

Note for Rona:

The articles should appear in the following order please

LIT-OA-2018-045.R1 Papen, Uta

LIT-OA-2017-078.R3 Tabarnero & Calvo

LIT-OA-2018-048.R1 Hayden, Emily

LIT-OA-2017-097.R3 Teng, (Mark) Feng

LIT-OA-2018-056.R2 Pantaleo, Sylvia

LIT-OA-2018-037.R1 Carter, Jane

LIT-OA-2018-028.R2 Hendry, Helen

LIT-OA-2018-051.R2 Merga, Margaret Kristin

Socio-cultural researchers understand literacy as ‘a social and cultural process that exists in multiple forms’ (Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004, p. 26). This expanded notion of literacy resonates with all papers in the present issue. The authors explore the challenges of providing young readers and writers with trustworthy and ample opportunities to develop their literacy competencies. In this issue various types of literacies are highlighted, through research using visual and critical literacy as well as other approaches to literacy learning. In this issue there is also an emphasis on varied vocabulary, linked to science teaching and practical approaches in the classroom, and contributors reveal literacy as a multi-faceted practice that carries different meanings for different children and for their teachers.

In the first article, Uta Papen describes a collaborative project with a primary-school teacher in a small primary school in England. The project supported critical visual literacy in nine to eleven-year-olds’ through their analytical thinking about images and texts in picture books. A thematic analysis of audio-recorded reading circles revealed that teachers take on different roles in picture book discussions, including manager, encourager, extender/refiner, clarifier/prober or director. While the director role seemed to nurture children’s critical understanding of the text-images connection most, it was also the most teacher-led. Papen makes the recommendation to develop more teacher-child participatory and long-term strategies for picture book discussions.

For children on the autism spectrum, the focus on visual information can be more important, as these children often pay close attention to visual details and tend to be more fluent in visual rather than verbal literacies. In the study by Rosa Tabarnero and Virginia Calvo, picture books were studied for their potential to support sociability, verbal communication and imagination of seven autistic readers in Spain. The researchers followed a qualitative ethnographic paradigm to establish the value of the picture book narrative as a literary genre for this group of children. The authors analysed children’s responses in the form of verbal engagement through visual and textual artifacts to two Maurice Sendak’s picture books and found that the children were able to follow the narrative structure of the stories depicted by Sendak. The opportunity to respond to a picturebook contributed to the children’s

development of verbal language. Moreover, the possibility to express a reading experience through writing seemed to have been very useful for these children.

Moving onto the topic of science teaching, Emily Hayden highlights the importance of integrating the language of science into science teaching. Recognizing and using science vocabulary is part of the multidimensional nature of literacy and its role in students' learning. Hayden's study involved a collaboration with a science teacher in a lower-middle-class US school. The researcher-teacher partnership lasted four years and generated opportunities for Hayden to analyse interviews with the teacher, her teaching journal, as well as pre- and post-test data from 274 students participating in the science classes. The teacher's multidimensional approach to vocabulary instruction and its combination with vocabulary assessment created a supportive science learning environment. In particular, the teacher's selection of focus words that she explicitly taught her students led to increased science language knowledge in her students.

Another useful instructional technique was explored by Mark Feng. Feng's study examined the impact of metacognitive reading strategy instruction on the reading comprehension of twenty-five primary school students who learn English as a second language in a Hong Kong international school. Metacognition in this context was promoted when teachers supported students' ability to be aware of and act on their understanding of their own learning. The metacognitive instruction was incorporated into ten reading lessons, during which the students were explicitly encouraged to report, discuss and reflect on their reading strategies. The approach was effective in helping students recognise the semantic, syntactic and phonological cues in texts as well as combining self- and text-knowledge during reading.

The fifth paper, by Sylvia Pantaleo, explores the potential of picture books to develop students' careful observation as a habit of mind. This classroom-based research aimed to increase nine-year-old students' visual meaning-making skills through a focus on elements of visual art and design in picturebooks. The pedagogy consisted of following a specific protocol concerning visual literacy and visual thinking strategies that prompted students to engage in slow looking and deep thinking about images. Pantaleo collaborated with a teacher of Grade 4 in Canada to establish how learning about picturebook artwork can develop these students' critical thinking and aesthetic understanding and thus enrich language arts. It was encouraging to note that positioning students as readers-viewers of picturebooks was integrated in the classroom environment and wider literacy landscape.

It is this wider literacy context that needs to be considered when it comes to specific policy decisions. Literacy interventions that reduce the multidimensional nature of literacy to a set of skills or capabilities need to be rigorously evaluated for their effectiveness. Paper 6 and Paper 7 in this issue are concerned with two recent policy changes in the UK that have, unfortunately, adopted reductive approaches to what it means to read and write. Jane Carter evaluated the impact of the phonics screening check that was introduced in England in 2012 for children in Year 1. Carter analysed the responses to a questionnaire completed by 59 teachers in 14 schools and focus group interviews by teachers and children in seven schools and concluded that the phonics screening check has narrowed the reading curriculum and even disconnected reading and phonics. A particularly worrying finding related to the use of pseudo words emerged in the screening check: while pseudo words might be at times helpful for avoiding children sight reading the words (and not applying their phonics skills), it is

counterproductive to use them in an assessment tool. Namely, the teachers in Carter's study taught the children pseudo words instead of real words, which reduced rather than expanded children's vocabulary.

Helen Hendry's study titled 'Becoming a teacher of early reading: charting the knowledge and practices of pre-service and newly qualified teachers.' zooms in on the implications of England's government policy to increase school led professional training at the expense of university-led professional development for future teachers. The study was a longitudinal, collective case study with seven lower primary pre-service teachers studying for their postgraduate certificate in education at one university in the East Midlands of England. Hendry analysed data from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and documentary analysis to ascertain the factors that the participants considered to be most influential in their training. The findings revealed the significant influence of a school's reading teaching practice on students' pedagogy development. The newly qualified teachers in Hendry's study were placed in schools with high priority on phonics teaching and consequently, missed out opportunities on wider reading pedagogies. Hendry concludes with some useful recommendations for better integration of university, mentoring and school participation in the experiences of pre-service teachers.

The final paper in this issue is by Margaret Kristin Merga and Susan Ledger, about reading aloud as an effective literacy strategy. The authors set out to find out how much or how little reading aloud occurs in Australian primary schools. Drawing on survey data supplied by 101 teachers from 14 primary schools, Merga and Ledger show that reading aloud is not as frequent as one would hope, considering its importance for students' literacy development. In fact, only a third of the surveyed classroom teachers read aloud each day. The reasons identified by the surveyed teachers were not related to their preferences, indeed many reported they very much enjoyed reading aloud and they were aware of children's enjoyment of it too. The key barrier was time and hence highlighted the importance of schools valuing and supporting teachers' reading aloud through whole school measures.

Reflecting on the messages from these papers, the question that remains for us, researchers and practitioners, is how to best engage in collaborative literacy practices to pave the pathway for the many literacies that shape children's everyday lives. As editors, we believe it starts with a conversation and we look forward to hearing and reading your responses to this issue.

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References

Gregory, E., Long, S., & Volk, D. (2004). *Many pathways to literacy: Young children learning with siblings, grandparents, peers and communities*. London: Routledge.