

Teacher-as-artist, Researcher-as-artist: Creating Structures for Success

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This chapter proposes the concepts of writer/illustrator as artist, teacher-as-artist and researcher-as-artist, as a way of crossing boundaries. It notes how the work of each of these comes together within the specific context of the classroom, and how they can collaborate to construct a powerful foundation for what Clay has referred to as “the deep structures of success”.

It is appropriate that this should be the concluding chapter of a book that seeks to cross the boundaries between disciplines. If boundaries are going to be crossed, it is in the classroom that such crossings will truly take place. For the most part, it is here, in an educational context of influence, that children’s literature becomes either inclusive entry point or exclusive barrier. For the most part, it is here that literature and arts become integral (as mind-openers, image-makers, spirit-feeders) to the sustainable futures of lifelong learners, or become unsustainable and unstaining.

It is however important to consider the nature of the crossing that is being proposed, for while the above comments obviously refer to children, they are also applicable to the other players in the classroom cast, teachers. While researchers in arts disciplines are sometimes guilty of implying a type of intellectual superiority over educational researchers, teachers can express disgruntlement with researchers in both fields, perceiving their theoretical discussions as remote and irrelevant to what actually goes on in classrooms, where they and their students are coping with critical everyday issues, such as, for example, achieving survival in a new language.

These perceptions constitute the real crossing: it is not so much a crossing of territory as a border dispute over intellectual capital. What is needed here is not a merger – the arts and education have their own rich and fertile spaces and their own prolific traditions of research and practice. What is needed however, is freedom of access, a to-ing and fro-ing that does not view either side distrustfully, nor require them to stand in the ‘alien’ queue, firstly to have credentials checked, and secondly to make sure that they are not carrying anything dangerous.

Research *does* inform practice; what is equally important to acknowledge is that *practice in turn informs research*. This simple fact engineers the bridge for the crossing, a wide thoroughfare that has traffic going both ways. One means of facilitating the construction of this bridge is to conceptualise a little differently the role of the key figures in the drama that is playing out around its environs: that is, in terms of children’s literature, the roles of writer/illustrator, teacher, and researcher. This conceptualisation does not so much change these distinctive roles as redescribe their distinctiveness in terms of a common denominator. This chapter will propose such a conceptualisation and suggest ways in which it may generate deeper understandings and commitment to each other’s purposes; it will do so while locating the discussion in a school context. Specifically, it will focus on how literary theory and educational practice function conjunctively in the experience of literature in everyday classrooms, and how the explicit proclamation of this conjunction crosses disciplinary boundaries and is intellectually liberating for both teachers and researchers.

It is important to note at the outset that theory in a postmodern society is not separate from or above the concerns of the everyday: postmodernism has in fact invested everyday activities – that is, ‘the routine, repetitive taken-for-granted experiences, beliefs and practices, untouched by great events’ (Featherstone 1992, p.160) – with dignity and significance. As Featherstone further notes, in everyday activities ‘there is an emphasis on the present which provides a non-reflexive sense of immersion in the immediacy of current experiences and activities’ (p. 160-161). This immersion in present is one of the distinctive features of classroom situations and one of the realities of a teacher’s life (as may be ‘the disorderly babble of many tongues’ which Featherstone identifies as another element of the everyday!).

Classrooms are characterised by the doings of the everyday. They are reproductive immersions in *presentness* – continua of presents continuous rather than pasts and futures. Teachers know this in practice. Here then is a place for a crossing: cultural theory can be applied to describe teachers’ everyday time-space (classrooms), using different language in relation to everyday experience, and so provoking new connections for both theorists and teacher practitioners. Revisiting practice equipped with a different language opens up new mental imageries and promotes deeper intellectual endeavours. Two examples come to mind. Firstly, conceiving of classrooms as ‘time-spaces’ describes the physical location of schools in literary-philosophical terms, and invokes at least some engagement with Foucault’s metaphorical idea of space as ‘a site or container of power which usually constrains but sometimes liberates processes of *Becoming*’ (Harvey, p.213). Secondly, although the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Mikhailovitch Bakhtin (1895-1975) may be a long way removed from Australian classrooms, and his writings are not about education but principally about the novel as genre, his research is similarly liberating in this context. Bakhtin spent much of his life as a teacher of teachers (at the remote Mordovia State Teachers’ College 1936-1961), and his theoretical writings about literature are deeply philosophical; they are writings about life, and contribute a stimulating conceptual framework for teachers and researchers in educational as well as literary fields.

Bakhtin relates the everyday to other ideas that are similarly interesting in this discussion and particularly relevant in the context of teachers and teaching. Two of these are *heterogeneity*, which relates to a sort of ‘open messiness’ – and *unfinalizability* (*nezavershennost*). He defines unfinalizability as the general chaos and mess and unfinishedness of the world, but notes that this is positive rather than negative: unfinalizability represents the potential and openness required for freedom and creativity. Heterogeneity is also an essential part of creativity – neatness of idea continually being challenged by a different idea, established hierarchies of thinking toppled by fresh, upstart concepts and ways of seeing the world. ‘Open messiness’ is not of course referring to physical mess (although arguably that may sometimes be part of it): rather it is the everyday juggling and flux of the thriving activity that characterises the type of dynamic classroom that I have referred to elsewhere as *a place for seeing* (Johnston 2001, p. 437).

We know this because good teachers have taught us that it is so – and those of us who are teachers may have found it out for ourselves. Here we are not applying research into practice; rather, practice is informing and corroborating research; this of course is part of the symbiotic relationship between research and practice anyway. It goes without saying that in this sense good teachers are also active on-the-spot, on-the-job researchers in their own specific fields. (Indeed, teachers constantly engage in what we could develop as a concept of *spot research*: working out through trial and error the best solution to remove a particular problem for a

particular child in a particular situation). This discussion, however, is concerned with relating literary research and educational practice; some may question the need or viability for doing this (that is, corroboration), arguing that such an application is an unnecessary backward step, contrived and wasteful. It is not. Applying theoretical understandings in different disciplines to the everyday realities and practices of teaching is important; in terms of a literary paradigm, it is important because it endorses and *names* the process. Naming, as we know from folk and fairy tales, is power; naming the process in a different, heterogeneous way is creative and sometimes subversive, releasing a whole lot of other, powerful, cross-disciplinary ideas that excite, but are messy and unsettled – that may lead nowhere but that may lead somewhere rather important. Thinking of classrooms in literary terms is itself heterogeneous; it helps us to take a little leap and recognise the creative skills of the teacher, whose classroom (and mindscape) is metaphorically open rather than closed, informally messy rather than uniformly tidy, unfinalized and therefore always on the move.

Children's literature - which relates to literary theory, educational contexts, and the artistic continuum, as well as to writers, illustrators, editors, publishers, children, teachers, researchers, parents and community - is an apposite location for a cross-disciplinary discussion. Setting apart for the moment the many and diverse roles of the children (who are of course specific and individual rather than collective), and the infinitely various nature of their needs, there are three other main roles: the *writer/illustrator-as-artist*, the *researcher-as-artist*, and the *teacher-as-artist*. These roles are all linked by a common practice or set of practices, obviously, that of being an artist. There will be no dispute over the first category (writer/illustrator-as-artist) because writing stories and drawing pictures is society's traditional perception of what artists do. But it is interesting – and fruitful - to tease out this idea in relation to teachers and researchers, with a view to exploring ontological relativities.

An artist is someone who is skilled in the processes and products of human imagination and creativity, who develops a set of artistic practices and uses a range of media and materials that enable these creative products to be expressed in distinctive ways. For Adorno, art works (and he is using the term in the conventional sense) are instances 'of an infinity of the present' (1984, p.282) – a phrase that could equally be applied for our purposes as a description of everydayness and the everyday. Menke comments that the distinctiveness, 'the uniqueness of art, is that it sets itself apart, that it separates itself off' (1999, p.3). I will return to this apparently contradictory second idea a little later.

Let's consider the notion of teacher-as-artist. This gained some currency in the 1970s: Gueulette (1979) discusses an idea of the teacher as artist and alchemist, stressing the concept of illusion in visual art terms; Dinan (1979) defines the teacher-as-artist as one who 'deliberately creates disorder by unsettling the audience'; Lessinger (1976) discusses a notion of teacher-artist performance 'that harnesses the power of affect to the educational process'; Axelrod (1974) applies the idea in terms of aesthetics; Newland (1971) uses Dewey's theory of aesthetics to develop an analogy of the teacher as artist; more recently, Michael Park (1992) argues a model of teacher as artist. This current discussion is rather more heterogeneous, and considers jointly the endeavours of both teachers and researchers.

Teachers of course, teach, that is, they are involved in the process of *educatio*: they lead, invite, draw out, raise up, rear, train. From nine o'clock in the morning to three or three thirty in the afternoon, five days a week for forty weeks of the year, for at least fifteen years of the growing child's life, teachers articulate beingness to children. How? They do so through language: 'the boundaries of language,' writes the Austrian philosopher Ludwig

Wittgenstein, 'are the boundaries of life-world'. A teacher educates by using the art forms of words and pictures. A good teacher is a craftsman of words, an artist who places words carefully, both public words (addressed to the class as a whole) and private words (addressed to individual children). Words may not be able to break bones but they can break spirits: Susan Price's *The Ghost Drum* (1987), a book now unfortunately out of print, is a brilliant explication of the magic of words: '... the sound of them, the use of them, the shock, the smart and soothing cool of them' (p.37). Chingis, the protagonist, is taught that:

Words can alter sight and hearing, taste, touch and smell. Used with a higher skill they can make our senses clear and protect us from the simpler magics.

It is Mark Antony's word magic that changes how the mob feels about Caesar's death; Cassius warns Brutus:

Know you how much the people may be moved
By that which he will utter?

In just the same way, teachers use the art of words to move, to help students see things differently, to change. A good teacher is one who makes word pictures that impart knowledges, that entice and even cajole children into learning, that connote possibilities of achievement and reflect probabilities of positive outcomes. These word-pictures tell stories that create images, paint and sculpt physical and mental landscapes, and proliferate media of response. They are inclusive pictures in which children can see themselves, being and doing; most of all, they are pictures in which children see themselves as success stories. In the context of reading reluctance, Martin notes, 'Remedial reading should begin with every child playing himself as a successful reader of books' (1972); these comments, reminiscent of Heathcote's notion of the 'mantle of the expert', are applicable to all teaching situations.

Teachers are not only writers and painters of words and images; they are also directors of the day-by-day performance of the everyday classroom. They assign roles – 'You're good at this, aren't you?' – 'Why are you always the last one to finish?' – 'And you, sit over there and try to do something right for a change!' These roles and their associated directions become cumulative and, just as they do in dramatic performance, they create characters, suggesting behaviours and actions. As in theatrical performance, these words echo in private worlds long after they are uttered in public worlds. The power of words (signifiers) can bring about the reality of the signified; as Bakhtin writes:

Not from the thing to the word, but from the word to the thing; the word gives birth to the thing (1986, p.153).

Every utterance builds on other utterances, every word is filled with intentions, implicit or explicit. Words form, manipulate, change. To quote again from Susan Price's *The Ghost Drum*, consider this passage where Chingis is taught how words can be used by those in power:

'Suppose that a Czar or Czaritsa ordered their people to fight a war, a stupid war, a war that should never have been fought. Thousands of people are killed for no good reason and their families left to mourn them. Much, much money is spent on cannons and swords, so there is no money to spend on other, better, things ... The Czar is afraid that if the people find out how foolish and wasteful the war was, they will be

furious and do him harm. So the Czar uses word magic. He says to the people: “The war was not foolish – no! It proved that our people are the bravest and best in the world because they died for us, and killed so many of the enemy. I know you are starving, my children, but that shows how noble you are and how willing to make sacrifices for the Motherland. I, your Czar, am proud of you!” He says this and repeats it over and over again, and he makes his servants repeat it over and over to everyone they meet – and the magic works. The people forget to be angry. They grow *glad* that their sons and brothers were killed, and proud that they themselves are cold and hungry.’ (pp.36-37).

All of this constitutes an artistic meeting place, teacher-practitioners, writers and researchers meeting together, grafting and propagating as part of intellectual endeavour, nurturing buds of new growth. The same deep idea is being given different forms of artistic articulation. In Bakhtin’s words:

[L]anguage has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. all words have a “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (1981, p.293).

Bakhtin is an example of a researcher-as-artist. Sometimes, as above, theory endorses practice, rather than informs it. More accurately, it expresses it in such a way as not only to describe what actually happens, but to draw striking word-pictures for teachers of what teachers actually do, exciting a language of possibilities that injects new ideas and enthusiasms. This is one of the roles of the researcher-as-artist. Researchers-as-artists choose words carefully and aesthetically not only to describe but to inspire, and to construct new stages for debate and discussion: ‘Suppose’, writes Margaret Meek (a wonderful example of another researcher-as-artist), ‘we now began to speak of reading in terms of *dialogue* and *desire*; would that not be a better beginning?’ (1991). Edward O. Wilson refers to science as a ‘culture of illuminations’ (1998, p.45); discussing contemporary society, Geoff Mulgan writes that democracy ‘can become more of a permanent conversation’ (1997, p.16). Hagerstrand develops a metaphor of ‘time geography’ that conceives of individual biographies as ‘life paths in space’ and describes daily routines of movement – such as going to school – in terms of geographical ‘stations’ and ‘domains’ where, in Harvey’s words, ‘certain social interactions prevail’ (1990, p.211). Derrida is an artist researcher-philosopher; he pushes us to the limit but articulates what we can’t say but intuitively, deeply, understand:

There is in literature, in the *exemplary* secret of literature, a chance of saying everything without touching upon the secret. When all hypotheses are permitted, groundless and *ad infinitum*, about the meaning of a text, or the final intention of the author whose person is no more represented than non-represented by a character or by a narrator, by a poetic or fictional sentence, when these are detached from their presumed source and thus remain in secret (*au secret*), when there is no longer any sense in making decisions about some secret beneath the surface of a textual manifestation (and it is this situation that I would call text or trace), when it is the call (*appel*) of this secret, however, which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds on to the other, then

the secret impassions us. Even if there is none, even if it does not exist, hidden behind anything whatever. Even if the secret *is no secret*, even if there has *never been a secret, a single secret*. Not One. (1997, p.109)

In the following passage, Currie refers to the researcher as critic, but in arguing a conceptual linkage of critic and reader, he interrogates common perceptions and stimulates ideas:

The empowerment of the reader is simultaneously the empowerment of the critic, who stands in as the reader's representative. The relation of critic to text is no longer that of knower to known. Producing meaning on the text's own level, the critic operates as a doer rather than a knower –and certainly not a detached or impartial knower.

Researchers and teachers meet at pragmatic levels, but they connect with greatest significance at the level of knowing and doing, which I am arguing is an artistic nexus. Both are knowers and both are doers; they know and do different things – but not always, sometimes they know the same thing differently. This interaction demystifies, communicates, and enriches. For example, children's literature researchers of the last decade focussed to a great extent on ideology (Hollindale 1988, Stephens 1992): these discussions have linked in educational fields to the debate about multiple literacies, in particular, *critical literacy*, which is defined as:

... reading with a knowledge of the workings of a language, reading with an awareness of what and how the text is making you feel, and reading with the ability to discern the ideas and attitudes and assumptions behind the text' (Johnston 2001, p. 320).

In other words, the concepts of *critical literacy* and *ideology* emerge in different fields, but emanate from the same intellectual impulse.

It is interesting to consider Julie Kristeva here. A very brief introduction to Kristeva's work would note its breadth and its depth: she resists easy classification; in the bounded, discipline-driven research agendas of the twentieth century Western world, her work is characterised by its interdisciplinarity and 'outside-ness' – to use another Bakhtinian term. Although she was a part of very influential intellectual circles, a student of Barthes, and is commonly labelled as a feminist, she moved in her own space on the edges. Barthes wrote of her first published book:

And now I have been made to feel again ... the force of her work. *Force* here means *displacement*. Julie Kristeva changes the order of things: she always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud: what she displaces is the *already-said* ... (Moi, p.1)

Kristeva (a Bulgarian who spoke fluent Russian and had a strong grounding in Marxism and Russian Formalism) was of course a foreigner in Paris, and as Moi notes was 'always foreign to the theoretical scene she was in' (p.3). This foreignness – outsideness, apartness - was her strength and her art as a researcher-as-artist.

The idea of teachers and researchers as artists – as communicators, philosophical inquirers, self-reflexive thinkers, creative and aesthetic organisers of material, performers, interpreters,

dramatists, actors, music-makers, directors, producers - crosses boundaries and provides thoroughfares, but does not need to preclude distinctiveness: each has its own role and difference. The nature of the relationship, however, must be as open, not closed, systems. Kristeva's description of adolescence in her essay on the adolescent novel provides a fine analogy:

'I understand by the term "adolescent" less as an age category than an open psychic structure. Like the "open" systems of which biology speaks concerning living organisms that live only by maintaining a renewable identity through interaction with another, the adolescent structure opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganisation of the individual ...' (1990, p.8).

The relationships between literary theory and teaching offer sites of multiple 'renewable identities'. We have already mentioned the idea of outside-ness; this refers not only to an awareness of others (the common usage), but, more importantly, to an *awareness of self as other* (the sense in which Bakhtin used the term). Such an awareness is of course a more sophisticated expression of one aspect of cultural literacy; that is,

'... the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of diverse ways of being. This knowledge, understanding and appreciation of diverse ways of being ... means being open to and experimenting with different ways of doing things, different sorts of formats, different ideas about beginnings and endings, different ideas even about what language should be, and different ideas about literacy' (Johnston 2001, p. 292-293).

More pragmatically, there is a 'concentration upon procedures from both traditions that can be cooperatively employed to serve a line of research' (Smith and Heshusius, 1986) – and we could add, a line of teaching.

I have already noted Menke's seemingly problematical comment (in the context of this discussion) that art separates. The teacher-as-artist does not actually separate, but s/he does know when to step back, when to operate at a remove, and allow space for the fledgling first steps of learners. Teachers know how to use physical space in the stage that is the classroom; they also know how to use mental space. The work of the teacher, like the work of an artist, is intuitive, aesthetic, expressive, creative. It is also deeply, intensely communicative. Most art is addressed to someone else - an audience, a reader, a viewer, a beholder, a performer, a listener. In fact, pushing the argument further, the aim of all artists is to get their message across, to transact, negotiate, arbitrate and evoke. The word 'arbitrate' is new to this discourse; it does not here pertain to teacher as judge or decision maker. Rather, it infers a particular process that leads to the resolution of differences between what children know and don't know. The artistry of words and pictures helps to embed new knowledge in the already-known as part of an arbitration kit.

Here teachers can draw on the powerful resources of the creative arts, which allow children the option of moving outside their own private worlds to try on other selves and roam in other subjectivities. 'Creative arts' is not, as some curricula suggest, only a separate group of subjects that includes art, drama, music, dance (important as these are); rather, creative arts are a plurality of *interdisciplinary, core-disciplinary, artistic practices, processes and paradigms* that spill over, usually at the deepest point, into all disciplines. A scientist's discussion of string theory and superstrings describes the dimensions of the universe as being 'tightly curled up in the folded fabric of the cosmos'; the same scientist notes that the

microscopic particles within protons and neutrons are called 'quarks' after a passage in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (Greene 1999, p.6, 7). Here scientific facts are expressed creatively, in poetic metaphor. These creative arts represent the human need to produce and to read narratives, to describe and create and imagine and dream - linguistically, visually, aurally - stories and images of human experience. 'Creative arts' must include literature; it must in particular, in school curricula at least, include children's literature - words and pictures, semantics and sounds, design and orthographies. The practices, processes and paradigms of the creative arts include literary and visual grammars (see, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), metaphor, imagery, representation of subjectivities; these can be conceptualised as what we could develop into an idea of the metacognitive *arts of knowing*. Indeed, it is these metacognitive arts of knowing that allow us to 'know' at the deepest level (beyond the superficial) - to perceive, receive, become aware of, think about, learn about, interpret, remember, imagine, sense. And it is these metacognitive arts of knowing that give artists the languages - words, pictures, musical, dramatic - to describe their 'knowing' to others.

In a so-called knowledge society, where knowledge seems to be increasingly situated as an autonomous commodity, creative arts and creative artistries provide personal, relational, handholds. For children, they provide media for involvement and response in all sorts of non-traditional ways. Through the processes of the creative arts, children can step out of self and respond in the safety of role. They may do so just by wearing masks (thus to hide, appear as other, or assume another identity of choice). They may bypass words altogether and paint responses and other selves; or dance a different idea of being, or they may simply sit and think and imagine. They may disregard formal linguistic structures and create word pictures that bypass lack of grammatical knowledge and emerge as poetry. Poetry can be a response to a scientific process (consider the notion of chemical reactions). Dance can be a response to the multiplication table (imagine dancing the three times table). Extreme? Perhaps, but worth trying. The teacher-as-artist, working in open collaboration with a researcher-as-artist like Howard Gardner, makes opportunities for as many different ways of responding as possible, offering options of success other than in traditional written and spoken forms. Writing and speaking will follow, but they should not always be pushed for first. Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences describes the many different forms of learning: bodily/kinaesthetic as well as logical/mathematical, musical/rhythmic as well as verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal. Whereas interpersonal intelligence relates, in Gardner's words, to 'the ability to notice and make distinctions about other individuals' (1984, p.240), intrapersonal intelligence has as its core capacity '*the ability to access one's own feeling life*' (p. 240, my italics). Both these are related; Gardner discusses them together - and they both clearly represent what happens in the literature/creative arts/educational domain. But it is the latter that I think is of pivotal importance in classrooms that are moments of continuous, everyday, becoming. Children need a sense of their own 'feeling life', even - particularly when - they cannot articulate it for themselves, even - particularly when - they are most divorced from any sense of it.

Here of course is where children's literature comes into its own. Literature represents in user-friendly ways diverse representations of 'feeling life': of the emotions and quandaries of being human. Its words and pictures give 'seeability' (Cassirer 1996) to the most abstract of ideas, and express those abstractions in ways that reach children and touch children's lives. The picture book by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks, *Fox* (2000), expresses a range of such abstractions. Its text is a child-like hand-written script that is often crooked, that can be read in various ways and held with different ways up, and that includes mistakes and cross-outs in

the publication details. The abstract ideas include particular slants on the nature of friendship (as in *Huckleberry Finn*), fear (as in *A Passage to India*), jealousy (as in *Cinderella*), love (as in *Romeo and Juliet*), temptation (as in the Biblical account of Peter's denial of Jesus: 'And when at dawn Fox whispers to her for the third time she whispers back, "I am ready"'); loyalty (as in *Middlemarch*), vengeance (as in *Hamlet*), treachery (as in *Julius Caesar*), trust (as in *An Imaginary Life*), the pain of loneliness (as in *King Lear*), and the absolute integral significance of life itself (as in *To Kill A Mockingbird*). These complexities are part of textual 'understory' (see Johnston 2001, p. 325). The writer and illustrator illuminate this understory in the artistry of their story and illustration – dramatic pictures, and simple words with sound effects within them:

Magpie feels the wind streaming through her feathers and she rejoices. 'FLY, DOG, FLY! I will be your missing eye, and you will be my wings.'

There are rich, intertextually dense, metaphors:

After the rains
when saplings are
springing up everywhere,
a fox comes into the bush.
Fox with his haunted eyes
and rich red coat.
He flickers through the trees
like a tongue of fire,
and Magpie trembles.

The visual chronotope – that is, the visual representation of people and events to time and space (see Johnston 2001, p. 348, 408) - is a time-space that is simultaneously freedom and imprisonment, an 'occasion' (Ozouf 1988, pp.126-137) which, like the experience of Australia to the early settlers, is at once exile and utopia. It also represents a compressed time space that is another, darker version of the wild, and 'where the wild things are.' *Fox* is a story of tangled emotions, and there is no easy resolution – we hope Magpie makes it home but the odds would seem to be against her.

Fox is a text that the researcher-as-artist can discuss at a number of levels, making connections to the artistic continuum of which it is a part (as above), describing it in terms of familiar narrative patterns such as the quest, the fable genre, the potential rupture of the open ending; and noting the changing endpapers, from the blaze of desert colours at the beginning to the same scene transfigured by deep colours of darkness at the end. It is also a text that, I would argue, indicates at least to some extent the influence of researchers on writers and illustrators: deliberately post modern in presentation, poetic, open, and intertextually dense. *Fox* is a fable of becoming.

The teacher-as-artist reads this story in classroom community, savouring its magic, but doesn't necessarily ask any questions at all about what it 'means.' Rather, children are offered the opportunity to create a response to the story, corporately or individually. The response can be in any medium: it may be a debate, a dance, a piece of music composed on recorder or keyboard, a radio play or report for a newspaper, a film script or play, a painting or sculpture or collage or installation of some sort. These responses will naturally promote talk and discussion, and writing of one sort or another. Children can choose the medium for

response in which they feel comfortable. ‘Teachers need to be imaginative and pluralistic if they hope to stimulate revealing performances of understanding,’ writes Gardner (1999, p.178).

Literature represents the processes of becoming in fictional lives and worlds; despite some critical rejection of the idea, it also plays a major role in the processes of becoming in real lives and real worlds. ‘All literature,’ writes Bakhtin, ‘is ... caught up in the process of “becoming”’ (1981, p.5) – a comment which clearly relates, in different paradigms, to both Montaigne and Foucault. What does a notion of ‘becoming’ mean, however, in classrooms where there are children who are having difficulties? What are they ‘becoming’ – or likely to become? In terms of literacy, for example, there are students struggling in a second language, in a first language, as reluctant readers, as reluctant writers, students who for a host of reasons are disadvantaged. Stanovich (1986), after reviewing the research, concluded that the biblical maxim propounded in the Gospel of Matthew can be applied to reading as well: ‘For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.’ (Matthew Ch. 13: v. 12). These children will continue to struggle unless researchers and teachers use their artistry to intervene – painting enticing backdrops, opening up scenes of success rather than failure, offering other ways of response. Literacy, says Lyotard, is not a technology of knowledge appropriation; it is what he calls ‘a relentless re-reading of reading’ (Godzich 1992, p135), an anchor to surroundings. Of course, not all reluctant students are ‘poor’ readers or writers; some children are skilled but not motivated to achieve. Goldberger’s definition of a reluctant reader as someone who is not motivated to read and who ‘is likely to have a permanent non-reading habit’ stresses that this may, or may not, be linked to low reading ability and poor grades (1978, p. 382). Nonetheless, the child who doesn’t like being in school is usually a child whose reluctance is symptomatic of a lack of success, a perceived lack of success, or fear of a future lack of success.

What structures for success can the collaborative enterprise of writers/illustrators, teachers and researchers construct for children under threat? Stanovich’s analogy is a brilliant example of the artistry of researchers in drawing attention to findings and proposals in mind-catching ways. Teachers know that the principle that success breeds success, and failure breeds failure, is true across the spectrum, and that the most important attribute for school success is a *sense of self confidence*. Theory supports this: in a study of cognitive and motivational determinants of reading comprehension, Ehrlich, Kurtz-Costes and Loridant note the diversity of poor readers as a significant factor; but stress (and the research literature unanimously agrees) the importance of self-confidence:

We suspect that for many of the poor readers, continued failures serve to exacerbate their lack of confidence, and beliefs that academic outcomes are not controllable. (1993, p. 375)

What Lowe calls ‘*relationship with self*’ (1994, p. 3) commonly appears to be negative in the reluctant reader and it is obvious that a poor reading self-image escalates as time passes and with each unsatisfactory experience. In fact, the one factor reluctant readers appear to have in common is a lack of confidence. In terms of second language learners, Tarone and Yule note:

Although it is not always included in discussions of the language learning process, self-confidence is normally assumed to have an influence on successful learning. When affective filters are explicitly discussed, there seems to be a consensus that the

general notion of self-esteem may be a crucial factor in the learner's ability to overcome occasional set-backs and minor mistakes in the process of learning a second language. (1989, p. 139)

The Catholic Education Office also notes that the basis of all successful learning is "the positive self-esteem and well-being of the learner." (*Diversity*.1993, p.29).

Without a *positive self-image*, children are for the most part going to be unhappy in the school situation and will be recalcitrant students. Here is where research and practice must collaborate to enlighten and inform how negative spirals can be interrupted and reversed. Part of the answer at least will be in allowing children a multiplicity of ways of expressing their 'feeling life'. Part of the answer will also be to affirm and value the knowledge and skills they already have – a gift for drawing comic characters, for playing drums, for tap-dancing, for singing, a keen interest in a particular sport, or in popular songs. Teachers-as artists find ways to celebrate whatever prior knowledges children bring to the classroom.

A positive self-image relates to confidence; confidence encourages risk-taking. Negative spirals need to be broken – and quickly – just as the negative cycle in poor reading needs to be interrupted as soon as it is recognised (see, for example, Clay 1991, Muehl and Forell 1973). Pressley, Borowski and Shneider (1987) have developed a model of metacognition based on the argument that successful strategy use enhances self concept and attributional beliefs and that these motivational states thus determine the acquisition of new strategies.

This is part of making children feel *a sense of belonging* in the teaching/learning situation. A lack of cultural knowledge can help to exclude children, particularly children from other language backgrounds. Using literature creatively can help to fill gaps in cultural knowledge; teachers can also choose texts that carry cross-cultural ideas: *Fox*, for example, is a story that could emerge out of a number of cultures. Reading is a psycholinguistic process, a process in which the schemata - the knowledge of the world - brought to the text by the reader will not only influence but may in fact determine the knowledge acquired from reading. The early research by Anderson *et al*, notes:

It may turn out that many problems in reading comprehension are traceable to deficits in knowledge rather than deficits in linguistic skill ... ; that is, the young readers may not possess the schemata needed to comprehend passages. Or they may possess relevant schemata but not know how to bring them to bear. Or, they may not be facile at changing schemata when the first one tried proves inadequate; they may in other words, get stuck in assimilating text in inappropriate, incomplete, or inconsistent schemata (1977: p. 378).

Another strategy for success is to give children a *sense of purpose*. The creative arts reflect multiple purposes and give opportunities for finding and describing 'meaning' in different ways. Reading is more than decoding; if the reader decodes, but fails to attain *meaning*, the process fails to have purpose. 'Getting words right' is not the task, writes Meek; the task is 'to interpret the meaning beyond the signs' (1991, pp. 200-201).. Teachers encourage the perception of purpose by offering diverse choices for expression of response – expressions which children can 'own' in some way, and feel confident about. Children who do not choose to read, who find reading 'hard work' and 'boring' (Lowe 1994, p. 39), and who stop reading will develop linguistic and cultural deficits; such children will soon lose control of the reading situation. In fact, the only control option for them is a negative one: they can overtly

or covertly refuse to participate in the reading process at all, a point which Lowe notes (1994, p. 7).

Meaning and purpose is wrapped up in story, and story begins in the classroom with *teachers reading aloud to children* – even when the children are perfectly able and competent to read for themselves. When a child is being read to, or read with, the classroom becomes a community - listeners, participators, imaginers. This is when teachers introduce stories that children are unlikely to choose for themselves; as Holdaway points out, ‘the orientation to book language develops in a rich exposure beyond immediate needs’ (1979, p. 40). Reading aloud also gives opportunities for all sorts of paralinguistic cues to meaning (voice and facial expression for example), it gives the child the opportunity to listen, to soak in the language aurally, taking from the reading what they will. Reading aloud, just for fun, sets up a structure for success.

Another structure for success is the *affirmative classroom*, where creativity and artistic response is facilitated, and learning is celebrated not as a singularity that can be ticked off, but as an underlying principle of holistic growth. This classroom offers opportunity for diverse, unfinalized activities relating to mental creativity, objective abilities and the external world. The less successful student has learned not to be a risk-taker and needs to be encouraged into actions that are not marred by histories of failure and that clearly offer possibilities of success. Drama, readers’ theatre, dance and music, mime and clowning, writing and drawing illustrations, making a comic strip, composing songs or music to tell story in different ways, designing costumes for characters, making a collage of ‘understory’, adapting events into own words as poetic response, or as radio play, or as film script, or as Internet role play; all of these are ways of retelling story in one’s own language of choice. This constitutes a scaffolding and safety net for the risks involved in participating in new learning.

In this scenario of success, the writer/illustrator contributes texts that captivate, that set imaginations racing, that draw new personal imageries and expand mental multiverses. I have written elsewhere (1995) about the type of texts that can be chosen and used with great success in classrooms where there are particular needs. The research – and Harry Potter – indicate that children like the unfamiliar planted in the safety of the familiar. Folk and fairy tales lend themselves to endless replays and retellings and seem to have a common appeal, as Wallace points out:

... the classic folk tales offer the most predictable genre for linguistic and cultural minority readers. (1988: p. 30).

These can be related to non-readers’ worlds by setting up connection points to things they know and are comfortable with, including popular music and film. Folk tales tap into indigenous stories and their archetypal similarities can provide cues and clues in the reading process which children can use to predict. In another way, this helps to serve as an example of Clay’s notion of the ‘predictable text’. Predictability in this sense has as Clay herself notes different meanings (1991, p. 184) but it does not simply mean repetitive or dull; it can, again as Clay notes, be constructive. The predictable text contains familiar material; the pattern of story is known even if the actual linguistic representation of that story is not. In this way, children are playing the role of reader (another version of Dorothy Heathcote’s ‘mantle of the expert’) and learning to use what they know to help with what they don’t know. In other words, says Clay, support is coming from the child’s own prior reading; familiarity is

encouraging independence and ‘the smooth orchestration of all those behaviours necessary for effective reading’ (1991, p. 184).

Children respond to the *sounds* of language, to rhyme and to rhythm. Like pictures, rhyme and rhythm can provide helpful clues for the less successful reader: patterns of rhyme can help a child to guess how a word is going to sound, and patterns of rhythm aid pronunciation as well as memory. A ‘big book’ such as Margaret Mahy’s *When the King Rides By* provides a non-threatening and energetic reading experience for children of all ages. This book lends itself to oral activities: to reading aloud, to reading in a group (providing a safe structure in which the child may dare to speak without fearing mistakes), and to all sorts of language play. For example, groups can create their own line of nonsense verse: ‘the lions roar and the trains rush by’, ‘the kangaroo jumps and the eggs all fry’. Children become creators of texts. In having fun with the language in this way, children are unconsciously responding to its metres and cadences; they are also unconsciously becoming familiar with how language works. Grammatical constructions such as participant and process relationship and agreement are being accumulated, practised, and confirmed.

The teacher-as-artist knows and trusts literature, trusts the creative responses that it can evoke, trusts its private maps and mindscapes; knows that children’s literature is part of a wonderfully diverse and vibrant artistic continuum, and will find creative ways of displaying parts of the whole continuum to the gaze of the class. This class will have words read to them, just for aural edification – there will not be endless written responses about character and plot. Literature is more than comprehension: it is sounds, rhythms, feelings, glimpses and dreams of ‘otherworlds’. In the past ‘literature’ has been perceived as too hard and too complex and has been watered down and simplified sometimes to the point of banality for ‘problem’ children. It is my experience that children often enjoy what they may not completely understand. Contemporary conceptions of *meaning* as interaction between the world of the reader and the world of the text infer the significance of the cultural base of literature and implicitly acknowledge its constant permutations; literature, however, is a part of both worlds. It is as much a part of the world of the reader as it is a part of the world of the text. Here again Bakhtinian theory recognises the significance of the continued interaction of the worlds of readers with texts:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. (1981, p.254)

The success of the *Harry Potter* books proves that the new technologies have not made the reading of books redundant: the pleasures of the text have survived the advent of the WWW and the Internet. The *Potter* books with their mix of genres – *Cinderella* story, school story, fantasy - and their sophisticated language and overt existentialism, indicate that the pleasures of reading are many and various. They include: what Rushdie calls ‘what happens nextism’; the fantastic promise of another self who has great powers and who is highly respected within a circle of those ‘in the know’; an understory that reaches out and touches children’s private worlds, including both their fears and their dreams; an accessible but not over-simplified text, thus providing a sense of reading challenge; peer approval; dark questions answered within the security of a community where ultimately good survives; and clever plays on words that peg the texts to everyday culture and the real world. It seems to me that these ideas offer teachers a structure for understanding effective classroom strategies: presenting

teaching/learning experiences as exciting and as a promise of other worlds; creating a classroom atmosphere of security and confidence; retaining the challenge of new learning without over-simplification and ‘dumbing-down’; embedding new learning in a rich classroom environment that presents more than one option of response (writing an answer). Story can captivate children as it captivates us: the teacher-as-artist uses everything in his/her power – voice, dramatic techniques, props – to present new learning as a story with a happy ending (that is, a story in which the child, like Harry, will ultimately succeed, even when there are setbacks and difficulties).

Discussing aestheticism, Sussman concludes that the purpose of all of the many strategies he enumerates is to bring about in the reader what he calls ‘an awakening’ (1997). The postmodern classroom is a performance space for such awakenings. Barriers and boundaries are removed; in Bakhtinian terms, this classroom is a stage ‘without footlights’: everything is performance, and everyone is performer. This democratic classroom appears free but is securely grounded in ‘deep structures’ that proactively work for success, especially for the success of those for whom success is the most problematical. The art of the writer-illustrator (beyond the footlights) makes the invisible visible, giving seeability to abstract ideas and complex thoughts. In an era of multiple literacies, the artistry of researchers and teachers meets to provide numerous points of entry and invite connections with the many provinces of the multiple realities of the classroom players. In the art form of children’s literature, all have a role to play, and a real contribution to make to the lifeworlds of those who are at the centre of what we do, children.

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