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**Literacy on the Edge:  
three to eight year-olds make meaning**

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## **Abstract**

Three to eight-year-old children's spontaneous and creative actions provide them with opportunities to call on their own stories and life experiences in their symbolic representations. Their symbolic representations offer a window onto their identities and their meanings, while providing the adults around them with an insight into their world by constructing meaning from the children's activities. These representations are frequently composed in the unofficial spaces that children inhabit, on the edges of the main literacy teaching and learning activities of the classroom, nursery playroom and home, and are indicative of the children's social worlds and literacy practices, made visible in their artefacts as they draw, model, make marks and role play.

The study takes place in a small nursery and primary school, and consists of ethnographic case studies which allow for the scrutiny and analysis of the artefacts made by the children at home and at school. The data comprise images of fifteen children's representations, supported by field notes and conversational interviews. The analysis of the data recognises the need for a respectful and ethical approach to the interpretation of children's meaning-making strategies. Role play, drawings, cut-outs and selected artefacts and found objects are some of the methods and contexts children employ to express their voices and to build theories of action through reflection and representation of their thoughts, experiences and feelings. The children's meanings provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation and critical thinking. The approach, which is taken in the interpretation of the children's attempts to communicate meaning through their symbolic representations, reflects an ethical pedagogy where the child is listened to and their meaning-making is interpreted on their own terms.

The thesis argues that literacy is predicated on making meaning, and that this should be supported by recognising the need for children to communicate and make their meanings visible in their artefacts and symbolic behaviour. The findings support the thesis and suggest that there is a need to acknowledge that young children are literate in the way in which they use their symbolic

representations to say what they mean, and that the richness of children's meaning-making practices is particularly evident when they are engaged on the periphery, or edges, of the main literacy activities in their homes and educational settings.

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
	Aims	11
	Background to the study	12
	Politicization of literacy	13
	The child's perspective	15
	Literacy in context	16
	Influences in the children's literacy experiences	17
	The multi-modality of children's early literacy	18
	Children have their say	18
	Structure of the thesis	20
	Contribution of the thesis	21
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Literacies in early childhood</b>	
	Introduction	22
	Theoretical models of children's learning	24
	Psychological models of literacy	25
	The concept of emergent literacy	29
	Socio-cultural perspectives	30
	The influence of Government policy on the teaching of literacy in schools in England	32
	Changing concepts of literacy	39
	Critical literacies	40
	Literacy as symbolic representation	43
	Summary	46
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Making meaning: defining literacy</b>	
	Introduction	48
	Exploring meanings	50
	Politicization of literacy	52
	Multiliteracies	55
	Designing meaning	57
	The multimodality of literacy	58
	Places and spaces for literacy	62

	Literacy on the edges of official spaces	64
	Summary and contribution of this thesis	65
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Research methodology</b>	
	Introduction	67
	Research aims and questions	67
	Case study strategy	69
	The contextual nature of the case	70
	Ethnography	73
	The practitioner-researcher as participant observer	74
	Locating this study: rationale for the research	
	paradigm	75
	Summary	78
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>The research methods and procedure</b>	
	Introduction	80
	The research context	80
	Sampling strategy	81
	Research participants: the children	82
	The position of the children:	
	children as co-researchers	82
	The adult participants	84
	Methods: the artefacts	85
	Rationale	85
	Analytical methodology of the visual data	87
	Categories used for sorting the materiality of mode	88
	Categories used for sorting the contextual	
	base for representation	90
	Filed notes	93
	The interviews: rationale	93
	Interview procedure	94
	Limitations of the research methods	97
	Ethical procedures	99
	Ethical issues of anonymity and consent	
	100	
	Ethics of interpretation	102

	Summary	104
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Data analysis</b>	
	Introduction	105
	The research setting	106
	The principal participants	108
	The supporting cast	122
	Reflections on the data	126
	Summary	127
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Children telling stories</b>	
	Introduction	128
	Retelling and constructing stories	128
	Personal experiences	132
	Making books, telling stories	134
	Stories for particular audiences	137
	Stories and role-play	141
	Stories about feelings and relationships	143
	Maps of narratives and stories	147
	Summary	150
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Power relationships</b>	
	Introduction	152
	Whose meanings: who decides?	153
	Children's voices	160
	Critical literacy	165
	Summary	169
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Reflections and implications: the contribution of the thesis</b>	171
	The research questions	172
	Limitations of the study	175
	Implications and contribution of the thesis	176
<b>References</b>		178



<b>Appendix 1</b>	Transcript of interview with Ellen and Joseph's mother	192
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Transcript of interview with Ellen and Joseph	195
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Transcript of Trudie's spooky fun	198
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Ginger: Ellen's book for her brother Sebastian	199
<b>Appendix 5</b>	Consent letter to the school	198
<b>Appendix 6</b>	Parents' consent letter	203
<b>Appendix 7</b>	Children's interview schedule	205
<b>Appendix 8</b>	Parents' interview schedule	206
<b>Appendix 9</b>	Example of field notes	207
<b>Appendix 10</b>	Matrix of artefacts	208

## List of images

1.	Joseph's story about his Mumbelow	100
2.	Joseph's visit to the Wildfowl Trust with his family	110
3.	Joseph's bear	112
4.	Hunting for Hattie	114
5.	Joseph's message for daddy	114
6.	Ellen's letter to the bird	118
7.	A witch's spell, written at home	120
8.	Ellen's house	121
9.	Harry built a stand for the goslings	124
10.	A map showing the way to the Power Rangers	125
11.	Power Ranger and his megasword	125
12.	Snow White and the wicked witch	129
13.	Puppets of Snow White and the witch	132
14.	Joseph's book about a swarm of bees	133
15.	Multimodal representations of the bees	134
16.	Trudie's book of Spooky fun	135
17.	Ellen's Carrot book for Sebastian	138
18.	Ellen's book about Ginger the cat	139
19.	Extract from Joseph's book about daddy	140
20.	Notices for the show	141
21.	Joseph and his coat	142
22.	Ella's house	144
23.	Playing on the slide	144
24.	Charles' map to find treasure	145
25.	A map of the school garden	148
26.	Directions to the hospital	149
27.	The view from Harry's bedroom	156
28.	Joseph's request for cake	157
29.	Ellen's message: eat peas=cake	157
30.	Dominic's skate-boarding ramps	158

31.	Ellen's poem written at school	160
32.	Ellen's poem written at home for her parents	160
33.	Paul's Power Ranger cut-out	161
34.	Joseph's 'power pack' for his Power Rangers play	161
35.	Problems at playtime	162
36.	Joseph's song sheet for Away in a Manger, with help from his sister Ellen	165
37.	Joseph's map of the Rococo Garden	165
38.	Joseph and Ellen's map, with vampires	163
39.	Joseph and Ella's declarations of love for the ducklings	166
40.	Joseph's reminders to the children	166
41.	Trudie's message about smoking	167
42.	Matches are bad for children	167
43.	Joseph and Ellen's bullfighting scene	168

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Aims

The rationale for this study emerged from observations of young children in a small primary school with an on-site nursery as they sought to understand what was expected of them in their drawings and their literacy activities. The overall objective is to explore how practice at home, at school and in pre-school settings can facilitate children's exploration of their identity and their own meanings, and encourage them to choose their own methods and contexts for representing their meanings. The intention from the very beginning was to examine children's own meanings which they themselves devised in their spontaneous meaning-making endeavours, by using the resources to hand to communicate, rather than relying on adult-constructed contexts alone. Kress (1997: 9) suggests that the forms that children use to communicate are 'expressive of the meanings which they intend to make'. This became the starting point for the study as contexts were sought in which the children could find and communicate their own voices in the artefacts they produced. These artefacts represent the children's literacy practices and reflect their meanings. The thesis proposes ways in which adults might gain an understanding of children's learning and make sense of their ventures in literacy.

The aims of the study evolved from the overall objective of exploring and examining the ways in which children could feel motivated and encouraged to make meaning by drawing on their own life experiences and ways of being. It became necessary to begin by defining what I understood by the term 'literacy', as it was the spontaneous actions of the children which were of interest, rather than the structured, adult initiated tasks associated with conventional, alphabetic forms. Kress and Pahl's seminal texts provided the

inspiration for exploring the different ways in which children could be seen to be developing their literacy, with a particular focus on children's propensity to use any resources available to them to make meaning in multimodal ways (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999). The children made use of every opportunity to make their artefacts, particularly when not engaged in structured 'taught' sessions, using any scraps of paper and mark making implements that were available. An important second aim was to analyse the children's artefacts to explore how these meaning making experiences might influence their literacy development so that the relevance of encouraging their spontaneous actions would be visible. Drawing on Kress and Pahl, it was deemed necessary to examine the resources that were available for the children to use, as well as the contexts within which they made meaning in this visual way in their drawings, writing and artefacts. A third aim was to consider how to provide children with opportunities to have their say in their efforts to make meaning. The work of Freire (1996) became an important source in recognising that children have a right to express their own voices and to be heard. A further consideration is the recognition of Dyson's contention that language is a 'system that allows for the representation of meaning' within a socio-cultural frame (Dyson, 2009: 9). With these views in mind, the aims at the outset of the study were as follows:

- scrutinising what is meant by 'literacy' in the broad sense of children making meaning
- critically analysing the ways in which children are influenced in the development of their literacy experiences by the study of their drawings, writing and artefacts
- evaluating a range of literacy practices which encourage children to express their own meanings in their communicative experiences.

### **Background to the study**

Data were gathered in a small privately owned co-educational primary school for three to eleven-year-old children in a Gloucestershire town, where I was working as an Early Years teacher: I carried out the research as a practitioner

researcher, and it is necessary therefore to acknowledge my own role as an actor in the context. The children and families who were the participants in this study were from relatively privileged backgrounds and it is recognised that the data are drawn from a particular social context.

These children may not have experienced the challenges of poverty and social disadvantage. However, they were nevertheless faced with school and parental pressures to achieve and to make progress with their learning. Both the school and the parents held ambitious aspirations for the children to achieve well academically. This is indicated by the fact that, although this was an independent school, the teachers in the school were required to teach to the National Curriculum and to take the children through their SATS tests at the end of Year 2 as in any other local school. The school functioned in many ways as any other mainstream school in the locality, yet the sizes of the classes were small by comparison and provided teachers with opportunities for flexibility in communication and allowing children time to carry out their tasks.

It is not within the scope of this study to address issues arising from or contrasting with private and mainstream education; instead it explores the experiences of children in relatively well-supported middle-class environments. The children are seen as citizens in their own right, who strive to make meaning in the context within which they find themselves. The work of Freire (1996; 1998a; 1998b) has had a significant influence on this study in providing the framework for examining and analysing the children's voices and the development of their literacy practices. The politicization of literacy as well as the effects of power relationships in the children's representations are discussed and explored.

### **The politicization of literacy**

Competence in language and literacy is highly valued and brings with it connotations of power and control (Clark and Ivanic, 1997). The imposition of adults' views on children's learning in order that they may make progress in

later life is not necessarily a reflection of the child's own voice and meaning-making practices, but focuses rather on the acquisition of writing and reading as a set of skills which are deemed necessary for future success. Language is seen as a tool to change society (Lambirth, 2011), and successive governments in the United Kingdom have endeavoured to address the issue of inequality by using 'traditional' means to ensure that all children learn to read by the age of seven. It is suggested by government and policy makers that this can be accomplished by using the very methods that have been devised and designed by the those in power, for example by teaching reading using 'synthetic phonics' (Rose, 2006). This is presented in a way that suggests that learning to read by the age of six will ensure that children do not become anti-social and will contribute to the economy in a responsible way.

Freire (1996) contends that power relationships are particularly evident in education: every individual has the right to a voice, and this includes children who may be perceived as the 'oppressed' in the sense that they are vulnerable due to their age and position in society. He suggests that 'pedagogy must be forged *with* the oppressed, not *for* the oppressed' (Freire, 1996: 30). For many children, their engagement with texts will be unlikely to reflect their own interests if they are required to respond to de-contextualised exercises and games rather than being encouraged to devise ways to express their own voice, meanings and identity. The study shows how children are able to express their own voices and build a theory of action through reflection and representation of their thoughts, experiences and feelings. When children feel that their reading and writing (or the artefacts that represent their reading and writing) are important, and that they own their work and have control over it, they can become literate in Freire's 'political' sense (Freire, 1998b). The data show that long before children are able to read and write in the adult sense, they are able to express their views, their thoughts, meanings and identities in a variety of ways.

Moss (2008: 9) challenges the dominant discourse which regards developmental views of childhood as the 'only true account'. He contends that the discourse of Early Childhood Education in the English-speaking world is

dominated by perspectives which are grounded in child development and economics (Moss, 2008). Commenting on the draft Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007a) in England for children from birth to five, Moss (2007: 10) suggests that the document, which was implemented and subsequently revised in 2012 (DfE, 2012e), was highly prescriptive and did not allow for 'democratic space'. He calls for an approach which encourages dialogue and ethical practice, and maintains that the Government's focus is on specific learning goals, developmental milestones and direct advice to practitioners, rather than on the broad principles which allow for children's own voices to be heard.

### **The child's perspective**

Surrounded by an abundance of well-intentioned strategies and initiatives to teach, diagnose and remedy perceived shortcomings, children may position themselves as recipients of adults' understanding of child culture, rather than initiators of their own culture (Broström, 1999). Children's drawings and writing may be characterised by adult conventions, expectations and limitations as they concentrate on their handwriting, letter formation and spelling, rather than on a way to communicate something which reflects their own intended meanings. This search for meaning underpins the rationale for the thesis in acknowledging the child's right to 'name their world ...(and) speak their word' (Freire, 1996: 69).

The principal data consist of images of children's artefacts that were produced at home and at school and nursery. These are supported by field notes and conversations with the children and their parents, with the analytical frame being underpinned initially by the work of Pahl (1999) and Kress (1997) in recognising the multimodal nature of children's meaning-making practices. The children became deeply involved in the production of their artefacts, which represented their individual narratives reflecting their thoughts. They were inventive in their choices of resources and frequently wrote or created messages and stories for family members and friends using multimodal approaches to their representations. The multimodality of children's meaning-



making strategies provides a context for their early literacy activities. They used opportunities in play at school, in the nursery setting and at home to make their own stories. The data show that the children frequently demonstrated a great depth of creativity and thoughtful consideration in these self-chosen activities.

Dyson and Genishi (2009: 77) suggest that teachers might learn about and gain an understanding of the experiences of children as they make their own 'personal narratives'. Children begin to learn how to develop narratives around their own lives and experiences and, while telling and retelling their own stories, they share their own worlds and concerns with those around them. While these personal narratives may be told verbally, the study explores the innovative and sometimes unexpected means by which children represent their stories visually.

### **Literacy in context**

Barrs (1988), Kress (1997; 2000b) and Pahl (1999) suggest that a broad definition of literacy needs to be adopted and should include symbolic development in areas such as dramatic play and drawing. The term 'literacy' within the context of this study is used as any symbolic or visual representation of the child's intention to make meaning. Children may represent their thinking through role play, building and constructing, and rearranging furniture as well as through media such as painting, drawing, collage, cut-outs and model making; this can be seen as symbolic representation, although there may not necessarily be an artefact to show for it afterwards.

The children in the study used resources that were to hand: not only pencils and paper, but also boxes, recycled materials, bits of fabric, paper, construction toys and any found objects. Sometimes their drawings and artefacts are accompanied by mark-making in some form; however, the use of writing (or invented or play writing) is not necessary in order to define the activity as 'literacy' (Kendrick and McKay, 2004). It is the child's narrative

about their meaning making that makes it into a literacy activity. Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999; 2007) suggest that children are able to represent their thinking in their narratives in a symbolic way through their role play, drawings and cut-outs, often using glue and sticky tape to join things together. To view literacy as a set of skills to be learned devalues the inventiveness that children show in their meaning-making practices.

### **Influences on the children's literacy experiences**

Vygotsky (1978: 118) viewed 'writing (as) a complex cultural activity, not a motor skill', which should be 'relevant to life'. The reference to the relevance of writing for children is demonstrated in this study through the artefacts that children produce in their activities as they play and make meanings which reflect their own interests. In the nursery and classroom the children participating in the study were constantly inspired by Power Rangers and other favourite characters from their home life, their play and their siblings. They also used knowledge of favourite stories and fairy tales, and changed and adapted these stories in their artefacts made up of their drawings, constructions and writing. Sometimes they were influenced in an immediate sense by meaningful experiences, and played these out in their role play, often writing and drawing in consultation with their friends. In the reception class children were inventive with the resources they could instantly lay their hands on, often using pictures or writing (invented or not) to produce messages, little books, cards for friends or family, or puppets for impromptu performances or role play. It seemed that they were influenced by a desire to communicate and to record some event or emotion which would sometimes be discarded soon afterwards or be forgotten. Just as often, though, the artefacts were precious and important, and needed to be given away to someone special, taken home, or become part of their play.

## **The multi-modality of children's early literacy experiences**

The children were drawn to the available resources, and they used a variety of materials spontaneously when they were available. Children in a Year 2 class made puppets to illustrate and act out their stories using straws and scraps of card. A great amount of problem solving and sharing of ideas took place in the classroom as they invented ways to represent their ideas. There was a higher noise level, in the reception class particularly, and the children's work appeared to be varied and individual to each child. Children understood that they could express themselves in a variety of ways, and there was a value placed on graphic representation, and particularly on drawing. Open-ended tasks and the availability of a wide range of resources such as scissors, glue, paint, boxes, paper and pencils appeared to inspire children to look for their own solutions, giving their own individual meaning to their work.

A range of resources encourages children to make choices and to make their own decisions about how they represent their thinking. Kress (1997: 93) finds that 'young children choose what they want to represent, then select the best possible means for doing it'. Together with freely available resources play, particularly role play, gives children the opportunity to draw on their own life experiences, to practise and explore what they know (their cultural experience) and to express their thinking freely. Children's symbolic representations can give insights into the way they construct their world and make it visible – using what they know, and interpreting it in their own way.

### **Children have their say**

When confronted with a range of resources from which to choose in order to find a representational means for their meaning making, the children demonstrated inventiveness and ingenuity. At times, some children appeared to adjust their writing and artefacts to fit in with more conventional and accepted 'school' behaviours, and this became evident in both the quantity and depth of their presentations. At school, time constraints and expectations of producing neat work were limiting factors which made it difficult for the

children to express their own voices in their work. At home, they would practise their school writing sometimes seriously, sometimes in a playful way. In this way their cultural capital enabled them to fit in with the expectations of school; however, this did not necessarily empower them to 'name the world' while 'speaking their word' (Freire, 1996: 69).

While geosemiotics describes interactions between people, resources and signs in particular places (Nichols, 2011), the approach taken in this study focuses on the semiotics of place on the periphery of activity in classrooms and homes. The spaces which children inhabit, away from the structure and formality of literacy activities which are planned and directed by adults, provide children with opportunities to explore their own meanings and in this way to name their own world (Freire, 1996). The children's artefacts which make up the principal data for the study, have predominantly been produced on the edges of intentional literacy activities both in educational setting and in the home: these incidental spaces were not necessarily planned or purposefully framed for literacy learning, but relied on children's ingenuity and creativity as they represented their thinking. Children move between the 'official' space of their literacy teaching and learning, and their 'unofficial worlds' (Dyson 2010a: 160) as they explore their own social worlds and childhood cultures. Children engage with materials and interactions of their own choice in the 'unofficial' spaces, on the edges of instructional literacy activity. Children's representations in this study often take the form of marks, models and drawings, which Dyson (2010a: 162) describes as a 'way of writing', a graphic representation of 'communicating the spoken word'.

Images which make up the data for this study may appear either pleasing to the eye, or apparently random at first sight: it is the meaning behind the artefact that is of interest rather than its aesthetic or visual quality. In this study the children's artefacts may be viewed as 'cute' and precious by the adult in a way that can devalue what the child is endeavouring to communicate: this tendency to generalise and 'reduce teaching to a feel-good process.....[and] coddling' is criticised by Freire (1998b: 4) who calls for a

professionalism which results in adults taking the child's contributions as expressions of their thinking seriously and on their own terms.

### **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis begins by reviewing the evidence on literacies in early childhood in Chapter 2, which explores different theoretical models and provides a historical context since the 1960s and 70s, demonstrating its relevance to contemporary literacy pedagogy (Clark, 2005). Chapter 3 defines literacy practices within the context of the study. The politicisation of literacy is examined with particular reference to the work of Lambirth (2011), Mills (2011) and Freire (1996; 1998a; 1998b). Aspects of multiliteracies, design in meaning-making, and multimodality are discussed drawing principally on Kress (2010), Janks (2010) and Pahl and Rowsell (2010; 2012). The chapter examines in particular the importance of children making meaning in their own spaces, on the edges of structured and planned literacy activities both in the home and in the school or nursery setting. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach. Chapter 5 discusses the research methods used and introduces the nature and coding of the data. The data are further analysed in Chapter 6: the analysis is explained and the participants are introduced. Chapter 7 discusses how the children tell their stories in their artefacts and explores the contexts within which children develop and tell the narratives. In Chapter 8 the power relationships in literacy teaching and learning are explored, with an emphasis on whose meanings are represented in the children's artefacts. The child voice is explored and recognised within a critical literacy framework, drawing on the work of Freire (1996), Janks (2010) and Vasquez (2004), amongst others. The thesis concludes with a reflective discussion in Chapter 9 which draws together the themes of the study in proposing an approach to early childhood literacy which is focused on meaning and valuing the child's innovative ways of communicating.

## **Contribution of the thesis**

The findings of the study make visible the ability of children to make meaning through the development of their literacy practices on the edges of traditionally accepted contexts for teaching and learning. The apparently incidental stuff of children's social worlds so evident in their making, drawing and writing may too easily be squeezed out of their everyday lives as they are immersed in a narrow discourse of learning the basics with its focus on skills, outcomes, standards and attainment (Dyson, 2013). In her ethnographic studies of children's early literacy experiences in kindergarten and first grade classrooms, Dyson (2003; 2010a; 2013) interrogates the richness of children's experiences which are evident in their own lives, in contrast to the everyday classroom requirements for learning the conventional forms of literacy which focus on the acquisition of alphabetic skills alone within a teaching and learning environment which is dominated by official policy and curriculum requirements. Her recognition of children's official and unofficial worlds informs this study, which explores the ways in which children initiate their own meaning-making practices both at home and on the edges of the structured activities of the classroom.

## Chapter 2

### Literacies in early childhood

#### Introduction

This chapter explores different theoretical models of literacy and approaches to pedagogy which underpin the study, and examines the changing perception of the nature of literacy. Categorising individual models and theories in separate, discrete units can be problematic, as there is a degree of overlap between different approaches. A range of theories which provides a lens through which to examine children's literacy practices may appear to oppose or complement each other, depending on the context within which they appear. Graddol (1994: 20) describes models of literacy as 'discourses about language', reflecting the different ways in which we think about language. The intention in this chapter is to set out approaches to the analysis of literacy in early childhood which inform this study and are reflected in the data.

To claim that children's symbolic representations fall within one particular model of literacy would be to dilute the complexity of the children's meaning making ventures. Sometimes the boundaries between different theoretical approaches are difficult to define, as each impacts on the other, and different models may be drawn on in analysing a child's individual artefact or literacy practice (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Different aspects of children's literacy can therefore be problematised and analysed by drawing on a number of approaches to learning in exploring the children's meaning-making practices from psychological, cultural and social perspectives. Larson and Marsh (2005) suggest that different theoretical models of literacy can be used at different times, in different contexts, creating a multidisciplinary framework on which to draw.

The chapter begins with an overview of theoretical models of children's learning, particularly in relation to literacy. It draws principally on the work of

Bruner (1990; 1996) in viewing children in a socio-cultural context, and as active agents in their own learning. This is followed by a discussion of psychological approaches to literacy, where the writings of K. Goodman (2005), Y. Goodman (1984), Smith (1994; 1985), Bissex (1984; 1980), Clay (1975; 1998) and Clark (1976; 1994) provide a background which is in part historical, and aims to demonstrate how theoretical approaches of the past can be relevant to modern understandings of the nature of literacy in early childhood (Clark, 2005). The notion of 'emergent literacy' is likewise traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, and provides a rationale for taking a socio-cultural perspective in children's literacy practices at home and in educational settings.

Perceptions of 'school' literacies are analysed and set in context with reference to a 'traditional' approach which draws on the acquisition of skills in contrast to a socio-cultural perspective which foregrounds meaning and dialogic pedagogy (Comber, 2003). This traditional approach appears to be informed by government policy and debates about the most appropriate way to teach young children to become literate. In educational settings this traditional approach is apparent in many curriculum frameworks and commercial programmes. Taking a new literacy studies approach to teaching and learning literacy, provides an argument for a broad view which is sympathetic to the development of identity, socially situated practice and children's own representations. Within a 'new literacy studies' framework, 'critical literacy' encourages children to analyse and debate issues that are important to them. Reference is also made to the work of Freire (Freire and Macedo, 1987; Freire, 1996) and Janks (2009), amongst others, in acknowledging the importance of children being able to 'name their word...and their world' (Freire, 1996: 69) within a critical literacy perspective. They argue that symbolic representation of the child's meaning making practices makes reference to children's early mark making, drawing and multi-modal activity as a valid and meaningful literacy practice.



## **Theoretical models of children's learning**

Bruner (1996) proposes a cultural psychological approach to education, where learning is always contextualised by the culture of the environment within which children find themselves. Learning takes place where the mind and culture meet, in that children make sense of people and resources by interacting with their surroundings and constructing and reconstructing their understandings in order to make meaning. Bruner (2006) proposes that children communicate before they are able to express themselves verbally, and that their early pre-linguistic communications with their caregivers are essential for the development of their use of language. He adds that children are motivated to communicate and to elicit responses from their caregivers, while they draw on their own experiences to help them derive and create meaning from their surroundings.

Bruner (1996) further contends that, rather than merely imitating or copying others in their search for meaning, children are capable of extending and reconstructing their understanding with the help of others, where, in the words of Dyson (2010b: 7,8), they are able to join others in 'shared childhoods' in playful and social ways of being together. Dyson (2010b) suggests that children's propensity to imitate or copy leads to learning that is more complex than it may seem, in that they make use of their own accumulated knowledge together with understandings built up in negotiation with others to reach new understandings about their world: it is in this sense that they are 'reconstructing their understanding'. What may initially appear as though the child is 'copying' the behaviour of siblings, friends and carers, may be a reflection of the way the child gains knowledge and then reconstructs it in their own way as they draw their own meanings from it. Such reconstructions in which children engage, serve to demonstrate what Bruner describes as 'the constructivist' nature of their learning, confirming his contention that 'knowledge is made not found' (1996: 119), and that children are active agents in their own learning. Olson (2001: 107) contrasts the constructivist approaches of Vygotsky and Bruner which recognise the external influences facilitating children's learning with the more 'internalist' approach of Piaget.

Piaget's reliance on a developmental foundation for learning where children are seen as unable to understand certain concepts until they have reached a certain stage, is critically analysed by Donaldson (1978) who draws on Bruner and Vygotsky's contributions to cultivating an understanding of the ways in which language and social interactions enable children to construct their learning in meaningful ways. Donaldson (1978: 20) challenges Piaget's finding that children under seven years of age were egocentric and have difficulty in reasoning, particularly in relation to their ability to 'decentre' by understanding a situation from someone else's point of view. She makes reference to tasks devised by Hughes and Lloyd, which demonstrated that children were indeed able to understand a situation from someone else's point of view, if what was required of them made 'human sense' to them (Donaldson, 1978: 25). Donaldson concludes that children's capacity to make sense of situations is greatly enhanced by meaningful contexts and the use of language which reflects their own interests, knowledge and experiences.

### **Psychological models of literacy**

Goouch and Lambirth suggest that children's early endeavours to become literate are facilitated by the way in which they can 'reorganise what they already know about the world' (2011: 14). They draw on Bruner's constructivist approach to developing an understanding of the way in which children learn: it is children themselves who play an active part in formulating their own new knowledge and understanding. Children learn in interactional ways, always in relation to their environment and those around them, whether these are adults or other children. Goouch and Lambirth further contend that environments, both in and out of school, provide social contexts and resources that are available and accessible so that they can be selected by the children for the purpose of representing their thinking and their meanings.

In his characterisation of 'folk pedagogy', Bruner (1996: 46) finds that teachers sometimes 'tell' children what the facts are, asking them questions in a way that require simple answers, rather than 'lead(ing)' them to discover

generalizations on (their) own'. He further argues that a didactic teaching approach should be replaced with one where the teacher encourages the child to 'understand and ...manage their learning'. This confirms Olson's argument (1984: 189) that 'explicit teaching procedures' are 'risky', as children are not necessarily able to relate these to meaning, and would therefore not become truly literate. Goodman (2005) maintains that meaning is central to children's literacy learning, and calls for the texts with which children are presented at school to be predictable and authentic, so that the child has a sense of authorship and audience which relates to their own understanding. He stresses the importance of '*starting where the learners are*' in order to draw on children's own interests and culture so that their learning is relevant and meaningful (Goodman, 2005: 91).

Smith (1985), writing from a psycholinguistic perspective, suggests that children learn to read and write by being immersed in a language-rich environment that includes 'real' books and environmental print. He stresses the need for the child to understand the functions of literacy and the ways in which these functions relate to each other. This understanding develops at the same time as their exposure to literacy, as learning about language and learning about its uses occurs simultaneously: learning about the nature of language and written text should not be preceded by the 'so-called basics or mechanics' such as the 'alphabet, phonic generalizations, spelling, and punctuation' (Smith, 1985: 143). Smith sees children learning through 'demonstration', where they can engage in an active way with real and meaningful literacy by becoming apprentices, and by seeing themselves as literate from the very beginning. Drawing on the concept of the child as an 'apprentice', Clark (1994) and Clay (1998) argue that competence in reading and writing develops 'reciprocally'. The commonly held belief that learning to read should precede learning to write is challenged by Clark (1994: 7), who sees these aspects of literacy as 'interrelated ... each ..... supporting the other from the earliest stages'. Smith (1994), Y. Goodman (1984), and K. Goodman (2005) emphasise a whole language approach, with the role of meaning as being crucial to the child's understanding of literacy and its purpose: Y.

Goodman (1984: 102) argues that 'learning language is learning how to mean'.

K. Goodman (2005) discusses the importance of children's construction of meaning, and sees this as an important aspect which underpins their learning about literacy. He argues that children have the capacity to make meaning of print, and to construct their own meaning through their literacy practices. This search for meaning in children's literacy learning is further explored by Bissex (1984), who researched the ways in which young children could manage their own learning by spontaneously adjusting and self correcting their invented spellings, and decoding words while reading and writing. Bissex (1984: 89) suggests that 'literacy learning is not merely imitative, but systematic and creative', and requires that learning take place through interaction with the environment, rather than solely through learning from a single teacher. She suggests that children use contextual clues and the meanings derived from these, to make sense of print and to communicate intended meanings. The ways in which children are able to self-regulate their learning, through reworking their stories and their drawings, demonstrates their ability to develop and improve their work, rather than merely to repeat or copy it.

Clay (1975) calls into question the belief that teaching children to write might be achieved through copying activities. She explains that if the activity is initiated by the child, then that child is active in their learning, whereas the likelihood when a teacher sets work to be copied is that the child may quickly tire, find it tedious and lose interest in writing. Moreover, she suggests that children need to have a greater understanding about print in order to make sense of copy writing: they may misunderstand directionality, form letters incorrectly or struggle to find the purpose in their activity. Clay's view on copying activities that are set by the teacher contrasts with that of Dyson (2010b), who makes reference to the way in which children use copying activities in order to reconstruct their learning. Clay (1975: 21) suggests that self-initiated copying and repetition can 'provide the child with a wonderful sense of accomplishment' as they familiarise themselves with forms of writing and grammar, using these opportunities to practice what they know. In

relation to being an active participant who constructs and reconstructs their own learning, Clay (1975: 63) sums up her thoughts on copying succinctly: 'Careful copying is a check on wayward inventing, but inventing is a quicker way to new discoveries'.

Clay's reference to copying seems to refer to adult-directed classroom activities, where the children may have little understanding of the task which has been set for them to copy (Clay, 1975). Children may wonder about the purpose of such a task, and may struggle to meet the teacher's expectations and therefore lose interest and confidence, while others may find that the task is too easy if little is required of them in terms of their own inventive skills (Mavers, 2011; Clay, 1975). In relation to learning to spell, Clark (1994) argues that there is little point in copying unless the child subsequently attempts to write the word on their own. This suggests that copying in this context, where the child is expected to emulate the teacher's writing, could be problematic for a child who might not have developed the understanding of the written word, or the hand-eye co-ordination and physical control needed to carry out the task.

In her analysis of the place of copying in children's text making, Mavers (2011) questions whether copying takes the form of 'mere replication' (p.12) or 'redesign' and 're-presentation' (p.31). Mavers argues that copying is ideologically framed, and expresses concern where it is employed for the purpose of 'mere replication', where children might be engaged in tasks that they can neither read nor understand. However she suggests that the process can require initiative on the part of the child in reconstructing and re-conceptualising ideas. In this way, copying becomes an intensely purposeful activity (Mavers, 2011; Dyson, 2010b) which can lead to new learning and understanding. The view of the child as an active agent as they construct and re-construct their own meaning is suggestive of a constructivist approach to learning which requires the child's purposeful intention (Bruner, 1996).

## **The concept of 'emergent literacy'**

The concept of emergent literacy originated in the 1960s, as a consequence of challenges to the view of literacy competence as a linear process which necessitates children having to learn and master certain skills prior to reading and writing (Razfar and Gutiérrez, 2003). Research by Bissex (1980; 1984) and Clark (1976) in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrated that children are capable of engaging in literacy experiences before beginning formal teaching and learning at school, often in their play and cultural practices at home. The term 'emergent literacy' is understood to refer to the ways in which children develop their own writing behaviour, before they have learned the formal skills of alphabetic writing (Larson and Marsh, 2005; Razfar and Gutiérrez, 2003). The concept of children learning to write by inventing their own way of writing evolved from Bruner's (1996; 1990) perception of the child as an active agent in their learning. While acknowledging the value that is placed on encouraging children to practice what they know, they could devise ways of expressing meaning using their own interpretation of the alphabetic symbol system (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982; Clay, 1975; 1998; Smith, 1994).

Larson and Marsh (2005: 105) define emergent literacy as a 'shift from the readiness perspective' which was encouraged by the developmental ideology of Piagetian theory. In emergent writing children are seen to be capable of engaging in literacy events by 'rehearsing' (Bissex, 1980: 167), and using their own invented spelling and understandings of the conventions of writing, in contrast to a developmental approach where children are required to master certain stages in their knowledge and understanding before attempting alphabetic writing. In questioning the developmental or maturational approach, Read (2009: 268) rejects the notion of sequential development in acquiring alphabetic writing proficiency, as learning is a cognitive process that is the 'result of an active effort, based on.....whatever the learner knows'. He suggests that learners attempt to 'integrate multiple kinds of information' (Read, 2009: 269), while their invented writing and spelling demonstrates their understanding of writing and in particular, of their phonemic awareness.

Ferreiro (2009), whose main concern is with cognitive processes involved with children's understanding of alphabetic writing, draws on the work of Clay and Teale and Sulzby to define emergent literacy as the period from three to six years of age when children are exploring the 'social functions of writing as well as the functioning of the writing system as a system of symbols'. However, Razfar and Gutiérrez (2003) suggest that the emergent literacy perspective was primarily concerned with schooled literacy rather than taking into account the socio-cultural understandings with which children develop their own voice in their meaning-making. Literacy was seen as 'unfolding in its natural context' and did not necessarily include interaction between the adult and the child (Razfar and Gutiérrez, 2003: 37), and there was a perception that the literacy practices of the home and family should match those of the school, thus school literacy appeared to be more highly valued than that of minority groups and the home. Rowe (2003) argues that children make use of many different signs and modes to make meaning, and questions the emergent literacy position where the focus might be on children's ability to distinguish writing from other forms of literacy: 'to limit the focus of research to children's writing is to ignore a large part of young children's meaning-making' (Rowe, 2003: 265).

### **Socio-cultural perspectives**

In their 1980s study of young children learning at home and at preschool, Tizard and Hughes (2002: 222) found that children displayed a 'range of interests and linguistic skills which enabled them to be powerful learners'. Children's interests and literacy experiences in the home provided a rich source of language competence which was firmly grounded in meaning within the child's cultural and social experience: this understanding of meaning was not always recognised and supported within the school environment where teachers were unable to communicate successfully with the children due to their lack of understanding of the home environment. The study concluded that, by the age of four, children were already experiencing a mismatch in their learning in their home and school environments; however, Tizard's and

Hughes's study included only girls, and can therefore not be seen as necessarily representative of all children (Clark, 1988).

Feiler (2005) finds that there is growing support for valuing the family and home in the development of literacy and communication skills: children develop their identities in their literacy practices at home, and come to the setting or to school already competent in a number of ways. He further contends that there appears to be a mismatch between home and school literacy practices, in that those of school are often absorbed into the home, but home literacies are seldom followed up at school. Children demonstrate that they are literate within the informal discourse of family and friends (Barton, 2007; Pahl, 1999; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Pahl, 2007; Goouch and Lambirth, 2011). It is well documented (Flewitt, 2005; Tizard and Hughes, 2002) that the rich and meaningful dialogue which takes place within the family and home is often not matched in the preschool setting and primary school, where children may feel isolated from their own socio-cultural surroundings and may be reluctant or unable to communicate verbally with less familiar adults and children. Moreover, Flewitt (2005) argues that this emphasis on talk and verbal communication skills may 'pathologise' children who are not talkative in the school context, whereas at home, children often collaborate with family members and with friends to create and recreate their interpretation of events. Much attention has been paid to the development of speaking and listening skills for children up to the age of five years (DfE, 2012e), as this is seen to provide an essential foundation for literacy learning. In contrast, the UKLA (Ozturk, 2012: 1) calls for a clear emphasis on 'purposeful talk' in the primary curriculum for children from five to eleven, in order to encourage 'social interaction, cognitive development and clarification of concepts'.

Goouch and Lambirth (2011) explore the way in which children learn language in the home and family through acquisition rather than through direct teaching as they develop and reach an understanding about the relevance of language, and use and adapt the aspects which are most meaningful to them. What appears as effective learning taking place in school



may be more accessible to the child if there is common ground between the cultural practices in the home and the school. The confusion that occurs where children need to 'learn' language and literacy practices at school which are not familiar to them in the home means that the practices that they are immersed in at home have to be re-learned in a different way at school, making it harder for them to derive their own meanings from school practices (Goouch and Lambirth, 2011).

### **The influence of government policy on the teaching of literacy in schools in England**

Early literacy is never far from the attention of politicians and the media: standards in reading and writing seem to be associated with success in early schooling and beyond. With the introduction of ever more programmes for teaching literacy, and in particular phonics (DfES, 2007a; DfE, 2012b), as well as frameworks for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007b; DfE, 2012e) and the National Curriculum (DfES, 2006; DfE, 2012c), there is a wealth of advice and guidance for teaching young children to become literate.

Comber (2003) suggests that the 'normative' or traditional model with its focus on teaching literacy as a set of skills, has remained influential in the Early Years. This is reflected in the EYFS documentation's inclusion of the learning goals that each child is expected to reach by the age of five, and the 'development matters' section where children's competencies are matched against their expected age or stage of development (DfES, 2007c; DfE, 2012e; DfE, 2012a). This developmental approach is used to gauge children's progress and development from birth to five years of age, suggesting a Piagetian model, where children are required to be 'ready' before moving on to the next stage of learning (Donaldson, 1978). It is an approach with which many teachers training in the 1960s and 70s were familiar (Clark, 1994). Clark contends that this may result in a 'deficit' model where children's failure to reach a certain stage could be interpreted as demonstrating that they were lacking in the required skills, rather than acknowledging what they know or can do. Clark (1994: 18) argues that the

focus on the child's stage of development, rather than what they are able to do, results in 'upper limits' being set for children's teaching and learning.

Historically, a cognitive psychological approach has been considered useful to assess children's readiness for learning before they move to the next 'stage' (Larson and Marsh, 2005); however, this view of preparing children for the next phase of school learning suggests that literacy is useful for school, not necessarily for everyday tasks in the home and elsewhere. Where a 'traditional' approach is used in the teaching of literacy, children might be encouraged to practise their handwriting, learn their phonics or trace patterns in order to develop their readiness for writing: these activities may be referred to as pre-writing skills (Larson and Marsh, 2005; Czerniewska, 1992). Czerniewska's view is that the terminology itself implies that children's early attempts at writing are not good enough and that only adult writing will be acceptable. Czerniewska (1992: 55) argues that, because local authorities at the time were encouraging the teaching of the 'mechanics' of writing before an emphasis on meaning, children would believe that their first attempts at writing and meaning making were not valued and they would learn that there were 'things to do before real writing (could) develop'. It could be argued that this is still the case in the light of current curriculum frameworks for literacy in the Early Years where a sequential approach to learning appears to be encouraged (DfE, 2012a; DfE, 2012c). This suggests that literacy should be adult directed in the early years: the adult would decide when to introduce 'real' contexts for writing. Czerniewska (1992) concludes that the deficit approach, where children are viewed as being in constant preparation for the next level of teaching and learning, means that they may feel that they never quite achieve what they are setting out to do.

Goouch and Lambirth (2011: 16) challenge the notion of 'linear' learning which is reflected in current curriculum documents (DfE, 2012e; DfE, 2012c; DfE, 2012a) in which teachers are required to teach children to become literate by instructing them in the skills which are perceived as necessary for literacy competence. Clark (1994: 15) endorses the early work of Clay (1975) which informs an understanding of the way in which children's literacy

competence develops. Clay (1975: 31) advocates helping children to become independent readers and writers, bearing in mind that they 'take stock of their own learning systematically' and in this way actively contribute to their own learning. This resonates with Bruner's view of the child as an active constructor of their own learning. Clay (1998) suggests that children do not acquire literacy competence through a linear approach to learning. Although Clay trained as a developmental psychologist, she challenges the developmental approach to literacy learning, and concludes that all children become literate in different ways, informed by their cultural context, rather than by their perceived readiness for the next stage of learning.

Clark (1994) argues that children need to feel that they can take 'risks' when inventing ways of spelling, and can only do this if they feel that their own attempts are appreciated. She suggests that errors reflect a child's knowledge and understanding at a particular time: these mistakes are not accidental, but demonstrate the child's grasp of alphabetic writing. Clark (1976; 1994) calls for the child's efforts in their own writing to be valued, and explains that children may limit their vocabulary if they are afraid to make mistakes, and may therefore be unable to reflect the complexity of their narratives in their writing.

Comber's suggestion (2003) that traditional approaches are still prevalent in teaching today is reflected in the skills-based approach seen in guidance to early years practitioners and teachers that encourages the teaching of phonics in short daily sessions before the children are introduced to language in books (Styles and Wyse, 2007). The approach which appears to be favoured by policy makers to phonics teaching in the early years advocates that children are taught their letters and sounds in readiness for reading and writing. Clark (1994: 121) argues that children should be 'encouraged to read and to write from the earliest stages' and that their 'mistakes' and risk-taking are important as these demonstrate their understanding of the conventions of literacy and enable them to write what they mean rather than what they can do correctly. This seems to contradict much of the advice currently given to

teachers of young children who may feel under pressure to 'prepare' children to meet the demands of school teaching and learning.

In the government appointed *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading*, Rose (2006) advocates a 'systematic', adult led, programme for teaching synthetic phonics. As a consequence of this review, the teaching of synthetic phonics has been endorsed by successive governments and has become an integral component in the development of policy and practice in teaching children to become literate. Synthetic phonics programmes were implemented by early years settings and schools in England in line with curriculum frameworks (DfES, 2007c; DfES, 2006) and the use of programmes such as Letters and Sounds (DfES, 2007a) and those recommended by the Department for Education (DfE, 2012d), were encouraged by policy makers and supported by local authorities. This emphasis on phonics teaching suggests that competence in reading and writing is reliant on mastering phonological skills and alphabetic recognition. Indeed, the Draft National Curriculum for English Key Stage One (DfE, 2012c: 6) recommends that children should be provided with books that 'do not require them to use other strategies to work out words'. In its response to the current government's proposed programmes of study for English (in England) the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) (Ozturk, 2012) supports the teaching of phonics, but recommends that phonics should be one of a number of strategies which children use to decode words, rather than the only method taught. In addition, the UKLA response suggests that there should be an emphasis on reading and writing for meaning in context, as well writing for a purpose and audience.

The positive effect that discrete phonics instruction is claimed to have on the reading and writing skills of children as young as four years old in Reception classes is not supported or evidenced by research (Styles and Wyse, 2007; Goouch and Lambirth, 2011; Clark, 2006; Clark, 2012a). Clark (2006) draws attention to the methodological shortcomings of the Clackmannanshire research on which the Rose report's enthusiasm for a synthetic phonics approach to teaching reading is based, and calls for further research to

explore the claims of the effectiveness of a phonics-only approach. Clark (2012a; 2012c) argues for a broad approach to literacy teaching, and for a consideration of the fact that many children in England start school at four years of age, in contrast to the school starting age in many other countries where children may not begin formal school learning until they are six or seven. Clark (2012a) suggests that the complex orthographic nature of the English language should also be considered when teaching young children to read as many words could not be decoded using a synthetic phonics strategy.

As the use of synthetic phonics programmes is recommended by the government in England for the teaching of reading, this inevitably influences the way in which teachers, parents and children approach writing too, creating an understanding that phonological skills involving letter-sound correspondence should be mastered before embarking on the serious business of literacy. Pahl (1999) suggests that this image of literacy as a set of skills to be learned implicitly devalues the role and importance of context and meaning; she argues that the artefacts produced by children in playful contexts in which they explore the resources available to them can be a rich source of invention, narrative and creativity while they may not explicitly demonstrate knowledge and understanding of phonics.

There appear to be contradictions in the approaches espoused by researchers and those of policy makers: on the one hand children are to be taught literacy using phonic decoding skills, while on the other hand learning through play, and in particular learning language and literacy in playful contexts, is widely accepted as an important and necessary feature in the early years (Hall and Robinson, 1995; Makin, 2003; Pahl, 1999). The richness of the children's meaning-making practices in the form of drawings, messages, stories and cut-outs provides a contrast and an additional means of representation to the teaching and learning of the skills needed for decoding words and gaining phonological competence (Kress, 2003). These two approaches may be seen working side by side in a complementary way in a broad, multi-sensory and varied approach which encompasses a range of

methods with a focus on the importance of meaning rather than decoding alone.

Spontaneous meaning making occurs during play and during activities which are inspired by the children's purposeful actions and intentions. Cook (2002: 8) refers to her research with four to six-year-olds in the first two years of school which was designed to address the 'marginalisation of role-play' after the introduction of the Literacy Hour in English schools from 1998. This project found that opportunities for role-play allowed children to develop their literacy understanding of different genres and conventions for writing, and to draw on their real life experiences to inform their narratives.

The inconsistencies of encouraging the play-based practice of the EYFS (DfE, 2012e) with children under five years of age, and a phonics programme such as Letter and Sounds (DfES, 2007a) which is advocated by the Department for Education in response to the Independent Review of the Teaching of Reading (Rose, 2006), as well as by commercially produced programmes aimed at parents and families and sold in popular bookshops and stores, sends mixed messages to parents as well as to practitioners and teachers. Added to this is the public outcry in the national press at the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008, criticising the assessment of five-year-olds against 64 outcomes at the end of their reception year in school. Although these 'outcomes' have since been reduced in number in the revised EYFS statutory framework (DfE, 2012e), children's progress continues to be measured and assessed according to set criteria. These developments are informed by traditional approaches (Larson and Marsh, 2005), which can be viewed as normative and standardised, where the stress is on individualised learning rather than on learning as a social practice.

'School' teaching and learning may be viewed as the child acquiring knowledge and skills, rather than making or constructing (and re-constructing) their knowledge as they do at home with their families and friends. The conversations that children have about their meaning making activities during their out-of-school experiences may not be easily replicated in the less

familiar, more formal setting of school or nursery. Millard (2003; 2006) refers to teachers' efforts to draw on children's knowledge and understanding developed at home to inform their literacy experiences at school as a 'literacy of fusion'. She argues that literacy practices at home have kept pace with modern technology and the demands of a more interactive and dialogical approach, while those at school are firmly foregrounded by skills-based teaching and learning pedagogies which are reminiscent of curriculum demands of the 1960s. Additional demands are made on children with testing at age six in de-contextualised word (and non-word) recognition and phonic skills (DfE, 2012b). Millard (2006: 237) further suggests that parents are encouraged to 'accommodate to the systems, practices and emphases of the school curriculum'. This confirms Feiler's assertion that 'school' literacies are likely to be practised at home, that the understandings learned at home are less likely to be valued at school (Feiler, 2005).

Jensen (2012: 312) argues for a 'unified approach' to early literacy, where there is a shared understanding about children's literacy development at school and in childcare. Jensen's research took place in Denmark, where the school starting age is six to seven years in contrast to four to five years in England. (Danish, like English, is not a phonetically regular language, and similar difficulties may be experienced by children in learning letter-sound correspondence.) This difference in school starting age needs to be taken into account in his argument for a 'democratic' approach, which is a key consideration in Nordic perspectives of early childhood education (BUPL, 2006). Jensen refers to the perception of literacy as a set of technical skills as 'schoolification' (2012: 315) and challenges didactic and developmental approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood, arguing for the need to take account of ethical and social consequences of a transmission model and to ensure that children's own perspectives are taken into account. Jensen does not argue for removing the teaching of discrete skills, but urges a democratic approach where children are active participants, and the approach to literacy as embedded in meaning without compromise: children's resourcefulness enables them to perform as readers and writers 'beyond letters and written story' (Jensen, 2012: 323).

## **Changing concepts of literacy**

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) portray New Literacy Studies as a broad field which is primarily concerned with people in different domains: it can be seen as a socially situated practice, encompassing the representation and development of identities, multi-modality and critical literacy. Literacy always occurs within social and cultural contexts, in everyday interactions in school, at home and 'for building and maintaining social relations' (Larson and Marsh, 2005: 18). It is a social practice which is contextualised by relationships in social and cultural domains. Children help with shopping at home, making lists and identifying products and labels (Larson and Marsh, 2005): everyday practices such as these may also be visible in children's role play in nursery settings and early years classrooms in school (Cook, 2002).

Cook (2002), in her study with children in nursery and the first year of primary school, suggests that real-life experiences drawn on by children in their play provide them with contexts which are relevant to them, and which reflect shared experiences with familiar people and places. In this way parents, families and teachers are drawn into the learning taking place in the nursery setting or primary school, while the children are able to lead the direction of the narrative as part of their role play.

In their 'writer's workshop' study with kindergarten children aged five to six years, Lysaker, Wheat and Benson (2010) make reference to another study carried out by Cook (2005) which explores children's out-of-school experiences in their play in a way which creates a 'third space' where 'new relationships and new knowledge are constructed and valued' (Lysaker *et al.*, 2010: 213). They acknowledge the importance of play to children's learning and development, and suggest that there is a need to consider play as a valuable context for children's experiences of literacy practices as in the case of Cook's studies.



Pahl (1999) carried out research in a nursery in order to study the way in which children's representations reflect their thinking, which in turn is shaped by their experiences both within the nursery and at home. She suggests that literacy is a far more complex concept than alphabetic writing alone, and that children develop ways to make meaning long before they 'arrive at literacy' (Pahl, 1999: 7). Pahl found that children in the Nursery participated in model-making, drawing, cutting out, collage and drawing in order to make sense of their world; they devised ways to use their knowledge and understanding gained within the home and family in order to record and represent their thinking.

### **Critical literacies**

The significance of children being able to 'name their word .....and their world' (Freire, 1996: 69) is demonstrated in the way they use their own linguistic and literacy resources with which to make meaning. Larson and Marsh (2005: 135) draw on the work of Freire and Comber in arguing for an approach to literacy in the early years that foregrounds children's own 'literary repertoires'. Reflecting on his work with communities becoming literate, Freire (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 159) advocates a 'critical literacy' approach in developing a pedagogy where learning takes place in the 'language of the people' so that they are empowered by the possibility of engaging in 'reflection, critical thinking and social interaction'. Freire (1998b) suggests that there is a need to value children's representations of their thinking, whether they are in the form of scribbles or writing, so that they can recreate their own language of meaning as they tell their stories. A critical literacy perspective is informed by a range of perspectives which evolve in different ways in different contexts: these include cultural and critical theory, politicisation of literacy, and a call for social justice and change (Comber, 2003; Comber and Nichols, 2004).

In their case study of literacy lessons in an Australian first grade class, Comber and Nicholls (2004: 56) found that children were expected to be 'passive recipients' of the teacher's narrative, without questioning issues relating to conformity, gender and violence. The teacher was engaged in

management of the group rather than encouraging the children's critical engagement with the story. Comber and Nicholls (2004: 59) suggest that, while acknowledging the challenges of teaching groups of young children, children may appear 'invisible' when their attempts to represent their thinking in their writing and their drawings are not recognised. Freire and Macedo (1987: 24) explore the challenges of school teaching by encouraging a critical pedagogy that recognises the constraints of resistance between the 'dominant ideology of the schools and the ideologies of the... students'. They call for 'democratic tolerance', and for students and teachers to work in collaboration with each other. The need for a dialogical approach which positions the teacher as well as the child as learner, is a key consideration of a democratic approach in critical literacy.

In her work with teacher education students, as a 'teacher educator and educational researcher', Kinloch (2013: 110) reflects on the challenges of ensuring that teachers make visible the voices of the children (and students), and is particularly concerned that the 'lived realities and community voices' of the children may be disregarded. Kinloch views literacy through a critical literacy lens, which is ideologically situated in social practice rather than as a technical skill. Literacy is seen as a 'culturally sustaining' pedagogy (Kinloch, 2013: 112) where there can be open engagement with meaning-making. This desire for meaning-making to be at the heart of literacy practice is reflected in a study by Marsh (2006) in her work with trainee teachers. She considered that it was possible to make use of popular culture in helping to engage and motivate children who might otherwise find it difficult to access the curriculum. Marsh (2006: 168) found that student teachers were unaware that popular culture might be a valid force in literacy teaching, as they perceived it as 'trivial', with little relevance to conventional forms of literacy. While these trainee teachers believed that popular texts might have a 'corrupting influence', Morrell (2013) suggests that issues brought to the fore through exposure to popular culture, particularly in the media, could encourage children and young people to adopt a stance that is critical, rather than merely one of entertainment and analysis. Morrell (2013: 167) contends that a critical approach encourages reciprocity of learning where 'authentic caring and

mutual respect' characterises the learning environment. Engagement with popular culture could act as a 'bridge between children's official and unofficial worlds' (Marsh, 2006: 160) where learning could be both 'active', and 'authentic', and where 'tasks have meaning and purpose' (Morrell, 2013: 16).

Drawing on Freire, Janks (2009) suggests that making choices in the words that are used in literacy is an ethical issue, as this affects the meaning that is communicated, and positions both the writer and the reader in particular ways. This ethical responsibility impacts on the books that are presented to children at school in the form of readers and text books, as well as in the children's production of texts. Comber (2003) challenges the notion of 'neutrality' which is presented to children in their texts at school, where the ethics and ideals may not be those with which the children are familiar, or have relevance to their particular socio-cultural environment.

A major consideration in a critical literacy approach, is that schools value and build on children's own linguistic, literary and socio-cultural traditions so that standard school texts are not favoured above all others (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Comber describes the critical literacy perspective as evolving (2003: 357): it enables children to become analytical and to think critically about texts, and has become part of a 'coherent model of literacy as social practice'. This view concurs with the findings of Vasquez (2004) whose work with young children in her kindergarten class demonstrated that they were capable of sophisticated and analytical thinking about everyday issues that affected them. In her reference to taking a critical literacy perspective, Vasquez (2004: 139) found that while working with the children, they 'imagined that the social world could be otherwise' and that they could 'change the way things were'. She suggests that young children are able to engage with issues of social justice, and have a clear sense of right and wrong. Vasquez used the social lives of the children as a starting point for critical literacy in her classroom, and worked with them to create an audit trail of data with which to work. This audit included collections made by the children and teacher of photographs, letters, transcripts of conversations, as well as children's drawing and writing which was at times supported by the teacher's written text. She actively involved the

children from the very beginning and displayed the audit trail in the classroom for the children in the class as well as the rest of the school, in this way engaging them actively in their literacy from the beginning.

Comber (2003) makes reference to discourses of power which are evident in classrooms. This view of language as a discourse of power is clearly evident in the work of Janks (2000) whose research began as an activist during the apartheid era in South Africa when the language of the oppressor, the dominant power, was used as a teaching medium for all, regardless of their own culture. Her research considers the value of encouraging an understanding that writing and rewriting texts can 'privilege some at the expense of others', and can be seen as a site for 'social action, social justice, identity and social transformation' (Janks, 2009: 128). Although some classroom materials were in use in the 1980s which required children to rethink and rewrite stories in order to problematise issues of democracy and social action, Janks (2009) and Comber (2003) argue that a truly critical literacy approach has not been explicitly incorporated into school and early childhood curriculum content more widely.

### **Literacy as symbolic representation**

In writing about children's play, Vygotsky (1978: 108) suggests that early scribbles and drawings are 'representational gestures': in assigning a function to gesture or drawing, the child creates meaning through 'first order symbolism'. In this way, he theorises that symbolic representational play involves gestures and drawings which acquire meaning, and can be seen as representing speech. 'Second order symbolism' arises when one representational function leads on to create new meaning. Vygotsky (1978: 110) considers that make-believe play contributes to the development of written language through this development of second order symbolic representation. Vygotsky's studies with three and four-year-old children demonstrated that they were able to record seemingly unrecognisable marks on paper to represent words, and were subsequently able to assign meaning to these marks, as a precursor to alphabetic writing. Vygotsky (1986: 219)

suggests that there is a complex relationship between thought and speech, in that thought 'does not merely find expression in speech; it finds it in reality and form'. He maintains that learning is in this way influenced by context and the mediation of tools or signs that help the children to derive meaning from their activities in a socio-cultural process.

Hall (1997: 17) suggests that 'representation is the production of meaning of concepts in our minds through language'. He proposes two systems of representations: firstly, mental representations are ways of organising concepts and the relationships between them; the second system of representation is language, a term he uses in a broad sense to include images when they are used to express meaning. Hall's position is that meaning is not in the sign itself in the form of the object, image or word (language), but in the relationship between them. He advocates a constructionist approach where meaning is constructed by the system of representation, social conventions and culture, rather than found in the object, image or word. Hall (1997: 22) argues that children are 'cultural subjects', who 'learn the system and conventions of representation, the codes and language of their culture'.

Children are able to distinguish between different forms of representation from an early age, well before they are three years old (Lancaster, 2003). Lancaster (2003: 148) describes children's learning about different forms of symbolic representation as a 'continuous, developing and expanding process' and draws on the work of Kress (1997) in recognising the child's ability to make use of available resources with which to represent their thinking. Children's efforts to represent their narratives are the result of 'thoughtful and reasoned' activity, and although scribbles and incidental marks are often considered as a stage to pass through on the way to competence, Lancaster (2003: 150) suggests that these should be seen as the child's 'systematic engagement' with text. Children's thoughtful and intentioned engagement demonstrates their understanding of the relationship between signs and concepts, and is 'at the heart of meaning' (Hall, 1997: 22).

Drawings can be seen as a child's graphic means of communicating and making meaning, and as a form of writing (Dyson, 2010a; Dyson and Genishi, 2009). The notion that drawing can be understood as graphic communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 2010a; Dyson and Genishi, 2009) is reflected in Anning and Ring's (2004) case studies of three to five-year-old children drawing. Anning and Ring found that children use drawing as a tool to represent the things that are important to them in their personal lives. They observed that adults in schools and settings seldom gave the children feedback on their drawing, suggesting that these were not valued to the same extent as their attempts at alphabetic writing. Although pre-school settings provide more opportunities for children to explore their mark making and drawing than schools do, there is an expectation that drawing should lead on to writing, rather than being valued as a valid means of representation and meaning-making (Anning and Ring, 2004): there is no linear progression from scribbles to drawing, and on to writing (Mavers, 2011; Lancaster, 2003). Mavers (2009: 141) defines the making of meaning as semiotic work, and argues that the often 'unremarkable' representations that children may produce in a very short time, are none the less the result of complex processes, 'requiring serious semiotic work'. Like Anning and Ring, Mavers (2011; 2009) further states that children's meaning-making needs to be taken seriously in order to enable them to participate in a range of contemporary literacy practices.

In their reference to children drawing, Kendrick and McKay (2004) argue that becoming literate means more than being able to read and write – it means that the child makes meaning through the use of the representational forms which they feel reflect their thinking. Pahl (1999) suggests that children's own forms of literacy practices should be recognised by acknowledging their own identities in their texting, writing, emailing, telling stories, role play and model making: she recognises the ways in which children construct their personal narratives using a variety of methods which need to be recognised as a valid means of making meaning. Flewitt (2005) concurs with this view and adds that while children express themselves in different modes, they do this in sometimes unexpected ways. She argues that it is the way in which children

devise methods of creating their own narratives and stories that demonstrates their identity and helps to develop their own voice. Pahl (2007) suggests that children's innovative ways of representing their thoughts reflect their creativity in the ways in which they are able to make links between experiences in the past and in different domains.

Kress (1997) refers to the ways in which children use the resources that are 'to hand' to represent their thinking and that young children are constantly endeavouring to make sense of their world: they use a variety of methods, not only drawing, to make their meanings clear to those around them. Kress (1997) argues that a multimodal approach to literacy provides children with opportunities to express themselves in many different ways as they draw on their experiences in a variety of contexts. Children may use resources that are to hand to represent their thinking: not only pencils and paper: but also boxes, recycled materials, bits of fabric, paper, construction toys and furniture. They are able to represent their thinking in a symbolic way in their drawings and cut-outs, often using glue and sticky tape to join things together. Binder and Kotsopolous (2011: 359) refer to children's multimodal meaning making as 'graphic thought', and 'ways of talking with images' in recognising the complexity of children's narratives before they are necessarily able to communicate verbally using speech or written forms of literacy. Kress (1997) argues that, although children's drawings and artefacts are sometimes accompanied by mark making in some form, the use of writing (or invented or play writing) is not necessary in order to define the activity as 'literacy'. Kress's contention is that children need to develop appropriate skills in order to make meaning, which enables them to communicate in a more graphic modern world, where printed texts are increasingly being replaced or supplemented by images and signs.

## **Summary**

Traditional approaches to literacy are widely evident in nursery settings and primary schools in England, and there appears to be limited response in curriculum guidance to the changing nature of contemporary communication

and meaning making practices which demand that children are conversant in graphic communication skills. This chapter has explored the way in which children become literate by reconstructing their understandings of their world while drawing on their own experience and knowledge (Bruner, 1996; Gooch and Lambirth, 2011). The case for literacy as a means for making and expressing meaning is made by researchers such as Clay (1975; 1998), Smith (1985; 1994), Y. Goodman (1984) and K. Goodman (2005) and Clark (1976; 1994; 2006), yet this call for a pedagogy focused on meaning does not sit easily with current government policy in England, which prioritises the acquisition of technical skills such as phonics. This chapter briefly explores the concept of 'emergent writing', challenging the view of literacy competency as a linear process which requires children to learn basic skills before learning to read and write.

The critical literacy approach, informed by Freire (1996) and the work of researchers such as Janks (2009; 2000), Comber (2003) and Vasquez (2004), recognises issues of identity, equality and social justice which have relevance for early childhood literacy in laying the foundations of literacy in which meaning is embedded. Children's own symbolic representations of thought and meaning are expressed in their scribbles, drawings and creative engagement with resources which are to hand (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999). Children demonstrate that literacy is about more than reading and writing in their use of the representational forms that give meaning to their thinking.



## Chapter 3

### Making Meaning: defining literacy

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature in relation to what is meant by literacy within the context of this study. In the previous chapter, a range of approaches and perspectives to early literacy were explored, drawing on psychological and socio-cultural perspectives (for example Smith, 1985; 1994; Clay, 1975; 1998; Clark, 1976; 1994; 2005). Young children's perspectives and understandings of literacy within the Early Years Foundation Stage in England (DfE, 2012e), and the demands and challenges of the curriculum for teaching English to children up to eight years of age (DfES, 2006; DfE, 2012c) were discussed. A critical literacy approach (Janks, 2010; Vasquez, 2004) was explored, and I examined the ability of young children to engage critically in thinking about equity and social justice issues relating both to themselves and to the world around them. Literacy in early childhood was broadly referred to as written communication; however, the notion of 'symbolic representation as literacy' was introduced and provides the main focus for this study, which scrutinises the meanings which three to eight year old children make in their symbolic representations in the artefacts they produce in day-to-day activities.

Young children's literacy can be defined more broadly than a school-based approach which is reliant on alphabetic script (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999; Kendrick and McKay, 2004), taking on the form of a variety of visual representations which are symbolic of the meanings which children construct in their communications. This chapter examines children's quest for meaning through their representations, and draws on Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999; Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) amongst others, to explore the ways in which children use available resources: not only pencils and paper, but also boxes, recycled materials, bits of fabric, paper, construction toys and found objects. The literature discussed in this chapter suggests that children are able to

represent their thinking in a symbolic way through their role play, drawings, model making and cut-outs, often using glue and sticky tape to join things together, and that these activities constitute their literary endeavours.

Sometimes children's drawings and artefacts are accompanied by mark making and writing in some form; however, the use of writing (or invented or play writing) is not necessary in order to define the activity as literacy (Kendrick and McKay, 2004; Pahl, 1999; Kress, 1997). This study defines the term literacy to mean the symbolic or visual representation of the child's intention to make meaning. Kress (1997; 2010) proposes a multimodal approach to literacy where children might represent their thinking in many modes. Within the context of this study, and based on Kress' proposition that 'young children choose what they want to represent, then select the best possible means for doing it' (Kress, 1997: 93), these modes can be viewed as symbolic representations of children's meaning-making endeavours, although there may not necessarily be an artefact to show for it afterwards.

A critical literacy perspective is continued in this chapter, and developed with an exploration of the politicisation of literacy. The chapter draws on the work of Clark and Ivanic (1997) and Freire (1996) amongst others, in exploring the hegemonic nature of literacy, while demonstrating that values attached to being literate and to writing in particular, are bound up with the socio-political contexts of society. The politicization of literacy, and its impact on culturally specific domains of literacy is considered, where children become literate as they endeavour to devise ways to make meaning. This chapter explores the concept of multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 2000; Gee, 2000; Fairclough, 2000; Kalantzis and Cope, 2012) and foregrounds literacy practices which are immersed in multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), where children are able to make meaning by using resources which are 'to hand'.

## Exploring meanings

Bruner (1996: 191) suggests that the reconstruction of meaning often takes place in the form of narrative 'as a mode of thinking, as a structure for organising ..... knowledge'. He further contends that children use narrative to recall knowledge and their experiences in order to understand them better. Bruner (1996: 121) describes narrative as a 'sequence of events': a story that is interpreted by the narrator as well as by the listener. This suggests a reciprocity between the child and audience where meanings are negotiated and shared. Bruner (1996: 39) further explains that narrative is a 'mode of thought' which enables the child to create meaning from their experiences that they can relate to their own lives and culture. This is further demonstrated in Binder and Kotsopoulos' contention (2011: 340) that children use their meaning-making activities to 'make their thoughts public and reveal how they think, view, and situate themselves in the world'.

In her study in a ninth grade English classroom, Rowsell (2012: 117) argues for opportunities for children to draw on their 'personal experiences, histories and the everyday...to effectively and most productively make meaning'. Drawing on Rogoff (2003), Flear (2006: 132) calls for a 'revolutionary' approach which foregrounds culture, context and the child's 'lived experience'. With reference to institutional contexts within which children are located, Flear (2006) argues that teachers need to recognise the child's 'lived experience' rather than relying on a developmental view, which she refers to as reflective of an 'evolutionary' approach. This reference to the child's 'lived experience' is suggestive of Bruner's (1990: 111) contention that new narratives are created by 'recovering the past' and that children draw on emotional experiences in their narratives in order to make meaning. Fisher (2010; 2011) draws on cultural-historical theory in her findings that children learn through their own experiences and activity in their quest to develop agency in their writing. She further contends that much research about children's writing is characterised by technical skill rather than meaning, and that children are deeply influenced by their socio-cultural environments in schools, 'developing as pupils at the same time as writers' (Fisher, 2010: 421). In proposing a socio-cultural rather

than a developmental view of childhood, Rogoff (2003: 10) considers the child's learning in relation to context and community, each having a 'transformational' effect on the other.

Hedegaard (2008a) suggests that learning is often conceptualised as reflecting a change in the individual child, in spite of the accepted understanding that children learn most effectively in groups with their peers, and in socio-cultural contexts. In recognition of the child's motives being formed by their relationship with the institution and those around them (including parents and practitioners) rather than purely individually, Hedegaard (2012) calls for considering the child's learning from a cultural-historical perspective that carries genuine meaning for the child. She draws on cultural-historical theory to build an understanding of the child's intentions and motives and makes a link between children's emotional experiences and the educational setting in analysing the child's intentional actions and understanding their motives (Hedegaard, 2012). Fisher (2011: 49) refers to cultural-historical theory in arguing that children's motives 'direct their actions as learners', and that there is a need to focus attention on the child's motives and activity rather than on the institution's practice alone. This focus on children's motives can help practitioners to develop an understanding of how to support them in making sense of the expectations of the classroom and their perspectives in relation to their writing (Fisher, 2010; 2011).

In their study of five-year-old children's writing in a Norwegian kindergarten, Hopperstad and Semundseth (2012) set out to explore what motivates children to write. They found that the children's attempts at practising alphabetic script is characterised by modelling their writing on the adult's practice, and the provision of pencils, paper and letters made of card. The emphasis is on the children practising alphabetic script so that they are familiar with the symbols of writing in readiness for school, rather than actually learning to write while at nursery (Hopperstad and Semundseth, 2012). Motivating factors are found to include the use of humour on the part of the teacher, as well as the use of a tactful and unhurried approach, while allowing the children to choose whether they want to participate in the activity. This

appears to contrast with Hopperstad's earlier study (2010) where her main concern is with meaning in children's drawings, rather than familiarity with alphabetic letters. In this study she draws on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and suggests that children express meaning in their drawings about their experiences and narratives, as well as about the decisions they make to devise visual ways of expression as they draw. This could be done by, for example, using framing, or adjusting angle to convey meaning and to communicate their intentions. Hopperstad (2010) is concerned with the 'interests that drive (children)' in devising ways of making meaning in their drawings. In her study, Hopperstad (2010) finds that the children's interests are based around facts, events and aesthetics (for example, in the use of colour).

Children's narratives provide them with the opportunity to draw on their own feelings, experiences and interpretations and in this way to develop their meanings: they 'create their own relations to this world, as well as modifying their world through their actions' (Hedegaard, 2012: 21). Van Oers (2003: 18) suggests that children may use their drawings as well as verbal means in their narratives, and maintains that, rather than simply retelling a sequence of events, narratives reflect 'the child's need of being understood'. He maintains that this is particularly apparent during playful encounters, and in the way children give meaning to their thinking during play.

### **Politicisation of literacy**

Lambirth (2011: 75) relates the 'source of the politics of literacy' to the 'affordance of language to make meaning', and to the ways in which these meanings are either supported by those in control, or challenged by those who resist the power which is associated with the dominant group. The early emphasis on decoding and encoding skills of writing that is encouraged and taught in schools revolves around learning the genres of essays, narratives and poetry: traditionally those genres which are valued by the prevailing socio-political ideology of society (Clark and Ivanic, 1997). There is an understanding that competence in literacy of the kind that complies with

accepted standards and ideologies of the government and received definitions will empower children and provide them with the cultural capital that they need to become educated and successful in school and later life. Clark and Ivanic (1997) maintain that this has resulted in a 'return to basics' approach: this is reflected in the interpretation and implementation of the recommendations of the Rose Review (2006).

Mills (2011) argues that the recommendations of the Rose Review to teach synthetic phonics 'first and fast' were adopted unquestionably by local authorities regardless of reservations voiced by researchers at the time such as Clark (2006), Styles and Wyse (2007) and more recently Clark (2012b). Private consultants were brought in to replace local authority support for schools and teachers after the introduction of the Primary National Strategy in 2003, resulting in the increasing marketisation of literacy, with the use of commercial materials being widely advocated in the early years and beyond (Mills, 2011). Mills further contends that the resulting commercial structured teaching frameworks being promoted for use in schools and recommended for the teaching of literacy, and in particular synthetic phonics, in the Early Years Foundation stage in schools, means that commercial companies are able to wield ever more power and authority. This is particularly evident in the materials used in Early Years settings in England to support the teaching of phonics.

Mills (2011) suggests that issues of power are often ignored, taking control away from the schools and teachers who work with the children directly. He outlines how policies for teaching literacy in schools were driven by the National Literacy Strategy from 1997, advocating what Street (2009) terms an autonomous model of literacy. Rather than foregrounding the technical skills of language such as phonics, spelling, punctuation and grammar, Searle (1998: xi) argues that these should be developed as 'tools' for language within a 'larger social, cultural and political context' as all children have an 'equal right to name the world'. Searle (1998: 7) writes from a critical literacy perspective, seeing language and action as inseparable: literacy is not 'neutral or passive', but empowers people to 'understand the world, then

change it'. In his work with children in secondary school, Searle (1998) confronts issues of social justice including racism, inequality and challenging issues in society with his pupils, and makes reference to Freire's contention that language is praxis (as reflection on action), and therefore has a transformative effect on the child's world (Freire, 1996).

The curriculum in schools often reflects the ideologies of the dominant groups in society (Freire, 1996; Lambirth, 2011) so that children are expected to conform to the literacy practices which are deemed to be important, but may not be familiar to the children in a cultural sense. Hedegaard (2012) contends that there are institutional demands for particular approaches to learning, which may not take account the child's own intentions and experience. Lambirth (2011: 15) defines the language and literacy of the home and community as the primary discourse, and cites literacy in school as an example of a 'secondary discourse' which is practised outside the home. He argues that it is advantageous for children if their primary discourse 'matches or is similar to that of the institution'. The secondary discourses of the school are supported by the 'instrumentalist approaches' which are considered by policy makers to be important for the maintenance of a market driven society, and who view literacy as an autonomous model which is based on the learning of discrete skills rather than what Lambirth (2011: 14) refers to as meaningful 'acquisition'.

Freire (1996) suggests that children may perceive the autonomous model prescribed by the dominant group as something to strive for: the more willing they are to accept this model of teaching, the better they are regarded as students. His notion of the 'banking concept' (Freire, 1996: 53) where children are filled with information like containers, is drawn on by Lambirth (2011) in demonstrating the decontextualised nature of much literacy teaching in schools, where technical skills might be valued above children's own literacy practices which are culturally and socially bound.

Giroux (1987) regards school as a site for regulation, limiting opportunities for a critical literacy approach which reflect the voices of teachers and children.

He contends that children (students) should be encouraged to recreate their own language of meaning, rather than developing feelings of inferiority when their own language does not necessarily relate to the accepted forms of literacy which are used and advocated by the dominant group. Freire and Macedo (1987) call for a move away from a traditional skills based acquisition of knowledge so that children can engage in literacy learning which reflects the relationship between their language and culture. They view writing as an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of their own reality, and which is 'emancipatory' in the sense that children are able to use their own ways of making meaning for 'social and political reconstruction', and are thus able to 'name their world' (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 159). Biesta (cited in Winter, 2011: 539) contends that education should not be directed only towards the individual child, but to the 'space' around them, so that the educator's responsibility is 'for the child and for the world'. Biesta refers to this as 'coming into the world', where the child's subjectivity becomes a political event in terms of action and responsibility (cited in Winter, 2011: 537).

### **Multiliteracies**

The notion of 'multiliteracies' was developed in 1994 by the New London Group (2000) in response to the changing demands of literacy. The New London Group (2000: 9) considers that a traditional approach to literacy pedagogy has been restricted to 'formalised, monolingual, monocultural and rule-governed forms of language', and therefore recommends making use of, and developing, an understanding of 'representational forms' that are more relevant to current, more visual modes. Multiliteracy is concerned with multiple forms of literacy such as computer literacy and visual literacy (Street, 2009), the second of which is the principal focus of this study. Cope and Kalantzis (2000: 5) suggest that the term literacy is generally associated with letter-sound correspondence and that 'mere literacy' is 'a kind of authoritarian pedagogy' that does not reflect the breadth of meaning that would be possible with, for example, visual modes of representation. Their views concur with those of Kress (2012), Gee (2005; 2000) and Fairclough (2000) that the prevalent perception of literacy is influenced by the privatisation and



marketisation of education in that skills-based knowledge is convenient for measurement and for encouraging competition in the market place, as well as for providing individual choice. Kress (2000b) suggests that, as with music and art, visual modes of literacy have been marginalised in schools as they are considered to be means of expression, rather than for communication: in order to communicate meaning effectively, modes are presented in different ways using, for example, variations on perspective and position (Kress, 2000a). He further contends that words are 'ready-made' (Kress, 2000b: 196), whereas other modes must be designed and are represented in different ways to indicate intended meanings. This view is affirmed by Mavers (2011) in her suggestion that children create meaning in their own ways, rather than necessarily using ready-made signs.

In his analysis of the New London Group's call for a multiliteracies approach, Street (2009) suggests that the dominant model of 'schooled' literacy is not suited to modern life with its narrow focus on western forms of literacy, its lack of cultural sensitivity, and its inability to respond to the demands of technology and visual forms of representation. Furthermore, the autonomous, schooled model that equates literacy with the skills and technical expertise required for competence in writing is informed by psychological theory that is focused on progress and development rather than meaning. By contrast, Street (2009) contends that a multiliteracies model is predicated on variation rather than standardisation. This view concurs with that of Kalantzis and Cope (2000) and the New London Group (2000), who argue for multiple modes of representation, where language and meaning are constantly being remade and transformed by users. This 'transformative process' is a more effective pedagogy which is 'more appropriate for today's world of change and diversity' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012: 188). Transformative pedagogy, where meanings are remade and restructured for new purposes, is one of four pedagogical principles of 'integrated instruction' put forward by Gee (2005: 67) as a 'bill of rights' for literacy.

Gee's principles of integrated instruction (2000) draws on The New London Group's (2000) reference to a 'theory of pedagogy' for multiliteracy. These

four theories of pedagogy encompass 'situated practice', which relates to the 'immersion in meaningful practices'; 'overt instruction' involving guided learning through scaffolding; 'critical framing' where learners are encouraged to reflect critically on their learning; and 'transformed practice', where transformed or 'redesigned' meanings are put into practice to inform new meanings in other contexts (New London Group, 2000: 35).

### **Designing meaning**

Janks (2010: 18) suggests that the word 'design' works 'across multiple modalities, multiple forms of meaning making or semiosis – you can design a text, a style of dress, a page, a poster, furniture, a room....'. This resonates with the New London Group's contention that 'meaning makers ....are fully makers and re-makers of signs and transformers of meanings' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012: 188). Design and redesign enable the transformation of meaning to take place, so that new meaning is reconstructed from existing meaning (Gee, 2000; Kress, 2000a). In her discussion about children copying in their attempts to make meaning, Mavers (2011) suggests that children make meaning by re-conceptualising and reconstructing existing designs. Mavers sees these actions as intensely purposeful requiring initiative on the part of the child, unless the activity is routine and lacking in meaning. A transformative theory constructs meaning as a process of redesigning signs 'in response to other signs' (Stein, 2008: 24) in order to represent the interests of the sign-maker.

Janks (2010: 25) equates this reconstruction of meaning through design to the ability to 'challenge and change existing discourses', which enables the meaning maker to use multiple modes to 'transform' meaning in the production of multimodal literacy. Kress (2000a) suggests that design enables the meaning maker to represent their interest in the most apt way by using available resources appropriately. He adds that 'design is transformative rather than totally creative', and that design represents complex thinking as it draws on personal, cognitive, affective and social interests of the user (Kress, 2000a: 156). Stein (2008: 23) draws on Kress in viewing the sign maker's

agency in meaning making: 'every sign is a representation of the sign maker's interest'. She views learners in multimodal pedagogy as designers, who are informed by their interests in transformative action and are 'agentive, resourceful and creative meaning makers' (Stein, 2008: 122). Kress (1997: 155) values design as deserving of attention in order to plan for change and transformation in shaping the future: 'what is to hand has to satisfy the needs of the design'. Design allows intended meanings to be represented in new ways by composing and positioning elements in different ways; for example to the front, the side, or by adjusting size and orientation (Kress, 2000b; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

### **The multimodality of literacy**

Kress (2000b; 1997) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) consider that all texts, whether in written or spoken language, are multimodal: meaning is always made using more than one mode, forming part of a 'multimodal ensemble' (Stein, 2008: 24; Kress, 2010). The author has to make decisions and choices, for example about choice of paper, word processing and layout in written text; in verbal text the reliance on expression, tone, gesture and posture may influence meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress maintains that although literacy is multimodal, one mode may dominate, where the principal meaning may be communicated in one mode, supported by meanings reflected in another. Jewitt (2009b) contends that multimodality is about more than language, and that language is not always central: it is only one of many modes. She sees modes as working together in a 'communicative event' to make meaning (Jewitt, 2009b: 15). Kress (2010: 155) defines modes as the 'material stuff of signs' which provide a lens through which meaning is made by means of intentional selection and arrangement. Multimodality requires choices to be made about modes: meaning is made through the materiality of a mode, or by means of a 'multimodal ensemble' (Kress, 2009: 64).

Kress defines educational approaches to literacy essentially as 'meaning making in a social and cultural environment' (1997: 8) where meaning-making

is seen as 'action'. In making sense of the demands of school, children are required to engage with multimodal interpretation and expression of meaning in the social context while taking account of the curricular requirements of the classroom and, particularly in the Reception and Key Stage One classrooms, they need to interpret what is going on in a busy environment (Mavers, 2009). Kress (1997) recognises the need for children to gain competence in the written mode as this will continue to be the medium most used by the elites in society and those in power. There is a need to recognise the contribution which a multimodal approach plays in enabling children to explore their identities both in the school and at home: however, Pahl and Rowsell (2012) suggest that both multimodal literacy and autonomous forms based on literacy as a set of skills are needed in education. Harste (2009) accepts the need for children to be able to function in a literate world: he questions the idea of multimodality becoming a part of a teacher-led curriculum and calls for a critical perspective where children are encouraged to be involved and engaged alongside adults in thinking about the curriculum. Due to the complexities of the nature of literacy, Harste (2009: 35) considers multimodality as a 'semiotic resource (which involves) language, vision and action', rather than equating directly to oral or visual literacy.

The ways in which children engage in their efforts to make meaning, such as construction play, model making, drawing and painting, may be regarded in school as a means of aesthetic development or as an expression of emotions rather than as meaning making in the form of communication, and therefore may not be taken as seriously as alphabetic forms of literacy (Kress, 1997). Visual forms of representation such as drawings are often used as an add-on to alphabetic literacy (Anning and Ring, 2004; Kress, 1997) even though these are representative of the meanings that children intend to make. This is borne out in the way in which young children's scribbles are often regarded as a stage to work through on the way to competence in literacy, whereas Lancaster (2003) and Mavers (2011) suggest that these early marks should be seen as children's 'systematic engagement' with text (Lancaster, 2003: 150). Mavers (2011) focuses a lens on apparently unremarkable marks or

scribbles made by children which are nonetheless fully meaningful, and contends that there is no linear progression from scribble to writing.

Dyson and Genishi (2009: 86) suggest that writing and drawing are 'graphic means of representing and communicating meaning' and that children are able to move fluently from drawing into writing in their literacy practices. Within their symbolic repertoire, children find a 'niche for print' (Dyson and Genishi, 2009: 83): children's experiences with manipulating symbolic materials in their play and drawing support them in their ability to make meaning through writing and drawing. Dyson (2010a: 162) maintains that drawings are a 'way of writing' for children, a graphic representation of communication in a 'spoken world'. It has been argued by Goodman (1984) that children as young as three years old are able to distinguish between different forms of representation. This view is supported by Lancaster (2003) who suggests that children's understanding about different forms of symbolic representation is a continuous process which begins early in the first year. Binder and Kotsopoulos contend that children engage in 'graphic thought' and this facilitates the use of visual representations to communicate meaning (2011: 341).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) associate western societies with language in the form of alphabetic literacy, while the visual mode as a means of communication tends to be subservient. However, they argue that schools should introduce children to a 'new semiotic order' (2006: 34) as the meaning of the visual is not necessarily available in written form. As an example of this, they cite the way in which science textbooks sometimes use images to explain concepts, and picture books tell stories in the illustrations rather than relying on written text alone. Rowsell (2012) suggests that more meaning can be made if there are more 'pathways' into literacy. She discusses the 'unequal distribution of cultural capital' which affects children who are not able to engage with 'traditional' forms of literacy, and calls for a redistribution of cultural capital by taking a multimodal approach to the teaching of literacy (Rowsell, 2012: 130) so that children can find and use the best possible resources with which to make meaning.

Pahl (1999) contends that the informal and sometimes apparently messy activities with which children engage in the home are deeply thoughtful expressions of meaning. In the nursery setting context, she also finds that children use whatever is to hand to communicate about their world through model-making, drawing and painting. She also calls for a recognition of the social and affective nature of children's meaning making activity, and acknowledges the opportunities which teachers and early years practitioners have in facilitating multimodal meaning-making as part of the children's literacy practices. Boys in particular, were found to embrace model making and three dimensional design in the nursery to develop and tell their stories (Pahl, 1999).

Larson and Marsh (2005: 71) suggest that in nurseries and schools there is a need to recognise the value of providing a range of resources, as well as a range of literacy practices, to encourage children to make decisions and to problem solve as they produce texts in a variety of forms to represent their meanings. Drawing on Dyson, Larson and Marsh (2005) urge educators to enhance children's learning by providing opportunities for children to immerse themselves in a rich range of textual practices. Dyson and Genishi (2009: 86) view both drawing and writing as 'graphic means of representing and communicating meaning'; they note that children are able to move easily between the two modes which make up 'dynamic, interwoven dimensions' of writing.

Dyson (2013: 169) suggests that the basics of literacy can be 're-imagined' if there is a focus on accepting the multimodal images and the 'performative voices' of children as they play and socialise. Children make use of a range of materials so that different modes support and complement each other as they play and engage in their social lives and story-telling. This reconsideration of the ways in which children develop their literacy practices resonates with researchers such as Kress (1997), Pahl (1999; 2007) and Pahl and Rowsell (2012) who have called for a recognition of children's multimodal meaning-making practices.

## **Places and spaces for literacy**

Dyson (2010a: 160) observes children playing and talking in class situations at school, drawing on their 'unofficial social worlds – their childhood cultures'. She suggests that this may be perceived by practitioners as 'unseemly and unlawful communication' as it does not fit comfortably within the expectations of teaching and learning at school. The unofficial spaces which children inhabit in the home and family have little in common with the official writing instruction of school, where literacy as a social practice is too often side-lined by the need to teach the basics of traditional forms of literacy and numeracy (Dyson, 2013). Dyson's reference to the official world of school highlights the notion of ideological differences between accepted literacy practices, where children have to learn what is acceptable both in and out of school. This may result in a perception that 'their own linguistic and semiotic experiences (are) irrelevant to schooling' (2013: 166) particularly where their literacy practices at home do not correspond to those at school. Mavers (2011: 124) suggests that the recognition and acknowledgement of meaning in children's texts, whether in the form of writing, drawing or artefact, is 'framed by relations of power' as interpretations and judgements are made by others. In the official space of the classroom or nursery setting, this may mean that their representations are misunderstood or disregarded as trivial or without meaning. Mavers (2011) further contends that this evaluation of children's meaning-making practices highlights the need to challenge the taken-for-granted practices of official literacy approaches which are often defined by curriculum requirements.

Morrell et al. (2013) view literacy within a socio-cultural frame, where children are required to understand their learning in the formality of the environment of school, yet may not be aware of its relevance to their out-of-school lives. In their studies of youth literacy in urban environments, they argue that children should feel empowered by their involvement in activities that matter to them, and that are meaningful and purposeful to their lives. This resonates with Dyson's proposition that activities for children should be realistic and relevant to their lives. Dyson further proposes that children experience ideological

differences in their official and unofficial worlds in and out of school, and calls for an acknowledgement of the 'symbolic repertoire' which they bring to their official spaces so that they can more easily adjust to the social and organisational demands of school (2013: 116). She suggests that in the 'official geography' of the classroom where children are seated at tables in groups, they are less likely to find that their learning from their unofficial lives with their friends, home and family is valued. While not suggesting that children should avoid learning the basics of literacy such as letter names, Dyson argues that teachers need to aim for 'the official world to learn from the unofficial world' (2013: 163) so that children can make use of the symbolic resources of their everyday lives in their quest for meaning.

'....the basic is not to move from drawing pictures to writing a certain number of sentences. Rather, the basic is to produce texts – deliberately organised constructions of meaning – through the use of symbolic modes appropriate to the circumstance, that is, to the social situation and cultural practice' (Dyson, 2013: 171)

In their reference to an Australian study which focused principally on parents' provision of spaces which were conducive to literacy learning in the home, Rainbird and Rowsell (2011: 219) explored the physical spaces, or 'literacy nooks', within which parents gathered together the resources for children which engage them in literacy activities. Mothers were found to value books as literacy resources, whereas fathers were found to be more likely to value different forms of achieving literacy. The provision of this physical space in the home was found to be reflective of understandings about being a good parent, where both traditional and non-traditional resources could be made available for children's use in shared spaces. Rainbird and Rowsell (2011) note that this study was conducted with middle-class families, and that the provision of providing specific spaces in the home for their children's literacy activities might be very different in working-class communities. Creating spaces in which children can develop their literacy at home within the social context of their family and friends, highlights the need to replicate this development of identity at school, and to recognise the importance of reading and writing being immersed in meanings which reflect children's lived experience (Rogers



and Elias, 2012). Rowsell's assertion that there is an 'unequal distribution of cultural capital' (2012: 130) which affects children in the early years of school, is evident in their difficulties in engaging with traditional forms of literacy. The socio-cultural context of their everyday lives and family, as well as 'literacy nooks' (Rainbird and Rowsell, 2011) in the home, provide them with a variety of modes with which to make meaning, and with opportunities for developing their literacy identities.

Dyson (2013) contends that writing in school is essentially an individual task. This individualistic approach contributes to an understanding that does not recognise their intentions in the official space of the classroom, but focuses rather on their acquisition of the skills and conventions of alphabetic writing. She calls for an acknowledgement in the official spaces of school and classroom, for children's literacy practices in their unofficial spaces of their homes and communities.

### **Literacy on the edges of official spaces**

Much of the literature about young children's literacy development and learning focuses on their time in educational settings, where they find themselves in the structured arrangement and management of the classroom or nursery playroom (for example Gooch and Lambirth, 2011; Mavers 2011; Fisher, 2010; 2011). As Dyson (2013) and Fisher (2011) suggest, going to school requires children to learn about the social organisation of the establishment as well as to make sense of academic and practitioner expectations. Dyson (2003; 2010; 2013) makes reference to the official spaces of the classroom, where children are organised into groups for teaching and learning. The classroom space is one where children find themselves in a social world different to the one of the official spaces beyond the school or nursery setting. A number of studies have taken place in children's homes and out-of-school lives, and is well documented by researchers such as Pahl (2002; 2007), Millard (2006) and Rainbird and Rowsell (2011).

Rainbird and Rowsell's (2011) reference to 'literacy nooks' in the home might suggest spontaneous literacy activity, and although these spaces can to some degree be seen as 'unofficial spaces' (Dyson, 2010) in that they are outside the organisation of the classroom, there is a need to study the spontaneous literacy activities which children devise for themselves in their own, unplanned spaces. The contribution of this thesis is concerned with such incidental activities in which children engage on the edges of these structured spaces which are designated for literacy activity. The data were for the most part gathered from these unofficial spaces, not only in the home, but also on the edges of classroom teaching and learning activities which were planned or structured by the teacher or practitioner. In the case of children's representations of meaning in the home, many of the artefacts were made away from direct adult supervision, generated from the children's own reflections and understandings as they attempted to make sense of their world.

### **Summary and contribution of this thesis**

This chapter has explored and explained the broad concept of literacy inherent in this study. It has examined the ways in which children make meaning, locating this within socio-cultural and cultural-historical theory by drawing on the work of Hedegaard (2012) and Fisher (2011). The politicisation of literacy was examined, principally with reference to Freire's contention that literacy is transformative and provides an opportunity for children to 'name their word and their world' (Freire, 1996). Policy makers and those in power generally advocate the teaching of literacy as a set of skills: reference was made to Mills (2011) in highlighting issues of power. A multiliteracies approach, initiated by the New London Group (2000), calls on multiple ways to represent meaning. Meaning-making is viewed as an active and transformative endeavour in the emphasis placed on issues of design by Kress (2000a), Janks (2010) and Stein (2008). Multimodality draws largely on Kress (1997; 2010), Pahl (1999) and Pahl and Rowsell (2010) in recognition that all texts are multimodal, and reflect the ways in which children negotiate meaning in fully intentional ways. Both drawing and writing are seen as

graphic means of making meaning, where each mode is represented as an essential part of the meaning, rather than as one trying to emulate the meaning of the other. The chapter views literacy as a meaning-making process which demands action within a social and cultural context, and presents an argument for the main contribution of this study in foregrounding the literacy activities of children on the periphery of structured and planned literacy teaching and learning. This focus on the edges of official literacy spaces presents an opportunity to provide a window through which to recognise and analyse the children's voices as they endeavour to make sense of their world. The contribution of this thesis lies in recognising and valuing the ways in which children become literate while engaged in meaning making activities away from the structured teaching spaces of the classroom and the home. This study acknowledges the notion of Rainbird and Rowsell's (2011) 'literacy nooks', and further recognises that children develop their own voices in their literacy endeavours in incidental places and spaces both in the home and the classroom. These spaces are not necessarily those planned for literacy activity, but enable children to devise their own ways of making meaning, using the resources that are to hand' (Kress, 1997: 255).

# Chapter 4

## Research Methodology

### Introduction

Chapter three provided a broad overview of literacy within the context of this study. The emphasis of the study is positioned on the meanings which children devise in their representations; these, together with the contexts within which they are produced, combine to inform the decisions made about the methodological approach and analysis. The study uses a case study research strategy to build up knowledge and understanding about children's literacy activities in context (Robson, 2002), and uses an interpretivist approach to understand and analyse the children's artefacts. These interpretations might seem incomplete and open-ended: understandings and meanings change and evolve as they are revisited by a combination of theory and evidence from the field and empirical data (Denzin, 2002). This chapter explores the nature of the case: I draw on Dyson and Genishi (2005) amongst others in considering the case in the context of home and classroom. It represents a 'natural history' of my journey through the research process (Silverman, 2010: 334) which is ethnographic in nature as it is concerned with 'understanding the subjective world of human experience' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010: 273). The aims and research questions are explained, and the methodological approach is examined.

### Research aims and questions

The aims of this study developed from the broad objective to explore the ways in which children in the nursery, reception and year one classes in a small primary school constructed meanings that were reflective of their own worlds and lives. These aims were to

- scrutinise what is meaning by 'literacy' in the broad sense of children making meaning

- critically analyse the ways in which children are influenced by the study of their drawings, writing and artefacts
- evaluate a range of literacy experiences which encourage children to express their own meanings in their communicative experiences.

The research questions were developed from the aims in order to explore the ways in which the children constructed and attributed meanings to their drawings, writing and artefacts in the 'official and unofficial' events and spaces of their classrooms and at home (Dyson and Genishi, 2005: 5). I draw on Dyson and Genishi (2005) in suggesting that rather than attempting to establish a relationship between different ways of teaching and learning, the aims of this study are to explore the case in terms of the children's artefacts and the meanings which they attribute to them.

The main research questions are informed by Nichols et al. (2011), Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999, 2007) and others in the literature (see chapters 2 and 3) in that they revolve around the physical and social environment as well as the children's activities, exploring how their meanings are constructed in relation to context, resources and their desired meanings. They have been devised with Denzin's discussion about the interpretive process (Denzin, 2002: 351) in mind, in which he calls for research questions to be framed around *how* rather than *why* questions so that the study can examine 'how problematic, turning-point experiences are organized, perceived, constructed, and given meaning'. The research questions are developed from the original aims of the study and reflect the themes emerging from the literature and the data as suggested by

Eisenhardt (2002):

- how are children influenced in the development of their literacy experiences in the nursery and year one classroom and at home?
- how do children construct their own meanings?
- how do a range of resources and contexts influence children in their meaning-making activities?

## **Case study strategy**

The purpose of this study is both explanatory and exploratory in nature. The children's meaning-making activities are explained by the study of their visual artefacts which they produced in their day-to-day activities at school and at home. The study is exploratory as it interprets these activities in order to find out how to encourage children's meaning-making endeavours (Yin, 2009). Yin suggests that this combination of both explanatory and exploratory types is characteristic of the structure of theory-building case studies. The artefacts, together with field notes and conversational interviews with both the children and their parents, enable the nature of the children's literacy activities to be explained and explored in different contexts in order to build theory about how children make their own meanings visible.

Chapters two and three set out the background literature informing the study, with the intention of defining approaches to literacy which serve as a frame within which to identify the theoretical underpinning understandings about children's meaning making endeavours. According to Eisenhardt (2002: 31), one of the strengths in theory building case studies is that the literature and empirical data combine with the 'insight of the researcher' to provide 'freshness in perspective' to a subject that has been studied in the past. Yin (2009: 18) defines the 'critical features' of a case study as .....

an empirical enquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The case study approach is pertinent in this study as the aim was to examine in depth the nature of literacy practices of three to eight year-old children within the context of their everyday lives in the nursery setting, school and home. The 'real-life phenomenon' (Yin, 2009: 18) of meaning-making activities is particularly relevant to this study as the aim was to explore, scrutinise and interpret the ways in which the children made their meanings

visible in order to build theory which would support them in this process. Eisenhardt (2002) suggests that an essential part of a theory building case study is to compare themes emerging from the data with theory drawn from a range of literature. She argues that linking data to theory is an important aspect of building theory which increases validity: in this study the analysis of the data took place alongside the review of the literature. This overlap in the design of the study enabled me as the researcher to develop theory emerging from the data during the research process.

### **The contextual nature of the case**

Denzin (2002) contends that the interpretations should be built on densely contextualised description, in order to meet the criteria for effective interpretive research. Thus the context and nature of the setting and participants are described so that the social worlds of the children are visible and a socio-cultural understanding is foregrounded. This study draws on Dyson and Genishi (2005: 10) who point out that the purpose of an interpretive case study is to find out 'what some phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case'. The 'case' is defined in this study by the contexts of school, nursery class and home, where the interpretations of the children and parents are central, together with that of the teacher, who in this case is in the position of practitioner-researcher. As the practitioner-researcher, I collected data in the form of visual artefacts, interviews with children and their parents, and contextualised these with field notes to explain and develop an understanding of the meanings of the children's spontaneous literacy practices. The 'human experiences' (Dyson and Genishi, 2005: 12) of the educational setting and the home provided an opportunity to understand what was happening, although the decision about the relevant importance of the data was made by me in my researcher role, in attempting to answer the research questions. The decision to focus on the spontaneity of the children's activities was made in response to the aim of the study which emphasises the children's own meanings, rather than those of the adults.

The participants in this study are fifteen children between the ages of three and eight, two of whom are siblings, and are studied in depth. These make up 'mini cases' within the case (Eisenhardt, 2002). The children who were the participants in the study attended the nursery, reception and Key Stage One classes in a small private school in a Cotswold town. The location of the educational setting, and the surrounding community and town, was relatively affluent, and provided opportunities for trips to the theatre, family outings over weekends, as well as holidays both locally and abroad. This was at times reflected in the children's self-chosen activities and can be seen as visible in their artefacts which make up the principal data for this study. Children's interests and meaning-making often revolved around their social lives with family and friends, while playing in their gardens or play-rooms at home.

The nursery class was a playful area where children were encouraged to learn through play. I was able to visit the nursery from time to time, and was the class teacher for a year one class during the first year of data collection. Although resources in the setting were plentiful, once the children left the nursery to join the reception class, they were expected to learn to read and write: the more formal aspects of schooling. In the nursery mark-making implements were freely available, as were paper and bits of materials with which to make models and collage. This was also the case in the reception class, where I was the teacher during the second year of data collection; however, more formalised reading and writing activities began to appear in this class, and became more noticeable in the years one and two classes, where fewer opportunities for play were available for the children. I was the teacher in the year one class during the first year of data collection, and found that the 'official communicative practices' in this and the year two class in particular, allowed fewer opportunities for the children's own meaning-making to occur as there was an expectation to 'teach the basics' (Dyson and Genishi, 2005: 13).

The classrooms in the school were spaces where children were busy with the everyday experiences of their 'official' lives (Dyson, 2010; 2013). By 'widening the angle of the lens' (Dyson and Genishi, 2005: 15) and collecting data from



their homes and family lives it became possible to explore the children's interests and literacy activities in their 'unofficial' lives too. As the collection of data progressed, it emerged that there were spaces within the official classroom environment and teaching situations where some children were making meaning on the edges of the structured adult-led teaching activities. Children who were for any reason not able or willing to join in with whole groups activities would make use of opportunities to develop their own interests on the edges of more formal, official activity. This construct of 'literacy on the edge' emerged from the data, reflecting Eisenhardt's contention that theory can be generated from within the case study, supported by anecdotal data to contextualise and interpret meaning (Eisenhardt, 2002).

The children's activities at home were for the most part contextualised by them, and by their parents, who brought artefacts in to the school as contributions to the data collection, and provided contextual information to accompany them. With some parents and children choosing to engage in schooled activities at home where they might practise the basics of literacy, it became apparent that some spaces in the home could be considered as either official or unofficial contexts. In addition to the concept of literacy nooks in the home, explored by Rainbird and Rowsell (2011) to describe the physical spaces which are set aside for children to engage with literacy activities and learning, the children in the study demonstrated that they were at times opportunistic in the way that they chose to make meaning. Some artefacts in the home were made on the periphery or edges of intended literacy nooks as part of their play and every-day activity, in much the same way as those made in the perceived formal environment of classrooms and school. Heath and Street (2008: 73) argue that there can be an 'ethnocentric bias' in interpreting the meaning of 'formal/informal'. The children's homes and family environments might be considered as informal or unofficial (Dyson, 2010; 2013) spaces due to researcher perceptions of the culture of the home; however, the data show that the children occasionally engaged in 'schooled' literacies at home either on their own, or with the encouragement or support of their parents.

## **Ethnography**

Siraj-Blatchford (2010: 272) defines ethnography as 'any study that aims to describe some aspect of the socio-cultural understandings and practices of a group' and relates this to endeavouring to develop deep understandings about a phenomenon in context. Robson (2002: 188) calls for the ethnographer to 'gain an insider's perspective', while Heath and Street (2008: 45) regard ethnography as 'inherently interpretive, subjective and partial'. As teacher in the school at the time of data collection working directly with the participants at least some of the time, it seemed appropriate to view this research as an ethnographic study as I was able to study their meaning making activities in everyday contexts. Siraj-Blatchford suggests that ethnographic studies are usually carried out as case studies which are centred on a particular group in a particular context. Heath and Street (2008: 2) describe the ethnographer as depending on opportunities for 'observing, comparing, reflecting, assessing and coming to feel' aspects of the case. As a teacher-researcher this could be a strength in enabling deep and detailed observation to take place, as well as challenging due to close involvement with the children and the possibility of missing details that might seem obvious and as a result, be taken for granted. Heath and Street (2008: 14) consider the ethnographer as working 'in the shadow of earlier representations of similar groups or situations'.

This study is located in the socio-cultural context of a particular school environment where the meanings made by a particular group of children are studied in order to contribute to an understanding of their literacy practices. Heath and Street (2008) contend that institutions identify with a certain culture: in a school environment where learning the basics of language and literacy might be regarded as necessary for competence, individual status and power, there is a need to recognise the multimodal nature of literacy within the context of this study.

## **The practitioner-researcher as participant observer**

The ethnographic approach is reflected in my role as a practitioner-researcher at the time when the data was gathered over a two-year period in a Reception and Year 1 class. Everyday teaching responsibilities in a busy classroom were combined with research and data gathering. Robson (2002) recognises that lack of time is a challenge for the practitioner-researcher, and concedes that the task of gathering data and carrying out research while meeting the requirements of normal work responsibilities is difficult. However, the strengths of carrying out this study as a practitioner-researcher include being 'on the spot' (Robson, 2002: 535) as I was able to gather the children's spontaneously produced artefacts during their day-to-day activities, and to contextualise them more easily than if I been visiting the school from time to time as an outside researcher.

As a practitioner-researcher, opportunities were available which would have been difficult to capture as an outsider. Given that the main research interest was embedded in the meanings which the children gave to their representations, my position as a practitioner-researcher added authenticity to the study. I was able to make use of the 'insider opportunities' (Robson, 2002: 535) as their teacher to record and observe their meaning making practices which might otherwise have been missed. One day-to-day challenge as a practitioner-researcher was that I needed to attend to my responsibility as a class teacher while finding time and opportunities to seek out the data that I needed for the study (Robson, 2002). Another difficulty for the practitioner-researcher role is described by Eisenhardt (2002) who argues that the richness of data is improved by multiple researchers as ideas and interpretations can be discussed and analysed in dialogue and reflection. A practitioner of participant-observer working alone is unable to benefit from different researchers 'combing' different data sets to discuss differences and similarities (Eisenhardt, 2002: 19).

A valuable advantage was that I was on hand to respond to the children's spontaneous activities and to engage them and their parents in conversations in the here and now, drawing on their 'lived experience' (Fleer, 2006: 132) which is represented in their artefacts at school and at home. This provided me as the researcher with a role as participant observer, which according to Robson (2002) is considered an essential method of data collection in the ethnographic approach. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is not possible to be a 'real participant' as the ethnographer is constantly endeavouring to interpret the experiences and meanings of the case, and cannot be certain that their interpretations truly reflect the intentions of the participants (Heath *et al.*, 2008: 31).

### **Locating this study: rationale for the research paradigm**

The study is located firmly within an interpretive paradigm, as it 'seeks to explain how people make sense of their ....social world (Hughes, 2002: 41). Denzin (2002: 354) posits that interpretive research is framed by both the researcher and the participants, placing them 'at the centre of the research process'. This study takes this as a central theme, as it is the researcher's interpretation of the children's meaning-making activities which is central to the aims of the research. These interpretations are reliant on the researcher's experience and knowledge of the field, and although it is the children's meanings which are central to the study, the researcher's subjective knowledge and interpretation interacts with these meanings (Denzin: 2002). This places a responsibility on the researcher to take account of the meanings and interpretations of the participants themselves, and influenced my approach in collecting data. I canvassed the views of the children and their parents, and encouraged them to edit their own contributions where possible (this is explained in further detail where the methods are problematized in Chapter 5). Interpretation itself is an essential process in order to draw meaning from the research process, and the goal is to develop understandings which are shared by the participants and the researcher.

The approach taken in this research is one which is immersed in the meanings which the children make in the context of their homes and the school or nursery. Dahlberg et al (2001: 25) acknowledge that there is a need to value our traditions and cultures in context: 'we are never contextless, we are never traditionless'. This view resonates with Fler's reference to cultural historical theory (2006; 2007) which values the individual's history through their lived experience. This study seeks to respond to the children's meanings which are seen as constantly changing and developing within the contexts of their cultural and social lives. The approach taken is one of uncertainty, where meanings are negotiated and fluid in the sense that the children explore open-ended possibilities in their literacy and meaning-making practices. Traditions and assumptions of the researcher are informed by their experiences and are reflected in their view of the world, as seen through a lens (K. Dahlberg *et al.*, 2001). They relate the 'world view' or paradigm to the researcher's standpoint which is informed by their own theoretical understandings and knowledge gained through his or her experience in particular contexts; however, they maintain that it is not possible to 'mix paradigms.....we must take a position' (K. Dahlberg *et al.*, 2001: 40).

G. Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 63) contend that postmodernism suggests a 'recognition of multiple perspectives and a discourse which encourages dialogue and reflection'. In contrast to K. Dahlberg *et al* (2001), Moss (2008) elsewhere proposes that, rather than accepting a particular paradigm, there should be a willingness to engage in a shared dialogue, where different paradigms can work together in a dialogic and democratic way which is resistant to a single dominant discourse. A modernist perspective of foregrounding technical skills based and developmentally appropriate practice can be replaced by complexity and multiple perspectives. Taking a postmodern approach, Janzen (2008) questions why much research is concerned with practice rather than with children, and argues that children should be seen as participants rather than objects of research. She argues that research is concerned predominantly with what children will become, rather than what they are. Janzen (2008) further suggests that children can engage with research on their own terms, rather than being directed by the

researcher, so that they are able to participate and contribute from a position of power. The approach taken by Moss (2008) is one of bringing ideas from different perspectives together, so that different paradigms can work together in dialogue, without one dominating the other. Moss (2008: 14) argues for the recognition of a range of approaches and ways and suggests that there are no clear answers: rather an openness to 'explore, discuss and reflect'. This resonates with the approach I have taken in this study.

The 'natural history' approach as advocated by Silverman (2010: 335) facilitated the use of field notes which informed the contextual nature of the children's meaning-making endeavours. The personal approach to the collection of data, which is inevitably a part of the role of the practitioner-researcher, allows opportunities for discussion of the data in context, and recognises that the researcher's voice is an important part of the data and its interpretation (Holliday, 2007). Clark and Ivanič (1997) and Holliday (2007) suggest that, from an ethical point of view, a personal approach enables the researcher to take responsibility for the research as their own role and decisions can be made clear. Holliday (2007) furthermore contends that a postmodern approach positions the researcher as an agent in their research, and that the use of the first person in reporting and writing up research allows for a more transparent and participatory voice. This is confirmed by Wolcott (2009) and Guba and Lincoln (2002) who call for an explicit acceptance of the subjectivity of the researcher.

A recognition of the researcher's agency calls into question the researcher as the 'objective knower' (Janzen, 2008: 288) and acknowledges the child as a co-constructor of knowledge within this study. Janzen (2008) maintains that a postmodern approach positions the child as an active research partner, who is involved in data collection and is a subject rather than an object of research. Dahlberg et al (2001: 33) suggest that a paradigm can be seen as 'analogous to an iceberg: only the top is seen; the largest portion is hidden and difficult to discern'. The data in the form of the children's artefacts can be viewed in this way: what is visible on the surface does not necessarily reflect its intended meaning as these are affected by the context within which the artefact is

produced and the child's intention, as well as the child's and researcher's own culture and past traditions. The presence of the practitioner-researcher allowed for consistent daily communication with the children about their views about what to include in the research project: the children demonstrated an understanding of the nature of the research by contributing artefacts during the school day, as well as bringing to school what they had made at home. They made their own decisions about whether to keep their artefacts for private use or to allow me as the researcher to scan them for safe keeping and data analysis before returning them.

In building theory from the case (Eisenhardt, 2002) themes emerge from the data during the research process. Dyson and Genishi (2005: 111) suggest that analysis of the data does not result in 'a trail of singular truths, nor of overly neat stories'. Although the data needs to be carefully organised and analysed in a systematic way, Denzin (2002: 363) contends that all interpretations are 'unfinished, provisional and incomplete' as the researcher works in a cyclical way to build on prior interpretations and understandings of the phenomenon. This resonates with my approach to this study, which takes a postmodern stance in valuing the changing, open-ended nature of interpretations of the children's meanings.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the methodological approach of this study. The chapter began by re-stating the aims of the research, and the research questions were explained. An ethnographic case study methodology was explored within the context of the study, drawing principally on Dyson and Genishi (2005), Eisenhardt (2002) and Heath and Street (2008) to provide an underlying rationale. This chapter explained my role as a practitioner-researcher and participant-observer at the time of data collection. The study uses an ethnographic case study methodology and explores the challenges as well the 'insider opportunities' which I, as the practitioner researcher, encountered in gathering the data. The study is located methodologically by acknowledging the importance of context, and is informed by Fler (2006:

132) in highlighting the child's 'lived experience'. Drawing on Dahlberg *et al* (2007) and Janzen (2008), a postmodern approach is taken in recognising the agency of the researcher and the participants in the research. Chapter 5 discusses the methods used and interrogates the ethical considerations taken in the study.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Research methods and procedure**

#### **Introduction**

The children's meaning-making representations are multimodal in character, and images of these make up the principal data for analysis. Following Kress (1997), Pahl (1999) and Pahl and Rowsell (2010) these representations are referred to as artefacts. This chapter explores both the nature of the artefacts and the rationale for naming them in this way, and examines the ways in which they were categorised for analysis. I discuss the research context, the sampling strategy and the participants and the methods used. Ethics are explored, not only in terms of informed consent, but also in terms of the responsibility of the researcher and other adults involved in interpreting the children's meanings.

#### **The research context**

Data were gathered at the school where I was teaching, a privately owned Primary School in Gloucestershire with an on-site Nursery for just under two hundred children aged three to eleven years. The Nursery was located in the garden level of the building, while the primary classes were on the ground and upper levels. The children and parents who participated in this study attended the Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 classes of the school. The parents came into the school on a daily basis, and took a deep interest in their children's progress and experiences during the school day.

The children were encouraged to find their own voice in a context which had traditionally been dominated by curriculum requirements and adult-led activities, to find a way to say what they mean and to 'name their word and their world' (Freire, 1996). The starting point for this study was a perceived need to provide an environment within which the children could devise ways

to make meaning in their own way, and develop their own forms of expression and representations. Government policy and curricula for early years had in recent years become ever more prescriptive in its advice to teachers and parents about recommended practice in teaching literacy to young children, for example through the curriculum guidance and direct advice about teaching (for example in Clark, 2006; Styles and Wyse, 2007; Moss, 2007).

In the Primary School where the study is located, my perception as a member of staff was that teachers and parents held clearly articulated assumptions about the expectations that children should be ready for learning, and that their future might be secured if they achieved certain goals and targets. The head teacher, teachers and parents in the school as well as in the Nursery appeared to support the expectation that children should be prepared for the next steps in their education. Children's perceived social capital is enhanced by the belief that academic competence will secure future employment: 'good jobs' with 'good salaries' (Grenfell and James, 1998: 21). In my methodological approach I endeavour to go beyond the acquisition of skills, or what Moss (2007) refers to as technical practice, and to find the children's voices in determining how they communicate what they mean, think and feel.

### **Sampling strategy**

Some children made use of every opportunity to engage in mark making, role play and model-making: these were the children who were asked to become the informants in this study. They were selected using a 'theoretical sampling' approach as I wished to 'replicate or extend the emergent theory' (Eisenhardt, 2002: 13) rather than provide a statistical analysis from the data (Robson, 2002). Using this approach, I endeavoured to ensure that the children taking part were those who were likely to represent their thoughts in a symbolic way so that the data would be relevant to the aims of the study. Eisenhardt (2002) suggests that a theoretical sampling approach selects the participants for theoretical reasons. With reference to the key texts of Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999) which informed the theoretical framework from the very beginning of

the study, it was considered necessary to select the children who used a multimodal approach to making meaning.

Frequently, the children selected for the sample would take every opportunity, to use available resources to make models, drawings, cut-outs and collages when not engaged in adult-directed teaching and learning activities. I had worked closely with the children in my role as their teacher, and as a practitioner-researcher was therefore able to make the judgement that they would be likely to engage in the symbolic representation of their thinking, and to use the resources available to make meaning.

### **Research participants: the children**

Fifteen children, eight girls and seven boys, aged between three and eight years participated in this study. Two of the children, a boy and a girl who were siblings, became the principal contributors to the collection of artefacts. Consequently there are two strands to the sample studied: case studies of twelve individual children in addition to the two children who were studied more intensively. At the beginning of the research these two children were three and six years old respectively: they and their mother contributed a large number of artefacts which they produced at home.

### **The position of the children: children as co-researchers**

Working within a postmodern perspective which foregrounds an ethical approach where the child is 'a knower' and a co-researcher (Janzen, 2008: 292), it was necessary to ensure that all who were affected by and involved in the research were fully informed from the very beginning (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007). The children were informed about the study verbally, and were reminded and asked every time their artefacts were considered for inclusion in the data collection if they were willing to contribute their work. Frequently they took the initiative by saying 'you can scan this for your project', or by explaining that their work was private and only for their parent, carer or other close family or friends, and could therefore not be used for the research study.

Alderson (2008) suggests that children can be viewed as researchers in everyday school life, as they show curiosity in things that interest them. Their roles as researchers are often overlooked as their motivation to find out about their world may be barely visible and little valued in their daily play activities. Alderson (2008: 285) calls for a recognition of the 'detailed data' evident in children's songs, drawings or maps. This could, for example, be seen in the maps drawn by the children in this study as they recorded events, and devised ways to explore direction, perspective and meaning (see for example figures 24, 25 and 26). The visual data aimed to show the children's own meanings, although adult interpretation remained a challenge in terms of ensuring that the children were contributing artefacts in order to be active participants in the study, rather than to please the adult (their parents or the researcher). This challenge was more evident in the interviews which were generally initiated by the adult. The children were encouraged to revise and revisit their own contributions to the interviews, where they were shown how to turn off the tape recorder and hand-held microphone if they changed their minds about taking part. Some liked to try this, to see how it worked before participating, and also chose to revise the content of their transcribed conversational interviews when I read the transcriptions back to them. This attempt to have some control over the procedure can also be seen in their willingness to negotiate which of their images should be included in the data. For example, Trudie revised my transcription of the text in her book of Spooky Fun (Appendix 3) where I had misinterpreted her spoken text.

Fleer (2008) suggest that the child's perspective is most visible when taken from both their home experiences and those of the institution. A cultural-historical approach to research takes account of children's positions in their contexts, in this case at home and at school. Rather than considering their past experiences, it explicitly requires the researcher to acknowledge the child's developing perspectives in their different environments, using a 'wholeness approach' that goes 'beyond the individual' (Fleer, 2008: 103). Studying children's meaning-making activities in both the home and family as well as in the school and nursery setting thus helps to capture the child's

perspective across different cultural environments of the home and educational institution.

### **The adult participants**

As I intended to gather data from their representations at home as well as at school, it was necessary that the sample should include children whose parents were interested, able and willing to provide examples in the form of artefacts of their children's activities at home. I wrote to the parents of the children explaining the scope of the study and, in addition to this, spoke to them regularly in my day to day interactions with them. In the event, many parents brought examples of their children's literacy activities made at home for inclusion with the collection of data. The ways in which the parents decided on the relevance of their children's artefacts reflected their willingness to view themselves as participants in the research and as co-researchers. Guba and Lincoln (2002: 207) suggest that a case study approach is 'a product of the interaction between the respondents, site and researcher...(and is) ...rooted in the person, character, experience, context, and philosophy of the constructor'. The day to day reciprocal interactions between the parents, children and the practitioner-researcher served to provide a voice for all the participants, and ensured that all were fully informed and able to contribute to the data collection.

I carried out conversational interviews with one parent of each of the children, and engaged them informally in dialogue about their children's literacy experiences at home and at school, often when they brought their children to school and collected them at the end of the day. It was usually the mothers who came to the school, and who were available for interview; however, one father was interviewed and contributed to the collection of data. The children and families were predominantly from affluent socio-economic backgrounds and professional, highly educated families. Parents had high aspirations for their children, believing that a good education would ensure their future both personally and in the workplace.

## **Methods: the artefacts**

The principal method for gathering data for the study consists of scanned visual images of the artefacts made by children in the nursery setting, at school and at home and were collected over the two-year period. I gathered children's artefacts alongside my work with the children, and wrote notes to contextualise them and recorded the meanings that the children gave them at the time. The artefacts were then scanned onto my computer before being returned to the children or to the parents.

## **Rationale**

I use the term 'artefacts' to describe the visual means by which children devised ways to express their thoughts and feelings. This led me to examine the resources and methods that they used spontaneously both in their play and in their adult directed activities at home, in the nursery setting and at school. The resources which were readily accessible to the children enabled them to express themselves in ways that led them to 'construct elaborate, complex representations of (their) world' (Kress, 1997: 33). Occasionally, the children's artefacts were represented by photographs of their role play where they had used furniture, construction toys and other, often surprising, objects to represent their stories, thoughts or actions. The data show that the children's chosen methods of representation ranged from drawing, cutting and collage to building and role play with found objects such as sticks, stones, feathers, leaves and boxes.

The artefacts provided visual evidence of children's drawing and writing, as well as a record of any other resources which they used in their meaning-making activities. A visual record was considered necessary for this study, as the intention was to find out how the children made use of materials in their activities in order to respond to the research aims and questions. The contention by Kress (1997) that children use the resources that are to hand to construct meaning was a strong influence in selecting a method that would

make this visible. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasise that rather than merely serving as illustrations, images carry meaning: meanings that are made visually are not necessarily possible to replicate in written form.

The artefacts which make up the visual data for this study, where children have represented their own meanings and narratives in a symbolic way, have resulted in what at times appears to be an untidy and complex collection of collage, cut-outs, drawings, writing and play writing. It may seem problematic and uncomfortable to be receptive to the multiple interpretations and expressions of the children's representations which reflect the changing and constantly varying nature of the child's voice, creativity and meanings in different contexts (Pahl, 1999; 2007). However disorganised and chaotic the children's activities may appear to have been on the surface at home and in the classroom, there was a clear order and focus about the intentions and meanings within which the children were engaged as they worked and played. My role as practitioner-researcher facilitated the use of classroom observations and familiarity with the children's representational activities to guide and inform me in categorising, sorting and storing their artefacts. A layering of methods and contexts for the children's representations of meaning formed a systematic and structured basis for data analysis.

The process of sorting the data into categories was based on the methods and resources used by the children, and the contexts within which they were produced. By recording the methods used by the children it would become clear which resources they were accessing and how they were making use of them to make meaning. The accessibility of resources is an important factor in encouraging children to represent their thinking (Kress, 1997); however, methods and resources are not in themselves likely to provide an understanding of what children are endeavouring to say unless accompanied by contextual information (Bell, 2001). Jewitt (2007) argues that there is a need to move 'beyond language' in the classroom by acknowledging multimodal texts and context. This can be equally relevant to the Early Years setting and home, and was a key consideration in my approach. Decisions about which categories to use were made as the artefacts were sorted and

grouped, choosing the categories with the help of field notes, interviews and observations from the Nursery and School, and those of the children's parents at home.

### **Analytical methodology of the visual data**

A matrix was developed to sort and categorise the artefacts and to provide a record of the methods used by the children to produce their artefacts. The materials used by children to represent their thinking give an insight into the choices they made as they selected from the 'resources to hand' (Kress, 1997). Kress refers to the materiality of modes that are used in communication: materials are selected in cultural and social ways in order to make meaning as in, for example, the gestures and signs that are used in sign language (Kress, 2009: 57). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Kress (2009) view multimodality through a social semiotic lens, drawing on the culture within which the child is positioned to select the materials needed to make meaning in context. Children selected the materials from the available resources to make meaning in the most appropriate way at the time, in particular circumstances. The ways in which the children made meaning were clearly affected by the resources available at the time in the home and in school, and in many ways their choices were opportunistic in the sense that they used the resources that were close to hand at the time of their intention to represent their thinking.

In providing image, writing and layout, amongst others, as examples of modes used in representation and communication of meaning, Kress (2009) suggests that there is a need to explore which semiotic resources make up a mode. In order to reflect the social and cultural contexts with which the artefacts were made, they were sorted into two separate categories to represent the mode within the context of this study. As a framework within which to analyse and sort the artefacts, and to reflect what Kress (2009: 56) refers to as the 'resources of the mode', the methods used by the children to make meaning are here referred to as the 'materiality of mode'. The artefacts



are also categorised according to context: context is socially and culturally defined so that materiality and context make up the mode.

Initially the visual data were sorted using a content analysis approach in order to present them reliably before analysing them in more detail later (Bell, 2001). Using Bell's definitions of variables and values, the modes used by the children can be seen as 'values', with each one fixed and clearly defined, although many artefacts employed more than one mode. For the purpose of this study, I viewed the contextual base for each artefact as a 'variable', with the child's intention representing reality rather than the physical reality as seen by the researcher. In this way the fact that the child might, for example, be outdoors is not as relevant as the child's engagement with personal experiences, stories or narratives. Information about the physical environment would appear in the field notes accompanying each artefact.

### **Categories used for sorting the materiality of mode**

1. Drawing: observations and contextual notes of the children producing their artefacts have shown that much drawing takes place spontaneously during play as a way of communicating or representing the child's ideas and thoughts. Yet there is an expectation that drawing leads to early writing, and that it is a stepping stone towards literacy (Anning and Ring, 2004) and so this expectation has the effect of devaluing drawing as a literacy practice in its own right.
2. Painting: used spontaneously often in conjunction with collage. (It was less practical to collect examples of paintings due to their large size.)
3. Collage: at home and in some classrooms at school the children had free access to glue, scissors, card and bits of paper, fabric and other found objects.
4. Models: the children used scissors, sticky tape and boxes to produce objects in their play. Sometimes models took the form of constructions or arrangements of objects, and these are occasionally represented by photographs.

5. Cut-outs: where children had access to scissors, they made much use of cut-outs, often with drawing.
6. Puppets: where the children had access to appropriate resources they made puppets, often as part of their role play.
7. Maps: these were produced often at home, and sometimes at school for various purposes. Barrs (1988) proposes that maps have an explanatory function which goes beyond pictures in reinventing creative and more formalised ways of representation. Children use maps as 'cultural tools' across official and unofficial sites of school and home (Dyson, 2003: 178).
8. Writing: this includes both the formal writing of the classroom and home as well as the children's spontaneous attempts, and what I have chosen to call 'play writing', a direct translation of the Danish 'legeskrift'. In her discussions about the development of the Storyride Project (Broström, 2002), Georg (1999) explains how the practitioners in the project recorded both the children's verbal stories as well as their own written attempts at writing stories which were represented by patterns and letters or written on computer. For the purposes of my study, I interpret the children's scribbles and their *intention* to write as 'play writing' in preference to the widely used English term 'emergent writing', as this seems to suggest that the child's written attempt is a forerunner of writing rather than a valid representation of the child's intended meaning.
9. Books: many of the children's artefacts were presented in the form of books: writing or drawings either stapled together roughly or carefully bound at school or at home.
10. Role play: children at play, not necessarily producing an end result. At first it was difficult to decide whether this was a materiality of mode or a contextual base for representing thought. Children used role play to extend and develop their thinking, often combining this play with play writing, drawings, cut-outs and puppets which led me to view this as the materiality of mode. The children frequently developed complex narratives in their role play, and at times these were accompanied by artefacts of various kinds.

## **Categories used for sorting the contextual base for representation**

The contexts within which the visual data were created are seen as important to the overall meaning of the children's artefacts, reflecting both the social and cultural nature of communication.

- A. Feelings and relationships: children often produced things for the people who were special to them: their friends and their families. Some children used the artefacts they had produced to draw their friends into their play at school or at home.
- B. Personal experiences: these included children's narratives that they represented in a multi-modal way, writing or play writing on their own initiative as well as at the request of their teacher or another adult.
- C. Stories: make-believe stories as well as those based on traditional stories, fairy tales and popular culture. Sometimes stories were told as part of their play, accompanied by artefacts of various kinds, usually drawings, puppets, cut-outs, writing or play writing.
- D. Message and signs: the children wrote messages to each other and to their families, particularly at home and in the Reception classroom. They put up signs and instructions, sometimes addressed to imaginary characters or even at one time to the classroom ducklings, possibly modelling their behaviour on their experiences with environmental print and reflecting their feelings about the importance they attached to their intended audiences for these messages.
- E. Knowledge and understanding: this term was used to include critical thinking and problem solving. At times, the artefacts demonstrated the children's concerns with ethical issues and social justice (Vasquez, 2004). In some cases the children represented events which they had experienced, ostensibly so that they might practice a skill, find out how something worked or invent something new. This very often involved problem solving and complex exploration of experiences.
- F. Other: undecided about context, possibly deciding on a different context during the process of sorting or requiring a more explicit description.

The relationship between the two broad categories of materiality of mode and context appear interrelated and are not easily separated; however, these categories help to give the artefacts the descriptive qualities needed on which to base further analysis (Table 1 below). These were then supplemented by further categories on the final spreadsheet, the matrix of artefacts (Appendix 10), to give the child's age, whether the artefact was produced at home or at school, a rating based on my judgement of the relevance of the artefact to this study (on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being perceived as the most useful), and other additional information. This last column helped to contextualise the artefacts at a glance, and to serve as a reminder of particular features.

		Contextual base					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
Materiality of mode		Feelings & relationships	Personal experiences	Stories	Messages & signs	Knowledge and understanding including critical thinking & problem	Other
1	<b>Drawing</b>						
2	<b>Painting</b>						
3	<b>Collage</b>						
4	<b>Models</b>						
5	<b>Cut-outs</b>						
6	<b>Puppets</b>						
7	<b>Maps</b>						
8	<b>Writing (including play writing)</b>						
9	<b>Books</b>						
10	<b>Role play</b>						

*Table 1: This working model was used when sorting the artefacts. Details of each artefact were then recorded onto an excel spreadsheet in order to facilitate analysis (Appendix 10).*

The initial intention was to code all the categories using the letters and numbers, but with such a large number of artefacts it became increasingly confusing as I worked through them. There seemed little point in coding in this way unless it made sorting and retrieving the data more efficient, and in some cases it might only serve to complicate matters further (Dey, 1993). In response to feedback from colleagues at a research seminar, the decision

was made to record the identifying details of the artefacts in columns using an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix 10). I continued to use the matrix above to refer to as I sorted each artefact into categories, and this proved to be a convenient and useful way to visualise the combinations of modes and contexts within which the children had worked.

Soon after inputting the information about the artefacts onto the spreadsheet, I found that using the full names of the files and categories enabled me to make adjustments to my classification decisions as I worked. This made using full names simpler and easier to read, without having to refer to a list of codes as I worked. Copying names and words after they had been typed in once was quick and easy. Once all the data had been entered onto the spreadsheet, a hyperlink was inserted into each of the files so that individual artefacts could be found with a click of the mouse. Field notes contextualised the children's meaning making activities.

### **Field notes**

Field notes accompanied each artefact in order to provide contextual information and background, and informal day-to-day notes were kept in a teaching journal. The visual data that was collected from the children's home activities were described by the children themselves or in some case by their parents. These descriptions contributed to the field notes in order to contextualise the artefacts and to give them meaning (see appendix 9)

### **The interviews: rationale**

The visual images are supported by two additional methods of data collection in the form of informal interviews in the form of conversations with the children and their parents, and field notes. The interviews with the children were carried out in their classrooms, with the aim of eliciting their views on writing and making meaning. The intention to carry out interviews with the children's parents was to gain an understanding about the ways in which the children

made meaning at home, with a particular interest in the resources and spaces for literacy activities.

### **Interview procedure**

The interviews were carried out in a conversational style (Dyson and Genishi, 2005; Einarsdóttir, 2007). I began by asking a number of broad questions and then gave the children time to respond and encouraged them to talk freely (see example in appendix 2). Robson (2002: 278) defines this approach as consisting of semi-structured interviews, which begin with a list of 'key questions', allowing time for answers to include extended responses. When interviewing the children, it was challenging at first not to ask leading questions, as the long silences seem to invite further interviewer contributions.

Some of the children seemed puzzled by the key questions, and appeared to think long and hard about what to say in spite of my reassurances. As a result of their hesitation, I engaged them in conversation to encourage and help them along; however, they sometimes answered 'yes' or 'no' without elaborating. Folque (2010) maintains that listening to children should be concerned with engaging them in dialogue in context, rather than endeavouring to find out what they know. She suggests that there should be a reciprocal relationship between the child and the researcher, where the children can express themselves interactively in familiar contexts. The children at first appeared to feel a little overwhelmed by the questions in spite of the fact that, in my position as practitioner-researcher and either their present or previous class teacher, they knew me well. However, some of the children had moved to a new class where their interviews took place, and they may have found this difficult as they were still learning about the expectations and ground rules of their new group and teacher. While the adults who were interviewed may have regarded the process as an informative and interesting part of the research in which they saw themselves as active participants, the children may not necessarily have regarded themselves in this way.

With a cultural-historical approach, Hviid (2008) finds that children may not view themselves as partners in research as they lack the knowledge and experience to make sense of the situation. As the children became more involved with the focus of the research, the interviews became more interactive and dialogic. In time, the children nevertheless provided some unexpected and rich information and understandings in the interviews. They were very enthusiastic throughout about participating, and several children not involved in the study, asked to be interviewed.

The key questions the children were asked evolved from the research aims and objectives: learning about the children's views on literacy, and in particular writing, and finding out about the ways in which they might be encouraged to express themselves and to represent or show their thinking. Einarsdóttir (2007) contends that it is important to ask the children for their opinions if we are serious about listening to what they have to say, and about respecting their voices and their rights, as well as their competence. Childhood can be seen as a distinct experience rather than a period of immature adulthood (Matthews and Limb, 1999; Brooker, 2001) and it is therefore relevant to elicit children's views. Following the advice of Brooker, the list of questions in the interview schedule were used loosely, as a guide only. In this way the intention was to encourage the children to talk freely while expressing their own ideas, rather than trying to please me or providing me with the explanations they might think I wanted (Appendix 7).

The interviews were tape recorded so that these could then be played back to the children who could then decide whether this was a true reflection of their thinking and, if necessary, suggest any changes. This was done in the Storyride Project where children were asked if they were happy with the way the adults had transcribed their stories (Broström, 1999). The children were encouraged to suggest any changes they wanted, also changing their stories if they so wished. Drawing on the methodology of the Storyride Project, I wanted to make it clear to the children that they had control over the information they were providing. Several children requested that their conversations be changed when the transcripts were read back to them on



the day following their interviews, with the result that second transcripts were made for these children to incorporate their views.

Tape recordings of the children's explanations of their meaning-making in the Reception classroom proved to be difficult as background noise made it impossible to hear what the children were saying. Space was limited and this was an on-going challenge to the children, as well as to classroom management when both teaching and data collection were in progress. The turning point came with the introduction of a microphone for the children to hold as they spoke, making their voices easier to hear when played back. The microphone also enabled them to choose whether or not they wanted their words recorded, as they could turn away at will, and put the microphone down on the table if they wanted to stop the recording. They were shown how to turn the tape recorder off when they had had enough, and this they did on several occasions. The tape recording of conversational interviews with the older children in the Years 1 and 2 classes was successful in that the children were excited and interested in taking part. Using a microphone for the children to hold seemed to focus more clearly on their voice, and they appeared to enjoy the control this gave them.

Seven year-old Ellen and her five year old younger brother Joseph, the two principal participants, were interviewed together as it was felt that they might encourage each other and feel more secure with the interview situation. Their ideas and conversation seemed natural and relaxed during the interview. However, on listening to the tape afterwards Joseph appeared to dominate the conversation, with Ellen taking more time to think about and consider her answers. In one way their shared interview appeared to help the conversation to flow more easily; on the other hand Ellen may have felt rushed by Joseph's more hurried responses.

Parents were interviewed informally about their children's literacy practices at home (Appendix 8). These adult interviews were informal and conversational in style. Usually, the mothers of the children were available at the end of the school day for conversational interview: one father and fourteen mothers were

interviewed. As the majority expressed a preference for not using a tape recorder, the conversations were written up during the interview and were word processed immediately afterwards. Using an ethical rationale for positioning the parents in a similar way to the children as active research participants (Janzen, 2008), the resulting transcripts were emailed to the parents who were asked if they wished to change or add anything. Many of the resulting changes were minor; however, one mother, Sue, provided much additional information about her children's meaning-making at home (Appendix 1).

### **Limitations of the research methods**

In addition to the methods of visual artefacts, interviews and field notes, I carried out a number of structured observations based on the Child Involvement Scale in Pascal's Effective Early Learning Programme (Pascal, 1996) in order to study the children's engagement with their meaning-making practices. These structured observations were abandoned over time as it became impractical to carry them out in the busy classroom environment without compromising the teaching activities and day-to-day responsibilities in the classroom. This difficulty of balancing the responsibilities of work and research is one of the challenges foregrounded by Robson (2002) in his analysis of the role of the practitioner-researcher.

#### The visual data

The collection of artefacts were limited by size and whether they were two or three-dimensional. Large paintings were difficult to scan and to store, with the result that the visual data was made up of predominantly small images and cut-outs, predominantly under A4 in size. The large number of artefacts collected helped to provide enough examples for the data to provide opportunities for analysis; one of the difficulties was that the collection became very large, which made it difficult to organise. It was necessary to be selective to avoid losing sight of the aims of the study: although the artefacts were stored in computer files under the names of the participants, a further

challenge was to find a way of sorting them into categories that made it possible to retrieve them when needed. The relative importance of different artefacts emerged over time as the study progressed (Holliday, 2007), and this informed the analysis of the visual data.

In the busy environment of the school and nursery, the artefacts collected were predominantly two dimensional and this could be seen as a limiting factor. However, from time to time the parents contributed photographs of artefacts in the form of favourite toys, models and arrangements of furniture which were constructed at home: a number of such photographs were also taken in the nursery and school setting. This made it possible to include images of models and play situations which portrayed three dimensional objects. An outside researcher might have been more successful in gathering artefacts from a wider selection of modes without the challenges of the practitioner-researcher role.

#### The field notes

Field notes were brief due to time pressures of day-to-day life in the school; in order to address this they were written up at the end of the day to keep the information as authentic as possible. The aim of the field notes was partly to contextualise the children's constructions of meaning, and also to provide an interpretation of these constructions which would reflect the children's true intentions. This concern for the interpretations of children's constructions of meanings is an ethical issue which requires the adult researcher's ability to take the children's voices seriously. The issue of the ethics of interpretation is discussed later in this chapter.

#### The interviews

An additional challenge for the teacher as researcher was noise in the classrooms which made it difficult at times to carry out interviews and conversations with the children. It was possible to find quieter spaces in the classrooms in which to tape record conversations with the children, taking

account of the children's need to feel at ease in these spaces. The children were so enthusiastic to be interviewed that it became necessary to extend this to all the children who requested it, rather than merely to those who were participating in the study. Parents were generally less willing to have their interviews recorded, with all but one requesting that the transcriptions should be carried out by hand. Although transcription might be considered a limiting factor in terms of time and the challenges of interpreting the voice of the interviewee with accuracy, it was recognised that those being interviewed had a right to revise their contributions and to change their minds about what they wanted to have recorded. This can be seen in Appendix 1 where Sue, mother of Joseph and Ellen, emailed her response including additions to me after I had sent her my record of our conversational interview. Ellen and Joseph's additions to their interview can be seen in Appendix 2.

### **Ethical procedures**

I adhered to the ethical responsibilities and code of practice of the school where the data collection took place, both in my position as a teacher and as a researcher, respecting the needs of the children, school and parents, and ensured that my work and responsibilities as a teacher took precedence over requirements for the research. I took account of the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (Appendix 11) (BSA, 2002) as agreed with University College Worcester in my PhD Registration application (I subsequently transferred my registration to Bath Spa University in 2010).

The researcher faces many challenges when working with children (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Coady, 2001). As a practitioner-researcher I had a duty of care and responsibility towards the children, their parents and the school where I was employed, and sought to ensure that the children were not disadvantaged in any way by the demands of the research as data was gathered for the study. This was facilitated by the fact that the children were familiar with both the researcher and the school environment where the data was gathered.

## Ethical issues of anonymity and consent

I wrote to the head teacher (Appendix 5) and the parents of the children (Appendix 6) after engaging in detailed discussions with them about the intended scope and scale of the project.

A conscious decision to use the real first names of the children in this study was made fairly late in the process of analysis; however, the school remains anonymous as do the children's surnames and the names of the adults. As I started to gather and analyse the data, it became clear that the children's names were sometimes an integral part of their artefact, as in three year old Joseph's drawing in his nursery storybook (Figure 1). Joseph had drawn a picture of his Mumbelow, a favourite fictional character which he had developed in his play at home. He identified this as his story with a large 'J', accompanied by play writing in order to 'name his world' (Freire, 1996).



*Figure 1*

*Joseph's story about his Mumbelow*

To give Joseph a pseudonym to protect his identity would be to deny him his own voice, as his name is part of his narrative about the Mumbelow, a very

personal and meaningful character in his home and Nursery life. It may not seem apparent to the casual observer of the drawing that Joseph's identity is closely bound up with the way he makes connections between his life at home and at Nursery. Mumbelow is a treasured character known only to his closest family at home, and it would be difficult to derive the full meaning from his drawing without making reference to his name in this context. Yin (2009: 181) suggests that anonymity in case studies should rarely be used: informants need to be identified in order to provide a clear trail for the reader to follow, and to contextualise the data effectively. Moreover, parents or children who read this study may be able to identify the participants due to the visual nature of the data without their names being used, so making the issue of anonymity pointless.

The issue of anonymity was discussed with University colleagues at a research seminar, where it was agreed that the use of first names in a case such as this would be necessary and desirable. Yin (2009) takes this further by contending that the identity of the entire case should be disclosed in order to inform the reader more fully about the case: however, it was considered that in this particular study the disclosure of the children's first names where the parents agreed, would provide sufficient clarity.

I explained to the children that I was using their drawings, models, collages and writing in a study of children's work, so that they felt involved and informed. It was an important part of the approach to this study that the children understood explicitly that they had control over the way their artefacts were being used. Children have the right to refuse permission for anything that they feel uncomfortable with, or that may be an infringement of their privacy, a view that is reflected in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unhchr, 1989) which states that the child 'is capable of forming his or her own views freely in all matters affecting the child...'

## **Ethics of interpretation**

The analysis of the data recognises the need for a respectful and ethical approach to pedagogical documentation of children's meaning-making strategies. This requires a 'pedagogy of listening' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005: 93) where children's meanings are taken seriously and where they are given time, space and resources which encourage them and provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation and critical thinking. The approach which is taken in the interpretation of the children's attempts to communicate meaning through their symbolic representations reflects a democratic and ethical pedagogy where the child is both listened to and taken seriously.

Kress (2010: 18) calls for a 'basic frame of ethical conduct' in communication, where resources for communication are accessible to all, and where all are able to problem solve and present their suggestions while acknowledging the 'effects of their (semiotic) actions on others'. The children who participated in this study demonstrated that they were willing to take an interest in wider social issues, as well as those that affected their lives directly (Vasquez, 2004). Before they were able to write in the adult sense, some children used their drawings and mark making to make visible their concern for their world and those that live in it. Others used drawing and writing together to communicate meanings that relied on both the use of alphabetic writing and drawing, cut-outs or collage to make their meanings clear. The role of the adult in this is one of providing resources, acknowledgement and taking these concerns seriously. The ways in which children choose to express their meanings may not resonate with the dominant discourse of school in the English early years classroom, but their meaning-making strategies are important all the same (Mavers, 2011). Freire (1996) suggests that a didactic approach to teaching controls thinking and action, because it requires students to adjust to the world, so inhibiting their creativity. He urges an approach which encourages communication where 'thought has meaning ...when generated by action upon the world'. This makes it all the more

important to recognise and acknowledge the meaning which children communicate through their own meaning making strategies.

Mavers (2011: 9; 2009: 154) refers to children's mark making and drawing as 'principled': they are 'making', rather than using the ready-made signs of alphabetic script. She contends that there is a need to take children's signs seriously as these can be formative in providing children with the resources needed to participate in diverse discourses in contemporary society (Mavers, 2011; Kress, 1997; 2000b). Adults and children engage together to make meaning (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) in the sense that the adults and children have mutual respect for each other's representations. This approach encourages them to engage in democratic practice, where each sees the other as participants in dialogue (Freire, 1996). Freire and Macedo (1987: 159) regard a critical literacy approach as emancipatory in the sense that children can use their own ways to make meaning and thus 'name their own world'. Listening to the thoughts and 'voice of the other' enables a pedagogy of listening to emerge (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) where children feel valued and can tell their stories and histories with confidence.

Children's artefacts in the form of the symbolic representations of their meanings provide practitioners, teachers and parents with a window onto the child's journey of meaning: this cannot be assessed or graded, but can be accepted and viewed as the child's intentional meaning, or as Mavers (2011) suggests, as principled action. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) urge teachers to be open to uncertainty, so that children can be encouraged to explore the unexpected and to challenge pre-set outcomes and expectations. This requires teachers to be prepared to acknowledge children's own representations of meaning, and to recognise the problem solving and critical thinking that children engage in when devising ways to make meaning.

Beauty in children's art work may be romanticised, and valued above meaning (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Dahlberg and Moss suggest that this may be as a consequence of a prevailing image of childhood as uncomplicated and developmental, where there is a predetermined outcome for children's



learning in a linear way. This expectation of the linearity of learning is encouraged by a dominant discourse where statutory requirements of government-imposed curricula are adopted and uniformity is valued. This discourse positions the child as less knowing than the adult, whereas the focus of this study is concerned in particular with the child in a more powerful and democratic relationship where their own meanings are foregrounded as they devise ways to name their world (Freire, 1996).

## **Summary**

This chapter begins by revisiting the research context: the school where the data collection took place. The sampling strategy was explored in setting out the theoretical sampling approach (Eisenhardt, 2002) which was used in selecting the participants. The principal data consist of visual images of artefacts made by the children, supported by conversational interviews with children and parents, accompanied by field notes. The informants were fifteen children aged between three and eight years, and their parents were interviewed and asked to contribute to the collection of visual data in order to gather examples of their children's meaning making practices at home. I draw on the work of Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999; 2007) in defining the term 'artefact' within the context of this research. The ethical approach is explored in relation to issues of informed consent as well as in the respectful and ethical responsibility of the researcher in interpreting and documenting the children's meanings.

The process of sorting the visual data is informed by the methods, resources and contexts which the children used to make meaning. I draw on the work of Bell (2001) and Kress (Kress, 2009) in the analytical methodology of the visual data, sorting them into categories based on materiality of mode and context. These categories are further defined and the method for analysis is explained. Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the data in further detail and reflects on the children's meaning-making using a case study approach.

## Chapter 6

### Data Analysis

#### Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 introduced the methodological approach as well as the research context, the participants and the data. A rationale was proposed for describing the visual images as artefacts: these were gathered over a period of two years from both the school and the children's homes. The chapter described how the artefacts are supported by field notes contextualising each one, documenting as far as possible the children's intentions and narratives at the time. Conversational interviews with the children as well as with their mothers and a father were carried out, and these are used to elucidate and add depth to the images of the children's artefacts.

This chapter gives an account of the children's representations of meaning in the form of their artefacts. It explores how the children devised ways of expressing their meanings through their representations: I introduce the children as participants in the research to provide an 'authentic context in which characters and plot can unfold' (Dey, 1993: 238), and to provide a meaningful context for the visual data. Using Dey's metaphor for making the data accessible to the reader, my approach is one of constructing a story 'with three basic ingredients: a setting, characters and a plot'. This chapter provides a detailed contextualisation of the visual data, and considers the children's meaning-making strategies. The chapter draws together the histories of the children in relation to their everyday lives in the contexts of home and the educational institution as reflected in their artefacts. The analysis of the principal data in the form of visual images is informed by cultural-historical theory and aims to develop an understanding of the ways in which the children create their meanings in particular contexts (Hedegaard, 2008b). This chapter demonstrates how the analysis is supplemented by

additional data in the form of field notes and conversational interviews with the children and their parents. The analysis of the data, which were organized according to the contexts and modes used by the children in the production of their artefacts, is presented in the form of a narrative (Robson, 2002), either as a case by case account (where each child is seen as a case) or across cases where comparisons and links are made between categories where this clarifies the information gained from the data.

These different strands of data form the basis of a flexible, theory-building approach (Eisenhardt, 2002; Yin, 2009) which allows themes to emerge as the data is analysed and reported. The large number of scanned images of artefacts were categorised in such a way that they became the 'basis for organizing and conceptualising the data' (Dey, 1993: 112) and facilitated analysis from an early stage. Categories included the materiality of mode and the contextual base, whether it was produced at school or at home, the relevance of the images within each category, additional information to assist in identifying the nature of the artefact, and the age of the child at the time the artefact was produced (Matrix of artefacts, Appendix 10).

I regard the children's artefacts, and indeed their narratives around the artefacts, as their stories which reflect their own constructions of meaning about their lives and experiences. The artefacts are made up of 'semantic layers' as the children engage in their quests to represent their thinking, while 'brushing up against thousands of living dialogic threads' (Bahktin, 1981: 276) as they draw on their experiences and resources to make meaning.

### **The research setting**

The setting was a small independent primary school with an on-site nursery. Children in the study were drawn from the Nursery and Key Stage 1 classrooms. Although class sizes were relatively small, with between twelve and twenty children in each, the space in some of the rooms was limited in the main part of a large Victorian house, while the nursery was located in a purpose built extension to the ground floor. The Nursery, Reception and Year

1 classes for the three to six year-olds were well resourced with toys, role play resources and craft and mark-making materials; the Year 2 classrooms where the seven to eight year-olds were based were more clearly areas for the serious business of work, with fewer resources or space for play.

Each of the children's artefacts tells a story: they are 'constructing selves and others' (Dyson and Genishi, 2009: 73) in their own playful way in the 'official' environment of the nursery, classroom or in the 'unofficial' familiar environment of their home (Dyson, 2010b: 160). Teachers were bound by the need to balance curricular requirements and the pressures of desired outcomes in keeping with the expectations of the school and beyond. It was considered that children, those up to five years of age in particular, learn through play and playful experiences (DfES, 2007b; DfE, 2012e). The six to eight year-old children's representations produced in the official environment of school reflected a perceived need by the teachers to engage with the technical mastery of literacy skills in response to the requirements of the curriculum. This was apparent, for example, in the teachers' requests for writing stories about tasks that were carried out or events experienced by the children with their families at the weekend. At times, the younger children were able to use drawing to supplement or replace their writing as a means of communicating their stories. At six, seven and eight years of age at school, they were bound by the conventions of more formalised writing, with requirements to pay attention to neatness, spelling and sometimes working within the constraints of limited time.

The children's homes were the contexts for many of the artefacts that make up the principal data. This was where children produced many of their artefacts in the 'unofficial' arena of the home setting (Dyson, 2010a: 160). The families in the school were mainly from middle class socio-economic backgrounds where books and mark making resources were freely available to the children. Parents supported their children in a variety of ways by encouraging drawing and exploration, or at times by encouraging the children to practise their skills learned at school. The children could, and did, draw on

experiences, their knowledge of favourite stories read to them, and regular family outings and holidays.

The richness of the familiar home environment, where the children's writing and drawing may be produced for family members, was apparent. Artefacts were frequently produced with siblings or friends in the socio-cultural contexts of the home which were different from those of school and nursery. Children's interpretations of these contexts were influenced by their past and present experiences, while learning and playing together 'side by side' (Dyson, 2003; Dyson and Genishi, 2009: 9). Letters, messages, drawings and books were made for brothers, sisters and parents at home, often using scrap paper, with little attention to neatness. They were often quickly produced, on the spur of the moment. The children found inspiration in their favourite characters from television and stories read at home and at school, and from the day to day experiences of importance in their lives.

### **The principal participants**

Joseph and Ellen, two of the fifteen children who participated in the research, were the principal participants whose artefacts make up the majority of the images collected for the data. I collected artefacts in the school nursery and classrooms, either during the teaching day as the children's class teacher or as a visiting teacher to their classroom. Joseph and Ellen's mother, Sue, provided many anecdotal vignettes of her children's literacy practices at home. Communication with Sue took place in the form of conversations at the end of the school day, or by email as well as during a more structured conversational interview.

Sue related how their kitchen and playroom at home was a busy environment of cutting, gluing and mark-making. The children appeared to make use of many opportunities to engage in spontaneous activities of their choice both in the house, the garden and during family outings. Although in the early years at school the children had access to a wide range of resources in the Nursery and Reception classes, they were nevertheless working and playing within the

routines of the institution and the requirements of the curriculum in the nursery and classroom. There was a change in this for Ellen as she moved into the more formal and less play-based older Key Stage 1 classes, and this was reflected in her mother's comments as well as in Ellen's responses during our conversations when I asked her to tell me about her writing and meaning-making at school and at home.

Soon after starting to collect the data, Joseph and Ellen's mother began to send photographs to me by email for inclusion in the collection of the data; she also emailed scanned images of artefacts and stories of the children's endeavours at home. Images of artefacts were sorted into a number of categories as outlined in Chapter 5 and they were rated according to their relevance: this related to whether the artefacts were considered to reflect the thoughts and narratives of the children in their roles as authors of their own stories. These then became part of the study and were included with the collection of artefacts from the children's symbolic representations at school and at home.

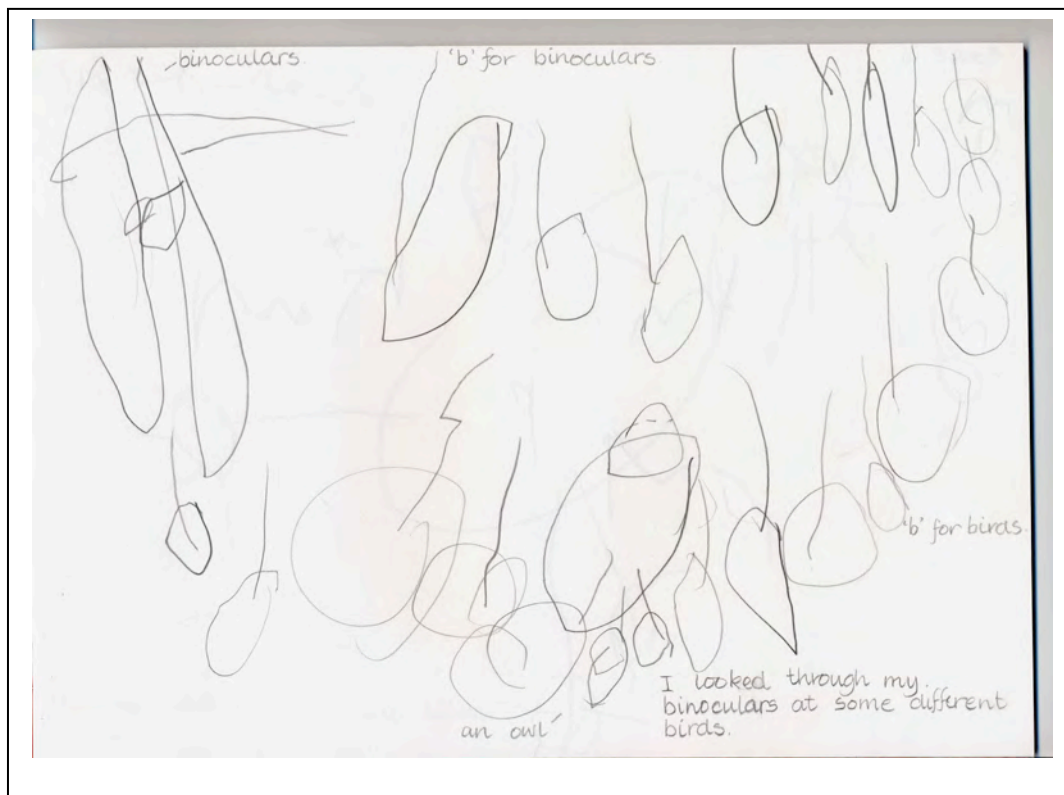
### Introducing Joseph

Joseph was three years old at the start of the study, the middle of three children. He attended the nursery in the mornings at first, and then moved to full-time attendance in the Reception class where I was his class teacher. In my role as practitioner-researcher, I was able to observe his play and symbolic representation at first hand. Joseph chose to organise his friends around him at every opportunity in the classroom, devising ways of using the resources that were to hand in order to represent his thinking. Kress (1997) and Pahl (1999) suggest that children make use of things around them to express themselves, and to make meaning, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways (Kendrick and McKay, 2004). Joseph's mother said that she was not surprised, as he frequently invented games in his play at home using a range of resources, often including his brother and sister as well as his parents in his play. She talked about him making contraptions with string

and furniture, often together with his younger brother Sebastian and older sister Ellen.

### Joseph's story

In his early years in the school nursery, Joseph, then 3 years old, demonstrated his fondness for including his friends in his play and meaning-making activities. His attempt to record his experiences at The Wildfowl Trust Reserve with his family over the weekend had resulted in a drawing and 'play writing' (Broström, 2002) in his nursery storybook (Figure 2). This storybook, similar to what was often called a news book in the older classes, was widely used in the school for children to write about their weekend experiences on a Monday when they returned to school. Sometimes the teacher would act as scribe for the nursery children, writing the children's story or news alongside their drawings. At times, the children would accompany their drawings with their own attempts at writing (Figure 2).



*Figure 2*  
*Joseph's visit to the Wildfowl Trust with his family.*

At three years of age in the nursery, Joseph used this opportunity for drawing and play writing about a significant experience which was important to him. In his drawing, he had shown himself and his binoculars, and practised writing the letter b for initial sound of birds as well as binoculars. This can be seen as an example of a three year-old child's early understanding of phonics in context: devised by the child in a way that is meaningful and spontaneously expressed. He made use of this opportunity to demonstrate his understanding without the need for an adult to provide a directed opportunity for phonics instruction. He continued to talk about his day at the Wildfowl Trust, and with the help of the nursery assistant made some ducks torn from paper, and fed them on the nursery carpet. This game continued over several days, starting with his drawing and the torn scraps of paper. He used a construction toy to make a set of binoculars which he had used to 'see the ducks better', and gathered the children together to make a train using chairs while rearranging the nursery furniture to support his play. The train was used to take the children in the nursery on an imaginary tour of the Wildfowl Trust. Through his role play, Joseph constructed a context for exploring and extending what Fler (2006: 132) refers to as his 'lived experience'.

As part of this role play in the nursery, Joseph used scraps of paper which he tore into pieces to represent the ducks, with smaller pieces for feeding to them (A photograph of Joseph's role play feeding the ducks is not included here to protect his identity). Joseph repeatedly revisited his weekend family experiences in the Nursery during the following three days, and was then redirected by the teacher to other tasks. He had devised a way to explore his own interpretation of the important events with his family, a 'third space' where his family and nursery experiences crossed to create a new understanding (Pahl and Kelly, 2005). Joseph did more than imitate or repeat his experience with his family during the weekend: he was using the resources which were both available and accessible in the nursery, as well as his friends and the nursery staff, to tell his story.



Whilst in the nursery, Joseph appeared to be anxious to please, and was at times upset when things did not go according to plan. This was demonstrated when, sitting at a table, he began to draw a picture of his bear with a green felt tip pen (Hattingh, 2011). The green colour had bled through the paper onto the table, creating a hole in the centre of his drawing and a green mark on the table. After some reassurance from the teacher, and help with cleaning the table, he took his drawing home at the end of the day (Figure 3). The next morning, his mother explained that the bear in the picture was one that he slept with in his bed and that had he continued to play and tell stories about his bear on returning from Nursery the previous day. By bed time at home that evening, Joseph told his mother that the hole was 'the bear's tummy, where the food goes in', and that the hole provided an x-ray picture of the contents of the bear's stomach. He was engaged in problem solving and developing his own narrative in order to explore the possibilities for a purpose for the hole he had made in the paper.



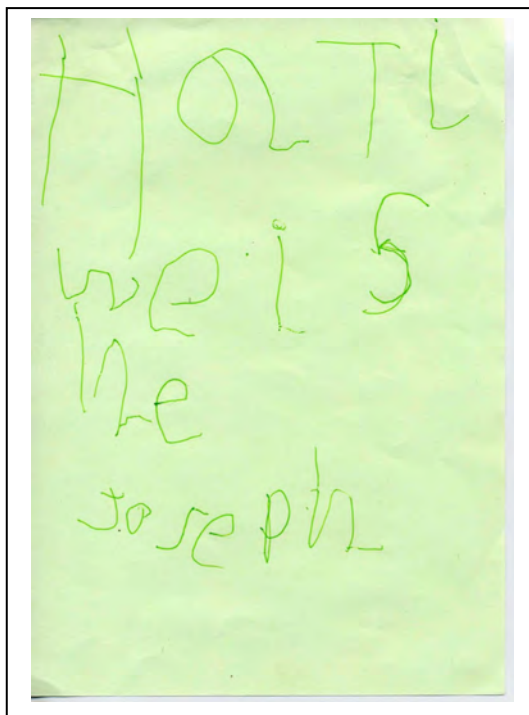
*Figure 3*  
*Joseph's bear*

Joseph's innovative ways of representing his thoughts reflect his creativity in the ways in which he was able to make links between experiences in the past and on-going experiences and situations (Pahl, 2007). This is an example of where Joseph had succeeded in transforming a worrying situation into a positive one through reflection and communication with his teacher at Nursery, and his mother during a bedtime discussion. Joseph was able to inhabit the official space of the Nursery and to develop his narrative in the unofficial space of home (Dyson, 2010a). What began as a drawing on scrap paper became a story about his bear whose stomach was x-rayed. Joseph's resourcefulness in creating a narrative around his drawing demonstrated his ability to solve a problem as he drew, and to represent his thinking in a 'principled' way as he interpreted and evaluated his drawing (Mavers, 2011: 9). Although the hole was made accidentally, Joseph used it intentionally in his narrative about the bear.

At home at this time, Joseph was very engaged with creating his own stories, with his mother scribing for him. He created his own character, the Mumbelow, which was based on the family's reading of Julia Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson and Scheffler, 1999) and was the subject of some of his artefacts. He instructed his mother what to write, looking to his older sister Ellen's books and artefacts as models. These stories were recorded in book form, on scraps of paper which were hastily stapled together but nonetheless treasured by Joseph and his family. At five years of age, Joseph made a number of books at home in which he recorded factual information; these grew out of his everyday experiences and interests. Books made at school in the official space of the Reception class responded to themes suggested by the teacher. The majority of Joseph's spontaneously produced artefacts at home and at school were made up of signs and messages, composed for particular reasons to meet a need on the spur of the moment.

A number of Joseph's artefacts were made about family relationships and emotions, and were considered to be situated within the context of 'relationships and feelings' on the matrix of artefacts (Appendix 10). He made

messages and signs to tell stories and to communicate information. At four years old at home, he frequently left messages for members of the family. When his baby brother could not find his toy Hattie, Joseph made a notice to put up in the kitchen so that 'we all know it is a Hattie hunt' (Figure 4). When Joseph had gone to the station with his mother to fetch his father, he became upset when he was late, having missed his train. Joseph's response to this incident was to record his feelings and to communicate them to his father while he was waiting for him to arrive (Figure 5). Joseph's message to his father reflects the emotion he felt in looking forward to seeing him, and was made possible by the resources which were incidentally to hand at the time as he waited in the car with his mother (Kress, 1997). Bissex (1980) stressed the importance of children rehearsing while devising ways to use alphabetic writing to communicate, and this has more recently been described by Ferreiro (2009) as providing opportunities for exploring the social functions of writing. In this particular case, Joseph intentionally used this mode in the form of his knowledge of writing and symbolic marks on the page to draw attention to a situation which was important to him.



*Figure 4*  
*Hunting for Hattie*  
*(Hattie where is he)*



*Figure 5*  
*Joseph's message for daddy*

At school in the Reception class, Joseph frequently used messages and notices to inform and signpost important events spontaneously during play, addressing these both to his friends and to the adults. This involvement of the family in important events at home was mirrored at school in the Reception class, where he wrote messages for others, using post-its or sticky tape to place them where needed. Joseph also continued to gather his friends around him to play out important events and to devise ways of representing them, using a combination of role play and mark making. The 'Easter Bunny' had visited the classroom and written messages to the children in the role-play area, and Joseph continued to write messages in reply in his play at home. Joseph was using his representational skills learned at school, in his play at home, and continued to do this throughout his year in the reception class as he transported his representations between the two contexts.

On one occasion while in the Reception class, Joseph joined his teacher and class friends for a string concert in the school hall at the start of day, where some of the older children played their instruments for the whole school. The children were entranced, and Joseph listened attentively during the entire performance. Once back in the classroom, the children were asked to choose their own activities. Joseph and his friend Ella set up rows of chairs to re-enact the concert, with folders balanced on the chairs representing their music. He acted with his friends in the cultural environment and the 'official space' of his 'classroom family' where resources were freely available (Dyson, 2003: 55).

Gathering his friends around him, Ella played an African drum, which was a permanent resource in the room, while Joseph put a small chair on his lap and used a wooden building brick as the bow for his cello. They re-played the concert, during which time other children passed in and out of their game: Paul drew some musical notes on sheets of paper, while Joseph and Ella played the music. Ella used different techniques to play the drum, rubbing it and gently scratching over the surface to produce soft rustling sounds. After playtime they continued the game and moved the chair arrangement into the

role play area as the space on the carpet was needed for other activities. Joseph tired of his cello, and started to play a rhythm with the wooden bricks on the chair seats. At about 11 o'clock they joined the maths table to work with the teacher, but continued to return to their game from time to time until lunch. Kress' (1997) study of his own children at home shows how children use a range of resources such as furniture and found objects to explore literacy in their own way. Joseph was working on an interpersonal level with his friends as he shared and negotiated with them in reconstructing their concert, and on an intrapersonal level as he sought ways to represent his thinking in this context.

When I related this classroom activity to Joseph's mother, she explained that  
....he plays games like that all the time at home. To give you a flavour, this weekend he and Ellen have been 'scuba diving' with goggles and pyjamas on; he has made a 'metal detector' with magnets; a 'workshop' in the garden with not much more than stones and buckets; a complicated pulley system as part of an ongoing 'road works' game with (his younger brother) Sebastian; and written several letters to our new friend the Easter Bunny (Appendix 1).

### Introducing Ellen

Joseph's sister Ellen was the oldest of the informants. At five years of age, she joined the Reception class where I was teaching, after attending the nursery the preceding year, and continued to supply me with artefacts made at home and at school until she left the Year 3 class as an eight year-old. Ellen enjoyed working quietly with one or two friends while in the Reception classroom and spent much time at school working at the tables, reading, drawing and writing. The majority of her artefacts gathered for this study were produced in the form of books that she made at home and at school. As she progressed into the Key Stage 1 class, Ellen found the pressure of time a challenge. In her conversational interview with me she said when at school, she only wrote for her teacher. She went on to say that 'I only write for myself if I have free time... hardly ever because I work slowly' (Interview transcript

Appendix 3). This is reflected in Fisher's (2010) findings showing that children find it hard to write at school due to time constraints.

Ellen's artefacts made at home were often in the form of books made for her younger brother. These were sometimes written on hastily torn scraps of paper, with many drawings to accompany her written text. Some of these books depicted nonsense stories, and they varied in mode so that some were zig-zag books, others stapled together. Her mother explained that she was saddened by the lack of creative activities at school as Ellen was drawing at home, yet at school she was anxious about making mistakes, often 'making repeated false starts – rubbing out over and over again' (Appendix 1). Ellen's artefacts which are included in the data, were predominantly in the form of writing at school, and drawing and writing at home, whereas Joseph appeared to focus less on drawing and more on writing at school and both writing and making at home.

#### Ellen's story

While in the Reception class at school, Ellen often chose to make her artefacts while at work and play with children in the class. On one occasion, she and a friend had found a dead bird during playtime in the school garden. One of the teaching assistants had helped the children to bury the bird, marking its grave with a cross they had made out of sticks. When Ellen came in from outdoor playtime with her friend, she settled at the writing table in the role play area with some urgency, where she made a card with a message for the dead bird (Figure 6). Ellen helped her friend, who had difficulty drawing and writing the message, to make her own card, and then requested that her own card be put up on the display board. The accessibility of resources (Kress, 1997), opportunity and time enabled Ellen to follow up her emotional response to this incident. At the same time, she worked within her friend's zone of proximal development so that she could achieve her task 'in collaboration with a more capable peer' (Vygotsky, 1978: 86).



Figure 6  
*Ellen's letter to the bird*

Drawing on Vasquez (2004), Ellen is seen here to be confronting an issue of importance to her, at the same time as she pondered the nature of death while communicating her sense of sadness over the death of the bird. The classroom environment provided a friend with whom she shared her feelings, and with whom she could negotiate the writing of her message. The drawing can be seen as an important part of her message, rather than merely an illustration to accompany her writing. Her literacy here is multimodal in that she has made use of colour, writing, drawing and symbols such as crosses (kisses) and a heart to foreground her emotions. Kress (2000b) suggests that drawing may be considered in schools as an expression of emotion rather than as communication and this may explain why artwork, for example in the form of drawing, is not always valued as a literacy practice. In this example Ellen has used her letter to the bird to communicate her feelings in a literate way using several modes rather than writing alone. Her phonological understanding is also clear and demonstrates her skill in writing independently while using her knowledge to write the words of her choice. In this context Ellen had taken risks by not limiting her choice of words used in her message,

and her mistakes can be seen as demonstrating her grasp of alphabetic writing (Clark, 1994).

Ellen's Reception year at school was characterised by such examples of quiet collaboration with her peers or periods of independent drawing and writing. In the Key Stage 1 classes, Ellen's mother Sue commented that there was little scope for creativity, and Ellen also became fearful of making mistakes. She felt that her teacher had helped her to settle into her new class with sensitivity, but found that

there is an emphasis on grammar and correct spelling, which I do applaud, but I feel that this is done to the exclusion of allowing some free expression and writing just for the joy of it. I am sad that Ellen's creativity (which I know is there) is now being stifled in favour of neat and correct work' (Appendix 1).

The data shows that Ellen produced many more artefacts at home than at school, and these were sometimes made in co-operation with Joseph. She made countless books and messages for her two younger brothers and for her parents, often using bits of scrap paper and stapling them together. Ellen explained that when she wrote at home, it was mainly 'for mummy and daddy'. She thought it important to write thank you letters if she had received a present, and said that receiving letters was 'exciting.....and I wonder who it is from...it is as exciting as a present' (Appendix 2).

Ellen's artefacts made at home reflected what her mother referred to as her 'offbeat sense of humour' and these included a number of jokes and riddles produced with her brother and friends at home. Just after her sixth birthday, Ellen wrote a spell while playing witches with her friend (Figure 7). Ellen here uses her drawing to supplement the information in her spell, to show what a two-headed person looks like, and how a frog might sit on one's head. Her spontaneous writing again here demonstrates her ability to write independently using her phonological knowledge to compose the spell, using the language a witch might use.



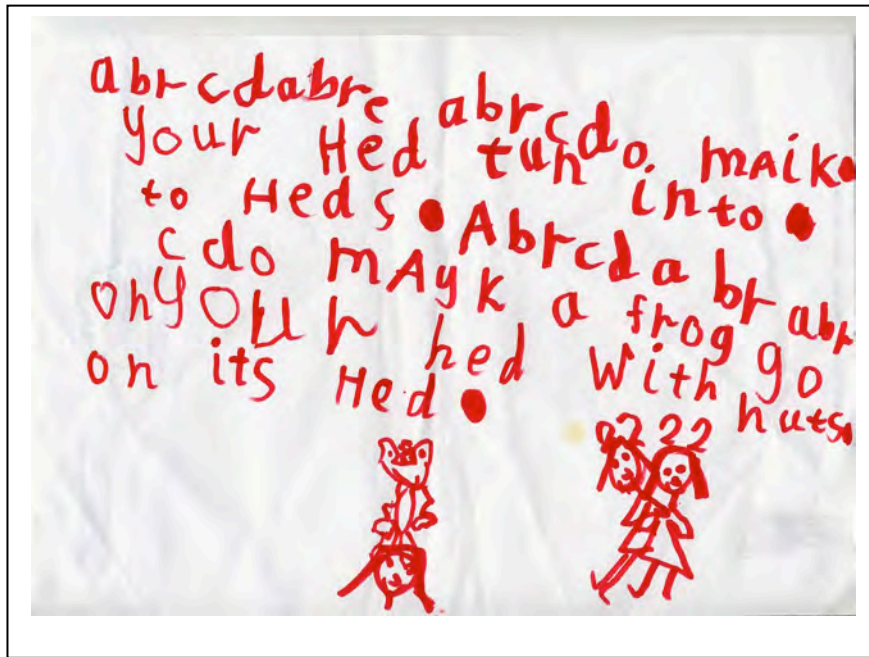


Figure 7  
A witch's spell, written at home

The data shows that Ellen's artefacts were predominantly made at home within the contexts of stories in the form of books about her personal experiences and feelings. She would often write stories for her toys, as these appeared to have a special meaning for her personally (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). She was an avid reader, and was read to frequently at home. As well as enjoying writing and drawing, Ellen used found objects in her garden at home, or when she was out with her family, to create narratives and stories. This might involve using little stones, a handful of cut grass, or conkers, twigs and logs which she would arrange with care as she composed a story about them, often while playing with her brothers. An example of this can be seen in Figure 8 which shows the first of two photographs of Ellen's house made of found objects in the garden of the family's house while on holiday. Ellen's mother provided the following context for this by email:

The first shows the house with the roof on. The second is with the roof off. Key - conkers=chairs; large leaf: bed with cover; small leaf: rug; stones and twigs at bottom left=fireplace and fire. There was certainly

a narrative to go with this, but I didn't hear most of it. The house had to be left intact so 'they' could return to it when they had been hunting (ie after we had come back home). The children also left a conker store so 'they' could eat.



*Figure 8*  
*Ellen's house*

The nature of this representation is suggestive of Jewitt's (2009a) contention that young children engage with meaning by becoming agents in their multimodal texts. Ellen worked with her brothers to create a narrative which made use of context and their own cultural experiences through storytelling and intentional meaning making. Ellen's meaning making at home was frequently carried out either with her younger brothers or friends, or for them in the form of messages, books and letters. I draw on cultural-historical theory in analysing and interpreting the artefacts, and this is particularly evident in Ellen's case as her multimodal meaning-making endeavours are framed by her home and family as well as her every-day experiences (Fleer, 2006; Hedegaard, 2008b).

Ellen's mother said that she always made a map when they went on holiday. She used maps for their 'explanatory function' in moving 'beyond pictures' in explaining and representing information and description (Barrs, 1988: 114). Sometimes Joseph added details to the maps in a negotiated meaning of their shared experiences. At seven and eight years of age, the data shows that Ellen enjoyed pursuing her interests in various ways, often by making books

and occasionally newspapers at home with Joseph, and engaging in critical thinking about newsworthy events.

### **The supporting cast**

Seven children in the Year 1 and 2 classes were aged between five and seven years for the duration of the data collection for this study. The children and their parents all agreed that artefacts for the study could be gathered, and to varying degrees they contributed artefacts made at home. Conversations with the children and their parents opened up a window onto their world at home, while I observed and gathered data from their activities in the classroom.

Six children made up the remainder of the informants for the study, all as members of the Reception class at four to five years of age at the beginning of the study. As with the older children above, their parents regularly related stories of their representations at home. I was frequently able to talk to parents at the beginning or end of the day to discuss their meaning making and artefacts made at school or at home. The small size of the school, and the wholehearted interest of the parents in their children's learning experiences, enabled me to gather images and talk to the children about them with ease. In addition to this was the need for the children to achieve certain learning outcomes and to ensure that the children were seen to make progress with their academic learning. The 'political realities of schooling' (Dyson and Genishi, 2005: 44) were constantly present as although the parents appeared deeply interested and encouraged by their children's creative development and the development of self-confidence and wellbeing, they also had high expectations of their children's acquisition of more formal academic skills.

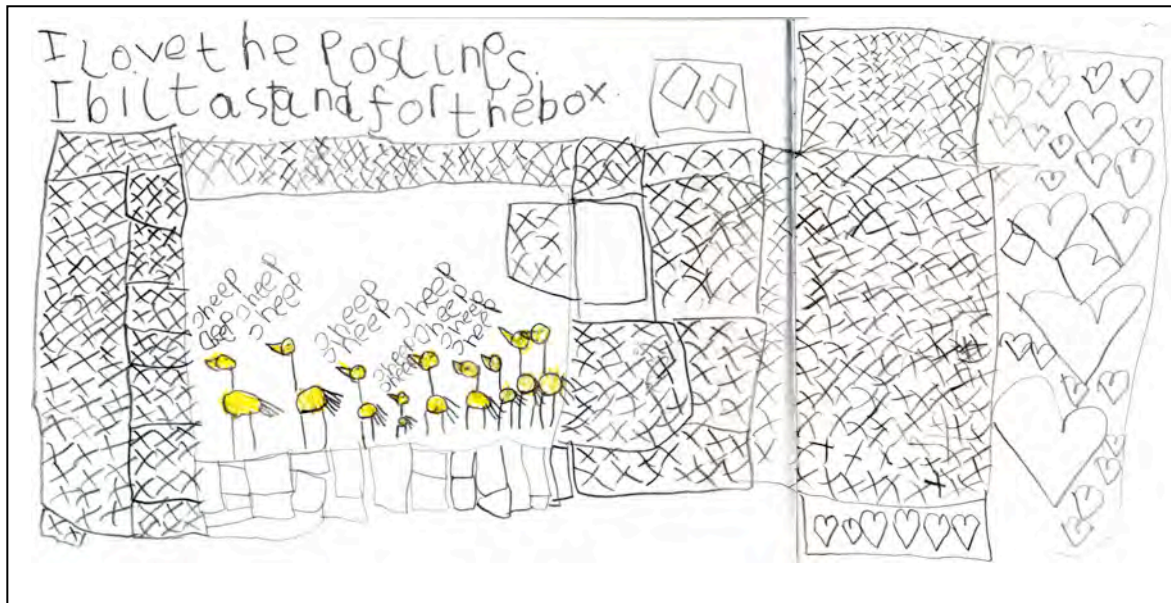
During the period of data collection, I was employed as class teacher for a year in the Year 1 class, followed by a year in the Reception class. This facilitated the gathering of data in my role as practitioner-researcher: however, a number of artefacts were also gathered from the children as they relocated

to other classes during the two years of gathering the data. As practitioner-researcher I visited other classes including the Nursery from time to time to gather data and to write field notes to contextualise the data.

### The stories of the supporting cast

As the children were aware of the nature of the research from the very beginning of the study, they contributed their artefacts for inclusion in the data spontaneously from time to time, as did their parents. Although most of the images depicted examples of writing and drawing, some children provided cut-outs, models and puppets to make meaning either on their own, or to accompany their writing. In both the Reception and Year 1 classes some children appeared reluctant to write or to join in with direct teaching activities, and chose to represent their thinking in more visual ways. This included, for example, making puppets, maps and three dimensional cut-outs which were used as characters in their role play in Reception, or in the case of the older children in the Year 1 class, to supplement or replace their writing.

In the Reception class, Harry and Paul used drawing as an immediate and effective way to make meaning. At the age of five, Harry had built a stand using wooden building blocks for the box housing ducklings and goslings which had been incubated in the classroom, and was upset when he was told to clear it away to make space for the next activity. Harry responded to a suggestion from the teacher that he might find a way of recording what he had made before packing it away (Figure 9).

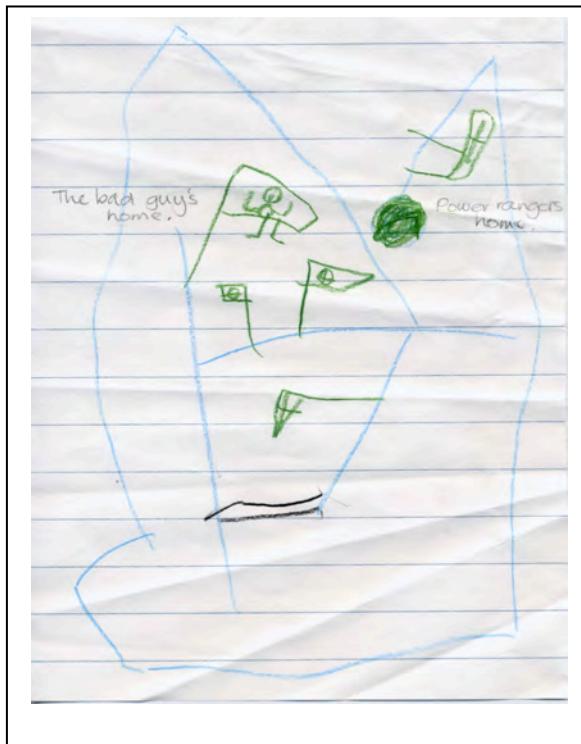


*Figure 9*  
*Harry built a stand for the goslings*

He drew a picture and accompanied this with writing to indicate his emotional engagement with the goslings, as well as to explain his construction (Figure 9). Although a 'young fluent reader' (Clark, 1976), Harry was at the time a reluctant participant in writing tasks in the classroom, occasionally becoming distressed when asked to write. Clark (1976: 62) suggests that competent readers may resist writing because the task is 'too easy' for them. In her study of young fluent readers, Clark (1976) also found that parents felt that their children's writing might be poor as they could not write as fast as they could think. Harry demonstrated his competence in spelling the words he chose to use in his writing. He used drawing as a mode in which to represent his emotions, with symbols such as crosses and hearts to communicate in addition to alphabetic writing (Dyson and Genishi, 2009). Harry used his drawing as a tool to 'understand and represent personal experiences and the important things' in his life at that particular time (Anning and Ring, 2004: 26).

Other research participants in the Reception class also used drawing to make meaning, sometimes in combination with maps and cut-outs (figures 10 and 11). Paul made use of power rangers, his favourite characters during his play at the time, as the subject of his meaning-making practices. This was often done in the company of his friends who sought his help in making three-

dimensional artefacts. Map making appeared in a number of artefacts, reflecting the children's skills in devising ways to 'go beyond pictures' in representing their thinking (Barrs, 1988: 114). The depiction of characters from popular children's culture at the time was characteristic of the choices they made in their making and drawing. For Paul, his artefacts about *Power Rangers* reflected his interest, his identity and his awareness of the wider world beyond that which alphabetic script alone could offer (Marsh, 2005). Sometimes the children used characters such as *Power Rangers*, at other times they explored traditional stories which they knew from being read to at home and at school.



*Figure 10*  
*A map showing the way to the*  
*Power Rangers*



*Figure 11*  
*Power Ranger and his*  
*megasword*

Coates and Coates (2006) contend that children's talk enriches their drawing activity, and this was demonstrated aptly by Paul in this example as he solved problems and negotiated ways to fit his cut-outs together so that they could be used in play. A year later, when Paul was in the Year 1 class, he said that he

just had to write at school, and 'I don't make things much at school because I don't have time. So I never make stuff at school I only make it at home'. His mother said that he continued to make cut-outs and collages at home, using pencils, crayons, paper and glue which were always available in the playroom. The data shows that this was characteristic of the children as they entered the Key Stage 1 classes.

In the Key Stage 1 classes the children participating in this study varied their use of modes other than drawing to make meaning at school. Much of the time the requirements of the curriculum required them to engage in alphabetic writing; however, when given time in Year 1 at five or six years of age, they were eager to use resources in inventive ways to extend and dramatise their writing. This was done usually by drawing as well as making puppets and signs.

### **Reflections on the data**

The coding used for organising the data enabled a large number of artefacts to be stored with relative ease. I regarded the efficiency of the process of sorting and retrieving the artefacts as important, as analysis would be complicated further if this was not done in a structured way with clear links to a framework informed by theory (Dey, 1993). With up to four hundred artefacts in the collection, it was essential to be able to identify those needed for particular purposes. The matrix of artefacts (Appendix 10) is an excel spreadsheet which provides a link to each image. However, this needed adjustment as the images were too large for the hyperlinks to work efficiently. This resulted in having to resize all the images to enable the links to retrieve the images. The links enabled me to access the images using the information stored on the matrix in the categories as described in Chapter 4 and listed on the spreadsheet. Inserting the data into the spreadsheet was time consuming, as was scanning and resizing the images, but once this was completed the resulting matrix facilitated the analysis. Field notes were written and stored using the file names as on the matrix, so making contextualisation of the artefacts possible and efficient. These were then stored in a folder together

with transcripts of the conversational interviews with parents and participating children.

## **Summary**

This chapter introduces the research setting to provide a context for the data. The research takes place in the Nursery and Key Stage 1 classes in a small primary school. Data was also gathered from the children's homes, brought in to school for inclusion in the data collection by the children and their parents. The chapter draws on Dyson (2010a) in providing a window on to the children's worlds as they attempted to make meaning in the 'unofficial' arenas of home and the 'official' surroundings of school. The children participating in the study were aged between three and eight years during the period of data collection. The principal informants, Joseph and Ellen, are introduced together with the remaining participants to provide a broad brush over their daily lives and experiences as reflected in their meaning-making practices at home and at school. This provides a context for the data, and provides a backdrop for the children's meaning-making practices.

A number of images of the children's artefacts are included and analysed' and these are supplemented by field notes and information gathered from interviews with the children and their parents. The data shows that the children made much use of drawing, cutting and gluing in their efforts, and contributed actively to the collection of data by providing examples of artefacts for scrutiny by me as the practitioner-researcher. The parents also participated actively by contributing to the data with artefacts brought in to the school from home. Final reflections on the data describe the ways in which the data were tracked and stored to facilitate easy and accurate retrieval for analysis.



## Chapter 7

### Children Telling Stories

#### Introduction

Using the matrix of artefacts (Appendix 10) as a guide, this chapter continues the journey through themes identified in the analysis of children's artefacts in Chapter 6. It explores the nature of the children's stories and narratives, and examines the materiality of modes which they used to make the visual representations of their meanings. The contexts within which the children told their stories provide a lens through which to gain an understanding of their interests and concerns. Sometimes their stories were made visible in their artefacts in the form of cut-outs, puppets and drawings as well as in their writing. The data reveal complex stories told in role play by means of drawing and writing, or by arranging and rearranging found objects as in Ellen's house (Figure 8) in Chapter 6, where she used wood, leaves and conkers to represent the characters in her story. Stories were at times inspired by retelling traditional tales, including fairy tales: at times they were aimed at particular audiences such as siblings or parents. This chapter is structured in a way that examines the contexts in which the children tell their stories. These contexts appear in layers which cannot easily be separated as the children engage in complex multi-layered meanings within a range of modes and contexts to make their artefacts.

#### Retelling and reconstructing stories

In the Year 1 class, a number of the children had attended a local theatre production of Snow White in the town with their families. Snow White represents the children's cultural understanding, and reflects their cultural, historical and social experience (Fleer, 2006). The conversations and role play in the classroom were dominated by this story, one with which all the children were familiar, whether they had been to the theatre or not. These

conversations and self-chosen activities reflected Dyson's 'unofficial' space within the 'official' space of the classroom (Dyson, 2010a: 160) as the children used any time they could find outside their curriculum tasks to engage in dressing up and role playing the story. During a self-chosen activity, when she had completed her tasks set by the teacher, Lydia drew a picture of Snow White (Figure 12), retelling this traditional story with clear reflections of good and evil. At first she used pencils in various colours to represent her view of the story in her writing and drawing, and later developed the narrative further by making use of a range of materials to provide depth and meaning to her story.



Figure 12  
*Snow White and the wicked witch*

Lydia accessed the writing table in the classroom, where a selection of paper and pencils were readily available and accessible to the children for use in their play and self-chosen activities. She used the unprinted side of a sheet of scrap paper to hurriedly record her story. Her artefact demonstrates the way in which children can use drawing and writing to make meaning without one mode dominating the other. Her writing demonstrates her understanding of the conventions of alphabetic writing, where she has used her phonological and grammatical knowledge which could be used by the teacher to assess

her progress making sense of taught lessons. The main written text of the story reads:

Snow White and the 7 dwarves and Snow White dies and the witch laughs, and Snow White marries the prince.

Lydia uses the digraphs th, ch and sh appropriately and makes valid attempts at spelling the other words, all of which demonstrate logical letter-sound correspondence. Lydia's writing shows her meaningful 'encounters with meaning' in authoring her story in her own way, using her knowledge of alphabetic writing to serve her own purpose (Goouch and Lambirth, 2011: 96). Goouch and Lambirth suggest that children need to take risks with writing and to solve problems while they are engaged in their own meaning making. Clark (1994) has called for children to be given opportunities to work out their own ways to spell words so that they do not become reluctant to use difficult words in case they make mistakes. She contends that children learn to 'write by writing', and that their progress can be assessed through careful scrutiny of their own attempts (Clark, 1994: 77). Lydia shows a developing understanding of the use of apostrophes, full stops and capital letters as well as a speech bubble which gives a voice to the witch. Lydia explained how the witch was trying to trick the queen into eating the apple by saying that 'it is a wishing apple'. Her story was animated and supported by the way in which she narrated through her writing, within a context of dressing up in role play and dramatisation of her interpretation of the story.

The drawing tells a part of the story that is not represented in Lydia's writing: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that the visual image allows for many different ways to interpret meaning. The image here is not merely an illustration as it carries with it particular meanings which are central to the story of Lydia's Snow White. The use of colour is crucial in understanding the roles of Snow White who is dressed in bright colours, and the witch who is wearing a dark dress. Lydia explained that the expression on the witch's face shows a 'wobbly mouth' to show that she is 'telling a lie', while Snow White smiles as she is good. The design of the image represents the characters' importance and status: Snow White is in the front with the witch slightly

behind her, and other characters of less importance to the story are small in size and placed in the back-ground. Both Kress(2000a) and Janks (2009) highlight the importance of the ways in which children use concepts of design to foreground or background elements in their artefacts, depending on the meanings they wish to communicate in context. When asked by the teacher what the two lines between the witch and the chair represented, Lydia replied that this was to show that she got up quickly from the chair. Although she may have seen lines used in this way in the past to represent speed, this is an example of how children may reconstruct meaning from previous experiences to represent it in their own way, for their own purpose (Mavers, 2011; Dyson, 2010b).

After drawing and writing about the story, Lydia organised her class friends around her to develop her Snow White narrative, both in role play and in making puppets. She made use of the materials at the writing table to make models of the characters, and drew on others to help her. They used card scraps in different colours to represent the characters: figure 13 shows a smiling Snow White with a purple face, while the witch is green to show that she is evil. Her mouth is drawn as in figure 12 to show that she is deceitful. Lydia has used sticky tape and glue to attach paper ribbons in Snow White's hair, and a collar for the witch. She asked the teacher for help when cutting holes for the eyes, and attached drinking straws to finish off her rod puppets. The availability of materials for the children to use spontaneously as needed is resonant of Kress's contention that children use the resources that are to hand in order to transform meaning (1997; 2010).



*Figure 13  
Puppets of Snow White and the witch*

### **Personal experiences**

At the age of four, Joseph's interests at home included the Mumbelow based on a favourite story and book at home, with his mother acting as scribe, and stapling the pages together to make a book. At five, Joseph joined his sister Ellen in making a book about a swarm of bees that had settled in a tree in their neighbour's garden. Their mother explained how Joseph became fascinated by the bees, and asked if he could write about the event. He wrote what looked like a newspaper headline, and followed this with information about the bees as they watched the beekeeper remove them (Figure 14).



*Figure 14*  
*Joseph's book about a swarm of bees*

Joseph has written: '20,000 bees have been in ...front garden'. He has written 'zzz' to represent the bussing bees, dots on the second page to indicate many bees, and on the final page he has drawn the beekeeper removing the bees with the caption: this is the beekeeper. As with Lydia's story, Joseph supplemented his experience with role play. He recorded his new found knowledge in various ways, through writing and drawing as well as through play. His sister Ellen drew a picture with a caption which demonstrates her knowledge and understanding of the event, and of the roles of the worker and queen bees. She made props with bits of string and card for him with which to extend the game they were playing (Figure 15). The bee mask represents the colouring of a bee's body, while the string provides a wearable costume that enhances their role play, with Joseph wearing the mask in his role as the bee. Their story can be seen as taking many forms in this way: making a book, drawing and writing, and a mask for dressing up and role play. The children used their personal experiences to explore an event which was important to them, and used multimodal representations to explore and research the meanings attached to the bees' way of life. In her work with children in kindergarten, Vasquez (2004) found that young children could engage in issues which were important to them and were motivated to find out about them. Joseph and Ellen used this event to find information and to record their new- found knowledge.



*Figure 15*  
*Multimodal representations of the bees*

Personal experiences provided many contexts for writing and making at home and at school. The data show that children wrote stories at school about personal experiences, usually to record what they did with their families when they were not at school. Stories told at home were predominantly about their own immediate interests and for an audience other than the teacher, or to use as part of their play.

### **Making books, telling stories**

At around the time of her fifth birthday, Trudie made a book about 'spooky fun' in the Reception class (see Figure 16 below). This was shortly after Halloween, which may have influenced her choice of subject for her story. Her story was narrated as a poem, and represented her ability to make meaning while working independently at a messy, busy table of scraps of paper, sticky tape, scissors and writing and drawing implements. I (as the practitioner-researcher) was reading with children at another table in the room, when Trudie brought the book to me and started to read it in rhyme.

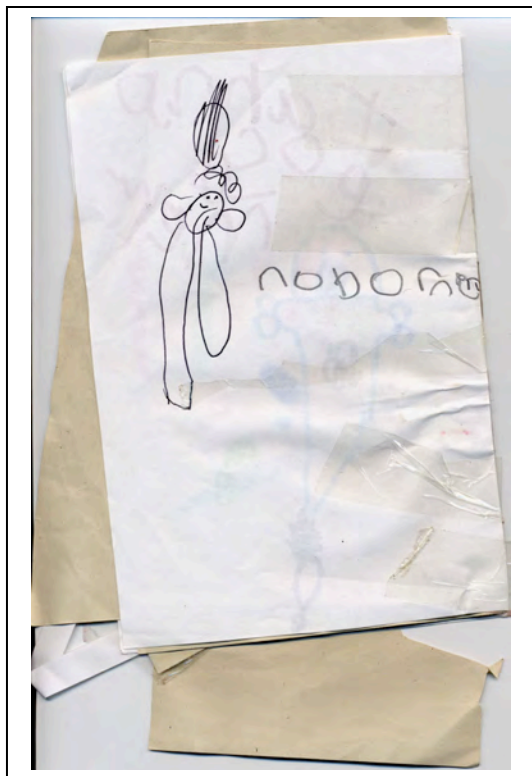


Figure 16  
Trudie's book of Spooky fun  
(Clockwise from top left)



Using Broström's method of asking children whether their stories could be tape recorded for the Storyride project (Broström, 1999), I asked Trudie to wait so that I could tape record her spoken text. She agreed, and waited until the tape recorder was ready before continuing to tell her spooky story while varying the expression and rhythm in her voice (see transcript of Trudie's recital of her poem in Appendix 3). Trudie had cut out a little monster and taped it onto a long piece of paper so that it could go in and out of each page in her book. She used the monster on the first page to animate the story, and was reluctant to let me borrow her book until she had taken it home to read to her family. She returned it to me the next day so that I could scan it onto my computer. Her mother said that she had read it several times at home. She also told me that she herself writes poetry, but had never asked Trudie to do any as she did not want to put any pressure on her.

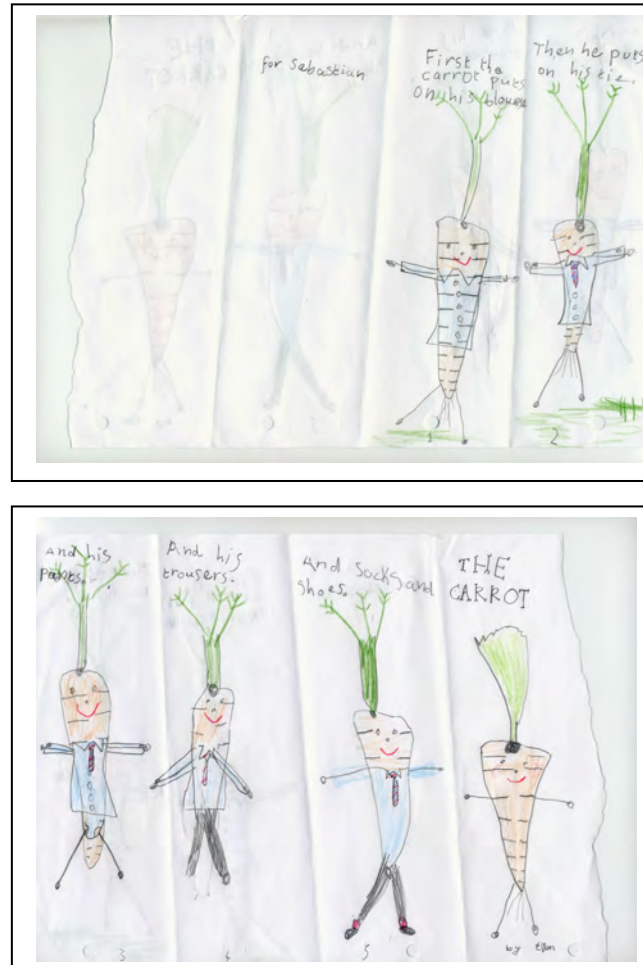
The original transcription of Trudie's story was corrected by her when it was read back to her, as 'the cradle of the wave' (see transcript of Trudie's story in Appendix 3) had been misinterpreted due to background noise affecting the sound quality of the tape. As suggested by Broström (2002), Trudie was able to accept or reject my interpretation of her story as the transcript was read back to her and displayed in the classroom the day after she had written it. This quick response was considered important while Trudie could remember the details of her story. Broström (1999) maintains that there is a need for children's voices to be heard in the representations of their stories, so that they have control over their own narratives. Giving the word to the child strengthens the child's culture, and ensures that their stories are part of their own culture. In Trudie's case, her home culture was reflected in her poetic story, drawing on her cultural history and her lived experiences at home (Fleer, 2006; Hedegaard, 2008b). Broström (1999) sees children as producers of culture, rather than as mere recipients of culture, through the telling of their stories.

Trudie's book demonstrated her inventiveness in designing the visual artefact, as well as in her narration of her story. She used a wide range of modes in which to represent her meanings: although the book is a traditional source for

a story, she has used cut-outs, flaps, drawing and writing as well as play-writing. The beginnings of phonological understanding can be seen in her attempts at writing, and she has clearly produced a title page as well as a back cover. Her narration to accompany her book is a demonstration of her understanding of rhythm and imagination in language. Jensen (2012) contends that the acquisition of literacy skills are important, but should not be the only focus. He suggests taking a socio-cultural approach where identity, wellbeing and personal development are seen to be fundamental to literacy learning and teaching.

### **Stories for particular audiences**

Ellen made a number of books for her siblings at home. Some of these were modelled on her knowledge of children's story books, others were made with humour and for specific purposes. Figure 17 below shows an example of a zig-zag book which Ellen made for her baby brother Sebastian at home, at the age of seven.



**Figure 17**  
*Ellen's Carrot book for Sebastian*

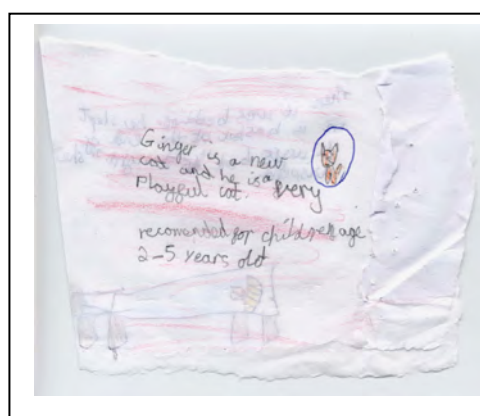
In an email to me, explaining the context for this, Ellen's mother said that she made the book

remarkably quickly one Saturday or Sunday morning. She was chuckling to herself while she wrote it. She brought it to me and I loved it. .... I asked her why she had written it, and, in response, she dived back to the drawing table and added the dedication 'for Sebastian' - 'because it's the kind of book children his age like'. She read it to him once or twice but, to be honest, I think she just wrote it because she wanted to - it made her laugh.

Ellen made many books for her younger brothers, and put her knowledge of books and stories to good use in designing their format and content. She frequently used humour to engage Sebastian in his stories, for example by making a book with a story about a giraffe with chicken pox. She enjoyed

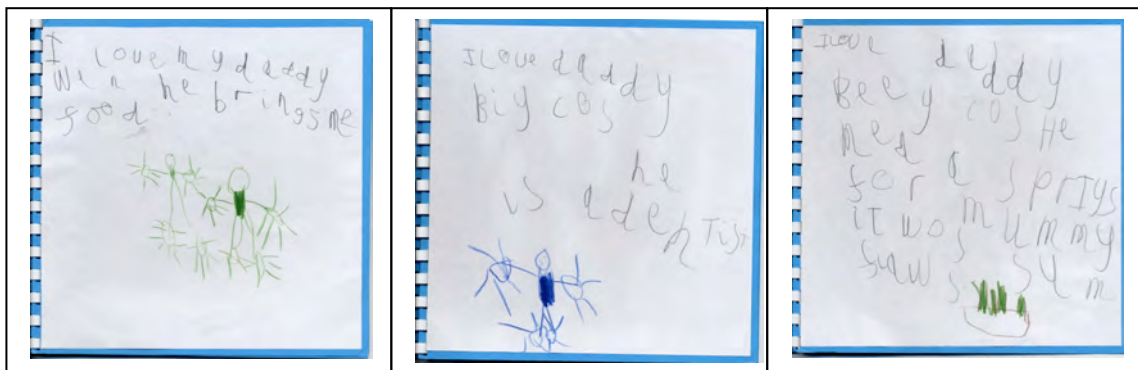
manipulating and changing events from life and recorded these in her stories at home where she did not have to be concerned about neatness or lack of time. Loizou (2005: 44) suggests that laughter and humour are 'components of social competence' and that the use of humour involves thought in finding ways to manipulate and alter knowledge. This enables children to feel empowered by their humour, and consolidates Ellen's position as the older, more knowledgeable sister. Ellen's writing at home was always accompanied by drawing and hastily gathered and joined scraps of paper, whereas her work at school was more precise in presentation, and more serious in nature. Ellen said that she enjoyed writing and 'would probably get bored' if she did not write (see interview transcript in Appendix 2) She added that she wrote for her teacher at school, and for her mother and father at home.

Ellen continued to use her knowledge of books to write stories for Sebastian. Her mother told how she had taken the children to the literature festival in the town, where she had attended a book making session. Her brother Sebastian had been upset when his book had to go back to the library, so Ellen decided to make a book for him about Ginger the cat (see appendix 4). Ellen used a speech bubble to show the cat's thought that the dog might be a monster. She provided a blurb on the back cover of the book which shows her awareness of audience, and her understanding of the sort of book and might appeal to her brother (Figure 18).



*Figure 18*  
*Ellen's book about Ginger the cat*

The majority of Joseph's artefacts relate to his play and to issues about which he felt strongly, in the form of messages and signs. Joseph wrote stories at school for his family on special occasions. In the Reception class he made a book for his father for Father's Day. Although many of Joseph's artefacts at this time were made as part of his play and immediate interests, he participated in the adult directed activities in writing for a purpose. Joseph worked independently on his book, devising his own spellings and looking around the room for clues which would help him to write the words. The writing activity was preceded by a group discussion with the children about the special things about their fathers.

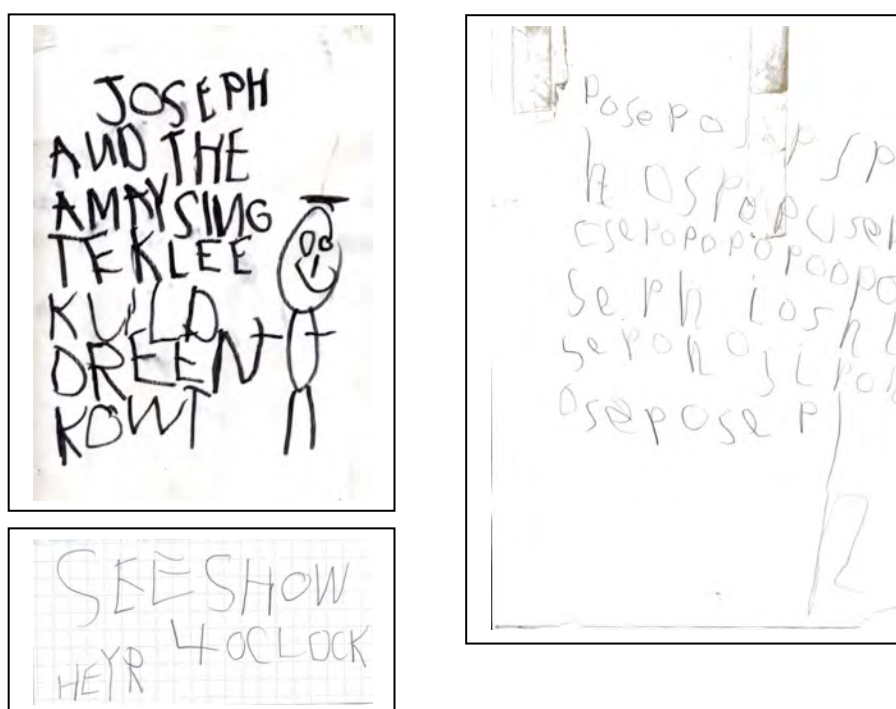


*Figure 19*  
*Extract from Joseph's book about daddy*

When Joseph had completed his book (Figure 19), I asked him why he had chosen to write it in this way and he replied that he wanted it to be the same on every page, because he wanted it to be like a 'real book'. The reciprocal relationship between early reading and writing has been highlighted by Clark (1994) and Clay (1998) as important in early literacy. Joseph's experiences with books at school meant that he was familiar with texts for young children which used repetitive texts to engage early readers. He used 'systematic and creative' (Bissex, 1980: 84) strategies in his spelling of words, and demonstrated competence in his phonological understanding in making valid attempts at writing unfamiliar words.

## Stories and role-play

In the initial analysis of the data, role-play was considered as providing the materiality of mode as well as a context within which to make meaning. In the matrix of artefacts (Appendix 5) role play was seen as a mode for ease of recording, as contexts such as gestures, dance and role play can be regarded as making up the materiality of the mode (Kress, 2009). Sometimes the children developed stories while engaged in role-play; at other times they used role-play explicitly to tell a story, as in Lydia's Snow White story (see figures 12 and 13). At five years of age in the Reception class, Joseph and his friend were engaged in role play about Joseph and the technicolour dream coat, a story with which they were familiar. As part of their play, they started to invite other children into the role play area to watch their production of the show. They made notices for the show (Figure 18) and taped these onto the floor so that the children would know what show was being put on.



*Figure 20  
Notices for the show*

The children's invented spellings were reflective of their knowledge and understanding about phonics as well as the genre of posters and notices.

Joseph used the letters of his name to make a programme for the show, and although he had shown on other occasions that he could make meaning by using alphabetic writing (see for example his book for daddy, Figure 19), the issue of importance on this occasion was in his role-play and relationships with class friends. Joseph directed the game, drawing others to join in and rearranging furniture to make room for his audience. Joseph used this opportunity to direct and show his friends, and to share his own experiences with them. In a similar situation in the Year 1 class, the children responded to a project about the same story by working together in making their own costumes out of sheets of paper, taped together to make the main character Joseph's dream coat. Working within the group of children in Year 1, Dominic used scraps of paper, string, wool, straws and colouring pencils to make a puppet with which to dramatise the story (Figure 21).



*Figure 21*  
*Joseph and his dream coat*

The children used literacy events to teach each other, mediated by their own cultural experiences (Freire, 1996). Literacy events in the Reception and Year 1 classes were often located within role-play: the children made props, signs and notices to accompany their activity. The proximity and accessibility of pencils, paper and items such as string and scraps of card together with a stapler and sticky tape, appeared to facilitate the writing of, for example, messages, notices and menus (Kress, 1997). The children often used cut-

outs in their artefacts. This technique seemed to offer them control over their artefacts, and allowed them to manipulate them to a greater extent than if using paper and pencils alone. It enabled them to control the design of their meaning making and to create three dimensional images when needed, as Paul did when making Power Ranger figures for himself and his friends in the Reception class (see Figures 10 and 11).

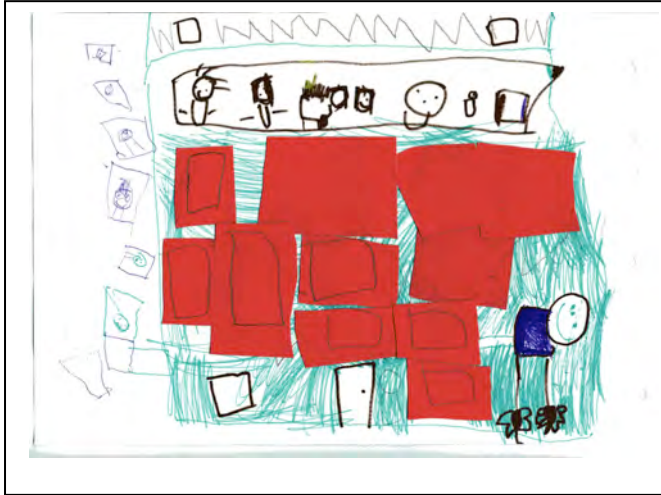
### **Stories about feelings and relationships**

At seven, Ellen wrote a story for her mother Sue as a get-well card. She had heard that her friend's mother had died and she worried about this when Sue was ill. The data showed that the children were more likely to express their feelings in their meaning making at home than at school, particularly once they were in the Key Stage 1 classes. However, Ellen had written about her feelings for a dead bird at school in the Reception class (see Figure 6), where she could use the classroom's less structured routine and more frequent opportunities for self-chosen activities to make artefacts that were personal to her. At home, Ellen showed her awareness of the affective dimension of her writing in her books and messages for her family.

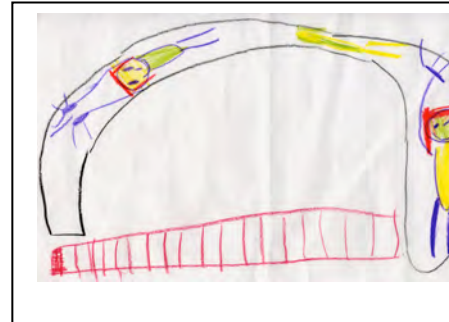
Ella, one of the other children in this class, used her artefact as a way of showing her feelings and sympathy for her friend who was anxious about coming home with her after school, as she had not been collected by anyone other than her mother after school before. Ella took her friend to the craft table in the classroom, talking to her about her house. She drew a picture on a sheet of card, and made cut-outs of red paper to make the windows (Figure 22). She accompanied her collage with a running commentary about her house, clarifying and extending her story as she drew and designed her artefact. This commentary helped to engage her friend and to draw her into the activity: she drew her family on the left side of the page after Ella had drawn her own family. The staircase is placed horizontally at the top of the paper as it would not fit in elsewhere. This problem solving action demonstrates the value of design in making meaning, which Kress (2000a) and Stein (2008) suggest is indicative of the sign maker's interest and agency.



It reflects the affective and personal dimension in the way children represent their meanings and their thought.



*Figure 22*  
*Ella's house*



*Figure 23*  
*Playing on the slide*

In her conversation with me, Ella's mother explained that

Ella uses writing and drawing to express her emotions from an early age. She would write down her feelings and draw and make models, often about things that worried her, and although it was unreadable in the adult sense, she could always talk about what she had produced. This was a way to show and discuss events that make her sad or happy (for example her first day at school when she felt nervous) and helps her to express herself when she can't put her feelings into words.

Ella's efforts to put her friend at ease and to reassure her demonstrates an ability to empathise and consider the feelings of her friend. Vasquez (2004) recognises this propensity of very young children to engage in and draw on their social worlds to consider issues of fairness and social justice. Their concern with everyday issues include friends and others in their group in much the same way that Ella purposefully provided reassurance for her friend. In Ella's drawing of her and her friend playing on the slide in the school garden (Figure 23), she foregrounds their own images and transforms meaning by representing the slide in a circular way to show how they climbed

up the tree house and ran around to access the slide. Ella has control over the representation of this image as she uses design to choose the way in which different elements of the image are communicated (Stein, 2008). Ella drew this picture after they had been outside playing, showing them with outstretched arms and smiles to represent their feelings of joy, exhilaration and speed, in her continuing effort to reassure her friend about coming to her house for tea.

In the Year 1 classroom, six-year-old Charles was at times a reluctant participant in teacher directed recording and practising of literacy teaching, preferring to use role play, dramatisation of stories and drawing to make meaning rather than to join in with structured tasks which did not engage his interest. After using talk to demonstrate his knowledge, the teacher suggested that he might like to find another way to show what he had learned. He started to draw, cut and join scraps of paper together, making a map, while telling a story about treasure being buried in the school garden (Figure 24). At play time, Charles gathered his friends around him and asked them to help him find the treasure, using an artefact he had made separately by cutting, colouring, using sticky tape and gluing two strips of paper together to make a cross.



*Figure 24*  
*Charles' map to find*  
*treasure*

The children followed Charles into the garden, where he hid the cross in a bush and followed him during playtime as he directed them where the treasure might be found.

Charles achieved a range of purposes with his artefact. He had practised the phonics which had been the focus of the literacy lesson in class (ch, oo), and said that the arrows pointed in the direction of his grandmother's house – the treasure would be found on the way to her house. In focusing a lens on the apparently unremarkable signs and drawings that children sometimes make, Mavers (2011: 3) maintains that it is the 'semiotic effort' which reflects learning, rather than the acquisition of specific skills. Charles's artefact reflects his meanings in a principled way as he invented his own way to represent his thoughts. His artefact became a useful prop for his treasure-hunting game, giving him a sense of control after what was in effect a taught session where the control was predominantly in the hands of the teacher.

Two weeks later, when Charles found his map again, he laughed at the way he had written the sounds and arrows. He presented this to the whole class, saying that he knew much better now, using humour at his own expense while entertaining his friends. He laughed at his interpretation of his directions to the treasure, saying that the arrows would make it hard to find the treasure. He used his map and his sense of humour to demonstrate the meanings in his artefact, and to demonstrate his social competence in reflecting on his own story about the treasure (Loizou, 2005).

When asked where Charles gets his ideas from, his mother replied that

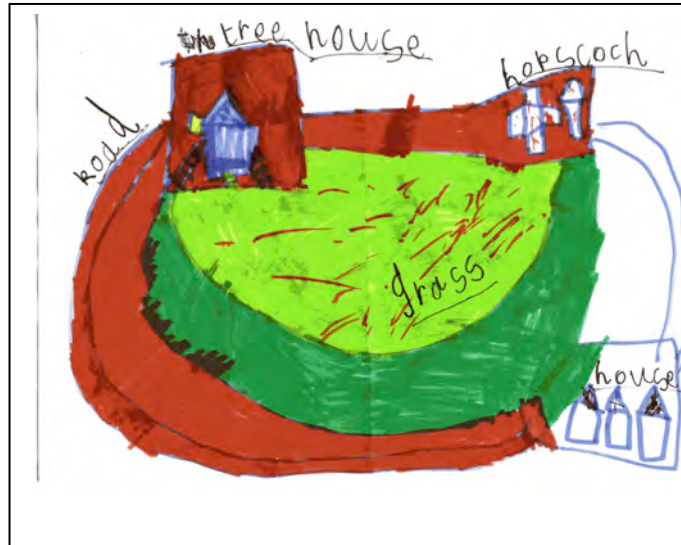
His ideas seem to just come into his head (*Charles gave a similar answer when asked this question*). Charles is always creating, and seems to spark ideas off everyday incidents. He made a barrier of boxes in front of the bird cage in the kitchen to prevent the dog from reaching the bird – this then became a castle, while keeping its function as a protective barrier..... He does not seem to enjoy writing for its own sake, and will much rather demonstrate, draw or construct rather than

write. He does not find 'story writing' (as required by school) very enjoyable.....

However, she also felt that he would be at a disadvantage if he did not learn to write willingly at school. She wished that he would learn to enjoy writing, and be comfortable about expressing himself. She believed that a reluctance to write would make his life difficult and he would find it hard to sit exams and write assignments, and this in turn would affect his self confidence. Mavers (2011) contends that, while valuing the range of ways in which children make meaning, there is a need for children to develop competence in reading and writing. However, in addition to this they need to adjust to other, more visual ways of expressing themselves in dealing with the changing nature of communication.

### **Maps of narratives and stories**

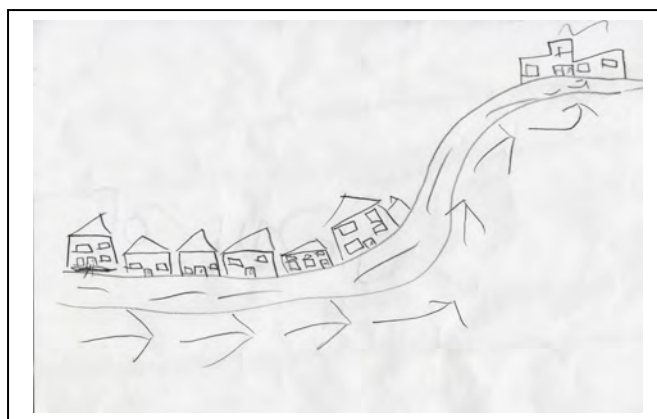
Some children made maps to communicate important events, or to record their experiences. Barrs (1988) viewed maps as one of the ways in which children could represent their meanings on paper in a symbolic way, using drawing and symbols to signify events, objects and action. Joseph and Ellen both made maps at home, when the family were going on holiday or to an outing away from home. The data provided one example of a map made at school: this was by Charles, who drew a map of the school garden and provided labels of different objects rather than taking part in the class task for literacy. Figure 25 shows his drawing of the garden to use in showing his friend where they were going to play. The teacher suggested that he might like to write labels to make his drawing clearer, and she used this opportunity to assess his competence in spelling.



*Figure 25  
A map of the school garden*

He had written his labels on his own without adult help which, at six years of age, demonstrated a sophisticated competence in spelling. He took his friend outside, using his map during playtime to decide where to play in the different areas of the garden. Pahl (1999) found that map-making appealed particularly to boys' interests, as it may help in transforming meaning into action. Charles devised his map with the purpose of directing his play with a friend and this provided him with a focus for his playtime outdoors. Pahl (1999: 47) suggests that 'drawing and map making could harness the power of play' in the nursery. In this case, the map is made by Charles in a Year 1 class to extend and empower his play while at the same time providing a context for his writing as well as an opportunity to explore perspective, space and proportion. In making the map Charles transforms his meaning-making through action as he devises ways to represent the garden, and uses this in a different way to support and facilitate his play outdoors (Pahl, 2001).

James at five years of age had drawn a map at home for reasons which were related to his anxiety about his mother getting to the hospital on time for the birth of his new baby sister (Figure 26). The map was intended for his father so that he would not get lost on his way to the hospital. He uses arrows to show direction, and draws houses on the side of the road, which is curved to represent the distance he would need to travel.



*Figure 26*  
*Directions to the hospital*

This map may invite a response which values it as a competent work of art, and as a means of emotional self-expression for James; however, it should be seen as a serious form of communication in addition to these observations. Both James and Charles have used visual means to convey their intended meanings in a way which would have been difficult using spoken or written language alone (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). Freire and Macedo (1987: 159) call for children to be encouraged to 'recreate their own language of meaning' and thus 'name their world'.

Ellen learned about map making at school, and followed this with several maps at home. She drew a map of Mars, and wrote in Martian: 'map of Mars, done by Ellen'. This reflected her interest in foreign languages and in particular different scripts. She labelled a volcano and a roundabout on her map to signify her developing knowledge and interest in finding out about Mars. Around the same time she made several maps to show where her friends live in response to the work she had done at school. Other occasions on which Ellen engaged in map making were when the family was on holiday. Joseph and Ellen frequently worked on maps together, drawing fictional characters on them at times to create adventure stories. The scope of map making appeared to provide them with opportunities to tell stories and to record where they had been or where they were living at the time.

## Summary

This chapter has explored some of the stories and narratives which children constructed while making meaning in different contexts. It recognises the materiality of the modes they chose to work in, and concludes that the contexts and modes within which children work are complex and difficult to define or separate. Although the chapter has attempted to discuss the children's stories under some of the headings suggested by the way in which the data were categorised, the artefacts are found to draw on many different materials and contexts at the same time. This is reflected in the complexity of the children's narratives, and of their motives in making meaning.

Some children enjoyed retelling favourite stories; these were at times inspired by traditional tales such as Snow White, and they were occasionally inspired by theatre productions some of the children had attended. These stories were retold using writing, drawing and role play, and were often accompanied by dressing up and the making of props and puppets. Visual images were seen to represent meanings which were not always able to be narrated using spoken or written language: this draws largely on Kress (1997; 2010; 2009) and Mavers (2011) in acknowledging the impact of the visual representations as a means of communication in themselves.

The children's personal experiences were reflected in their story-making, and included exploring and finding out about subjects which interested them. Stories were told in books that were made at home or at school, sometimes hastily assembled but always reflective of immediate interests and meanings. The artefacts represented a socio-cultural lens through which to gain an understanding of the children's worlds. The chapter explored books made by the children for particular audiences. The inclusion of humour and the demonstration of their understanding of the conventions of writing and story-telling and making were visible. Role play was found to be a powerful context and medium for the children's stories which encouraged them to devise ways to make their meanings visible and to explore different modes of

representation. Although feelings, emotions and relationships are recognised and valued in the children's stories and narratives, this chapter concludes by drawing on Freire and Macedo (1987) in valuing the artefacts as communicative practices which encourage the children to 'name their world' by using their own ways to represent their meanings.



## Chapter 8

### Power relationships

#### Introduction

Chapter 7 explored the stories that the children told in their artefacts, represented visually in their drawings, play writing, collage and puppet-making. These stories were at times told and recorded in their artefacts alongside their play; at other times the children made books to write and tell their stories to a chosen audience. The stories children told often reflected their sense of humour, emotions and their interests in events such as Joseph and Ellen's story about the bees. The children used traditional stories to retell and reconstruct their own versions, and used these opportunities to demonstrate their concern for issues of fairness, good and evil, as in Lydia's story of Snow White (figure 12) where she used colour and form to identify the attributes of the characters. James's map to show his father the way to the hospital to ensure that his mother would arrive in time for the birth of her baby demonstrates his care and his ability to empathise. He used his drawing to communicate his feelings as well as to allay his anxiety about the new baby, and provided a window onto his emotions about the events that concerned him.

This chapter explores whether the children's own meanings are visible in their meaning-making practices. Children's responses to the practices of the Nursery and school may be influenced by the demands for particular conduct, rather than by their own motives (Hedegaard, 2012). Power relationships in early childhood literacy are explored in relation to the artefacts, and the chapter considers the ways in which the voices of the children are visible in their artefacts through their meaning-making practices. The children's ability to share the feelings of others and to show concern in both their own worlds

and in wider society is explored in this chapter, which concludes by taking a critical literacy perspective in analysing their artefacts.

### **Whose meanings: who decides?**

Children in the Year 1 class participated in a period of structured phonics teaching every day. This was usually followed by a task consisting of a worksheet which was directly related to the teaching that day, but not necessarily linked to a context which was of interest to the children. Charles's maps of the school garden (figure 25) and of his treasure, showing the way to his grandma's house (figure 24), demonstrate that he was unwilling to participate in this task, yet produced artefacts in which he was able to indicate his understanding of the teaching whilst devising ways to pursue his own interests. Charles's enthusiastic search for meaning in response to the teacher's taught session resulted in devising an innovative solution to this task, where he could demonstrate his own interpretation of his learning and an ability to challenge the adult's choice of activity. Although Charles did not engage in the activity set for the class, he chose to find other visual ways to make meaning of the situation by accessing the resources available in the classroom. Cope and Kalantzis (2000: 5) maintain that 'mere literacy' does not allow for the powerful messages that would be possible with a visual representation, and that a multiliteracies approach offers a broader view, enabling Charles to reinvent language and meanings in his own way.

A key aspect of the multiliteracies approach to literacy is that it is concerned with the 'designs of meaning' (Fairclough, 2000: 162) as can be seen in the way that Charles transformed the resources in order to make meaning in his own way. The maps drawn by Charles are an example of the way in which children can use drawing to 'bring friends closer', and to include them in their 'social world' while using drawing and signs as a way of representing intended meanings in a graphic way (Dyson, 2010a: 162). Charles used both of his maps as a means to invite children into his game. Fisher (2011) suggests that children find it difficult to understand their role as learner in the classroom. Children as young as Charles, at six years of age at the time, appear to be

required to reach an understanding about the motives of the teacher. Fisher draws on Hedegaard *et al.* (Hedegaard *et al.*, 2008) in contending that there is a need to focus on the child's motives and activities, rather than on the institutional practice: the child's motives 'that direct their actions as learners' are not always in agreement with those of the teacher (Fisher, 2011: 49).

Hedegaard (2012) suggests that motives are formed socially as can be seen in the way Charles engages his friends in his activities, rather than acting purely individually. This social appropriation of meaning was also evident in the way Lydia drew on her class friends to help make puppets for her Snow White story (figures 12 and 13). A production of Snow White which involved all the children in the class followed Lydia's self-initiated drawing, writing and puppet-making. A similar theme can be seen in Joseph and Henry's 'show' of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat (Figure 20) in the Reception class, and Charlotte's production in the Year 2 class, where Dominic made puppets of Joseph and his dreamcoat as a contribution (Figure 21) to Charlotte's activity. The children were able to make meaning by drawing on their social worlds involving their school friends within the official context of school (Dyson, 2010a).

The data show that Joseph and Ellen frequently made their artefacts at home for each other, their younger brother or their parents. Their artefacts appeared to be inspired by their experiences and relationships with each other, or by events and stories with which they as a family were familiar. They frequently used humour to try to attract the attention of each other and their parents, occasionally making artefacts principally for their own enjoyment, as in the case of Ellen's Carrot book ostensibly made for Sebastian (Figure 17). As Ellen's mother related in her email accompanying this image of the Carrot Book, Ellen appeared to enjoy the making and reading of this book, regardless of Sebastian's apparent lack of interest in it. This particular example also implies that it is not always a simple matter to interpret children's motives, as an analysis of the child's intentional actions may not be easily understood by others (Hedegaard, 2012).

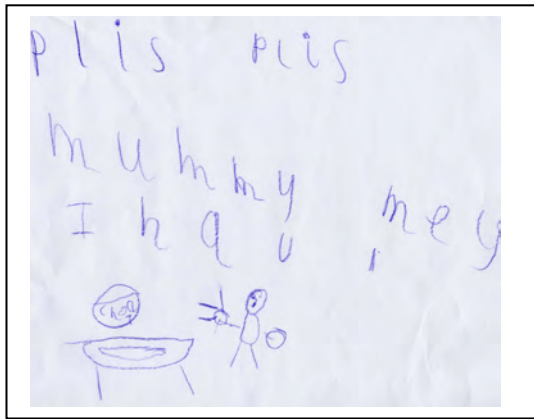
In Harry's drawing of the stand for the goslings in the Reception class (Figure 9), he showed his emotions, and used drawing as a way to record his structure. His writing shows a competence in the technical skills of writing such as spelling, phonics and letter formation, yet it is in the drawing that the complexity of Harry's encounter with meaning was apparent. Here he employed print to serve a purpose (Goouch and Lambirth, 2011), either to please the teacher, or to supplement the meaning in his drawing. Earlier in his year in Reception class at school, Harry had responded to requests to write or draw about his experiences with his family by focusing on the visual image to represent his meanings, rather than on alphabetic writing. He had drawn a large yellow sun to represent his holiday in France, and was reluctant to add any writing to this. He firmly said that this was all that was needed, reflecting Kress and van Leeuwen's contention that the image is not just an illustration: it in itself carries meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

He later drew a picture of the view from his bedroom window on Guy Fawkes night (Figure 27) onto which he attempted to write about his feelings with the teacher's encouragement. Harry's drawing of fireworks is complex and expressive, reflecting his feelings and thoughts in some detail. His mother told me that his drawing was an accurate image of the view from his bedroom, and that he had sat in his room to avoid being near the fireworks as he was afraid of them. As a five-year-old, Harry's choice of medium for recording his emotions was clearly made visible in his drawing; however, he showed competence in his attempts at writing and appeared to try to please the adult by writing in addition to his drawing.

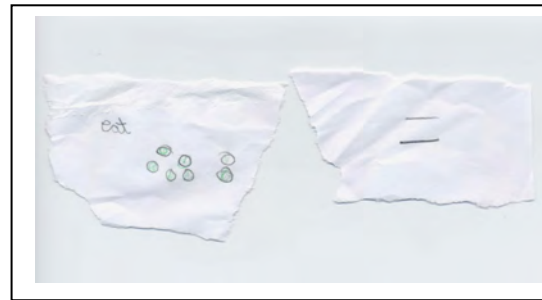


*Figure 27  
The view from Harry's bedroom*

Joseph and Ellen's mother Sue had commented on the immediacy of the children's meaning-making, commenting that, although their artefacts were meaningful while they were being made, these meanings were sometimes lost afterwards when the moment had passed. She had emailed an example of five-year-old Joseph and seven-year-old Ellen's shared humour and understanding about expectations during dinner time, with the following explanation of the context: Sue had said that Joseph could only have chocolate cake if he ate his peas. Joseph had hurried from the table to write a message and draw a picture (Figure 28), as he knew that she would like this. Ellen replied with a message that eating peas equals having cake (Figure 29: she had placed a cake after the equals sign). They laughed after this, but Joseph still had to eat his peas!



*Figure 28*  
*Joseph's request for cake*

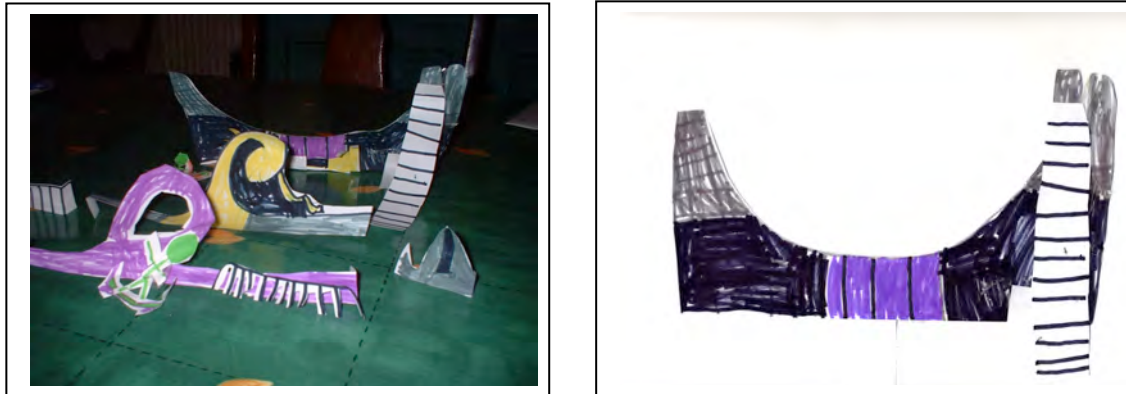


*Figure 29*  
*Ellen's message:*  
*eat peas=cake*

Joseph used his ingenuity to find a way to achieve his goal: his motives were clear, and he used his knowledge of the cultural context of home and family to attempt to have his own way. The humour within the family context in responding to this takes on a teasing nature whereby the child shows resilience by joining in with the laughter while learning about cultural expectations in a particular context. Rogoff (2003: 219) posits that in some cultures children learn to endure teasing without losing confidence as it is used to teach them about 'appropriate behaviour' and 'not losing face in front of others'. The humour here also demonstrates Joseph's social competence, and his use of humour as an 'attribute of thought' (Loizou, 2005: 43) as he engaged with a situation and was empowered by his capacity to grasp the humorous response to his request. Ellen joined in with the game, playing an active part in the teasing ritual while both children used a multimodal approach to represent the request for chocolate cake, accessing paper, pencil, a cake and humour as their resources.

The power of having resources to hand (Kress, 1997) was demonstrated by six- year-old Dominic playing at home in his bedroom with his friend. The bedroom window looked out over a skate boarding ramp where teenagers played and showed off their skills. Dominic admired these older children's skills, and his mother Caroline explained that

Dominic had been playing in the park with his friend Jasper, and spontaneously made these skate board ramps when they came in (they had been watching the teenagers using the ramp behind the house). Jasper had a skate board and Dominic wished he had one – in Dominic’s own words.



*Figure 30  
Dominic’s skate-boarding ramps*

Using paper and coloured pens to make three dimensional figures, the two boys made a range of artefacts representing the much admired scene (Figure 30). This resonates with Dyson’s suggestion that children inhabit shared practices, giving them social agency in participatory cultures (Dyson, 2010a). Dominic’s mother said that there were always paper, scissors and pencils available at home, and that

...writing is not really “him”. .....the skill of writing comes easily to him, so I am not concerned about his disinterest in writing. He is only not doing it because he would rather play sport and be outside doing physical things.....football and other physical activities bring out a different person and he then seems far more confident and self-assured.

Dominic represented his thinking with ease when engaged with outdoor pursuits as he identified with physical action and sports. However, in his puppet of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat (Figure 21) which he had made at school, he demonstrated a willingness to make meaning about different events, using available resources with skill.

There were examples among the data where the children were seen to have copied the teacher's writing, in an apparent attempt to model alphabetic writing. Although Mavers (2011: 14) suggests that copying can be 'intensely purposeful', she qualifies this by questioning the reasons for copying, and who it might be for. Copying can require initiative on the part of the child in reconceptualising and reconstructing meaning, or it can be seen as reproduction where it might be a routine activity and lacking in meaning. Sometimes the children used their learning at school to develop and reconstruct their knowledge and understanding at home, using these opportunities to make visible their own meanings. For example, Ellen used her knowledge gained during a family visit to the literature festival in making a book about Ginger for her younger brother (Appendix 4) which reflects her knowledge of the genre as well as her competence in writing expressively for a particular audience. Soon after this, at seven years old, she also learned about book-making at school, and was given a homework task of making a book suitable for reading to young children. Ellen's mother described her response to this task by explaining that

...Ellen brought her Easter homework home and I think it is the first truly creative assignment yet - she has to write a story, in book form, aimed at nursery children. Unlike her usual homework, which she does kicking and screaming at the latest possible moment, she started this after tea this evening....

Other examples of children using their knowledge gained either at school or in their wider family lives were evident in Ellen's poetry as well as in the books and stories she wrote at home. She wrote a poem to her parents for Valentine's Day, after learning about writing poems at school. Her poem written at school (Figure 31) was done neatly in her book; however, she often used scraps of paper for her writing at home (Figure 32), where the immediacy and meaning of the context saw her using language in an emotional and expressive way.



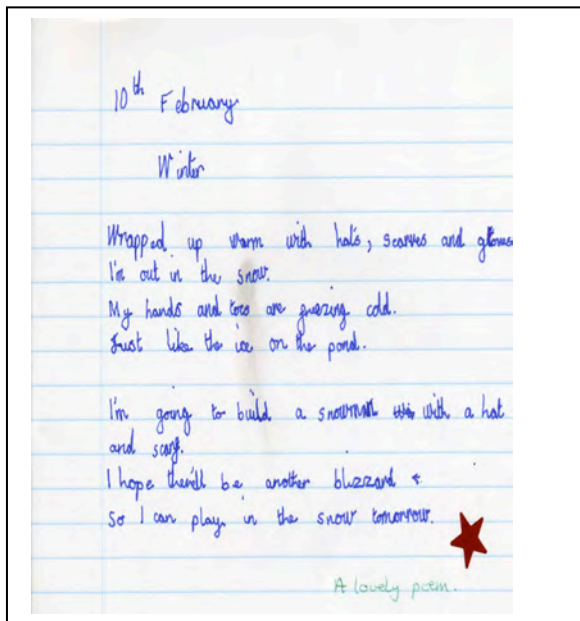


Figure 31  
Ellen's poem written at school

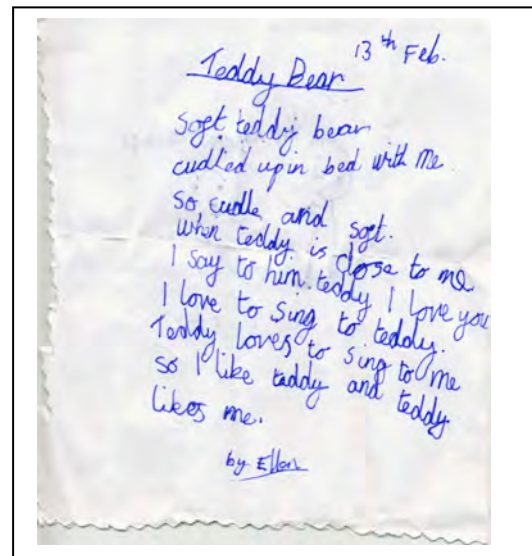


Figure 32  
Ellen's poem written at home  
for her parents

Ellen's writing at home and at school demonstrates how 'children can activate meaning in a different way at home than at school'....(in)....'transforming artefacts across sites' (Pahl, 2001: 120). Although Ellen appears tentative about reflecting her identity in her school practices (Scanlan, 2010), she has used this opportunity to use her school learning to develop her own voice and identity in her writing at home.

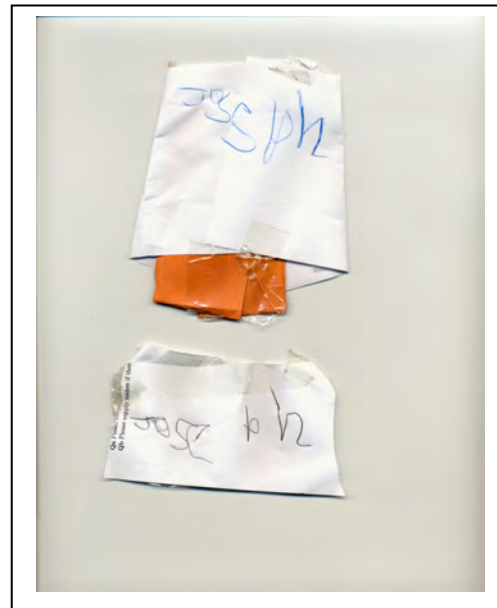
### Children's voices

At three, Joseph had used his drawing of his bear (Figure 3) to tell a personal story that demonstrated his affection for his bear, while extending his story and solving the problem of the hole in the paper. Joseph's story about his bear was an unexpected development for the adults around him, which demonstrated that children make meaning in surprising and sometimes unexpected ways (Flewitt, 2005). Later, at four and five years old in the Reception class, his meaning-making consisted largely of communications and messages which were intended for friends and family members. He also used badges and small constructions made of paper tape and glue to

accompany his role-play (Figure 34), particularly in relation to role play about Power Rangers, characters with which he was unfamiliar at the time. Much of the role play in the classroom revolved around Power Rangers characters, often initiated by Paul's cut-outs and models (Figures 10, 11 and 33). Paul's skill in making cut-outs, and his ability to use this in stimulating Power Rangers play with his friends while drawing them in to their shared interests and Dyson's shared, participatory cultures (2010a), all helped to bring the children together in the social world of the classroom.



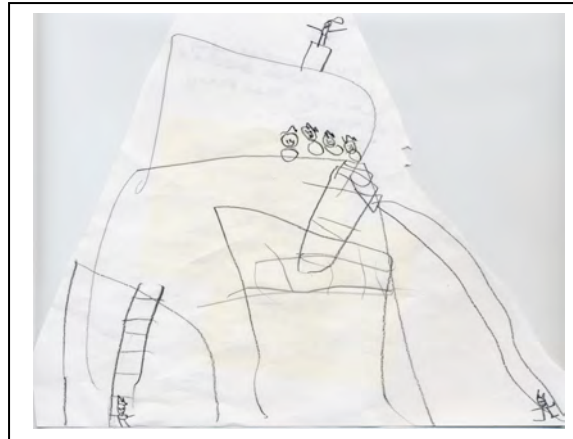
*Figure 33  
Paul's Power Ranger cut-out*



*Figure 34  
Joseph's 'power pack' for his  
Power Rangers play with Paul*

Paul's propensity to express himself graphically was visible in his spontaneous actions in using drawing and cut-outs in preference to writing or play-writing. He used his ingenuity to devise ways to communicate, particularly when excited or busy in play. His drawings and cut-outs were an important part of his 'communication in a spoken world' (Dyson, 2010a: 162), for example where he used a hurriedly made drawing to explain his difficulties in the school garden at playtime (Figure 35). Paul complained that some children were blocking the entrance to the tree house and slide, which prevented others from climbing up and taking turns. Once he had made this drawing and talked about it, he forgot about it, finding it three months later

under a piece of furniture in the classroom. He used this to reflect on the situation and to make light of his feelings at the time.



*Figure 35  
Problems at playtime*

When not engaged in role play with their friends, their sign-making and messages made at school were often linked to the responsibilities associated with caring for ducklings and goslings in the classroom (see, for example, Harry's stand for the goslings in Figure 9). Much of Joseph's activity was carried out in partnership with one or two friends as he used bits of paper, post-its and sticky tape to display his signs.

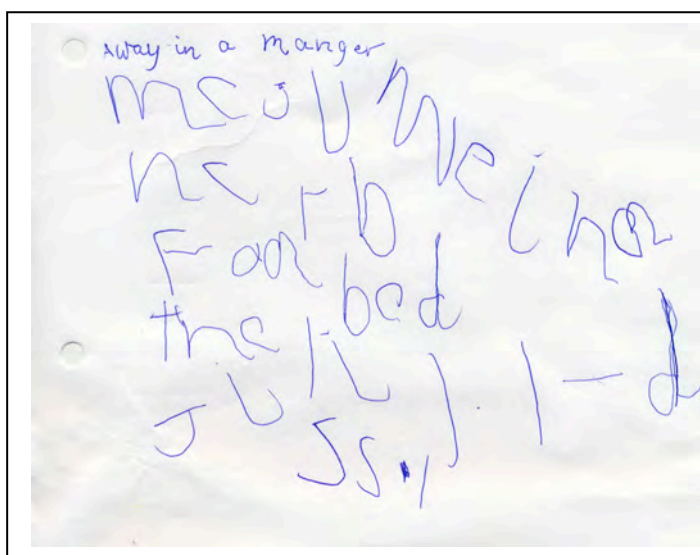
At four and five years old in the Reception class, Joseph's artefacts were sometimes made for reasons which were immediate and instructional, such as making signs with his friend Henry saying 'dont tuch', and 'please don't touch thank you' to tape onto the table surface next to their Lego aeroplane constructions, to stop anyone packing them away. In the event, they usually *had* been packed away by the next morning, but this did not seem to matter to the children: it was the immediacy of the situation that was important to them. Joseph and Henry also used their time in the role play area of the classroom. Early in the Reception year, I had recorded in the field notes that

Joseph was playing with Henry in the role play area, shopping, inviting children to buy imaginary goods. Both boys were writing their names on card and sticking them on tables and the backs of chairs with bluetack. Joseph repeatedly used his name for messages, filling

pages with the letters, very quickly written to represent his imaginary shopping lists and prices.

Shortly following this, after Joseph had joined the older children in the school hall with the rest of his class for a Christmas concert rehearsal, Joseph's mother Sue wrote to me about his response to his subsequent meaning-making at home:

Joseph felt very keenly the lack of a carol sheet for (the Reception children in) the school concert rehearsal.....This was the subject for discussion at mealtimes on several occasions, with Ellen (who was in the Year 2 class) proudly stating that her class had all received theirs. Things got worse for Joseph when Ellen brought the sheets home from school and he didn't have any. ....Joe's first attempts at producing sheets of his own happened before he really looked at Ellen's - they were just lots (and lots and lots) of Js, Ps. Once it dawned on him that these were the carols he was singing, he asked Ellen to help him make one of his own - hence her writing at the top. She went off to do something else ... and he carried on alone. He came to me complaining that he couldn't spell 'lord' and I encouraged him to use one of your 'magic lines' ... Soon after that he left it and it was only afterwards that I realised how well he had done (Figure 36).



*Figure 36*  
*Joseph's song sheet for*  
*Away in a Manger, with*  
*help from his sister Ellen*

Joseph's longing to be included in the singing practice of the older children in the school could be seen in his painstaking efforts to write the words of the

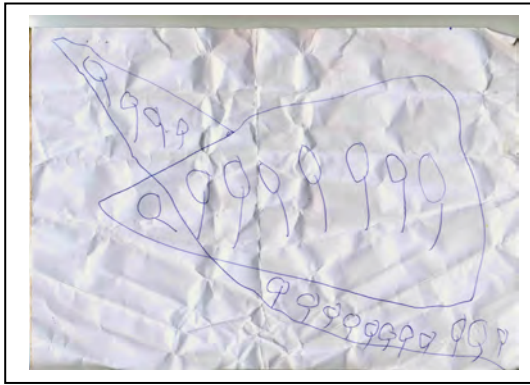
song. Millard (2006: 238) calls for a 'literacy of fusion which is characterised by blending aspects of school requirements with the children's current interests'. She draws on the work of Marsh (2003: 376) in suggesting that there is a tendency for 'one way traffic' from school or nursery to home, in children's use and understanding of literacy practices. Joseph may have used his learning from school at home in his efforts at spelling, and in using a *magic line* which he had been taught to use at school when he could not work out how to write a word. However, both he and Ellen showed urgency and purpose in the writing at home which was not always visible at school (see for example Ellen's writing at school and at home in Figures 31 and 32, as well as her story book about Ginger for her brother Sebastian at home, Appendix 4).

Other children in the Reception class appeared to prefer to use a different mode within which to work in order to make visible their interpretation of songs and music, using their understanding of musical notes to represent the meaning that this had for them. They systematically recorded row upon row of notes on sheets of paper and used these in their role-play. The data include examples of musical notes from both school and home; however, Joseph's interest was predominantly in using writing as a mode from his earliest time in the Reception class in order to make his meanings clear.

Joseph combined his writing with diagrams and map-making, particularly when making meaning at home. For example, his mother explained that

He made a map in advance of our visit to the Rococo Garden (in Gloucestershire) to see the snowdrops. He carried (his map) around with him and tried to correlate the real garden with his map, (saying) 'that's this part'. It became really real to him. Two more maps followed when we got home, based on a maze at the garden.

When the children arrived home, Joseph and Ellen made a map together. They drew figures of vampires designed to put people off getting the treasure. They used their fantasy play to help to extend their story associated with the family trip to the Rococo Garden (Figures 37 and 38).



*Figure 37*  
*Joseph's map of the Rococo Garden*



*Figure 38*  
*Joseph and Ellen's map, with vampires*

### **Critical literacy**

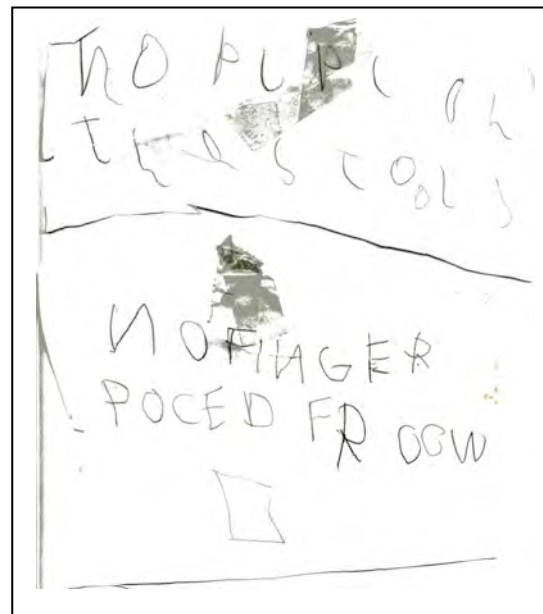
Joseph and his friend Ella made notices about the ducklings for the classroom. Some of these were stuck onto the toilet doors to let the older children in the school know that the ducklings had hatched in the Reception classroom. Others were taped onto the light box housing the ducklings and goslings after they had been moved from the incubator. Joseph demonstrated his meaning-making about events and issues that were close to his heart in the way he made signs in the classroom. Vasquez (2004), in taking a critical literacy approach with her kindergarten children, maintains that teachers need to discuss things with young children that are of importance to them in their lives. Taking care of the ducklings demonstrated the children's capacity to show concern for other living animals, and provided an opportunity for the children to revisit and explore the hatching and growing events in depth. The events relating to the incubation of the eggs also showed the children that they were able to take responsibility and take control, and that their views and ability to care were taken seriously.

Joseph and Ella made labels using post-its to stick on furniture and the doors to declare their feelings about the ducklings. These were done independently, and they used their knowledge and understanding to devise ways of writing the words, demonstrating their phonological understanding while making their voices heard. Figure 38 is an example of the way in which they made their

feelings known in the 'official' arena of the school (Dyson and Genishi, 2009: 73), while Figure 40 ('no people on the stools, no fingers poked through') communicated Joseph's concern for the safety of his friends, and his familiarity with the ground-rules of the classroom. These ground-rules were the result of discussions with the children, informed by the approach taken by Vasquez (2004), about the ways to care for the ducklings effectively. The children had agreed that it would not be a good idea to put their fingers through the wire netting surrounding the cage in case they were bitten, and that sitting or standing on stools might result in children falling over and hurting the ducklings, themselves or each other (one of the children had fallen off a stool, and this had resulted in a discussion about the safety of the stools).



*Figure 39*  
Joseph and Ella's declarations of love for the ducklings

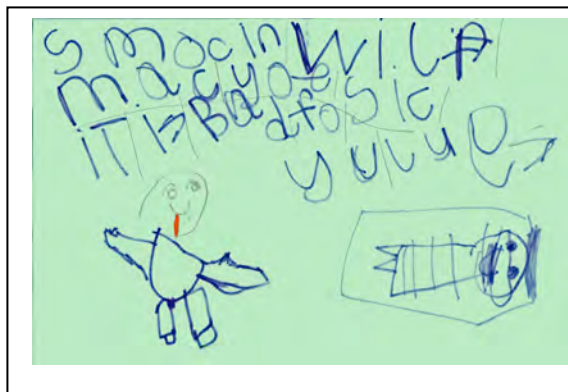


*Figure 40*  
Joseph's reminders to the children

Joseph found his own 'niche for print' within his 'symbolic repertoire' (Dyson and Genishi, 2009: 83). Using what he considered to be the most suitable writing implements and scraps of paper which were accessible to him at the time, his messages and signs were important to him in an immediate and urgent way. He responded to another child's mess on the carpet in the classroom by writing a note and taping it over the resulting wet patch, saying: 'bey cerfl wer you sit and pley' (be careful where you sit and play), showing

his consideration for the child's feelings by not mentioning his name, or the reason for the wet spot.

Vasquez (2004) contends that children position themselves differently in a critical literacy approach: they learn to negotiate and consider not only their own worlds, but the worlds of those around them. During a visit to the local rugby club with her parents, five-year-old Trudie had played by rolling up a piece of paper and pretending to smoke. Her father mentioned that smoking was not a good idea as it was bad for you, after which Trudie wrote and drew about her concerns over the damaging effects of smoking. In Figure 40 Trudie wrote: 'Smoking will make you sick. It is bad for you'.



*Figure 41  
Trudie's message about  
smoking*



*Figure 42  
Matches are bad for  
children*

Trudie's writing and drawing demonstrate her understanding of the issues, and that she took them seriously. Both at home and at school, the children appeared to be questioning 'why things are the way they are' (Vasquez, 2004: 139), and indicated that they could change things. Trudie's valid attempts at writing were well supported and supplemented by her drawings in the communication of the meaning, and she used a pencil to draw lines along her rows of writing, indicating that she understood the directionality of print and the separation of words. She followed this up later that day with the writing and drawing about matches in Figure 42, showing that she had thought deeply about the issues even though her mother said that they had not spoken much about the dangers of smoking with Trudie.



The data included examples of the way in which children use their toys and precious objects to make meaning. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) suggest that children's artefacts are bound up with their identities, and that these artefacts give children a sense of power in their meaning-making practices. At home, Joseph and Ellen used their favourite toys to role-play and question the practice of bull fighting while on holiday in Spain with their family. The transformation of their multimodal materials into texts with meaning engaged them in discussion about a cultural practice with which they were unfamiliar. Their mother Sue wrote that

....the children made paper matadors' costumes for their toys, and a bullfight poster, quite spontaneously one afternoon when we were in Spain. They spent about 2 hours on it in all. Although we had made it clear that we didn't agree with bullfighting, we did try to explain that it is part of Spanish culture and history and that it isn't always easy to judge other peoples' traditions.....the captions say 'el white bear' 'el brown dog' (Figure 43)



*Figure 43  
Joseph and Ellen's bullfighting scene*

The children combined their toys with other materials to work together in transforming meaning while exploring an issue of animal welfare. They used role play to re-enact the scene as they understood it, and made clothes for their animals as well as a poster. Looking further than the object, and

exploring what might lie behind this, the children's concerns with social and animal welfare issues engaged their interest and provided an opportunity for them to name their world ....and speak their word (Freire, 1996: 69).

## **Summary**

Power relationships are evident in early childhood literacy practices, particularly in early years settings and schools where children may be taught the technical skills needed to become what might be perceived by those in positions of power as competent writers (Fisher, 2010). Comber (2003: 358) contends that children are inducted into 'particular kinds of knowledge of the world' where they are taught how their lives should be. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the deeply held meanings which children are capable of expressing in their multimodal artefacts, whether these are written in alphabetic script, or represented in a variety of modes. Children may find that their voices are not heard if they do not understand the purpose of their meaning-making activities, or if their motives are not understood by those around them (Fisher, 2010; Hedegaard, 2012).

The chapter reflected on the ways in which the data show how children chose to make meaning: their artefacts represented their literacy practices in terms of meanings which provide opportunities for the children to 'name their world' (Freire, 1996: 69), rather than merely to demonstrate their technical skills in spelling, forming letters, or presenting neat writing in their school books. However, sometimes these skills were present and well developed within the context of meaningful practices rather than in de-contextualised taught situations alone. Examples of this competence in the skills of alphabetic writing appear in many of the images of the children's artefacts where they combine different modes, including both writing and other modes such as drawing, gluing and cutting in communicating meaning. However, this chapter endeavoured to show that the children's voices were clear and their meanings visible whatever mode they were using: Dyson and Genishi (2009: 83) argue that children's own invented signs are the basis of 'inner speech', and that

their graphic means of representation are as effective and meaningful as written forms.

This chapter considered the visibility of children's voices in their meaning making endeavours. Children's search for meaning is predicated by their interests, their motives and intentions. They design meaning in the sense that they use the resources that are accessible and available to them to represent their thinking in their own way. I considered the argument put forward by Fisher (2010) that children may find that their own understandings are at odds with those of the teacher, and that there therefore is a need to ensure the agency of children as writers. Children draw on their social worlds in making meaning, and, particularly when at home in a family context, may make use of humour to explore culturally accepted ways of being. The artefacts from the data collection showed that an image (for example, a drawing or cut-out) can be meaningful in itself and should not be seen merely as an illustration to accompany writing.

This chapter acknowledges children's social worlds, where they draw each other into their meaning making practices. The children used their competence in meaning-making, such as making cut-outs and signs, to engage each other in shared activities. The chapter explored the nature of critical literacy in early childhood, where children are able to demonstrate their capacity for taking responsibility, sharing and caring while questioning the way things are. They used their meaning-making practices to explore issues of fairness and welfare that were important to them, their friends and their social worlds.

## Chapter 9

### **Reflections and implications: the contribution of the thesis**

It is important that young children know from the very beginning that the meanings they make in their day-to-day actions are heard, valued and regarded as relevant. It has been recognised that children in educational settings can find it difficult to understand the motives and purposes of activities with which they are required to engage (Fleer, 2006; Fisher, 2010; Hedegaard, 2008b; 2012). In addition to this, children's motives may not be easy to interpret, and this needs to be recognised by educationalists in order to ensure that there is a 'pedagogy of listening' and that the child's perspective is sought (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005: 93). The visual data gathered for this study show that the artefacts which children produced were made intentionally by the children to communicate important meanings to themselves and to others. The title of the study was revised to reflect the ways in which these literacy activities might be re-imagined within the conventional expectations both in the school and the home. The emerging theory (Eisenhardt, 2002; Yin, 2009) developed from the literature and the data, inspired a development in focus from symbolic representation as a concept in becoming literate in itself, to the children's constructions of meanings on the edges of conventional and structured literacy teaching and learning activity.

In reflecting on the findings of the study, this chapter revisits the research questions, considers the implications of the research as well as its limitations, and considers the contribution of the thesis.

## **The research questions**

The research questions which were posed at the start of the research were concerned with the artefacts that children make in their day-to-day literacy activities using multimodality in the construction of their meanings. An emerging theme in the study was one of literacy as making meaning in different ways, rather than relying on alphabetic script alone. This was supported by the literature in chapters 2 and 3, and by the analysis of the data.

- How are children influenced in the development of their literacy experiences in the nursery, year 1 and 2 classrooms and at home?

It was not the intention of the study to see children's artefacts as demonstrations of forms of alphabetic literacy, but rather to suggest that children's meaning-making practices should themselves be regarded as literate, whatever mode they chose to use in producing their artefacts. Some children who were reluctant to write, for example in the Reception and Year 1 classes, used drawing or cut-outs as their preferred mode of representation, and these were recognised as fully literate within this context. Drawing on Dyson (2013), the study does not argue that children do not need to learn to write in alphabetic script, but rather that their own attempts at meaning making should be accepted as their literate endeavours and as showing creativity and ingenuity in an increasingly visual world. A key consideration in the study is that all children are regarded as literate, not only those who can read and write.

The children's constructions of meaning were greatly influenced by the meanings they attached to their friends, families and every-day experiences. The data were sorted into categories that reflected their interests both in terms of 'materiality of mode' and within the context of these interests. These often revolved around stories written and drawn for their families, for themselves or their friends. At school, the children were not always engaged

with the whole- class teaching sessions, and used opportunities on the edges of the classroom space to use the resources in ways that were meaningful to them. For example, Charles made his map of the school garden to find imaginary treasure in order to attract his friends to his play outdoors (Figure 24) rather than join in with the daily phonics lesson. At home, children likewise made use of opportunities outside the spaces planned for literacy learning, for example, by using scraps of paper to make signs, tell jokes or make books. Ellen's book made for her baby brother about Ginger the Cat (Appendix 4) was written and drawn on torn bits of paper, but carried an important message both emotionally in wanting to please her brother, and also to practise and demonstrate her writing skills learned at school and home.

- How do children construct their own meanings?

In examining the meanings which children made in their playful and spontaneous actions at nursery, in school and at home, the data provide a rich and informative resource for recognising and acknowledging the child's voice. Children's meaning making practices provide an underlying theme in this study. The work of Freire and Macedo (1987) and Freire (1996; 1998b) inform a continuing framework for focusing on the child's meaning as a prerequisite for becoming literate. With a political emphasis on a back-to-basics approach there does not appear to be a recognition on the part of policy-makers of the importance of encouraging children to make meaning (Lambirth, 2011; Clark, 2012b). Freire (1996) explores power relationships in society, and in particular in education where, as Comber (2003) suggests, children are drawn into a normative, traditional model of literacy education where children are expected to accept particular understandings of the world.

The richness of the data which were supplied by the children and their families in this study, demonstrate that they used spontaneous opportunities to engage with serious issues, whether on a personal or social level. A critical literacy perspective (Janks, 2009; 2010; Vasquez, 2004) was taken in acknowledging the concern which children have with their lives and the world they live in, often troubling issues relating to their families and others who are

important to them. The choices that the children's parents made in selecting artefacts for inclusion in the study were in themselves interesting and reflected their concern and understanding of their children's interests in their meaning-making practices. Added to this are the examples of activities with which the children engaged at home, which could inform practice in educational settings in creating opportunities for further exploration. A key consideration in this study is that children's artefacts might at times look unimportant (drawings were often made on scraps of found paper) but nevertheless reflected their intentions. The meanings they attached to their artefacts were no less important, whatever the outcome. Children may perceive the dominant model of literacy as the model to strive for: however, if they know that their own attempts at making meaning are truly valued, then their literacy becomes more expressive and reflective of their voices.

The data show that children's feelings and emotions were often explored in their artefacts. Rather than viewing their artefacts as merely expressive of their emotions, their artefacts contributed to an ability to communicate effectively, thereby helping children to voice their concerns about deeply held convictions and beliefs. If, as Freire and Macedo (1987: 157) suggest, writing is a 'critical comprehension of reality', then children can use their artefacts to explore the world as it is and their role in it, and to develop their thinking in a critical way.

- How do a range of resources and contexts influence children in their meaning-making activities?

In order to encourage children to find their own ways to make meaning from a young age, a wide range of resources needs to be accessible at all times (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 1999). This applies not only to pre-school children, but also to those in Years 1 and 2. As the data show, children in the study, who were aged from three to eight years old, made meaning at home and at school using different modes in addition to alphabetic script. Many of the artefacts were made using resources found in the classroom and home, and others were made using their favourite toys together with writing and cut-outs

in order to make their meanings visible (Figure 43). The matrix of artefacts (Appendix 10) showed that the children often used stories and personal experiences as a contextual base for their meaning-making. These were either made at home, or at school as 'unofficial' activities on the edges of the 'official geography of the classrooms' (Dyson, 2013: 117). These stories were part of the children's own everyday lives, reflecting their own interests and concerns.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study took place in a setting where the children and their families were relatively affluent. The children had access to resources both at home and at school, and were able to choose how to best represent their thinking. This availability of resources may not be accessible to other children in different economic situations. Some of the opportunities which the children in this study had, may not be available to the same extent to other children who might miss similar experiences for making meaning due to lack of these resources and opportunities. Although the particular socio-economic environment of the research setting might be considered atypical of most children and family's experiences, the children themselves demonstrated that they could use resources and 'unofficial' spaces within the official environment of school and home in which to construct meaning. Many of the children in the study were expected to learn the 'basics' of literacy and were under some pressure to make progress with this, despite the depth of meaning demonstrated in their artefacts.

My role as a practitioner-researcher in some ways limited the study in that it was difficult to be both researcher and practitioner. The main constraints were the demands on time during busy days as a class teacher. These limitations were recognised, however, and the richness of the data demonstrates the advantages of being close at hand during the data gathering stage.



## Implications and contribution of the thesis

An unexpected outcome of the study was that some of the children's artefacts could at times be analysed and used to assess a child's progress and understanding of their phonological awareness and handwriting competence. It is possible that a visual pedagogy could be beneficial for children with special needs who, for example, might find it difficult to communicate in other ways. Children with expressive language delay would be able to make meaning through their artefacts. Kress (2010) recognises sign language as one mode for making meaning, and this extends to include a variety of other modes as well.

Replicating the research with children and families of different socio-economic backgrounds would be a valuable further study, especially where the approach in schools is focused on the acquisition of skills. Rather than children from disadvantaged backgrounds gaining competence predominantly in the technical skills for literacy, there is a need to draw on Freire's critical pedagogy in encouraging children to be confident in developing their own voice. Freire (1996: 30) argues that 'pedagogy must be forged *with* the oppressed, not *for* the oppressed'. This study demonstrates that it is the children's own representations of meaning, not necessarily those being imposed by those in power, that are effective in representing their meanings. An analysis of children's symbolic representations of their meanings should draw on socio-cultural and cultural-historical theories such as those of Fleer (2007) and Hedegaard (2008a; 2012) in empowering the voices of children in different cultural and socio-economic contexts.

Dyson (2013) contends that instruction in the 'basics' is most visible in schools for low-income children and their families, as there is an perception that this would ensure equal understanding of literacy skills in all children. However, she further suggests that there is an absence of social practice in this conventional approach to literacy teaching, and that this effectively 'writes out' or 'silences childhood' by a lack of acknowledgement of the

'particularities' of their lives (Dyson, 2013: 5). Furthermore, Dyson (2013: 174) suggests that the 'ideology of individualism' which informs testing and teaching the basics of letters and sounds, 'misinterprets the dialogic nature of writing' where children would have the opportunity to develop their own meanings.

An implication of this study is the need to ensure that the opportunities and materials needed for making meaning are available to all children in early childhood education. The resources, including time and opportunities for exploring their own interests at home, need to be made more easily available at school in order to encourage children to communicate their voices in their symbolic representations. The main contribution of the thesis lies in recognising the value of children's meaning-making on the edges of the activities and spaces for teaching and learning. These activities on the edges of traditional teaching spaces provide children with the opportunity for exploring incidental yet meaningful experiences that are too easily squeezed out by conventional literacy teaching. The narrow discourse of outcomes and attainment in traditional teaching models could limit children's opportunities to explore their own meanings on the edges of the 'official' spaces in the classroom and at home.

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## Appendix 1

### Meeting at school - asking Sue, Joseph and Ellen's mother, about the children's writing at home

Notes in italics were added by Sue after our conversation

#### Can you tell me about the children's writing and making at home?

Joseph writes and draws spontaneously at home as part of his play. He makes lots of contraptions with string, recently using chairs and tables to make a hospital, also attaching things with blue tack.

*When you spoke to me about Joseph's game with Ella the other day, I wasn't really surprised: he plays games like that all the time at home. To give you a flavour, this weekend he and Ellen have been 'scuba diving' with goggles and pyjamas on; he has made a 'metal detector' with magnets; a 'workshop' in the garden with not much more than stones and buckets; a complicated pulley system as part of an ongoing 'roadworks' game with Sebastian; and written several letters to our new friend the Easter Bunny. His level of involvement in all these is very deep, and all activities are entirely child-led.*

#### What resources are available to them at home?

Resources - The children have a large table to work on, with a variety of resources including different kinds and sizes of paper, sticky tape, staplers, blue tack, chalks, crayons, pencils, pens and different types of scissors.

*They also have a small table and chairs in the playroom, and will also often spread out onto the kitchen table, as the kitchen adjoins the playroom. Paints are always available, also glue, Megasketcher – v often used as a drafting tool. (You need to see this, I think).*

### **Do they often draw and write together?**

Joseph and Ellen often work together, and do not usually ask us for help with spelling, rather making things spontaneously, making meaning as they work.

### **What is it about writing that you want for them?**

I believe that their meanings are very immediate, and that the children's artefacts are meaningful while they are being made (*and often lose meaning once they are made*). Meanings change with time, and things are sometimes quickly discarded or seemingly forgotten (unless making books or messages for members of the family for a specific reason).

*Joseph has recently been asking for his 'Mumbelow' books again; I have suggested that he writes another one. So some things retain meaning even over time, not sure why, although Joe was very fond of the Mumbelow.*

Ellen seems to have lost her love of drawing at school: her school work (writing) seems devoid of any creative input and her work appears very adult directed

*I might reword this: there seems little scope to be creative, and Ellen is also fearful of making mistakes. Her creative writing and artwork (at school) now show evidence of repeated false starts – rubbing out over and over again. This is now starting to have a knock-on effect at home, and she has become very self-critical, for example today she did a lovely painting of a lion and then screwed it up and threw it away, saying 'I will never be able to draw anything realistic.' I don't know if this is something all children do with age or whether school is having this influence.....*

However, I am appreciative of the way Ellen's teacher has helped her to adjust to the year 3 class (given that Ellen skipped year 2) but feel that the constraints of the National Curriculum limit creativity.

*Yes, there is an emphasis on grammar and correct spelling, which I do applaud, but I feel that this is done to the exclusion of allowing some free expression and writing just for the joy of it. I am sad that Ellen's creativity (which I know is there) is now being stifled in favour of neat and correct work. Perhaps the balance needs readjusting: there is plenty of comprehension but no literary appreciation – books are read and read but there is no discussion of style etc. Without appreciating excellence in others, it is hard for creative work to grow.*

## Appendix 2

### Transcript of conversation with Ellen and Joseph

***Bold italics indicate Ellen and Joseph's additions after I had read the transcript to them.***

Key: L interviewer  
E Ellen  
J Joseph

L How do you show what you are thinking....can you think of some ideas?

***E I would do some drawing and writing***

J I would first tell the person who was next to me what I was going to do, and then I would do it – ***and I could phone them***

L What things would you do to show your ideas?

J I would sort of write them down on a piece of paper and then the next day I would copy them

L Oh, why would you copy them

J Because then I could give one to somebody else and then I would have a copy of it

L Right, so you would write your ideas down.....so it is talking and writing: are there any other ways you can think of, so that you can show your thinking

L You do other things as well, do you remember the seed holder you made-

J Well I could get a big piece of paper and draw a big picture of it...***I make boats for my cuddly toys***

L Who would your message be for then...

J God (he had been telling me about going to church) ***My friend Tom***

L Ellen, when you are writing at school, who are you writing for

- E For Mrs Booth ***Now I do it for mummy and for Sebastian and the rest of the family***
- L Would it be for anyone else?
- J I know, it would be for our family – not all of it, some of it. ***It would be for mummy***
- E I don't know.....because most of my writing (at school) isn't free, it's for work
- E I only write for myself (at school) if I have free time, hardly ever because I work slowly. (later Ellen added this)
- L Right...so when you are writing at home, who is it for then
- E Usually for mummy and daddy, and for putting on the wall ***for Joseph and I write letters to say I love you and Happy Christmas***
- L I know that you have done some things for Sebastian to read as well
- E Yes
- L Joseph, when you are writing at school, who is it for
- J Ellen, grandma um....(***My friend***) ***Henry, and mummy***
- L You made a daddy's book once didn't you, and you did some writing when you were playing with Henry once - who was that writing for?
- J No-one.....it was just some secret writing.....
- L Why do you think you should learn to write?
- J To send messages to parts of the world.....if we knew they were in danger
- L That would be an important message to send.....Ellen, what do you think?
- E So when people give you presents, you can write a thank you letter by yourself ***and it's fun***
- J and you, when someone lives a long way away, you could just write a letter....and send it to them ***or I could phone them***
- L Does it make you happy when someone writes to you
- E ***Yes, it is exciting***, and I wonder who it is from..... it's as exciting as a present
- L What makes you want to write at school or at home?
- J Well I think it's boring not writing,
- E you'd probably get bored if you didn't write

L What about at school, Ellen

E ...Otherwise you get told off though-

L Do you really? (much laughter)

E If you don't write anything you get told off

L I would like to ask you both now where you get your ideas from for your writing

J from people really, because people give me ideas

E From authors....

L When you are playing, where do your ideas come from then -

E My brain

L When you make your models, like when you made your seed holder Joseph,

E and I made medals

L Why did you want to make those-

E Because of the Olympic games

L Have you made Olympic medals

E+J mmm.....yes

L If you choose to show your ideas, how would you choose to do it

E By drawing and writing

J I would make a model out of boxes or paper or something **then I would just make my idea**

E I might do both, I might do all of them....it depends how am feeling really

L does it depend how you are feeling

E Yes.....if I am in a writing mood or a making mood or a drawing pictures mood **and when I can decide for myself**

L are there any other ways you can think of to show your ideas. You have mentioned writing, drawing, making models, talking.... (Joseph pulls a face)

L Do you sometimes put on a show or something like that?

E I make puppets

## Appendix 3

### Trudie's book of spooky fun

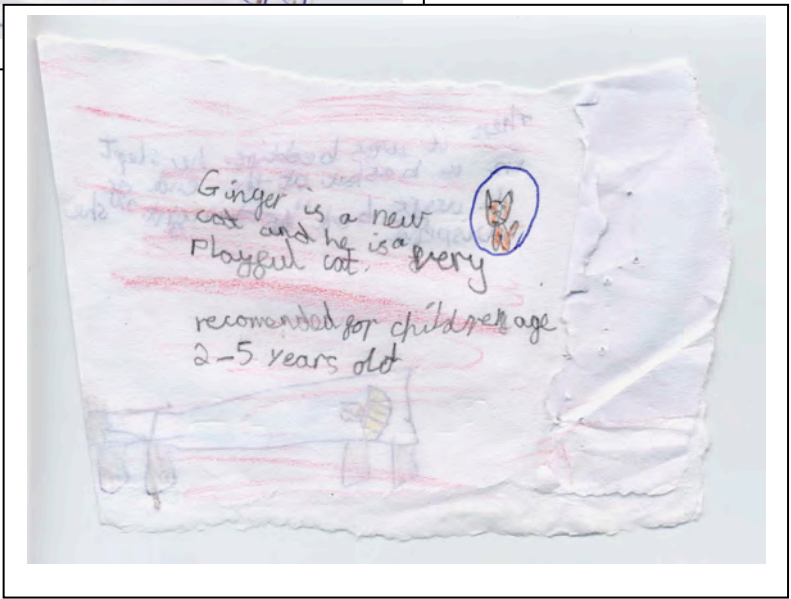
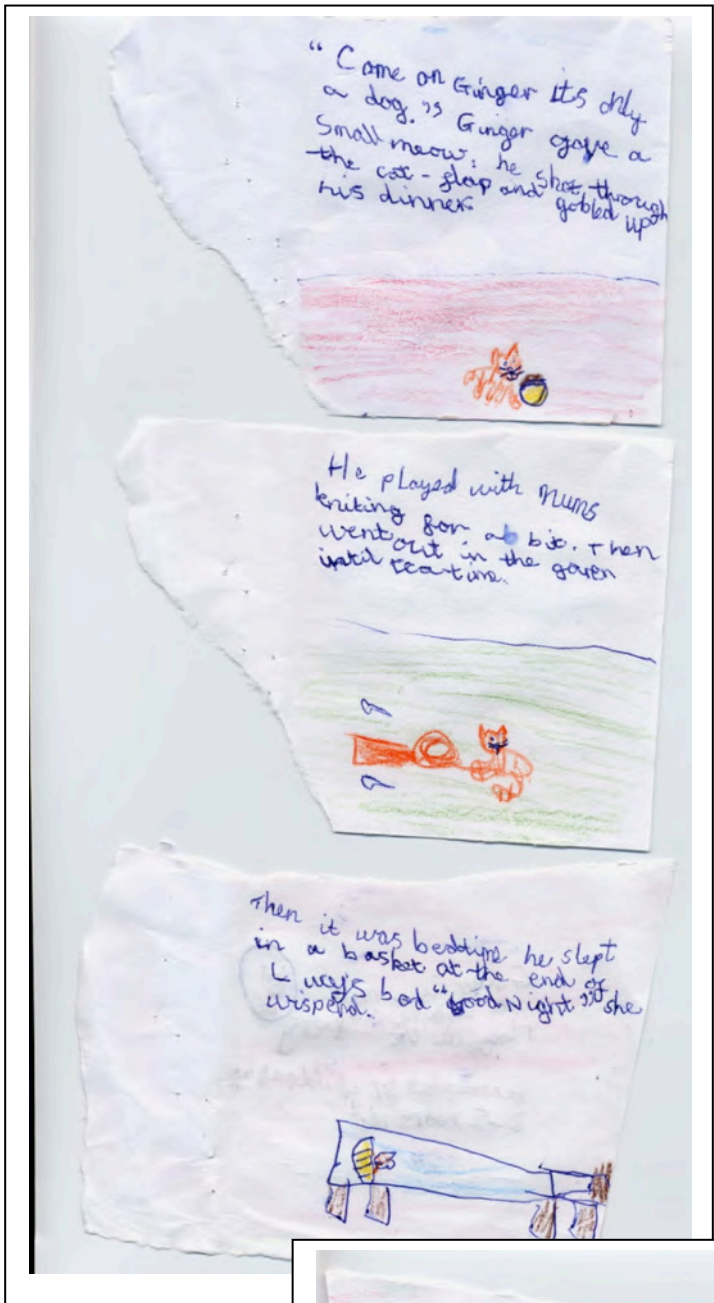
Open the door...for scary fun, then you find every-one  
But first of all-find the spooky kitchen,  
find the monster then find big nose .....  
open the doors again  
find the spiral pattern of a house, then turn the page without a doubt  
now you find the bat sleeping, in the harvest chair  
find the monster going oooorrrrr every where  
the night  
the nights are so scary, they are spooky ....and brave  
they eat you up in the cradle of the wave  
open the hoop, now you see I am big ears  
Now I will find you  
Oo, oo  
Now I'm around  
Watch out because the flower pincher's around  
I am a bat, a big scary bat - I will eat you up  
And I am a ghost, a friend of the house  
Now, it is the end of the book  
Read it again  
In a hook.

## Appendix 4

Ellen's book for her brother Sebastian about Ginger the cat







## Appendix 5

### Consent letter to the school principal

XXXXXXX  
XXXXXXX  
XXXXX  
XXXXXXX

The Principal

XXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXX

25th June 2003

Dear xxxxx

As you know, I have embarked on a research degree at University College Worcester. I am now writing to you to formally ask for your permission to locate my research at xxxxxxxx School.

The proposed title of my thesis is "The symbolic Representation of thinking: Three to eight year olds venture into literacy." My research will involve a number of children in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and I intend to ask their teachers, and in some cases their parents, to collect artefacts (such as models, cut-outs and maps) and examples of drawings and writing to supplement the evidence for my research.

I will treat all names as confidential, and will not identify the school, the children, the parents or the teachers by name in my thesis. However, I hope that the findings of my research will, in time, be helpful to you and to the school in the development of an effective model for literacy teaching in the early years.

I anticipate that I will continue to gather evidence for my research during the next twelve to eighteen months. Evidence will be gathered mainly in my own classroom, and in other classrooms only with your specific permission and that of the teacher concerned. I will endeavour to keep you up to date with my work, and will notify you of any developments or changes.

I will gather evidence in school by:

1. Collecting artefacts, drawing and writing
2. Tape recording the children talking about their symbolic representations
3. Carrying out observations in order to contextualise the children's literacy experiences

I will ask parents for their permission both verbally and in writing, and enclose a copy of this letter together with my proposed research programme for your information.

Although I will inevitably use some 'school' time to carry out observations and record children's talk, I will endeavour as far as is possible to carry these out in the normal course of my work as a class teacher. In most instances, this fieldwork will deepen my understanding of the children's literacy experiences, thereby supplementing the on-going record keeping requirements of the school.

I would be grateful if you could indicate in writing your agreement to my proposed research.

Many thanks

Yours sincerely

Lone Hattingh

## Appendix 6

### Consent letter to the parents

XXXXXX  
XXXXXX  
XXXXXX  
XXXXXX

14<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Dear Mr and Mrs xxxxxx

I am a part time research student with University College Worcester, and am working on a PhD on the development of literacy in the Early Years. The proposed title of my thesis will be: *The symbolic representation of thinking: Three to eight year olds venture into literacy.*

I intend collecting evidence both at school and at home, and hope that you will be kind enough to allow me to borrow pieces of xxxxx's work which I will copy or scan for detailed analysis and study. Of course, *all* pieces will be returned to you as soon as possible, and no child will identified by name in my thesis.

I will gather evidence for my research in school by:

- Collecting artefacts, drawings and writing
- Tape recording the children talking about their symbolic representations
- Carrying out observations in order to contextualize the children's literacy experiences.

In the normal course of the day at school, the children's progress is assessed through observation. I therefore anticipate that this fieldwork will deepen my understanding of the children's literacy experiences, thereby supplementing the on-going record keeping requirements of the school and enhancing the planning of teaching and learning opportunities.

I am looking at the way in which children make meaning, using the resources that are 'to hand'. This includes not only attempts at writing in the conventional sense, but may take the form of artefacts such as cut-outs, drawing and map making. I am particularly interested in examples which are 'child initiated' rather than adult directed, and which demonstrate the voice of the child. This approach to the curriculum informs the way in which we are developing our understanding of the children's literacy development in school.

I am also interested in material which the children are producing at home, and would welcome recent artefacts, drawings and writing your children have done outside school, for example during role play on their own or with siblings, or recording family events and outings. It would be helpful if these examples could be dated and annotated to indicate the circumstances in which they were produced (for example, playing after watching a favourite television programme, making a map for a friend).

Please feel free to ask me if you would like more information, or are unsure about the relevance of any of xxxxxx's work. You are very welcome to read my writing about this research: do let me know if this is of interest to you.

Please indicate on the enclosed duplicate of this letter if you agree to my use of xxxxxx's work in this way, as well as transcripts of tape recordings and observations, and accept my grateful thanks for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Lone Hattingh

You may/may not use examples of xxxxx's artefacts, drawings, mark making and writing for study towards your research degree. Observations and transcripts of conversations may also be/may not be used.

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7

### Children's interview schedule – a guide

Can you think of how you can show what you are thinking?

Who would your writing be for?

Why do you think you should learn to write?

What makes you want to write?

Do you write at home?

Is your writing the same at home as at school?

How do you get ideas for your writing?

What makes you want to draw and write, and make models and cut-outs?

What is your favourite way of showing your thinking?

Are there any other ways you can use to show your ideas?

## Appendix 8

### Interview schedule for parents – a guide

Does she draw and write spontaneously at home?

Where does she get her ideas from?

Does she have adult support in her drawing and writing?

What is it about writing that you want for her?

(Baliostok, 2004)

Do the children draw and write together?

What resources are available to her?

Baliostok, S. (2004) *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 4, 65-83.

## **Appendix 9**

### **Example of field notes**

#### **Paul's artefacts**

##### **Paul-1**

Paul drawing at school at the writing table with xxx. Animated discussion about the Power Ranger's actions - this is a map showing the way.

##### **Paul-2**

Paul came in from playtime, trying to explain to me what a difficult time he had in the garden. xxx had stopped him going into the tree house, and later stopped him coming out. He followed his breathless explanation with a quickly drawn diagram of the tree house, with the positions of the other children marked so that I could see what a troublesome time he had had. It showed very graphically what he had been trying to explain, but unfortunately I could not find it afterwards - he may have taken it home, or simply discarded it once I understood what he was trying to say.

Much later, almost 2 months, he found the drawing in the classroom while looking for some paper. He explained again that xxx was at the bottom of the slide, and he is in the tree house with xx, xx and xxx. He was very upset at the time, saying that he had a very unhappy playtime, but all the characters in the drawing seem to be smiling!

##### **Paul-3**

Drew and cut out a power ranger, and a shark and sword, then devised ways of putting them all together so that the power ranger could sit on the shark while using his sword.



## Appendix 10

### Matrix of Artefacts (extract)

	File	Materiality of Mode	Contextual base	Home/school	Rating	Additional information	Age
1	Lydia -1	drawing/writing	story	school	5	Snow White	6
2	Lydia -2	puppet/cut-out	story	school	5	Snow White&queen	6
3	Lydia -3	puppet/cut-out	story	school	5	dwarf	6
4	Lydia -4	writing	story	school	4	ducklings	6
5	Lydia -5	writing	story	school	4	ducklings	6
6	Lydia -6	writing	story	school	4	ducklings	6
7	Lydia -7	drawing/writing/ cut-out	story	school	4	Christmas carol	5
8	Lydia -8	drawing/writing	story/personal experience	school	4	Sports day	6
9	Lydia -9	drawing/writing/ cut-out	feelings&relationships/ message	home	4	Mothers day	5
10	Charles-3	writing/map/cut- out	message/personal experience	school	5	treasure	5
11	Charles 4	drawing/writing/ map	feelings&relationships	school	5	school garden	5
12	Charles 5	drawing/writing	message/feelings &relationships	home	3	snap cards	6
13	Charles 6	writing/cut-out	message/feelings &relationships	school	5	yoo hoo	6
14	Charles 7	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	3	with mum's friend	7
15	Charles 8	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	3	with mum's friend	7
16	Charles 9	writing/book	story	home	3	with mum's friend	7
17	Charles 10	writing/cut-out	story	school	4	Christmas carol	5
40	Dominic -1	role play/model	story	home	5	motor bikes	6
41	Dominic -2	role play/model	story	home	5	motor bikes	6
42	Dominic -3	drawing/cut- out/role play	story/personal experience	home	5	skate boards	6
43	Dominic -4	drawing/cut- out/role play	story/personal experience	home	5	skate boards	6
44	Dominic -5	drawing/cut- out/role play	story/personal experience	home	5	skate boards	6
45	Dominic -6	drawing/cut- out/role play	story/personal experience	home	5	skate boards	6
46	Dominic -7	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
47	Dominic -8	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7

48	Dominic -9	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
49	Dominic -10	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
50	Dominic -11	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
51	Dominic -12	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
52	Dominic -13	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
53	Dominic -14	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	My Week zig zag - Beech	7
54	Dominic -15	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	football, self initiated	8
55	Dominic -16	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	football, self initiated	8
56	Dominic -17	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	football, self initiated	8
57	Dominic -18	drawing/writing/ book	story/personal experience	school	4	football, self initiated	8
58	Dominic -19	writing	story	school	4	literacy year 3	7
59	Dominic -20	writing	story	school		self chosen - football	8
60	Dominic -21	drawing/writing/ model	feelings&relationships	home	4	banner	5
80	Ellen-3	drawing/writing/ book	story	school	4	"My family"	5
81	Ellen-4	drawing/writing/ book	story	school	4	"My family"	5
82	Ellen-5	drawing/writing/ book	story	school	4	"My family"	5
83	Ellen-6	drawing/writing/ cut-out	story/feelings/personal experience	school	5	death of bird	5
84	Ellenbird -1	drawing/writing/ cut-out	story/feelings/personal experience	school	5	death of bird	5
85	Ellenbird -2	writing	story/personal experiences	school	4	news book Yr 1 no drawing	6
86	Ellen -7	drawing/writing	story	home	5	Annahibby	6
87	Ellen -8	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	giraffe story	6
88	Ellen -9	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	giraffe story	6
89	Ellen -10	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	giraffe story	6
90	Ellen -11	drawing/writing	story/personal experiences	school	5	rough book - fireworks	6
91	Ellen -12	writing	story/personal experiences	school	5	news book - same as above	6
92	Ellen -13	drawing/writing	story	home&school	3	based on a read	6

						story	
93	Ellen -14	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	crocodile unfinished	6
94	Ellen -15	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	crocodile unfinished	6
95	Ellen -16	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	crocodile unfinished	6
96	Ellen -17	drawing/writing	story/personal experiences	school	5	rough book	6
97	Ellen -18	drawing/writing	story/personal experience	school	5	toy 'science'	6
98	Ellen -19	drawing/writing	story/personal experience	school	5	toy 'science'	6
99	Ellen -20	drawing/writing/ book/role play	story	home	5	for toys	6
100	Ellen -21	drawing/writing/ book/role play	story	home	5	for toys	6
101	Ellen -22	drawing/writing/ book/role play	potential story	home	2	for toys	6
102	Ellen -23	writing	story/personal experiences	school	5	news book Yr 1 no drawing	6
103	Ellen -24	drawing/writing/ book	story	home	5	humour/zig-zag book	6
104	Ellen -25	drawing/writing/ book/role play	story	home	5	for toys	7
105	Ellen -26	drawing/writing/ book/role play	story	home	5	for toys	7
106	Ellen -27	drawing/writing/ role play	story/personal experiences	home	5	baby pictures	7
107	Ellen -28	drawing/writing/ role play	story/personal experiences	home	5	baby pictures	7
108	Ellen -29	drawing/writing	story/personal experiences	home	5	with mum	7
109	Ellen -30	writing	story/personal experiences	school	3	news book	7
110	Ellen -31	role play/model	story/personal experiences	home	5	photograph	7
111	Ellen -32	role play	story	home	5	grass and leaves/photograph	7
112	Ellen -33	drawing/writing	story	school	3	"creative writing"	7
113	Ellen -34	drawing/writing	story	school	3	"creative writing"	7
114	Ellen -35	writing/drawing/ role play	story	home	5	title	7
115	Ellen -36	writing/drawing/ role play	story	home	5	poem	7
116	Ellen -37	writing/drawing/ role play	story	home	5	witches spell	7
117	Ellen -38	drawing/writing	sign	home	5	fire engine	7
118	Ellen -39	writing	story/grammar	school	4	Yr 2 redrafted	7

119	Ellen -40	writing	message	home	5	reminder for herself	7
120	Ellen -41	drawing/cut-out		home	5	Mary and Joseph	7
121	Ellen -42	drawing/cut-out		home	5	same, flaps lifted	7
122	Ellen -43	drawing/cut-out/model	feelings/problem solving	school	5	bird, twig	7
123	Ellen -44	drawing/writing/book	story/relationships	home	5	Zig-zag for Seb	7
124	Ellen -45	drawing/writing/role play	sign	home	4	menu	7
125	Ellen -46	drawing/role play	story/relationships	home	4	Hibbi game	7
126	Ellen -47	drawing/writing/role play	story	home	4	toys	7
127	Ellen -48	writing/drawing/map	story/personal experiences	home	5	family outing	7
128	Ellen -49	writing/role play	story/personal experiences	home	4	playing school	7
129	Ellen -50	drawing/writing/book	story/feelings	home	4	get well for mum	7
130	Ellen -51	drawing/writing/book	story/feelings	home	4	get well for mum	7
131	Ellen -52	drawing/writing/role play	story	home	4	vet folder	7
132	Ellen -53	drawing/writing/role play	story/personal experiences	home	4	playing school	7
133	Ellen -54	drawing/writing/role play	story/personal experiences	home	4	playing school	7
134	Ellen -55	drawing/writing/role play	story/personal experiences	home	4	playing school	7
135	Ellen -56	drawing/writing/role play	story/personal experiences	home	4	playing school	7
136	Ellen -57	writing	story/personal experiences	school	3	"creative writing"	7
137	Ellen -58	drawing/writing/book	story	home	5	tiny	7
138	Ellen -59	drawing/writing/book	story	home	5	tiny	7
139	Ellen -60	drawing/writing/book	story	home	5	tiny	7
140	Ellen -61	drawing/writing/book	story	home	5	tiny	7
141	Ellen -62	drawing/writing/book	story	home	5	tiny	7
142	Ellen -63	drawing/writing/book	story/relationships	home	5	for Seb/humour/carrot book	7
143	Ellen -64	drawing/writing/book	story/relationships	home	5	for Seb/humour/carrot book	7

144	Ellen -65	drawing/writing	messages/ relationships	home	5	warnings!	7
145	Ellen -66	drawing/writing	messages/ relationships	home	5	warnings!	7
146	Ellen -67	drawing/cut-out	feelings/story	home	5	vampire	7
147	Ellen -68	other/flour and water	story/narrative	home	4	imaginative play	7
148	Ellen -69	other/flour and water	story/narrative	home	4	imaginative play	7
149	Ellen -70	other/cooking	Knowledge &understanding	home	4	cakes	7
150	Ellen -71	writing	story	school	4	Yr 2 assessment task	7
151	Ellen -72	writing	story/personal experiences/grammar	school	3	"creative writing"	7
152	Ellen -73	writing	story	school	3	poem	7
153	Ellen -74	writing/drawing	story	home	5	Valentines day poem	7
154	Ellen -75	writing/drawing	story	home	5	Valentines day poem	7
155	Ellen -76	writing/drawing	story	home	5	Valentines day poem	7
156	Ellen -77	writing/drawing	story	home	5	Valentines day poem	7
157	Ellen -78	map/writing	story/knowledge &understanding	home	4	Mars	7
158	Ellen -79	map/writing	story/relationships/ personal experiences	home	5	friends	7
159	Ellen -80	writing/drawing	message/personal experiences	home	5	humour - pasta	7
160	Ellen -81	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
161	Ellen -82	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
162	Ellen -83	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
163	Ellen -84	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
164	Ellen -85	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
165	Ellen -86	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
166	Ellen -87	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7

		book	knowledge & understanding				
167	Ellen -88	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
168	Ellen -89	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships/ knowledge & understanding	home	4	school task	7
169	Ellen -90	writing/drawing/ book	story/feelings	home	5	Ginger the cat for Seb	7
170	Ellen -91	writing/drawing/ book	story/feelings	home	5	Ginger the cat for Seb	7
171	Ellen -92	writing/drawing/ book	story/feelings	home	5	Ginger the cat for Seb	7
172	Ellen -93	drawing/writing/ cut-out/role play	story/personal experiences/ knowledge	home	5	bees	8
173	Ellen -94	drawing/writing/ cut-out/role play	story/personal experiences/ knowledge	home	5	bees	8
174	Ellen -95	writing/drawing/ map	story/personal experiences	home	5	holiday in Yorkshire	8
175	Ellen -96	model/role play	story	home	4	duck on beach photograph	8
176	Ellen -97	drawing/writing	story/knowledge & understanding	home	5	newspaper in Spain	8
177	Ellen -98	drawing/writing	story/knowledge & understanding	home	5	newspaper in Spain	8
178	Ellen -99	drawing/writing	story	school	3	Yr2 assessment book	7
199	Harry -3	writing/drawing/ model	story/personal experiences/feelings	school	5	stand for ducklings 05.02	5
200	Harry -4	writing/drawing	story/feelings	school	5	ducklings/rain in storybook	5
201	Harry -5	writing/drawing	story/feelings	school	5	ducklings/rain in storybook	5
202	Harry -6	writing	story/personal experiences	home	3	writing for his mother	5
203	Harry -7	writing	story	home	4	writing for his mother	5
204	Harry -8	writing/drawing	story/personal experiences	home	5	writing for his mother	6
205	Harry -9	writing/drawing	story	school	5	Yr rough book - codes	6
206	Harry -10	writing	sign	school	4	travel agent	4
240	Joseph-1	drawing/writing	story	school	5	mumbelow	3
241	Joseph-2	writing/drawing	story/personal experience	school	5	birds and binoculars	3
242	Joseph-3	role play	story/personal	school	5	mobilo/photograph	3

			experience				
243	Joseph-4	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	5	mumbelow	3
244	Joseph-5	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	5	mumbelow	3
245	Joseph-6	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	5	mumbelow	3
246	Joseph-7	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	5	mumbelow	3
247	Joseph-8	writing	message	school	5	John Lewis	4
248	Joseph-9	writing/drawing/ book	story	home	5	2nd mumbelow book	4
249	Joseph-10	drawing/book	story	home	5	3rd mumbelow book	4
250	Joseph-11	drawing/book	story	home	5	4th mumbelow book	4
251	Joseph-12	drawing/book	story	home	5	5th mumbelow book	4
252	Joseph-13	drawing/book	story	home	5	6th mumbelow book	4
253	Joseph-14	drawing/book	story	home	5	7th mumbelow book	4
254	Joseph-15	drawing/book	story	home	5	8th mumbelow book	4
255	Joseph-16	drawing/book	story	home	5	9th mumbelow book	4
256	Joseph-17	drawing/book	story	home	5	10th mumbelow book	4
257	Joseph-18	drawing/book	story	home	5	11th mumbelow book	4
258	Joseph-19	writing/role play	other - receipt	home	4	train ticket	4
259	Joseph-20	writing	relationships	home	3	daddy'	4
260	Joseph-21	drawing	story/relationships	home	5	himself for daddy	4
261	Joseph-22	writing	message	home	5	special writing to bank	4
262	Joseph-23	drawing	Other/story	home	5	practising drawing	4
263	Joseph-24	drawing/role play	story	home	5	tally marks/photograph	4
264	Joseph-25	drawing/role play	story	home	5	tally marks/photograph	4
265	Joseph-26	drawing/writing	story	home	5	himself - for me	4
266	Joseph-27	writing	sign	home	5	Hatti	4
267	Joseph-28	writing/role play	story	home	5	vet's game	4
268	Joseph-29	writing	message/feelings &relationships	home	5	daddy late	4
269	Joseph-30	writing/role play/cut-out	story	school	5	power	4
270	Joseph-31	writing/role play	story	school	5	minotaur	5
271	Joseph-32	model	Knowledge &understanding	home	4	bird box/photograph	5
272	Joseph-33	writing	story/song	home	4	song sheet	5
273	Joseph-34	writing	message	home	4	reminder	5
274	Joseph-35	map/drawing	story	home	5	before visit	5
275	Joseph-36	map/drawing	story	home	5	after visit	5

276	Joseph-37	map/drawing	story	home	5	Ellen's after visit	5
277	Joseph-38	map/writing	story	home	5	pub	5
278	Joseph-39	writing/role play	story/relationships	home	5	show programme	5
279	Joseph-40	drawing/writing	story	school	5	first story	5
280	Joseph-41	drawing/writing	story	school	5	first story	5
281	Joseph-42	writing	sign	school	5	don't touch	5
282	Joseph-43	writing/book	story	school	5	number book	5
283	Joseph-44	writing/book	story	school	5	number book	5
284	Joseph-45	writing/book	story	school	5	number book	5
285	Joseph-46	writing/book	story	school	5	number book	5
286	Joseph-47	drawing/writing	message/relationships	school	5	to Ellen	5
287	Joseph-48	role play	story/relationships	school	5	concert/photograph	5
288	Joseph-49	writing/role play	story	school	5	castle game	5
289	Joseph-50	writing/role play	story	school	5	castle game	5
290	Joseph-51	writing/cut-out	message	school	5	Easter bunny	5
291	Joseph-52	writing/role play	message	home	5	Easter bunny	5
292	Joseph-53	model/cut-out	story/feelings	school	5	medal	5
293	Joseph-54	writing	message	home	5	to daddy	5
294	Joseph-55	writing/role play	story	home	5	Hannah's plan	5
295	Joseph-56	drawing	story	home	5	megasketcher/photo graph ducklings	5
296	Joseph-57	drawing/writing	message&sign	school	5	ducklings	5
297	Joseph-58	writing	message&sign	school	5	ducklings	5
298	Joseph-59	writing	message/feelings&relationships	school	5	letters to Bear	5
299	Joseph-60	writing	message/feelings &relationships	school	5	letters to Bear	5
300	Joseph-61	role play	personal experience /story	home	5	busker photograph	5
301	Joseph-62	writing/drawing/ book	story/knowledge &understanding	home	5	bees	5
302	Joseph-63	writing/drawing/ book	story/knowledge&unde rstanding	home	5	bees	5
303	Joseph-64	writing/drawing/ book	story/knowledge&unde rstanding	home	5	bees	5
304	Joseph-65	painting	Knowledge &understanding/ personal experience	home	5	bee photograph	5
305	Joseph-66	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5
306	Joseph-67	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5
307	Joseph-68	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5
308	Joseph-69	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5
309	Joseph-70	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5



		book					
310	Joseph-71	writing/drawing/ book	story/relationships	school	5	daddy's book	5
311	Joseph-72	writing/drawing	message	home	5	folder/letter	5
312	Joseph-73	collage/drawing	story	school	4	his house/self- initiated	5
313	Joe -1	writing	message&sign	school	5	banner for ducklings	5
314	Joe -2	writing	message&sign	school	5	about ducklings	5
315	Joe -3	writing	message/feelings &relationships	school	5	warning on carpet	5
316	Joe -4	role play/model/writi ng	story	home	5	photograph angel	5
317	Joseph -74	writing/role play	message&sign	home	4	reason/photograph	5
318	Joseph -75	writing/role play	story	home	5	photograph	5
319	Joseph -76	writing/role play	rules	home	5	Ellen's rules	5
320	Joseph -77	writing/role play	message	home	5	Joe's message	5
321	Joseph -78	writing	story/feelings	home	5	ghosts	5
322	Joseph -79	writing/role play	message	home	5	door photograph	5
323	Joseph -80	drawing/writing	message	home	5	peas	5
324	Joseph -81	drawing/writing	sign	home	5	Ellen's humour	5
325	Joseph -82	drawing/writing	message	home	5	lounger	5
329	Joseph -86	role play/writing	story	home	5	bullfighting	6
330	Joseph -87	role play/map/drawin g	story	school	5	power rangers	4
331	Joseph -88	drawing/cut-out	story	school	5	power rangers	4
332	Paul -1	collage/cut- out/drawing	story	home	5	power rangers	4
333	Paul -2	drawing/cut-out	story/relationships	school	5	play time	4
334	Paul -3	collage/cut- out/drawing	story	school	5	power rangers	5
335	Paul -4	drawing/cut-out	story	school	5	power rangers	5
336	Paul -5	drawing/cut-out	story	school	5	power rangers	5
337	Paul -6	collage/cut- out/drawing	story	school	5	dinosaur	5
338	Paul -7	drawing/cut- out/writing	story/relationships	school	5	for mummy	5
339	Paul -8	drawing/cut- out/writing	story/relationships	school	5	for mummy	5
340	Paul -9	collage/cut- out/drawing	story	school	5	power rangers	5
341	Paul -10	collage/cut- out/drawing	story/relationships	school	5	for daddy	5