

Informing Teaching

Literacy Moves On

Using popular culture, new technologies
and critical literacy in the primary classroom



Edited by Janet Evans

Literacy Moves On

Also available:

The Writing Classroom, edited by Janet Evans, ISBN 1-85346-721-9

The Literate Classroom, edited by Prue Goodwin, ISBN 1-85346-566-6

The Articulate Classroom, edited by Prue Goodwin, ISBN 1-85346-703-0

Other titles in the Informing Teaching series:

Improving Learning in Secondary English, by Geoff Dean,

ISBN 1-84312-146-8

Literacy through Creativity, edited by Prue Goodwin, ISBN 1-84312-087-9

Creativity in the Primary Curriculum, edited by Russell Jones and Dominic Wyse,

ISBN 1-85346-871-1

Drama and English at the Heart of the Curriculum, by Joe Winston,

ISBN 1-84312-059-3

Making Connections in Primary Mathematics, by Sylvia Turner and Judith

McCullouch, ISBN 1-84312-088-7

Literacy Moves On

**Using popular culture, new technologies and
critical literacy in the primary classroom**

Edited by Janet Evans



David Fulton Publishers

David Fulton Publishers
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

First published in Great Britain in 2004 by David Fulton Publishers
Transferred to digital printing

David Fulton Publishers is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © David Fulton Publishers 2004. Copyright for individual chapters resides with the original contributors.

Note: The right of the individual contributors to be identified as the authors of their work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 84312 249 9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Cover illustration by 11-year-old Adam King

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

Contents

Acknowledgements viii

Foreword ix

Anne Haas Dyson

Notes on contributors xii

Children's voices: Children talking, drawing and writing about their
out-of-school interests 1

Introduction: The changing nature of literacy in the twenty-first century 6

Janet Evans

Part 1: 'New' literacies and children's ways of using them

1 Multimodal texts: What they are and how children use them 16

Eve Bearne

2 Moving stories: Digital editing in the nursery 31

Jackie Marsh

3 Children reading and interpreting stories in print, film and
computer games 48

Margaret Mackey

4 The Dagger of Doom and the Mighty Handbag: Exploring identity in
children's on-screen writing 59

Guy Merchant

Part 2: Focusing on texts with a critical eye: Critical literacy in the primary school

5 Creating opportunities for critical literacy with young children: Using
everyday issues and everyday text 78

Vivian Vasquez

6	Beanie Babies: An opportunity to promote literacy development or a money-spinner for the business tycoons?	97
	<i>Janet Evans</i>	
7	Children reread and rewrite their local neighbourhoods: Critical literacies and identity work	115
	<i>Barbara Comber and Helen Nixon</i>	
 Part 3: Bridging the gap between children's personal interests and teachers' school-based curriculum demands		
8	Curiosity Kits: Linking reading and play in the middle years	134
	<i>Ros Fisher</i>	
9	Writing about heroes and villains: Fusing children's knowledge about popular fantasy texts with school-based literacy requirements	144
	<i>Elaine Millard</i>	
10	Getting it right for children: Making meaningful connections between culture, community and school	165
	<i>Dominic Scott</i>	
Index		179

To Les, my husband . . .
he gives unconditional support at all times.
He is a star!

Acknowledgements

Writing is hard and time-consuming and I wish to thank the writers, each one expert in their field, for agreeing to contribute to this edited volume. The time, effort and expertise they have given is truly appreciated.

Many individuals have influenced me in relation to the subject matter of this book but I would especially like to thank Jackie Marsh and Elaine Millard for opening up the field and inspiring me with their wonderfully organised research seminars on popular culture.

When I have needed moral support and a listening ear several people have been there for me. I would particularly like to mention Guy Merchant who has talked things through and given advice on several occasions. Also Anne Thompson, a valued friend and teacher who gives freely of her time and challenges my ideas when appropriate.

I would like to thank my editors Margaret Marriott from David Fulton and Danny Miller from Heinemann. Once again it has been great working with them both. Their advice and encouragement has been welcome – and needed – at all times.

Finally I have two special mentions to make. The first goes to Anne Haas Dyson – the doyenne of research into popular culture. I have really valued her caring involvement and am grateful for her thought-provoking foreword. The second to the children and staff of Gilded Hollins County Primary School, Leigh, Lancashire, who got involved and were willing to talk, write, draw and share ideas when asked. Thanks to all of you.

Janet Evans
September 2004

Foreword

Anne Haas Dyson

In this lively book, Janet Evans and her colleagues offer us, their readers, an imaginative reinterpretation of the longstanding mantra of childhood education: Start where 'the child' is. Their collective efforts are informed by a fresh perspective on the usual places to locate that child. Those usual places are in neatly contained geographic locales and along well-marked literacy paths, as 'the child' accrues an ever-increasing basketload of knowledge and skills. (Pity the child from a poor 'locale' who strays from the path, perhaps diverted by the big bad wolf of contemporary media.)

And yet, as the authors herein know, everyday worlds in geographic locales are populated by people who have migrated from somewhere else, and their circulating texts are pulsating with rhythms, images and words that have crossed borders too in their global media reach (Appadurai 1996). Consider, for example, this vignette based on an ongoing project:

A British author writes a series of books about a boy wizard, which becomes the basis for movie productions, the most recent of which is, in fact, playing just this weekend in mid-Michigan; a group of American school children, of diverse ethnic cultures and similar economic constraints, are anticipating a cinema excursion to view this film, courtesy of their after-school care program. Six-year-old Tionna is going, and envisions herself riding the bus and sharing her popcorn with Makeda (but not Jeanette, which irritates the latter child). Lyron is not going; instead, his father will rent the first Harry Potter movie (which will be cheaper than giving Lyron money for popcorn and soda pop). Ezekial is not going either, because 'my grandma says Harry Potter is about witchcraft.'

Capitalist ventures like Harry Potter become global, transmedia phenomena. Still, how and what those media mean is found in the actions of people, including children like Tionna and her peers, embedded in particular social, economic, political, even religious circumstances (Massey 1998; Dyson 2003). This is no time for simplistic visions of a homogenous melting-pot world . . . or, indeed, of literacy itself.

But this is what we have in the USA and in other nations around the world. In the States, there is increased emphasis on 'the basics' – the sounds and conventions of written standard English – and schools are accountable for children's steady progress on standardised tests. But in a world of interconnected

people and media, children gain experience with increasingly multimodal texts, as written language combines with other symbolic material – images, voices, movement (Kress 2003). Moreover, literacy is not a set of skills but a symbolic resource that mediates participation in varied kinds of practices for representing and communicating meaning (Heath 1983; Street 1993).

It would be a (post-)modernist conceit to link the multimodality of children's writing solely to new technologies. Given time, materials and space, young composers quite readily interweave whatever symbolic tools are at their disposal – drawing, singing, gesturing, talking and, yes, writing (Dyson 1988). But, even now, those modalities are usually interpreted and instructionally channelled quite literally into the 'writing process' (whatever the composer's multimodal intentions). Drawing, for example, is dubbed 'planning for writing', even though it might not have been so intended by a child.

As educators, we are in urgent need of a newly conceived language and literacy curriculum, in which we start where children are, in a media-filled world that is increasingly diverse and interconnected. We may begin by using children's experiences with varied media resources as bridges to a more traditional literacy curriculum. But we cannot stop there. As Evans and her colleagues collectively demonstrate, we need curricula in which children and teachers use their cultural and symbolic resources to deconstruct and design texts of varied modalities, that is, curricula in which they make decisions about the symbolic tools and substance that might suit an ever-widening, evolving network of communicative practices. We also need careful research on the nature of such decisions and how they are situated in diverse childhood histories and channelled by varied official and unofficial contextual conditions. And, to inform all of the above, we need rich visions of classroom possibilities, and that is just what Janet Evans and her colleagues offer in abundance.

Inside the chapters to come, readers will meet, among others: four-year-olds making decisions about the production of animated films; young schoolchildren exploiting the representational possibilities of electronic mail, computer games and adventure genres, both screen-based and print-based; immigrant children studying, playing with and producing a popular media genre and, in the process, making the local cuisine a global matter; and teachers and children analysing kid products like Beanie Babies and Pokemon cards and, thereby, considering their own potential for exploitation and power as consumers. In short, readers will find diverse authors coming together with their symbolic and social resources and experiences; jointly, they provide substantive fuel for our critical, imaginative and enjoyable reconstruction of language and literacy work (and play) for and with our children. Enjoy!

Anne Haas Dyson
Michigan State University
September 2004

References

- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dyson, A. Haas (1988) 'Negotiating among multiple worlds: The space/time dimensions of young children's composing', *Research in the Teaching of English*, 22 (4), 355–90.
- Dyson, A. Haas (2003) *The brothers and sisters learn to write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Heath, S. Brice (1983) *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the new media age*. London: Routledge.
- Massey, D. (1998) 'The spatial construction of youth cultures', in T. Skelton & G. Valentine (eds) *Cool places: geographies of youth cultures* (121–9). London: Routledge.
- Street, B. (ed.) (1993) *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Notes on contributors

Eve Bearne

Eve Bearne teaches and researches at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. Her current research interests are children's production of multimodal texts and gender, language and literacy. She has edited and written a number of books about language and literacy and about children's literature to include: *Making Progress in Writing* (RoutledgeFalmer 2002); *Art, Narrative and Childhood*, co-edited with Morag Styles (Trentham 2003); and *Classroom Interactions in Literacy*, edited with Henrietta Dombey and Teresa Grainger (Open University Press 2003). She is currently President of the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

Barbara Comber

Barbara Comber is Director of the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures at the University of South Australia. Her research interests include teachers' work, social justice, critical literacies, poverty and education, and school-based collaborative research. She recently co-edited two books entitled *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms* (Comber & Simpson 2001) and *Look again: Longitudinal studies of children's literacy learning* (Comber & Barnett 2003). She has been a researcher on a number of longitudinal studies of children's literacy development. Her current research, with Barbara Kamler, includes early- and late-career teacher-researchers investigating together how to turn around the problem of unequal literacy outcomes.

Janet Evans

Janet Evans is Senior Lecturer in Education at Liverpool Hope University and a part-time freelance Literacy and Educational Consultant. She teaches on full-time and part-time postgraduate teacher education courses and provides professional development consultancy to individual teachers and whole schools. Her research

interests include critical reader response in the picture story texts genre, process writing and interactive writing through role play in the early years, and the impact of popular culture and critical literacies in the primary classroom. She regularly publishes in academic journals and has edited language and literacy books to include: *What's in the Picture: Responding to Illustrations in Picture Books* (Paul Chapman 1998); *The Writing Classroom: Aspects of Writing and the Primary Child 3–11 Years* (David Fulton 2001); and *Writing in the Elementary Classroom: A Reconsideration* (Heinemann 2001). Janet is on the review panel for several academic journals including the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, Sage Publications, and *Language Arts*, NCTE.

Ros Fisher

Ros Fisher is Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Exeter where she works with initial teacher training students and master's degree students. Her research interests are centred round the role of the teacher in the teaching of literacy to primary/elementary-aged children. She writes regularly in professional and academic journals. She is the author of *Inside the Literacy Hour* (Routledge 2002); joint editor of *Raising Standards in Literacy* (Falmer 2002); and co-author with Maureen Lewis of a book about Curiosity Kits (NCLL 2003).

Margaret Mackey

Margaret Mackey is an associate professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta, where she teaches courses on contemporary theories and practices of reading and on multimedia texts for young people. She is the author of *Literacies across Media: Playing the Text* (RoutledgeFalmer 2002); and of *The Case of Peter Rabbit: Contemporary Conditions of Literature for Children* (Garland 1998). She is co-editor of *Children's Literature in Education: An International Quarterly*, with responsibility for North America; and has edited a volume of essays for a centennial series: *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit: A Children's Classic at 100* (Scarecrow 2002). She has written many articles on changing patterns in young people's reading behaviours and on contemporary developments in texts for young people in print and other media.

Jackie Marsh

Jackie Marsh is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. She is involved in research relating to the use of popular culture and the media in the early childhood literacy curriculum and is the author of numerous publications in this area. Jackie is one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. Publications include *Literacy and Popular Culture*

(Sage 2000) co-authored with Elaine Millard; and the *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy* (Sage 2003) co-edited with Nigel Hall and Joanne Larson. Jackie is currently President-Elect of the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

Guy Merchant

Guy Merchant is a Principal Lecturer and Co-ordinator of the Language and Literacy Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University. His current research focuses on children and young people's experience of popular digital literacy – particularly the use of synchronous chat and interactive communication through email. He has published a number of research studies and produces a variety of curriculum materials in the area of primary literacy. As a founding editor of the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* he has a strong interest in the changing nature of literacy and its impact on early childhood. His recent publications include *Developing Primary Language and Literacy – The Co-ordinator's Handbook* (with Jackie Marsh); *Picture Books for the Literacy Hour*; and *Non-Fiction for the Literacy Hour* (with Huw Thomas).

Elaine Millard

Elaine Millard is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Sheffield and a founder member of its Literacy Research Centre and MA in Literacy and Language in Education. Prior to this, from 1968 to 1988 she worked as an English teacher in a wide variety of 11–18 comprehensive schools in Sheffield and Nottinghamshire. Her research interests span issues in the development of literacy at all levels, from early reading and writing to critical literacy. Her research has focused on gender, race and class differences in the development of home and school literacies, including computer literacies. Her publications include *Differently Literate: Boys, Girls and the Schooling of Literacy* (Falmer Press); and *Literacy and Popular Culture: Using Children's Culture in the Classroom*, co-edited with Jackie Marsh (Paul Chapman Publishers).

Helen Nixon

Helen Nixon is Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures in the School of Education at the University of South Australia. Her research interests include the pedagogies of global media culture and connections between the new information and communications technologies and changing social constructions of literacy and educational disadvantage. She is particularly interested in how children's out-of-school media popular culture interests might be used within a critical literacy/English curriculum. She is editor with Brenton Doecke and David Homer of *English Teachers at Work*

(AATE/Wakefield Press 2003) and has published widely for English/literacy teachers and researchers.

Dominic Scott

Dominic Scott is currently an assistant professor at Millersville University, Pennsylvania, where he lectures in education. Dominic began his teaching career in Belfast, Northern Ireland, at the beginning of 'the troubles'; an experience that profoundly affected his attitude to education, literacy and liberation. He taught in middle schools and high schools in the United States, and became concerned with the inequalities in educational opportunity for poor and minority children. He has spent much of his career in the US working with children and youth at risk of school failure. This commitment brought him to New Mexico, where he worked with marginalised students in alternative schools. He currently serves on the executive board of a charter school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, that seeks to provide educational opportunities for students of colour who are at risk of school failure, and is active in Good Schools Pennsylvania, a pressure group that advocates equitable school funding.

Vivian Vasquez

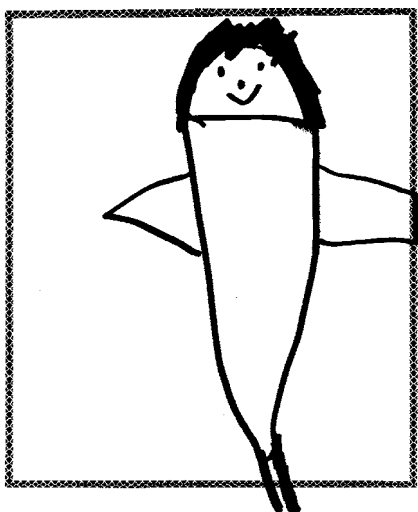
Vivian Vasquez is currently an Assistant Professor at American University in Washington DC. Previous to this she was a pre-schoolteacher and elementary schoolteacher in Canada for 14 years. Recent publications include two books, *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children* and *Getting Beyond I Like the Book: Creating Spaces for Critical Literacy in K–6 Classrooms*. She has also published several book chapters and articles in national and international journals including *Language Arts*, *Phi Delta Kappa*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Reading Teacher* and *Reading Today*. She has held appointive and elective offices in scholarly organisations including the National Council of Teachers of English, the American Educational Research Association, the International Reading Association and the Whole Language Umbrella. Her research interests are in critical literacy, early literacy, inquiry and social justice in school settings, and teacher research. Most recently she is engaged in research on critical literacy across grade levels and across the curriculum in a predominantly ESL setting.

Children's voices

Children talking, drawing and writing about their out-of-school interests

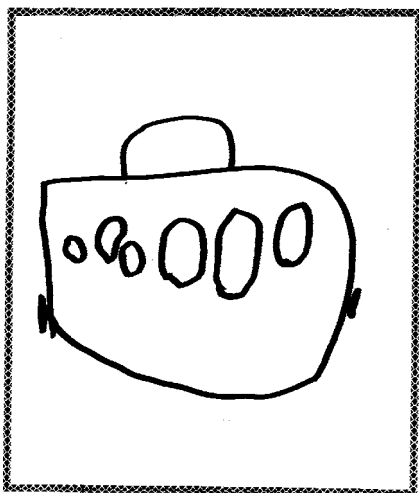
Some children between the ages of three and 11 years were asked what their favourite out-of-school interests were and what they liked to do and play with at home. Their responses, which almost without exception identified popular culture as being of prime importance, fell into five categories: film and video, TV programmes, computer games, toys and other activities (see Figure 3 in the Introduction). Not surprisingly the younger three- and four-year-old children preferred playing with toys more than the older groups of children. Every toy was a film or TV programme tie-in and was linked to many of the associated, commercially available collectables, e.g. figures, badges, comics, dressing-up clothes etc. The older children chose films and videos more than any other category, with TV programmes following a close second. Once again their popular culture interests were evident in each and every one of their choices.

Three- and four-year-old children's choices



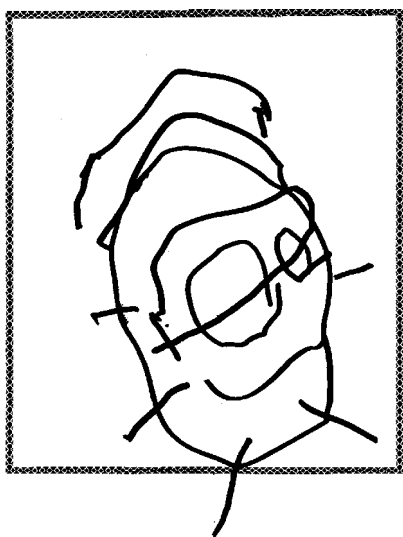
Morgan 4 years 4 months

I play with my Barbie toy with my cousin Josh. Barbie has pink clothes and shiny, gold beautiful hair. Red lips like a rose. Colourful with a pink dress, a crown and a coach. The coach takes her around so she doesn't have to walk. There's a horse, a girl horse. I push her along and she pulls the carriage.



Caitlin 4 years 3 months

I play on my computer – Barbie game – press numbers and count 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 . . . 13. You use the handle to carry it [the toy computer].



Gareth 3 years 10 months

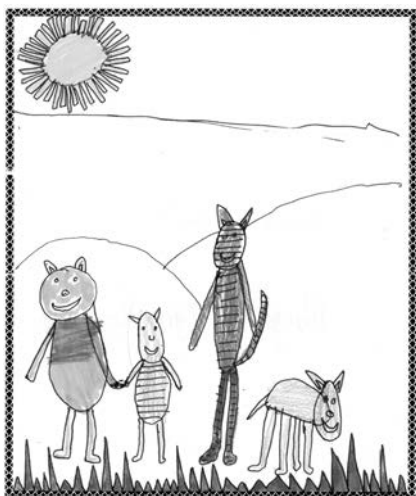
With my turtle. He's got a mask and green legs. He kills monsters. He's got a sword to batter the monsters, not the good ones.



Tom 4 years 1 month

Batman, he has a belt and bats. I make my Batman toy fly. He has a remote control and when you press the button it can fly out. He throws bats at the Joker . . . he's funny but he's a baddy and I punch him.

Six- and seven-year-old children's choices



Abigail 7 years 2 months

I put Winnie the Pooh because it's funny.



Abigail 7 years 1 month

Scooby Doo. I watch it on TV. I chose Scooby Doo and the Witch's Ghost. I choose Scooby Doo because it is my favourite programme because there is always someone in the costume.



Oliver 6 years 6 months

X Box game – State of Emergency. Michael is in trouble by the police. He has found a weapon. People are holding TV. Lots of things even sacks. Michael has killed two people.



Toby 7 years 4 months

I have chosen Jurassic Park 3 because it is really scary. And the Spinasaurus killed T Rex.

10- and 11-year-old children's choices



Georgia 11 years 0 months

I have chosen Winnie the Pooh because all the characters are really cute and it's great how they all stick together and go on lots of little adventures. There are lots of collectables which are really fun to collect. I have a pencil case, socks, lots of teddies and even the books and videos. I think that he looks so sweet and adorable.



Thomas 11 years 3 months

The Simpsons are a family of five people, (Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie). The programme is brilliant. It is the funniest cartoon I have ever seen. The jokes are hilarious and I could watch them over and over again. I think Homer is just like my dad.