

Literature and life: How text can shape lives and build communities of interest and belonging¹

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I have been motivated to present this paper by two things. First, a growing concern that in our excitement concerning the possibilities of digital literacy, that we might just forget about the importance of story as a vehicle for learning about written language and the shaping of human character. Second, I have experienced the joy of being a grandfather over the last 20 months and this has once again provided me with a valuable reminder up close of the role that narrative text and adult structuring of children's early encounter with such texts can play in early language development.

One of my grandson Jacob's most exciting experiences is the reading of books. It wasn't always so. When he was about 7 months (we'd been trying to read to him from about 8 weeks) his mother worried that he showed little interest in these strange edible objects. He groped them, chewed them and tore them but that was it. One afternoon at age 7 months I taught Jacob how to read. Well, I taught him that these strange objects had an interest beyond ingestion. And from that point on he began not only to take more interest as his mother and father 'read' to him, he began to seek out books to open them and to look at them. What did I do? I did what experienced parents have been doing for generations. I held him close, and I used all the powers of intonation and finger pointing to direct his attention at the pictures on the page while constructing language that had meaning for him.

"Let's look at the book Jacob. Oooh, it's a dog. It's a BIG dog. Woof, woof! Can you see the dog Jake....?" Or words to that effect. Then we moved on to the cat, the sheep and so on. The sum total of his attention on day one was probably three minutes at first reading but this was a start.

Within a matter of weeks, books were his new favourite things to be looked at while rolling on the floor (sometimes the right way up). By 10 months he was 'reading' them alone for 5-10 minutes at a time. By 18 months he was reading them to Pooh Bear with language that had links to previous tellings of the story by Mum, Dad and Grandad. At 20 months one of his favourite things is to sit with Grandad in his study and run from the lounge to the bookshelves getting yet another book for me to read to him. He has now entered a stage of developing all the advanced strategies concerning how to get an extra book before bedtime. For example, swap to a new book half way through the 'last book', then return to the last book because it was only half finished. He has also worked out which buttons to push to ensure that I'll go on demand to my study to read.

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The above anecdote is not meant to suggest that all children enter the world of literacy in the same way that Jacob has. In cultures other than that of my family, the storybook can have less importance. Indeed, in my own home, I can never recall being read to by my parents, although I was realised later in life that my early experiences in the home were rich in anecdotes and oral storytelling. Some cultural groups place more importance on oral traditions, dance and music and leave written language for institutional settings like schools. But while the storybook isn't the only early pathway to literacy it is certainly a common one, and one that has proven effective for many children.

While being part of Jacob's entry into the world of literacy I've noticed one other thing; at this stage of his life, the internet has had no impact on him at all. Nor, at this stage has much digital literacy impacted on his life. Only in the last two to three months has television and video begun to play a part. The viewing of *Playschool*, *Bananas in Pyjamas* and cricket, football and car racing with Grandad (when his mother isn't watching) have all exposed him to written language presented in different forms, and in the case of *Playschool*, the dramatic presentation of some stories, rhymes and songs. 'Ten in Bed' takes on new meaning now because he's seen Ted and Jemima act out this traditional rhyme/song.

Interestingly, Jacob's early encounters with literacy via television have all supported his early encounters with book reading. Beyond the wealth of rhymes and songs that he now is able to view, his observation of the program's daily telling of the time and noting the day of the week has led him to identify clocks in books, attempt to announce the day of the week and so on. As well, one of his most significant encounters with a story at the textual level, as opposed to the event level, object or picture level, has been inspired by a *Playschool* enactment by Jemima, Big Ted and two other teds of the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The juxtaposition recently of Jacob's viewing of the program's enactment of the story followed almost immediately by the reading of the book (at Jacob's request) has led to a level of engagement with the story that I had not previously observed. This engagement has been shown in four different ways, including the:

- level of attention given to the full reading of the story;
- number of re-readings requested;
- extent to which he has returned to the story on subsequent occasions;
- degree of vocal involvement with the story of an intertextual kind.

The first three forms of evidence of engagement are self explanatory, but the fourth requires further explanation. In reading the book version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, Jacob became involved in the reading by superimposing a new layer of dialogue beyond the reading, linking the text to other 'real life' texts or meanings. As *Goldilocks* came first to the three bowls of porridge, then the

chairs, and finally the beds, he would say with exaggerated intonation for each of the first two choices “Nooo”, anticipating and predicting the right choice that was to come. Subsequently I observed him applying this textual response to other situations where a choice between competing options is required, emphatically saying “Nooo” with exactly the same intonation. Several days later, he could be seen engaging in dramatic play. For example, as he sat on a lounge chair he jumped up saying “Nooo” and went to the next chair.

Why have I taken the time to share these experiences with my grandson? Simply another grandparent bragging about his grandchild (well partly)? The primary reason is to illustrate five points that I would like to make in this presentation before dealing with the application of all that I will say today to the classroom.

- The storybook still has an undiminished role to play in early literacy development even in the age of digital literacy.
- Literature has a value well beyond its important utilitarian function as an excellent vehicle for the learning of literacy.
- Reading is acquired in the context of relationships with other significant people.
- Story reading can (and should) be a multi-modal experience and invite rich intertextual experiences.
- “Texts teach what readers learn”.²

1. Literature has a value well beyond its important function as vehicle for the learning of literacy.

It was Harding (1972) who suggested that reading, like daydreaming and gossiping is a means to offer or be offered symbolic representations of life. These in turn allow us to reflect on the consequences and possibilities of the experiences. Just as I am affected by human tragedy in my world, I am also affected by the tragedy of characters in books. So too with joy, amusement, fear, love, curiosity, love and sadness. By reflecting on these and other experiences we come to a greater understanding of our world and ourselves. As well, we share an experience of text that can act both as mortar to build rich personal and textual histories, and bridges between our lives and the lives of others.

Literature has been playing an important role in the shaping of human existence for many centuries. Many have made the observation that story provides a means not only to understand the human condition but also to re-create ourselves (Bruner, 1990; Kelly, 1955; Langer, 1995; Rosen, 1983).

Bruner (1986) suggests that while there are two modes of thought, the paradigmatic and narrative, they are complementary ways to view reality. A well

² Margaret Meek develops this thesis at length in her small monograph *How texts teach what readers learn*. South Woodchester (UK): The Thimble Press, 1988.

formed argument (the paradigmatic) and a well told story (narrative) can both be used to convince others of something. The paradigmatic seeks to convince of truth through logical argument, while the narrative seeks to enrich life, and to communicate timeless truths about the human condition through fictional experiences that are nonetheless reflective of the reality of life. Each provides a distinctive way of ordering experience and of constructing reality. Bruner suggests that people learn best when both modes are used. Similarly, Rosenblatt (1978) describes stances for the reader that can range from the objective and detached reading of a text for a narrow purpose (efferent reading) to the more subjective personal reading of a text when we bring our knowledge and experiences to bear on a text as an insider (aesthetic reading). The subjective experience of the literary text is a vital part of literacy experience. Narrative is the substance of life, we experience much of reality through the power of story. We live our daily lives through narrative (Langer, 1995).

Furthermore, literature brings with it knowledge and cultural value that is important for the building of community, shared values and social history. Now having said this places me right in the sights of all who have argued that texts have the power to alienate, suppress and coerce. The New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis, 2002) argues that literacy can be a tool of oppression (one that empowers some and disempowers others) and as a result that we seek more equitable tools for learning, communication etc. While not denying that the 'canon' of literature (for example) has been a tool for silencing the voices of women and minorities, this is not an excuse for ignoring or neglecting literature.³ Rather, our understanding of how texts can disempower should motivate us to examine how we can ensure that our children grow up as critical readers.⁴

2. The storybook still has an important role to play in early literacy development even in the age of digital literacy⁵

Given all that I have just said it should come as no surprise that I would suggest that the narrative form is still important. But I need to stress that this doesn't mean that somehow I'm in denial and can't see that literacy is changing. My argument is simply that this does not relegate literature to a new status as slightly less relevant textual form.

There is much circumstantial evidence⁶ to suggest that children today are

³ A topic worthy of exploration is the relative valuing of textual forms. With the rightful questioning of how texts can disempower and privilege particular voices we cannot ignore the question of what is culturally valuable. I would argue that there is little justification for arguing that the latest Coca Cola advertisement has equal cultural value to a Shakespearean play.

⁴ A full discussion of critical reading is beyond the scope of this paper. For a more detailed discussion of critical literacy the book *Critical Literacy: Politics, praxis and the postmodern* by Lankshear, McLaren and Greene (1993) provides a useful introduction.

⁵ The comments in this section of my paper are based on a presentation that was given at the University of British Columbia in July 2003 and which was webcast by the University. The talk is available in webcast form at <http://www.ikebarberlearningcentre.ubc.ca/ikblc-webcast.html#digital> or in text form from my website www.trevorcairney.com

experiencing literacy in new forms. There appears to be potential for children to 'read' a myriad of pictures, images, words and sounds as they observe others using auto tellers, writing letters, collecting faxes, reading messages on cell phones, and playing video games. Increasingly, they can observe members of their families purchasing products via computer (although not many people, or many products), answering Email, interacting with their televisions, sending SMS messages, and downloading images, recipes, and other documents from the Internet.

In the contemporary literacy world there appears to be a greater interaction between multiple sign systems, particularly print, sound, image, and physical context (note the use of video phones). Jacob's experience with Playschool and the reading of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is indicative of this type of experience, and yet, as a phenomenon it is hardly new. We need to know far more about how changing literacy forms impact on opportunities for multi-modal experiences of meaning making. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) define multi-modal forms as those that involve the combined use of other forms of meaning making (linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial). Jacob was engaged in a form of multi-modal meaning making stimulated by his joint engagement in and use of linguistic, visual and auditory forms.

The area of most focussed interest in recent times has been how the internet affects literacy. Increasingly literacy users access the resources of the internet in order to research issues of many kinds. No longer do they require shelves of encyclopaedias. Instead they 'surf the net' to read print, interpret diagrams, draw, talk, listen, write etc as part of the one learning activity. As our world increasingly relies on technology for information sharing, communication and learning this will be even more marked. Even the way television presents itself has changed, with image and text being integrated in different ways (some would say more like books, newspapers etc). There is equal interest in the importance of film, gaming and so on.

Not surprisingly literacy educators when faced with the changing terrain of literacy have been re-working their definitions of just what literacy is.

The New London Group has challenged the very use of the word "literacy" and suggested that *the use of this singular term means that literacy "remains centred on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, being conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence.....Such a view of language must characteristically translate into a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy."*(Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p.5)

As a result of their deliberations the NLG has argued for the use of the term

⁶ I contend that there is little empirical evidence to date on the changing nature of literacy as experienced by children. Intuitively things seem to have changed but has the experience of children changed dramatically? Certainly not at school. Much research is needed on this topic.

Multiliteracies, which they suggest:

“Leads to a pedagogy of multiliteracies that focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone.” Multiliteracies for the New London Group is based on the understanding that *“language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes.”* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p.5)

While not wanting to deny that literacy has changed, the impact of these changes on the early literacy experiences of children is less clear, as is our understanding of what other pathways will be effective for young literacy learners. Hence, in this internet age where we are being urged to embrace the world wide web as a rich virtual world to explore and use to shape our knowledge, we must not forget that literature represents a vital first resource for early literacy learning and a foundational part of human literacy experience. In recognising the substantial opportunities of the web, we must not overlook the power that literature has to shape children's early literacy experiences. The internet, which is largely a means to access expository texts, music, image and some video material, does not suddenly make the storybook obsolete. Even if the web offered access to all of the world's literature (and it offers little access to it), I doubt that we would still see the book become obsolete.

There is a convenience in paper and opportunities for control of print not offered by the web. Recently we saw JK Rowling become one of the world's richest women (richer than the UK's Queen Elizabeth) with income in the last financial year of about \$750 million. When her last book was released millions of people queued to buy the 5th Harry Potter book. Interestingly, what we did see with this book is the complementary operation of other media to stimulate interest in it. The relationship between the films and the books has been a vital driver of the popularity of the books themselves. Indeed, a lot of the wealth that JK Rowling has gained is due to media advertising, the film and DVD versions etc, but the driver was a paper book.

I watch 6 & 7 year olds reading a 760 page book and I marvel at the power of this book; a story delivered on in ink on paper the same way it has been for centuries (and written on paper by the author 'longhand'!). And yet, we know that new media are also having an impact on our lives. How can the continuing impact of 'old' literacy be reconciled with the pervasiveness of new media and the rapid development of telecommunication systems that seem to shrink our world daily? Well, the answer is simple, there is a power in a story that cannot simply be replicated by the exploration of the paradigmatic. Narrative in dealing with the endless richness of its exploration of the human condition cannot easily be replicated on the web, particularly when it is removed from the context of close human relationships. The latter is a point on which I will now elaborate.

3. Reading is acquired in the context of relationships with other significant people

My anecdote concerning Jacob's reading of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* illustrates what linguists and psychologists have known and studied for decades, that meaning is constructed within social contexts (Halliday, 1975; 1978) and similarly, that learning is dependent upon social relationships (Snow, 1983). Snow's work is of particular interest to this discussion. She examined the language interactions of parents and children in the preschool years, and found development was facilitated in a number of ways. First, adults often continued or elaborated topics that the child introduced. Second, they reduced the uncertainty in the language task by structuring the dialogue. Third, they insisted that their children complete language tasks (e.g. answer the question) if they thought they knew the answer. Similarly, research conducted with one of my students in the 1980s into the social construction of classroom literacy experiences (Cairney & Langbien, 1989), illustrates just how deeply embedded early literacy experiences are in the social relationships that they experience at home and school.

The playground in Susan Langbien's Kindergarten was often the setting for much child initiated drama and dramatic play. Little birds looked for their mothers (from *Are you my mother?*, Eastman, 1960). A group of children became the Three Billy Goats Gruff and the troll, and used a balance beam as their bridge. Another group played 'house' and whenever Genevieve set off for the shops she reminded herself *Don't forget the bacon* (Hutchins, 1976). Literature was part of the fabric that bound this small community of learners together.

Literacy is a social practice that has many specific manifestations (Gee, 1990; Luke, 1993; Welch & Freebody, 1993; Cairney, 1995). I have argued elsewhere that literacy cannot be separated from the people who use it (Cairney, 1995). Literacy is a process situated in sociocultural contexts defined by members of a group through their actions with, through and about language (Bruner, 1986).

One of the consequences of accepting a sociocultural view of learning and literacy is that it shifts our attention "from a view of individual learners to a view of learning as participation in a community of practice" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The emphasis then needs to be not on how individual children learn, but on why and how people learn through their participation in the practices that define specific groups and communities, how communities organise their resources, and how participation in the culture shapes identity.

Thus, families construct particular views of literacy, and what it means to be literate. As Hannon (1995) points out, "The family's literacy values and practices will shape the course of the child's literacy development in terms of the

opportunities, recognition, interaction and models available to them" (p.104). That is, families' shared ways of participating in literate behaviour may be defined as the opportunities for literacy learning that family members have through the provision of resources and experiences, the recognition and valuing of members' achievements, the interactions surrounding literacy events, and the models of literacy demonstrated by family members (Hannon, 1995). This again raises the issue of the relevance of literature for all families. Couldn't it be argued that picture books are not the only pathway to literacy and that families might well choose other modes of meaning making more closely aligned to their cultural practices? The short answer is yes. However, the qualified answer is that we know far less about other pathways and further research is required before blindly suggesting that all pathways to literacy are equally effective and valid.

4. Story reading can (and should) be a multi-modal experience

One of the strongest arguments for the embracing of multiliteracies and a recognition that new forms of literacy must be explored is that literacy is increasingly a multimodal practice. Indeed, the NLG has argued that the advantage of thinking about Multiliteracies is that it leads to a pedagogy *"that focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone."* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5)

Multiliteracies for the New London Group is based on the understanding that *"language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes."*

Their thinking is based on a number of key premises:

- That we live in a world of increasing complexity characterized by integrated meaning-making systems, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural and so on (p.5).
- Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal.
- That our world is marked simultaneously by increasing local diversity and increasing global connectedness – while we have English dominating much of what we do in the world (tourism, trade, computers etc), we have multiple Englishes emerging (marked by accent, national origin, subcultural style and professional or technical communities) – English requires us to cross (increasingly) linguistic boundaries. That effective citizenship requires us to use multiple languages around the world.
- That we experience in this world changing working, public and personal lives.
- That no longer do the old pedagogies of formal, standard, written national language have the utility they once possessed (p.6).

The NLG believes that teachers need to embrace the concept of 'design' to describe what will make up our literacy programs in schools. So instead of word recognition, phonics, comprehension etc, we are asked to consider the term

'design' to cover the forms of meaning because it is argued that "it is free of the negative associations for teachers of terms such as 'grammar'."

They suggest that our interest should be in the 'grammars' of various semiotic systems (grammars of language, film, photography, gesture etc) as well as 'orders of discourse'. Cope and Kalantzis apply their concept of design not just to language as a meaning system but also to *visual meanings* (images, layouts, screen formats), *audio meanings* (music sound effects), *gestural meanings* (body language, sensuality), *spatial meanings* (environmental spaces, architectural spaces) and finally *multimodal meanings*.

Their work is underpinned by their belief that the removal of literacy (which they see as a dominating, colonising and disempowering tool of the wealthy and powerful) is possible and desirable, and that design is an alternative that will be more equitable and empowering.

What questions does this redefining of literacy raise? The work of the NLG is exciting because it challenges previously rigid assumptions about literacy and its purposes, as well as literacy pedagogy. But the work should be questioned, not just accepted. Yes there are many new textual forms, but how do they actually affect our lives? What would be gained and (perhaps) lost in embracing all modalities for meaning making as equally valuable and relevant?

Yes, technology is having an impact on how information and knowledge are being created and shared, but how does that differ from other great technological advances in the past (e.g. printing press, telephone, fax, biro, community libraries, cell phones), and by what degree? How dramatically should corporations, governments, schools and individuals respond to this new technology?

Yes, there seems to be greater scope for new forms of literacy but how is this occurring and what impact does it have on teachers and school literacy? How does it enhance learning? And what impact has this had and in what areas of life, and (as with the impact on child rearing) is this inevitable or even desirable. Is the picture book a tool of oppression that needs to be controlled?

Cope & Kalantzis (2000) argue that non-written forms of meaning making are becoming more important, which of course implies that written forms are becoming less important. The question needs to be asked "is this true"? Is the narrative really less important than it once was? Is this true for all forms of written language? Is it true in all contexts? At this stage in our history evidence for such changes is limited.

One of the dangers in the work of the NLG is that it might lead us to reduce the importance of written language and in the process lead to a loss of more than we predicted. If written language (and particularly literature) was becoming less

important would this be a good thing? Whose purposes would be served if its demise was promoted?⁷

In the defence of the NLG I don't want to suggest that much of what I have discussed above has reflected an attempt by them to remove literature from the curriculum. They recognise for a start that "all meaning making is multimodal, all written text is also a process of visual design" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p.29). However, a careful reading of their comments on this matter suggests a relatively limited acceptance of just how richly multimodal the experience of literacy forms such as the picture book can be within the home and school. While they acknowledge that desktop publishing adds a new dimension to visual design of written texts, they fail to address the way in which written language is stimulated by other modes of meaning making, and in fact the way in which very meanings constructed reflect multimodal explorations of written forms like the narrative.

However, what interpreters and implementers of their work might do is to devalue (perhaps mainly by omission) the role that literature plays as a text form and the very methods that have been used successfully to engage children with these texts. It seems to me that it is not literature that is the problem, but rather the pedagogical practices that surround its use in schools. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) quite rightly warn against the dangers of situated practice⁸ as the sole basis of pedagogy. They suggest that many children require more explicit guidance and instruction to develop more conscious control and awareness of one's learning (p. 32). Furthermore, they argue that situated practice alone will not necessarily create learners or learning communities. This is a warning against progressive approaches which would suggest (or at least imply) that if you connect children with books and that they will learn to read and write. They also warn against the dangers of overt instruction as a socialising agent. While they are correct in sounding this warning, it must be recognised that many would see the socialisation of children into patterns of learning, compliance and submission to authority as important functions of schooling.⁹

Having sounded the above warnings in interpreting the work of the NLG I would want to embrace strongly the framework they suggest for pedagogy. They argue that pedagogy must be based on four components, situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing (interpreting the social and cultural context of meaning

⁷ There is an important ideological issue to be explored here that is well beyond the scope of this paper. I have discussed the issues in more detail in my UBC paper cited earlier in this paper. The work of the NLG is very much ideologically driven and as such reflects a set of values that need to be unpacked and interrogated. In buying their arguments we are also buying their values and ideological agendas. This needs to be discussed more fully in the public arena.

⁸ Situated Practice refers essentially to the meaning making experiences within the world (in all its forms including work and school) of learners. It is essentially immersion in meaningful experiences.

⁹ There is another discussion to be held about this subject that involves the whole issue of values. Overt instruction will inevitably reflect values and beliefs about the world. Most parents believe that social values are important and would want education to reinforce some of those valued and stressed in the home. This is one of the reasons that independent schools have grown in number. The work of the NLG needs also to be assessed against the values implied as foundational to the work and hence fully evaluated in this light.

making to view critically the texts or meanings constructed), and transforming practice (the transfer of new meanings to other contexts). Such a pedagogical framework is vital for the effective use of literature in classrooms.

5. “Texts teach what readers learn

My final reason for wanting to reinforce the value of literature in the classroom is its potential to teach. It was Margaret Meek who has probably articulated most clearly this basic understanding about how children learn about written language. That is, children learn a great deal about written language as part of the experience of using written language, and in particular, “by becoming involved in what they read” (Meek, 1988, p.7). Meek argues that children’s early experiences of reading and being read literature can teach them many things. For example, they learn about how books work and in fact how narratives work. Very early they learn what the front of the book looks like, which way to hold the book, how to move from page to page focussing attention on pictures and later print.

One might hear Margaret Meek’s words as suggesting that all children require to become literate is to be immersed in children’s literature. Not exactly. Meek recognises that one of the most powerful parts of the early experiences of literature for the very young is the interaction that takes place between an adult and child as part of the reading of a text.¹⁰ While she places less importance on the adult’s intervention in meaning making than some would see as appropriate, her point is a simple one. Many things about language, discourse and the world are learned as children engage with literature.

One of Jacob’s earliest lessons about print came whilst reading Maurice Sendak’s *Where the wild things are*. Max goes off on his imaginary journey to the land where the wild things are after being sent to bed without his supper. When he returns his supper is waiting for him and the last page of the book that has no illustrations brings closure with just 5 words “and it was still hot”. After a third or fourth reading when Jacob was about 15 months old Jacob’s Dad read the final page and made the gesture of blowing, as if the food (that wasn’t pictured) needed to be cooled. The next day Jacob was observed reading the book to himself and when the last non-illustrated page was reached he began blowing to signify the food that was still hot. Jacob had learned that those marks on the page could represent meaning and he was able to reach closure with his own reading as he realised that Max’s food was “still hot”.

But the lessons learned from the experience of reading are even more complex. Meek asks “how do children learn to distinguish the hero from the villain?” I would add how do children first realise the difference in characters from one text to another? When do they first learn that a bear isn’t necessarily just a cuddly

¹⁰ The work of Bruner (1986) and Rogoff (1990) concerning the way adults scaffold learning is of critical importance here. Each argues for the importance of an adult guiding children as they engage in learning.

friend but a potentially dangerous animal? Jacob learned this during a reading of Brenda Parkes simple predictable picture book titled "Who's in the Shed". The book has a simple plot. A truck arrives at a farm and an animal is unloaded and placed in a shed. We don't see what is unloaded but as we turn each page a small part of the animal is revealed through a window. On each page the refrain is "Who's in the shed?" and a little more is revealed. When the final page is reached the full image of a grizzly brown bear appears behind a barred window. Showing claws and big teeth it is fierce. On the first two readings Jacob's interest didn't allow us to reach the end of the story. But by the third reading and Grandad growls as the bear is revealed. Jacob jumps slightly and says "again", meaning of course he wanted it read again. On the second reading when the final page was reached and Grandad growled he jumped and ran to the door of the room looking back at the picture. For several days he would enter the room and move tentatively towards the book, open several pages then retreat to a safe distance and make a growling noise. What had Jacob learned? First, that not all bears are cute and cuddly. Second, that books have the power to shift the emotions, to evoke emotional responses. Third, that authors have the habit of revealing their most significant insight near the end of the story. Fourth, that author's structure and layer their meanings to tell their story. Fifth, that word and pictures have a relationship.

Books for many children offer opportunities to consider for the first time major issues such as life and death, pain and suffering, fear and frustration. Teachers of older readers could add their own examples of how student's reading of literature has taught them things for the first time. Perhaps new aspects of the human condition are brought into focus, language devices are discovered, literary devices for plot development and characterisation are observed and understood for the first time. Encounters between readers and texts have the great potential to teach.

Conclusion

In concluding this talk I would want to draw together the various arguments to challenge teachers to hold on to the literary text as a critical part of literacy learning. Literature has the potential to lift the human spirit, to teach and to provide enjoyment. As I have argued elsewhere (Cairney, 1995), literature can act as:

- a mirror to enable readers to reflect on life problems and circumstances;
- a source of knowledge;
- a source of ideological challenge;
- a means to peer into the past, and the future;
- a vehicle to other places;
- a means to reflect on inner struggles;
- an introduction to the realities of life and death;
- a vehicle for the raising and discussion of social issues.

The work of scholars like the NLG has rightly highlighted the need to consider new forms of literacy and to question old forms and pedagogies. However, there is a danger that in our rush to embrace new literacies that we will devalue the narrative form of writing. Let me conclude this paper with a summary of how literature can be used to its full potential in any classroom. I want to suggest ten ways to use literature as a powerful language form.

- Ensure that your students have regular opportunities to read complete literary texts independently and in groups. Few schools continue the practice of daily independent reading. I ask why not? Ensure that your students are encouraged to find books that they can read independently¹¹ and also plan for focussed work with a common piece of literature at regular intervals.
- Provide opportunities for insights and responses to books to be shared with others. Create 'space' in your class program for informal and structured sharing. Nancie Atwell (1987), used the metaphor of the 'dining room table' to describe the way she encouraged sharing of literature in her classrooms; natural conversation shared between people with a close and supportive relationship. Students need the opportunity for the freedom to share spontaneous responses with others ("you've gotta read this bit") as well as more structured opportunities to share insights in groups under the direction of a teacher.
- Choose texts at a regular intervals to be shared by groups in a systematic way. This form of literary reading is where you make a careful choice of the literature and structure deliberate strategies to open up new learning about language and the world.¹²
- Encourage multi-modal readings of literature with other forms of meaning making being integrated at various points in the reading of the text. Provide opportunities and demonstrations of how our reading of literature can be related to art, music, scientific learning, drama and so on.
- Recognise and build on the intertextual¹³ experiences of your students. Most people if probed will indicate that they frequently think of other books, movies, songs, life experiences and so on as they read. The concept intertextuality is in a sense a metaphor used to describe the constant social construction and reconstruction of meaning, as readers and writers "transpose texts into other texts, absorb one text into another, and build a mosaic of intersecting texts (Hartman, 1990, p.2)." Multi-modality and evidence of frequent intertextuality in your classroom provide evidence that the environment you have created is

¹¹ In a national literacy project we found that as students moved from primary to secondary school that there was a significant drop off in independent reading due to the changed demands of high school (Cairney, Lowe & Sproats, 1995).

¹² My book *Other Worlds: The endless possibilities of literature*. Portsmouth (NH): Heinemann is devoted to how literature can be used in classrooms.

¹³ The concept of intertextuality is simply the process of interpreting one text by means of a previously composed (read or written) text (Barthes, 1979; Kristeva, 1980; DeBeaugrande, 1980). Intertextuality has been a research interest of mine since the early 1980s. My research on young children's intertextual experiences has been the subject of as number of journal articles (e.g. (Cairney, 1985; 1988a; 1990c; 1992a).

a rich one where members of a community are sharing their insights and making connections between the meanings they are creating across varied textual forms.

- Create opportunities for readers to consider critically the things that they read.¹⁴ This will involve efforts to encourage consideration of the ideological intent of authors and the purposes for which texts may have been written.
- Expose your students to a variety of literary forms from the earliest age. These literary forms should be representative of accepted cultural traditions as well as the contemporary life of the time. Ensure that your students have access to the broadest range of literature possible. This should include 'classic' literature and contemporary writing across all literary genres.
- Create a classroom learning environment in which literary texts are shared as part of an accepting community. This should be a place in which students:
 - read and explore literary texts as an extension of varied and meaningful social relationships;
 - communicate their insights and discoveries about literature to others;
 - experience success as readers, setting personal reading goals and reading texts that are of significance to them;
 - experience new language forms, new authors, new uses for reading, alternative writing styles, new language, new writing topics, new purposes for writing and new audiences;
 - learn new things about texts and their interpretation, not as mere 'empty vessels' being taught what each text means, but as part of their language experiences stimulated by the shared reading of a piece of literature.
- Use questions carefully. Questioning can be misused (see Cairney, 1995 for a full discussion) very easily. If we are to create exciting and challenging literacy learning environments, then questions need to be used in a different way. They should be:
 - inductive as well as deductive. Deductive questions start from a set of given facts and attempt to lead students towards a specific answer. On the other hand, inductive questions encourage students to discover alternative explanations for something. The former directs the student's thinking in a set direction, while the latter elicits a reaction and encourages a search for multiple solutions;
 - open not just closed. Open questions generate multiple interpretations while closed questions seek a single 'correct' answer and usually get it;
 - asked by students as well as the teacher.
- Ensure that meaning is central. The starting point for a rich literary environment is a concern to construct meaning that is relevant and important to the student him/herself. Readers read literature for pleasure, to learn and to explore literary form. Rich textual meaning is the goal not the learning of a new literacy skill, or conformity to a social practice.

¹⁴ The development of critical literacy approaches to literacy has been an important contribution to our growing understanding of how to consider authorial intent, the ways in which texts ideologically present a limited view of the world and the ways text can promote views of the world that many would challenge.

The purpose of this paper has been to argue for the maintenance of a special place for literature in all classrooms. While, the world is changing and new forms of literacy have specific currency, the power of narrative remains central to human existence. As such, I believe that it will continue to have a significant place in any curriculum. As Langer (1995, pp 7-8) argues:

“Narrative, the form through which we most often experience subjective reality, calls upon, embodies, and is everyday human experience. We live and tell our lives through narrative. In doing so, we are faced with viewing a life – a human condition – in its entirety. In life, we cannot parcel out certain conditions and put others aside. History counts; there is desire and conflict; a variety of perspectives come into play. We need to deal with the many forces that create a living reality, including the inseparability of the parts, the gaps, then shifts in perspective and time, the multiple vantage points from which each situation can be viewed, and the many participating voices.”

The key with the use of literature is to avoid what Cope and Kalantzis (2000) quite rightly warn us against, the decontextualising of any literacy event or practice. What I hope I have demonstrated in this paper is that literature can be part of a rich classroom environment where like many emerging forms of literacy it can be experienced within a classroom context where students are part of the creation of the context within which the texts have meaning. Texts are experienced, enjoyed and critiqued by community members who understand and use literary forms for purposes that are significant and which ultimately have the potential not only to teach things about language and textual meanings, but to transform their lives.

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