themes in the portfolio

Statement of aims
Reconceptualising literacy curriculum & literacy pedagogy for social justice in early childhood education

Major theme
Literacy curriculum

Constituent themes
- Sociocultural perspectives
- Multiliteracies
- Home & school connections
- Visual & critical literacies

Major theme
Literacy pedagogy

Constituent themes
- Explicit teaching of language knowledge
- Drama pedagogy for literacies
  - Advocating drama
  - Drama as ‘productive pedagogy’
  - Drama for multiliteracies
  - Drama for home/school connections
  - Drama for visual & critical literacies

The initial statement in Figure 1 identifies the aims of the portfolio as the reconceptualization of literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy for social justice in early childhood education. This statement contains the two major themes of the portfolio, namely, literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy. Each of these major themes has a number of constituent themes. For the major theme of literacy curriculum the constituent themes are: socio-cultural perspectives; multiliteracies; home and school connections; and visual and critical literacies. For the major theme of literacy pedagogy, there are two pedagogical approaches that comprise constituent themes and these are, firstly, the explicit teaching of language knowledge and, secondly, the use of drama contexts for developing students’ literacies. The theme of drama pedagogy is further constituted by five themes, three of which reiterate the
literacy curriculum themes noted above, and the two additional themes of ‘advocating drama’ and ‘drama as productive pedagogy’.

The statement of aims in Figure 1 also contextualises the portfolio themes within early childhood education and recognises that the personal, professional motivation underpinning the choice of these themes is a concern for social justice in education. This concern is not categorised as a theme because it is construed as an underpinning rationale for the research into literacy curriculum and pedagogy and is integrated into discussions throughout the articles rather than treated as a separate topic. The terms ‘social justice in education’ and ‘early childhood education’ are explained in Chapter 2, as are the portfolio themes. This section outlines the articles in which the themes are primarily treated and summarises this information in Table 2 on page 16.

The first article in the portfolio, ‘Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood’ (Martello, 2002a) has a primary focus on literacy curriculum. It presents an overview of an extended literacy curriculum and offers guidelines for pedagogy to meet the demands of new literacy practices. This article is placed first in the portfolio because it summarises the rationale and scope for literacy curriculum reform and it introduces the four themes of sociocultural perspectives, multiliteracies, home and school connections, and visual and critical literacies.

In the second and third articles of the portfolio, ‘Talk about writing: Metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers’ (Martello, 2001a) and ‘Precompetence and trying to learn: Beginning writers talk about spelling’ (Martello, 2004a), the emphasis is on literacy pedagogy and, in particular, the explicit teaching of language knowledge to beginning writers. Both articles report on a single case study into the perceptions of beginning writers about learning to write. Data, gathered from the reflections of young writers of varying competence, was used to support recommendations for the explicit teaching of knowledge about language. In these articles I argue that this teaching strategy, when balanced with other recommended strategies, can be especially effective for those students whose out-of-school literacy experiences are not congruent with school literacy practices.
Current literacy pedagogy is also critiqued in the third article (Martello, 2004a) which presents a critical reappraisal of one prominent teaching strategy for spelling, that is, encouraging students to ‘try’ to spell. I argue in the article that, unless this strategy is accompanied by explicit teaching of spelling knowledge, it is unhelpful and an indication of constructing young literacy learners as ‘pre-competent’. Because the second and third articles in the portfolio (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) are the only ones concerned with the pedagogical strategy of explicit teaching of language knowledge they are grouped together with the first article to comprise Chapter 4.

Each of the remaining five articles in the portfolio investigates different benefits of using drama pedagogy for the development of literacies with young students. They also include discussion of the extended literacy curriculum and thus encompass both of the major themes of the portfolio. The theme of drama as a productive pedagogy in the fourth and fifth articles of the portfolio, ‘Four literacy practices roled into one: Drama and early childhood literacies’ (Martello, 2002b) and ‘Drama: A productive pedagogy for multiliteracies in the early years’ (Martello, 2004b), establishes that drama teaching strategies promote inclusivity and the engagement of all students. Because drama meets these and other criteria for productive pedagogy, I argue in these articles that it provides an enhanced learning environment in which content is significant to students’ lives and through which they can achieve learning of high intellectual quality. Both of these articles draw on drama case studies with young students to investigate how drama promotes the development of multiliteracies.

The sixth article, ‘Drama: Bridging the gap between home and school’ (Martello, 2002c), has a primary focus on literacy pedagogy while also incorporating themes related to literacy curriculum. In this article drama pedagogy is proposed as a means of achieving congruency between home and school literacy practices. Sociocultural perspectives, home and school connections and drama pedagogy are themes addressed in this article which acknowledges the everyday lives and out-of-school interests of students and asserts that these can be effectively connected with the school literacy curriculum through the use of drama.
The last two articles in the portfolio, ‘Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years’ (Martello, 2001b) and ‘Connecting literacies: Multimodal and critical literacies through drama in the early years of school’ (Martello, 2005, in press), have a primary focus on literacy pedagogy, specifically drama pedagogy, for the development of visual and critical literacies in early childhood. These articles also incorporate the major theme of literacy curriculum through its constituent themes of visual and critical literacies. As with all five articles investigating drama pedagogy, these articles combine both the major themes of literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy because they employ drama pedagogy to achieve the goals of the literacy curriculum.

In the following table, Table 2, the major themes and their constituent themes are mapped onto the eight articles to illustrate their presence across the whole portfolio.

**Table 2: Themes mapped onto portfolio articles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title of article</th>
<th>Major theme/s</th>
<th>Constituent themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood.</td>
<td>Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Sociocultural perspectives Multiliteracies Home &amp; school connections Visual &amp; critical literacies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Talk about writing: Metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy</td>
<td>Explicit teaching of language knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Precompetence and trying to learn: Beginning writers talk about spelling</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy</td>
<td>Explicit teaching of language knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Four literacy practices roled into one: Drama and early childhood literacies</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy &amp; Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Drama as productive pedagogy Drama for multiliteracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Drama: A productive pedagogy for multiliteracies in the early years</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy &amp; Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Drama as productive pedagogy Drama for multiliteracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Drama: Bridging the gap between home and school</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy &amp; Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Sociocultural perspectives Drama for home/school connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy &amp; Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Drama for critical literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Connecting literacies: Multimodal &amp; critical literacies through drama in the early years of school</td>
<td>Literacy pedagogy &amp; Literacy curriculum</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Drama for visual and critical literacies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this chapter the portfolio has been introduced by outlining its structure, published articles and themes. A brief explanation of the contents of the five chapters was followed by a summary of the published articles, indicating the order in which they are presented in the portfolio. The themes that are explored in the portfolio articles were first identified as they have emerged in the author’s personal, professional history before being summarised and mapped across the relevant articles. Tables have been provided to summarise the eight articles in the portfolio (Table 1, pp 6 & 7) and to identify and locate the portfolio themes across the articles (Table 2, p 16). The themes themselves were presented diagrammatically in Figure 1 (p 12). The following chapter provides a detailed synthesis of the portfolio themes and the articles.
CHAPTER 2

OVERARCHING STATEMENT

This chapter presents a synthesis of the themes that recur throughout the published articles in the portfolio. It explains the themes within a new, cohesive framework that unifies them and clarifies relationships among them. In summary, the synthesis encompasses the statement of aims, its major and constituent themes (see Figure 1, Chapter 1) and their relevance both within the portfolio and to the broader education community. Consideration is given to the contributions the research makes towards building an emerging field of knowledge at the intersections of early childhood literacy education and drama education.

2.1 Statement of aims: Reconceptualising literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy for social justice in early childhood education.

The articles presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this portfolio elucidate the aims of reconceptualizing both literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy, for the purpose of social justice in the context of early childhood education. The term ‘early childhood education’ commonly refers to the provision of care and education for children from birth to eight years of age within educational institutions such as childcare centres, preschools and primary schools. The participants in the research for the portfolio were predominantly children aged from five to eight years who were in the early years of primary schooling. However, some research involved preschoolers and the scope of discussions within the articles encompasses the whole early childhood age range.

The statement of aims for the portfolio identifies social justice for young students as the goal of literacy curriculum and pedagogy reform. The term ‘social justice’ is used specifically in the context of education, drawing on the concept of ‘social justice in
education’ (for example, Connell, 1993; Griffiths, 2003; Sturman, 1997). Griffiths explains the general concept of social justice as,

\[ A \text{ dynamic state of affairs that is good for the common interest,} \]
\[ \text{where that is taken to include both the good of each and the good of} \]
\[ \text{all ... It includes paying attention to individual perspectives at the} \]
\[ \text{same time as dealing with issues of discrimination, exclusions and} \]
\[ \text{recognition, especially on the grounds of (any or all of) race,} \]
\[ \text{gender, sexuality, special needs and social class (2003, p 54).} \]

The concept of social justice acknowledges that not only individual members but whole groups of people, as noted by Griffiths, suffer discrimination and exclusion from social and economic ‘goods’ such as recognition, education, health, employment, income and housing. Connell proposes several reasons for connecting the general notion of social justice with education, one compelling reason being that ‘schools are major social institutions, they have weight in the world’ (1993, p 12). Griffiths applies the same rationale in explaining the relationship between social justice and education,

\[ \text{Since education is part and parcel of the rest of the social world,} \]
\[ \text{social justice in general has a reciprocal relation to social justice in} \]
\[ \text{education (2003, p 44).} \]

Connell further explores the relationship between social justice in general and social justice in education and notes that formal education is a resource that is itself unequally distributed, with few people reaching the top levels of tertiary education (1993, p 12). He claims that there is ‘massive evidence of inequalities in chances of benefiting from the upper levels of education, depending on social background’ with, for example, the children of less educated fathers being far less likely to enter tertiary education than those whose fathers have a university degree (1993, pp 13, 14).

However, Connell argues that justice in education is not simply a matter of distribution or access to education but is equally related to what kind of education is being provided. He explains that,

\[ \text{Education is a social process in which the ‘how much’ cannot} \]
\[ \text{be separated from the ‘what’. There is an inescapable link} \]
\[ \text{between distribution and content (Connell, 1993, p 18).} \]

Connell introduces the concept of ‘curricular justice’ to highlight the importance of curriculum, that is, the content of education, to social justice in education. He claims that injustices are created for less advantaged students, such as poor or indigenous
students, because mainstream curriculum and pedagogy marginalises their experiences and knowledge (p25). Connell refers to the mainstream, socially dominant curriculum as ‘the hegemonic curriculum’ and argues that it ‘has a class history embedded in it and has always operated to include and exclude students on class lines’ (1993, p 18). To work towards social justice in education Connell proposes the adoption of an inclusive curriculum, one that he describes as ‘a counter hegemonic curriculum designed to embody the interests and perspectives of the least advantaged’ (1993, p44). The concept of ‘curricular justice’, in relation to literacy curriculum and pedagogy, describes the specific aim of this portfolio in attempting to promote social justice in education.

Within the educational field of literacy, educators have also recognised the central roles that curriculum and pedagogy play in achieving social justice. For example, Luke points out that school literacy curriculum and pedagogy impact on students’ future career and life choices and he calls for open examination of both.

*How schools, curricular programs and classroom instruction construct literacy for students and parcel out entry into different career and life trajectories needs to be defined and tabled for debate* (1993, p 6).

Each of the articles in the portfolio addresses, in different ways, the research directions suggested by Luke (1993) concerning the construction of literacy in educational programs. Explicit connections between the construction of literacy in early childhood and issues relating to curricular justice (Connell, 1993) are made in the articles. In writing the articles I adopt the premise that success in literacy eludes some young students because of inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy and that early failure in literacy has ramifications for future success in school and in life. I present arguments for a socially and educationally inclusive literacy curriculum and for effective pedagogy to engage and assist all students, especially those marginalised by unexamined school practices.

Alloway (1999) raises the issue of social injustice in early childhood literacy education in Australia by highlighting the impact of inappropriate curriculum upon the ‘least advantaged’ students. Using results of national literacy testing she notes the low literacy achievements of particular groups of students, namely, students from
low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, boys and those from language backgrounds other than English (1999, p3). She suggests that, rather than adopting the usual focus on individuals to explain these disappointing results, educators need to be examining,

… what is wrong with curriculum and pedagogies that produce such uneven results – in identifiable social demographic patterns – from early periods of life (Alloway, 1999, p 4).

Along with many other educators, I take Alloway’s point that ‘mainstream curriculum’ and ‘taken-for-granted practices’ are implicated in the systematic patterns of literacy failure and that they deserve the ‘critical gaze’ of teachers and educators (1999, p 5). Alloway’s research locates causes for early literacy problems within school practices and her work has had a seminal influence on my theorising about literacy and my literacy practice. Other influential researchers whose major Australian studies have informed my theorising are Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn (1995), Cairney & Ruge, (1998) and Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, (1998). A key finding reported by all of these researchers is that a mismatch between home and school literacy practices adversely affects some students and results in poor literacy progress. Findings from these studies, and others, inform the research directions in the portfolio. They confirm the need to reconceptualise both literacy curriculum and pedagogy and endorse reform in terms of social justice in education.

2.2 Major theme: Literacy curriculum in early childhood education

One contribution of the research in this portfolio towards reconceptualizing literacy curriculum, is in consistently advocating and applying an extended definition of literacy, that is, one which recognises the social and cultural dimensions of a broad range of children’s home and community literacy practices. Defining literacy in this way extends on definitions that view literacy primarily as reading and writing, and sometimes talking (Anstey & Bull, 1996, p 39).

The article entitled ‘Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood’ (Martello, 2002a) is positioned first in the portfolio because the extended definition of literacy that is explicated in it encompasses the literacy focus of each
article in the portfolio. That definition of literacy uses the concept of modes (discussed later in this chapter) to identify the modes of representation, that is, spoken, written, visual, and critical that constitute an extended definition of literacy. These components of literacy are also recognised by many contemporary literacy educators (for example, Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2004; Makin & Jones Diaz, 2002) and are incorporated into English syllabus definitions of literacy (for example, Board of Studies NSW, 1998). All of these components of literacy, particularly the less commonly recognised ones of visual and critical literacies, are taken up and explored in the research studies for the portfolio.

Reference to a broad, inclusive definition of literacy is reiterated throughout the articles. Reporting research that disseminates an updated construction of literacy, including the everyday practices of a majority of people, is one means of addressing the inequality in literacy outcomes noted by Alloway (1999). Another way to do this is by demonstrating how young students’ home literacy practices can be incorporated into the preschool and early school curriculum. The latter is a concern of the research reported on in the first article (Martello, 2002a) and it is also addressed in the paper entitled ‘Drama: Bridging the gap between home and school’ (Martello, 2002c). Both articles focus significantly on strategies that utilise children’s familiar resources, their interests and their popular culture for developing literacy. Providing early childhood teachers with explanations of current literacies and literacy teaching increases the possibility of literacy success for a broader range of students than is currently the case.

Arguments for literacy curriculum reform given in the articles cite the negative effects of a hegemonic literacy curriculum as a convincing rationale for change. In the first article (Martello, 2002a) I establish arguments against restricted literacy practices that emanate from a limited definition of literacy. This is necessary because many early childhood practitioners still adhere to earlier definitions that limit literacy to formal, paper-based reading and writing, and sometimes including talking and listening. Classroom practice and assessment that is based on such a view disadvantages students whose home practices do not include regular experience with the print-based literacies of reading and writing or whose home language is not standard English. These students, who may be more familiar with visual and oral
texts, perform poorly in comparison to students who have regular experiences with print and who speak the dominant language and the standard dialect. The same comparisons mean that they are also assessed unfavourably by teachers and deemed to have difficulties with literacy. Thus an inappropriate literacy curriculum and its associated assessment contribute to the patterns of failure reported by Alloway (1999) and warrant the reforms suggested by the portfolio research.

In contrast to narrow definitions of literacy, current perspectives acknowledge a much wider range of practices and define literacy, for example, as:

*talking, listening, viewing, reading, writing, drawing and critiquing, in English, in languages other than English, and in sign language (Jones Diaz, Beecher, Arthur, Ashton, Hayden, Makin, McNaught & Clugston, 2001, p 22).*

Extended definitions of literacies, such as this one, reflect the reality of peoples’ everyday lives as they make and take meaning in practices such as using computers, watching television and playing digital games. The articles in this portfolio adopt this extended definition of literacy as an integral part of the alternative curriculum that is proposed in discussions of the themes of sociocultural perspectives, multiliteracies, connecting homes with schools and visual and critical literacies.

### 2.2.1 Literacy curriculum: Sociocultural perspective

A sociocultural perspective underpins the movement towards more inclusive definitions of literacy and is therefore an integral theme in the portfolio articles. In this view literacy is seen as emerging from the social and cultural practices in which individuals participate as members of families and communities (Anstey & Bull, 1996, pp 150 – 153). Since families and communities differ, a diverse range of literacy practices, arising from different sociocultural contexts, is recognised from this perspective. Consequently, literacy is construed as social practice because ‘literacy practices are embedded in the practices of our everyday lives’ (Winch et al, 2004, p xxxi). Viewed from a sociocultural perspective literacy is also acknowledged as a social construct that changes with time and culture. For example, Luke describes
literacy as ‘a dynamic, evolving social and historical construction. It is not a fixed, static body of skills’ (Luke, 1993, p 4).

In treating literacy as social practice the emphasis is on practices, particularly on those social practices that involve engagement with literacy texts, rather than on seeing literacy purely as a cognitive achievement as it has been constructed in the past (Makin & Jones Diaz, 2002, p 9). This view of literacy promotes the inclusion of all students’ home and community practices as legitimate components of literacy. It also negates deficit views of education that locate literacy problems within individuals, either in terms of cognition or social background.

Sociocultural perspectives on literacy have their roots in the theories of Bourdieu (1991), and others, who opened up to scrutiny the relationships between language and power, including how institutions, such as schooling, adopt particular socially-constructed discourses that privilege some groups and marginalise others (Jones Diaz, Beecher & Arthur, 2002, p 307). Bourdieu portrays literacy as ‘cultural capital’ that can be converted into wealth and status, so long as it is the valued version of literacy. As noted previously, the literacies developed by some students are not valued in many preschools and schools and these students consequently struggle to learn the unfamiliar, book-based literacies taught in these settings. Jones Diaz et al (2002) point out that the orientation of much early childhood education ignores the experiences of some children.

_Literacy practices of early childhood settings most often represent those of dominant Anglo middle-class monolingual families, giving meaning and voice to their experiences and silencing other experiences_ (2002, p 307).

Sociocultural approaches to literacy are explained in the first article (Martello, 2002a) and adopted throughout the portfolio. The first article documents the different ways in which young children make and take meaning depending on their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Acknowledging and valuing students’ familiar social and cultural practices is one important means of making school literacy relevant and accessible to more students, especially those whose home practices often fall outside of narrower views of literacy. The explication of sociocultural
perspectives is a recurrent theme in the portfolio and one that offers possibilities for social justice in education.

2.2.2 Literacy curriculum: Multiliteracies

The concept of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) framed within a sociocultural perspective helps to explain the use of the plural term literacies in the portfolio articles as it conveys the diversity of home and community literacy practices that are part of children's social and cultural lives. Additionally, multiliteracies refer to practices that involve multimodal texts, explaining why the concept of modes is pivotal in the portfolio articles as it is in some current views of literacy. Kress (1997, p 7) describes modes as ways of making signs (a combination of meaning and form) using different materials, such as sound, bodies (to speak or gesture) or: graphics. The concept of modes of representation (Kress, 1997; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) was introduced in the first article (Martello, 2002a) to explain that meaning-making is not only achieved through language but also through images, sounds, gestures, use of space and combinations of these modes.

Employing the concept of modes was important for the purposes of the portfolio because modes account for all of the forms of representation that currently occur in children’s lives, including those involving technology, such as digital games, computers or mobile phones, along with the linguistic modes of speech and writing. Modes also provide a way of describing and emphasising the gap between home and school experiences since school literacy practices primarily focus on linguistic modes of representation. The concept of modes recognises the variety of texts with which children engage, especially digital and computer-based texts, where combinations of spoken, written, visual, aural and spatial modes are commonly integrated to make meaning.

The concepts of multiliteracies and modes provide a complementary framework for the extension of literacy definitions because they help to describe the complexities of meaning-making and meaning-taking in children’s everyday literacy practices. The multimodal nature of multiliteracies is acknowledged in the portfolio articles and the
modes identified and researched are the linguistic modes of spoken and written language, the visual mode, combinations of these modes and critical modes. Critical modes are explained as

... both multimodal and metamodal as they employ the materials of other modes in reflexive processes of critique, analysis and transformation of the other modes (Martello, 2002a, p 38).

Categorising literacy practices according to modes, as useful as it is, is not yet widespread among early childhood literacy educators. One contribution of the portfolio research is to widen its appeal through explanation and application.

Another related concept used in the articles is that of technoliteracy. This concept clearly associates new forms of literacy with new and emerging forms of technology (for example, Lankshear, Snyder & Green, 2000; Hill & Broadhurst, 2002). The concept is relevant to the portfolio themes because it recognises the multimodal literacies that are involved in the everyday use of technological devices such as digital phones, games platforms and computers. In my research, multiliteracies, modes and technoliteracies are central concepts that contribute to the arguments for viewing literacy as social practice. These concepts also assist in identifying content currently omitted from school literacy practices but which also constitutes new content for an extended literacy curriculum.

2.2.3 Literacy curriculum: Home and school connections

A research theme of this portfolio that emanates from the recognition of multiliteracies is that of identifying and making connections with students’ home and community literacy practices. Knowledge of what constitutes their out-of-school practices and interests means that these can be built on in prior-to-school and school contexts.

In the early childhood field research indicates a need for better connections between home and school practices in order to engage students from all social groups in school literacy learning (for example, Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Marsh & Millard,
Based on this research, educators recommend increased recognition of home and community literacy practices. The research highlights the detrimental effects of narrow definitions of literacy and of the lack of congruency between many students' home and school literacy practices. For example, Jones Diaz and Makin argue that

... no literacy program is effective if it marginalises some children, if it ignores the home and community experiences that children bring to early childhood programs ... (2002, p 4).

Their research asserts that, by recognising and using their home practices, educators assist all students, including those currently disadvantaged by school curriculum and practices, to build new literacies on familiar foundations. Other researchers point out that investigating the nature of children's popular culture can enhance the quality of preschool and school literacy work. Marsh and Millard appeal for a sensitivity to children's culture that will allow teachers to create more powerful language work from the currency of pupils' own preoccupations (2000, p 2).

The children's popular culture interests on which research for this portfolio was based were: superheroes, television programs, digital games and literature. Other themes of interest to young children, such as the home and families, were also topics within the research (for example, Martello, 2002c).

In proposing that connections between home and school literacy practices offer benefits to young students, several justifications are offered in the articles. As well as the argument that this benefits those students for whom school literacies are unfamiliar and difficult, linking home and preschool/school is considered as a way to engage students in literacy learning through topics already of interest to them. Additionally, the issue of identity is associated with opportunities for young students to demonstrate their out-of-school knowledge and skills (Martello, 2002c). Particularly for those children from non-dominant linguistic, social or cultural backgrounds, the sense of self-worth developed in supportive home environments can be promulgated through positive connections between school and home. The affirmation of social and cultural identities through connections between home and preschool/school is considered in the research.
The theme of making connections between children’s homes and preschool/school is present throughout the portfolio as it constitutes one of the ways in which literacy curriculum can be reformed and extended. Connections with children’s homes are also seen as an important means of making school literacies relevant and accessible to all students, making this an issue for social justice in education. Research in the portfolio, through the examination of relevant classroom practices, also contributes to the research advocating home and school connections.

2.2.4 Literacy curriculum: Visual and critical literacies

The recognition of multiliteracies and of the diverse literacy practices that are part of everyday life, in children’s homes as well as in educational institutions, as legitimate components of literacy has been identified as a premise of the research in this portfolio. Educational authorities also recognise a wide range of literacy practices, as noted in official definitions of literacy since the 1990s. Throughout Australia, syllabus definitions of literacy acknowledge new and emerging literacy practices by including the visual mode of representation, that is, the components of viewing and creating images, in definitions of literacy (for example, Australian Education Council, 1994; Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1998). In New South Wales, as in other states, the primary school syllabus definition of literacy not only includes ‘viewing’ as a component of literacy but also notes the importance of critical literacy:

*The syllabus emphasises the development of critical literacy. This involves students in questioning, challenging and evaluating the texts that they listen to, read and view (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, p 5).*

It is these two recently recognised components of literacy, the visual and critical literacies, that are investigated in the portfolio research and particularly in the drama studies reported on in Chapter 5. This research focus is considered necessary because there is no evidence of the widespread teaching of these components of literacy in early childhood education despite their inclusion in official syllabus documents such as those noted above. Visual and critical modes of representation are components of
literacy that require further research and the dissemination of teaching strategies relevant to early childhood education. The research in this portfolio contributes to the research base in these areas.

**Visual literacy**

In relation to visual literacy the research studies emphasise the prevalence of images in both new and old literacy practices. Some of the many forms in which images are present in children’s lives are documented in the articles which note examples such as pictures in storybooks, children’s own drawings, moving and still screen images, photos or the three-dimensional models that children make from plasticine and from sand (for example, Martello, 2002a). The presence of images as a way of making and taking meaning in children’s social and cultural lives is portrayed as ubiquitous and therefore deserving of recognition as an important component of literacy learning and teaching.

Because of the prevalence of images in contemporary culture the inclusion of visual literacy in extended literacy definitions is relatively easy to justify, however its implementation in early childhood classroom practice often falls short of the theoretical possibilities. Although early childhood teachers and students interpret images, with or without accompanying written text, as part of literacy teaching, the intention is usually to understand the meaning of the image or of any associated written text. The aims of visual literacy go further than this and require that teachers and students explore the ways in which images are constructed to achieve the particular purposes of the people who create them. It is this aspect of visual literacy that the portfolio research investigates. Callow (1999) explains that experience with viewing images does not equate with knowledge about how images work:

> Unlike written text, some of the patterns and structures of visual images remain implicit and unexplored by many experienced viewers, young and old (Callow, 1999, p 2).

The meanings that young children take from their popular culture texts are informed as much by the images and sounds as by the spoken or written language that constitute a multimodal text. For example, meanings are made through the
illustrations in books and through the drawings of characters in animated cartoons
and films, where line and colour clearly differentiate between the ‘goodies’ and
‘baddies’. Because images contribute so much to the meanings in young children’s
popular culture, the research in this portfolio acknowledges the need for students to
learn the ‘grammar’ of images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), that is, to learn how
particular features, such as angles, colour or layout, contribute to the meaning of an
image.

In the image-based research reported on in one article (Martello, 2005), the features
of colour and line in a book’s illustrations were examined by young students.
Students’ notice was particularly drawn to contrasts in the use of these features and
to the meanings associated with these contrasts. For example, students noticed that
the dark colours of a large old house and overgrown garden indicated the lonely life
of the old recluse who lived there while the neighbouring house was depicted in
bright colours, mirroring the happy existence of its inhabitants. For the seven and
eye eight year old students involved in this research, accessing the grammar of images
was not a difficult task, embedded as it was within engaging, narrative-based drama.
Their insightful responses demonstrated both a facility borne of many experiences
with images and the ability to understand how specific features of images work to
make meaning. In the article the point was made that more young students could be
given the same opportunities to develop visual literacies.

The research case study provided cogent arguments for more widespread teaching
about images to all students, including very young ones. The case for more focus on
visual literacy in the early years was seen as especially compelling in the current
globalised and commercialised communications climate. For example, the research
noted the prevalence of images in advertising that targets young children as
consumers of ‘global cultural commodities’ (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) such as
popular toys, games, snack foods, clothes and merchandise associated with their
popular culture. This context highlights the contribution that visual literacy makes
towards social justice by assisting all students to develop awareness of the
constructedness of images and consequently decreasing their chances of being
manipulated by them. The need for both teachers and students to understand the ways in which images work to influence viewers was strongly argued in this article which contributes to knowledge about the teaching of visual literacy in the early years of school.

**Critical literacy**

A majority of the studies in the portfolio address the concept of critical literacy either as the central topic or peripherally and sometimes it is linked with visual literacy (for example, Martello, 2005). In general, the critical literacy research addresses: rationales for critical literacy, explanations of critical literacy, explanations of drama as pedagogy for critical literacy and examples of classroom practice to develop critical literacy through drama in early childhood education (Martello, 2001b; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2005).

The articles that incorporate the theme of critical literacy are underpinned by the thesis that it is not only possible but it is also important to teach critical literacy to children in their early childhood years. The emphasis on this theme is also aimed at increasing the amount of teaching of critical literacy because such teaching is not yet widespread. Critical literacy is important because, as with visual literacy, it develops students’ awareness of how texts operate so that they are less likely to be manipulated by them. As well as investigating the teaching of critical literacy to young students, the collection of articles itself is aimed at critiquing and transforming literacy curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education. This intention has been identified as part of the central theme of the portfolio through the use of the term *reconceptualising*. Reasons for the strong emphasis on critical literacy and for critiquing literacy teaching practices are explored in this section.

Resistance to critical literacy work with young children in preschool or early school settings is often based on the assumption that it is developmentally inappropriate and therefore too difficult for this age group. Demonstrating that critical explorations can be implemented in appropriate ways with young children is one of the goals of the portfolio research. Researchers such as O’Brien and Comber (2000) have published
examples of successful critical literacy teaching with young students. Their work demonstrates the validity of their claim that

... critical literacy is not a developmental phenomenon to be reserved for senior school children, but can be an integral part of everyday practice with young children, which many children first experience at home and in their communities (O’Brien and Comber, 2000, p 157).

Research in the portfolio contributes to this position by providing accessible rationales for the teaching of critical literacy with early childhood students and by describing examples of such teaching.

In providing a rationale for critical literacy, the research draws on the work of Knobel and Healey (1998) who concede that there are many different views on what constitutes critical literacy and the results it seeks to achieve. To address this lack of consensus Knobel and Healy identify the similarities among a range of approaches to critical literacy, thus clarifying the topic and making it more accessible to teachers. My research (Martello, 2001b) summarises four characteristics of critical literacy identified by Knobel and Healy, namely, the need for critical questioning, the view of language as social practice which is never neutral or value-free, the need for analysis and evaluation of texts and practices, and the aim of social justice and change through transforming taken-for-granted practices (Knobel & Healy, 1998, pp 2 - 4). The use of Knobel and Healy’s framework for critical literacy not only serves the purpose of disseminating their work to an even wider audience but also provides the framework for an analysis of drama as a critical pedagogy (Martello, 2001b).

The articles also offer suggestions for developing critical awareness through drama experiences with early childhood students. For example, in one article a variety of ideas for adopting critical perspectives in drama experiences are suggested (Martello, 2001b) and in another is a demonstration of how seven and eight year old children critiqued the intentions of a book’s illustrator with considerable insight (Martello, 2005).
Another approach that the portfolio research takes to promoting critical literacy is to encourage the critical examination of teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding literacy. The analysis and transformation of taken-for-granted social and language practices is an objective of critical literacy (Knobel and Healy, 1998) and my research applies such a critique to established curriculum content and teaching practices. The first article in the portfolio (Martello, 2002a) presents arguments for examining teachers’ views of what constitutes ‘literacy’ citing these as the theoretical underpinnings, whether explicitly or implicitly held, of literacy teaching practice. In this article, an exposition of children’s current literacy practices is used as evidence of changes in their everyday literacies, changes that warrant the critique and transformation of literacy curriculum and teaching practice in early childhood education.

Another research study in the portfolio that directly applies the processes of critique and analysis investigates the common literacy teaching practice of encouraging young students to ‘try’ to spell (2004a). The research examines the socially constructed concept of ‘childhood’ and how views of childhood have influenced teaching practices, often in ways not recognised or challenged by the educational community. The teaching strategy under critique is claimed to construct young students as ‘precompetent’ and, as a consequence, to have a negative effect on the teaching of spelling. This article constitutes a critique of a teaching practice that has otherwise remained largely unexamined. It also exemplifies some of the processes of critique and analysis and, through demonstration, encourages further analysis and reform of literacy curriculum and teaching practice.

The theme of critical literacy is significant in the portfolio for a number of reasons. It is incorporated into a majority of the articles because it is seen as a valuable, recent addition, along with visual literacy, to an expanding and inclusive literacy curriculum for early childhood education. The value of teaching critical literacy lies in the development of students’ analytical skills and their awareness of the constructedness of all the texts they encounter at home and at school. The articles discussed in this section also address the issue of teachers critically examining their own beliefs,
whether about the meaning of ‘literacy’ or of ‘childhood’, as a necessary step towards challenging entrenched curriculum and taken-for-granted teaching practices. Taken together these approaches to critical literacy in the portfolio contribute arguments for the more widespread adoption of an extended literacy curriculum that includes critical literacy. They also assist in the pursuit of social justice in education by challenging and attempting to transform current literacy curriculum and teaching practices.

2.3 Major theme: Literacy pedagogy in early childhood education

As well as supporting the premise that literacy curriculum will be renewed by adopting an extended view of literacy, the research in this portfolio is equally concerned with identifying effective pedagogy for literacies, particularly in early childhood education. As outlined in Chapter 1, there are two main pedagogic approaches considered in the articles. These are, firstly, the explicit teaching of language knowledge and, secondly, the use of drama for developing young students’ literacies.

The explicit teaching of language knowledge is investigated as a strategy for literacy teaching in the second and third articles of the portfolio (Martello, 2001a & 2004a). The research project informing these two articles was undertaken with young students in the first years of school and the recommendation of explicit teaching was clearly directed towards the teaching of these students and not towards the teaching of preschooleers. Therefore, this major theme relates only to the teaching of literacy in the context of the first three years of primary school.

The second pedagogic approach investigated in the research is that of using drama as a teaching and learning strategy for literacies. The research for this major theme involved both preschoolers and students in the early school years. The last five published articles in the portfolio (Martello, 2002b; 2004b; 2002c; 2001b; 2005) investigate the use of drama to provide productive contexts for the development of literacies. Each of the two broad pedagogic approaches, of explicit teaching of
language knowledge and of drama as literacy pedagogy, is discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1 Literacy pedagogy: Explicit teaching of language knowledge in the early school years

Understanding how language works and knowing how to use it in ways that are valued in schooling and in the broader community are goals of education systems throughout Australia (for example, Board of Studies NSW, 1998). While it is equally important to argue for changes in what is valued, as the research in this portfolio does, it is clearly an issue of social justice that all students, particularly those groups currently under-achieving in literacy, gain access to the language of power within the culture. One effective way of doing this has been shown to be through the use of explicit teaching strategies to teach knowledge about language and how it is used to achieve different social purposes. My own research supports this premise and is informed by earlier research in this area.

In discussing her work with Aboriginal students, one of the groups identified by Alloway (1999) as under-achieving in literacy, Malin asserts the benefits of strategies that,

*assist teachers to initiate students into the culture of power through the explicit teaching practices that expose students to the knowledge and interactional styles of the majority culture (1994, p 323).*

Munns, Lawson and Long (1998) draw on the same argument for explicit teaching in their monograph devoted to improving literacy outcomes for ‘poor kids’ another group they argue is disadvantaged by school literacy curriculum and practices. They report on the successful use of the ‘Curriculum model’ (Metropolitan East DSP, 1989) which includes explicit teaching as part of a cycle of practices that also builds links with students’ real world knowledge and teaches the language knowledge needed to achieve their social goals (Munns, Lawson and Long, 1998). Munas et al.
recommend the use of explicit teaching about language knowledge and demonstrate it as a successful strategy in their examples of classroom practice.

Munns et al. recommend explicit teaching about language as part of their broader aim of changing curriculum and ‘challenging existing pedagogies’ (1998, p 11). These researchers, like Connell (1993), locate the causes of injustice in education within the curriculum and teaching strategies. They also specifically encourage teachers to pay heed to the school and community context as one important way to achieve social justice. One strategy for acknowledging the community context is demonstrated in the portfolio by research that promotes connections with students’ home interests (for example, Martello, 2002a, 2002c).

Two articles in the portfolio (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) culminated in conclusions that ‘challenged existing pedagogies’, as advocated by Munns et al. (1998), and recommended the use of explicit teaching of language knowledge. These recommendations were based on my own research and on research into the literacy teaching practices prevalent in many early years classrooms throughout Australia (for example, Anstey, 1998; Edwards-Grove, 1999). In particular, the latter research highlights the way some current practices contribute to educational disadvantage for students because of a lack of explicitness.

Both Anstey (1998) and Edwards-Grove (1999) analysed literacy lessons and found that the teachers’ stated literacy objectives were often obscured by other, competing objectives within the lesson and therefore were not understood by the students. These researchers used their evidence to call for more explicitness in literacy teaching. Ludwig and Herschell (1995) also analysed school literacy lessons and, even when compared to parents’ guidance with homework, found them lacking in the specific language knowledge that could benefit students. These research findings informed my conclusions about my own research into the perceptions of beginning writers (Martello, 2001a & 2004a). That research revealed marked differences in the students’ knowledge about language and, specifically, in their use of metalinguistic terms and their knowledge about spelling. Literacy teaching strategies were
implicated in my interpretation of results and recommendations for the use of explicit teaching, supported by the above research, were made as part of the conclusion to each article.

The portfolio articles that recommend explicit literacy teaching practices (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) draw on further research to identify another, related cause of unequal literacy outcomes among students. This involves the sociocultural backgrounds of students and recognises that students are positioned differently in relation to school literacy knowledge, teaching methods and language (Anstey & Bull, 1996). Research informs us that conscious knowledge about language is often the kind of knowledge that middle-class students acquire or are taught in their homes and communities (for example, Luke, 1993). Parents with a high level of education tend to scaffold and tutor their children in the uses of language and the knowledge about language that schools and society value. This congruency between home and school contributes to success in school literacy for these children. However, for students from sociocultural backgrounds with language and knowledge that is not congruent with school practices, the effects of school literacy curriculum and teaching methods often result in educational injustice. According to Anstey & Bull,

*Those students who did not come from homes where these types of activities took place were not only coping with the demands of new content but also with the different behaviours expected of them, thus they were disadvantaged from the beginning and often remained so (1996, p 107).*

Research in the portfolio supports these findings. Evidence from the case study reported in two of the articles indicated that gaps between students in their literacy competence were identified in their first year of schooling and remained largely unchanged in their second and third years of school. The implication drawn from the research was that teaching had made little impact on the initial gap between students. The research also provided evidence that differences in literacy competence between students can be related to their knowledge about language and concluded that explicit teaching about language and how it works could help to redress this inequality in literacy outcomes.
The explicit teaching of language knowledge is a theme in the portfolio because it is beneficial for all students and is an important means of avoiding educational disadvantage for some students. Educational disadvantage is perpetuated through the implicit literacy teaching methods discussed earlier as well as through a literacy curriculum that fails to address the diversity of students’ language uses and knowledge. Explicit literacy teaching is also recommended by education authorities (for example, NSW Department of Education and Training, 1998) and is recognised as an effective way to ensure that all students have ‘access to powerful ways of knowing and powerful literacies’ (Munns et al, 1998). Articles in the portfolio expound the pedagogical strategy of explicit teaching of language knowledge as one appropriate teaching method for achieving social justice in early childhood education.

2.3.2 **Literacy pedagogy: Drama pedagogy for literacies in early childhood education**

As explained in the previous section, explicit teaching about language is recommended in the portfolio as a teaching strategy to assist all young students in the development of their literacies. However, in the published articles this recommendation is always accompanied by the proviso that explicit teaching be embedded in engaging and meaningful learning contexts. In the five articles that constitute Chapter 5 of the portfolio, drama is advocated as a uniquely effective way of providing such learning contexts. The portfolio therefore makes a substantive case for the use of drama as an effective pedagogy for implementing the literacy curriculum. In the following sections, the themes that are treated within the drama-related articles are explained. Some of these themes reiterate those for the major theme of literacy curriculum because drama is proposed as the pedagogical means of incorporating these themes into the literacy curriculum. The drama-related themes explained in this section are: advocating drama; drama as productive pedagogy; drama for multiliteracies; drama for home/school connections and drama for visual and critical literacies.
2.3.2.1 Advancing drama

In the five articles in Chapter 5 of the portfolio, case studies and theoretical/conceptual research are used to argue that drama pedagogy contributes significantly to literacy success for young students. However, it is also acknowledged that drama is currently undervalued and underused by teachers in general and by early childhood teachers in particular. These articles draw on my research and other published research into the uses of drama pedagogy to create a strand that both advocates for drama and acknowledges a need for continued education about its benefits.

Gavin Bolton’s seminal, early theorising about drama was useful (Martello, 2001b & 2005) for explaining one of the clearest distinctions between drama and other teaching strategies, that is, that drama can engage the emotions and lead to the kind of understanding he describes as a

\[ \text{... shift of appraisal, an act of cognition that has involved a change of feeling, so that some facet of living is given (however temporarily) a different value (Bolton, 1979, p 41).} \]

Bolton claims that educational drama shares this learning potential with children’s early pretend play and says that, for both, the learning ‘has to be felt for it to be effective’ (1979, p 31). However, it is precisely this ‘feeling level’ that Bolton says is ‘either not recognised or ignored by teachers’ (p31). This lack of understanding by teachers, of how the emotional dimension contributes to learning in children’s spontaneous dramatic play and in classroom drama, may partly account for the under-valuing of both in education. Bolton’s theorising provided reminders in the articles (Martello, 2001b & 2005) of drama’s origins in children’s spontaneous dramatic play and of its uniqueness as a teaching and learning method that engages the emotions with the intellect. Highlighting these features contributes to current understanding of how drama pedagogy increases opportunities for literacy learning in early childhood education.
The connections between young children’s self-motivated, dramatic play and classroom drama are clear and have been explained by researchers over many years (for example, Bolton, 1979; Warren, 1999). However, drama is still undervalued and underused in early childhood education, a point reiterated in my research (Martello, 2002b, 2001b & 2005). Researchers have found that only a minority of early years teachers use drama (Warren, 1999; Mackay, 2001) and early years curriculum statements do not generally acknowledge its potential. In Australia, Warren points to a lack of recognition of educational drama among early childhood teachers who she says understand the importance of play in education but are

... less likely to realise that it can lead to planned drama experiences which can extend children’s knowledge and understanding (1999, p3).

One possible reason for the lack of understanding about drama’s potential is that teacher education in the arts in general, and drama in particular, is minimal in both pre-service and in-service courses. As Ewing points out,

... there has been little professional development available for teachers in Australia who wish to develop their understanding of arts teaching in primary schools (2004, p 35).

In the context of early primary schooling in New South Wales, the teaching of Drama has recently been made mandatory within the Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2000), effective from 2006, though this applies only to state schools and comes after a ‘particularly long and frustrating battle’ for drama advocates (Anderson, 2004, p 6). Disappointingly, before compulsory implementation has even begun, drama is under threat of losing its mandatory status as detailed in the discussion paper ‘Defining Mandatory Outcomes in the K – 6 Curriculum’ (Board of Studies NSW, 2004). This paper proposes that, within the Creative Arts syllabus, only selected outcomes in Visual Arts and Music will be mandatory while all Drama and Dance outcomes will be optional. This proposal provides further evidence of the lack of understanding of Drama pedagogy and of Drama as an art form.
My research points out that it is not only in Australia that drama practitioners have to fight for its recognition in education. Hendy and Toon (2001) lament the omission altogether of drama in a recent revision of the early years curriculum in the United Kingdom. They reiterate Warren’s point, quoted earlier, that links are not made between children’s spontaneous dramatic play and educational drama. Hendy and Toon attribute the omission of drama from the curriculum to the fact that, in the literature,

There has been very little crossover between early years practitioners writing about early years pretend play and those writing about ‘process drama’ (Hendy & Toon, 2001, p 71).

The research noted above and my own data point to the continued need for further research and publications exploring and disseminating the many benefits of using drama in the classroom. This is especially relevant in the early school years when young students are still enjoying their own, self-motivated explorations through dramatic play and respond with obvious enthusiasm to any classroom drama activity, educationally effective or otherwise. The strong emphasis in this portfolio on advocating a place for drama in early years literacy teaching is a positive reaction to the current absence of drama in many early childhood classrooms.

2.3.2.2 Drama as a ‘productive pedagogy’

In one of the portfolio articles (Martello, 2004b) an explicit strategy is proposed for advocating the wider use of drama. This is to continually update the currency of drama by demonstrating how drama contributes to the dominant educational discourses of the day. In the article this was acted on, firstly, by identifying the quest for ‘productive pedagogy’ and the teaching of ‘multiliteracies’ as current, pre-eminent, educational concerns in Australia and, secondly, by demonstrating what drama has to offer in both of these fields. The five drama-oriented articles in the portfolio (Martello, 2002b; 2004b; 2002c; 2001b; 2005) implement this strategy for drama advocacy. These research studies investigate either how drama is a ‘productive pedagogy’ or how multiliteracies are developed through drama or they investigate both of these propositions.
The current concern to identify effective pedagogy is a significant theme in the drama research. At least two state education departments in Australia, those of Queensland and New South Wales, have developed initiatives in the past three years to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Two of the portfolio articles (Martello, 2002b & 2004b) are based on the models adopted by these states, that is, ‘Productive pedagogies’ by Education Queensland (Education Queensland, 2002) and ‘Quality teaching’ by the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET, 2003). My research investigates the common origins, similarities and differences in the two models. By utilising the Productive pedagogies framework I demonstrate how the key elements of drama work within drama lessons to achieve many of the criteria that define productive pedagogies. One of the stated aims of identifying productive pedagogies is to

... make a difference for different groups of students, including those usually regarded as disadvantaged (Lingard, Mills & Hayes, 2000, p 102).

By identifying drama as a productive pedagogy the research assists in establishing drama’s potential for achieving social justice in education through making the literacy curriculum more accessible to all students.

The Productive pedagogies framework (Education Queensland, 2002) employed in the articles lists twenty criteria that characterise productive pedagogies and groups these into four categories. My research explicitly links most of the twenty criteria to drama concepts or strategies that assist in their development. The discussion demonstrates how drama experiences draw on and integrate elements from the four major categories of Intellectual quality, Relevance, Supportive classroom environment and Recognition of difference. Significantly, the application of the productive pedagogies framework to examples of drama reveals that many of the criteria, across all four categories, were met in one drama lesson. The implication drawn from this was that quality teaching and learning can be achieved through regular drama experiences.
Establishing drama as a ‘productive pedagogy’ or as ‘quality teaching’ enables drama advocates to enter the dominant discourses of the moment in education in Australia. This is not to suggest that other arguments in support of the wider uses of drama are redundant but to state that drama as a teaching and learning method has a new forum for dissemination and discussion. This portfolio contributes to the field of drama because it reworks what we know about drama in the light of new pedagogical frameworks and creates opportunities for more educators to recognise its potential. Connecting drama to another dominant discourse, that of multiliteracies, also highlights its efficacy as pedagogy for developing valued curriculum content.

2.3.2.3  Drama and multiliteracies

There are a number of ways in which this research demonstrates that drama provides effective contexts for literacy teaching and learning. In the first of the drama-related articles (Martello, 2002b) this is achieved by associating drama with the pre-eminent literacy theory of Luke and Freebody (1999) who construct literacy as social practice and acknowledge the existence of multiliteracies. Their ‘four resources model’ of literacy is widely accepted by Australian literacy educators. Luke and Freebody maintain that, to be fully literate, a person needs to engage in four ‘families of practices’ that are centred on code-breaking, meaning-making, text using and text analysing (1999). Their framework recognises the multiple facets of literacy and their inclusion of critical literacy, or, in their terms ‘text analysing’, makes their work central to the construction of literacy adopted in this portfolio.

In one article (Martello, 2002b) the research demonstrates that drama pedagogy promotes the integration of the four families of literacy practices within contexts that promote their use and have meaning for young students. This application of Luke and Freebody’s (1999) framework to early childhood drama experiences constitutes one of very few published efforts to explicate such connections. This research therefore contributes significantly to building this intersecting field of drama and literacies and is clearly integral to the aims of the portfolio.
While advocating the use of drama by connecting it with a pre-eminent literacy framework, the portfolio research simultaneously demonstrates drama’s effectiveness in achieving a central goal of literacy teaching by developing students’ ability to communicate in a variety of modes of representation. The interrelated concepts of modes and multiliteracies are integral to the portfolio research, as noted in section 2.2.2, and are applied extensively through the drama studies in Chapter 5. Each of the drama articles documents students’ use and creation of texts in spoken, written and visual modes through drama experiences, and some of these articles also include examples of students engaging with critical literacy (for example, Martello, 2002b, 2004b). The concepts of modes and multiliteracies provide a comprehensive framework within which to analyse the literacy practices that occur in the drama experiences. This framework was instrumental in qualifying the extent to which drama is an effective pedagogy for literacy learning.

Another dimension of multiliteracies incorporated into the drama studies is that of technoliteracies. In one article (Martello, 2004b) the concern to acknowledge the validity of technoliteracies (see section 2.2.2) led to a literature survey for examples of early childhood drama experiences that involved the use of technology, such as the internet and email. It is integral to all of the portfolio research that uses of digital communication media are recognised as legitimate literacy practices. In this article, it was argued that using these technologies within a drama framework requires the user to read and create meanings through multimodal texts that combine modes such as spoken and written language, with images and sounds. Through collating instances where young students engaged with technology to understand and create meanings within a drama framework, the research demonstrated that drama experiences allow teachers and students to capitalise on the multiliteracies inherent in current communication and information technologies (Martello, 2004b).

The drama studies demonstrate that, in drama contexts, the students’ uses of multiliteracies occur in an integrated way, as they do in everyday life, because drama replicates the social and cultural contexts in which real literacy practices are situated. Along with the previously noted power of drama to engage the emotions, the drama
articles emphasise that drama imbues the creation of new texts with enthusiasm and commitment, sometimes missing from other classroom literacy exercises (Martello, 2005). In relation to young students, the portfolio research claims and demonstrates that drama is effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of multiliteracies because it generates meaningful opportunities for engagement with literacy practices. In articulating these connections, the research provides a strong rationale for the use of drama contexts, especially with students for whom conventional approaches to school literacy are not engaging or successful (Alloway, 1999).

2.3.2.4 Drama for home and school connections

Another significant way in which drama pedagogy is credited with alleviating educational disadvantage is by facilitating connections between students’ home interests and their school literacies. As noted earlier, connecting the home and school lives of young students is a theme in the portfolio, one which requires implementation through suitable pedagogy that uses and builds on students’ interests and popular culture.

A concern of the research in the portfolio was to select and validate teaching strategies that are as engaging for the students as their popular culture interests are. This poses a dilemma, as educational settings must compete with the high production values of many of the games, television programs and films popular with young children. There is a danger that what students once found interesting can be made stale, overfamiliar or even boring through the use of decontextualised classroom exercises or other repetitive practices, such as reading a passage and answering ‘comprehension’ questions about it. Therefore the choice of pedagogy for the task of connecting home and school is a crucial one that is addressed by this research.

Recognising the importance of connecting homes with schools, the articles strongly recommend the use of drama as an appropriately engaging pedagogy for the task. This recommendation was informed by investigations of drama teaching that engaged students’ feelings by working with subject matter from their home lives. Considered to be of intrinsic interest to students, topics such as popular digital games
(Pokemon), children's television programs (Widget), superheroes, students' homes and houses and their family genealogy were explored through drama case studies. These studies illustrated how rich, drama contexts can bridge the gap between home and school while simultaneously addressing the educational goals of literacy learning.

Drama is described in the articles (Martello, 2002c) as an ideal pedagogy for reinforcing students' sense of self-worth by validating their out-of-school lives and skills within the school context. Drama is explained as ideal for this task

... because one of its primary aims is to use students' own interests and knowledge as the basis for exploration of ideas and situations. Teachers with knowledge of drama, particularly of its focus on process, use it to affirm students' current state of understanding and to develop these understandings further (Martello, 2002c).

When students' own understandings about their homes, popular electronic games or television programs, for example, were used in this research as the basis for drama they provided strong motivation for students to engage with the experiences. Once engaged in the drama the research showed that students not only explored the topic itself to develop new understandings but they also used a range of literacy practices connected to the roles and situations in the drama.

The drama case studies aimed at bridging home and school (Martello, 2001b, 2002c, 2004b) demonstrated how school beginners engaged in a variety of literacy practices such as talking, listening, reading, writing and viewing while enjoying drama experiences based on their popular culture. As noted previously, an additional benefit of using drama to link students' home practices to school literacy practices is that it encourages participation by students who are less familiar with school literacy practices. Therefore this is one important way to work towards social justice for those students who are disadvantaged by never having their own home practices validated within the school. Demonstrating the usefulness of drama pedagogy in this regard fulfils the portfolio aim of striving for social justice in education through inclusive teaching strategies. These articles contribute to the literature in the fields of
both drama and literacy by explaining the ways in which drama operates to connect home and school and to promote multiliteracies.

2.3.2.5 Drama and visual literacy

Another theme in the portfolio is the use of drama pedagogy to develop young students’ visual literacy. The research into visual literacy is underpinned by the belief that the prevalence of images in children’s daily lives, at home and at school, makes it imperative that young children are taught about how images make meaning. I have argued elsewhere (2.2.4) that, although images have been a part of literacy education for some time, visual literacy for young school students demands a more critical edge to deal with the preponderance of images in their popular culture texts and in advertising that targets children. Consequently, one case study in the portfolio investigates features of the ‘grammar of images’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), specifically, colour and shape and how these contribute to the meaning of an image. The significant contributions of drama pedagogy towards developing visual literacy in early childhood education can be explained in the context of this investigation and can be justified on a number of grounds.

One way in which drama pedagogy facilitates visual literacy is in enabling students to understand images by drawing on intertextual meanings. In the article with a major focus on visual literacy (Martello, 2005) students’ drama experiences, collectively construed as a drama ‘text’, were strongly-related to the images (book illustrations) the students later examined. Because the themes and characters developed through the drama were intentionally similar to those depicted in the images, the drama experiences enabled intertextual understandings to inform students’ analysis of colour and line in the images. This investigation suggested that drama, by providing parallel texts, makes intertextual meanings available to students and facilitates their understanding of how related images are constructed. Theorising the role of drama in this way contributes to a more widespread understanding of drama’s effectiveness as pedagogy for multiliteracies.
Another benefit of drama pedagogy in the development of young students’ visual literacy emanates from the choices that students make in constructing the drama text. The case study noted above (Martello, 2005) suggests that the students’ first-hand experience of making choices to create the drama text predisposed them to understand the choices made by the author/illustrator in constructing the images. In reporting the case study I conclude that the drama assisted the young students to understand, via the analogous creation of a drama text, that images are also constructed by people to achieve particular purposes. This understanding is central to visual literacy and was demonstrably assisted through the use of drama pedagogy in the case study research.

Drama pedagogy further contributes to the development of visual literacy because it provides an engaging means to explore both two and three-dimensional images. For example, two-dimensional images, such as photographs or artworks, can be used to instigate drama explorations and can be better understood as a result of such explorations. The relationship is reciprocal as images inform drama work and are informed by the drama. The drama case study under discussion (Martello, 2005) was based on an illustration from a literary text. Extrapolating from the illustration of a large, gloomy house a central character was developed (‘Who might live in this house?’) and a range of engaging drama experiences were generated from this interpretation. In comparison with less imaginative classroom practices with images in the early years, such as the ‘picture talk’ or comprehension exercise, interpreting an image to explore its possible implications through drama is more intrinsically interesting to young students. This case study demonstrates that drama pedagogy facilitates the study of images and is, in turn, enriched by the use of images.

Other kinds of two-dimensional images are created by students within authentic drama contexts. For example, in a drama about setting up a restaurant, students have reasons to create texts, such as, a floor plan, a menu or an advertisement, all of which are multimodal texts using images and language. Or, similarly, a drama about devising a new digital game could require students to design the characters or a cover
for the DVD. In drama contexts, the analysis of real-world images informs the design of the drama-related images. Such intertextual comparisons can increase students’ understandings about the grammar of visual texts and how grammatical features contribute to meaning.

The use and study of three-dimensional images is another means by which drama assists in the teaching of visual literacy. Because drama involves the bodily enactment of ideas, students create three-dimensional representations, either moving or still, as a regular component of drama experiences. For example, the drama strategy of the ‘still image’ (a frozen moment representing a photograph, sculpture or the like) involves understanding how body posture, facial expression or positioning relative to other participants, affect the meanings made by the image. Still images created in drama contexts can be compared with images from advertisements or elsewhere as a means of understanding how these commercial images construct their effect.

The article discussed above (Martello, 2005) offers evidence that drama pedagogy facilitates the development of visual literacy in early childhood education. It documents how drama enables students to draw on intertextual comparisons and to understand that an author makes choices in the construction of a text, whether this is a drama narrative or an image. The case study exemplifies an authentic drama context which generates opportunities for the use and creation of a variety of two and three-dimensional visual texts. This research makes a significant contribution to knowledge about the specific role that drama pedagogy plays in developing visual literacy for young students.

### 2.3.2.6 Drama and critical literacy

The use of drama to develop critical literacy with young students is a theme present to varying degrees in all five of the drama-oriented articles in Chapter 5 of the portfolio, however it is the predominant concern in two particular articles (Martello,
These articles explore the propositions that drama promotes the development of critical literacy because it is itself a critical pedagogy, because it involves role-taking allowing for multiple perspectives and because the construction of a ‘multimodal drama text’ through drama pedagogy exemplifies the constructedness of all texts. Arguments for each of these propositions are elaborated in the articles and synthesised in this section.

In one article (Martello, 2001b) I argue that drama is a critical pedagogy, one through which texts and social practices can be interrogated, analysed and transformed. In justifying this claim, explanations centre on how each of the defining elements of drama, that is, role, tension, focus, symbol, reflection and disengagement (Ewing & Simons, 2004) operates to promote the key characteristics of critical literacy (Knobel & Healey, 1998) discussed earlier in section 2.2.4. The publication of this analysis, explaining these relationships between drama and critical perspectives in the context of early years literacy education, stimulate wide interest (See appendix F) and has made a substantial contribution to the intersecting fields of drama and critical literacies.

To further explain how drama facilitates critical literacy the articles highlight the potential of role-taking and the adoption of multiple perspectives (Martello, 2001b & 2005). I argue that, through adopting different roles, or stepping into the shoes of others, students begin to understand how a different world-view or perspective might result from different experiences. The adoption of multiple perspectives, particularly on the same situation, assists the role-taker to consciously reflect on a character’s motivations and to compare these with her/his own. Through drama, students can begin to understand that the social practices and the language associated with particular characters reflect the characters’ life circumstances and contribute to their world-view or beliefs.

Such explorations of characters’ motivations, actions and language are an integral part of classroom drama work and provide a ready-made entry to critical literacy. The articles explain how the analysis and evaluation of ‘the taken-as-natural
relationships between language and social practice’ are imbued with purpose within the drama context, thereby employing several elements of critical literacy approaches as summarised by Knobel (1998, p 92). By analysing the connections between drama and critical perspectives in this way, the proposition that drama is a critical pedagogy is supported in the drama articles.

Another, perhaps unique, contribution of the portfolio research towards establishing that drama pedagogy promotes critical literacy for young students is in conceptualising drama experiences as the creation of new texts, specifically ‘multinodal drama texts’ (2004b). This term encapsulates the gestures, language (spoken and written), images and use of space that, in combination, create the resultant drama text when students and teachers engage in process drama (2004b). Because drama is usually improvised these texts are described as unique and transitory because they evolve out of the particular pretext, roles and situation of the drama. However, the creation of new drama texts is achieved through a series of choices, both within and out of the drama, and this transparent exercise of choice can contribute to understandings that all texts are constructed, a key tenet of critical approaches. This explication of drama experiences as themselves being multimodal texts constitutes an original feature of the research and contributes an additional dimension to the theme of drama pedagogy for the development of critical literacy.

An important proviso articulated in the articles is that, despite its obvious potential, drama’s usefulness as a critical pedagogy depends upon whether teachers adopt a critical orientation towards the drama work and know how to guide young students towards critical awareness of the issues inherent in the particular drama (Martello, 2001b). To assist in this task, I devised a set of questions for use by teachers wanting to develop students’ critical literacy through drama pedagogy. The questions focus on roles that might be played, and replayed differently, depending on changes in the character’s motivation, attitude, language and action (Martello, 2001b). These questions encourage teachers to capitalise on the use of role-playing from multiple perspectives for the purposes of critical literacy. They also emphasise relationships of power between participants and the consequences of alternate courses of action. In
essence, the set of questions emphasises using drama strategies for ‘the interrogation of a character’s worldview, values and beliefs’ (Martello, 2001b).

In devising the set of questions outlined above, I acted on Knobel’s warning that simply adopting different character perspectives does not constitute a critical approach, unless it is clearly linked with the critical assumption that ‘texts are never neutral, but are social constructions’ (1998, p 94). The questions, by focussing on the many choices that contribute to creating a particular drama, can lead to the understanding that, by making different choices at any point, students create different drama texts. Developing drama around these questions is intended to guide teachers and their young students towards understanding that all texts, not just their own, are constructed to achieve the particular purposes of those who create them and that they are not neutral or value free.

In the drama case study reported in the final article (Martello, 2005) the teacher promoted a critical perspective with seven and eight year old students by emphasising the choices that contributed to their multimodal drama text. The case study, also discussed in the previous section, had a dual focus on visual and critical literacy. Critical awareness was encouraged when students examined the choices the illustrator (Graham, 1992) had made in constructing images in a literary text. The students’ understandings that the illustrator had made deliberate choices, for particular purposes, were evident in responses such as the two below about contrasts in the book’s frontispiece and endpaper images:

‘Because he (Bob Graham) wanted to do a different look before he did the end picture where the plants were cleaned up.’

‘Because he wanted to get a big change for the end.’

(Martello, 2005, in press)

Responses such as these, from seven and eight year old students, constitute some of the evidence that critical literacy, and visual literacy, were achieved through the use of drama pedagogy.
Through the analysis of drama case studies, the articles in Chapter 5 present a variety of arguments to substantiate the claim that drama is a critical pedagogy that promotes the development of critical literacy in early childhood students. The arguments centre on the use of role-taking for the adoption of multiple perspectives and on the choices that contribute to the construction of drama texts, as means by which drama facilitates critical awareness and contributes to critical literacy. Because there are few published explorations of such connections between early childhood education, critical literacy and drama, the articles in Chapter 5 make a substantial contribution to the literature.

Overall, the drama-related research in the portfolio demonstrates that drama is a productive pedagogy for developing multiliteracies, for connecting students’ home and school lives and for developing visual and critical literacies. Providing evidence that drama is an effective pedagogy for developing multiliteracies in a connected and holistic way, is an important theme in the portfolio.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter constitutes a new theorising of the aims and themes of the portfolio which are organized into a cohesive framework (Figure 1, Chapter 1). The new framework both unifies the portfolio themes and also clarifies the interrelationships among them. This framework superimposes an additional layer of meaning onto the collected articles and validates their presentation as a coherent body of work. The chapter follows the organization of the themes within the framework. It presents a synthesis of the aims, and the major and constituent themes that are identified in the framework and maps these themes across the eight published articles in the portfolio.

The chapter explains all of the components of the statement of aims of the portfolio which is ‘the reconceptualization of literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy for social justice in early childhood education’. The early childhood education context is defined and the underlying purpose for the research is theorised as social justice in
education. Each of the major themes of literacy curriculum and literacy pedagogy is examined through a number of constituent themes. For the theme of literacy curriculum, the four constituent themes of sociocultural perspectives, multiliteracies, home/school connections and visual and critical literacies are described as important to the portfolio because they encapsulate new approaches to literacy and contribute to the portfolio aim of a more socially and educationally inclusive curriculum.

In addressing the major theme of literacy pedagogy, the two pedagogical approaches of explicitly teaching language knowledge and of using drama pedagogy are summarised with reference to the articles in which they are treated. Both strategies are credited with promoting literacy success for students currently under-achieving in literacy and, therefore, with contributing to social justice in education. The theme of drama pedagogy is further traced through a number of constituent themes that reiterate those for literacy curriculum (multiliteracies; home and school connections; visual and critical literacies) and include the additional themes of ‘Advocating drama’ and ‘Drama as productive pedagogy’.

Reasons for advocating drama, particularly in early childhood education, are explored in the chapter and these reasons also contribute to the strong emphasis on drama pedagogy in the portfolio. While learning through play is well-understood by early childhood practitioners, the closely connected processes of learning through drama are not. The five articles about drama pedagogy explicate many advantages of using drama to implement literacy curriculum. This makes a considerable contribution towards increasing the acceptance of drama, particularly in the light of a reported lack of such published research in the early childhood field.

*There is without doubt a dearth of articles and books written by drama practitioners solely for those working with preschool and early years children... very little has been produced specifically for early years settings that explains how drama could be used in a developmental curriculum (Hendy & Toon, 2001, p 71).*

The articles in this portfolio address this shortcoming in the early childhood education literature. They advocate extending the literacy curriculum and using drama to teach the components of this extended literacy curriculum, especially visual
and critical literacies. The major focus on drama is reflected in the use of the term ‘acting on’ in the title of the portfolio and, as stated in Chapter 1, this is also meant to indicate a concern to ‘do something about’, or to change, current literacy curriculum and practice in early childhood education. The investigations into early childhood literacy curriculum and pedagogy contribute to the attempts to

... remake literacy in primary classrooms for children in ways that increase and enhance children’s powerful participation in literate culture (Luke, 1993, p 4).

This portfolio extends this endeavour to include the crucially important preschool years when children’s identities as learners are first influenced by the constructions of literacy and the literacy practices of educators in early childhood settings. As noted in the first article of the portfolio, when early childhood educators extend their definitions of literacy and their literacy teaching practices to include children’s multimodal home literacy practices, they can ‘strengthen the pathways into literacy for all children’ (Martello, 2002a). In this portfolio, drama is offered as an effective pedagogy to implement connections between homes and schools and to teach an inclusive literacy curriculum. Furthermore, the portfolio research itself builds connections between the fields of early childhood literacy education and drama education and contributes substantial new theorising to the intersection of these fields.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research methodology and the specific research methods used in the portfolio research. The research employs a qualitative paradigm incorporating the two qualitative approaches of theoretical-conceptual research and case study research. Each approach is explained and mapped onto an overview of the published articles (Table 3). The specific methods employed in the case studies for data collection and analysis are then explained and exemplified through the relevant case studies.

3.1 Research paradigm: Qualitative

The research projects for the portfolio articles fit within a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative approaches aim to understand social phenomena in their natural settings and allow the researcher to interpret data with a degree of subjectivity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Research undertaken for this portfolio interprets the social phenomena of planned teaching/learning interactions between young students, teachers and the researcher in early childhood educational settings. While the subjective nature of interpretations in qualitative approaches is construed by some as a fault, it is strongly defended by qualitative researchers who assert the need to interpret their evidence. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) report that qualitative studies are commonly used in education, among other disciplines, and they attest to the important role of interpretation for researchers using these approaches:

Qualitative researchers believe that the researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of what he or she sees is critical for an understanding of any social phenomenon (2001, p 147).

Another reason for the choice of qualitative research for this portfolio is its accommodation of the researcher as both participant in and observer of the social
phenomena under study. As a participant researcher in the teaching and learning experiences investigated, my ability to interpret these events was enhanced. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) in their account of the historical development of qualitative research, which they claim is often centred on the changing role of the researcher, acknowledge the continued centrality of this participant status in their generic definition:

*Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible* (2003, p4).

For the research in this portfolio, the world of early childhood classrooms, in early primary schools and preschools, were sites for the interpretation of practices relating to the teaching and learning of literacy and drama. As researcher, I was part of the investigated experiences, either as teacher/researcher or as observer/researcher of classroom experiences collaboratively planned with other teachers. Roles specific to each study are explained within the research articles. My roles as both participant and observer were integral to the research, as was the requirement to situate the research within the natural settings of preschool and primary classrooms. These features of the studies reported in the portfolio characterise them as qualitative research.

### 3.2 Research methodologies: Theoretical-conceptual research and Case study research

The portfolio research employs two types of methodology, namely ‘theoretical-conceptual research’ (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999) and case study research (Yin, 2003a & b). Each of these methodologies is explained in the following sections and their application across the published articles is summarised in Table 3. These methodologies were found to be complementary and appropriate for achieving the purposes of the research that informed the collected articles.
While the specific purpose for the research reported in each article differs, the overall purpose of the portfolio research was to contribute to the expansion of theory (Yin, 2003b, p10) in relation to how literacy is perceived and how it might most effectively and fairly be taught. Using theoretical-conceptual research in combination with case studies provided the most effective mix of methodologies for this purpose.

### 3.2.1 Theoretical-conceptual research

Theoretical-conceptual research is also known as ‘library research’, ‘secondary research’ or ‘research synthesis’ and refers to the use of existing texts, such as theoretical texts, policy and syllabus documents among others, as the principal data base for research (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999, p36). Knobel and Lankshear explain that, in this type of research,

> The teacher-researcher subscribes to theories which s/he makes explicit and uses to inform decisions about concepts and themes used in the analysis, the selection of texts and the interpretations to be made based on the analysis (1999, p39).

This explanation accurately describes my approach to the research studies within the portfolio where sociocultural and critical literacy theories are explicitly adopted and applied in the analyses of the pedagogical strategies of explicit teaching and the use of drama. Sociocultural and critical literacy theories have also influenced the choice of related concepts, such as modes, multiliteracies and home/school congruency, applied in the analysis of the drama case studies discussed in the following section of this chapter. Additionally, the theory of drama in education (eg Bolton, 1979) informs the choice of drama case studies as well as decisions about how they are conducted, sampled and interpreted.

Theoretical-conceptual research is identified as a distinctive methodology of the portfolio research, and not construed simply as a necessary component of case study research, because, in some instances, it is the only research method employed. In particular, the first article in the portfolio (Martello, 2002a) relies entirely on this method of research. As summarised in Table 3, the data for this article was drawn from theories, concepts and numerous case studies derived from the related
literature. Similarly, theoretical-conceptual research methods provide the data for a major section of the fifth article (Martello, 2004b) in which the data-base of drama/literacy experiences was drawn from the literature to illustrate the theoretical proposition that drama facilitates multiliteracies.

As well as being the only research strategy in these instances, theoretical-conceptual research also contributes to the theoretical understanding required for case study research. Yin (2003a) says that reliance on sound theoretical concepts is ‘one of the most important strategies for completing successful case studies’ (p 3). As case studies were used extensively in the research for this portfolio, theoretical-conceptual research was essential. However, for its sole use in some instances it warrants recognition as a distinct research method.

3.2.2 Case study research

Case studies were used extensively in the research for the portfolio. Yin (2003a) points out that the case study method is appropriate ‘when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context’ (p 4) as was true of the portfolio research which investigated particular, literacy teaching and learning phenomena within classroom contexts. Elsewhere Yin explains that case studies are the appropriate research strategy when,

A “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (2003b, p 9).

The case studies undertaken for this portfolio (see Table 3 in this section) investigated how particular variables within literacy teaching/learning experiences can facilitate literacy learning for young students. The specific ‘how’ question/s investigated in each of the case studies are recorded in Table 3. Yin’s criteria noted above (2003b, p9) further confirm the appropriateness of case studies for the portfolio research because the classroom events examined were contemporary and, apart from the initial planning of teaching/learning experiences, the data resulting from student responses were outcomes outside the control of the researcher.
The case studies that inform the research in this portfolio are summarised in the following table (Table 3). Each case study is identified by: a number and title; the site and participants; the investigation question/s; the research methods; portfolio articles in which the research is reported; and the theories and concepts that are related to the case study in the published articles.

The case studies, undertaken specifically for the portfolio research and summarised in Table 3, fall into two groups differentiated by whether or not drama was involved. Only the first literacy case study, ‘Learning to write’, does not include drama, so it alone comprises the first group and the five drama case studies, numbered 2 to 6 in the table, constitute the second group of case studies. Each grouping of case studies is outlined in this section and further information about individual case studies is provided in the following sections of this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study title</th>
<th>Site &amp; Participants</th>
<th>Investigation Question/s</th>
<th>Research Methods</th>
<th>Articles reporting on this case study</th>
<th>Theoretical-conceptual research: Theories &amp; Concepts employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple case studies cited from the literature</td>
<td>Multiple sites and participants cited from literature</td>
<td>How do diverse, multimodal, social-cultural practices affect children’s literacies and educational practices?</td>
<td>Theoretical-conceptual research (T-C research)</td>
<td>Martello, 2002a (Article 1)</td>
<td>Sociocultural perspectives on literacies; Modes &amp; multimodality; Home/school congruency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Learning to Write</td>
<td>Primary school Student cohort from 1st to 3rd year of school (longitudinal) School teachers Author/researcher</td>
<td>How do beginning writers perceive the processes of learning to write? How does the use of metalanguage relate to writing competence?</td>
<td>Interviews, audiotaping, observations, documents, content &amp; linguistic analysis, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2001a (Article 2) Martello, 2004a (Article 3)</td>
<td>Metalinguistics Explicit teaching Constructions of childhood Precompetence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pokemon drama</td>
<td>Primary school Kindergarten (K) students Student teachers Author/researcher</td>
<td>How is literacy learning facilitated through drama contexts with popular culture content?</td>
<td>Documents, observations, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2002b (Article 4) Martello, 2001b (Article 7)</td>
<td>Productive pedagogies Four literacy practices Drama pedagogy Home/school congruency Critical &amp; Multi-l literacies Drama pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Family tree drama</td>
<td>Primary school Year 2 students Student teachers Author/researcher</td>
<td>How is literacy learning facilitated through drama contexts with relevant content?</td>
<td>Documents, observations, content analysis, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2004b (Article 5)</td>
<td>Productive pedagogies Multiliteracies Drama pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Widget drama</td>
<td>Primary school K &amp; Year 1 students Author/researcher</td>
<td>How is literacy learning facilitated through drama contexts with relevant, popular culture content?</td>
<td>Documents, observations, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2002c (Article 6)</td>
<td>Home/school congruency Multiliteracies Critical literacy Drama pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Superhero drama</td>
<td>Preschool setting Preschoolers (3 &amp; 4yrs) Author/researcher</td>
<td>How is literacy learning facilitated through drama contexts with popular culture content?</td>
<td>Audiotape recording, observations, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2001b (Article 7)</td>
<td>Drama pedagogy Critical literacy Popular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Image-critique drama</td>
<td>Primary school Year 2 students Author/researcher</td>
<td>How are visual and critical literacies facilitated through drama contexts?</td>
<td>Audiotape recording, observations, document and image analysis, interpretation T-C research</td>
<td>Martello, 2005 (Article 8)</td>
<td>Visual &amp; critical literacies Drama pedagogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ‘Learning to write’ case study provided the data for two of the published articles (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) and investigated a cohort of school beginners’ perceptions of how they were learning to write. The writing practices that students engaged in at home and at school were canvassed through interviews, documents and observations conducted at the school. As it was the site of overt literacy instruction, the school was the site for the collection of data. The case study was designed to obtain students’ responses about helpful strategies for learning to write and to interpret these and other data in relation to how literacy is taught. Interpretations of the data were validated through the use of data from a variety of sources, namely, interviews with students and teacher, documents and observations, and through the use of different methods of data analysis, such as, concept and linguistic analysis. The use of these collection and analysis methods is explained in the following sections of this chapter.

The case studies numbered 2 to 6 in Table 3 comprise the second group of case studies designed and implemented as the research base for this portfolio. Each of these five case studies explored particular features of drama experiences with students in preschools and the first years of school. These case studies inform the five articles in Chapter 5 of the portfolio where the use of drama pedagogy for literacy learning is investigated. The use of case studies has been described by Carroll (1996) as ‘the research methodology that most clearly fits (the) special conditions of drama’ (p77). Carroll explains that drama is a ‘negotiated’ and ‘non-reproducible’ art form and that,

_The participants within a drama in education session or series of sessions create a unique set of social relationships that becomes a single unit of experience capable of analysis and study (Carroll, 1996, p 77)._ 

The drama case studies in this portfolio consisted of single drama sessions, each employing a range of drama strategies, with specific content and resulting in the creation of unique texts (spoken, written, visual) that are documented and analysed in the articles in Chapter 5. As outlined in Table 3, these case studies generated a wealth of data that was investigated within different theoretical frameworks. Whereas data from the sixth case study, the ‘Image-critique drama’, were examined exclusively within the frameworks of drama pedagogy and visual/critical literacy (Martello, 2005), other drama
case studies were analysed more than once within differing frameworks to explore multiple dimensions of the drama experience. For example, Table 3 records that data from the second case study, the ‘Pokémon drama’, were analysed within five different theoretical frameworks and reported in three of the published articles (Martello, 2001b, 2002b and 2002c). The theoretical frameworks applied to the case studies are also explained in Chapter 2 and outlined in the contextualising sections preceding each article in Chapter 5.

The use of case study research has perceived limitations that warrant recognition as the portfolio relies heavily on this research strategy. Leedy and Ormrod (2001, p149) report that the major weakness of the case study is that results cannot be generalised to other situations, especially when only a single case is studied. However, Yin (2003b) points out that while case studies are not generalisable to populations or to other cases, they are generalisable to theoretical propositions. He explains that

\[ \text{In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study your goal will be to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization) (Yin, 2003b, p 10).} \]

The drama case studies in this portfolio provide evidence in support of my theoretical proposition that drama is an effective pedagogy for literacy teaching and learning. Each case study is analysed to support a stated proposition, for example, that drama facilitates critical literacy or that drama is a ‘productive pedagogy’. Collectively, the analyses and interpretations accumulated through five drama case studies allow for generalizations about drama's efficacy as pedagogy for literacy learning. Yin claims that

\[ \text{If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed (2003b, p33).} \]

Leedy and Ormrod concur with the view that case studies are useful for generating support for hypotheses and add that they are also useful for 'learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation’ (2001, p 149). As stated throughout Chapter 2, my research on intersections between early childhood literacy education, multiliteracies and drama pedagogy opens up a relatively under-researched field for which the case study
methodology has been demonstrably appropriate. The case study research, in combination with theoretical-conceptual research, provided appropriate qualitative methodologies for the purposes of the research in this portfolio. Within case study methodology there are many possible methods of collecting and analysing data and those used in the portfolio are discussed in the following sections.

3.3 Methods of data collection

This discussion of the data collection methods used for the portfolio research draws on Yin’s (2003b) model of case study research. Yin states that the list of sources of data ‘can be quite extensive’ however he identifies the following six major sources: ‘documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participaant-observation, and physical artefacts’ (2003b, p 83). Of the methods noted by Yin, the methods of data collection for the portfolio research included: documentation, interviews, direct observation and participant-observation. Additional methods used in the research and discussed in this section are the use of audiotape recordings and the reflective practitioner role.

The methods of data collection for the portfolio research were varied and chosen as appropriate to the particular case study. The principle of triangulation, ‘the use of multiple methods … to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p 8), was applied as far as this was possible and appropriate to the particular case study. Data were collected from at least two sources for each case which, according to Yin, has the advantage of developing ‘converging lines of inquiry’ (2003b, p 98). The method of applying different theories or conceptual frameworks to the same set of data was also used in all of the portfolio case studies, as noted in Table 3 and discussed in section 3.2.2 above. This type of triangulation, known as ‘theory triangulation’ (Patton, cited in Yin, 2003b, p 99), supplements the use of multiple sources of evidence in the portfolio case studies.

Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to in the implementation and reporting of the case studies and in the writing of the research articles. For the funded case study project,
'Learning to write', a university ethics committee approved the methods of data collection, storage and reporting. Other case studies undertaken in schools and preschools were approved by school principals and directors, with confidentiality assured and anonymity guaranteed when this was requested. Ethical practices were also applied to the collection, storage and reporting of the data.

In the following sections, each method of data collection used in the portfolio research is discussed and related to particular case studies. The methods specific to each case study are also outlined in the contextualising sections preceding each of the published articles in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.3.1 Documentation

In their discussion of the document genres that are most likely to be of interest to teacher-researchers investigating literacy, Knobel and Lankshear (1999) include the types of documentation used in the portfolio research. These are, specifically, syllabus and curriculum documents, student records, students’ work samples, classroom texts, unit and lesson plans (p53). As well as these document genres Knobel and Lankshear also classify the researcher’s field notes and transcripts of recorded interviews as primary sources of data that ‘are statements written or collected by witnesses of events or processes’ (1999, p53). Primary documents of this kind were also produced as part of the portfolio research processes and used as sources of data.

Syllabus and curriculum documents, relating to both English literacy and drama, provided data for the portfolio research as these revealed the dominant discourses emanating from state and national educational bodies. For example, extracts from the English K – 6 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998) were central to the examination of the pedagogical strategy of trying to spell in the ‘Learning to write’ case study and the Creative Arts K – 6 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2000), which incorporates the art form of Drama, was cited to confirm the mandatory status of drama in the primary school curriculum in the discussion of the ‘Family tree drama’ case study. The latter syllabus was also the source of ‘outcomes’ and ‘indicators’, that is, educational objectives, for the drama lessons on which the drama case studies were based. Syllabus documents such as these two provided evidence of the status quo that was under critique in the research.
Student records and student’s work samples were other forms of documentation used in the portfolio research. Student attendance records were accessed to determine the age of student participants in each case study and teachers’ assessment records provided background information about students’ academic progress, such as, reading ages and writing proficiency.

Student work samples, in the form of writing, drawing and transcriptions of spoken language, were a pivotal source of data in the case studies and were also used to exemplify the theoretical-conceptual research, as in the first article (Martello, 2002a), for example. In the ‘Learning to write’ case study (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) samples of students’ written texts were assessed to determine their level of writing competence and later provided a measure for comparison with their spoken explanations of learning to write. Samples of students’ written and spoken texts provided evidence that drama contexts promoted multimodal literacies in all five drama case studies (Martello, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, 2004b & 2005).

In the drama case studies, written texts constructed jointly by the teacher/researcher and students were another form of evidence of the production of texts within drama contexts. Documents such as the written description of a Pokemon character’s attributes in the ‘Pokémon drama’ case study (Martello, 2001b & 2002c) or the character profile for a drama character in the ‘Image-critique drama’ (Martello, 2005) were examples of such jointly-constructed, written documents that contributed to the argument of the case under study.

Other documents that constituted data for the case studies were a classroom text and lesson plans. The literary text, ‘Rose meets Mr Wintergarten’ by Bob Graham, was a central document both in conducting the ‘Image-critique drama’ case study (Martello, 2005) and in its analysis. The analysis of how students came to critique illustrations from this book, after engaging in a thematically related drama, drew on critical and visual literacy theory exemplified by reference to the author/illustrator’s construction of the images. In this sense, the text and its images became a source of data for the research.
A final form of documentation used in the research was the lesson plan. Lesson plans were relevant to the five drama case studies and provided contextual information about the student participants (grade level), aims, materials, type and sequencing of activities for the drama experiences. The lesson plans were an essential record providing information that was integral to the design of each case study.

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are considered an important source of case study information (e.g. Yin, 2003b, p89) and they constituted the main method of data collection in the ‘Learning to write’ case study. This case study investigated the perceptions of eight members of a class cohort of beginning writers, aged six and seven years, about learning to write. Eight students were selected from an original class cohort interviewed in the previous year. They represented four of the most developed and four of the least developed writers from the original cohort. The interviews were semi-structured in that they followed ‘a certain set of questions’ (Yin, 2003b, p 90) but remained open-ended and employed language adapted to the level of the young students. The interviews were conducted between the researcher and individual students, although the students were withdrawn in pairs from their classroom to an adjoining reading resource room for the interview. This occurred during their routine English lesson. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed.

Although interviews were not used for the other case studies, they were considered necessary for the ‘Learning to write’ case study because the investigation centred on how the young students themselves perceived the processes of learning to write. Transcripts of the interviews with eight students provided the data for two of the articles in the portfolio (Martello, 2001a & 2004a). Specific interview questions and procedures are detailed within the research articles themselves.

3.3.3 Audiotape recordings

Audiotape recordings were used extensively in the portfolio research both to record interviews between the researcher and student participants in the ‘Learning to write’ case study (Martello, 2001a & 2004a) and to record the drama lessons for the drama case
studies numbered two to six in Table 3 (Martello, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, 2004b & 2005). In discussing the use of audiotapes for interviews Yin notes that they ‘certainly provide a more accurate rendition of any interview than any other method’ (2003b, p92) and this partly explains my own use of the technique for the ‘Learning to write’ case study. Audiotaping the interviews also allowed me to focus attention on what the young participants were saying and to help them to feel at ease, without the distraction of note taking.

For the five drama case studies audio-taping was particularly beneficial because my direct involvement in the drama experiences, either as teacher or participant, made in situ observations difficult. Tape recordings of the drama experiences contributed important data about the spoken exchanges between students, and between teacher and students. They were required to supplement the teacher’s lesson plans and the students’ written texts, to create a more detailed record of the drama experiences. In the case study ‘Image-critique drama’ extracts of the students’ spoken language provided evidence of their developing understandings about the construction of images as well as their use of different language modes within the drama context.

The audiotape recordings were fully transcribed, for the interviews in the ‘Learning to write’ case study, and selectively transcribed for the five drama case studies. The audiotaped data provided an invaluable resource for understanding the whole event under study, while transcripts were used for categorising, analysing and interpreting the data. Transcripts of the spoken language of students in the ‘Learning to write’ case study and in the five drama case studies were essential to the analyses undertaken for these studies. Although audiotapes sometimes include background noise that makes them difficult to transcribe, they were used in the portfolio research to supplement written observation notes which ‘are often insufficient to capture the richness of what one is observing’ (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p 158)

3.3.4 Observations (Participant-observer)

Observations undertaken for the portfolio research supplemented the data collected through other methods. Yin includes observations as one of the main sources of evidence for case studies, explaining that the method involves being present at the case study site
and that evidence obtained this way is ‘useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied’ (2003b, p 93). For the ‘Learning to write’ case study, observation field-notes about classroom procedures and materials were used to supplement data collected through the interviews and documents, and these provided another source of information about the students’ literacy practices (Martello, 2001a & 2004a).

The participant-observation mode of data collection was employed for the five drama case studies because I was a ‘participant in the events being studied’ (Yin, 2003b, p 94). Many researchers argue that, as participant-observers within case study events, they can gain a perspective that is ‘invaluable in producing an ‘accurate’ portrayal of a case study phenomenon’ (Yin, 2003b, p 94). This is true of the five drama case studies which benefited from my participation, sometimes as the teacher leading the drama and sometimes as a participant in drama experiences taught by student teachers. In the ‘Widget drama’, ‘Superhero drama’ and ‘Image-critique drama’ case studies I participated as the teacher, whereas my participation roles in the ‘Pokemon drama’ and ‘Family tree drama’ case studies were those of collaborator, co-planner and participant in drama lessons taught by student teachers.

As a researcher investigating my own work and that of others, it is not possible to turn off the observer’s eye when also involved in the event. This makes the teacher/researcher akin to ethnographers who interpret ‘what seems to be going on from multiple perspectives, and thereby over time construct their own understandings about social realities’ (Ecmiston & Wilhelm, 1996, p92). My understandings about the social realities of classroom interactions are based on many years of teaching, and of learning about teaching, and these experiences contribute to my interpretations of the case study events.

3.3.5 The reflective practitioner

Occupying the roles of both participant and observer in the manner described above is closely aligned with a view of the researcher as a reflective practitioner, that is, one who seeks to understand her/his own practice by reflecting while engaging in the actions and reactions that constitute it. Taylor (1996) explains that the reflective practitioner stance ‘requires the ability to scrutinize the immediate context’ and that it
Demands a discovery of self, a recognition of how one interacts with others, and how others read and are read by this interaction (Taylor, 1996, p27).

Since improvised interactions and collaboration between participants are at the core of drama, understanding how these processes successfully operate is crucial. This makes the role of the reflective practitioner particularly relevant to drama practitioners/researchers who investigate the explicit and implicit knowledge that informs their decisions and how these decisions lead to students’ learning (Taylor, 1996, p27). Analysing the workings of particular drama strategies for the drama case studies in this portfolio drew upon this kind of reflection-in-action. The reflective practitioner role has been acknowledged by the editors of an anthology in which one of my articles (Martello, 2002c) was published. Rasmussen and Ostern (2002) credit the drama community with having ‘developed its own innovative recommended research designs such as ‘the reflective practitioner’’ (p 10). They go on to list seven authors in their anthology, including myself, whose work exemplifies this type of research.

3.4 Methods of data analysis

Analysis of the case study data involved four broad strategies within which a variety of specific analysis techniques were employed. The analysis strategies applied to the data are in accord with those described by Leedy and Ormrod (2001, p 150) as being typical of case study research. These strategies are categorization, interpretation, pattern identification, synthesis and generalisation. The strategies and techniques that contributed to the analysis of the research data are outlined in the following sections.

3.4.1 Categorisation of data

According to Leedy and Ormrod ‘categories are identified that can help cluster the data into meaningful groups’ (2001, p 150). The data in each of the six case studies were categorized into coherent groups depending on the investigation questions. In the ‘Learning to write’ case study where students’ metalinguistic knowledge was compared to their writing competence, interview transcripts were examined to identify the metalinguistic concepts (e.g. ‘word’, ‘sentence’, ‘alphabet’) that were referred to by the
student participants. Ten categories of such concepts were identified through the metalinguistic terms the students used (Martello, 2001a).

In the drama case studies, a common form of data categorisation used was that of identifying the modes (i.e. whether spoken, written, visual or combinations of these) of students’ texts created within the drama context. This strategy was applied to the data in the case studies ‘Pokemon drama’ (e.g. in Martello, 2002b, 2002c), ‘Widget drama’ (Martello, 2002c) and the ‘Image-critique drama’ (Martello, 2005).

The application of theoretical-conceptual research in the portfolio articles also relied on the analytical strategy of categorisation. For example, in arguing that drama was a productive pedagogy (Martello, 2004b), segments of the ‘Family tree drama’ case study were categorised according to the published criteria for productive pedagogies that were being met. Similarly, the investigation of drama as a critical pedagogy categorised the essential elements of drama according to how each of these facilitated key components of critical approaches (Martello, 2001b).

**3.4.2 Interpretation of single instances**

The interpretation of single instances involves examining particular instances within the data ‘for the specific meanings that they might have in relation to the case’ (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p150). Drawing on theoretical-conceptual research, I attributed meanings to particular instances within the data collected for each of the case studies. For example, in the ‘Learning to write’ case study, single instances of a student’s use of a language term (e.g. ‘letters’) were interpreted as an example of metalinguistic knowledge and later related to each student’s writing competency.

Other examples include interpreting the ‘single instance’ of a child’s drawing as an example of the visual mode of representation in the first article (Martello, 2002a) and interpreting the use of the word ‘try’ in a syllabus document as an indication of constructing children as ‘precompetent’ in the ‘Learning to write’ case study (Martello, 2004a). The interpretation of single instances, such as the students’ production of particular spoken, written or visual texts within drama experiences, was a common strategy employed in the drama case studies to substantiate the argument that drama
facilitates the use of multimodal texts (e.g. Martello, 2002c, 2004b & 2005). This technique constitutes linguistic analysis at the level of whole texts.

3.4.3 **Linguistic analysis**

Linguistic analysis at the word level was also used for analysing single instances of students’ language in the ‘Learning to write’ case study. Specifically, aspects of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985) were used to interpret the language of two students and their identities as learners of spelling (Martello, 2004a). The linguistic analysis focussed on the students’ language choices for transitivity and, in particular, on their choices for participant roles, processes, or verbs, and circumstances. These linguistic features indicated the learners’ identities in relation to the task of learning to spell. The analysis is explained in the published article.

3.4.4 **Identification of patterns**

In each case study in the portfolio, the interpretations of single instances were brought together to substantiate underlying themes or patterns. The identification of themes and patterns served to ‘characterise the case more broadly than a single piece of information can’ (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p 150). One illustrative example of this analytical strategy involved the data discussed earlier from the ‘Learning to write’ case study. After instances of students’ uses of metalinguistic terms were categorised according to ten linguistic concepts, they were counted and the data for each of two student groups (four less-developed writers and four more-developed writers) were recorded into a table. Comparison between the two student groups was facilitated by categorising and counting instances within the data and a pattern in the use of metalinguistic terms was identifiable after results were tabulated. The tabulated results showed that the more developed writers used a greater variety of these terms and used them in greater quantities than the less developed writers. The use of quantitative techniques was unique to one article in the portfolio (Martello, 2001a) which reported on the ‘Learning to write’ case study. Using numbers within a qualitative case study is considered appropriate by experts such as Denzin & Lincoln (2003, p 10) and Stake (1995, p 36) and does not affect the overall qualitative nature of the research.
Another example that illustrates the strategy of identifying patterns in the data, involved the ‘Family tree drama’ case study and theoretical-conceptual research into ‘productive pedagogies’ (Martello, 2004b). The specific technique entailed examining a series of drama strategies (e.g. presenting a problem or interviewing a character in role) used in the ‘Family tree drama’ and identifying which of the published criteria for productive pedagogies were met by each drama strategy. The systematic analysis created a consistent and comprehensive pattern of drama strategies meeting the criteria for productive pedagogies.

Using data from the ‘Pokemon drama’ case study, a pattern was identified in a similarly incremental way to demonstrate that drama pedagogy facilitated the development of four kinds of literacy practices (Martello, 2002b). And in another example of pattern identification, instances drawn from different data sources, namely, from the literature, syllabus documents and samples of students’ spoken language, were interpreted as pointing to the same phenomenon, which was the construction of ‘precompetent’ identities for young literacy learners (Martello, 2001a).

3.4.5 Synthesis and generalisations

Leedy and Ormrod describe the processes of synthesis and generalisation as culminating processes of case study research through which ‘an overall portrait is constructed’ with ‘implications beyond the specific case that has been studied’ (2001, p 150). They warn that any generalisations made are tentative, particularly in relation to single case studies. However, Yin’s notion of generalising to theoretical propositions (2003b, p10) rather than to other cases is applicable to the case study and theoretical-conceptual research in this portfolio. As discussed in section 3.2.2, this research is based on propositions about the sociocultural nature of literacies and about the efficacy of drama as a productive pedagogy for developing multiliteracies. In individual case studies, and collectively, the research aimed to build on and expand theories relating to literacies and to drama in education, by contributing evidence and explanations to these fields.

There is also a strong element of synthesis in the portfolio research. It has been stated in Chapter 2, the Overarching Statement, that a unique contribution of the research in this portfolio is that it brings together in coherent syntheses, areas of research that have not
been extensively explored in the literature. The research unifies knowledge about early childhood literacy education with knowledge about drama in education. The drama case studies explore intersections of these fields and contribute to this relatively under-reported area of research and scholarship. Through the combination of case studies and theoretical-conceptual research, the research contributes to propositions that go ‘beyond the specific case’ (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p 150) and towards new explanations of literacy learning and teaching.

In conclusion, this chapter has described the qualitative research methods used in the research for this portfolio. It has explained the use of a combination of theoretical-conceptual and case study research methodologies and identified the specific methods of data collection and data analysis employed in the research. A summary of information about the case studies, their participants and research methods, the theories/concepts applied in the research and their location in the published articles has been presented in table form (Table 3). Examples of the application of specific research methods have demonstrated their effectiveness in contributing to the research base for the portfolio articles.
CHAPTER 4

Literacy curriculum and explicit pedagogy

Article 1

Article 2

Article 3
Context for Article 1


Context

This article was an invited contribution to a groundbreaking, Australian, edited book on early childhood literacies. My previous publications and conference presentations on early childhood literacies were consistent with the editors’ focus on emerging, more inclusive views of literacies. My chapter was one of three chapters in the first section of the book which established the theoretical foundations for the whole book.

This article is positioned first in the portfolio because it introduces the central theme of reconceptualising literacy curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education. The article establishes all of the constituent themes for literacy curriculum (see Figure 1, Chapter 1) and outlines principles for literacy pedagogy that are developed in other articles in the portfolio. It is concerned with early childhood literacies in general and introduces the concepts of modes, and multimodal literacies, that are central to much of the research in the portfolio.

Specific focus and significance to the field

The chapter focuses on a reconceptualized view of literacy that includes emerging literacies. In it I adopt a sociocultural perspective on the learning and teaching of literacies in early childhood. The definition of literacy is extended to include visual and critical modes of making meaning, as well as written and spoken ones, and literacy is acknowledged as an integral part of everyday social practice. However, recognition of the home and community practices of all children as valuable and relevant to early childhood literacy education is not yet widespread so both my chapter and the whole book present a challenge to established practice. Since the book is aimed at a readership
of early childhood practitioners and teacher education students it makes a significant contribution to reconceptualizing the field of early childhood literacy teaching.

**Research methods**

The chapter was based on theoretical/conceptual research and on multiple case studies drawn from the literature about early childhood literacies. A sociocultural theory of literacy was applied to the case studies and the related literacy concepts of modes, multimodal texts, visual and critical literacies and home/school connections were employed to substantiate the sociocultural approach. Examples of diverse literacy practices, selected from case studies in the literature and from the researcher’s own data, supported the thesis that literacy is a sociocultural construct and that children’s current literacy practices need to be reflected in the literacy curriculum and in early childhood literacy teaching.

**Contribution to the field**

This article

i) presents a unique synthesis of theories and research to articulate new directions for early childhood literacy curriculum and teaching practice.

ii) was published as a foundational chapter in a ground-breaking Australian book on early childhood literacies.

iii) has been widely disseminated through sales of the book which is used by several universities as required reading in their early childhood teacher education courses. (See Appendix B – Supporting documentation for Article 1)

**Please note:** The presentation of articles differs from the rest of the portfolio text as they are photocopies of the published articles as they appear in books and journals. This convention validates publication of the articles.
Chapter 3

Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood

Julie Martello

Abstract

This chapter describes how each child's pathway into literacy is a distinctive journey shaped by personal, social and cultural factors. The practices that constitute children's pathways into literacy are as diverse as the individual families, communities and cultures in which each child lives. Early childhood educators contribute to the building of literacy pathways in the foundational preschool and early school years. Their understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of multiple literacy practices informs the beliefs and values underpinning their own teaching practice. Exploring the multimodal nature of literacy practices extends the possibilities for what counts as children's literacy practices and for valuing the diverse literacy experiences of homes and communities. Early childhood educators can have a positive impact on the literacy pathways of all children by achieving continuity between home and educational literacy practices.
Pathways into multiple literacies

Children’s pathways into literacy begin in early childhood and continue throughout life as they encounter ever-widening social contexts for literacy practices. While many children reach common literacy milestones in the early childhood years, their pathways into literacy are as diverse as the literacy practices of individual families, communities and cultures in which each child lives. The pathways metaphor used in this chapter attempts to capture both the divergent and convergent nature of a child’s journey into personal and public literacy practices.

What counts as literacy varies between cultures and social groups within cultures and questions such as ‘What is literacy?’ and ‘How do different beliefs about literacy affect children’s literacy learning?’ are appropriate ones for early childhood educators to consider. They are appropriate because teachers’ own practices will reflect beliefs about literacy and about children’s learning, whether these are consciously acknowledged by the practitioner or not. A sociocultural perspective for early childhood educators is useful because it recognises the interplay between social and cultural beliefs and literacy practices and therefore the constructedness of what counts as literacy. As literacy practices change and expand, a sociocultural approach accommodates the notion of ‘multiliteracies’ incorporating other forms of representation, including visual images and gestures, as well as language (Cope & Kalantzis 2000, p. 5). For early childhood educators, this approach also helps to explain how patterns of inequality occur where educational definitions of literacy exclude the literacy practices of some groups of students, families or communities. The broad definition of literacy adopted in this book is inclusive of diverse literacy practices, since it encompasses listening, talking, reading, viewing, writing, visual and critical literacies.

Literacy practices are part of everyday life and, while exercising a degree of choice in their interests and activities, children are also members of families, groups and communities who introduce them to distinctive literacy practices from the beginning of life. From their earliest speech experiences through to contact with written language, information and entertainment technologies, what happens in children’s homes and communities shapes their early literacy learning. How, and whether, this early learning is taken up and extended through early childhood educational practices has a considerable impact on the direction of children’s literacy pathways. The need for more continuity between community and school literacy practices is emerging as a critical factor in literacy success for students.

Beliefs about how children learn literacy are as relevant to the early childhood educator as beliefs about what literacy is, as both will guide everyday educational practice. A useful view of learning which has been applied to language is that explained by Gee (1992, p. 113) who says that language is
acquired 'subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice' and that it is also learned. He views learning as a conscious process involving teaching by competent language users. This theory explains how children acquire spoken language or sometimes learn to read or write before beginning formal schooling. They acquire language subconsciously through demonstrations and engagement in the literacy practices of their homes. They also learn more consciously about language and how to use it through the explanations and scaffolding provided by others. Scaffolding, a term coined by Bruner (1985) and based on aspects of Vygotsky's (1962) work, refers to specific kinds of adult assistance which gradually enable children to achieve language tasks independently. For early childhood teachers, Gee's model explains why literacy teaching should include scaffolding and explicit explanations about language as well as opportunities for children to simply engage in purposeful literacy experiences. The theory emphasises that early childhood teachers require professional knowledge about which aspects of literacy are better acquired and which are better learned through some form of teaching (Anstey & Bull 1996). For example, young children usually require explicit teaching about such language knowledge as the alphabetic principle, print conventions and spelling or reading strategies. These professional choices about teaching practices are also informed by a broad definition of literacy which encompasses the many different literacy practices of families, communities and cultures.

**Literacy is multimodal**

There are many practices which constitute literacy and one way of considering a range of literacy practices is to first identify the modes of representation which literate practices draw upon. Kress (1997, p. 7) describes modes as ways of making signs (a combination of meaning and form) using different materials or 'stuff' such as sound, our bodies (to speak, or gesture) or graphics. In the case of the definition of literacy used earlier, we can differentiate spoken language (using sound, air pressure and our bodies as the material for talking and listening), written language (using a physical surface, some means of marking and the writing system itself, as the materials for reading and writing) and visual images (using a variety of materials for drawing, making and viewing). Each of these modes is further described by Kress as being multimodal because each uses a combination of 'materials'; for example, writing relies on both the materials of surface (e.g., paper, stone, cloth) and a marking device (e.g., ink, chisel, the body) and the writing system itself (Kress 2000, p. 185).

The New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis 2000) is developing a theory which encompasses all symbolic meaning systems. It has identified (ibid., p. 5) six overarching design elements: 'linguistic meaning, visual meaning, audio meaning, gestural meaning, spatial meaning and the multimodal patterns of
meaning that relate the first five modes of meaning to each other. The modes discussed in this chapter are the linguistic (spoken and written language) and visual modes, and the multimodal integration of these in current communication and entertainment technologies. Critical literacies are seen here as both multimodal and metamodal as they employ the materials of other modes in reflexive processes of critique, analysis and transformation of the other modes.

**Becoming literate through diverse social practices**

A survey of early literacy experiences among any group of people is almost certain to reveal an array of differences spanning anything from the language spoken at home to family habits around oral stories, songs, television or books. Experiences of literacy in childcare prior-to-school and school settings also vary considerably in relation to a range of factors; for example, whether the familiar language of the home is used or not, what types of texts are used, the kinds of social relationships enacted around texts, whether grammar is taught or whether a language other than English is taught.

One way to consider the diversity of children's literacy experiences is to identify features of home or educational contexts which may offer differences for individuals or groups of children. Pathways into literacy are diverse because children experience literacy in a great variety of literacy practices and through different modes (spoken, written, visual, critical). In their daily lives, they encounter different types of texts and have different kinds of interactions with others around the texts they encounter.

The ways of making meaning with which children may be familiar are increasingly multimodal and may emphasise one or more of spoken or written language and visual images. These three modes are intricately linked in many contexts and not seen as separate in children's lived experience. Some children are introduced to critical practices from an early age as some later examples demonstrate. Children come into contact with some modes more than others, contributing towards differences in each child's pathway into literacy. Literacy practices might focus on one or more of the modes outlined in Figure 3.1.

To appreciate each child's journey into literacy, early childhood educators need to have knowledge of children's past and on-going familiarity with particular literacy practices. We can consider how this might lead to predispositions or strengths in spoken, written, visual and other modes of communication and what this might mean for planning literacy experiences with which all children can connect. The modes of communication are used in the following section as an organising framework for illustrating some of the features that contribute to the diversity in children's pathways into literacy.
The spoken mode

Children acquire spoken language through hearing and interacting with others in the language of their home or community. In western, English-speaking countries, where the majority of children learn the dominant language in their homes, there are also significant numbers of children whose home language is not English. In Australia, there are at least 240 languages other than English spoken, including nearly 48 Indigenous languages, resulting in 14.6 per cent of the Australian population regularly using a language other than English in the home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, cited in Clyne & Kipp 1997). Gibbons (1991, p. 1) claims that English is the second language for one in four school children and, in some schools, up to 90 per cent of students speak or have contact with a language other than English in their homes. There are potential advantages for children in being bilingual or multilingual and much depends on the attitudes, knowledge and skills of early childhood educators in understanding second language learning and in providing appropriate experiences to capitalise on children’s achievements in another language (Makin et al. 1995).

Another kind of diversity in spoken language is the use of dialects or
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variations within a given language. In many countries, dialects are related to particular geographic regions but Australian regional differences are rarely strong, and social factors determine dialects instead. The main variants of spoken English in Australia are Aboriginal English, forms of immigrant English and the non-standard social dialect (sociolect) sometimes called broad Australian (Emmitt & Pollock 1997). Children whose familiar home language is a non-dominant dialect of English can be disadvantaged by teachers who may not recognise the validity of a dialect spoken in the home and who may treat dialectic differences as mistakes rather than as legitimate linguistic practice.

Whatever a child's home language and dialect, it is learned through particular patterns of interaction in social and cultural practices. Ethnographic accounts of language behaviours in different groups and cultures illustrate how children are introduced into language communities in very different ways. For example, Malin, Campbell and Agius (1996) describe how patterns of verbal and non-verbal interaction between adult and child members of the Nunga Aboriginal people in Australia are used to develop independence, resilience and care for younger kin among very young children. They note how parents' frequent use of question tags, such as 'isn't it?', encourage a greater sense of equality between themselves and their children than was observed in the Anglo-Saxon middle-class families studied. While considered inappropriate by the non-Aboriginal parents, the practices of teasing or scaring children to control and warn them are used by Nunga parents to help their children develop resilience to future exploitation and racism. These and other practices documented are often misconstrued by those outside the Nunga culture. Ethnographers caution against this tendency to interpret another culture's practices negatively because they differ from one's own. This study clearly demonstrates how rationalised beliefs and values underpin the linguistic and social practices of all groups and cultures.

In another ethnographic study, Schieffelin and Ochs (1998) report that, among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, mothers will speak for their babies rather than directly to them and, until they are about eighteen months old, babies are rarely addressed as a communicative partner. While rich language interactions occur around the baby, its own vocalisations are not generally responded to, as they are not considered communicative. Once a Kaluli child uses two key words, the words for 'mother' and 'breast', language is believed to have begun and mothers then begin using specific strategies to teach them how to speak. Schieffelin and Ochs document many other differences between Kaluli and Western adult–child linguistic practices, such as the avoidance of baby talk or modifications to suit the child's ability, further demonstrating how each culture has its own beliefs about language and how children acquire it.

Differences between the beliefs and practices of the Nunga, the Kaluli and those prevalent in western cultures prompt us to recognise the social and cultural origins of such beliefs and practices. These examples also remind
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us of the diversity of cultural and linguistic practices that exist within multicultural societies and that is the legitimate concern of early childhood educators.

In homes and in early childhood settings, the speech used in routine daily practices, such as meals, toileting, preparation for bed, bathtimes and dressing, is patterned and governed by rules. Sometimes children acquire the expected language and social roles through repeated participation and sometimes explicit instructions are given as, for example, with using the telephone or greeting friends and relatives. The complexity of rules surrounding mealtime conversation is demonstrated by Luke (1993), who maintains that a child learning how to participate in this routine has to acquire knowledge of rules that govern who can nominate which topics, how to get the floor, the use of appropriate gestures, who can interrupt whom, who has the final word, the use of slang or profanity and even volume levels. Through their talk during routine events, parents, caregivers and teachers help to construct children's social identity in relation to authority and power, gender and age and their world view (Luke 1993). An awareness by early childhood teachers of the possible differences between the linguistic and social rules of children's homes and those of the centre or school can inform the sensitive blending of expectations and strengthening of children's pathways into literacy.

The written mode

Learning how to read and write are major achievements in early literacy development and both are built on understandings about how the writing system represents the already familiar spoken mode. The foundations for understanding and using the written mode are established in children's homes and in early childhood settings for many children. Social practices which involve print, can vary in relation to:

- the language itself (English, community languages and dialects)
- the types of text
- the kind of interactions around print
- the integration of written language with other modes
- the frequency of involvement, and
- the nature and extent of explanations about how the written language works.

Whatever the profile of each child's experience with the written mode, the challenge for children is eventually to understand the relationships between the sounds of their oral language and the letters or symbols that represent them in particular ways. While children do construct ideas about written language without obvious teaching many educators believe that learning to read and write a language competently for a range of purposes requires a level of explicit teaching and is not simply acquired through use. Early child-

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Hood teachers are positioned to provide the appropriate teaching in preschool and early school settings.

In western, English-speaking cultures there are numerous accounts of individuals and groups of middle-class children learning to read and write in book and print-oriented homes and early childhood centres (see, for example, Campbell 1999; Schickedanz 1999). Children with extensive early book and print experience are often successful as literacy learners in schools because of the congruency between their home practices and those of schools. Since the early 1980s, research has also begun to concentrate on groups of children for whom there is little connection between home and school literacy practices and to provide a more comprehensive view of the range of print-related practices that constitute literacy in homes and communities (see, for example, Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn 1995; Heath 1986).

**Literacy practices involving written language**

The social practices through which children might experience written language vary greatly and are usually multimodal. Research that focuses on home literacy practices provides a starting point for considering the diversity of pathways into written language. Several studies, carried out in Australia and elsewhere, have illustrated the kinds of variety that exist in children's homes in relation to print and how it is used (see, for example, Cairney & Ruge 1998; Heath 1986; Purcell-Gates 1996; Teale 1986). In Australia, Cairney and Ruge's (1998, p. 111) classification of home literacy practices provides one framework for identifying the literacy purposes and practices experienced by children outside of educational settings. The home uses they found were:

- literacy for establishing or maintaining relationships; for example, letters and cards to and from relatives
- literacy for accessing or displaying information; for example, use of the Internet, catalogues, junk mail, TV guides, recipes, shopping lists, forms, newspapers
- literacy for pleasure and/or self-expression; for example, playing computer or electronic games, board games, and reading books, magazines and comics
- literacy for skills development; for example, homework activities.

Research in the United States notes additional literacy practices based around religious texts (see, for example, Heath 1986; Teale & Sulzby 1986) and in Australia the use of technology such as computers and fax machines is common in homes (Cairney & Ruge 1998). These studies and others highlight the variability of reading and writing practices in homes and commu-
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...ilies. The families studied by Cairney and Ruge represented different socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural groups and their research indicated as much diversity within these groups as between them.

When children are involved in social practices involving written language, they have opportunities to learn to read and write themselves. Involvement, especially when accompanied by appropriate explanations, provides children with the linguistic information to formulate and test hypotheses about how written language works. For some children, adult explanations and invitations to engage with print may not occur because they are not part of the adults’ cultural framework, or they are not possible in the circumstances of daily life. In the preschool years, children who have a lot of experience and interaction around print often begin to read familiar environmental words or to join in the reading of familiar phrases in written texts, particularly where repetition or rhyme aids the memorisation of the text. Environmental words such as 'EXIT' or 'STOP', labels from food packages, their names or prominent words in their homes and early childhood centres are examples of children's early reading material. Preschool children also engage in writing-like behaviour, which might reflect English letter shapes or the symbols of a different home language. The pathway to independence with written language begins with these earliest attempts and usually takes several years of practice and instruction for conventional reading and writing to be achieved.

For most children, formal literacy instruction involving explicit teaching begins in the first years of school. While some children’s previous literacy experiences have led them to experiment, practice and attain a level of conventional writing and reading competence, other children beginning school have little understanding of written language. Some may have learned to read and write in a language other than English and, in doing so, developed linguistic and process skills which assist in learning literacy in a second language, as long as teachers are sensitive to the particular challenges involved in supporting the transfer of literacy understandings (Perez 1998, p. 60). The seven-year-old bilingual boy who wrote his name in both Arabic and English (see Figure 3.2) was convinced that his teacher did not know that he could write in Arabic, suggesting many missed opportunities for supporting the child in his second language and for teaching his classmates about language.

Depending on their home literacy experiences and the school's literacy practices, the transition to school will bring sudden changes in literacy pathways for some children, while continuing smoothly for others. Syllabus and other support documents guide early childhood teachers regarding appropriate content and strategies but understanding children's prior-to-school and on-going out-of-school literacy experiences is essential for early childhood educators, who need to build on what children already know.
The visual mode and multimodal literacies

Pathways into visual and multimodal literacies also begin in the first years of life, when children create and understand visual and multimodal texts. While drawings, paintings or models are easily recognised as visual images, children commonly create more elaborate multimodal representations with a wide range of materials such as sticks, sand, toys and household objects, which are used to represent other things. In dramatic play scenarios, children regularly draw upon linguistic, visual and gestural modes to make meanings. They design complex multimodal representations in their preferred media. Some use materials such as paper, crayons, scissors and glue to do collage, cutting out and pasting. Others spend considerable time arranging toys or blocks, while narrating involved storylines. Still others employ dress-up clothes and roleplay to represent aspects of life in which they are interested. In fact, we can observe children making meaning in 'an absolute plethora of ways, with an absolute plethora of means, in two, three and four dimensions' (Kress 1997, p. xvii).

Kress (1997, p. 154) makes a plea for encouraging children's dispositions towards these multimodal forms and for recognising the 'dynamic interaction between the various modes', especially in the current multimodal communication landscape. The inclusion of drawing in a definition of literacy opens the way for the recognition of other visual and multimodal texts regularly created by children in the preschool and early school years. By giving more attention to children's multimodal representations, early childhood educators will develop understandings about the 'dynamic interaction' between modes, such as that demonstrated in Figure 3.3. They will also have new opportunities to extend play and learning by encouraging or planning for the inclusion of modes not used by children, or less frequently used. For example, the design of a sandpit scenario, block structure or roleplay
Figure 3.3: A seven-year-old's visual image, accompanied by oral storymaking and written labels scribbled by the child's grandmother:
scenario can be linguistically enhanced through children’s oral explanation or written labels. Recognising the meaning-making modes used by children allows early childhood educators to make and extend connections between children’s interests and their literacy practices.

Many children of preschool and early school age already have considerable experience in using electronic media, such as games, CD-ROMs and videos, which are based on visual images and often require the interpretation and manipulation of an array of signs, icons, moving and still images, diagrams and print. When children view and interact with television, computers or electronic game screens, they are becoming familiar with visual images (moving and static) and learning to understand the meanings attributed to these images within their culture. Other sources of images available to children are books, magazines and artworks. Children are constantly negotiating their way around a variety of multimodal texts and making sense of them. How children learn to use images, learn through images and learn about images is a field of enquiry deserving of more interest by the early childhood profession.

Callow (1999) provides a useful framework that identifies the features used by image makers (e.g., angles, colour, reading paths and layout) to produce particular meanings and effects. The use of one such feature, colour, was the focus of investigations by a class of five-year-olds and their teacher (White 1999) when they looked at how colour is used in books and in television advertisements. White provided activities that led the children to understandings about how colour is used to indicate the gender of characters (pink for girls) and to attract readers and viewers for entertainment or commercial purposes (bright rather than dull colours). Through their investigations, these children developed critical understandings about the purposeful selection of colour in visual images and about themselves as the target audience for these manipulations. These children’s pathways into visual and critical literacies are being illuminated by such informed early childhood teaching practices.

Critical literacies

Accounts of critical practices in early childhood settings are not common. Some children are inducted into critical practices at home when, for example, adults might regularly question the veracity of claims made in television advertisements. Adults might deride the alleged skills of an action toy being shown executing impressive Kung-Fu tactics and compare it with similar toys owned by the child, pointing out their inability to move without assistance. While some children may be introduced to critical practices in the preschool years, it is more likely to occur at school, if at all.

junk mail related to Mothers' Day. Their work led to understandings about the differences between the constructed worlds of commerce and the students' real worlds. The authors advocate the use of community texts in literacy classrooms and provide strategies that early childhood teachers could use to develop critical practices. The ability to critique and analyse how texts not only inform or entertain but also manipulate their audience should be a part of every child's literacy pathway (see, for example, Chapter 17 of this book). As with the other modes of communication, there is considerable diversity in children's experience of critical literacies in homes and in early childhood settings.

**Literacy practices of home and early childhood settings**

An expanding body of research, both in Australia and elsewhere, is aimed at understanding more about the relationships between the literacy practices of early childhood settings and those of families and communities (see, for example, Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn 1995; Heath 1986; Hill et al. 1998; Makin et al. 1999). As in Heath's seminal study in the United States, studies in Australia show that where there is a mismatch between home and school literacy experiences, children can experience difficulties and even failure with school literacy. Heath's conclusions implicate early childhood teachers in school failure because some children's talents and strengths were not recognised within the accepted view of school literacy and of language competence.

In the Australian educational context there is also evidence that particular groups of students consistently perform at lower literacy levels than others, a finding which challenges the common assumption that literacy problems reside with the individual child (Alloway 1999; see also Chapter 14 of this book). Alloway points out that school literacy practices advantage groups of children whose social and cultural backgrounds are most closely aligned to the belief systems of the school, while disadvantaging other groups, namely boys, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and those who speak English as a second language.

The tendency for school personnel to blame families for students' poor literacy achievement was noted by Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995) in their Australian study of literacy practices in low socioeconomic urban communities. Rather than question their own practices, school personnel persistently referred to students' socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and other features of home background as reasons for literacy achievement or the lack of it. However, analyses of teacher-student classroom talk in schools designated 'disadvantaged' revealed that 'explicit teaching of text and textual features were very rare occurrences' (Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn 1995, p. xxvi). This lack of explicit teaching about literacy stood in marked contrast
to the practices of parents at home and those of teachers in schools not designated 'disadvantaged'. Their findings led the researchers to make recommendations about the need for teaching practices that provide students with explicit knowledge about language and literacy.

In an Australian study noted earlier, Cairney and Ruge (1998, p. 2) set out to 'identify matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school and to consider their consequences for the success of children at school'. In their findings, they note marked differences between the literacy practices and values of the families they researched and those of the schools in their study. They also acknowledge differences between families and between schools in their literacy practices. Students whose home practices were most like school practices were more successful than students whose home practices differed from those of schools. This study, and the others described here, highlights the need for early childhood educators to focus on our own literacy practices when attempting to understand why success at school literacy eludes some groups of children and not others. An awareness of the many dimensions of literacy learning and of the diversity in children's literacy experiences will equip early childhood educators to adopt inclusive literacy practices that strengthen the pathways into literacy for all children.

**Implications for early childhood practice**

Achieving continuity between home and early childhood literacy practices is a prime responsibility of early childhood educators. This begins with awareness that children's pathways into literacy begin in their homes and communities, where they learn patterns of language use and interaction and where they regularly engage with a variety of oral, written and visual texts. It requires awareness that home literacy practices continue to be part of children's literacy learning, alongside the literacy practices used in early childhood settings.

In order to continue building strong pathways into literacy early childhood educators need to find out what children's familiar practices are. This also implies that the home practices are understood as legitimate literacy practices and valued for their diversity rather than viewed as impediments to the literacy practices valorised within educational institutions. Embracing and capitalising on a wide range of community literacy practices extends the learning possibilities for all children. Two effective strategies for finding out about children's home and community practices are

- building genuine partnerships with families
- building genuine relationships with children by listening, observing and recording what they do and say in everyday experiences.

Linking children's home literacy practices with preschool and early school practices involves using children's familiar practices and materials in a
variety of ways. Early childhood teachers can plan to provide environments that include familiar language, resources and experiences. This means facilitating the use of a child’s familiar language or dialect to promote self-esteem and learning. It means using a variety of resources (familiar and new) for promoting talking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, drawing, making and critiquing. Resources from children’s homes, such as toys, videos, food packages, or experiences based on popular cultures can create opportunities for literacy experiences. Marsh (1999) describes how making Teletubby custard with a group of preschoolers attracted the interest of even those children not normally part of the ‘literacy club’ and involved them in experiences with a written recipe.

In the early school context, early childhood teachers have curriculum responsibilities to teach about and develop children’s literacy. Mandatory English syllabuses provide guidelines about the knowledge, understandings and skills that constitute school literacy. However, these constraints do not diminish the opportunities or the need to make connections between home and school practices. Home practices and children’s interests can become the basis for learning to participate in an increasing range of literacy practices valued by schools and other cultural institutions. The strategies of explicit instruction, scaffolding and independent practice can be used to facilitate children’s pathways into new literacies and develop their understandings about spoken, written and visual modes of language.

Recognition of children’s multimodal literacy practices and the multiliteracies available to them through their homes, communities and popular culture, enriches and extends the possibilities for early childhood practice. Early childhood educators may need to pay more attention to children’s visual representations in their drawings and three-dimensional constructions, as these are frequently their preferred meaning-making modes and they are often integrated with other modes such as speech and writing. The visual images created by others on TV, computers, in books and paintings, for example, warrant more attention, since we can help children to develop understandings about how they operate to attract, persuade, inform or manipulate the viewer. In order to assist children with visual literacies, early childhood teachers will need to understand more about images so that both teachers and children will have access to ‘a language to talk about images’ (Callow 1999, p. 4).
Reflection and follow-up

1. (a) Record literacy experiences from your own early childhood within your home or close community (e.g., songs, oral stories told; language other than English used; being read to at night; printed materials in the home and how they were used; early school experiences).

(b) Share your memories with others in a small group and identify any practices that members experienced in common, as well as practices that represent diversity within the group. Collate the responses to exemplify diversity and similarities among the group.

(c) Classify the literacy practices of the group as primarily spoken, written, visual or a combination of modes.

2. Conduct a literature search for studies about the different home and community literacy practices of minority social, linguistic or cultural groups outside the dominant culture. Consider ways to build upon these experiences in preschool and early school settings.

3. How smooth has your own pathway from home to school literacies been? Can you identify which practices have contributed to a smooth or fragmented pathway into particular literacies?

4. If you are a tertiary student studying to become an early childhood teacher, what are some of the new literacy practices associated with becoming a member of the academic community? You could categorise these in terms of the predominant modes and the academic practices involved.

References


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Becoming literate in early childhood


Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice


Context for Article 2


Context

In this article I report on a research project, the *Learning to write* case study, for which I was the sole investigator. The project was funded by a research grant from Charles Sturt University and investigated the perceptions of school beginners about learning to write. In an earlier article, not included in this portfolio, (Martello, 1999) I reported on the initial stage of the project which canvassed the views of twenty-five school beginners about strategies they considered helpful in learning to write. In this, the second of three articles reporting on the project, the language of eight of these same students is examined for evidence of metalinguistic knowledge.

This article and the following one are presented together because they draw on data from the same case study and because, within the major theme of literacy pedagogy, they both address the constituent theme of the explicit teaching of language knowledge.

Specific focus and significance to the field

Starting from the learner’s perspective the article addresses pedagogical issues. One major enterprise of the NSW Department of Education & Training since 1997 has been its attempt, through the Literacy Strategy, to improve literacy outcomes for primary students. Of the eight principles underpinning this strategy, the first asserts the need for “explicit and systematic” teaching of knowledge about language (NSW DET, 1998). Particularly in relation to written language, this kind of metalinguistic knowledge is thought to assist in general language proficiency. The data from my research supports this view as the students with the most developed competencies in written language used metalinguistic terms more frequently in their talk about writing. The article contributes evidence in support of pedagogical initiatives promoting more explicit teaching of
syllabus content, particularly the teaching of relevant metalinguistic terms to beginning writers.

**Research methods**

The article is based on the *Learning to write* case study (see Table 3, Chapter 3) and used mainly qualitative methods while some quantitative strategies were employed in the analysis. This long-term case study traced some of the same cohort of students through their first three years of school. Initially 25 students were interviewed in their first year at school. A focus group of eight students, four more-developed and four less-developed writers, were involved in each of the following two years. Interviews took place at the primary school to which the researcher was a familiar visitor. Data collection methods consisted of interviews with the students and teachers, samples of student writing and observation of classroom practices. Through themic and content analysis of the language students used in the interviews, ten categories of metalinguistic concepts were determined. Quantitative methods were employed to count instances of the use of metalinguistic terms and to record results in table form. The tabulated data clearly demonstrated differences between two groups of students in the frequency and quality of metalinguistic terms in their language.

**Contribution to the field**

This article

i) was published in a national journal in Australia.

ii) was presented as a conference paper at a national conference (Australian Early Childhood Association National Conference)

iii) has attracted interest from educators including email correspondents from other countries. (See Appendix C – Supporting documentation for Article 2)
Talk about writing – metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers

Julie Martello

This paper reports on a case study, which investigated the metalinguistic knowledge of beginning writers. The study of eight children in their second year of school provides evidence that the children’s metalinguistic knowledge is related to their writing competence. These results are discussed in relation to current research into the content and strategies for teaching writing in the early years of school.

Introduction
The research reported upon here focuses on the use of metalinguistic terms (language to talk about language) by beginning writers, and on whether this knowledge is related to their ability to write conventionally. In Australia most state English syllabus documents maintain that knowledge about language contributes to literacy development and they recommend explicit teaching about language (e.g. Board of Studies NSW 1998, Dept. of Education, Queensland 1994). In relation to the teaching of writing, since the 1990s these syllabus documents have included a new emphasis on teaching about a range of text types for different social purposes and on the text structures and language features which realise these purposes. Such changes in syllabus approaches to writing instruction resulted from research in the 1980s which highlighted the omission of this, and other, content from primary school literacy curricula (e.g., Martin & Rothery 1980, 1981, 1986, Christie 1985, Hammond 1986). Nevertheless, evidence available to this researcher suggests that, particularly in rural towns in NSW, explicit teaching about language is not widespread. Research to support or refute the need for explicit teaching about language is needed and one intention of this paper is to contribute to discussion about the explicit teaching of knowledge about language, especially in the early years of school.

Knowledge about writing encompasses many aspects of language, from the macro level of whole texts and their socio-cultural contexts to the micro level of words and their components. At all levels the ability to understand and use linguistic terms can facilitate discussion and learning about language. As stated above, this connection is recognised in

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English syllabuses around Australia, for example, the development of ‘a shared language for talking about language’ is an objective of the NSW English K-6 Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW 1998, p. 9). The ability to use language to talk about language, that is, to use a metalanguage, is one feature of metalinguistic ability. Metalinguistic ability in general has been described as ‘the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structural features of language’ (Bowley 1988, p. 3). Bowley draws a distinction between this kind of ‘explicit accessible knowledge’ and ‘the implicit or tacit knowledge that is used to comprehend and produce language’ (1988, p. 3). The ability to understand and produce language was termed ‘language competence’ by Chomsky (cited in Bowley 1988). It is the relationship between writing competence (use) and knowledge about language that this study explores. Specifically, the use of metalinguistic terms was investigated as a measure of knowledge about language.

The assessment of children’s writing competence and their metalinguistic knowledge in the first years of school must acknowledge the significant roles of home and community literacy practices in shaping children’s uses of language and their knowledge about it. As well, for increasing numbers of children early childhood care and education settings provide an additional context for language and emergent literacy development. The degree of intervention or teaching about literacy that occurs in these settings is currently the subject of research in Australia (e.g. ACT Education & Community Services 1999, Makin 1998, Raban & Ure 1997). Diversity in literacy practices in homes, communities and early childhood settings results in equal diversity in the literacy abilities of children beginning school. A few children can already read and write, many have had considerable contact with print and its purposes and some have had little experience of print. However, when children begin formal schooling it is generally expected that they will be taught in explicit ways, appropriate to their understanding, to read and write conventionally. While acknowledging the wide range of socio-cultural practices that constitute the teaching and learning of writing, this study focuses on the assessment of children’s metalinguistic awareness, as evidenced in their use of metalinguistic terms, and how this might relate to their ability to write conventionally.

The research focus on the children’s use of metalinguistic terms is relevant to curriculum content and teaching strategies because it encompasses the kind of knowledge that is sometimes taught, sometimes assumed to be known in the first years of school. Print concepts such as ‘letter’, ‘word’ and ‘sentence’ are used repeatedly in literacy classrooms and the ability to understand, act upon and use them accurately is arguably essential to children’s ability to learn to write. At a time when children face the challenge of moving from spoken language to understanding the written language system with all its conventions, the teaching and learning practices adopted are vital. This is particularly
important in the light of the diverse language experiences of school
beginners mentioned earlier. Knowledge about children’s own knowl-
dge is a prerequisite to teaching the appropriate content and using
appropriate strategies.

Talking to children about their writing is one effective means of
assessing their knowledge about language. The interview format,
described in the next section, was chosen because it provides a relevant
context for the children to display this knowledge. In contrast to formal
testing procedures, the children were not directed towards particular
features of language but were involved in a discussion which facilitated
a display of knowledge and the use of familiar terminology. In this con-
text, the children’s use of metalinguistic terms and their references to
features of the language system can be assumed to represent some,
though not all, of their established knowledge about written language.

Method
This research reported here was part of a longer study of a cohort of
twenty-six children during their first two years of school. The children
attended a government school in a large rural town in NSW, Australia
and were from a range of family structures of middle and low socio-
ecomic status. Most children in the class were Anglo-Australian,
including the eight discussed in this paper, with only two children
having different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The first phase of
the study involved interviewing the twenty-six children in their first
months at school when they were four and five years of age and before
formal literacy teaching was under way. Children were asked individu-
ally about themselves as writers and about the strategies, and people
that helped them learn to write. Most children volunteered demonstra-
tions of their writing and discussed home literacy practices, particularly
copying from writing models provided by parents and siblings.
Children’s writing samples and information from the teacher provided
further data at this stage. For a detailed account of this phase of the
study see Martello (1999).

A focus group of eight children were chosen to be interviewed again
at the end of their second year of school. These eight children, now aged
six and seven, had been identified in the first phase of the study, by both
the class teacher and the researcher, as being ‘less developed’ (four chil-
dren) and ‘more developed’ (four children) in relation to the whole class.
Development was defined in terms of their writing competence, assessed
using early learning profiles (NSW Dept of School Education
1995) and the NSW K-6 English Syllabus outcomes and indicators (Board
of Studies NSW 1998). The interviews with these eight focus children
were conducted during class English activities and children were indi-
vividly withdrawn to an adjoining reading storeroom. They were asked
to comment of their writing progress and specific questions were posed

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about the teaching strategies they found helpful, the kinds of writing they did, classroom procedures and spelling strategies used when attempting unknown or difficult words. The questions were intended to explore the children’s perceptions of their writing abilities, their conscious knowledge about the strategies they used (metacognition) and their knowledge of language terms (metalinguistic awareness) to talk about their writing development. As well as the interviews with the eight focus children, who were now distributed in two classes, writing samples and input from the two class teachers contributed to the data. The children’s use of metalinguistic terms and reference to language concepts in the interviews is the main focus of discussion here.

Findings
The analysis of children’s interview responses revealed wide-ranging information which was classified into the following three broad categories: information about the contexts in which writing was taking place; evidence of the children’s metacognition; and evidence of their metalinguistic awareness. While the children’s metalinguistic awareness is taken up in more detail, each of the three categories of information is defined further and illustrated with examples.

Contextual information
In the course of the interviews children referred to the contexts of the classroom and the home as sites for interaction with family and teachers. Contextual information about writing primarily described classroom procedures, teaching strategies and content. Procedures for handwriting lessons, spelling assistance and teacher modelling were described and information given about writing frequency, topics, text types and terminology used. Closely observed accounts of classroom procedures were a common feature of all the children’s responses. The procedural practices of schooling were clearly understood by the children, as the following answers to questions about spelling and handwriting lessons demonstrate. Both these responses were made by girls, and girls, in general, were particularly adept at knowing how to ‘do’ school.

‘Well, we have got dictionaries and we get them out under our desk and we come to the teacher and she helps us and she helps write them down in our dictionary for us.’

‘Well, we keep on doing the letter across the row. We do the little letter across the first row and the big letter across the second row and then we write a sentence across the third and do a pattern across the fourth.’

Metacognition
Meadows (1993) describes metacognition as the ability to reflect upon
and talk about one’s knowledge, strengths, weaknesses and capabilities. All of the children demonstrated this to some degree. The following responses not only demonstrate metacognitive processes but indicate something of the children’s positive and negative attitudes about themselves as writers.

‘I normally write one [page]. I don’t have very long stories.’

‘I think I am very good at it [writing].’

‘I make mistakes … I make a lot because sometimes I forget and I don’t look on the board what the word is. I try and sound it out.’

‘I can nearly read running writing.’

**Metalinguistic ability**

All children in the study displayed some metalinguistic ability. Often it was through the use of linguistic terms (e.g. ‘word’, ‘letter’) and sometimes through reference to specific language knowledge (e.g. ‘p.h says f’). A summary of instances indicating metalinguistic ability is provided in Table 1. However, the following example is representative of many of the children’s responses, which combined metacognitive and metalinguistic insights. The child was responding to a question about what she needed to know in order to write well.

‘Um, words. You have to know how to put them around the right way and, um, you have to know what to do and how to write them, but you don’t always have to know how to write them. It is a matter of learning and you have to be patient.’

The following discussion will focus on metalinguistic ability and, in particular, the use and extent of metalanguage as an indication of knowledge about language.

**Children’s use of metalinguistic terms**

In the interviews, which provided the data for Table 1, the children were all asked the same questions, though some had to be prompted more than others through supplementary questions. Other children displayed knowledge so readily that they were asked additional questions, such as one about punctuation. It is also the case that what children said in these interviews was not the sum of their knowledge. This is true of any assessment procedure.

Within these limitations the interview context provided transcripts rich with children’s language. The children, now at the end of their second year at school, used a range of metalinguistic terms as a matter of course. Table 1 provides a summary of ten language concepts evident in the transcripts, the terms the children used in referring to these and,
where applicable, the frequency of use. Column 1, ‘Language concept’, identifies ten categories of language concepts, which were derived from transcripts of the children’s interview responses. The second and third columns record the exact words or letter names used by the children in the two groups, one group previously assessed as ‘less developed writers’ and the other group assessed as ‘more developed writers’ respectively. Square brackets are used where entries are not the children’s own words.

Table 1: Language concepts, children’s use of metalinguistic terms and frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language concept</th>
<th>What less developed writers said</th>
<th>What more developed writers said</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use of the word ‘letter’ or referring to concept ‘letter’</td>
<td>t, h, o, e, r, l, g, j, p, s, u, m, a</td>
<td>m, u, t, h, e, f, p, h, s, o, p, h, i, e, c, l, a, r, e, e, silent e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use of letter names</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use of the word ‘word’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Use of the word ‘sentence’</td>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>sentence [2 references]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use of the word ‘alphabet’ or concept</td>
<td>alphabet, the a, b, c</td>
<td>alphabetical order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Upper and lower case letters</td>
<td>little one; the big one, capital letters</td>
<td>little letter; big letter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Concepts of grapho-phonetic relationships, spelling
- [sound it out (said by all)]
- [Acknowledge some words can’t be spelled by sounding out]
- [Demonstrate specific spelling knowledge e.g. u, not o, in ‘sunflower’]
- [Need to ‘try’ to spell]

8. Punctuation
N.B. Only one child was asked, as an extension
- [Not mentioned]
- [Five punctuation marks explained]

9. Print and cursive forms of writing
- [ones with spaces (print)]
- [running writing]

10. Text types
- [story]
- [story, stories]
- [label, poems]

The language used by the children to talk about writing shows that they understood basic language terms such as the words ‘letter’, ‘word’, ‘sentence’ and ‘alphabet’ and were developing understanding about upper and lower case letters, grapho-phonetic relationships, punctuation and a limited range of text types. However, the clear difference between the two groups is in the extent and frequency of the use of metalinguistic terms. The more developed writers used the terms ‘letter/s’ and ‘word/s’ at least twice as often as the less developed writers and provided more examples of specific letter names, spelling rules and text types. They also used extended terms such as ‘letter clues’, ‘silent letters’, ‘word order’ and ‘alphabetical order’ without prompting, suggesting that these concepts, like the more basic ones noted above, were familiar and well-understood.

Other features of the children’s responses suggested qualitative differences in knowledge about language between the two groups. The less developed writers, in general, did not elaborate in answering questions and often required prompting. They tended to demonstrate how to ‘sound out’ a word rather than refer to specific letter/sound knowledge. The less developed writers showed concern about neatness and size of writing, and two of the boys in the group displayed negative attitudes to writing. On the other hand, none of the more developed writers were negative about writing and two were very positive. These children also
demonstrated detailed knowledge about classroom practices and procedures for writing lessons, to the extent that they seemed quite capable of adopting the teacher’s role themselves. In summary, the evidence from these data suggest that the more competent writers had more knowledge about language than the less developed writers or, at least, were able to display their knowledge through the use of metalanguage.

One last noteworthy feature of the language used by several children in these interviews about writing is the common reference to having to ‘try’ when learning to write, especially in relation to spelling unknown or difficult words. Four children, two from each group, used this expression with one of the less developed writers repeatedly employing the verb ‘try’ when describing spelling strategies. This language choice suggests that the children see themselves as not yet able to achieve the required goals of writing or spelling but in a state of transition towards competence. They adopt a position of ‘precompetence’, an identity that Freebody (1995) says is inherent in adults’ theories of childhood and which is promoted in literacy lessons, curriculum and assessment statements. This issue is taken up in the concluding discussion of teaching strategies.

Discussion
The evidence from this qualitative case study indicates that the children who were identified as being more developed writers on the basis of their writing competence were also more able to display metalinguistic knowledge. They used more extensive metalanguage and they used it more often than the less developed writers. Through their control of a metalanguage the more competent writers could consciously access more extensive knowledge about language than those assessed as less competent writers. According to Bowey ‘a metalinguistic orientation’ contributes to the acquisition of literacy (1988, p. x) and in this study greater metalinguistic awareness corresponded with greater writing competence.

Children’s knowledge about language and writing is strongly influenced by classroom contexts, particularly by the kind of teaching that occurs. While acknowledging that there are other influential factors at play, school-based teaching is necessarily implicated in an assessment of these children’s knowledge. Since the more developed writers had more knowledge about language this suggests that less developed writers will also benefit from more knowledge about language. In principle, the idea of teaching school beginners about language is already recommended in state and national syllabus documents in Australia. There is no evidence, however, that the explicit teaching of metalinguistic knowledge to primary school children is widespread. Even where teachers believe that they are teaching about language there is growing evidence that literacy lessons in schools are often not clear in their focus (Anstey 1998,
Edwards-Groves 1999) and that this further disadvantages the children with less beginning knowledge about language or with different ways of using language (Ludwig & Herschell 1995). Many teachers will require considerable support in order to implement syllabus recommendations requiring the explicit teaching of metalinguistic knowledge but the findings of this study suggest that this is necessary and will contribute to children's writing development.

Another pedagogical issue related to explicitness in teaching practices is highlighted by the findings of this study. The notion of children as 'precompetent' and the resultant teaching practice of encouraging children to 'try' deserves some attention. As noted earlier, four of the eight children made references in their interviews to 'trying' or requiring patience in learning to write. Encouraging children to 'have a go' or 'try' is a prevalent teaching strategy in approaches to writing and spelling and its origins are understandable. When children have only limited knowledge of letter/sound relationships they must use what they know to begin to write. In re-examining this strategy, however, it can also be interpreted as resulting from a lack of explicitness in teaching. Exhorting children to 'try' is too general to be useful to children who would benefit from more specific and explicit information. The area of 'sounding out' words is a useful example. When we give children more teacher demonstrations and scaffolded joint efforts they can learn what it means to 'sound out' a word. A demonstration of the particular letter/sound relationships causing a problem for a child, stating how this is what you as a competent speller/reader would do, provides more guidance than encouragement to 'try to sound it out'. Simply asking children to write down the letters which represent the sounds they can hear in a word is a more explicit instruction for beginning writers than suggesting they try to sound it out. A general principle to increase explicitness in literacy teaching might be to avoid asking children to 'try' and instead first ask ourselves what information is needed to achieve the task, then demonstrate or explain it.

Another pedagogical concern raised by this study is that after eighteen months of schooling the gap between the two groups of children, identified soon after school entry, remains. While both groups have made progress, the question of whether teaching can bridge the initial gap arises. All the children in this study had access to the same teaching but were clearly not able to take up the information in the same way. One obvious variable is what happens outside the school. The children achieving most success in writing development are likely to be those children whose previous and current out-of-school experiences, at home or in early childhood settings, are similar to those of the school. Where children's familiar interaction patterns and language environments are very different to those of the school, there is less likelihood that unilateral teaching strategies and content will achieve the same results. This lack
of congruency between home and school literacy practices is not the responsibility of homes but requires that school personnel examine how their literacy practices and assessments value particular home experiences while devaluing others. Teaching practices that value and make connections with the home literacy practices of all children need to be promoted and implemented to ensure successful literacy learning for all children.

The results of this case study have implications for both the content and the teaching strategies for beginning writers in the first years of school. The metalanguage used by teachers is sometimes assumed to be understood by school beginners or it is expected that children will learn to understand the terms through their repeated use. Bowey notes the danger, for example, in assuming that children entering school ‘comprehend metalinguistic terms such as “word” in the same way as adults’ (1988, p. 25). Terms that are essential to progress in writing cannot be left to chance. Explicit teaching strategies that highlight the terms to be used within writing, and other literacy lessons, need to be promoted and implemented. The dissemination of current best practice in this area is a necessary first step. As in all language teaching this is practice which is based on whole texts and purposeful contexts.

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Context for Article 3


Context

This article is the third emanating from the funded research project that traced beginning writers through their first three years of school. As noted in the context for the previous article, one report of the findings was published in 1999 (Martello, 1999) and the second report is included here as Article 2 (Martello, 2001a). For this, the third report on the research, the transcripts of interviews with the students when they were in their second year of school were re-examined for the students’ constructions of identity as learners. The pedagogical implications of these learner identities, especially in relation to the teaching of spelling, were a particular concern of this research.

Specific focus and significance to the field

The article takes a controversial position on the common practice of encouraging young writers to try to spell as it proposes that this teaching strategy constructs literacy learners as ‘precompetent’. Evidence that the strategy of trying contributes to the construction of precompetent identities is traced through syllabus materials and educational practices. The article argues for balancing this strategy with targeted explicit teaching practice and reiterates the concern, expressed in earlier research (Martello, 2001a), that a lack of appropriate explicit teaching can further handicap students already disadvantaged by literacy curriculum and practices. The article presents a reconceptualisation of a common, taken-for-granted teaching practice, making this critique significant in the early childhood literacy literature. Publication in an international, online journal offers a wide readership for the article.
Research methods

The article is based on the *Learning to write* case study (see Table 3, Chapter 3) and on theoretical/conceptual research into childhood, precompetent/competent identities and the historical development of approaches to teaching and learning spelling. The case study, described for the previous article, took place in a primary school with student participants in their second year of school. Data was collected through interviews (audiotaped and transcribed), samples of students’ writing and syllabus documents. Extracts from the transcripts were selected to represent students from each of two groups and were analysed using aspects of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985). Syllabus documents and curriculum guidelines were selectively sampled for evidence confirming the thesis of the article. Evidence from these sources, and from observations of teaching practice relating to spelling, was triangulated to validate the research premise.

Contribution to the field

This article

i) was presented initially at the Faculty of Education Colloquium, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, 2002.

ii) was published in a prestigious international, online journal with access to a wide readership.
Precompetence and *trying to learn*: Beginning writers talk about spelling

JULIE MARTELLO  Charles Sturt University, Australia

**Abstract** This article explores some of the implications inherent in the pedagogical strategy of encouraging students to 'try' or 'have a go', particularly within the context of early writing and spelling. Pedagogical approaches built on the assumption that the learner will need to try in order to learn are construed here as emanating from and contributing to the construction of identities of 'precompetence' for students in the first years of school. The discussion of precompetence is contextualized within early literacy curriculum documents and practices in Australia and further examined through a functional linguistic analysis of two students' talk about spelling strategies. The students' explanations are marked by differences in the identity each learner constructs for herself and by differences in metalinguistic knowledge, suggesting possible links between the two. A rationale for the prevalence of encouraging students to try to spell is offered and supplementary approaches, based on the explicit teaching of spelling knowledge, are recommended.

**Keywords** early childhood; literacies; precompetence; spelling; teaching

**Trying and precompetence**

In the educational context of literacy learning in the early school years, young students are expected to 'have a go' or 'try' when learning to spell and there are sound pedagogical reasons for this, established by Clay (1975), Graves (1983) and others. The encouragement to try to do something is particularly salient in Australian culture and as a dominant ideology it has found sympathy in the discourse of early literacy in Australia, as elsewhere in the English-speaking world. While this article draws on examples from the writer's local context within Australia, the reader is invited to consider whether or how the arguments might apply to their own areas of expertise and in their own countries and cultures. Whatever the context,
exhoriating another to try to do something implies at least two assumptions about the trier, that is, that she/he possesses some of the required resources, but also lacks some required resources, leading to risks for the outcome. This article offers another perspective on the strategy of ‘trying’ and examines it as a reflection of teachers’ beliefs about childhood, beliefs translated into curriculum policies, classroom practice and finally into students’ perceptions of themselves as learners. The intention here is not to deny the value of the strategy for young learners but to suggest that, in the context of formal schooling, it needs to be supplemented by the teaching of relevant knowledge. In the example used here that is spelling knowledge, so that students are not forced into an over-reliance on trying. This re-examination draws on theoretical discourses around constructions of childhood and children’s learning, on syllabus documents and on an analysis of two young writers’ talk about spelling, where possible links between the students’ identities as learners and their spelling knowledge are explored.

One relevant perspective on the practice of encouraging young students to try can be found in Freebody’s (1995) discussion of how adults’ theories of childhood cast children as ‘precompetent’ in relation to some tasks, particularly in literacy lessons, both at school and at home. He reminds us that the category of ‘childhood’ is a social construct and that a society’s views of what is ‘natural’ for children to do or be like vary according to culture and time. Freebody claims that currently early childhood is often seen as a time of ‘precompetence’ in education, among other fields. Drawing on talk in literacy lessons, he demonstrates how children’s pre-competent identities are built through interaction and collaboration between adults and children, and are sometimes contested by young children themselves (Freebody, 1995: 18). The examples of children’s talk about spelling analysed later in this article are interpreted as further evidence that some young literacy learners assume precompetent identities while others adopt identities characterized by confidence and competence. Some possible reasons for differences in the learners’ identities are explored later in the article, though the much wider scope for possibilities is acknowledged.

In Freebody’s discussion of the construction of precompetent identities for young children, he uses examples from official educational documents of the mid-1990s describing students’ achievements in terms of their ability to ‘try to’, ‘strive to’ or ‘attempt to’ show competence in various tasks (Freebody, 1995: 18). This construction of young students as pre-competent continues to be evident in official syllabus documents in Australia, the UK and elsewhere. For example, in the New South Wales (NSW) primary school English Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998) the spelling
section of the writing strand includes the following indicators through which students demonstrate achievement: in Early Stage 1 (first year of school), ‘vocalises words when trying to write them’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1998: 40, emphasis added), ‘attempts to spell by listening carefully to the sounds in the word and trying to write them accurately and in sequence’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1998: 40, emphasis added); and, in Stage 2 (fourth and fifth years of school), ‘uses known letter patterns when attempting to spell unknown words’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1998: 41, emphasis added), ‘uses knowledge of familiar letter patterns when attempting to spell unknown words’ (Board of Studies NSW, 1998: 41, emphasis added). Despite the overall emphasis on the achievement of competence in other outcomes and indicators in this syllabus, the word choices emphasized here seem to perpetuate the view of students as precompetent even into the fifth year of primary school.

This view of children as precompetent is also prevalent in the personal rationales of many educators who envisage each educational stage/phase as preparation for the next, for example, preschool for school, or primary for secondary school. While these rationales are equally likely to be repudiated by colleagues, in education it seems that there are many programmes predicated on the idea that students are never just right, ready or competent for who and where they are, but always needing to get ‘ready’ for the next stage of institutional education. From broad policy to programming content and pedagogical practice, there is anecdotal evidence among educators for this tendency. More concrete evidence of this is outside the scope of this article, though examples come readily to mind. Preschool programmes that attempt to prepare children for school are one example at the policy and programming levels. While classroom activities that purport to promote ‘readiness’ for the real practices of reading or writing are other, thankfully disappearing, examples.

However, there are alternate constructions of childhood and, in the early childhood field, for example, these are gaining currency. The approach to early childhood education espoused and practised in Reggio Emilia, in Italy, has long been valued and adapted by educators in Australia, the USA and elsewhere. One main tenet of this approach is the belief that young children, far from having ‘limits and weaknesses’, have ‘surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities linked with an inexhaustible need for expression and realization’ (Malaguzzi and Gandini, 1994). A similar philosophy and practice is strongly stated in the recently published NSW Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services (NSW Department of Community Services, 2002: 22), which describes preschool children as ‘capable and resourceful’ and states that they are ‘often more competent,
more intelligent, more capable than they are perceived or understood to be'. And, perhaps in contradiction of the less visible precompetent identities constructed in them, many official assessment statements focus on what students can do, rather than on what they cannot do, or are trying to do. In the previously quoted Writing strand of the primary English Syllabus in NSW (Board of Studies NSW, 1998: 40) a beginning speller in Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 meets expectations for progress if she/he, for example, 'says beginning and ending sounds of spoken words' or 'draws on knowledge of common letter patterns and letter-sound correspondence'. These expectations acknowledge the young student's limited experience of written language, while at the same time recognizing small steps already taken along a complex and long path to writing and spelling proficiency.

The idea that young children are precompetent is taken up in different degrees and in different ways within particular discourses. In education, one prevalent theory of learning is that of Vygotsky, who acknowledged children's 'precompetence' by identifying a 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) in which the child is not able to solve problems alone, because their level is just ahead of current development, but is able to solve the same problems with assistance from knowledgeable adults (Vygotsky, 1962: 103). Within Vygotsky's theory the notion of precompetence is inextricably linked to learning through interaction and cooperation with supportive adults. Precompetence is not viewed as a state that the child has to overcome through trying. Instead, teachers or competent others scaffold learning by working with the child to achieve a particular task. In time, and with continued scaffolding, the child learns to do the task alone. This version of precompetence has teaching built in to it, which may account for its attraction in pedagogical discourses and in classroom practice.

Another aspect of Vygotsky's theory has a bearing on how adults' beliefs about young children's precompetence can be enacted in pedagogy and internalized by students. This is his explanation that learning first occurs in interpersonal situations and is later established intrapersonally. Vygotsky states that:

Every function in the cultural development of the child comes on stage twice ... first in the social, later in the psychological, first in relations between people as an interpsychological category, afterwards within the child as an intrapsychological category. (Vygotsky, 1978: 163)

It is not only concepts about the world, but also ideas about themselves that students learn from their teachers and others with whom they regularly interact. If the teacher's talk regularly construes students as being precompetent or not ready to know particular concepts, then students can absorb
these messages, or resist them as noted earlier, and see themselves as pre-
competent as learners and in relation to aspects of the curriculum. One area
of the primary school curriculum where adults seem to construct young
students as precompetent is in the teaching and learning of spelling,
particularly in the practice of encouraging students to try to spell.

**Trying to spell**

For beginning writers, the task of learning to spell looms large. Along with
forming letter shapes and observing spatial conventions, it is a major
component of making meaning through written language. Most children
need considerable time, sometimes years to acquire sufficient spelling
resources to enable them to write messages accessible to an unknown
reader. As with all aspects of literacy learning, different linguistic, social and
cultural backgrounds will influence what each child knows and can do
regarding literacies. Studies around the world have documented how
children's diverse home and community literacy experiences prepare them
differently for the demands of school literacies, particularly print-based
literacies (see for example Freebody et al., 1995; Heath, 1986; Purcell-
Gates, 1996; Teale, 1986). Whatever their background, many young
children begin school with limited ability to use written language or to
spell communicatively. It is this initial lack of spelling knowledge that
prompts teachers to encourage children to use the limited knowledge of
letter-sound relationships that they do have, to try to spell.

Teachers' understandings of children's attempts at spelling are informed
by research that builds on the seminal work of Clay (1975) and Graves
(1983). Graves' notion of 'invented spelling' has been particularly influen-
tial. Most subsequent research (for example Gentry, 1987; Kress, 1997,
2000; Read, 1986; Treiman, 1993) supports the view that young children
display admirable creativity, problem-solving skills and tenacity in learning
to understand the spelling systems of their language. It is widely under-
stood that the development of conventional spelling is best nurtured in
supportive contexts, where meaning is the primary focus of daily, purpose-
ful writing and children are encouraged to use the information they
currently have to spell the meanings they want to make. Kress, for example,
even argues that the term invented spelling does not do justice to the
'application of the principles of the motivation of signs, and of the integral
coherence of meaning and form' that children engage in as they attempt to
make sense of spelling (Kress, 1997: 126). He applauds their 'rigorous,
analytic examination' of a system that, at least in relation to the English
language, 'does not make full sense when seen from any one single perspective'
(Kress, 1997: 126, emphasis in original). Noting the different approaches taken by children in attempting to understand spelling, Kress suggests that teachers not only need to ‘understand the real historically complex constitution of this system of contradictory principles’ but also need to be able to ‘devise strategies’ to explain it to children with differing orientations to understanding spelling (Kress, 1997: 126, 127).

It would be difficult to find an educator who did not believe that teachers have a responsibility to teach young students spelling knowledge that complements their own efforts to learn how the spelling system works. Likewise, most educators would not dispute that this needs to be done with sensitivity to children’s diverse literacy experiences, with a primary focus on meaning and in purposeful contexts. However, this is not always the case as evidence, anecdotal but substantial, from the writer’s local context shows. Observations by both the writer and successive cohorts of early childhood, teacher-education students based in schools for professional development indicate that the teaching of spelling in many small, regional communities does not always meet these criteria. In these contexts, the teaching of spelling too often adheres to a model of rote learning of lists, worksheets, tests on Friday and an over-reliance on the students’ ability to try, often without the prerequisite teaching that might make trying successful. While all of these practices warrant critique, the focus here is on the strategy of trying and its prevalence in some early years classrooms.

As discussed earlier, teaching students to try to spell makes eminent sense in the context of beginning writers’ understandably limited knowledge. The strategy continues to be useful whenever new spelling challenges arise. However, this strategy need not and should not remain the principal spelling strategy for long. If it is promoted by teachers as a predominant spelling strategy, and this is continued throughout the primary years, there is a danger that students will see themselves as precompetent learners who will always need to strive to spell and never be in control of the knowledge or strategies that might make them competent spellers. Instead, the systematic and explicit teaching of spelling knowledge and other spelling strategies, as recommended in syllabuses and guidelines here and elsewhere (for example NSW Department of Education and Training, 1998), should provide an ever-growing repertoire of spelling resources for the young student. Increased spelling resources will lessen the need for risk-taking through trying. Achieving a balance between risk-taking through trying and applying relevant spelling knowledge is an obvious goal but maybe also an elusive one.

In the following section, an examination of the talk of two young students suggests that some young students do see trying as a principal
spelling strategy and do seem to internalize teachers' messages about being precompetent. The role that spelling knowledge might play in these students' sense of identity as learners is also considered in the analysis.

**Learner's identity and spelling knowledge**

The following discussion and analysis is based on short samples of much longer transcripts of two beginning writers talking about themselves and their spelling strategies. The transcripts were of interviews between the writer (researcher) and the students when they were in their second year of school. The two children discussed here, Leesa and Melinda (not their real names), were part of a larger study of students attending a state school in a regional city in NSW. These two children, and their class cohort, had also been interviewed in their first year of school as part of the larger study. For more details of both phases of the study see Martello (1999; 2001).

At the time of the interviews sampled here, Leesa was seven years old and Melinda was six. Both came from Anglo-Australian backgrounds with English as their only language. In their first year of school, Leesa was assessed as one of the least developed writers in the class and Melinda as one of the most developed writers. This situation was still valid late in their second year when they were among eight students selected for the follow-up research. The identification of Leesa, as a less developed and Melinda, as a more developed writer was based on samples of their writing, using early learning profiles (NSW Department of School Education, 1995) and the outcomes and indicators from the NSW K-6 English Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998).

The interviews sampled here were conducted during English class activities when the eight focus children were individually withdrawn to an adjoining room. They brought with them a collection of their previous writing, which was shown and discussed during the interview. The researcher had also spent time observing and working with the class, and so shared experiences relating to the writing were part of the interviews. The children were asked to comment on their general progress in writing since the previous year, the teaching strategies they found helpful, the kinds of writing they did, classroom procedures for writing and the spelling strategies they used when attempting unknown or difficult words. Because the question about spelling a difficult word usually elicited initial answers describing general procedures, such as asking the teacher and using personal dictionaries, it was rephrased until metacognitive responses were given. For example, students were asked: ‘If the teacher isn’t there and you have to spell a word without any other help, how do you work out how to
spell a difficult word?’ This question was intended primarily to illuminate the spelling strategies and knowledge that students independently used and were aware of using.

The methodology of asking young children to comment on their learning strategies and knowledge as described above is problematic as it requires a level of metacognition, that is, the ability to reflect on ‘one’s own cognitive machinery and how it works, both in general and at the particular moment’ (Meadows, 1993: 78). Because children’s prior learning and experiences vary so much they also vary in their ability to reflect on learning in this way. Also, children may not have the language to clearly express something even if they do understand it. Accordingly, what children report in the short samples of interview used here is not necessarily all that they know or can do. Some of these limitations may be overcome by reference to further information given by the children and recorded in the longer transcripts of interview and by the in-depth analysis of the words recorded here.

The interview responses of all eight students included in this second phase of the research revealed differences between the two groups (less or more developed writers) in their metalinguistic awareness (see Martello, 2001). Intriguingly, four of the eight students referred to trying when discussing spelling, prompting this closer look at two of the students and the role of trying in their spelling strategies and in their construction of themselves as writers/spellers. In the extracts examined below, Leesa and Melinda reveal quite different identities as learners of spelling and writing, with Leesa adopting a precompetent identity whereas Melinda clearly sees herself as competent.

**Analysing talk about spelling**

Extracts from the responses of Leesa and Melinda were analysed using some aspects of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985, 1994), as it allows the researcher to examine specific features of language and to interpret the personal and sociocultural meanings realized through these language choices. Because the language samples are short it was decided to perform a thorough analysis to validate the interpretations as far as possible. According to Halliday (1985), a fundamental role of language is its ideational function, its role as a means of making sense of experience and representing it. Halliday has argued that language is what enables human beings ‘to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience, of what goes on around them and inside them’ (Halliday, 1985: 101). By focusing on language choices for transitivity, that is, participants as subject
(who/what?), processes (does what?), participants as object (to whom/what?) and under what circumstances, we can understand the roles that these students assume for themselves, the aims they hope to achieve and some of the contributing circumstances surrounding these. Central to transitivity is the choice of process type (realized by verbal groups), their meanings and the key participant functions (realized by noun groups) associated with each process type. Halliday (1994) summarizes the choices for these in the grammar of English (Table 1).

The following analyses and their interpretations draw on Halliday’s work as well as on other aspects of functional grammar. Figures 1 and 2 contain linguistic analyses of the responses of Leesa and Melinda after they were asked how they would go about spelling a difficult or unfamiliar word. The responses are analysed for the two students’ choices for participant roles, process types and circumstances, where applicable. The questions to which each student is responding are written in bold type above the analysis tables. Within the tables, the bold type identifies the student’s words and beneath these is the linguistic analysis, organized into columns to display separately the functional constituents of each clause. Leesa’s language and analysis is presented first in Figure 1, with discussion following.

**Leesa’s identity and spelling knowledge**

The most striking feature of Leesa’s language extract is that the first three processes are represented by verbal group complexes consisting of the verb

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Type</th>
<th>Category meaning</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• material:</td>
<td>‘doing’</td>
<td>Actor, goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action</td>
<td>‘doing’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>event</td>
<td>‘happening’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• behavioural</td>
<td>‘behaving’</td>
<td>Behaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mental:</td>
<td>‘sensing’</td>
<td>Senser, Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perception</td>
<td>‘seeing’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affection</td>
<td>‘feeling’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognition</td>
<td>‘thinking’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• verbal:</td>
<td>‘saying’</td>
<td>Sayer, Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• relational:</td>
<td>‘being’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attribution</td>
<td>‘attributing’</td>
<td>Carrier, Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identification</td>
<td>‘identifying’</td>
<td>Identified, Identifier; Token, Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existential</td>
<td>‘existing’</td>
<td>Existent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prompt: Why can’t you do it too big?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It</th>
<th>will</th>
<th>go</th>
<th>off the page.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(the writing)</td>
<td>Modal: action</td>
<td>Material: certainty</td>
<td>Location: place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1 Leesa: Processes, key participants and circumstances*

‘to try’ before a second verb. In these instances, the process is extended and the relationship between the two verbs is one of conation, that is, one of intention to action or of striving towards a goal (Halliday, 1994). In the analysis, I have italicized the verb ‘try’ and the subject participant role associated with it because these seem indicative of the kind of precompetent identity under discussion in this article. However, since the last verb in such verb complexes is considered the relevant one for process type in transitivity analysis (Martin et al., 1997), I have also identified the key participant functions associated with it.

Through her repeated use of the primary process ‘to try’ before the secondary, non-finite processes, ‘to think’, ‘to move’ and ‘to do’, Leesa
reveals her sense of the need to strive for, and perhaps not achieve, the second process which is sometimes mental (to think) and sometimes physical action (to move, to do). These process choices put Leesa in the role of Senser (thinker) and Actor and, together with the other participants and circumstances, they reveal something of her identity and her knowledge. As noted above, her role as Senser is tinged with the doubt of having to try and perhaps not succeeding. As an Actor, the proposed behaviour to be ‘tried’ is moving one’s hand to write, doing ‘letters’ (a general language concept) and controlling the size and positioning of the writing. These rather mechanical and spatial concerns suggest that the challenges Leesa perceives, or is able to explain, are more basic than the identification of spelling strategies to tackle an unknown word.

Leesa’s responses in sections of the transcript not recorded here were mostly about procedural strategies rather than the application of spelling knowledge. She had to be prompted often to elaborate on her answers, which tended to stop short of any clear strategies. For example, when asked about how she was learning to write Leesa did state that:

... some words you can sound out but some just, just... you have to just think like that or, or, or you wont get ...

However, she needed assistance to establish that these were words we learn to recognize by sight, and was unable to explain ‘sounding out’ until given a word on which she demonstrated the strategy. Leesa had a positive attitude to writing and thought she was good at it. When asked how she thought she might get even better she answered:

You’d have to go read a book, then try to copy it, then try to write it by yourself, without the book.

This and other responses of this kind implied a lack of agency for her in the processes of writing and a sense that she could not use writing for her own purposes.

Through these language choices, particularly the repeated use of the verb try, Leesa constructs a view of herself as not yet able to achieve the required goals but in a state of transition towards competence. For her the writing/spelling process requires constant effort, is bound by constrictions (‘not do it too big’) and is almost out of her control (‘It will go off the page’). In terms of the earlier discussion, Leesa identifies herself as a pre-competent writer, even though she can write and demonstrates a reasonable degree of metacognition about some general processes to be applied in writing/spelling. In these extracts and throughout the interview she does not articulate or refer to specific spelling knowledge or conventions upon
which she could draw as a resource for spelling difficult or unknown words. It may be that the absence of spelling resources prompts her to adopt an identity of precompetence and to display this by trying. Despite trying so conscientiously, the risk of failure is high for Leesa. The reality of regularly falling short of expectations is borne out by her identification as one of the four least developed writers/spellers in her class. Whatever she can do is overshadowed by what she cannot yet do or does not yet understand, as the culture of precompetence pervades her own sense of identity as a young literacy learner.

As noted earlier, not all young literacy learners assume precompetent identities, which prompts us to look for possible reasons behind these differences. Among the many possible reasons, two being explored here centre on teachers’ beliefs about childhood as a time of precompetence and the role that might be played by knowledge about language, particularly spelling knowledge. Another important factor in the construction of different learner identities must be the sociocultural experiences of each child, acknowledged but not examined here. A look at how Melinda responds to the question about spelling a difficult word, analysed in Figure 2, illustrates how some young students do not adopt a precompetent identity and instead display confidence about their literacy achievements.

Melinda’s identity and spelling knowledge

In the choice of processes, Melinda’s responses are markedly different from Leesa’s because of the absence of the verb try, the range of process types used and their modality (degree of certainty). Melinda uses material (use, do, practise), verbal (sound out) and mental (learn) processes, identifying a range of options for spelling and a range of roles for herself as actor, sayer and senser. She sometimes uses the modal auxiliary ‘can’ attributing to herself the ability to achieve the accompanying processes. The remaining processes (use, sound out) are not qualified in any way, implying that, without doubt, this is what one does (use letter clues; sound out the word). Melinda, like Leesa, uses the generalized ‘you’ rather than ‘I’ in her responses, reflecting the conditional nature of the interviewer’s question. The use of the inclusive ‘you’ also indicates both students’ assumption that they are describing the same processes others go through in spelling a difficult word. This is possibly an indication that their ideas about learning to write and spell have developed within the shared practices of the classroom.

Despite their shared context for learning, Melinda’s language choices for modality place her in the role of one who is in control of the processes,
Question: How do you work out how to spell a difficult word?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[You]</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>letter clues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material: action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prompt: How do you do that?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>sound [out]</th>
<th>the word</th>
<th>out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sayer</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Verb extension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prompt: ... any other things you do to help you with spelling?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>can (are able to)</th>
<th>do</th>
<th>a lot of writing</th>
<th>at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal potential, ability</td>
<td></td>
<td>Material: action</td>
<td>Location: place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>And [You]</th>
<th>[can] [are able to]</th>
<th>practise</th>
<th>your spelling words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal potential, ability</td>
<td>Material: action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prompt: Good. Anything else?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>can</th>
<th>learn</th>
<th>letters</th>
<th>like t,h says ‘th’ and p,h says ‘f’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
<td>(Elaboration)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modal potential, ability</td>
<td>Mental: cognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Melinda: Processes, key participants and circumstances

whether mental or physical, and one who has the ability to achieve the related goals. In contrast to Leesa, she adopts an identity of competence rather than precompetence and a look at other features of her language may give some clues as to why she assumes such competence.

Melinda’s responses demonstrate both metacognitive and metalinguistic
abilities. Like Leesa, she is able to reflect upon her own learning and articulate the strategies she uses in writing and spelling. Unlike Leesa, she is able to draw upon specific knowledge about language. She demonstrates her spelling knowledge in several ways, such as through reference to the use of 'letter clues' and the implication of a connection between letters and sounds when prompted to explain how the letter clues are used: 'You sound the word out'. A further prompt about spelling strategies is interpreted more generally and she explains two broad strategies which contribute to her ability to spell, that is, 'a lot of writing' and practising her spelling words. The final prompt by the interviewer elicits very specific knowledge about letter/sound combinations ('like t, h says th, and p, h says f') and demonstrates this point of difference between the two students.

Melinda was asked additional questions, not recorded in the table, including one about punctuation, because she quickly established her ability and willingness to display knowledge about language. The following response explaining punctuation marks illustrates not only her detailed knowledge and facility with metalanguage but also her willingness to engage in the school-based practice of displaying knowledge.

A full stop goes at the end of a sentence and a question mark goes at the end of a question. An exclamation mark goes at the end of something in a book that someone's yelling . . . usually.

When asked about speech marks, she continued:

They're like commas and, if you're writing about someone saying something, you put the speech marks around what they're saying.

Melinda's repetition of the words 'goes at the end of' in the former example was delivered with a chant-like intonation, suggesting both her familiarity with this knowledge and her overfamiliarity, or even boredom, with displaying it. Again, her use of the present tense (goes, are, put) lends a sense of certainty to her views and Melinda continues to identify herself as part of the community of writers who share this knowledge by using the inclusive 'you' in the last comment. However, the comparison of these two students' talk illustrates that Leesa does not share this knowledge or this view of herself as a writer, differences which are explored further in the following discussion.

**Discussion**

The analysis and interpretation of Leesa's and Melinda's talk provide insights into the way each constructs herself as a writer/speller and what
she understands about spelling knowledge. Though the two students were in the same class and receiving the same instruction, their responses were markedly different on both dimensions. Leesa, with little spelling knowledge displayed or evident in the transcript of the interview, adopts an identity of precompetence as a writer/speller. In contrast, Melinda demonstrates considerable spelling knowledge and assumes an identity which is correspondingly confident and competent. A major difference between the two students centres on the kinds of strategies for spelling that each is aware of using or able to explain. Leesa reveals an over-dependency on the strategy of 'trying', which she applies to some general writing processes, while Melinda accesses specific spelling knowledge, as well as citing general processes for improving spelling. The differences in these two students' approaches to spelling naturally raise questions about how one student has learnt so much while another, in the same class, knows so little about spelling knowledge. To explore some possible answers, I intend to leave notions of ability aside and focus on two pedagogical issues that are open to the kind of change that could improve literacy outcomes for all students, including others like Leesa.

First, there is considerable evidence now that some students' experiences outside of school, in their homes and communities, equip them with the dispositions and language skills valued in schools and rewarded by success, while the converse is true for other students (see for example Cairney and Ruge, 1998; Freebody et al., 1995). This points to one possible reason for Melinda's relative success in learning the spelling knowledge that eludes Leesa. If we assume that the spelling knowledge displayed by Melinda has been taught at school, then the question arises as to why Leesa has not also learned it. It is possible that Melinda's experiences of language outside of school are congruent with school practices and the transition to school literacy learning is smooth for her. She notes that one way to improve her spelling is through writing a lot at home, suggesting that this already happens at her home. On the other hand, Leesa does not mention home literacy practices throughout her interview so it is possible that her literacy experiences outside of school are not congruent with school usages of spoken and written language, making it difficult for her to engage with and make sense of school literacy instruction. Again, the consensus view among those writing on this topic is that the responsibility to connect with and build on the linguistic, social and cultural experiences of all students, not just those currently valued by institutional schooling, lies with educators (see for example Alloway, 1999; Hanlen, 2002; Makin and Jones Diaz, 2002; Spreadbury, 2002). This same body of literature describes many examples of how students' popular culture pastimes and experience with
technologies, for example, can provide engaging contexts for building curriculum knowledge with previously disenfranchised groups of students. Making better connections to Leesa's home language and social practices is one pedagogical move that could help her to engage with any focused literacy teaching associated with these contexts.

Second, the very existence of and the specific nature of focused literacy teaching has to be another variable influencing how students take up what teachers teach. Not all literacy teaching is as explicit or as systematic as English syllabuses and curriculum guidelines require. There is some evidence that literacy lessons are often unclear in their specific literacy focus (Anstey, 1998; Edwards-Groves, 1999) and that this creates even more disadvantage for students with less beginning knowledge about language or those unfamiliar with the kind of language used for school instruction (Ludwig and Herschell, 1995). Information about the teaching of literacy in the two students' classroom was not explicitly collected for this study and there is no intention to comment on it here. However, in general, learning about written language systems, including spelling, is not likely to happen through unconscious acquisition, as with spoken language, but requires explicit teaching. It needs to be demonstrated clearly, in appropriate language and within appropriate contexts. In the research cited above it was noted that the literacy focus of lessons was often obscured by other objectives and not obvious to the students being taught. While some students, notably those with some initial understandings or opportunities to learn at home, might glean enough information to make progress with implicit teaching, others can only strive for competence and risk failure. Explicit and systematic teaching is one way to ensure that students do not continue to try in a vacuum but, at least, have some knowledge that they can try to apply.

It is through everyday educational practices that students' identities as learners are constructed. Pedagogical approaches that consider students' home experiences, their familiar language and their starting knowledge about writing/spelling will benefit students more than those that pay no attention to these factors. Pedagogical strategies that strengthen the explicit and systematic teaching of literacy will also assist all students to develop new understandings about it. The possible absence of these perspectives may explain the differences in the two students' ability to take up the spelling knowledge taught at school.

It seems worth exploring further whether the strategy of encouraging students to try, particularly in the context of spelling, serves all students well and whether this strategy is always balanced with the teaching of relevant spelling knowledge. If teachers consciously or unconsciously see young
literacy students as precompetent they might also subscribe to the corollary, that literacy development, including progress in spelling, will automatically occur as students gain years and language experience. The need to teach spelling knowledge and strategies may not be a priority if student approximations or errors are consistently interpreted as demonstrating that they are precompetent or 'not ready' for new learning. However, teachers do have a responsibility to teach something and spelling knowledge, like any other aspect of literacy, can be taught in context-sensitive ways and in purposeful language. As teachers and teacher-educators we can assist more students to develop identities of competence as writers and spellers through appropriate teaching of spelling knowledge, balanced with recognition of their learner status.

Teachers’ beliefs about childhood as a time of precompetence can be traced through official education documents, policies and programmes to classroom practices and finally to views held by children about themselves. The promotion by teachers of the strategy of trying to spell can be interpreted as a manifestation of teachers’ beliefs that children are precompetent. While it is a valid strategy within particular contexts, trying to spell depends on the teaching and learning of relevant spelling knowledge for success. Evidence has been offered to suggest that some students internalize teachers’ discourses around precompetence and demonstrate a learner identity marked by a sense of precompetence, while others do not. Many positions in between these two also exist and vary according to the child, the child’s linguistic, social and cultural experiences and the particular learning area. This article attempts to open up discussion about the need to balance the common teaching strategy of encouraging young students to try to spell with the teaching of relevant spelling knowledge.

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CHAPTER 5

Literacy curriculum & drama pedagogy

Article 4

Article 5

Article 6

Article 7

Article 8
Context for Article 4


**Context**

This was an invited article for the Melbourne Studies in Education journal, specifically, for a themed edition on ‘Drama and Learning’. The editors suggested that my contribution address drama and literacy in the early years of schooling. The invitation presented an opportunity to extend my recent research (Martello, 2001b) into drama pedagogy for early childhood literacy learning by examining drama’s contribution to the ‘productive pedagogy’ framework (Lingard, Mills & Hayes, 2000) which was an educational initiative at the time and to further examine drama’s productiveness within a predominant literacy framework (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

**Specific focus and significance to the field**

The article aims to explain the value of drama in relation to two distinct, educational frameworks. The first is the ‘productive pedagogy’ framework in which criteria for quality teaching and learning are identified. Salient features of drama pedagogy are explained to demonstrate how they meet many of the criteria contributing to a productive pedagogy. The second framework describes four different kinds of literacy practices that together constitute effective literacy. The efficacy of using drama to develop all four kinds of practices is demonstrated through data from a drama case study with school beginners.

This article makes a significant contribution to the literature because, at the time of publication, there were few other publications that explicated the specific contributions of drama pedagogy to either of the two frameworks of ‘productive pedagogies’ (e.g. O’Toole, 2002) or the four resources model of literacy (e.g. Barratt-Pugh, 2002), particularly in the context of early childhood education. This article was one of few
examples that brought these areas of education together into the early childhood sphere and it addressed an obvious gap in the literature.

**Research methods**

The article is based on theoretical/conceptual research into the productive pedagogies framework, the four resources model of literacy and drama pedagogy. It also draws on the *Pokemon* case study (see Table 3, Chapter 3) which investigated the use of drama and popular culture for developing literacies with students in their first year of school. To examine drama’s potential as a productive pedagogy, specific drama strategies were exampled and interpreted in relation to the published criteria for productive pedagogy. The *Pokemon* case study provided the data for investigating the use of the four kinds of literacy practices within a drama context. Case study data consisted of documents in the form of students’ written, spoken and visual texts, lesson materials and the lesson plan. The students’ texts and lesson materials were interpreted as evidence of drama’s ability to promote and integrate the four kinds of literacy practices.

**Contribution to the field**

This article

i) was published in a prestigious, refereed Australian education journal.

ii) has attracted interest from educators in Australia and abroad (See Appendix D – Supporting documentation for Article 4)

iii) uniquely documents relationships between drama, productive pedagogies and the four resources literacy model within the early childhood education context.
Four Literacy Practices *rolled* into One: Drama and Early Childhood Literacies

Julie Martello
Charles Sturt University

**Drama: Undervalued and Underused**

The literature on process drama and its use as an effective pedagogical strategy is both extensive and convincing (see, for example, Bolton¹, Morgan & Saxton², Warren³). However, so far, it has not convinced a majority of educators to employ drama in the primary school classroom on a regular basis. This is particularly true of early childhood classrooms, where, it can be argued, it is more appropriate than any other learning and teaching strategy. Although some states in Australia have drama as part of the mandatory curriculum for primary schools, there is evidence⁴ to show that it is not generally taught as a subject discipline or used as a learning and teaching strategy. The need for further evidence of drama’s value continues to drive committed drama educators to research and explain this much under-rated subject and pedagogy.

Drama’s value as a learning and teaching strategy is a driving concern of this article. The article characterises drama as a ‘productive pedagogy’⁵ promoting quality student learning on four essential dimensions. At a time when the spotlight is on the quality of teaching as a determining factor in many children’s success in literacy and in schooling in general, the productive pedagogy framework provides critical guidance in how we might achieve excellence in teaching. In relation to specific curriculum content, the paper focuses on the use of drama in early childhood to extend students’ literacy learning into four kinds of literacy practices that constitute effective literacy. The work of Luke and Freebody⁶ is used here as the basis for discussion of literacy

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teaching as it encompasses the many new literacies engaged in by children in their use of technologies and other popular culture pastimes. Drawing primarily on a drama session with kindergarten students (the first year of formal schooling in New South Wales), the paper highlights the integration and use of four kinds of literacy practices within a purposeful drama context.

**Drama as a Productive Pedagogy**

Rather than attempting to review and reiterate the established body of writing that explains how students learn through drama, my aim here is to adopt the current framework of what constitutes a 'productive pedagogy' and to demonstrate that drama conforms to the definition of a productive pedagogy. The concept of productive pedagogies draws on the findings of a large scale research project - the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study – and attempts to refocus the attention of educators on achieving success for all groups of students by bringing together aspects of accepted practice that optimise quality student learning. The approach characterises a ‘productive pedagogy’ as one that meets a range of criteria grouped into four dimensions. The following table outlines the four dimensions and their contributing characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Quality</th>
<th>Relevance (Connectedness)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking</td>
<td>Connectedness to the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>Problem-based curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
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<td>Substantive conversation</td>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge as problematic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metalanguage</td>
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<tr>
<th>Social Support</th>
<th>Recognition of Difference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student control</td>
<td>Cultural knowledges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student support</td>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Group identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit criteria</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
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</tbody>
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7 Lingard, Mills, Hayes, op. cit.
8 ibid., p.102.
9 ibid, p.107.
The assertion that drama is a productive pedagogy will be justified here by mapping the defining features of drama and its main concepts onto the essential characteristics of productive pedagogies. The following discussion attempts to do this by linking the drama concepts of role, tension, focus, symbol and reflection\textsuperscript{10} to the productive pedagogies criteria, listed above and italicised below, that they satisfy.

The use of role, where students and teachers step into the shoes of others, is central to all process drama. Students have many opportunities through role to engage in drama situations where problems, of both the real and imagined worlds, are grappled with in safe and supported contexts. Teachers support drama work by co-constructing the framework with students who then engage with the drama context through roles that draw on their real-world background knowledge. While the agreed parameters of the drama frame provide protection from real-world consequences, inside the drama students make decisions (self-regulation) and engage in substantive conversations about ideas on intellectual and emotional levels, leading to a deep understanding of the issues at play.

Role work is intrinsically connected to narrative structure as some part of a narrative is enacted in every episode of role-taking. Enacting roles is a means by which students explore the multiple perspectives of people from different social and cultural contexts. It promotes inclusivity of all class members because students can not only choose both the type of role that suits them and their level of engagement with the role but as a group can explore themes such as ‘difference’ and ‘inclusivity’ through drama. The negotiation and group decision-making necessary for successful process drama usually leads to a healthy group identity in the drama classroom. Taking on roles in process drama necessitates student engagement in tasks that can meet all of the criteria of the four dimensions of productive pedagogies.

Another central element of drama is tension. This refers to the inclusion of some kind of problem to be solved or difficulty to be overcome and is a primary means of maintaining student engagement in the drama over time. The use of a range of elements that produce tension, for example, constraints on space, time, the unknown,\textsuperscript{11} make drama the perfect vehicle for a problem-based curriculum. The context in which a problem is set can be drawn from any and all subject areas. For example, a drama about the first European crossing of the Blue Mountains can integrate Social Studies (e.g. Indigenous and European history, cultural geography) with Science (e.g. edible plants, wildlife behaviour, landforms), English (e.g. writing diaries, letters, reports, lists; drawing and annotating maps; talking and listening in group discussions, retellings; reading instructions, letters) and Creative Arts, where the drama outcomes themselves will be the focus (e.g. role-taking, collaborative problem-solving). The integration of knowledge from across the curriculum is therefore always a feature of drama, since drama is about life situations.

\textsuperscript{10} R. Cusworth, J. Simons, Beyond the Script: Drama in the Classroom, Newtown, 1997.

\textsuperscript{11} Morgan, Saxton, op. cit.
The learning that occurs when students grapple with problems in drama experiences is built upon their own background knowledge, drawn on in the immediacy of drama action. However, drama also involves research of the relevant topics outside of the dramatic action. In drama experiences where the narrative is developed over several sessions, higher order thinking is involved because both sources of knowledge inform the drama action and are transformed within it. In this kind of drama, students have opportunities to develop deep understandings of concepts (such as that of “terra nullius” in the example above) which can be unpacked using the multiple perspectives of a range of participants (for example, the explorers, the indigenous inhabitants, government officials). The emphasis on problem solving in drama means that concepts are presented and dealt with in an integrated way, for example, in a scene where explorers meet indigenous inhabitants, and are then fruitfully available for discussion and reflection.

In drama, the element of focus is essential as it defines the educational outcomes planned initially by the teacher and prevents the drama from floundering for want of a purpose. Having a focus for the drama ensures that the situations and roles negotiated between students and teacher are directed towards the exploration of particular curriculum content. For example, in a drama discussed later in this paper, the students enjoy demonstrating the powers of characters from the popular electronic game, *Pokemon*. However, for the teacher the focus of the drama is to have students use language to explain, to write lists of the powers, to investigate the origins of the characters’ names and to transform this information by creating and documenting their own game characters. In planning a focus for drama, teachers ensure that the work has intellectual quality and relevance to the curriculum as well as to students’ worlds.

The symbolic representation of ideas is another essential element of drama that contributes to its characterisation as a productive pedagogy. Symbols are often used as a shortcut to shared meanings and can add depth to the drama. Objects, words or actions can become symbols imbued with shared meaning developed within or outside the drama. The selection or recognition of appropriate symbols requires a depth of understanding of ideas being represented and, when discussed explicitly between teacher and students, adds intellectual quality not commonly present in everyday schoolwork.

As well as the essential elements of drama already noted, process drama adherents recognise the importance of time for students to reflect upon their drama experiences so that learning is made more conscious. Reflection through discussion allows students to disengage from roles they have played and consider the similarities and differences between their real and drama experiences. Guided reflection about feelings and actions in the drama presents students with opportunities for metacognition or understanding of their own learning processes. Again, this kind of higher order thinking and deep understanding is available through reflection on drama in a way not often experienced in other class activities.
Four Literacy Practices roled into One

The discussion above is by no means exhaustive, however it does illustrate how features of drama characterise it as a productive pedagogy that comprehensively fulfils the criteria set out by Lingard, Mills and Hayes. The question arises as to whether there is any other single classroom method that does so. Drama alone seems capable of integrating all of the requirements of a productive pedagogy into a cohesive whole. Perhaps drama's role as a teaching and learning method will be reconsidered in this light.

Learning Literacies through Drama
One way to substantiate the claim that drama is a uniquely productive pedagogy is to demonstrate its effectiveness in a specific learning area, such as literacy learning. Definitions of what constitutes literacy have expanded in recent years to include the multimodal literacies involved in viewing visual images and using digital technologies. In the following sections of this paper current views of multiliteracies and of the four kinds of literacy practices necessary to become a literate person will be outlined, leading to a discussion of how drama integrates these literacy practices in the early school years.

The widespread use of information and communication technologies in homes and schools has resulted in definitions of literacy being extended to encompass these and other activities. Expanded definitions of literacy are inclusive of a wide range of community practices such as television viewing and electronic game playing. The term multiliteracies is used to incorporate many forms of representation, including visual images and gestures, as well as language. In Australia, mandatory syllabus documents also acknowledge the changing literacy landscape and literacy definitions generally include talking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, visual and critical literacies (see, for example, Board of Studies NSW, 1998). However, this rethinking of what constitutes literacy has not yet had a noticeable impact on teaching practice where views of literacy as primarily book-based reading and writing often persist and create disadvantage for some students.

There is mounting evidence to show that a wide range of literacy practices that young children engage in at home and in their communities is ignored or undervalued in school literacy teaching. This research also indicates that where there is a mismatch between home and school literacy experiences, children often experience difficulties and even failure with school literacy. Following Heath's very early study in the

14 ibid.
15 ibid, p 5.
USA, there have been several in Australia, (for example, Cairney & Ruge\textsuperscript{18} and Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn,\textsuperscript{19}) that implicate teaching practices in school literacy failure because some children's talents and strengths are not recognised within the accepted view of school literacy and language competence. In the Australian educational context there is also evidence that particular groups of students consistently perform at lower literacy levels than others, a finding which challenges the common assumption that literacy problems reside with the individual child. Alloway\textsuperscript{20} points out that school literacy practices advantage groups of children whose social and cultural backgrounds are most closely aligned to the belief systems of the school while disadvantaging other groups, namely boys, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those who speak English as a second language.

The detrimental effects on particular student groups of narrow definitions of literacy and of the lack of congruence between many students’ home and school literacy practices have resulted in calls for increased recognition of home and community literacy practices (for example, Beecher & Arthur;\textsuperscript{21} Marsh & Millard\textsuperscript{22}). In the early childhood field, educators are describing the many ways that continuity between homes and schools can be achieved. Some ways include using a variety of resources from children’s homes, such as toys, videos, food packages or basing experiences on students' popular culture interests, such as favourite television characters or electronic games. Many, if not all, of these practices can be included in classroom drama as the examples used later in this paper demonstrate. The topics around which drama work is based can be taken from the children's interests and popular culture and their familiar language can be used and extended through a variety of drama roles.

\textit{Teaching Literacies in the Early School Years}

Though views of what constitutes literacy differ, the teaching and learning of literacies is still considered the pivotal focus for most other learning in primary schools and particularly in the early years. One of the pre-eminent frameworks for literacy teaching, adopted by many researchers and educators in Australia, is that of Luke and Freebody.\textsuperscript{23} They maintain that to be effective literacy users, children and adults alike need to be proficient in a range of integrated practices that allow them to: decode texts; participate

\textsuperscript{23} Luke, Freebody, op. cit.
in the meanings of texts; use texts functionally; and critically analyse and transform texts. They are briefly explained in the following summary:

- Decoding texts - this involves recognising and using such aspects of written language as, the 'alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, conventions and patterns of sentence structure and text'.

- Participate in the meanings of text - this involves understanding and composing meaningful written, visual and spoken texts; and drawing upon prior knowledge of the world and of other texts to bring meaning to new texts.

- Use texts functionally - this involves knowing the social and cultural functions of various texts and knowing how these functions shape the way texts are structured.

- Critically analyse and transform texts - this involves understanding and acting on the knowledge that texts are not neutral; that they actively construct and represent the world; and that they can be critiqued and transformed.

In this framework, texts can be spoken, written, visual and combinations of these modes. The four kinds of practices outlined in the model relate to both understanding the multimodal texts of others and creating one's own. They are 'variously mixed and orchestrated in proficient reading and writing' so that while each is necessary 'none of the four families of practice is sufficient for literate citizens'. The teaching and learning of a repertoire of all four practices is considered just as relevant in early childhood education as in later years.

There are many classroom activities through which these four kinds of literacy practices are developed in the early years of school though, it is argued here, none achieve the integration and contextual authenticity offered by role-taking in drama. In the following section of the paper the discussion centres around how in one drama lesson with children in their first year of school the four kinds of literacy practices noted above are used. Possibilities for follow-up drama lessons that provide further opportunities to extend these literacy practices are also explained and some additional drama resources for developing literacies with children in the first years of school are mentioned.

24 ibid., p.7.
25 ibid., p.8.


**Developing the Four Kinds of Literacy Practices through Drama**

Bringing together two themes discussed earlier in the paper, the main drama experience discussed here was based on children's popular culture and incorporated opportunities to use the four integrated literacy practices. While popular culture games and artefacts are often banned from the preschool or school setting, this lesson was planned to build on students' interests and use their knowledge as a springboard for developing the literacy practices deemed necessary for literate citizens. By using the popular electronic game, *Pokemon*, as a focus the lesson was also an attempt to bridge the gap that exists for some children between home and school. The introductory drama lesson described below is taken from work done collaboratively with teacher education students and myself. While this lesson has already been successfully used with kindergarten children, I have suggested others with the aim of extending opportunities for use of the four literacy practices.

The *Pokemon* lesson: In an introductory drama lesson with kindergarten children, the teacher took the role of a young woman, called Belinda, whose much younger niece had challenged her to a *Pokemon* battle. Belinda’s problem, providing the tension in the drama, was her lack of knowledge about the *Pokemon* characters and their various powers. She asked for the kindergarten students’ help to learn about the game in preparation for the match with her niece. The drama lesson was organised so that the kindergarten students, working in three groups, undertook to teach Belinda about three of the most powerful *Pokemon* characters. They needed to verbally describe each one as well as show Belinda, through enactment, the behaviours each engaged in. As part of their preparation for enacting the *Pokemon* characters’ behaviours, the children dictated a list of them to adult scribes. The list, beginning with the *Pokemon* character’s name, was used as a prompt for the enactment and was read several times by the children in the course of the lesson.

**Drama and Decoding Texts: ‘J for Jigglypuff, P for Pikachu’**

In the introductory drama lesson, the three written lists of *Pokemon* characters’ behaviours were written and read by the kindergarten children with adult scaffolding as needed. The children were encouraged to offer suggestions for the spelling of the *Pokemon* characters’ names (for example, ‘Jigglypuff’) and observed while the adult helpers sounded out and wrote the list of powers dictated by the children (for example, ‘crosses her arms when angry’). This writing and reading had purpose within the narrative of the drama and the children’s enthusiastic involvement reflected this. They were engaged in relating letters to sounds and in recognising whole words when rereading the lists for the benefit of the teacher in role as Belinda. These lists provided concrete artefacts that could be used later in literacy lessons as communally constructed and understood texts, accessible to even those children not reading conventionally in other contexts.
Other examples of the use of drama to assist in developing children's ability to break the code of written texts focus on these skills more directly. In one of the earliest Australian texts written about drama with young children (five to eight year olds), Mem Fox\textsuperscript{26} combines the fun of role-taking with curriculum content ranging from reading and writing to maths and science. Almost all of the thirty-six lessons in her book have an implicit literacy objective such as reading a letter from a fictional character, hearing a poem or singing a song. More explicitly, there is a section devoted entirely to developing knowledge about some of the word families that assist in the decoding of texts.

Decoding texts involves more than knowing letters and their corresponding sounds, so it is important for children to see and recognise whole words, especially those not read through 'sounding out'. In Mem Fox's lessons, as in the \textit{Pokemon} lesson above, there are many imaginative reasons for using written texts such as letters from characters, poems, rhymes, songs, labels and lists of all sorts of things. These whole texts and whole words are not only spoken but written, for authentic reasons within the drama, so that children have opportunities to revisit the texts and become familiar with them.

\textbf{Drama and participating in the meaning of texts: Intertextual knowledge}

The television programs, computer and electronic games that many young children frequently watch and use are predominantly visual texts that make meanings through a combination of images and language, both spoken and written. The games include images from a range of meaning systems such as icons, gauges, maps or grids. Children's familiarity with these systems and understandings of these texts is drawn upon when the games become the focus for drama lessons. In the \textit{Pokemon} lesson described above, the majority of children provided information about the game and its characters and all were involved in creating new texts built upon this knowledge. The children with most knowledge of the game will have gained this knowledge from a wide range of materials such as posters, trainer's guide and character profiles as well as from playing the game. Therefore, the extent of intertextual meanings made will vary among the drama participants but all will benefit from the joint creation of new texts and follow-up activities based on them.

Follow-up drama experiences in which young students might create new and varied texts could be developed around devising a new game based on the \textit{Pokemon} game. This would involve research using the materials associated with \textit{Pokemon} and transforming this information by creating new characters with new powers and a new

\textsuperscript{26} M. Fox, \textit{How to teach Drama to Infants, without really Crying: Drama Classes for Fives to Eights}, Sydney, 1984.
set of rules and procedures for the game. As each new character is being developed, the students would need to try out, or enact, the actions and behaviours suitable to its appearance. They could organise the classroom space and furniture to replicate the possible routes or scenarios for events in the game. Recording all of this would entail drawings, maps and character profiles as well as a range of other texts like those in the *Pokemon* game. The playing of the class-devised game would be physical rather than virtual with symbolic moves and counter-moves to represent the ‘battles’ if these remained a part of the game. Building new drama experiences such as these would necessitate the use, mediated for young children by adult scaffolding, of a range of written and visual *Pokemon*-related texts to develop and extend intertextuality.

**Drama and using texts functionally**

In the introductory drama lesson under discussion, the children drew upon their knowledge of other texts and created new texts in the form of the lists of each *Pokemon* character’s powers. A list is a particular type of text appropriate for the purpose of remembering and enacting the characters’ behaviour in the drama context. As well as the written texts, which also became texts for reading, the children engaged in devising and enacting visual texts using gestures and sounds to emulate the *Pokemon* characters for the teacher-in-role as Belinda. They shaped their enactments, or visual texts, with the help of student-teacher helpers to successfully perform the demonstrations of characters for Belinda. When the children created spoken texts to explain verbally to Belinda they were again shaping their language to perform contextually driven functions. The drama context provided opportunities for the children to create new spoken, written and visual texts based on their knowledge of these kinds of texts from both inside and outside of school.

Another opportunity for using texts functionally through this drama arises from the research suggested in the previous section. Classroom research of *Pokemon*-related texts would involve a wide range of different text types. These could include: the *Pokemon* pop quiz book, a range of *Pokemon* narratives, the *Pokemon* collector’s sticker book, as well as the already mentioned Trainer’s Guides, posters, character profile books and the multimodal game itself. Within a drama context such as devising and enacting a new game, using this variety of texts would serve a purposeful end rather than become another classroom exercise.

**Drama and critically analysing and transforming texts**

In the example of the *Pokemon* drama lesson and the suggested follow-up drama of designing and enacting a new game, many opportunities exist for analysing and transforming texts. One is through the investigation of *Pokemon* characters’ names. The name *Pokemon* itself is a contraction of the words ‘pocket monsters’ and many of the *Pokemon* characters have names that play with parts of words or complete words.
Most names relate to characters' attributes and are formed by combining contractions or by constructing compound words. Jigglypuff, for example, looks like a puffed-up 'ball of fluff' and Bellosom, whose name is obviously derived from the word 'blossom', is a Flower Pokemon who has petals and attacks using 'sweet scent', 'stun spore' and 'petal dance'.

Tracing the morphemic origins of a selection of Pokemon names focuses on the human construction of these names and opens the way for students to emulate some of the naming patterns (e.g. artificially stretching out the sounds in a word, as in 'bellosom') to create new names for Pokemon or for a new game. Based on the examination of Pokemon names, students could create names for a new game, building new characters with specific powers and behaviours. Scaffolded by the teacher, this could be done orally first, recorded in writing and drawings and presented dramatically through enactment of behaviours. The transformation and active production of texts in these ways is one of the aims of critical literacy. Students can become aware of the constructedness of all texts as they deconstruct aspects of the Pokemon game and reconstruct their own versions. Drama provides an ideal pedagogy to support teachers and students in developing contexts for this work.

Four Literacy Practices roled into One with Drama

The discussion above highlights how drama integrates a repertoire of literacy practices into a cohesive whole for young children learning to become literate. Through drama experiences teachers can replicate many social and cultural contexts in which the four literacy practices are situated. Drama contexts avoid the danger of teaching about literacy practices in isolated exercises and give real purpose to the use and creation of a range of multimodal texts. The roles that teachers and children take on within drama are the means by which we enter situations infused with social and cultural meanings. Our role improvisations are informed by our real-world knowledge of social and cultural possibilities but, protected within the drama framework, we are free to create new spoken, written and visual texts. Apart from real-world purposes, what better way to use and extend a repertoire of literacy practices? Drama is a productive pedagogy that, perhaps uniquely, integrates many kinds of learning into one meaningful experience for young and old students alike.

Note: References are from personal files as these were amalgamated with those of all other articles in published journal.

References

Context for Article 5


Context

This article was an invited contribution to a book published by Currency Press in association with the New South Wales educational drama association, recently renamed as Drama NSW. The book is the third in an occasional series that presents up-to-date drama theory and practice by NSW practitioners. The chapter was selected for publication in competition with other contributions. It was placed second in the book because it assists in establishing a genera’ framework on the role of drama as a productive pedagogy. In previous research (Martello, 2002b) I had begun to explore the idea of drama as a productive pedagogy by explaining how the elements of drama promoted learning that met the criteria for productive pedagogy. This article employed a drama lesson to demonstrate drama’s potential as a productive pedagogy.

Specific focus and significance to the field

Using a drama lesson as a case study, I examined how specific criteria for productive pedagogy are met at each stage of the lesson. This application of the productive pedagogy framework to a particular drama lesson allowed for a close analysis by linking relevant learning criteria to specific drama strategies within the lesson. The research illustrates the general principle of drama as a productive pedagogy. Additionally, drawing on my own research and on the literature, examples of drama experiences were used to demonstrate how drama incorporated multiliteracies, that is, literacies in spoken, written and visual modes.
In this article I identify two predominant initiatives in the Australian educational context, that is, productive pedagogies and multiliteracies, and argue that drama has a place at the centre of these educational discourses although it is often overlooked in the official literature. By demonstrating that drama achieves the criteria for productive pedagogies and develops multiliteracies, specifically in the early school years, the article clearly outlines the argument for placing drama at the centre of these educational discourses. The significance of this article lies in the relative scarcity of such efforts to position drama within predominant discourses, such as those about productive pedagogies and multiliteracies, and especially for the early childhood field.

Research methods

The case study Family tree drama (see Table 3, Chapter 3) provided the data for the first half of the article where content analysis of drama strategies matched these strategies with relevant criteria from the productive pedagogies framework. The case study was undertaken within a primary school, with students in their third year of school and with a teacher education student as the class teacher. The researcher was a participant/observer in the drama lesson. Theoretical/conceptual research informed the second half of the article in which drama examples were extrapolated from the literature and used as evidence of the development of multiliteracies through drama pedagogy.

Contribution to the field

This article

i) was published by a state professional body (Drama New South Wales) after selection from among competing contributions, in a collection that presents current best practice. (See Appendix E – Supporting documentation for Article 5)

ii) has led to the presentation of an invited workshop to primary school teachers for this body. (See Appendix E - Supporting documentation for Article 5)
Chapter Two

Drama: A Productive Pedagogy for Multiliteracies in the Early Years

Julie Martello

This chapter focuses on process drama as a 'productive pedagogy' capable of meeting and integrating criteria across the four dimensions of Intellectual Quality, Connectedness, Social Support and Recognition of Difference. In the context of early primary school, the chapter goes on to illustrate drama's productiveness in the field of multiliteracies by demonstrating how drama can integrate and extend literacies in spoken, written and visual modes and make links with young students' home lives and popular culture.

Bringing Drama to the Centre of Education Discourse

After many years of advocacy, Drama is finally a part of the NSW K–6 Creative Arts syllabus (BOS 2000) and is to be implemented by teachers in 2006. Drama's position in the primary curriculum is not yet firmly established, however, and there are many questions to be addressed. Some of these questions focus on which aspects of drama will be taught within the constraints of a crowded curriculum. Drama specialists at all levels will help to steer the implementation of the syllabus. The task of assisting in the selection, explanation and promotion of particular aspects of drama brings with it responsibilities as well as opportunities.

The preparation of teachers, both inservice and preservice, to teach the Drama strand raises similar opportunities. Teacher education courses must
now recognise the status of Drama with other mandated primary curriculum subjects so that it shares core status with Music, Art and Dance in Creative Arts subjects. For courses where Drama has not previously been part of the core curriculum, this is a time of review and change. Courses and subjects may need to be rewritten to include the content of the K–6 Drama syllabus. This provides an opportunity for tertiary drama educators to position drama within the current dominant discourses of education.

To maintain a position of strength for drama within the primary school curriculum and tertiary courses, it is important to demonstrate how drama contributes to the dominant educational discourses of the day. If the currency of drama is not continually updated, we risk returning to the years when drama was seen as peripheral to the core curriculum. This means we must consider both the content of drama as a discipline and the use of drama as a teaching/learning method. In relation to the discipline of drama, we need to ask questions about drama's place in the present lives of primary students: how the elements of drama are used in the digital media that children regularly encounter in popular culture, for example. As a pedagogy, we need to demonstrate how drama facilitates teaching and learning in the domains of most concern.

Two of the pre-eminent concerns in education today are the identification of productive pedagogies and the teaching and learning of multiliteracies. Right now in NSW the 'Quality teaching in NSW public schools' discussion paper is focused on pedagogy because 'it is the quality of pedagogy that most directly and most powerfully affects the quality of learning outcomes that students demonstrate' (DET 2003). The Department of Education in Queensland has for some time been concerned to identify productive pedagogies that have students 'engaged in intellectually challenging and relevant curriculum in a supportive environment' (Education Queensland 2002a).

Another big picture issue is the teaching of multiliteracies in ways that offer success to all students. As technological change expands the combinations of spoken, written, visual and multimodal texts familiar to young children, the challenge for educators is to encompass these multiliteracies in their classrooms.

Both of these current issues provide spaces where the pedagogical applications of drama can be explored and celebrated, in order to bring drama to the centre of educational discourse. Stating and restating drama
connections to these discourses is an important task for drama educators in all educational settings at this time, especially in New South Wales. This chapter focuses on the benefits of promoting drama as a teaching and learning method that can address the current quest for productive pedagogies and strengthen the quality of literacy teaching in an integrated primary curriculum. It demonstrates how the processes of drama, especially in the early years, can contribute to high quality teaching that integrates multiliteracies in the primary school curriculum.

How is Drama a Productive Pedagogy?

The connections between doing drama and students' learning opportunities have often been documented by drama practitioners and the concept of 'productive pedagogies' provides us with a new and comprehensive framework within which to do this. The concept of productive pedagogies originates in the work of Newmann & Associates (cited in Lingard, Mills & Hayes 2000) on 'authentic pedagogies' in the United States. In Australia researchers Lingard et al, (2000) undertook a large scale research project, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study, and used the findings to modify the US work for the Australian context. Their findings have been taken up by Education Queensland (Education Queensland 2002a & 2002b) and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET 2003) to inform major, strategic programs that focus on the quality of teaching in primary and secondary schools. The identification of 'productive pedagogies' attempts to refocus the attention of educators on achieving success for all groups of students by bringing together aspects of accepted practice that optimise student learning. Significantly, part of this quest is for 'pedagogies (that) might make a difference for different groups of students, including those usually regarded as disadvantaged' (Lingard et al 2000, p. 102). This is also one of the commonly stated aims of drama teaching.

The work on 'productive pedagogies' characterises them as practices that meet a range of criteria grouped into four dimensions for the Queensland model (see Table 1). The NSW model reduces this to three by merging the two dimensions of 'Relevance' and 'Recognition of Difference' into one called 'Significance' (DET 2003). Each major dimension is further characterised by a range of contributing elements which are almost identical in both models except that the NSW model omits three of the Queensland elements (Problem-based curriculum; Group identity and Citizenship) and adds one called 'High Expectations'. The discussion here draws upon the Queensland
model of productive pedagogy because it acknowledges the importance of a ‘Problem-based curriculum’ and problem-based learning is central to process drama. The Queensland model developed by Lingard, Mills and Hayes is reproduced in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual Quality</th>
<th>Relevance (Connectedness)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Higher order thinking</td>
<td>7. Connectedness to the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Deep knowledge</td>
<td>8. Problem-based curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Substantive conversation</td>
<td>10. Background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowledge as problematic</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Metalinguage</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive classroom environment</th>
<th>Recognition of Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Student control</td>
<td>16. Cultural knowledges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Student support</td>
<td>17. Inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Explicit criteria</td>
<td>20. Citizenship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The four dimensions of Productive Pedagogies.
(Source: Lingard, Mills & Hayes 2000, p. 107)

There are many ways in which we can establish that drama is a productive pedagogy. Elsewhere, I have justified this claim by explaining how the use of key elements of drama, such as role, tension, focus, symbol and reflection (see for example, Cusworth & Simon 1997), provides learning experiences that satisfy many of the essential elements or criteria of a productive pedagogy, as outlined in Table 1 (Martello 2002a).

Another way to bring drama into current discussions about ‘productive pedagogies’ (PP), is by documenting examples of classroom drama which meet a number of the criteria for ‘productive pedagogies’. John O’Toole (2002) convincingly describes two drama projects that meet many of the stated criteria for PP. He even points out some of the shortcomings in the criteria, that there is not one criterion relating to ‘creativity’, for example. He further notes the lack of drama lessons among the exemplars provided in the handbook for Queensland teachers (O’Toole 2002). Perhaps by analysing more drama lessons in the light of the PP criteria, as I do in the next section of this chapter, we can establish a place for drama in the PP discourse and contribute to the ongoing review of those criteria.
Productive Drama Pedagogy in the Early Years Classroom
The lesson described here was planned and implemented by Dianne Meurant with a class of Year 2 children who were learning about 'Families – Past and Present'. The drama began with a large chart depicting a family tree which linked the children in the class to a fictitious King, Queen and princess. This provided the pretext for an adventure to travel back in time to rescue the kidnapped baby princess. The lesson achieved much in terms of curriculum outcomes and student engagement, albeit with some of the gender stereotyping characteristic of traditional tales such as the one embedded in this drama. An examination of the sequence of drama strategies used in the lesson makes it possible to consider the PP criteria being addressed in each major section. Readers may interpret the drama and PP analysis differently since many of the criteria overlap and the drama strategies can easily be associated with more than one PP criterion at a time. In the following analyses, the PP criteria are italicised when referred to by name.

Drama Lesson: The Family Tree
The teacher began by discussing the concept of 'families' and asking students to imagine how their mothers might have felt holding them as new-born babies. An explanation of the term 'generation' followed and a large family tree diagram, containing the names of all the children in the class, was unfolded. As the current generation, the children were asked to enter the drama frame by accepting that several generations earlier a King, Queen and a princess were among their ancestors. The family tree diagram provided a visual representation of the concept of 'generations', with the horizontal layers symbolising shifts in time and place in the history of the family.

PP in Action: Recognition of Difference; Relevance; Intellectual Quality
From the beginning this drama draws all students into the lesson by reflecting on their own early babyhood and including their names on the family tree. Connections are made to their personal experience and inclusivity is ensured through the universality of the focus on mothers. The intellectual quality of the drama work is established when metalinguistic information about the meaning of the technical term 'generations' is given orally. The visual resource of the family tree diagram provides an alternative, easily accessible explanation of 'generations', strengthening the possibility of deep understanding of the concept.
Drama Lesson: Presenting the Problem

The drama frame is entered when the teacher reads a letter from the King, back in the past, asking for help to rescue the Princess who has been kidnapped by robbers. The Queen is deeply distressed and asks her loyal subjects (the students) to help return the princess to her parents. Before tackling the problem the students are directed to the family tree diagram to count how many generations back these ancestors lived. The discussion centres on travelling back five generations to help the King and Queen, and on preparing questions to ask them. Two students are chosen to sit quietly in role as the King and Queen, wearing a crown and a cloak as symbols of their status. A large circle is made on the floor from coloured wool and, holding hands, the students jump into it to travel back in time.

PP in Action: Relevance; Supportive Classroom Environment; Intellectual Quality

Every engaging drama is problem-based, that is, organised around 'identifying and solving problems' (Education Queensland 2002b). The tension in this drama relates to what all students know and can imagine from their own background knowledge, the closeness between family members and the distress of losing someone loved. The problem is sufficiently removed (five fictitious generations) to avoid real distress but intriguing enough to promote engagement.

The conventions of using the crown, the cloak and the coloured wool circle exemplify the use of symbolism in drama, the metaphorical use of an object or action to mean something else. I suggest that when students use and understand these symbolic resources they are demonstrating higher order thinking through the manipulation and transformation of ideas (Education Queensland 2002b). The use and manipulation of symbolic resources does not seem to be practised often in other school subjects, except perhaps in Maths, English and other Arts strands. However, it is commonplace in drama and worthy of more attention. When students are engaged in manipulating and transforming ideas to solve problems, they are constructing knowledge in unpredictable ways, making the outcomes uncertain (Education Queensland 2002b). Some people construe this uncertainty as a drawback for drama, because the outcomes are rarely clear cut. Others argue, as I do, that this uncertainty is an advantage of learning through drama. Students become 'producers of knowledge' through engagement in drama experiences (Education Queensland 2002b).
Drama Lesson: Teacher’s Structure for Students’ Decision-making and Action

Following the introduction and presentation of the problem, there are several open-ended sections of the lesson in which the teacher allows students to make decisions about a range of issues. Decisions are centred on the following incidents along the narrative structure: the way to the King and Queen’s palace; the questions they will ask the King and Queen; what provisions will be needed for the baby when she’s found; the way to the kidnappers’ den; the way to cross a river safely; what questions they will ask the kidnappers when they reach their den; and, finally, how to get back the princess. Each of these sections involves the enactment of whatever decisions are made. For example, the students buy provisions from a shopkeeper (teacher in role) for the baby. They help the shopkeeper add up the cost of the items and spell some items as the shopkeeper writes them down. They also consult with the royal parents before purchasing each item to check if it is appropriate. To do this they are interacting, in role as ‘loyal subjects’, with other students, in role as the King and Queen.

The teacher provides a guiding structure for the action and also some prompts to steer the drama towards both learning opportunities and a satisfying outcome for the drama narrative. For instance, the teacher plants four footprints while the students enact crossing the river. These serve to reassure the students that others, most likely the kidnappers, have been this way recently. The footprints prompt students to work on solving the problem of how many kidnappers there may be and what sizes they are. The section ends when the loyal subjects, with King and Queen in tow, confront the kidnappers (two students in role) who will not let the royal party enter their den. They must now devise and enact a plan to rescue the princess. The students suggest ideas and the teacher in role must help to structure the work so that the princess is successfully rescued.

PP in Action: Relevance; Supportive Classroom Environment; Recognition of Difference; Intellectual Quality

These sections of the drama lesson are again based strongly on problem solving for the students. The students are charged with making several decisions and enacting these with the support of the teacher. The direction of the lesson is largely under student control within a supportive structure that enables them to achieve success. The teacher promotes student engagement through
ensuring that the lesson has tension and is held together by a strong narrative structure. The teacher also provides opportunities for student learning across several subject areas such as maths (buying from the shopkeeper), spelling (for the shopkeeper's list) and health (what does a baby need to survive) along with the drama skills of role playing and playbuilding. The lesson achieves connectedness not only in its 'integration of diverse fields' (Lingard et al 2000) but also in relation to students' background knowledge of other subjects and of the real world. This degree of connectedness is more commonly found in drama than in other school lessons.

Successful drama lessons are all characterised by the kind of open-ended sections described above where conversations between role takers are unscripted, unpredictable and not controlled by the teacher. The drama described here, as with most drama lessons, promotes substantive conversations in which 'sustained dialogue between students, and between teachers and students' occurs often and where the talk 'involves sharing of ideas', 'extended statements' and the choice to direct comments to others or select the next speaker (Education Queensland 2002b). Drama lessons meet these criteria for substantive conversations, and others documented in the same source, because it has always been a concern of drama practitioners to share the power traditionally held by teachers and to facilitate student control of their own learning.

Drama Lesson: Resolution and Reflection
After the princess has been rescued, the students, as loyal subjects, are thanked by the King and Queen and return to the present by jumping out of the symbolic coloured wool circle. The teacher questions students to help them reflect on their roles in the drama asking, for example, how the King and Queen felt about losing their daughter. Questions also focus on more abstract issues raised by the drama, especially how the removal of one ancestor, such as the princess, could affect the family tree. The diagram of the family tree is used to discuss these ideas about generations and the importance of each person is emphasised. Students are encouraged to attempt to draw their own family tree.

PP in Action: Intellectual Quality
As drama practitioners know, there is always a teaching/learning focus underpinning the more obvious narrative action and, in this lesson, the teacher brings the students' attention back to the learning focus of 'families
past and present’ through the diagram of the family tree. First, the felt experience of the students within the drama is drawn on to consider how losing a family member affects individuals. Then the teacher helps students to connect their drama experience to the real world by moving from the specific incident to the general principle that losing an ancestor will affect the generation of descendents. There can be few more powerful ways to achieve deep understanding of a concept than this kind of personal involvement, leading to clear connections with abstract ideas. And, of course, the students demonstrated their understanding of the concepts through their relevant answers. They also have the opportunity to transform this knowledge about generations by drawing up their own family tree, thereby ‘producing new knowledge’ (Education Queensland 2002b) and satisfying one more criterion for intellectual quality through doing drama.

It is possible to illustrate how even more criteria for a productive pedagogy are met in this one drama lesson but that would be labouring the point. Instead, we can imagine how regular drama lessons of this type, focusing on topics across all key learning areas, are a most powerful way to accomplish quality teaching and learning that has significance for students. The planned learning in this lesson was targeted at specific outcomes in both the Creative Arts (Drama) and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Key Learning Areas. As I noted, it also included opportunities for literacy and maths learning. Drama has long been appreciated for its ability to provide contexts for teaching and learning content across the curriculum and especially for literacy. As views about what constitutes literacy change, we need to consider how drama can accommodate these changes.

Changing Literacies and Drama
The task of bringing drama to the centre of current education thinking can be further advanced by addressing some of the ways in which drama contributes to the teaching and learning of literacies. The literacy practices in which children engage have become increasingly multimodal and technology-based and the terms ‘multiliteracies’ (Cope & Kalantzis 2000) and ‘techno-literacy’ (Lankshear, Snyder & Green 2000) capture this diversity. These terms admit a much wider range of practices under the banner of ‘literacy’ than previous definitions which were often limited to reading and writing. Literacies are now understood as being part of everyday social practices, including the use of digital technologies such as computers,
television and games platforms. Acknowledging changes in social and cultural practices, current definitions of literacy include spoken, written, visual and auditory texts, very often in combinations, as well as critical awareness (e.g. BOS 1998).

This extended view of literacies is driving changes to school literacy practices requiring them to take account of students’ home and community practices. Questions about how educators should respond to these realities are central to much current discourse about literacy teaching. One consensus view in the early childhood field is that educators need to identify the diversity of students’ home literacy practices and extend these into the literacies valued and mandated in the school curriculum (e.g. Barratt-Pugh and Rohl 2000; Makin & Jones Diaz 2002). In the search for teaching and learning contexts that can develop multiliteracies, while at the same time maintaining student interest by building on their home experiences and popular culture, drama can provide many of the answers. Since drama can reproduce the whole range of human experience, in any chosen context, it is the perfect pedagogy for addressing the multiple literacies that need to be taught.

To advocate a place for drama in the growing discourse about multiliteracies we can point to the way drama can recreate as wide a range of social and cultural situations as life itself. The need to use language, images, gestures or sounds to communicate meanings is embedded in drama situations in as much variety as in life. And drama is especially potent as a critical pedagogy since it provides opportunities for multiple perspectives to illustrate different points of view. As students make choices to create their own narratives in drama they can be helped to understand the constructedness of all texts and the value in questioning texts that others create. This kind of critical literacy is particularly important as students engage daily with multimodal texts aimed at influencing them in various ways. A predisposition to challenge all texts can be uniquely developed through drama.

Drama and Multiliteracies in the Early Years
To date there is not a lot of published evidence of how drama can be used as a pedagogy for developing multiliteracies, including critical literacy, or for connecting home and school literacy practices. We could be documenting the kind of work that is happening in order to bring drama into the centre of
these topical discourses. The following section outlines examples from the published literature that focus on drama as a context for multiliteracies in the early years.

**Dramatic Play and Multiliteracies**

Several published dramatic play projects for young children focus on the opportunities for developing multiliteracies. In their choice of contexts the teachers involved in these projects recognise the value in drawing on the children's home lives and popular culture interests. For example, Marsh (1999) describes a project based around the theme of Teletubbies that was undertaken with a group of preschoolers in a British nursery school. The work provided opportunities for spontaneous dramatic play and exposed the children to a variety of literacy texts, such as a recipe for making Teletubby custard. Marsh reports that some children not previously interested in written texts became new members of the 'literacy club' through this drama work because it was linked to their keen interest in the Teletubbies television program (Marsh 1999).

Hall and Robinson (2000) describe another dramatic play program involving British school beginners based around a garage. In this program the teachers inserted tensions into the children's dramatic play such as demands for council permission to build, an accident at the garage and complaints about the garage's work. The literacy practices engaged in by the children in the course of their dramatic play included a wide range of spoken, written and visual texts (Hall & Robinson 2000).

In an Australian example documented by Barratt-Pugh (2002), Year 1 students used their real-world knowledge to create a classroom café, called 'Pizza Everyone'. Through their planning and dramatic play they engaged in many literacy practices and critically explored complex issues. The students designed the layout, advertised the café, held an opening, planned the menu, collected recipes, applied for jobs and wrote fire regulations, among many other activities (Barratt-Pugh 2002). The children engaged in their own spontaneous dramatic play daily, while the teacher enhanced the drama by introducing several problems. Tensions were centred around the following realistic situations: having to accommodate a mother with twin babies and numerous baby accoutrements; dealing with customers unable or refusing to pay the bill; enacting a fire drill; and dealing with demands for different foods to cater for people with special diets. All of this dramatic play was supported by the use and creation of a rich array of literacy texts. Less
commonly and equally importantly, this dramatic framework was used by the teachers to explicitly and critically explore issues of exclusion and access, conflict and difference (Barratt-Pugh 2002).

Some of the documented early childhood classroom work incorporating technoliteracies has also been generated within dramatically framed contexts, though the role of drama has not been explicitly recognised. In one such example discussed by Hill and Broadhurst (2002), young children were invited to imagine themselves into the future and to create a business card for their adult careers using the Kid Pix software. In another example also related by Hill and Broadhurst (2002), a mixed group of Year 1, 2 and 3 children in the Northern Territory communicated with students overseas about the travels and lives of some Australian stuffed toys they had sent to the overseas students. The toy characters took on complex attributes requiring passports and travel journals for their adventures. The project propelled the students to use technologies such as email, the internet and digital cameras. Both of these projects benefited from the ‘as if’ drama framework and provide examples of the possibilities for incorporating technologies and technoliteracies into drama work from the earliest years of school.

Structured Process Drama and Multiliteracies

In addition to the dramatically-framed projects outlined above, experienced drama teachers have documented examples of more structured process dramas which deliberately focus on developing multiliteracies. O’Toole and Dunn (2002) explain in some detail how ‘drama is a discipline that is very well placed to support and extend’ the wide range of practices now encompassed within multiliteracies (2002, p. 32). They describe numerous embedded opportunities for multiliteracies and cross-curricular tasks in their drama exemplars which contain lessons appropriate for the early years of school.

A final example of structured process drama for students in the early years of school is taken from my own collaborative work with tertiary and school students. The intention was to use drama to connect to the children’s popular culture and to provide a context for developing literacies. At the time the lesson was taught many young children were engrossed by the electronic game, Pokemon. We planned and implemented a drama that required Kindergarten students to teach a woman (the teacher in role) what they knew about three popular Pokemon characters. The woman needed to
know because she was being challenged to a Pokemon duel by her young niece. The drama itself and the literacies involved have been more fully documented elsewhere (Martello 2002b) but a key feature of the drama was that it allowed the Kindergarten students to use their real-world knowledge to teach someone who didn’t know and needed to know about the Pokemon characters. This is a common drama strategy that works well with young students and could be used effectively to connect with students’ current popular pastimes. Despite the simple pretext for this drama it provided several opportunities for developing the literacies of these school beginners.

The ‘Pokemon Challenge’ drama required students to engage with a range of integrated multiliteracies. In terms of spoken language the students had to provide information about the game objectives and characters and use explicit language to help the adult to understand. While they did not write for themselves, they dictated text to an adult about the actions of a particular Pokemon character and this was recorded onto a chart. When presenting their information to the adult, the students read this text with some scaffolding from their adult helpers. The students also viewed images of Pokemon characters copied from the game handbook and observed the enactments of their fellow students. They created visual and auditory texts when they enacted some of the behaviour and powers of a Pokemon character. Overall, this drama experience, like the others described here, effortlessly prompted students to create and use spoken, written and visual texts because these practices arose in a meaningful, narrative context. This is what drama offers to the teaching and learning of multiliteracies.

Conclusion
This is an opportune time to promote drama, especially in New South Wales, as Drama becomes a mandated strand of the K–6 Creative Arts syllabus. Teachers in all educational settings from schools to universities can capitalise on drama’s official status by enumerating the many ways in which it enhances teaching and learning. The examples above of drama frameworks and process drama for developing multiliteracies in the early years are only a small part of a body of drama work that could contribute to discussions about the centrality of drama as a pedagogy for teaching multiliteracies. The earlier example showed that many of the criteria for productive pedagogy can be met in just one drama lesson. At the very least these and other successful drama experiences achieve Intellectual Quality through deep-understanding and substantive conversations, they achieve Relevance by using
real-world problems and drawing on students' background knowledge, they provide Supportive Environments by engaging students' interest and integrating every aspect of the work into a meaningful Narrative structure. It should not be difficult to position drama at the centre of current dominant discourses by providing further examples of drama as a highly productive pedagogy that integrates the use and extension of multiliteracies.
Note: References are from personal files as these were amalgamated with those of all other articles in the published book.

References


Board of Studies NSW. (2000). *Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus.* Sydney: Board of Studies NSW.


Context for Article 6


Context

This article was presented at the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association 4th World Congress and subsequently accepted for publication in its refereed anthology of research articles. Of the eighty-seven papers submitted for publication, the thirty-two published in the anthology were considered by the editors to “represent a rare coalescence of artistic, teaching and writing skills and competencies” (Rasmussen & Ostern, 2002, p11).

Although the article addresses a readership of committed drama practitioners I saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate how the use of drama pedagogy meets emerging concerns among literacy educators for valuing home practices and for developing critical literacy. I had recently explored home/school connections in a general literacy context (Martello, 2002a) and had investigated drama and critical literacy (Martello, 2001b). For this article, I synthesised these two important issues and contextualised them within early childhood drama education.

Specific focus and significance to the field

This article connects several educational concerns, making it possibly unique in the related literature. Appeals in educational literature for connecting home practices with schooling and for developing critical literacy both have strong social justice dimensions that also resonate with the goals of educational drama. The article articulates these issues and relationships.
Although much educational rhetoric professes an appreciation of each child’s individuality, research cited in this article shows that, in the reality of schooling, some kinds of individuality are apparently shared by whole groups of students and are appreciated much more, or less, than others. The article explores the relationships between students’ home literacy practices, their sense of identity and their likelihood of success at school. It further examines how the emerging patterns of inequality might be addressed through the use of drama to validate the identities that students have built up in their lives out of school. Through its ability to acknowledge alternative perspectives, drama is described as a means to validate different student identities and to develop critical literacy. In exploring relationships between these important educational issues, the article addresses a critical gap in the contemporary literature.

**Research methods**

The article presents its thesis initially through theoretical/conceptual research into the areas of home/school congruency, multiliteracies, critical literacy and drama pedagogy. Two case studies, the *Widget drama* and the *Pokemon drama* (See Table 3, Chapter 3), were employed to support the thesis. The site for the case studies was a primary school and participants were students in the first two years of school, teacher education students and the researcher as teachers. The two drama case studies were analysed for evidence of how drama promotes links with students’ homes, positive student identities and critical literacy.

**Contribution to the field**

This article
i) was published in an international anthology of drama articles and distributed to many of the one thousand participants from at least seventeen countries who attended the IDEA Congress.

ii) was presented at an international conference (IDEA) in Bergen, Norway.

iii) is used by tertiary educators as a reading for students. (See Appendix F – Supporting documentation for Article 6)
Drama
Bridging the Gap between Home and School

JULIE MARTELLO

Drama and Literacy Learning
Drama has always been closely associated with the development of language and literacy
because it requires extensive use of spoken and visual communication and often involves the
use of written texts as well. Examples abound of students writing and reading as part of drama
experiences; literacy events occur in their earliest spontaneous dramatic play and continue
through to structured classroom drama lessons. Though definitions of what constitutes literacy
are changing, drama's role in its development remains as valid as it ever was.

Within current discourses around literacy, its definition is being extended to encompass
changes in literacy practices, for example, the increasing use of information and communication
technologies. Definitions of literacy are now more inclusive of a wider range of community
practices such as television viewing and electronic game playing. The term 'multiliteracies' is
used to incorporate many forms of representation, including visual images and gestures, as well
as language (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). In Australia, mandatory syllabus documents also
acknowledge the changing literacy landscape, and literacy definitions generally include talking,
listening, reading, viewing, writing, visual and critical literacies (see, for example, Board of
Studies NSW, 1998). As definitions of literacy expand so does the need to equip students, of all
ages, with a critical awareness of how representations of the world are constructed by them-
selves and others to achieve particular goals. Students in Australia and elsewhere are being
given opportunities to develop critical literacy in order to both create their own effective texts,
in a variety of modes, and to understand how they are positioned or manipulated by the texts of
others. It has been argued (Martello 2001) that drama is a critical pedagogy whose key elements
provide an ideal learning medium to fulfil the aims of critical literacy. Examples discussed later
in this paper will demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between drama and literacy, including
critical literacy.
The Home/School Divide

Success in school literacy learning does not come to all students equally, and much research has focussed on the factors which contribute to success or failure in literacy learning because of its central place in school learning. In the past, lack of literacy progress was often attributed to factors inherent in individual students or their families, but more recently the causes of literacy problems are seen to reside in differences between the literacy practices of homes and those practiced and valued in educational institutions. From Shirley Brice Heath’s seminal study in the United States (Heath, 1986), to recent studies in Australia (for example, Alloway, 1999; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995) evidence is mounting to show that where there is a mismatch between home and school literacy experiences, children often experience difficulties and even failure with school literacy. Heath’s study implicates the failure of teaching practices in school literacy because some children’s talents and strengths were not recognised within the accepted view of school literacy and language competence. In the Australian educational context there is also evidence that particular groups of students consistently perform at lower literacy levels than others, a finding which challenges the common assumption that literacy problems reside with the individual child (Alloway, 1999). Alloway points out that school literacy practices advantage groups of children whose social and cultural backgrounds are most closely aligned to the belief systems of the school while disadvantaging other groups, namely boys, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those who speak English as a second language.

In the Australian study carried out by Cairney and Ruge (1998) the authors set out to “identify matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school and to consider the consequences for the success of children at school” (1998, p. 2). In their findings they note marked differences between the literacy practices and values of the families they researched and those of the schools in their study. Students whose home practices were most like school practices were more successful than students whose home practices differed from those of schools. An example of this, which is commonly stated in literacy texts, is that students who are read to at home learn to read relatively quickly and easily in the early years of school because school experiences and interactions around books are familiar, echoing those of home and building on them (see for example, Schickedanz, 1999). However, not all students have these book experiences because they may not be part of the adults’ cultural framework or because of the circumstances of daily life. Additionally, school definitions of what constitutes literacy can disadvantage students whose home practices are overlooked or even seen as detrimental to literacy development. Students who are good at understanding and manipulating electronic games, for example, may not achieve literacy success at school because these practices are not valued or built upon in the school context, while practices unfamiliar to these students are. These findings help to explain how patterns of inequality occur where educational definitions of literacy exclude the literacy practices of some groups of students, families or communities.

The detrimental effects of narrow definitions of literacy and of the lack of congruence between many students’ home and school literacy practices have resulted in calls for increased recognition of home and community literacy practices (for example, Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Marsh & Millard, 2000). In the early childhood field, as in the wider educational arena, educators are describing the many ways that continuity between homes and schools can be achieved. Awareness of students’ out-of-school interests and activities is needed to begin the process of legitimising and valuing them. Literacy enhancing activities can be extended if the
students' familiar language, resources and experiences are utilised in educational settings. This means facilitating the use of a child’s familiar language or dialect to promote self-esteem and learning. It means using a variety of resources from children’s homes, such as toys, videos, food packages, or basing experiences on students’ popular culture interests, such as favourite television characters or electronic games. The literature on this topic contains many examples of teachers who have used students’ popular culture to create opportunities for literacy experiences. In one such example, Marsh (1999) describes how making Teletubby custard with a group of preschoolers attracted the interest of children not normally part of the ‘literacy club’ and involved them in experiences with a written recipe.

**Drama: Affirming Social and Cultural Identities**

The aim of drawing upon students’ home practices in educational settings is to both validate the worth of these and to provide motivating content and contexts for developing new literacy skills and understandings. The identities that students construct within their homes and communities are sometimes invisible or even read negatively in their school contexts, risking not only literacy failure but also alienation from school and all of its practices for some students. Students belonging to minority linguistic, social and cultural groups need to see their lives and identities reflected in the classroom resources and activities to allay the risk of alienation and to promote the safe environment necessary for learning. Drama provides an ideal pedagogy for reinforcing students’ sense of self-worth by connecting their out-of-school lives and skills to their school lives. It is ideal because one of its primary aims is to use students’ own interests and knowledge as the basis for exploration of ideas and situations. Teachers with knowledge of drama, particularly of its focus on process, use it to affirm students’ current state of understanding and to develop these understandings further. Drama is an ideal pedagogy for affirming students’ social and cultural identities because it does not deal in the absolutes of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ but provides a platform for the investigation of all points of view. Research and discussion outside of the drama framework is used to clarify factual information or broaden understandings where this is needed.

The ability to explore all points of view is also the strength that enables us to describe drama as a ‘critical pedagogy’ (Martello, 2001), one which encourages the questioning of social practices and of the multimodal texts that are part of them. As students construct texts (spoken, visual, gestural, written and multimodal) and identities in their drama work they can become aware of the constructedness of all texts and all identities. Of course, the use of drama will not automatically lead to this kind of critical awareness without the teacher’s commitment to developing such awareness. Relevant questions and reflective activities need to be framed within a critical discourse. Knobel (cited in Knobel & Healy, 1998) warns that simply adopting different character perspectives does not constitute a critical approach. Students require guidance to begin to understand that all texts, whether spoken, written, visual or multimodal, are not neutral or value free but are constructed by people who have particular worldviews, values and beliefs and who therefore represent reality (through language and action) in different ways. Through using drama, teachers can promote critical literacy by constructing activities that explore different versions of an event and they can ask questions about the effects of different times, places and cultures on such events.

Guiding questions to promote critical reflection on texts have been provided by many writers, including questions appropriate for use with children in the preschool and early school
years (e.g. O'Brien & Comber, 2000, p.156). Many of these questions can be adapted for use in drama contexts by focussing on characters, their motivations and actions. Questions such as those proposed below can be integrated into drama improvisations:

- How should this character behave? Or, how is the character behaving? What can we tell from the character's language? Why is the character behaving/speaking in this way? How does she/he feel (what's her/his attitude) about the situation?
- What other behaviour/attitude could the character have? How would her/his behaviour and language change?
- What kind of relationship do the characters have between them? Does any character have more power than any other? What kind of power do they have?
- What does the character want to happen? Why does she/he want this to happen? How would this outcome affect the character? How would it affect other participants in the drama? What else could happen instead and how would this affect all the participants?

In drama contexts, the above questions can be used to inform alternative enactments around a situation, with follow-up reflection and comparisons with similar real-life or literature-based situations. The interrogation of a character's worldview, values and beliefs can be achieved through a range of documented drama strategies which bring the lives, motivations and language of others to life for young students. This makes drama a powerful pedagogy for both examining the lives of others and for reflecting on students' own lives, particularly their home lives, in affirmative and safe contexts.

**Drama Links to Home Practices and Critical Literacy: Two Lessons**

The two lessons drawn upon in the following section illustrate the potential of drama to provide ways to bridge the gap between home and school while also addressing the educational goals of literacy and critical literacy. The drama lessons outlined are taken from my own work with young children and from work done collaboratively with teacher education students. These drama lessons created opportunities for students' literacy development through talking, listening, acting, reading and writing. Links with home life were a major objective of both lessons. In the first lesson discussed, the intention was to use students' knowledge of their physical homes and the everyday events that occur in different rooms and make links with children's television viewing. The second lesson is also connected to home life and draws upon the students' popular culture by using their knowledge of a popular electronic game. Both lessons stopped short of taking an overtly critical perspective, so I have offered suggestions for extending them towards a critical awareness of texts and of social practice.

The approach to drama experiences taken in the two lessons described here is one which is based around narrative structure. The development and resolution of a narrative or the devising of alternative endings or segments of a narrative are common outcomes for process drama with young students. This kind of drama experience is highly suited to young children who can obtain a powerful sense of achievement through the satisfactory resolution of problems encountered in the narrative. They can be involved directly in creating the narrative, from the invention of its characters, context and complications to its successful resolution. The teacher guides the drama by planning for maximum student input within a structure of drama strategies that will facilitate a satisfying result for all. The teacher plans for the use of guiding questions and strategies to build the narrative. This can include planning the beginning situation, roles and a problem or complication, and selecting and facilitating the workable episodes for enactment.
The following drama lessons are built around this principle of achieving a satisfying narrative structure within which students make decisions and solve problems while also meeting the educational objectives noted earlier: making links with home practices and developing critical literacy awareness.

**Lesson 1: Widget goes Australian**

**Students:** Combined Kindergarten & Year 1 (First two years of school, aged 5 and 6 years)

**Content:** Homes.

**Focus:** Identifying family activities in the home environment for someone who doesn’t know.

**Objectives/Outcomes:** Children will have opportunities to – (Drama)

- interact with a person using role;
- adopt the mantle of an expert in a fictional setting;
- develop simple enactment skills (activities done in different rooms of a home; searching a house);
  (Social Studies & English)
- draw upon and share cultural knowledge of activities that occur in specific places (rooms in homes);
- make connections between their own needs and how these are met at home;
- use oral language to describe, explain, imagine;
- engage in reading, writing and drawing practice.

**Summary of the Lesson:** This lesson with school beginners centred around a character doll, Widget, who is the leading character in a children’s television program. Widget comes from another planet, Planet W, and investigates life on earth. For the drama, the character doll was introduced to the class and used as a puppet by the teacher to talk to and answer questions from the students. The students were invited to question Widget about a problem she (originally a male in the television program) had come to see them about. Widget explained that she was visiting Earth from her Planet W and was supposed to return with information about how people live in their homes. She did not have this information because she had been stuck on a shelf for the past few years. She could not find her special crystal which would teleport her home to Planet W. She asked the students to help her find it but she did not know the names of the rooms in her house and could not remember where she left it.

In order to help Widget to remember where she lost the crystal, the students were encouraged to teach Widget about houses in their town, what is in them and what we do in them. The students suggested a range of possible rooms (six were chosen: kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, loungeroom, laundry and dining room) and worked in six groups to plan how to explain the rooms and what we do in them for Widget. Student teachers worked with each group of school students, using the following guidelines for groupwork:

i) List what we do in each room on butchers’ paper e.g. “In the kitchen we . . . .” (pro forma provided)

ii) Each child can draw something on the butchers’ paper to show Widget what they have or what they do in this room (kitchen, dining room, etc.) at home.

iii) Student teachers scribe brief descriptions e.g. “we eat, we wash dishes . . .”
iv) Prepare a short enactment, involving all children, to show Widget something we do in the room we are describing.

With Widget as an audience, the young students presented information about the rooms of a house and enacted a short scene to demonstrate what happens in each room. They then enacted a search around the fictional house (classroom) with Widget to look for the missing crystal. The tension of needing to be quiet (to avoid waking the family) assisted the enactment and students' helpful discoveries of the crystal were kindly rejected until it was found in the last room searched. Widget expressed gratitude that she could now go home to Planet W and that she had learnt a lot about people's homes. She used the crystal to take the students to Planet W for a quick visit as a reward for their assistance.

Discussion of Lesson 1: Links to Home Practices and Literacy

The content for this lesson was chosen partly for its relevance to the social studies syllabus objective of understanding cultural practices attached to specific places. In the reflection phase after the drama, the students were given an opportunity to reflect on their experience through questions about both the drama strategies (e.g. talking to puppet, using the role of an expert, enacting) and about the focus content on homes and what we do in them. They were encouraged to think about their home lives by discussing the similarities and differences among their responses. This provided opportunities for these young students to consciously reflect on their own lives and perhaps to make comparisons with the lives of their classmates. Through this drama lesson students' family and personal identities could be affirmed and understood by students themselves in a way not normally available in the classroom. They had opportunities to discuss and enact elements of their home lives within the drama and to reflect on this in a more conscious way after the drama. In these ways the drama lesson promotes connections with students' home practices that are sustained and substantial.

The groupwork recording on butchers' paper provided a useful resource for follow-up work and introduced a written literacy component into the lesson. The proforma provided for the groupwork was completed by both the adult helpers who recorded the students' responses in writing and the students themselves who responded orally and drew pictures of events related to each room. The resultant documents on butchers' paper illustrate some of the similarities and differences in the home practices of the students and constitute a resource on which further work could be based. The following two examples from the drama demonstrate this potential:

In the dining room-
we eat * we watch TV * we play under the table * we set the table * we clear the table

In the lounge room-
we watch TV * we have a rest * we have a nap * we play the computer

Different social practices, for example, eating while watching television, or ownership and use of computers, arise in these examples and could be used to stimulate further research. As well as the social issues, the drama activities involved the literacy elements of reading, writing, talking, listening, enacting and viewing, any of which could be developed further through related activities. Critical awareness about the different social practices of families or social groups, and the validity of these, could also be heightened if the teacher has a commitment to such a perspective. The following are two suggestions which could be used to move students towards a critical awareness of social practices and the texts that represent them.
Extending into Critical Literacy

1) View an episode or more of ‘Widget’ (or similar children’s television program) to research aspects of life on Planet W (e.g. homes, social practices, clothes, use of electronic gadgets) and how these are portrayed using visual images and spoken language. With modelling and scaffolding by the teacher, plan and enact situations between chosen characters from the program. As part of planning, discuss possible situations based on what is known of social habits and dwellings.

2) Read and discuss with students a range of picture books about families around the world for a wider perspective on similarities and differences in homes and family practices. Document particular dwellings and research how each is related to: a climate, available resources, historical developments, people’s skills and occupations, people’s customs or social practices. Compare again with students’ own dwellings and practices.

Lesson 2: The Pokemon Challenge

Students: Kindergarten (First year of school, aged 5 years)
Content: Pokemon, popular electronic game.
Focus: Teaching someone about the Pokemon game to help her succeed in a challenge match.
Objectives/Outcomes: The students will have opportunities to – (Drama)

- interact with a teacher in role;
- adopt the mantle of an expert in a fictional setting;
- enact being Pokemon characters and other toys;
- develop body and spatial awareness using slow motion;
  (Social studies & English)
- use social and cultural knowledge about a popular electronic game;
- use oral language to describe and explain;
- engage in writing and reading a brief text.

Summary of the Lesson: This lesson was taught by a student teacher assisted by two other student teachers. The teacher took the role of a young woman, called Belinda, whose much younger niece had challenged her to a Pokemon battle. Belinda’s problem, providing the tension in the drama, was her lack of knowledge about the Pokemon characters and their various powers. She asked for the kindergarten students’ help to learn about the game in preparation for the match with her niece. The drama lesson was organised so that the kindergarten students, working in three groups, undertook to teach ‘Belinda’ about three of the most powerful Pokemon characters. They needed to verbally describe each one as well as show ‘Belinda’, through enactment, the behaviours each engaged in.

Discussion of Lesson 2: Links to Home Practices and Literacy

This lesson was designed to connect with the students’ home lives and their interests and allow them to use their considerable knowledge about a very popular cultural pastime, the Pokemon game, whose existence and associated artefacts are often not appreciated by schools. Another aim was to empower the kindergarten students by recognising their expertise and knowledge of a phenomenon not understood by many adults and allowing them to demonstrate these. In this way the game itself was treated as a legitimate and valued pastime and, by implication, the students and their interests were affirmed as worthy of the school’s attention.
As with most drama lessons there was considerable engagement in literacy activities. All of the kindergarten students were interested in the drama (although a few were not familiar with Pokemon) and used both spoken language and enactment to coach the teacher in the necessary knowledge. The student-teachers also scribed the kindergarten students’ descriptions of the powers of the three specific Pokemon and these large written texts were used as reminders during presentations to ‘Belinda’. For example, one group of kindergarten students had chosen to explain the Pokemon called Jigglypuff and constructed the following list of attributes with a student-teacher: (JIGGLYPUFF—)

sings them to sleep * scribbles on their faces when angry * crosses her arms when angry * has a blown up face * sings in a microphone ‘Jigglypuff’ * double slaps

While the lesson created opportunities for literacy development through talking, listening, acting, writing and reading, it did not have a critical perspective. A few of the many possibilities for building on this starting point are offered below. In moving them towards a critical awareness of the Pokemon game and characters, the intention is not to discourage students from involvement and enjoyment of the game. It is instead a way of both validating and building on students’ home experiences and interests while fulfilling some of the educational aims of critical literacy.

**Extending into Critical Literacy**

i) Investigation of Pokemon characters’ names: the name Pokemon itself is a contraction of the words Pocket Monsters and many of the Pokemon characters have names which play with parts of words or complete words. Most names relate to characters’ attributes and are formed by combining contractions or by constructing compound words. Jigglypuff, for example, looks like a puffed-up ‘ball of fluff’ (Barbo, 1999, p. 49) and Bellossom, whose name is obviously derived from the word ‘blossom’, is a flower Pokemon who has petals and attacks using ‘sweet scent’, ‘stun spore’ and ‘petal dance’ (Barbo, 2001, p. 39). Tracing the morphemic origins of a selection of Pokemon names focusses on the human construction of these names and opens the way for students to emulate some of the naming patterns (e.g. artificially stretching out the sounds in a word, as in ‘bellossom’) to create new names for Pokemon or for a new game. (This could also prove a productive pathway into specialist knowledge about topics such as flower parts as the information on Bellossom suggests.)

ii) Based on the examination of Pokemon names, students could invent new names and new characters for the Pokemon game with specific powers and behaviours. Scaffolded by the teacher, this could be done orally first, recorded in writing and drawings and presented dramatically through enactment of behaviours.

The transformation and active production of texts in these ways is one of the aims of critical literacy (Knobel cited in Knobel & Healy 1998: 95). Students can become aware of the constructedness of all texts as they deconstruct aspects of the Pokemon game or children’s television programs such as ‘Widget’ and reconstruct their own versions. Drama provides an ideal pedagogy to support teachers and students in developing contexts and strategies for this work.
Conclusion

Many drama lessons taught daily around the world provide the kinds of opportunities described here to build bridges between homes and schools, and to develop students’ critical literacy awareness. These lessons are not exceptional, but are offered as examples of the potential of drama to achieve particular educational objectives which reflect current concerns and understandings. As research continues to identify shortcomings in school practices, especially its lack of congruency with home and community practices, as the cause of educational disadvantage, the spotlight will focus more on teaching processes. The calls for closer connections between homes and schools in order to use and value students’ out-of-school knowledge and experience can be effectively addressed through the use of drama. So, too, can the calls for developing critical literacy awareness as the suggestions above demonstrate. These new educational objectives present opportunities to reconfirm the value of drama as a teaching and learning methodology and to renew our own calls for its more frequent use in the early years, or any classroom.

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Context for Article 7

Martello, J., 2001, ‘Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years’, 
*Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Volume 24, Number 3.

Context

This article was an invited contribution to the *Australian Journal of Language and 
Literacy* for a themed edition on ‘Critical literacy in early childhood’. The journal had 
previously published my work (Martello, 2001a). As a long-term exponent of drama in 
education I used this opportunity to further research ideas about the valuable role that 
drama could play in developing young students’ literacies in general, and critical literacy 
in particular. Drama lessons generated through my university teaching provided data for 
investigating how drama develops critical literacy.

Specific focus and significance to the field

The importance of developing students’ critical awareness has been a particular concern 
in literacy education during the last decade, partly in response to the proliferation of 
persuasive, global texts that target young children. Drawing on young children’s popular 
culture, this article explains how the main elements of drama connect strongly to the 
aims of critical literacy. By mapping the essential elements of drama onto key 
characteristics of critical literacy practices, the research takes a unique approach to 
establishing drama as a critical pedagogy. At the time of writing, there were few other 
published, Australian articles that connected these educational concerns in relation to 
primary school students. Subsequent interest supports the view that the article addressed 
a gap in the literature connecting critical literacy with process drama, particularly in the 
early years context.

Research methods

The article employs both theoretical/conceptual and case study research. In proposing 
the thesis that drama is a critical pedagogy, theories about critical literacy and about
drama pedagogy were reviewed and central principles selected from each in order to analyse salient connections between them. The theoretical case claiming drama as a critical pedagogy was supported by data from two case studies, the **Superhero drama** and the **Pokemon drama** (See Table 3, Chapter 3). The **Superhero drama** case study involved preschool students, in a preschool setting, whereas the **Pokemon drama** was undertaken in a primary school with Kincergarten (first year of school) students. The other participants in both case studies were teacher education students and the researcher. Case study data used in the article were in the form of lesson plans and procedures, and documentation of drama strategies and of resultant literacy texts produced (spoken, written, visual). Extrapolating from the case studies, the article offers suggestions for additional drama experiences to support the hypothesis that drama develops critical literacy.

**Contribution to the field**

This article

i) has been published in a refereed, national literacy journal.

ii) has been used by a state education authority (Education Queensland) and requested by individuals. (See Appendix G – Supporting documentation for Article 7)

iii) addresses a gap in the literature.
Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years

Julie Martello

This paper argues that drama is a critical pedagogy which facilitates a questioning perspective towards texts and the social practices of which they are part. Building on examples from preschool and early school years, the paper explores how drama is uniquely placed to realise the aims of critical literacy because it focuses on making meaning, on the exploration of multiple perspectives and on tensions between different beliefs or world views.

Drama as pedagogy (a teaching/learning methodology)
Views about what drama is differ among members of educational communities so an explanation of what is meant here by ‘drama’ is needed. The kind of drama discussed here is also called ‘process drama’ (O’Neill 1995) or ‘drama in education’ (Bolton 1979) and this defines its central quality of being a process, rather than product oriented, though of course it is possible to end up with a very impressive product. It is not about the performance of scripted plays but about largely improvised, fictional contexts in which students are guided to explore the kinds of situations faced by people in real life, within a distanced and safe environment. Content across the curriculum is available to exploration through process drama, as is knowledge about the discipline of drama itself. Its teaching and learning potential lies in the role-taking and exploration of particular moments within the drama framework and in the guided reflection that occurs outside of the drama itself.

Although this kind of drama has been promoted and disseminated since its beginnings in Dorothy Heathcote’s work in the 1960s, there are still very few preschool or primary school teachers who use it regularly (Mackay 2001, Warren 1998). Teachers have differing ideas about what drama is and many feel that they have insufficient knowledge about how to use it in the classroom. One recent study showed a tendency for teachers to equate drama with theatre or scripted plays because their own experience of drama had been of this kind (Mackay 2001). With drama a part of the recently released Creative Arts syllabus in NSW (Board of Studies NSW 2000) it is timely to reconfirm its value in the curriculum and explore links with another curriculum initiative, the promotion of critical literacy.
This paper focuses on the role of drama as pedagogy, a teaching and learning methodology, and explores its potential as a critical pedagogy which has strong, natural connections to the aims of critical literacy. Similarities between the key characteristics of drama and of critical literacy are highlighted. Examples of drama lessons with preschool and early school students form the basis of an exploration of ways in which drama can realise the aims of critical literacy if early childhood teachers adopt a critical stance.

**How does drama promote learning?**
Rationales for the use of educational or process drama highlight the unique power of drama to tap into children’s intrinsic motivations and to involve the emotions for lasting and memorable learning. Many practitioners have written about the learning potential in using process drama (Bolton 1979, Cusworth & Simons 1997, Morgan & Saxton 1987, O’Neill 1995, Warren 1999). Some of the principal ways in which drama promotes learning are:

- It enables children to use and reflect upon what they know and through this assists them to make their own knowledge conscious. Heathcote (cited in Warren 1999) says children are often barely conscious of what they know or understand and drama promotes awareness and ownership of knowledge.

- It draws upon children’s current knowledge, interests, understanding and language and offers opportunities to extend these into the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1977) through associated activities and research.

- It involves the emotions which make situations and ideas memorable and assists in lasting learning. From the early establishment of drama as a teaching/learning method theorists have claimed that it is because drama is felt that it is so effective, that it promotes ‘the deepest kind of change that can take place ... at the level of subjective meaning’ (Bolton 1979, p. 31).

- It allows exploration and problem solving in safe, supported and motivated situations where children are more likely to take risks and ‘have a go’ without the threat of real-life consequences (Cusworth & Simons 1997).

It works from a premise of shared power between students and teacher, allowing students to see their ideas respected and used to further the drama. This promotes students’ engagement, ensuring that drama remains an enjoyable and desired activity.
What can students learn through drama?
The learning that can be promoted through drama defies curriculum boundaries. Through doing drama students can learn about drama itself, as a discipline, as well as learn about the content being dealt with. Some of the most common learning areas documented in the literature and demonstrated in drama lessons are the following:

- **cognitive**: language—creating and using spoken, written, visual and multimodal texts in a range of contexts and for different audiences; concept development across all curriculum areas (e.g. science, social science, history) including the discipline of drama as a content area; problem solving; decision-making and research skills.
- **physical**: e.g. spatial awareness, strength, agility, balance.
- **social/cultural/emotional**: co-operation; collaboration; confidence; empathy; tolerance; problem solving; beliefs and values (e.g. about gender, ethnicity, class).
- **creative/imaginative**: the expression of ideas and understanding others’ representations of ideas; the expression and understanding of emotions.

Drama as a critical pedagogy
The field of drama in education has been and is still being explored extensively in its theoretical and practical dimensions, and drama’s connection to critical literacy is one aspect of this exploration (see, for example, Hertzberg & Ewing, 1998). The approach taken in this paper is to link the key elements of drama commonly identified in the literature (e.g. Board of Studies 2000, Cusworth & Simons 1997, Morgan & Saxton 1987, Warren 1999) to key characteristics of critical literacy. The five key elements of drama to be considered here are those of:

- role
- tension
- focus
- symbol and
- reflection/disengagement (Cusworth & Simons 1997).

The identification of key characteristics of critical approaches to literacy is also an evolving concern. In this paper, the four key characteristics of critical literacy practices identified by Knobel and Healy (1998) are used to inform the following description of drama as a critical pedagogy. The characteristics of critical practice identified by Knobel and Healy are:

1. Critical questioning: It is about encouraging students to investigate, question and even challenge relationships between language and
social practices that advantage particular social groups over others (Gilbert & Taylor cited in Knobel & Healy 1998).

2. *Language as social practice*: It is underpinned by the belief that language—and the way we use language to read, write, view, speak and listen—cannot be separated from the cultural and social practices of which it is part and therefore language is never neutral or value-free.

3. *Analysis*: It is about analysing and evaluating all texts to uncover how they promote certain versions or representations of reality. Doing this ‘involves analysing relationships between language, social groups, social practices and power’ (Knobel & Healy 1998, p. 4).

4. *Social justice and change*: It is about transforming taken-for-granted social and language practices or assumptions for the common good. The development of socially aware and active citizens is an aim of critical literacy. It is about social change (Knobel & Healy 1998, pp. 2–4).

How, then, does the use of process drama as a teaching/learning methodology encompass the above characteristics of critical literacy practice? The following description of each of the key elements of drama (role, tension, focus, symbol, reflection/disengagement) explains how drama practice provides a range of productive starting points for critical literacy.

**Role**: In process drama students and teacher enact the roles of other people within jointly-negotiated, fictional contexts. Without the adoption of roles there is no drama. Taking on a role requires that participants step into another person’s shoes and begin to understand the world from this person’s perspective. In role one can experience how others might think, feel and act in response to a particular situation. The adoption of single or multiple perspectives through role is a first step towards conscious awareness of another point of view or set of beliefs. It also enables the role-taker to consciously reflect on her/his own real-life beliefs in contrast to the assumed ones. With appropriate teacher guidance the use of role provides concrete contexts for the investigation and comparison of characters’ motivations, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours (language and action) and relationships with others (power).

**Tension**: Drama employs many of the same elements as theatre, including narrative structures which rely on some form of tension, or problem situation, to drive the drama. Without a problem there is little need to talk, think or act. Unresolved conflict provides the excitement which
engages the learners both intellectually and emotionally and motivates them to become involved in the drama activity (Morgan & Saxton 1987). The tension around which effective classroom drama experiences revolve is created by differing beliefs or perspectives on the problem at hand. Dramatic moments are often played and replayed to explore alternative ways of dealing with an issue, creating opportunities for explicit discussion and enactment of the relationships between beliefs, language and social action.

**Focus:** Process drama is planned by a teacher who has educational goals, or outcomes, to pursue and therefore each drama experience will have two kinds of focus. The teacher plans engaging experiences, using drama strategies, around a concept or theme under study encompassing both a dramatic focus (the fictional situation/problem) and a teaching/learning focus (the curriculum content e.g. popular children's games). The teacher guides students towards the educational goals from within the drama, as teacher-in-role, and through discussion and reflection outside of the dramatic episodes. Some examples of specific drama strategies and content used with students in the first years of school are discussed later in the paper, with ideas for extending the work into more critical practices.

**Symbol:** Symbols are used in drama to represent shared meanings being developed by the group or meanings recognised within social groups and cultures. While classroom drama does not require the use of props and costumes, it is strengthened through the use of relevant symbols, such as an empty bowl to represent hunger. Discussion about the choice and meaning of symbols provides opportunities for reflection on their social and cultural embeddedness, with even young children being able to identify meanings and social practices associated with symbols e.g. a red heart or yellow chicken. Investigating symbols can lead to questions and understandings about the social constructedness of their meanings and to research into the origins of symbols associated with the social groups to which students belong (Knobel 1998, p. 103).

**Reflection and disengagement:** In order to maximise opportunities for learning through drama, time for reflection and disengagement is considered essential. Planned questions and activities encourage students to focus on aspects of the drama experience and to make learning conscious by, for example, comparing their own lives/beliefs with those enacted, researching issues that arose within the drama or planning experiences to extend the dramatic exploration. The possibilities for questioning, challenging and planning alternative courses of action make this component of process drama lessons an obvious site for developing critical practices.
Drama’s unique contribution to critical literacy

The general links between drama and critical practices outlined above show the potential of drama as a critical pedagogy. However, the unique contribution that drama can make towards the development of critical literacy is that, in drama, students use both language and action, experiencing language as social practice first-hand and having opportunities to replay and reflect upon the relationships between language and social practices. Unlike other classroom experiences where meanings are made through language only, effective process drama requires language to be used in a much wider set of cultural and social situations, often accompanied by action. Further, in order to engage drama participants, the social/cultural situations are built around a point of tension between opposing attitudes or beliefs. These components of drama open up unique possibilities for students to become personally committed to examining both the language and the social practices associated with a range of perspectives on and beliefs about the issues at the centre of the drama.

Of course, the use of process drama will not automatically lead to critical practices without the teacher’s commitment to such practices. Relevant questions and reflective activities need to be framed within a critical discourse. Knobel (1998, p. 94) warns that simply adopting different character perspectives does not constitute a critical approach. Students can be guided towards understanding that all texts, whether spoken, written, visual or multimodal, are not neutral or value-free but are constructed by people who have particular world views, values and beliefs and who therefore represent reality (use language and act) in different ways. Using drama teachers can promote critical literacy by constructing activities that explore different versions of an event and ask questions about the effects of different times, places and cultures on such events. Critical strategies that have been suggested for use with texts are also applicable to drama. For example, Green (2000) outlines the following strategies used to assist students in adopting a critical stance towards texts:

- Comparing different versions of the same story.
- Retelling known stories from a different point of view.
- Using teacher questions to frame the discourse.
- Teacher and students jointly constructing texts.

Guiding questions to promote critical reflection on texts have been provided by many writers, including questions appropriate for use with children in the preschool and early school years (e.g. O’Brien & Comber 2000, p. 156). Many of these questions can be adapted for use in drama contexts by focussing on characters, their motivations and actions.
Questions such as those proposed below are already an integral part of creating improvisations within process drama:

- How should this character behave? Or, how is the character behaving? What can we tell from the character’s language? Why is the character behaving/speaking in this way? How does she/he feel (what’s her/his attitude) about the situation?
- What other behaviour/attitude could the character have? How would her/his behaviour and language change?
- What kind of relationship do the characters have between them? Does any character have more power than any other? What kind of power do they have?
- What does the character want to happen? Why does she/he want this to happen? How would this outcome affect the character? How would it affect other participants in the drama? What else could happen instead and how would this affect all the participants?

In drama contexts, the above questions can be used to inform alternative enactments around a situation, with follow-up reflection and comparisons with similar real life or literature-based situations. The interrogation of a character’s worldview, values and beliefs can be achieved through drama strategies which bring the lives, motivations and language of others to life for young students.

*Through drama to critical literacy in early childhood education*

The point has often been made that it is never too early to promote critical literacy awareness (e.g., O’Brien & Comber 2000, p. 157) and the examples drawn upon in the following section illustrate the potential of process drama strategies to provide ways into critical literacy in preschools and the first years of school. The drama lessons outlined are taken from my own work with young children and work done collaboratively with teacher education students. While the original lessons created opportunities for students’ literacy development through talking, listening, acting, reading and writing, they stopped short of taking an overtly critical perspective. Using the lesson outlines as starting points, I have offered suggestions for extending them towards a critical awareness of texts (spoken, written, visual and multimodal) and social practice.

The development and resolution of a complete narrative or the devising of alternative endings for a narrative are common outcomes for process drama with young students. This kind of drama experience is highly suited to young children because it involves them directly in creating the narrative, from the invention of its characters, context and
complications to its successful resolution. The teacher guides the drama
by planning for maximum student input within a structure of drama
strategies that will facilitate a satisfying result for all. The teacher plans
for the use of guiding questions and strategies to build the narrative.
This can include planning the beginning situation, roles and a problem
(complication), selecting and facilitating the workable episodes for
enactment. The following drama lessons are built around this principle
of achieving a satisfying narrative structure within which students make
decisions and solve problems while also meeting other educational
objectives. The lessons are organised according to the focus material.

1. Popular culture: Superheroes (preschoolers)

In a series of drama experiences with preschool children around the
theme of ‘Superheroes’, activities drew upon what children knew about
particular superheroes, e.g. what powers they had, how they dressed
and what kinds of things they did to help people. The drama sessions
were designed to enable the children to use their knowledge to create
their own narratives involving superheroes, within structures provided
by the teacher but also requiring them to meet challenges and enact solu-
tions along the way. One drama experience proceeded as follows:

- The children create a superhero: through the teacher’s guiding ques-
tions and with a teacher-education student to take on the role, the
children dress and name the superhero.
- Problem narrated by the teacher: a train has come off its tracks and
people are stranded.
- The children build the track (from long, wooden blocks) in prepara-
tion for the drama. Teacher gains agreement for an imaginary train
and children sit inside train boundary as passengers and sing a train
song.
- Enact derailment after planning how and stressing safety rules.
- The superhero attempts several times to reposition the train but fails
and asks children’s help.
- The children disembark and enact, with teacher guidance, coordinat-
ed effort to right the train. After several attempts children succeed
and are thanked by the superhero.
- Everybody gets back onto train and complete journey with a train
song.

Extending into critical literacy

1. Through questions for reflection on drama: Did the superhero solve
the problem alone? Could one person solve such a problem? How was
problem solved? Can children recall superhero stories they have seen,
heard or been read that were similar to their story? If so, in what ways?
2. View, read or retell other superhero stories and compare problems and how they are solved. Children may note the prevalence of physical fighting to resolve disagreements in some superhero stories. Discuss other ways of conflict resolution and relate to preschool context.

3. Have children identify a range of superheroes and powers each has. Teacher, using children’s input, plans further drama experiences around these.

Through enacting, discussing and creating their own versions of superhero scenarios, children may begin to recognise similar patterns in the portrayals of superheroes in other media, such as books, comics, television, videos and electronic games. This is a first step towards seeing themselves as authors of texts and recognising the often formulaic construction of texts by others.

2. Popular culture: Pokemon (Kindergarten)

This lesson was planned and implemented with a Kindergarten class whose teacher had identified ‘Toys’ as the current class topic. The lesson was taught by a student-teacher, with the support of two others, and was based on the electronic game, Pokemon. One intention was to legitimise this popular cultural pastime whose existence and associated artefacts are often not appreciated by schools. Another was to empower the Kindergarten students by recognising their expertise and knowledge of a phenomenon not understood by many adults and allowing them to demonstrate it. The teacher’s role, reflecting the reality, was that of one who doesn’t know. Specifically, the teacher would take the role of a young woman, called Belinda, whose much younger niece had challenged her to a Pokemon battle. Belinda’s problem, providing the tension in the drama, was her lack of knowledge about the Pokemon characters and their various powers. She asked for the Kindergarten students’ help to learn about the game in preparation for the match with her niece. The drama lesson was organised so that the students, working in three groups, undertook to teach ‘Belinda’ about three different Pokemon. They would verbally describe each one as well as show ‘Belinda’, through enactment, the behaviours each engaged in.

As expected, all of the Kindergarten students were totally engaged by the drama (although some were not familiar with Pokemon) and used both spoken language and enactment to coach the teacher in the necessary knowledge. The student-teachers also scribed their descriptions of the powers of the three specific Pokemon and these large written texts were used as reminders during presentations to ‘Belinda’. For example, one group of Kindergarten students had chosen to explain the Pokemon called Jigglypuff and constructed the following list of attributes with a student-teacher:
JIGGLYPUFF
✓ sings them to sleep
✓ scribbles on their faces when angry
✓ crosses her arms when angry
✓ has a blown up face
✓ sings in a microphone 'Jigglypuff'
✓ double slaps

After successfully imparting their expertise to 'Belinda', the Kindergarten students were thanked and the drama ended there. The reflection focussed on other favourite toys and what made particular toys enjoyable. While the lesson created opportunities for literacy development through talking, listening, acting and reading, it did not have a critical perspective. Some of the many possibilities for building on this starting point are offered below. In moving them towards a critical awareness of the Pokemon game and characters, the intention is not to discourage students from involvement and enjoyment of the game. It is instead a way of both validating and building on students' home experiences and interests while fulfilling some of the educational aims of critical literacy.

Extending into critical literacy
1. Investigation of Pokemon characters’ names: The name Pokemon itself is a contraction of the words Pocket Monsters and many of the Pokemon characters have names which play with parts of words or complete words. Most names relate to characters’ attributes and are formed by combining contractions or by constructing compound words. Jigglypuff, for example, looks like a puffed up ‘ball of fluff’ (Barbo 1999, p. 49) and Bellossom, whose name is obviously derived from the word ‘blossom’, is a Flower Pokemon who has petals and attacks using ‘sweet scent’, ‘stun spore’ and ‘petal dance’ (Barbo 2001, p. 39). Tracing the morphemic origins of a selection of Pokemon names focuses on the human construction of these names and opens the way for students to emulate some of the naming patterns (e.g. artificially stretching out the sounds in a word, as in Bellossom) to create new names for Pokemon or for a new game. (This could also prove a productive pathway into specialist knowledge about topics such as flower parts as the information on Bellossom suggests.)

2. Based on the examination of Pokemon names, students could invent new names and new characters for the Pokemon game with specific powers and behaviours. Scaffolded by the teacher, this could be done orally first, recorded in writing and drawings and presented dramatically through enactment of behaviours.

The transformation and active production of texts in these ways is one of the aims of critical literacy (Knobel 1998, p. 95). Students can
become aware of the constructedness of all texts as they deconstruct aspects of the Pokémon game and reconstruct their own versions.

3. Using literature: interrogating characters (preschool or early school)
Children’s literature is a rich source of ideas for exploration through drama and, with sensitivity to the cultural beliefs of groups represented among the students, stories, poems and rhymes from different cultures can be used. Warren (1999) documents several drama experiences based around traditional fairy tales and nursery rhymes that she has implemented with children from two years of age. Once stories or rhymes have been introduced to children through telling or reading they can provide characters and themes for exploration in drama.

One drama strategy, sometimes called ‘hot-seating’, involves interviewing a character from a story or rhyme and asking her/him questions. Characters to be interviewed can be those in the known story or peripheral characters who might be mentioned or not but who would have an interest in the events of the story. With young children it is advisable for the teacher to take on the role of the character being interviewed because it requires some skill to maintain the role and to answer with consistency and with implication. Successful hot-seating or interviewing requires a focus and the preparation of relevant questions. For example, if interviewing the mother of the three little pigs, the focus might be on trying to find out how she felt about the pigs leaving home. If interviewing one of the little pigs the focus might be on why he wanted to leave home at such a young age. In any case, part of the preparation of questions for the interview is to speculate on the possible reasons for a particular event or motivations for actions. Some examples of interviewing characters from a story will illustrate the potential of this drama strategy in relation to critical literacy.

The story of Cinderella contains a number of themes that can be explored through interviewing characters related to the story. The specific focus chosen will depend upon which major theme is to be focussed on: rags to riches transformations; sibling rivalry and stepfamilies; patriarchal and stratified societies; gender inequality; royalty; wealth and poverty; etc. If several characters are interviewed then it is possible to compare their preoccupations and their perspective on the world. To strengthen the drama framework, the children also require plausible roles, for example, as palace officials who are investigating the mystery woman who disappeared at midnight. This gives them a reason to be interviewing everybody connected with the ball. A more general role for the children would be as reporters for the local newspaper or for a television report. Possible characters for interviewing might be:

1. One of the stepsisters. The teacher negotiates a focus for the interview (What would we want to ask her? Children are often interested
in fairness and may want to know why Cinderella is treated so badly) and an attitude for the role (What will she be like? e.g. arrogant, kind, jealous, sympathetic?).

2. A servant who waited on guests at the ball. Possibilities for the servant's attitude would be discussed with the children. She/he might be tired and resentful or honoured to be present at the ball. Alternative attitudes can be demonstrated by the teacher in role following suggestions by the children concerning language and demeanour appropriate to the attitude.

3. A royal visitor from a neighbouring country. Interviewing such a character might afford opportunities to find out about children's perceptions of the accoutrements of wealth. This could later be compared with the lives described by characters like the servant, e.g. Cinderella herself, a coachman or a seamstress who sewed the fine dresses of the ball guests.

4. A character from another version of the Cinderella story e.g. Princess Smartypants (Cole 1986) or Prince Cinders (Cole 1987) by Babette Cole. After reading these versions of the story to children, the characters of Smartypants or Prince Cinders could be interviewed and compared with that of Cinderella.

Through the kinds of drama activities suggested in the examples above the early childhood teacher can begin to develop students' awareness of the ideologies embedded in stories and of the beliefs of particular characters within them. Because drama provides a means for students to manipulate these texts and others, such as popular games or superhero scripts, it encourages understandings about the human authorship of texts. In drama activities students learn through constructing their own meanings that all texts are constructed and therefore open to questioning and to change. By taking on roles students try out alternative perspectives first-hand, using language and action, making these differing perspectives uniquely available for examination and challenge. Because drama revolves around points of tension between beliefs or perspectives it provides teachers and students with opportunities to identify and reflect on a range of differing views and the ways in which they are manifest both in text and in social practice.

References
Board of Studies NSW, Creative Arts K–6 Syllabus, Board of Studies NSW, Sydney.


Context for Article 8


Context

This article was presented at the international Learning Conference, Cuba, June, 2004, and subsequently accepted for publication in the International Journal of Learning, the proceedings of the conference. Articles for this conference and its publication are refereed and published both on-line and in hard copy.

The article presented an opportunity to reach a wide international audience interested in multiliteracies and to highlight the use of drama pedagogy as a means of developing emerging literacy modes in early childhood education. In the article I extend an established research interest in critical literacy through drama to include the development of visual literacy. This new direction for research was partly in response to the conference focus on multiliteracies and partly due to my strengthening conviction that the critique of images deserves more attention in early childhood education.

Specific focus and significance to the field

This article proposes reasons for teaching visual and critical literacies and investigates the use of drama pedagogy to teach them. The article draws on expert opinion about persuasive global texts that target young children in an era of multimodal technologies and it notes the prevalence of images in these global texts. It establishes the case that visual and critical literacies are necessary components of early education and demonstrates some implementation possibilities through a drama case study.

Since the prospective audience for the article was one of literacy, not drama, practitioners, the article includes explanations of how learning, in general, and literacy
learning, in particular, occur through drama pedagogy. A drama case study was specifically planned to address visual and critical literacies and data from the case study was interpreted in order to assess the effectiveness of drama pedagogy for these purposes. Theorising drama pedagogy as a means to develop these emerging literacies, particularly in the early years of school, is a relatively new area of research and this article contributes to this currently small field.

**Research methods**

Initially, the article employs theoretical/conceptual research in order to explore relationships between the current multimodal, technological communications environment and the educational objectives of visual and critical literacies. Theories and explanations about drama pedagogy are also a product of this research. The *Image-critique drama* case study (See Table 3, Chapter 3) informs the latter section of the article. Participants in the case study, which took place in a primary school, were seven and eight year old students in their third year of school and the teacher/researcher. Data from the case study were in the form of spoken, written, visual and multimodal texts which were analysed with reference to visual codes (i.e. colour, shape, size) and characteristics of critical awareness (i.e. constructedness of images, illustrator’s choices).

**Contribution to the field**

This article

i) was presented at an international conference, the Learning Conference, Cuba, June, 2004.

ii) was refereed and accepted for publication in the International Journal of Learning, the conference proceedings. (See Appendix H – Documentation supporting Article 8)
Connecting literacies: Multimodal and critical literacies through drama in the early years of school.

Abstract:
This paper identifies process drama as an engaging and productive pedagogy for developing students’ multimodal literacies and critical awareness, especially in the early years of school. The paper draws on a case study of drama work undertaken with students in the first years of school. The drama experiences are based on images and themes from children’s literature and address both curriculum objectives and the children’s real-life concerns.

At a time when many young children’s home lives are rich with opportunities to use multimodal technologies as part of everyday practices, particularly in their popular culture activities, educators are searching for ways to engage students with school-based literacies. Drama is often overlooked in this search and this paper provides evidence for its effectiveness.

Children’s increasing access to a world of information also comes with increasing opportunities for commercial interests to target them as consumers of global commodities. Again, educators are looking for ways to develop children’s critical abilities to assess and question the range of multimodal texts they encounter daily. In this paper the case study is analysed to explain how drama is a critical pedagogy that encompasses multiple perspectives and allows students to examine the constructedness of all texts, whether spoken, written or visual. The paper includes a strong focus on how students’ understandings about images are accessed and heightened through the use of process drama.

Multimodal and critical literacies in the early years

Young children are engaged in a range of different literacies, in different modes, regularly in their daily lives. These ‘multimodal’ literacies (New London Group, 2000; Kress, 2000), involving combinations of spoken, written, visual, audio, gestural and spatial meanings, are integrated into children’s experiences in a relatively seamless way. Using and creating multimodal texts is part of current everyday practices, such as viewing television or using computers and electronic games. The challenge for early schooling is to both teach about and further develop children’s multimodal literacies in an equally integrated manner and to maintain children’s interest at the same time. The use of drama in the classroom successfully addresses these challenges, it is argued here, in ways that no other classroom practice does or can do. The notion of drama as education is not a new one but, while it remains under-utilised, the potential of drama remains unexploited and both students and teachers miss valuable opportunities for learning.

The need for ‘critical framing’ is strongly advocated by the New London Group as an essential component of the pedagogy for teaching ‘multimodal’ literacies, also referred to as ‘multiliteracies’ (2000, p34). The group describes the pervasiveness of the “global commodity culture” and the “invasive global texts” that confront young children and
is “extensive and encompasses cognitive, social, emotional and moral learning” (Warren, 1999, p 5).

One of the distinguishing features of early spontaneous dramatic play and also the more structured drama activities that teachers can be involved in, is the involvement of the emotions. Bolton (1979) cites this as an important difference between drama and other classroom learning, pointing out that although skills and objective knowledge are learned through drama, “the deepest kind of change that can take place is at the level of subjective meaning. The learning … has to be felt for it to be effective” (1979, p 31). When teachers understand how to use drama strategies effectively they can effect student learning that involves a

“change of insight”, [where there is] “some shift of appraisal, an act of cognition that has involved a change of feeling, so that some facet of living is given (however temporarily) a different value.” (Bolton, 1979, p 41)

Involvement in the ‘as if’ of drama emulates the conditions of real life, though in a protected situation where exploration can occur and mistakes can be reflected upon without the real-life consequences (Cusworth & Simons, 1997). This provides a penalty-free environment and encourages the drama participants to creatively try out possibilities for action. These and other features of drama contribute to deeper exploration of issues and long-lasting learning because it is linked to emotional involvement.

The current concern, in Australia and elsewhere, to identify productive pedagogies involving quality teaching and deep learning for students has resulted in the production of sets of criteria against which to measure teaching and learning experiences. For example, in the state of Queensland, in Australia, the Productive Pedagogy model identifies twenty essential criteria categorised into the four overarching elements of Intellectual Quality, Connectedness, Supportive classroom environment and Recognition and valuing of difference (Education Queensland, 2002). In another state, New South Wales, a similar model has been adopted (NSW Dept of Education & Training, 2003). In other papers I have set out to demonstrate how the use of drama in the early years of school meets many of the criteria for a productive pedagogy and provides highly productive contexts for developing literacies (see Martello, 2002 & 2004).

Other drama practitioners have also illustrated how process drama experiences involve students in the meaningful use and extension of a range of literacy practices. In the Australian educational context, Dunn and O'Toole (2002) describe drama experiences with early primary school students highlighting the many opportunities for cross-curricula and literacy learning. Warren (1999) and Cusworth & Simons (1997) document a similar range of literacy outcomes through drama with students from preschool to late primary school. Elsewhere around the world the efficacy of drama has been documented by experts such as Neelands (2000), Morgan & Saxton (1989), Taylor (2000) and Winston (2000). Despite the wealth of literature about the effectiveness of drama as a teaching and learning method, it is not commonly used by generalist primary school teachers. The following case study contributes to the body of evidence sampled
above and advances it by highlighting the special case of process drama as a productive context for visual and critical literacies.

Case study: Dramatic contexts for multimodal literacies

The work described here was done with 27 students in a Year 2 class, this being the third year of formal schooling in New South Wales, Australia. The children attended a public school in an outlying suburb of a rural town and were predominantly from middle class backgrounds. They were all native English speakers and there was one indigenous student. The students were seven and eight years old and most were fluent readers, with about five students having literacy problems. The class teacher, Vicki, had also focussed the students' attention on visual texts during the preceding two terms by examining book covers and pictures, both with and without reference to accompanying written text. Access to computers, another major contributor to visual literacy, was widespread among the children with most having computers at home and all having access to computers at school.

A sequence of three drama lessons was planned and taught by the researcher/author (called the 'teacher' in the following descriptions), in collaboration with the class teacher. These lessons were intended to complement the class program in its focus topic on 'friendship', an important issue for many students. The use and development of multimodal literacies, especially visual and critical literacies was a parallel objective. The intention was to explore some of the book's themes through drama based only on the double-paged illustration inside the front cover. It was hoped that the students' understandings of the visual and written text when it was read later would be deepened because of insights gained from their drama experiences. In order to analyse the interplay of multimodal texts within the drama context the lessons were audiotaped and relevant sections transcribed. Samples of the students' related written texts were also collected to support this discussion and analysis.

O’Neill (1995) writes about the significance of the ideas or materials used to initiate any drama work, which she calls the ‘pretext’, because they activate and inform “the weaving of the text of the process drama” (O’Neill, 1995, p. 20). The pretext for the drama discussed here was one illustration from the book “Rose meets Mr Wintergarten” which is written and illustrated by Bob Graham (Graham, 1992). The image, described later, encapsulates the central themes of the book and was used to ignite their exploration through the drama. As well as the theme of ‘friendship’ the book addresses other social and moral issues such as: attitudes to the outsider, loneliness and what constitutes happiness. The illustrations in this book very cleverly support and augment the written text. The interplay between the deceptively simple illustrations and the written text provided rich opportunities for dramatic exploration of the theme of ‘friendship’ and for the use of multimodal literacy practices.

Pretext for the drama: The image. The initiating illustration is of two contrasting houses in a street scene peopled by local children on foot and on bicycles with a moving van outside the modest, smaller house. The larger, palatial two-storied house has an intensely overgrown garden consisting of dark, shrubby bushes and towering cactus
plants almost obscuring the house and its tall fence. The much smaller house next door is surrounded by an open space of lawn, with flowerbeds on the periphery of its block and no fence at all. The contrasting mood of each house and garden is also reflected in the illustrator’s palette of dark browns and greys for the large house and bright colours for the small one.

The image was presented to the students as an introduction to the drama. The teacher focussed discussion about the image both on what the students noticed in it and on who they thought might live in the big, dark house. The former question elicited some very observant responses discussed later in the paper. The latter question linked the image (pretext) to the drama (text) by initiating the first drama task, to develop rumours that the people in the street might circulate about the person who lived in the big house.

Drama strategy: In role, relaying rumours about mystery character. To connect to the book’s treatment of ostracism or demonisation of the unknown outsider, the students were invited to take on the roles of people in the street who were sharing rumours or stories about the person who lived in the big house. The book itself includes an image of a chained dog, straining on a leash at children too afraid to retrieve their football from the big house’s grounds. Because of this the teacher modelled an example rumour about guard dogs chained up in the garden. This negative portrayal of the unknown owner, reflecting content in the book, was intended as a temporary idea that would be challenged later in a meeting with the owner who would defy these early assumptions.

After time for planning in pairs, using a photocopy of the illustration of the big house, the students took on the roles of ‘townspeople’ and, sitting in a circle, related their conjectures about the person who lived in the house, usually assumed to be an old man. They were given an opening phrase, “I’ve heard that the person who lives in this house . . .”, to structure the responses consistently as rumours and to help overcome shyness or nervousness. As expected, their stories echoed the mood of the big, dark house in the picture and referred to nasty things done or kept by the old man. Some of the students’ rumours are reproduced here with examples of context-specific vocabulary underlined to highlight the way drama promotes imaginative language, spoken in this case, and not easily accessed during other kinds of classroom activities.

Spoken language: Imaginative and context-specific

“I’ve heard that the person who lives in this house . . . (given opening)

- catches children and puts them in dungeons.”
- is a wizard . . . and he’s mean.”
- is actually a ghost.”
- is a vampire.”
- has fourteen blood-thirsty (? Inaudible).”
- has a shed full of sharp, nasty tools.”
- says, in a friendly voice, ‘welcome, welcome’. Then, once in the door, he sits them down and gives them a poisonous cup of tea.”

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Drama strategy: (Out of role) Inventing the mystery character. Following the telling of
rumours, the students devised a character outline, for a possible inhabitant of the big
house. This planning work was guided by teacher-questioning and recorded onto large
sheets of paper by the teacher. Most of the students contributed to this discussion and
many did so several times in their eagerness to have a say in the character’s making.
Their oral language contributions were again inventive and, because they were asked to
consider a range of possibilities rather than adhere to the person imagined in their
rumours, their vocabulary was diverse. Some examples of the students’ contributions
demonstrate this diversity.

Spoken language: Making statements, inventive vocabulary

“Maybe he’s ashamed to show his face.”
“He’s too spooky and people don’t want to marry him.”
“There are things hidden in the garden.”
“He wants privacy.”

The students decided that the house’s owner was an old, perhaps wise, man who might
be hiding something, had been married and was called Mr Albino. The written text
scribed by the teacher provided for these young writers both a model of how a
competent, adult writer goes about the process of writing and a reading resource for
reference during a later interview with the character. It is reproduced here as an example
of the integrated use of written text as a seamless aspect of the drama.

Written language: Recording ideas.

“man
alone
old & wise
something hidden in the garden - treasure
- bomb!

might be married
Mr Albino”

Drama strategy: Teacher-in-role & student roles. Using the drama strategy of teacher-
in-role, the teacher adopted the persona of the character that the students had invented.
In preparation for meeting him, the teacher helped students to plan some questions that
they would like to ask him. Then the teacher, using a jacket as the symbol for the role,
was interviewed by the students, in role as people in the street, and answered with
implications that echoed the character in the book. The old man character said that he
was lonely, would like to have friends but was teased or avoided by the people in the
street, who seemed to think he was some kind of monster. He asked the students if they
might advise him on how to make friends and, as young students usually are, they were
keen to help him. In portraying the character as more needy than threatening, the
intention was to provide an alternative reading of the image of the house and to
challenge the earlier assumptions that the man was evil.
During the interview the students asked many questions, enthusiastically taking this opportunity to practise a skill often reserved for the teacher in classroom interaction. As further examples of the integrated use of different modes of language possible in drama, some of their questions are presented here.

*Spoken language: Asking questions*

"How come there are big trees around your house?"
"How long have you lived in the house?"
"What’s (hidden) in the garden?"
"Are you rich?"
"Do you really keep children in the back?"
"How do you make the garden grow?"
"Are you married?"
"Why do you have fences (ornate trim) on your roof?"

*Drama strategy: Group improvisations.* Before students could advise the ‘old man’ about how to make friends they needed time and guidance to plan this. The teacher had planned some possible situations which related to the students’ own lives and through which they might show the ‘old man’ how to make friends. These possible scenarios had been written onto cards, providing another integrated opportunity for the students to read for a purpose.

*Written language: Instructions on how to be a friend*

Making friends: Helping someone do something (tie shoelaces, pick up dropped books).  
Making friends: Invite someone to your house and share your toys and games.  
Making friends: Co-operating in a game (taking turns at skipping or marbles).  
Making friends: Sharing food with someone who has none.  
Making friends: Showing a new child around the school.

The students were organised into groups to plan and rehearse a scene from one of the cards to show the old man how to make friends. Later, the teacher, in role as the old man, watched the student improvisations with obvious interest. Their demonstrations were received with grateful thanks and with an enthusiastic resolve to emulate their strategies by sharing his money, large house and even by taking down his big fence to encourage friendship with his neighbours. The children agreed heartily with these suggestions and the drama was concluded with the children displaying a sense of achievement in their efforts.

*Insights into visual literacy*

The instances of spoken and written texts described above were not the only ones used or created as part of this drama work but have been chosen to illustrate the variety of modes and purposes that can arise within a drama context. While the focus for the rest of
the paper is on visual and critical modes, there are also references to further examples of spoken and written texts related to the drama.

During the drama and the associated activities the students made many highly observant comments about the initiating image on the inside front cover of the book “Rose meets Mr Wintergarten”. As stated earlier, it depicted two contrasting houses and their gardens, both augmented by associated shapes and colours, looming and dark for the big house and simple and bright for the smaller. One striking example of the students’ heightened visual orientation came in the middle of our joint construction of the character who might live in the big house. The image was on display alongside the large sheet of paper on which I was recording the character’s attributes. While the discussion centred on whether the character was shy or might have been divorced, one boy must have been scrutinising the picture as he interrupted to say:

“I noticed, in the picture, um, over the old grey house the sky’s all grey but when you go over the nice house, the sky’s all blue.”

This astute observation indicated a readiness to explore the contrasting elements in the illustration and perhaps to consider the author/illustrator’s intentions in making decisions about features such as these. In a follow-up to the drama lesson described above, the initiating image was discussed again and the whole book “Rose meets Mr Wintergarten” was read. The students’ responses to the double-page image were again astute, perhaps reflecting the insights gained through participating in the drama activities that so closely mirrored the book’s themes. In fact, several students made reference to aspects of the picture that related to the drama narrative that we had constructed.

After discussing the picture orally, the students were given a worksheet on which the image had been reproduced across the top in black and white. They were asked to record what they noticed about the two houses into two columns underneath the image. With the image in the book on display, they were invited to record what they had noticed about the use of colour, the houses, gardens, fences and anything else they wished to comment on. Naturally, their written responses were constrained by their control of written language and many were able to say much more than they could or wished to write. However, they were also informed by a considerable body of experiences, through the drama, discussions and book reading, all of which contributed to a remarkable depth and breadth of written observations. Some of the recorded observations on the twenty worksheets collected give a flavour of the students’ visual literacy.

Noticing choices for colour

Though not many students named colours directly, they all referred to the general palette of dark or light colours applied to each house. This was possibly the result of having a black and white photocopy of the image on each student’s worksheet which was closer to hand than the coloured illustration in the book at the front of the classroom. While there were only four mentions of ‘green grass’ associated with the small house and one of ‘black roof”’ for the big house, most of the students wrote about ‘dark’ and ‘bright’ colours for the big and little houses respectively. Some examples relating to the
Illustrator’s use of a dark or bright palette for each of the houses are included below and organised, as they were on the students’ worksheets, in columns for each house. The students’ original spellings are recorded to demonstrate how their observations often outstrip their ability to write conventionally.

The big house

‘dark kales’ (dark colours)
‘dark sciye’ (dark sky)
‘no sun’
‘derly’ (dirty)
‘the dark house’
‘It is dark’
‘It’s very dark’
‘very dark roof’

The little house

‘brite kales’
‘brite sciye’
‘sun on it’
‘It is not derty’
‘the bright house’
‘It is bright’
‘It is colafoul’ (colourful)

Notice for shape and attributes

As well as the use of colour, the students showed an understanding of the contrasting elements of shape, objects, attributes and other details that contribute to the different moods associated with each house. Some of the more salient details relating to shape and the kinds of objects associated with, or omitted from, each house are recorded here. The students’ use of adjectives is noteworthy as it is through the adjectives that the specific qualities of the objects in the image are reported in the written descriptions. Adjacent contributions are by the same student.

The big house

‘a fans’ (fence)
‘prickly bushes; barb wire fence’
‘big bushes, spikes (spikes), cactuses’
‘huge cactuses, long fence, bent chimney’
‘scary trees, dezet trees’ (cactus)
‘big prickile bushes’ (prickly bushes)
‘giant plants, long fence’
‘lots of prickly plants and a tol fents’ (tall fence)
‘dark plants, very dark roof, cactus going over fence’
‘busy, big trees and plants; big gate and long fence; gaps in roof’

The little house

‘No fans’
‘green grass’
‘The green grass, trees’
‘green grass, bright (bright) trees’
‘apple trees, grass’
‘nice tree, bushers’
‘furniture truck, bright house’
‘lots of fresh grass’
‘short grass, mouwd grass’

‘very small garden; all windows opened; small doorway’

Again these astute observations indicated both heightened visual literacy and an inclination to understand that the illustrator has made deliberate choices in designing this image. The next step was to move into critical literacy by making these choices and their intended meanings explicit.
Focus on critical literacy: Choice in constructing texts

One way in which these students were helped to move into critical literacy was by exploring the author/illustrator’s intentions in his choices for the image in question. By asking questions about why the author/illustrator might have chosen to draw the image exactly as it was, the teacher encouraged a critical perspective from the students who rose to the challenge very competently. The book’s narrative has the old man in the big house (Mr Wintergarten) approached and given food (hotcakes) by his friendly neighbours (the Summers) from the little house. Their lesson in friendship is reciprocated when he kicks back their lost football. The image on the inside back cover of the book shows the beginnings of a transformation in the old house and garden as the big, spiky cactus and wire fences come down. The students were assisted to compare the beginning and end images through teacher questioning and again they noticed a great deal about the images and their meanings. Most of their observations were delivered in an exclamatory, very animated tone, as if they were making important discoveries. Some of their very excited responses are recorded below.

Spoken language: Noticing changes in the image

Teacher’s question: “How is it (end illustration) different now to the one at the front?”

Students’ oral responses:

“Cause they’re taking all the long grass and all that down.”
“They’ve took the fences away!”
“The kite’s flying over his house!”
“... and now the sky over his side is blue.”
“... and they’re scraping all the plants over one side.”
“He lets children in his yard.”
“He’s playing soccer with the kids!”
About the dog: “It’s not growling!” “And it’s playing.” “And it’s not chained up!”
“Those two people down on the bike, they’re looking at it (the big house) like they like it.”
“Well, um, it isn’t actually painted but seems as it’s all bright, it sort of ... (“The light’s hitting it!” interrupts another child) ... the light’s hitting it... it might’ve been cleaned?”

These observations of the contrasts between the front and end illustrations reflect the students’ understandings of the book’s narrative and the drama narrative they had constructed. Comments about the people and the dog are especially related to the meanings made in both narratives and were no doubt informed by these. Cumulatively, these opportunities to understand the narrative’s meanings and to discuss the related images contributed significantly to the students’ ability to develop critical awareness of the author/illustrator’s intentions.

The students’ critical understandings about the image at the front of the book were evident in their responses when they were asked later to consider why Bob Graham
made that picture as it was. Their answers were written onto the worksheet noted earlier. Not all students had time to respond to this question but the responses of those who did are reproduced here. Spellings are left as attempted by the students. References to ‘sides’ refer to the photocopied image with the big house on the left hand side and the small house on the other side. The relevance of names of the characters in the book, Mr Wintergarten and the Summers, had also been part of the discussion about the images, as some responses here demonstrate.

*Written language: Students’ critical awareness of author/illustrator’s intentions and the use of contrasts to achieve them.*

*Teacher’s question:* “Why did Bob Graham make the picture like this?”

*Students’ written responses:*

“Bob Graham dun the picher like this bikos he wonted that side skery and that side nise.”

“Because he wanted to do a different look before he did the end picture where the plants were cleaned up.”

“Bob Graham draw the long trees so at the end of the book the black house loocks better.”

“He wanted to make a part dark and a part bright.”

“Bob Graham did this pitcher cause to make it scary and dark and big.”

“Because winter is a bit dark. Summer is bright.”

“Because he wonted to get a big change for the end.”

“I think Bob Graham done the piture like that to make their last name stand out.”

“He rite the book becase one dark and one lite.”

“Mr Wintergarten likes winter and the Summers like sun.”

These thoughtful answers from such young students are evidence that they are able to critically appraise this image by drawing together several strands of information highlighted in the previous lessons. The drama has helped them to understand the implications of the dark colour palette used for the house and garden owned by the dark character, Mr Wintergarten, and, by contrast, the bright colours used for the Summers. In the drama the invention of a character to inhabit the dark house brought to the surface those assumptions that the illustrator probably intended his readers/viewers to initially imagine. In both the drama and the book, contrasts were introduced to challenge the expected, initial assumptions. In the case of the drama, the ‘dark’ character was not evil
but only 'needy'. He was in need of friendship and strategies for making friends. Likewise, in the book the offer of friendship by Mr Wintergarten’s generous and open neighbours, the Summers, was the catalyst for changes to the man, his house and his garden. In their responses about the illustrator’s intentions these young students demonstrate their understanding of the use of strong contrasts as a means of making meaning.

In constructing the meanings in his book the author and illustrator, Bob Graham, has made numerous choices for his written and visual texts. The drama experiences have helped the students to focus on some of these choices by allowing them to become authors of a similar dramatic text, thus rendering the act of authorship more transparent. They too have made choices about the character who lives in the big house and about how to help him. This first-hand knowledge of the process of making choices to create text has perhaps made it possible for the students to understand the author/illustrator’s choices to the degree that they do. The structuring by the teacher of experiences and questions is an instrumental and necessary contribution to students’ development of critical awareness.

Conclusions

In western cultures, the multimodal and technological communications climate in which many young people operate on a daily basis involves a shift from ‘reading the world’ as ‘told’ in written text to ‘reading the world’ as ‘shown’ in images (Kress, 2003). According to Kress (2003) and others, reading images as opposed to reading written text draws upon a visual grammar and a different kind of logic. Regular use of image-based technology also predisposes many young people to develop heightened visual abilities (Prensky, 2001). In the work described here, the seven and eight year old students displayed some of these abilities from the first time the focus image was viewed and discussed. After involvement in drama strategies that deepened their understandings of the ideas associated with the images, their awareness of visual meanings was highly focussed and the teacher was able to move them towards more critical understandings of the author/illustrator’s creation and intentions.

Students, especially young students in the early years of school, are drawn to role-playing in their own spontaneous play and it is generally understood to be a means of learning for them. Classroom drama experiences, like the examples described here, build on this self-directed, dramatic play and use drama to achieve the goals of the school curriculum. In particular, drama can provide highly productive contexts for all aspects of multimodal literacy. As in the real life situations it recreates, drama integrates the spoken, written, visual, auditory and gestural modes of making meaning into a seamless whole. For students, the whole self, including the emotions, is involved in role-playing and problem solving within a narrative framework that always makes sense. Meeting all of these conditions is difficult, if not impossible, for other classroom experiences.

Among the many benefits of drama, some of which were noted earlier, is its ability to give children a feeling of successful completion of a task which is made to feel real and worthwhile through the involvement of the emotions, as well as the physical and
cognitive domains. Drama not only provides scope to integrate different modes of literacy but it requires the integration of body, mind and feelings in a way that few other classroom experiences are able to do. The young students’ enthusiasm and satisfaction at the end of the drama session reported here, as it is in at the completion of all successful process drama, is the result of this holistic experience.

In the current global communication climate, where commercial interests have a strong input into the viewing experiences of young people, visual and critical literacies are centrally important. Drama is a powerful pedagogy for developing these in schools, as demonstrated in the examples presented here. It allows students, with the guidance of the teacher, to become the co-constructors of texts and to therefore understand the constructedness of all texts. It also makes critical awareness more accessible because choices are made communally and are therefore rendered transparent and open to scrutiny. In the light of drama experiences students can be guided to understand how other texts make meanings and how those meanings are created through the deliberate choices of author, illustrator or speaker.

One final example may serve to sum up the themes of this paper. Ostensibly, it is evidence of one child beginning to understand the power that he, and other students, can have to make choices within the drama framework. However, it implies an understanding of the choices of authorship and therefore the beginnings of critical literacy. During the invention of the character who might live in the big house depicted in the image, I was recording the students’ suggestions and had written the word ‘old’ underneath the word ‘man’. I stopped momentarily to suggest that our earlier assumptions that the character would be nasty or evil, evident in our rumour-telling drama exercise, might not be the case. Taking up the idea, one boy then asked,

“Can we turn ‘old’ to ‘wise’?”

My answer then, as it is now, was “Yes, in drama we can” and I added ‘wise’ to the character profile. This was a graphic demonstration of our ability to make choices and changes, and, by implication, an example of how, in other texts, other people make similar choices and changes. And we can do a whole lot more than simply change ‘old’ to ‘wise’. If teachers, many of whom are ‘digital immigrants’ (Prensky, 2001), are to be wiser and not just older than our young students, we need to do more to ensure that young people learn how to critically read the images that are such a dominant mode in their lives. Choosing drama as a pedagogy for developing multimodal literacies in a connected and holistic way is a wise choice. It is a choice that can also lead to opportunities to develop the critical awareness that might protect the young and old from being uncritical consumers of the images of others.
APPENDICES

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Appendix A - List of author’s publications

AUTHOR’S PUBLICATIONS


Appendix B - Supporting documentation for Article 1

From: Lee, Debbie (ELS) [D.Lee@elsevier.com]
Sent: Thursday, 12 May 2005 12:26 PM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: RE: Literacies in Early Childhood

Dear Julie,

'Literacies in Early Childhood' (Makin & Jones Diaz, Eds, MacLennan + Petty, Sydney 2002), to which you contributed Chapter 3, 'Many roads through many modes: Becoming literate in early childhood' has sold over 6000 copies to date. It is used as a prescribed text in a number of universities (approximately 10) in Australia and New Zealand. It is also distributed in the US via Brookes Publishers.

Regards
Debbie

Debbie Lee
Publishing Editor, Elsevier Australia
30-52 Smidmore Street, Marrickville
NSW 2204

Tel. (02) 9517 8919
Mob. 0411 722 630
Fax. (02) 9517 2249
www.elsevier.com.au
Appendix B - Supporting documentation for Article 1

From: Laurie Lye [llye@caspercollege.edu]
Sent: Friday, 14 June 2002 8:01
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: Many roads through many modes

Dear Dr. Martello,

I am a librarian trying to find the above-mentioned chapter in a book authored by McLennon and Petty: _Literacies in early childhood_. Could you tell me if this work is in print, or if this chapter might be available through some source. I have been unable to locate it through traditional Interlibrary Loan Channels. I can see from your web page that you may be working on it at this time.

Thank you for any help you might be able to provide,

Laurie Lye
Casper College Library
125 College Drive
Casper, WY 82601
U.S.A.
llye@caspercollege.edu

From: Laurie Lye [llye@caspercollege.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, 18 June 2002 6:44 AM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: RE: Many roads through many modes

Julie,

Thanks for writing back. This book is not identifiable in any online bookstores that I can find, or in World Cat (an international card catalog), nor can I find it in Library of Congress. I am not familiar with how long it might take to get distributed here, assuming it was published in Sydney. Is there any other way for a patron to get her hands on your chapter until the book is available? Thanks again for any suggestions you might have.

Laurie Lye
Appendix C - Supporting documentation for Article 2

From: Julieta [julietaPicco@hotmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, 1 July 2004 11:53 AM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: Metacognition and ESL writing proficiency

Dear Ms Martello,

My name is Julieta Picco and I am from Argentina. I am a student at a postgraduate course in Linguistics, and I am currently gathering material to work on my final dissertation.

As I was surfing the Internet today, I came across this reference to your research work: "Metacognition and metalinguistic awareness in beginning writers". It happens to be that I am very interested in working with the effect, in fact whether there is any, of metacognitive strategies on ESL writing proficiency.

I was wondering if it would be possible to access the 1999 and 2001 articles where the results of your project have been published, or if you could tell me whether there is more research done in the field that you know of.

Thank you very much for your time.

Looking forward to your reply.

Yours faithfully,

Julieta Picco.

---

From: Asal Family [asal_family@hotmail.com]
Sent: Friday, 29 October 2004 10:28 PM
To: Martello, Julie

Dear Martello,

I am studying 'Teaching English as a Second Language' at MA level in Iran. I have seen your article about metacognition. I am interested in this area, so I have decided to work on my thesis about this subject. I wanted to know if you can help me to find some researching or some articles in this area.

Sincerely Yours,

Asal Family
Thank you for the copies! I will most definitely cite the information as you suggested. The work you are doing is wonderful. I have been teaching as an outreach adjunct for Lesley University in Cambridge, MA for 17 years. I travel across the country and teach two different courses in their Creative Arts and Learning graduate program - "Integrating the Arts into the School Curriculum" and "Drama in Learning". It seems that education in Australia is farther along than the US when it comes to adopting the arts, specifically drama, as a dynamic and effective tool to teach curriculum across subject areas.

Thank you again.

Sherye

Sherye Weisz, Executive Director
Southeastern Massachusetts Arts Collaborative
P.O. Box 356
Attleboro, MA 02703
508/222-8484 (phone)
508/222-6646 (fax)
Appendix E - Supporting documentation for Article 5

From: Michael Anderson [m.anderson@edfac.usyd.edu.au]
Sent: Saturday, 11 October 2003 11:05 AM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: Re: State of the Art III

Julie,

Here is the text of the attachment...

Dear Julie,

Thank you for submitting an abstract for the EDA publication 'State of the Art III'. We had an overwhelming response to our call for papers. It is wonderful to see we have so many skilled practitioners and writers in our state.

We would like to include your paper in this publication and use your name in promotion for this material. Please contact us urgently if you do not want this to occur.

Please refer to the "notes for intending contributors" on the next page of this letter. The deadline for submission of your chapter in full is 27 October 2003. We expect the full publication will be ready early next year.

Should you need to contact either of the editors during the next few months you can email or call us. Our contact details are:

Michael Anderson
Email: m.anderson@edfac.usyd.edu.au
Work: 02 9351 7810
Mob: 0411 793 396

Chris Hatton
Email: chat1248@mail.usyd.edu.au
Mob: 0425 250 256

We look forward to working with you over the next few months.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hatton & Michael Anderson
(Editors)

Notes for Intending Contributors to State of the Art III (Adapted from Drama Australia’s NJ guidelines with permission)

State of the Art III is the third book in a series published by the NSW EDA. Contributions should take the form of a chapter for such a text but may employ a variety of forms including but not limited to research studies that may be critical, descriptive, empirical, ethnographic, historical or theoretical in nature, position papers, interviews etc. Chapters may take a narrative form, or another non-traditional form. Please discuss this with the editors should you wish to do explore these options. Please observe the following guidelines:

1. Two hard copies and an electronic copy should be emailed to both editors by the 27th October 2003.
Dear Julie,
I am the Professional Development officer for Drama NSW (formerly EDA). Chris Hatton (President) passed on to me your proposal for a paper to be presented at the recent State Conference. We will be having a Primary Teachers in-service day on Saturday 21st August. Would you be interested in presenting your paper on "Visual & Critical Literacies" on this day? Regards, Belinda Wright
Appendix F - Supporting documentation for Article 6

From: Julie Porteus [Julie.Porteus@utas.edu.au]
Sent: Monday, 28 February 2005 11:07 AM
To: Martello, Julie

Dear Julie,

The unit I use your article *Drama bridging the gap between home and school* is with 3rd year Bachelor of Education students with the title- Developing Literacy through drama. I believe this article clearly articulates the relevance of bringing 'texts' from home into the classroom and we discuss a variety of these texts and how they could be incorporated into drama experiences.

Regards

Julie Porteus
Co Program Director
Bachelor of Education
University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1307
Launceston 7250
Telephone 0363243150
Fax 0363243048

---

From: Fi O'Connor [oconnorfi@hotmail.com]
Sent: Friday, 4 October 2002 2:20 PM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: drama as a bridge!

dear Julie Martello,

I am an early years educator and drama practitioner who has just returned to Australia after completing my M.A. in the psychology of education (at the Institute of Education, University of London). I am a reading recovery teacher, too.

I am very keen to continue my research into the areas of sociocultural affect on learning and how best to bridge differences between home and school. I have worked with many Bangladeshi, Somali and Sudanese children and their parents, and as early years consultant to The Unicorn theatre for Children, who are doing some great stuff on bringing home into school through drama.

I am passing through Bathurst on Wednesday 9.10.02 and would like to talk to you about your research. I realise that this is short notice and you may be unavailable. Please do reply to this mail, though, at oconnorfi@hotmail.com - I would very much like to compare what is happening in England with what is happening in N.S.W.

thank you for your time,

Ms Fi O'Connor
Appendix G - Supporting documentation for Article 7

From: Robyn Cations [alea@netspace.net.au]
Sent: Monday, 3 March 2003 9:46 AM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: Article

We have received a request from Education Queensland for permission to use your article "Drama: ways into critical..." which appeared in the October 2001 issue of AJLL in one of their professional development packages.
Are you happy for them to use it, with due acknowledgement of course?
Robyn

******************************************************************************
Robyn Cations
ALEA National Office
PO Box 3203 Norwood SA 5067
Ph: (08) 8332 2845
Fax: (08) 8333 0394
Web: www.alea.edu.au

******************************************************************************

From: Kelly Winney [kelly.winney@gecdsb.on.ca]
Sent: Sunday, 18 July 2004 8:39 AM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: your research on drama and critical literacy

Hi Julie,

I was very excited when I found a description of your research titled Drama: Ways into critical literacy in the early childhood years. I am a grad student at the University of Windsor and I am hoping to do my own research in using drama to promote critical literacy in the junior grades.

I am wondering if you could tell me where I might find a copy of the full text of your research (our library doesn't carry the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy).

Thanks in advance for the help,
Kelly Winney
Grade 4
Northwood Elementary
Appendix H - Supporting documentation for Article 8

From: Kathryn Otte [kathryn@commongroundpublishing.com]
Sent: Wednesday, 25 May 2005 12:11 PM
To: Martello, Julie
Subject: 2004 Learning Conference Referee Results

Dear Julie Martello,

I am pleased to be able to inform you that your paper for the Learning Conference 2004 has now been refereed and accepted for publication. Your paper was sent to two referees, with your name and organisational affiliation particulars deleted. Technically, this conforms to ‘two-way blind’ refereeing standards - in which neither author nor referee know each other’s identity. In a practical sense, however, the referee may have been able to determine your identity by searching for the paper title in the conference program. In this sense, we are only able to guarantee that the paper has been through a ‘one-way blind’ referee process - in which the identity of the referee remains confidential.

*** Referee Reports ***
Please find attached two referee reports (Adobe Acrobat PDF).

When a referee has annotated the text of your paper, we have included this at the end of their referee report. Please note any comments the referees may have made, make any corrections and changes you think necessary or as have been suggested by the referees.

Your paper has been accepted for publication on the basis that at least one of the referee’s reports has recommended publication. When one of the reports recommends against publication, we suggest you take this referee’s comments particularly seriously, and address their concerns within the bounds of reasonable revision (rather than having to write a substantially different paper).

*** Your Final Submission and Publishing Agreement ***
Please find attached your original paper with our publishing agreement (Microsoft Word document). By emailing the paper back to us with this agreement included, and doing this from an email address that clearly incorporates your name, you agree to the terms of this agreement.

Please make all changes to this attached Microsoft Word document with the publishing agreement (do not change the file name). You will not be able to make changes to spelling or punctuation after submission. As a final check, we ask that you proofread your entire document for punctuation, spelling and consistency.

Please return your final paper to us by Friday 10th June 2005.

If there are any problems with the transfer of the attached files, or you have any concerns, comments or queries, please feel free to contact me directly at: kathryn@commongroundpublishing.com

Best Regards,

Kathryn Otte
Publishing Manager, Learning Conference
Email: kathryn@commongroundpublishing.com
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ACTING ON LITERACY CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Education

University of Western Sydney

by

Julie Marie Martello

M. Ed., Deakin University
B. Phil. in Ed. Studies, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Dip. Teaching, Mitchell College of Advanced Education

May 2005
Dedication

For Bernice and Guido,
for the chances you gave me
and the ones you didn’t have
Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the many people who were part of the learning journey that led to the completion of this portfolio. In my personal and professional life their contributions are recognised and valued.

I especially appreciate the generosity of all of the teachers and students, in preschool and school settings, whose participation made the research studies possible and fruitful. Teaching colleagues who have inspired, shared ideas and commented on work in progress are heartily acknowledged and thanked. And in the wider educational community, I am grateful to the many academics whose work has contributed to my own research.

Thanks to my principal supervisor, Janice Hall, for her positive energy, encouragement and feedback. And thanks to my associate supervisor, Mary Mooney, for her commitment, support and timely, expert advice.

My most heartfelt appreciation and gratitude goes to my partner, John, who was often the first critical reader of the writing, and who has also enabled the work by being chef, housekeeper, childcarer and more. Thanks for clearing the way to the study.
Statement of authentication

I certify that the material in this portfolio, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, is my own original work, and that it has not been previously submitted towards a higher degree at any other university or institution.

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Abstract

The eight published articles in this portfolio collectively constitute a reconceptualizing of literacy curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education, with an emphasis on the use of drama pedagogy. The portfolio includes a synthesis of the themes that unify the articles and a review of the qualitative research methods that inform the articles, namely, theoretical/conceptual and case study research.

In relation to literacy curriculum, the portfolio explicates an inclusive and extended definition of literacy which reflects the wide range of social and cultural practices that engage young students in their everyday lives. From a sociocultural perspective, the articles investigate current literacy practices involving spoken, written and visual modes of representation and highlight the prevalence of multimodal texts within the concept of multiliteracies. The lack of congruence between students’ home literacies and conventional school literacy practices is recognised as a source of curricular injustice that adversely affects literacy progress for some students. The inclusion of home practices and visual and critical literacies in the early childhood literacy curriculum is advocated and examined through case studies.

Reconceptualising literacy pedagogy is another major theme of the articles in the portfolio. The majority of articles explore the use of drama pedagogy for the teaching and learning of literacies in early childhood education. Drama, in this context, is process-oriented role-play through which teachers and students collaboratively explore ideas and situations related to the curriculum. A second pedagogical strategy researched in the articles is the explicit teaching of knowledge about language to young school students.

The portfolio is underpinned by the premise that the proposed reforms of literacy curriculum and pedagogy contribute to social justice in education by facilitating success in literacy for more young students.