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Bringing Together What We Know about Literacy and Equity: A Discussion about What's Important

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INTRODUCTION

Doing well at learning literacy in schools requires much more than just learning sounds, words, how to comprehend, and how to produce texts. Learning literacy is a social and material practice. By this we mean that it requires relationships with tools, texts, people and resources, and that it occurs in specific spaces and times. As such, despite insistence by some to push notions that initial literacy learning should privilege teaching of the most basic skills (see for example Buckingham, Wheldall & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013) it is fair to say that such approaches will always be necessary but will never be sufficient. Indeed, literacy practices are learnt across a person's lifespan as we need to communicate with different people in different ways for different purposes. Literacy research mounts a case that, as educators, we should resist reductive positions in the literacy debates (see for example Clark, 2018). And as claims about fake news and absolute truths echo around the world political stage it has never been more important to be educating students towards critical engagement with texts, across modes, in digital as well as more traditional ways, and as a collaborative practice.

In this chapter, we discuss key issues for teaching and learning literacy. In what follows we provide a record of a recent discussion we had about learning literacy. We considered what we know about the implications of digital and print tools and ways of working in schools. We move on to discuss curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in our current policy context, and the need for children to know how to engage with literacy as a collaborative practice. As a social justice issue we believe that all of our discussions about literacy must consider not just schools but also issues related to communities, homes and families. We hope that this discussion between long-term colleagues provides a framing to open up the field and raise questions for chapters that follow.

KEYWORDS

literacies

material practice

poverty

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Recent education policy across many international contexts has increased the emphasis on testing, the introduction of high definition curriculum, and measures that have led to de-professionalising the teaching profession. And all of this in a context of rising economic and employment uncertainty for teachers, and also the communities in which they are working. This leads us to be interested in what these conditions mean for those children and young people who are growing up in communities and places where poverty has implications for everyday life. Because of this, we theorise literacy education as an issue of social justice.

In describing literacy in current times, Luke (2018) recently commented that:

The future just happened to log on early. Policy and governance, truth and lies, and the boundaries between the legal and illegal, public and private are now played out through Twitter exchanges where 140 character texts ... have become central media news, public policy and politics ... The practices, parameters and standards of human exchange and communication are in rapid transition. (p. vii)

Taking up these ideas has led us to think about the importance of (re)articulating what we think about schools and learning literacy, especially for those students who live in marginalised or disadvantaged communities. What are the ‘big’ challenges for schooling and equity, and for leaders, teachers and educators, children and young people, and their families and communities? How can schools, educators, and communities collaborate with children and young people to prepare them for rich and fulfilling work, civic and recreational lives? How might education systems, and educators, work towards providing access to quality schooling to *all* children, in contexts where the material and social practices of learning and using literacy are shifting, as is the balance between print and digital texts and the relationships between different modes, purposes, grammars and shapes, and the potential audiences of any text production. We know that learning literacy cannot be understood, or indeed facilitated, if our focus is only on the ‘best’ way to teach or on how children ‘best’ learn. What literate practices are learnt and used involves a complex set of relations between the social, cultural, economic and political forces at play. Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are part of this set of relations – but only one part.

Thinking about literacy and equity: A conversation

In the rest of this chapter we provide a transcript of a recent conversation where we challenged ourselves to think about literacy and equity (see Comber & Woods, 2018 where we also utilised this idea of a conversation as the basis for a written publication). As researchers and teachers in education we have worked together over the last decade on issues related to social justice, literacy and quality.

Annette started her teaching career as a primary school teacher in the Logan district, which is south of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia. Most of her school-based teaching has been in areas where children's lives are impacted upon by poverty, so when she began her research career, issues of social justice and equity were always central to how she has theorised practice, policy, and research of literacies and learning literacy. Barbara started her teaching career in a regional school in South Australia where there was a high level of poverty and has always been interested in young people who were alienated from schooling in various ways. Most of her research has been conducted with teachers, parents and young people in schools located in low socioeconomic communities.

We both have long-term teaching and research relationships with teachers, and our research approaches are participatory. By this we mean that we take up opportunities to work alongside leaders, teachers, children and their families and communities in the drive to understand and support quality literacy teaching and learning.

Annette Well, I guess even though I have spent a lot of time in classrooms in schools, where teachers and children are trying to get on with the core work of teaching and learning, I continue to be puzzled by some recent policy and education solutions to providing a quality literacy education to all children. I regularly talk to teachers, educators and researchers about the importance of telling stories that are counter to deficit discussions about schooling, schools, teachers, children and their families, and I think this is becoming more and more important. I know you also spend a lot of time in classrooms working with teachers and children. It's a privilege to have the opportunity to do that, and with that comes the responsibility to talk about the many wonderful things that are happening, but also to problematise the contexts within which this literacy education is occurring.

Barbara Yes, watching teachers making spaces for children to work collaboratively is something that I get very excited about. When children and teachers co-author, whether they do this in pairs or groups of children writing, or adults and children writing, children benefit because they are able to pool their resources and have success in producing a text, or reading someone else's text. It is always amazing to watch children learning, but even more so when children are able to learn from other children as well as from adults and adult-determined resources.

Annette I think about some of the 'principles' of quality literacy teaching that I've come across over the years, and I'd have to say that many of the ways I was taught to think about literacy and quality literacy teaching in my initial teacher training and in-service professional development can still inform ideas of quality literacy teaching and learning now. So, for example, children need time to read and write, and of course speak and listen, and design and view, in order to improve how they read and write.

Barbara Producing text matters if you are to get better at producing texts! In other words, students need frequent opportunities to write, not only to practise selected fragments of the task. Reading leads to improvements in reading, and learning to read needs to involve regular reading of texts that make sense. Extended and regular time spent doing the 'real thing' is an essential investment.

Annette And yet increasingly teachers and children seem to be finding it more and more difficult to have time to ‘do’ literacy. Learning about how sounds work, grammar and sentence structure, words, and all the other component parts of engaging with texts will always have a place in learning literacy. However, the curriculum should not privilege the learning of these parts over providing children with the opportunity to read, produce and engage with meaningful complete texts for real purposes and audiences. It is in using real texts for real purposes that children learn to love language, texts and what we can do with those texts. I am always confused about how we can expect children to improve as readers and writers if they rarely read and write.

Barbara Having time to practise is so important, and writing or reading for important purposes also matters a great deal. Reading and writing for real purposes and real audiences, about things that have actual consequences, provides links to the real world. I’m thinking of examples like Helen Grant and the work she did with young children about welcoming students and families to the new school year in order to think about imagining a new, more socially just world (Comber, Woods & Grant, 2017). Teachers and children worked for real purposes, with real texts and real audiences, but they also were engaging with important issues.

Annette Teachers who do this seem to understand that teaching literacy needs to happen across all areas of the curriculum. Integration is important. Dennis Kwek (2012) and others including Courtney Cazden and Allan Luke have talked about this in terms of ‘weaving’ across lessons, units, curriculum areas, and to the outside-school lives of children. The idea of weaving together skills, understandings and content learnt in different contexts as groups of children work together to learn about, and with, literacy, is useful.

Barbara Sure. It isn’t just a matter of learning to read and write in English lessons for example. Instead, teachers and children must focus on learning to write in science, technology and mathematics every possible moment so that children learn literacy for real-world and academic purposes. Both matter.

Annette The emergence of digital literacies and smart technologies also has implications for literacy curriculum and pedagogy. I think about how much engagement there is with digital texts and technologies throughout all dimensions of our lives – but digital technologies in schools is also a curriculum and pedagogy issue and opportunity. You and I both know that the emergence of digital ways of communicating hasn’t replaced more traditional print-based literacies.

Barbara Yes, thinking about how digital literacies are taken up in classrooms is very interesting in terms of early career teachers, teachers who’ve been teaching for a while, and late career teachers. And what I’ve seen in the research I’ve been involved in – and also in some regards as a grandmother too – suggests that the impact of digital technologies, digital literacies and smart technologies in classrooms is very uneven across schools.

Annette It is hard to believe that in a country like Australia some children still have much greater access than others to basic digital technologies, and for at least some children a lack of access impacts on their ability to learn about these things.

- Barbara It probably comes from a range of things. Teacher experience of ‘being’ digital would be one – teachers can be enthusiastic about working with digital technologies or reluctant. I don’t want to seem as if I’m saying that it is simply down to the teacher, because how a teacher feels about incorporating digital literacies and smart technologies is very contingent on the contexts in which they are working and the permissions that they are given in terms of learning to incorporate these new texts and new ways of working. Teachers are really important and one of the things that my research (Comber & Woods, 2018a; Kervin & Comber, 2019) suggests, is that teachers having the opportunity to play, and to learn about – and with – new technologies is absolutely critical. The uneven levels of uptake in classrooms clearly relate to questions of ease of access, and that hasn’t gone away.
- Annette We see that every time we go to a school, don’t we? Australia does not have equitable access to digital ways of working in schools – or indeed our children don’t necessarily have equitable access to digital technology in out-of-school settings either.
- Barbara There are very, very different situations around Australia at the moment – one school might have excellent access to a range of software, hardware, and connectivity, and another school literally down the road might have very poor access. That is going to have an impact on teachers’ capacities and enthusiasm for engaging children in digital literacies. In our research (Kervin, Comber & Woods, 2017; Baroutsis, Kervin, Woods & Comber, 2017) we have seen that sometimes teachers are unaware of how much children, at a young age, are already producing texts of various kinds, using smart technologies – particularly of course by using the mobile phone. Smart technologies like those found in mobile phones have changed people’s lives forever – for better or worse.
- Annette Yes. Allan Luke talks about having ‘a prosthetic archive of human knowledge in the device in our pockets’ (2018, p. viii). In a project that we called the URLearning Project, myself and colleagues collaborated with teachers and families at one school to provide media arts training in an afterschool media club (Woods, Levido, Dezuanni & Dooley, 2014). We thought we would provide access to new digital ways of working for children and young people who did not have a lot of access to digital technologies in their classrooms. The children and young people soon showed us that even though they had had fairly limited access to technology they were very capable of using the same to produce texts across a diverse range of modes. Enabling a space where they had time to play and work on projects they were interested in became the main focus of MediaClub.
- Barbara It is in a very interesting state of flux actually, where we are all trying to work out the positive ways of incorporating digital literacies and smart technologies into early childhood education. We really need to be ready to experiment, and also make decisions based on specific children’s responses in the actual context. To do this requires that we have a real focus on the resources and materials that are used as children and teachers work together to learn literacy.
- Annette It has been interesting to think about the material and social dimensions of learning to write in our recent Australian Research Council funded research project (DP150101240) with Lisa

Kervin and Aspa Baroutsis. (See for example Kervin, Comber & Woods, 2017; Baroutsis, Kervin, Woods & Comber, 2017.) Thinking about literacy as a sociomaterial practice means foregrounding the embodied, physical, spatial, and temporal dimensions of engaging with texts and text production – which are everyday practices and part of how we get things done. When you start to think about who, when, why, with what, and with whom children are learning to be literate, it's possible to see that the humans, texts, tools, resources and technologies are all involved in what becomes possible in interactions with texts. These new ways of thinking about literacy aren't always evident in education policy and practice though.

- Barbara Indeed. The emphasis of standards and testing and accountability is having a real impact on early years literacy teaching and learning and that is a concern (Comber, 2012). We see evidence of that in classrooms with an emphasis on correct spelling, an emphasis on rote learning, an emphasis on repetition, an emphasis on limited tasks that children can get 'right' (Comber & Woods, 2018b). It's not that these skills are of no importance; it is the amount of time given to privileging such aspects of literacy, rather than experience with learning the complexities of text production and its purposes, that is very troubling. Many teachers are troubled by this also. On the one hand we have teachers invited to be more adventurous, more innovative, to run with what is new and exciting, and then on the other hand we have the constant barrage of policy, and pressure from the media for teachers to reinvent the basics. And these are not the basics of today, these are the basics of yesterday. So we have a lot of tensions, a lot of problematic pressures that are really impacting on teachers. When I talk about teachers, I'm also referring to school leaders, who are under a lot of pressure to lift their school's NAPLAN results. We hear about these pressures from children themselves each year during NAPLAN testing week (Howell, 2016). The emphasis on testing and assessment can limit actual time for teaching and complex learning.
- Annette Or time for learning at a different pace. The focus on standardisation and reaching standards has meant that children are being represented as either knowing something or not – any understanding of learning as a process, a process that might happen quickly or slowly, has been lost.
- Barbara However, some teachers and children are still finding ways and time to design and enact worthwhile, compelling lessons and approaches. Some teachers still manage in the face of the pressures, those that we've just discussed, to teach well and to aim high. My most recent experience in classrooms has enabled me to watch teachers who are working in various contexts in South Australia on the topic of water literacies (Paige et al., 2018). Teachers are researching with children to learn more about the amount of water we use and the health of their local fresh-water systems, researching what impacts the health of those local water ecologies and so on. How does this relate to writing?
- Annette One of the things that we've known over many years is that for people to want to write they must have something worth writing about. They have to have something that they know about and they need to care enough about it to want – or maybe even need – to tell someone else.

Barbara Writing is not something that most people do for no reason – except perhaps in schools. In the rest of life people write to get things done. So these teachers are working with students who have conducted field research, library research, research with local Elders, and with local community members with relevant knowledges. For example one teacher has worked with children to have them research issues about the amount of European carp in the Murray River. So they are thinking about the pros and cons of how we might deal with a problem of carp and its impact on the indigenous fauna and flora. These types of questions are complex, and so teachers who are working in these kinds of ways invest a lot of time in building children’s understandings before they ask them to produce a text.

Another example of purposeful work with texts, which comes from the water literacies project, involves teachers and children walking to the local wetlands, or to the local river, or river mouth, where they analyse the type of signage that has been erected in these local areas for example. So they are analysing the kinds of information texts that are available in the local community collaboratively. All of this builds children’s understandings of how texts work in the world. The potential of texts – paying attention to the different types of signage, the different genres, looking at pamphlets, looking at posters, and so on, before you are asked to produce a text yourself. Children could also do related searches online. So these same teachers and children are researching to see what they can find on YouTube and on complex websites. All of this means that they are learning literacy at the same time as they are learning many other things – important things.

I also believe that it is very important that teachers and children have fun as they learn literacy – enjoyment is incredibly important. For example, English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) teacher Helen Grant studied the whole idea of fake news with her students who have recently arrived in Australia and are learning English. They have worked together to look at the question of fake news and how this works, before experimenting with producing fake news themselves. Their engagement was so evident in how much they enjoyed what they were learning and how they were learning (Comber & Grant, 2018).

Annette My experience is that children love language, words and sounds if they have time to play with how they work together. I’m always concerned when I hear teachers using a simplified vocabulary with young children. Why say shouting mark instead of exclamation mark? Why not use discipline-specific vocabulary as you talk about intellectually demanding concepts? It is difficult to learn and understand concepts that you don’t have words to describe. So this relates to engagement and enjoyment and learning literacy in an education that values substantive content in the curriculum, even for young children (Luke, Woods & Dooley, 2011). Another example is work conducted by Amber Cottrell in working with children who love writing to set up a lunchtime writing club. These young children not only spent time writing their own stories but also became writing leaders in their school in order to encourage other teachers and children to privilege and engage with writing (Cottrell & Woods, 2018).

Barbara Agreed. The impact of standards and testing is interrupting this type of engagement in the early years of school and teachers and educators should be ready to push back. I worry when I see that children are not being given *time* to read and write as they *learn* to read and write. The focus on learning all the parts in out-of-context activities – learning sounds, sight words, spelling, learning handwriting only by copying, and all the testing and assessment, means that in some classrooms I’ve seen little evidence of real reading or real writing. And in some classrooms there is definitely a focus on reading and writing being an individualised activity with children being expected to comprehend and produce texts in isolation from each other and from meaningful contexts. We need to remember the importance of learning to communicate.

Annette And the other thing is to remember how important engaging in different communication modes is to learning literacy. Having the opportunity to talk about writing is crucial – and that can’t happen when children are asked not to talk while they write individually.

Barbara Memorising, copying, writing quietly – of course there can be a place for all of those things while learning to write. Indeed we all copy in order to learn how to do things. And it’s not that there is never a place for individualised work or for skills practice. These are things that I would see as ‘not real writing’ – practising handwriting, or practising spelling – activities that are important to learn of course, but that aren’t real writing. However, when it’s these types of activities that come to dominate the curriculum, rather than learning to write with pleasure and with a sense of purpose – that is a problem. Nothing can substitute for doing the actual task – that is writing or reading for an actual purpose and context, in a genre that makes sense.

I’m concerned when I’m in classrooms where I’m seeing little experimentation, little pleasure, little satisfaction with learning literacy. The other thing that has surprised me is that in some classrooms there is not much writing or reading that is done over time. By this I mean when children write and come back to texts to improve by redrafting. Or when children are given the time to read longer books, or to reread texts that they have enjoyed. I’ve seen spaces where the focus is on short tasks or short pieces of writing, where there is not time to develop and revise a piece of writing, to give commitment to a piece of writing over time.

Annette I think this happens as a result, in part at least, of when writing a text becomes assessment. So, like you, I’m not saying there is no room for children to be assessed in writing by being asked to write a text – of course this is one way of assessing writing capacities. However, the drive for standardisation and the popularity of standards-based assessment in current contexts means that it seems to me that one of the few times that children are asked to write a text these days is when they are asked to complete an assessment task. An assessment task with criteria and standards will always have prescribed limits around time to be spent, support able to be offered, and the process to be followed – that’s the point. And all of this is fine – unless writing for an assessment task is one of the only times that children are given to write texts. In that case it is unlikely that children are provided with

opportunities to craft writing over time, to return to a text later to continue to draft and develop the ideas. We have known a lot about what a good literacy program looks like for decades, and one of the things we know is that children learn to be literate by engaging in literacy – working with texts and language, across modes, for real purposes.

And while we are talking about literacy assessment it is worth thinking about how important it is to assess in a variety of ways in order to get a broad picture of the children in any class – their group needs and individual needs. And of course, children also require timely feedback on their efforts.

Barbara Watching and listening to children is so fundamental to learning to teach those children. Without watching children it isn't possible to know their strengths and where they will need support. Variety and choice are crucial in literacy programs as well. We know that that makes a big difference to people's attitude to writing. So it is absolutely important to allow for a variety of topics, a variety of genres, and at least some of the time for children to have some choice in what they select to read and write, talk and listen to, design and view. All of these things are worth remembering. The absence of meaning and choice has an impact on the energy children have for reading and writing, for revising, and ultimately the quality of the text that they produce.

Annette Literacy and being able to communicate with texts is tied into power and disadvantage. I'm not sure that all teachers realise this. Simply put, being literate is a democratic right, and schools have a responsibility to provide children and young people access to literacy. Unfortunately we are not currently achieving this for all children. Our systems currently seem to take for granted that some children will benefit more than others from school.

Barbara One of the books that I've read recently that has had a big impact on my thinking is Deborah Brandt's work on the rise of writing (Brandt, 2014). One of the things that she does brilliantly is to show how writing – or text production more generally – is becoming absolutely central to everyday life. Whereas we have always thought about being able to read as the basic literacy required to participate in everyday life – and it is still true in some ways. But Brandt's work indicates how now, in the workplace or leisure spaces and in ordinary everyday life, writing is crucial to be able to be a full participant. For that reason I believe children need to learn to write at the same time as they are finding out about how texts work in the world. So children are not just learning to write so that they can write the correct spelling of words as an example, but they are learning to write so that they can be full participants as citizens. And this needs to be the case from very early on in life. Children are learning to write and produce texts so that they can represent themselves in their communities. So that they can be involved in what is going on.

And not for the future, but for right now – even at school. One of the things that I've had reinforced for me recently from Helen Grant, who is a wonderful teacher-researcher (see for example Grant, 2014), is that some of the children who attend the school where she works have never participated in decision making, for example in a student representative council. So, as they try to understand how democracies work, reading and writing and

speaking is critical to engagement in their own school life. So writing for me is absolutely fundamental to equity because it is about being an active participant in what is going on in the world. Realising, for example, that writing a persuasive text is not just something that we do in preparation for a test like NAPLAN, it's something that we do because we want to make change – positive change – in the world.

- Annette Part of this is about including parents and community members in the decision making of what happens in schools and classrooms. Without representation of a diverse range of perspectives about what is important, what is needed, it is difficult for a school and for teachers to deliver a high quality, high equity literacy education.
- Barbara Engaging with families and communities is crucial.
- Annette In order to teach children it is really important to know them, to know their perspectives, beliefs, values, and understandings as well as what content they know or how many words they can read.
- Barbara Teachers can learn a lot from talking and engaging with families, from parents, from grandparents. For example, many children in classrooms may well speak more than one language. Many children can even write in more than one language. Thinking about how we can respect other forms of knowledge, other forms of linguistic practices is always a challenge for schools and always important. Children who do not speak English as their first language are no less capable as language learners and users; indeed they are living proof of students' capacities for complex learning. I would always want to contest deficit views of any students, based on any category.

In terms of learning to write and becoming literate, it is always in our interest to find out what children can already do, and to develop shared projects from there. Very often we will find out that children are already playing in a whole range of ways at home where they are playing with language and writing and labelling and documenting, and also seeing their families do that in various ways. We should always assume that children have had access experiences upon which teachers can build.

In terms of building relationships with families, one of the things that is challenging is that educators tend to think about what parents can do to support what schools do, and I'm not against that of course, but parents and families are already doing what they need to do to get on with their lives. It is really important to think about what schools can do to support what families do – not by fixing families– but by developing some shared projects. Some of the things that you see in schools where this is working well is a willingness to have families and grandparents come into the classroom, maybe particularly in early childhood settings. And, whether it be early in the morning or late in the day, that there be an openness, where people can volunteer some of the great things that are already going on in the home, but not requiring families to be the kind of teachers that teachers are required to be. Not requiring parents to teach kids school things at home. We need to instead think about what they are already doing and how we can build on that.

- Annette That makes me think about Nancy Fraser's ideas around social justice. Many people (see Blackmore, 2016; Keddie, 2012; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013) have taken her feminist conceptualisation into thinking about education. This results in thinking about not only ensuring access to appropriate resources, funds and powerful ways of using language (redistributive social justice), but also the importance of schools and teachers working to ensure that all students are able to recognise their cultures, values, practices, beliefs and languages within the school curriculum and practices (recognitive social justice) and also having strong and diverse representation in the decision making about what gets taught and how (representational social justice). I think Fraser's conceptualisations of social justice (see for example Fraser's interview with Amrita Chhachhi in 2011) remains a really interesting way to think about what it means to educate other people's children well.
- Barbara I am overawed by the capacity that some teachers have for orchestrating appropriate combinations of different practices over time. And I'm always absolutely amazed at what motivated, engaged children learn in relatively short periods of time. A lot gets accomplished, which is pretty amazing really if you stop to think about it. So it is important to acknowledge and analyse just how well most teachers do teaching most of the time.
- Annette Final thoughts about the teaching of literacy for social justice?
- Barbara We need to work to give teachers an opportunity to become re-engaged, and reinvigorated about writing and reading – that will have an immediate impact on the kinds of opportunities they make available to their students.
- Annette I agree – teachers of literacy need to love texts! And I also want to see more reading and writing, listening and speaking, and designing happening in classrooms – from the earliest days of school.
- Barbara Yes. When children get a chance to play with reading and writing and to incorporate it as an element of their play, that develops a different type of relationship with text production and comprehension – children get to become authors and experience the actual social consequences of being readers and viewers.

Conclusion

This chapter presents our discussion of key challenges facing early childhood teachers in designing and enacting a literacy program that responds to current policy demands, the interests of diverse students, and the changing nature of communicative practices brought about by new technologies. Drawing on a range of research studies, we have argued that the use of digital technologies in early childhood settings is still very much contingent on equity of access, as one of a number of factors impacting on teachers' work. We note that provision of access remains very uneven around Australia.

Our discussion stresses that early literacy learning needs to be embedded in real-world investigations, where children are involved in activities that matter to them. Despite the emphasis on standards and testing of discrete skills, children need extended time to read, to write, and to revisit whole texts, in

order for them to learn about how various literate practices work in context. Actively participating in collaboratively co-constructing texts is crucial to social participation in these times, where the rise of writing has become critical in most aspects of everyday life. More than ever, given Australia's increased cultural diversity, being alert to what children bring and can already do is fundamental to contesting deficit views of certain groups. As educators we need to continually examine whether the program on offer is just. And to think through to what extent children are able, and enabled, to access complex literacy practice, to recognise what they each bring to the classroom in terms of language and cultural knowledge, and to ensure that every child is able to fully participate and represent themselves and their communities.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Recount a literacy learning activity that you have observed in a classroom that you think was well planned and organised. What was it that made this activity effective? How might you change the activity to fit the needs of other children that you teach?
2. Have you ever observed a child who was not able to participate in a particular activity or lesson? Think about this episode. Are you able to frame what it was that made the activity inaccessible to the child? Write down your thoughts. Now write down some ideas about what could have helped this be a more inclusive situation.
3. Now return to what you wrote. Are the reasons you've thought about related to the child or to the lesson? Have you considered that thinking about what a child 'can't do' might be framing how you would plan a lesson and teach particular children? What would happen if you thought instead about what a child 'can do'?
4. Consider a school, or early childhood education (ECE), context that you know. Perhaps this could be one where you have worked or completed practicum. Now list all the things that you know (not assume that you know) about the community where this school of ECE context is located. How might you find out more?

Suggested further reading

Comber, B. (2016). *Literacy, place, and possibility*. New York, NY: Routledge.

In this book, Barbara gives examples of quality literacy in current times and the possibilities that are available for teachers and children to take up.

Morgan, A. M., Comber, B., Freebody, P., & Nixon, H. (2014). *Literacy in the middle years: Learning from collaborative classroom research*. Marrickville Metro, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association Australia [PETAA].

This edited collection showcases teachers' work with students and provides examples of innovative approaches across the curriculum. The collection reminds readers of what is possible in current education contexts, and provides many examples of practice to inspire teachers to try something different in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Henderson, R. (2019). *Teaching literacies: pedagogies and diversity* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press.

While the focus of this edited collection is the primary and secondary years, the chapters are written by leaders in the literacies field and provide foundations in understandings of current challenges and opportunities in relation to teaching literacies. Many of the chapters have ideas and teaching strategies, and there are excellent extracts of practice throughout. The broader focus provided beyond early childhood education will be useful to readers of this collection.

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