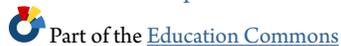2002

Narrative, meaning making and personal development: Teachers' storied experience in Montessori, Steiner and other primary classrooms

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Chapter III

Narrative – A Context for Language Development and Understanding

The first pattern to emerge from an analysis of coded data was the use of narrative by teachers from all four pedagogies to foster an understanding of linguistic structure and narrative genre. The Catholic and Government teachers, who viewed themselves as whole language practitioners, provided support for an approach that asserts language skills can be learned experientially in natural and meaningful contexts. Although viewing language learning in this way has revolutionised education in the latter quarter of the 20th century, it became apparent from interview data and literature reviews that many whole language premises have been inherent in both the Montessori and Steiner curriculum for far longer than in these more traditional educational models. Indeed, interviewees from all four educational settings expressed an appreciation for the powerful link between concept-formation and narrative structure and in constructing curriculums reflected on varying ways on the following questions based on whole language assumptions:

- Is there a link between language and thought begins early and is developmental?

- How do children use narrative as a tool in constructing their knowledge and understanding?

- How is oracy a prelude to literacy?

- What are the effects of basing reading and writing curriculum activities on whole meaningful texts?

- Does effective language education means heeding certain principles of natural learning including:

    immersion,
    demonstration,
    expectations,
    responsibility,
    use,
    approximation,
    refinement and
    response?
    and

- Do children learn most effectively when they are provided with an integrated approach to language exploration?

Each of these questions reflecting whole language assumptions is examined in turn and illustrated with excerpts from the interview data.

Is there a link between language and thought that begins early and is developmental?

The structuralist, Noam Chomsky, believed that there were innate organisational patterns for language which he labelled Language Acquistion Device (Chomsky, 1965,1968). Bruner claims that this "innate syntactic language" view of language acquisition has been discredited; we are now aware that there are far more gains from social interaction than Chomsky was aware of at the time, and thus the current accepted theory of grammar acquisition is that "rules can only be learned instrumentally" (Bruner, 1990, p. 72). However, he contends that there may be a case for the innate readiness for the meaning of language provided by the ability to form a prelinguistic appreciation of context (Bruner, 1990). His views concur with Polkinghorne who notes that "the more accepted position is that narrative structures,

although dependent on basic human capacities, are acquired by abstraction from experiences" (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 112-113).

The work of Greenfield and Savage-Rumbaugh (1990) and of Mandler (1992) supports the contention that concept formation begins before language as children experience physical operations and relationships in dealing with the environment. Greenfield and Savage-Rumbaugh base their conclusions on comparative work with primates who show comprehension of words with gesture and action without being able to articulate them. Mandler has made similar conclusions based on her work with human infants. In fact, she believes that concept formation is occurring earlier than Piaget hypothesised – concurrently with sensorimotor schema rather than afterwards. She theorises that the analysis by the infant of perceptual information leads to "image schemas, which in turn form the foundation of the conceptual system, a system that is accessible first via imagery and later via language as well"(p. 588). Among the concepts Mandler sees developing in this way are agency, causality and animacy (Mandler, 1992, p. 592). Since these concepts parallel elements of narrative including character, plot and metaphor, Mandler's findings support Bruner's view that early conceptual preverbal development is laying the goundwork for elements of narrative.

Montessori wrote that "language has begun when it is linked up with perception, even though speech itself, in its psycho-motor mechanism is still rudimentary. "Spoken language has its beginning in a child when the word he pronounces represents an idea" (Montessori,1912/1988b, p. 246). Bruner notes that certain concepts of communication are in place before the child has mastered formal language for

expressing them linguistically including "indicating, labelling, requesting, and misleading."[32] In some prelinguistic way the function comes first through interpersonal communication. Children grasp the significance of what is being talked about before they can join in (Bruner, 1990, p. 71). Vygotsky (1962, 1978) has also explored this social aspect of language development. In the early years, the child uses gestures and objects in play that represent objects in relationships. Pretend play and drawing is thus the beginning of the literacy trail. Word meaning becomes generalised as children communicate with parents and others and later it serves an inner, personal function as a child starts talking to himself or herself (Loeffler, 1993; Van Groenou, 1995).

Wiltz and Fein (1996) identify Vivian Paley as a contemporary educator whose practice is inspired by the observations of Vygotsky and Bruner.

> Play, the natural medium through which children actively express pleasure, curiosity, logic and fear, becomes the integrated curriculum of her preschool classroom. Fantasy play allows children the opportunity to develop a role, think about a subject, follow a theme and make sense of their universe. Play is a way of life in the nursery school. (p. 63)

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[32] Misleading – By misleading, Bruner is referring to the ability observed in two to three year olds who having hidden something, then proceed to "withhold relevant information form the searcher, and even create and then supply the searcher with false information as misleading footprints that lead away from the hidden treasure" (Bruner, 1990, p. 75).

Bruner (1990) provides evidence to support his view that it is not only the will to communicate but also "the push to construct narrative that determines the order of priority in which grammatical forms are mastered by the young child"(p.71). He notes that four of the grammatical structures required to create narrative are among the first to appear. These include "agentivity – action directed toward goals controlled by agents", "sequentiality- that events and states be linearised in a standard way", "sensitivity to what is canonical and what violates canonicality in human interaction", and "narrative perspective" or voice (p.77).

Sutton-Smith like Mandler proposes that Piagetian mental schematic theory[33] is inadequate to explain children's development in story telling. He asserts that the idea of the "scripts" of every day life does not explain the development either. Rather, he describes the complexity of being able to tell a story as a "theatrical quadrologue" involving director, audience, actor and counteractor. This story process begins at 2-6 months with face games with the parents followed by action games such as peek-a-boo at 8 months when the child is the audience and 15 months when the child is the director. Sutton-Smith concurs with Vygotsky and Paley that "the true source of

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[33] Schemes – Piaget referred to action patterns as schemes. They were like action patterns without words. Piaget theorised that learning of these schemes occurred through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the incorporation of new knowledge into existing schemas. Accommodation refers to the modification of the child's existing schemes to incorporate new knowledge that does not fit the scheme. Adaptation is maintaining a balance between assimilation and accommodation. (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 1999, pp. 24-25)

narrative is play scaffolding, not social-picture-book scaffolding alone" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 68-71).

Sutton-Smith supplies a timeline for children's subsequent story construction:

- Very young children "organise repeated behaviour around one or more central actions (or words) which are then varied endlessly in a patterned fashion" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 75).

- By the age of 3 or 4 years, they have mastered staging. There is a "sense of oneself as storyteller, of the storyteller as an audience, and of the story itself as a stage for the action of characters" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 79). He also notes constancy in the characters at this age: "After the first few stories and by the age of three years, most of our children have stories in which the characters become constant and the actions take place in a roughly chronological sequence" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 80).

- Up until the age of about seven there is no real effort displayed to present a resolution or conclusion. "They are stronger on introductions, complications, and endings than they are on development and resolution" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p.81).

- When children do start to include a conflict and resolution in their narratives, the nature of the resolution evolves in the following stages:

  No response to conflict

  Failure to resolve conflict

  Nullification (central character renders threat powerless)

  Transformation (Danger is removed and there is a complete transformation so the protagonist can't return to original state.) (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 83)

- By the Age of 11 or 12, children are able to embed subplots in their narrative (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 83).

Catholic school interviewee, Kate, revealed similar observations in her description of how the attributes of the children's narratives change as they get older. She commented on the fact that early stories are sequenced recounts whereas the stories of older students have more conflict. She also observed that language becomes more varied and complex.

> When they come into Yr. 2, it's really simple…As they go to Yr. 7, they become much more descriptive, use more adjectives and adverbs rather than (just nouns)…the format of the story changes. [The stories] probably become a bit more conflicting…But it's mainly the language that changes…Metaphors or similes are [examples of] the types of language they can use. Rather than just "One day I went shopping"[it becomes] "One day when it was windy I went down to the shopping mall and I bought…"…. The sentence structure changes more than anything else. (Kate: 100-110)

Carol who had taught all age levels from 3-12 years in the Montessori system also noted that the language became more detailed with age and that scaffolding plays a significant part in this development:

> I think more detail as they get older. Maybe because I've tried to help them…. I'll tell them to get a picture in their mind…What do you see? Is she

bent over? To help them. Because your picture in your mind is different from the picture that I have in my mind. Or you know a chair. Or any object. Describe what your chair looks like. What colour is it? And things like that so their stories get more detailed at least in my class because we do that and when we're proofreading, we'll say, "Well, what does that chair look like? Because you know we're talking about living in a house. Well, what does that house look like? To add more detail. (Carol: 79)

Government School teacher, Lynne, noted a change from a preference for fantasy to a preference for reality in the older primary children:

Yes, well, I suppose the younger one would be more into writing fantasy, fairies and the older ones get more into reality. Well, I know some of the children in another class this year. They've been writing modern day fairy tales or twisted fairy tales, writing in modern day using the themes and theirs were all very much into reality. They bring it into their own lives rather than the "once upon a time" stories – the here and now, things from television and their own sort of backgrounds. (Lynne: 156)

To the question, "You have taught every grade; have you noticed how children's stories change as they mature as far as developmental differences or topics they choose or characters?" Sam from a Waldorf school replied:

There are … general trends. Their stories become more complex, but also

they start writing more about an inner life. They can't do that in Class 2, but

by Class 5, they can do that. They're writing more about their thoughts and

feelings, which would happen after Class 3. (Sam: 540)

Interviewees thus noted a content focus as children developed from fantasy to reality,

from external events to concern with an inner life, as well as an ability to use more

complex language and to create more complex plots and characters.

How do children use narrative as a tool in constructing their knowledge and
understanding?

Children at a remarkably young age are making sense of their worlds through

language. Montessori introduced the word 'dictorium' to describe the use of language

for intellectual growth. She strove to differentiate clearly between spoken language

that "develops through the exercise of its mechanisms and is enriched by perceptions

and the dictorium that "develops with the mind and is enriched by intellectual culture"

(Montessori, 1912/1988b, pp. 247-248). What is remarkable is that she made this

differentiation based on her observations of children in 1912 making a very early

claim that educators need to view aspects of narrative as a means for the child to

construct knowledge and understanding.

In 1991, Carol Westby (p. 334) made a similar observation noting that it is the

narrative form that moves the child along a continuum of "learning to talk" (learning

phonology, syntax, and semantics necessary to communicate basic desire and needs)

to "talking to learn" (using language to monitor and reflect on experience, and reason about, plan and predict experience).

> Developmentally, narrative is the first language form that requires the speaker to produce an extended monologue rather than an interactive dialogue. In relating or listening to a narrative, the speaker and listener act as spectators rather than as participants. As spectators, the speakers and listeners reflect on experiences, whereas as participants, they use language to get things done and to make changes in the current situation (Westby, 1991, p. 340).

In the eight decades between Montessori's first writing to the present, evidence that narrative is a central tool in constructivism has mounted. [34] Polkinghorne (1998) states that "for human existence, linguistic forms are paramount, for they filter and organise information from the physical and cultural realms and transform it into the meanings that make up human knowledge and experience. On the basis of this constructed experience, we understand ourselves and the world, and we make decisions and plans regarding how we will act" (p. 158).

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[34]Constructivism – Pepin (1998, p. 180) states that constructivism "holds that human beings construct their knowledge in the very process of adapting and that knowledge only has meaning to the extent that it resolves problems encountered while attending to various goals or the accomplishment of various projects." He further emphasises (1998, p. 184) that because there is no such thing as "experienceless knowledge", the constructivist perspective has "no room for a kind of education that is conceived of in terms of transmitting knowledge, reducing the gap which separates students' knowledge from established knowledge)

The teachers I interviewed generally acknowledged that the opportunity to share ideas and experiences and to retell and create stories was very important for children's cognitive development and knowledge acquisition. In every class observation, I noticed narrative form being used in a variety of ways. On the day that I visited Kate's class, for example, children, as they worked collaboratively several times during the day, were invited to engage in dialogue. One of these was a news sharing time; later in the morning, children worked in groups to write scripts with environmental messages. Although script writing was a culmination of a term of scaffolding the narrative genre form, the plays followed the expected resolution for that stage of nullification of the threat rather than any enduring resolution of the problem (Sutton-Smith, 1986). So, for example, in one of the scripts, boating enthusiasts, who littered the bay with plastic rings that endangered marine life, had their boat capsized and were denied the privilege of boating again by the water police!

An environmental messages was also the focus on a day I was visiting Nigel's class. In this case, he told half the story of the frog friends, *Lester and Clyde* (1976), who face the problem of a polluted habitat and invited the children to orally suggest possible outcomes and then to write their own endings. As in Kate's class, the narrative genre format was scaffolded, and children were encouraged to find a solution for the poor frogs' habitat problem. Again, I noted that the suggested solutions conformed to Sutton-Smith's timeline (1986). In this multi-age class, the 5 and 6 year olds sequenced events without any clear solution whereas the 7 and 8 year olds suggested immediate solutions of the nullification format without any lasting resolution. They managed to relocate the frogs to another environment, but no

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suggestions were made of how the pollution problem might be solved in some long-term way. In this Montessori class, children were designing and creating frog environments so most of them had realistic descriptions of desirable environments for their endings. As in Kate's class, Nigel invited children to construct stories to explore not only language and social studies, but also to share relevant life events. In this case, they performed some problematic scenes from a recent camp that were suggested by the teacher and then rewrote the scripts for a more satisfactory ending. Perhaps not surprisingly, a "Sorry" or "I'll be your friend" often was viewed as a quick verbal way to nullify any problem for the younger children whereas groups that included older children brainstormed realistic alternative patterns of behaviour for the situations. One of these mixed groups dealt with the problem of homesickness. They decided to create a family like group to help their friend feel less lonely and to brainstorm special activities to do that one couldn't do at home. Thus, instead of nullifying the problem by denying it or glossing over it, they transformed the situation. (Observation Nigel's class: 21/9/99)

How is oral narrative a prelude to literacy?

Both ontologically and phylogenetically, oracy is a prelude to literacy; humans learn to decode and encode through listening and speaking before reading and writing. "Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings" (Ong, 1982, p. 8).

As previously discussed, educators have noted that children begin using oral narrative from a very early age in rudimentary forms learning structures that will later be applied to the written word (Barton Booth, 1991). Montessori (1949/1988a) observed, "How does it happen that these sounds, at first meaningless, suddenly bring to mind comprehensions and ideas? The child has not only absorbed words and meanings, he [sic] has actually absorbed sentences and their constructions" (p. 23). Montessori emphasised that oracy prepares the child for written grammatical structure. As is noted in *First Steps* [35](1994), oral retells also prepare the child for reading and writing with a consideration of the elements of character and plot.

> Children begin to develop narrative language from an early age. They fantasise, role-play and practise make-believe continually. Young children also relate personal experiences. These recounts, which are the earliest form of oral narrative, have a very simple structure based on a sequence of events. Later, children begin to produce oral narratives as a product of their imagination. These attempts are more complex and involve the manipulation of story characters, plot, time order and thematic relationship." (Education Dept. of WA, 1994, p. 78)

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[35] *First Steps* – literacy program developed by the Educational Department of Western Australia. Developmental programme for guiding children in all strands of literacy and promoting meaningful integration of all modes of decoding and encoding.

Viewing oracy as differing from written narrative primarily in its form of expression and in its developmental progression influences teaching approaches. For example, as preparation for literacy, the focus on rhymes such as nursery rhymes or children's rhyming texts is viewed as a way to practise phonics and focus on key words that will help children decode for reading:

> A development of this is the learning of a cumulative song by heart and then learning to read the key words in the song. Whole class choral reading is just a small initial part of the reading process and is suitable for songs and to accompany performances, etc. as you have seen. (Sam: 700)

> I also used the nursery rhymes a lot. I think it's important for children to … learn some of those nursery rhymes. (Carol: 190)

Similarly, orally retelling of a story is practised as preparation for retelling it in writing:

> Children must tell many stories before they ever write them. They must also have a great deal of experience with rhythm and rhyme. (Bernadette: 106)

Often, teachers model writing by recording the oral narratives of preschool children. For example, I recorded the following observation from Shawn's class:

We started in the 3-6 class where she revealed how she is a scribe for children who "sign up" for her to record their stories in written form. She does this faithfully, noting exact pronunciation, so that for the three year old she had recorded "maked" for "made" charting the child exploring the rules of language as well as the communication vehicle. (Shawn: 86)

Likewise the scaffolded *who, what, where, when* and *why* or *how* of morning news provides preparation for reading and writing the news article genre.

This little boy who can't read or write came to school with his face badly grazed. I think his mother called and said he had fallen off his bicycle. And when he came back, he was so anxious to tell us how this happened. He told us he was driving his father's hot rod and he crashed. He described the crash and how he rolled the car into the barrier and he spent about fifteen minutes on this story he made up. He was telling the other kids that that's the way it happened [but] he had actually fallen off the bike. …He made up a fantastic story. Catching fire and the fire engine came. He's very keen to tell us about his dad's hot rod racing all the time and I suppose he just puts himself into that situation. Strange. (Lynne 1: 169)

Some of the teachers interviewed expressed the view that oracy is so important as a precursor to literacy that we need to spend far more time on oral language activities than is allowed for in current recommended practices. Rushton (1996), who works with Australian Aboriginal children, acknowledges that spoken and written language serve different purposes and oral games and activities can be effectively used to

scaffold written language. "Even though they may not be able to read or write, they are quite capable of reproducing orally the structure of a written text and remembering its purpose and structure" (p. 89). Games include description games, instruction games, recount and narrative games. "The topics selected for the oral language games relate to children's immediate experiences and environment, but playing the games encourages them to speak in a way that resembles written English more closely than their everyday speech" (p. 93).

Lynne, who works in a Government school with many disadvantaged children and has considerable experience using both *First Steps* and *Literacy Net*[36], explained that she feels some children need more oral practice than others. She expressed her concern in an interview follow-up that children were expected to write a persuasive viewpoint when their circumstances had given them no knowledge or practice in debating format. She finds some of the oral discussion advocated by *Literacy Net* helps to counter this curriculum deficit.

Using *Literacy Net* talking and *Reader's Circle*[37], we are getting the children

to think a little deeper. They are discussing the ins and outs and talking about

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[36] Literacy Net – name given to Western Australian Education Dept. initiative to combine guided reading (see note viii) and student outcome statements to help create a profile of children with literacy problems and then to scaffold outcomes with appropriate literacy activities such as reader's circle (see vii).

[37] *Reader's Circle* – sometimes referred to as a Literature Circle. Small groups of students (5-6) meet to discuss novel they are reading. In preparation, they have noted questions about plot or characters, items of interest, words of interest. "Literature circles offer children the chance to talk about what they

characters in more depth and writing clues…[I realised] I needed to do a lot

more work with them orally before getting them to write it down. This year

[even] with better readers, we do lots of talking first. I don't worry too much

about writing down. (Lynne 2:10-13)

Bernadette, a Waldorf teacher, also believes in devoting much more time to oracy

before writing in the classroom.

I absolutely believe that language must be oral first. Written language is such

a late development in culture and it should be for children too. Steiner

actually says somewhere that in an ideal world, we wouldn't teach writing

until they're twelve, but of course we can't do that in our world, so we

compromise and start at seven. But can you imagine what we could do if they

weren't writing? They would pick up writing soon enough, but you would be

working with all this wonderful oral stuff even more and we keep it going so

strongly all the way through. (Bernadette: 52)

One implication of Bernadette's plea for a longer period of literacy focus is that the

more children know about speaking, the more ready they will be for tackling reading

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have read in the context of a small group where they can ask questions, listen to other interpretations,

clear up misunderstandings, voice their opinions and be confronted with other people's readings of the

text – together they can access other meanings." (Simpson & Wilson, 1993, p. 134

and writing. This belief reflects the natural learning paradigm that is a key

foundational belief of whole language theorists.

Also implicit in Bernadette's comment is a suggestion that, in addition to providing

practice for writing, oracy is a unique type of narrative with characteristics and

purposes separate and distinct from that of written narrative.   As a Steiner teacher,

Bernadette has explored how oral narrative characteristics such as rhythm, rhyme and

imagery relate to the mythic understanding of young children which parallels the way

traditional oral cultures made sense of their worlds. Chapter IV will incorporate an

exploration of how this view linking oral narrative to a mythic understanding has been

proposed not only by Rudolf Steiner over seventy years ago, but also by

contemporary education theorists including Ong (1982), Berry (1988), Egan (1997)

and Sandlos (1998).

What are the effects of basing reading and writing curriculum materials on whole meaningful texts?

I am one of a generation of educators who have embraced the whole language

approach; I am convinced that the revolutionary rudiments of this movement were

sound, even if modifications of practice have resulted from waves of process writing,

genre approach, critical literacy, functional grammar and integrated approaches such

as *First Steps*, *Guided Reading*[38] and *Literacy Net*. My commitment and that of many

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[38] *Guided Reading* – Freebody and Luke (1990) identify four roles of a literacy learner: code breaker, meaning- maker, text user, text critic. Guided reading is the process of scaffolding readers through these four ways to interpret a text.

colleagues to whole language strengthened as our classrooms became the habitats of enthusiastic learners in contrast to the settings of boredom that typified our own early literacy experiences. Nightmarish flashes include a repetitive chorus of "Look, Jane, look. See Spot Run" and the memory of sitting in a circle taking turns to decode the meaningless trivia provided by basal readers. This might be followed by comprehension exercises on the tedious text or perhaps unrelated grammar workbook pages or lists of what seemed to me to be arbitrary spelling words. My nightmares all relate to the traditional language teaching methodology of the time – characterised by the separation of language components, arbitrarily sequenced skills-based exercises, the drilling of skills in abstraction from experience and a curriculum that followed a textbook (McCulla & Walshe, 1979; Goodman, 1986). To this list, I might add that the curriculum was teacher directed and individual needs were neither appreciated nor catered for. Children were taught in a total class group in desks separated into rows.

In the 1970's, dissatisfaction such as I've shared created a general rumbling in expressions of discontent in the teaching of language. This led to a re-evaluation of methodology by a number of theorists and the whole language movement was launched. Australian and New Zealand educators were a prolific and vocal force, joining British and North American language specialists in advocating the critical move away form the traditional Reductionist approach that emphasised pattern matching, discrimination training and a focus on accuracy to Constructivist/Interactivist theories that emphasised teaching in context, meaningful experiences and the empowerment of children (Goodman, 1986; Payne, 1993). Simplistically stated, it was now frowned upon to teach language components in

isolation. It was believed that reading and writing should be based on whole meaningful texts.

> Language is language only when it's whole. Whole text, connected discourse in the context of some speech or literacy event, is really the minimal functional unit, the barest whole that makes sense. When teachers and pupils look at words, phrases, sentences, they do so always in the context of the whole, real language texts that are part of real language experiences of children. (Goodman, 1986, pp. 27-28)

Interviewee, Fran, recalled the exciting times when these ideas were first applied in West Australia.

> For the next number of years I was in the education department writing the reading notes, "How to Teach Reading" and I
> completed that all the while doing this extra study …with this lecturer who had himself studied with Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman. So we were getting that model coming through which was really very exciting times, actually. Really, really exciting. (Fran 1: 29)

Fran went on to describe the joy derived from an experiential literacy model:

Always the quest for making reading interesting and joyful. … Reading should

be joyful, you should take joy from reading. And this was all new in a sense,

because we'd been plodding through with Dick and Dora and Janet … (Fran 1:

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Margaret Meek, a New Zealand educator, wrote and demonstrated extensively on the

importance of empowering the reader. "To learn to read a book, as distinct from

simply recognising the words on the page, a young reader has to become both the

teller (picking up the author's view and voice) and the told (the recipient of the story,

the interpreter." (Meek, 1988, p. 10) Margaret Meek's work, with a younger reader

focusing on *Rosie's Walk* by Hutchins (1968), is demonstrated in *How Texts Teach*

What Readers Learn (Meek, 1988) Over 27 pages of pictures, one reads the text,

"Rosie the hen went for a walk across the yard around the pond over the haystack past

the mill through the fence under the beehives and got back in time for dinner." This

simple, yet whole meaningful text can engage the child as he/she starts to predict

patterns in the text, look for obstacles and second guess the fox who is not in the

written text at all.[39]

Does effective language education means heeding certain principles of natural
learning?

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[39] Grammar context – Although Meek doesn't write about functional grammar in *How Texts Teach*

What Children Learn (1988), one could certainly use this wonderful 27 word text for the exploration of

prepositions.

Smith (DeStefano,1981) explained that a child decodes because he/she is learning all the time through a combination of demonstration, engagement and sensitivity. We must be shown, be interested in what we are shown and be sensitive[40] to that showing. Australian, Brian Cambourne (1988), expanded on referring to the *Parallel Principles of Natural Learning* to describe how the literacy process could follow the process of learning to speak. In exploring these Principles, I was struck by how many of them were acknowledged as important in Montessori's and in Steiner's writings and curriculum. This may be because the *Parallel Principles of Natural Learning* lay a foundation for a constructivist approach to teaching language and Montessori and Steiner were early advocates of a constructivist approach. Both stressed a "bottom up" rather than a "top down" approach to learning. The primary role of education in their view was "putting the onus on students to construct personal meanings and interpretations" (Powell, 2000, p. 45). This meant designing a curriculum and an environment that would promote meaning-making. It also meant viewing the teacher's role as a guide or facilitator rather than the dispenser of knowledge.[41] Certainly there are differences between Montessori and Steiner classrooms and what is viewed as a Constructivist classroom today.   Montessori materials, which support the curriculum, are each designed to teach a single concept and are often self-

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[40] Sensitive – Smith describes sensitivity as "the absence of any expectation that learning will not take place or that it will be difficult." (1981,p. 105)

[41] Role of the teacher – Montessori views the role of the teacher as a facilitator throughout the child's education whereas Steiner sees the teacher's role as an evolving one – a benevolent authority figure in

correcting, thereby, providing a contrast to the open ended nature of a constructivist curriculum. However, it could also be said that most materials can be explored in several ways and are, in fact, tools the children can draw upon in their self-chosen avenues of exploration.   In Montessori schools, explorations – especially in the early years – are often individual and in Steiner schools whole-group lessons are very common. Although collaborative learning occurs in both settings, it is not as predominant as in constructivist classrooms. What should be emphasised, though, is that both Montessori and Steiner believed that the child brought something unique to each learning experience (based on previous experience, level of development, personality and learning style) and further constructed himself or herself in an individual way as a result of this experience (Chattin-McNichols, 1992; Powell, 2000; De Vries & Kohlberg, 1987; De Vries, 2000). Both believed that narrative had a key place in education forming a foundation for engaging the child in the process of self-education. Therefore, there is support for considering both Montessori and Steiner as forerunners of the whole language movement. Some of the similarities and differences of the Montessori and Steiner curriculums – in contrast to the whole language curriculum – can be clarified by considering their views and practices in relation to Cambourne's *Principles of Natural Learning.*

Immersion

Young children are immersed in a world of spoken language. (Cambourne, 1988) To learn to read and write, the natural learning paradigm would imply that we should

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the early years gradually transforming as the student's needs require a facilitator and companion in upper primary years.

immerse the children in texts of all kinds including environmental print.   Cambourne

stated that this would include teacher and learner-controlled "visual and aural

immersion" (p. 46). *The Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998)[42]

itemized the varieties of material that contribute to this immersion "including: signs,

billboards, notes, messages, memos instructions, reports, newspapers, magazines, CD-

Roms, Web pages, essays, text books, fairy stories, picture books, myths legends,

fables biographies, autobiographies, novels, stories, poetry and drama" (p. 91).

Certainly, in my class observations, there was a multiplicity of texts in the

Government and Catholic schools and also in the Montessori school classrooms. Big

Books were mentioned as a key resource by all the Government and Catholic teachers

and by Allison and Nigel from the Montessori Schools. Most classrooms also had

library corners with additional texts. Kate described the variety of texts in her

classroom:

> I use *Charlotte's Web*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The BFG, Tales of a*
>
> *Fourth Grade Nothing*, Jolly *Postman,* a lot of fairy tales, the spider stories.
>
> When we're doing a theme, I choose a book everyday. I'll have a book for
>
> each day. Usually we spend at least 15 minutes reading …If I can use a book
>
> to demonstrate something I will. (Kate: 26)

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[42] The *Curriculum Framework –* the Western Australian framework establishing learning outcomes
expected of all students Kindergarten to year 12.

All the Government and Catholic schools had phonics charts and letter charts on the walls and a great deal of displayed children's work.   Lynne had a colour chart and a days of the week chart as well.

 Montessori classrooms had far less print on the walls, but they did have language activities on shelves in a designated area of the classroom. One popular language activity to emphasise the function of the noun involved labelling moveable and immovable items in the classroom, although these labels were usually only up for the period of exploration. All the Montessori classrooms I visited had an extensive choice of reading books. Ellen, for instance, had a story corner with beautiful picture books. The stories selected were rich in universal meaning, beautifully illustrated and representative a variety of cultures. They included: *The Piece of Straw* by Morimoto (1985), *St Francis Of Assisi* by Chesterton (1987), *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Wojeciechowski (1997), *Remaking the Earth: A Creation Story from the Great Plains of North America* by Paul Goble (1996), *Noah's Ark* by Janisch (1997), *The Story of the Root Children* by Von Olfers (1990) and a book on Greek myths, among others. Ellen also had a shelf of biographies and age appropriate novels including *The Witches* by Roald Dahl (1983) which was reading to her class at the time of my visit. American Montessori teacher, Carol, also had a variety of lovely books representative of varied cultures and narrative genres. She used the Great Books programme as a guide in selecting books for her classroom.

> *Junior Great Books* is a series for children. *Great Books* is for adults who are really into literature and sitting and discussing it and so *Junior Great Books* is meant for the children. *What Are? Books* were a collection of shorter stories.

We did *Aesop's Fables* and How *did the Elephant Get its Trunk?* There was also a Russian story similar to *Cinderella*.... (Carol: 170-171)

Steiner also believes in immersing the child in language but is very clear that for the young child this is oral language only. My observations indicated that Waldorf teachers support Steiner's view that:

If a teacher tries to explain the subjects during the first school years, the children will react by becoming blunted and dull. This approach simply does not work. On the other hand, everything will go smoothly if, rather than explaining the subject matter, one forms the content into a story, if words are painted with mental images, and if rhythm is brought into one's whole way of teaching. (Steiner, 1996, p. 100)

One does not see a great deal of environmental print in the Waldorf early childhood classroom. On the day that I spent in Class 2, there was one blackboard with coloured chalked rhyming words emphasising phonics work happening in the class that week:

shack	duck	clock	kick	well	hill
back	luck	rock	trick	shell	Jill
track	muck	dock	pick	bell	kill

There was also a poem by St. Francis (beautifully written and illustrated in chalk on the blackboard) whom they were studying as part of their Year 2 Curriculum

Praised be God for sister Moon

and every twinkling star;

They shine on heaven most

bright and clear

All glorious they are.

Praised be God for brother

Wind

That storms across the skies

And then grows still and silent

moves and sweetly sings and

sighs.   Praised be God for

brother fire

Friendly and wild and tame

Tender and warm, mighty and

strong

A flashing, flaring flame.

Praised be God for mother

Earth

Who keeps us safe and well

Whole mother heart all warm

with love

Dark in her depths doth dwell.

Saint Francis

I noted that beautiful storybooks were present in the preschool area. On my observation in a Steiner classroom, it was explained to me that most storybooks are selected for their beauty and realism in terms of presenting the whole human form rather than merely a hand or a head. So, although, occasionally stories are read to children, they are most often told and often presented through puppetry. The same puppet play might be presented for several days allowing the children to immerse themselves in the story and to gather some additional relevance for themselves on each visitation.

When children have reading books in Grade 2, readers are made up of the animal fables that have been told to the children.[43]

> In my class, I made up two readers (with parent help) based on the animal
> fable stories which the children had heard and written about. The text was
> more complex than what you would expect from a first reader and so memory
> played an important part. The children's motivation to read (even a
> challenging text) was high because the books were tailor made to suit their
> interests and because the familiarity with the content was high. (Sam: 705)
> Sam explained that these main stories, such as the fables and library books that
> are read to the children, arouse and maintain "initial motivation." This is
> supported by simple word – skill readers. (Sam: 709)

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[43] Animal Fables, Celtic tales and tales of the Saints form the mythical base for the Year 2 curriculum.

In addition, the children in a Steiner class do a great deal of choral recitation and choral reading which Cambourne suggests is a type of immersion (Cambourne, 1988, p. 125). Sam reported that his class often recited the above poem about St. Francis when they were studying saints.

Mem Fox (1997b) adds to this idea of immersion by asserting that "when we develop literacy we should be reading aloud daily, bombarding children with the best texts available" (p. 123). She is really emphasising two points: selecting good literature and daily reading.

Fran, currently teaching in a Catholic school, supported the quest for quality literature:

> I really wanted to introduce them to good literature, but also to heighten their engagement, engagement into literature…so what I did initially was to really introduce them to the concept of journey and to show them that good literature often involves a journey. (Fran 1: 77-79)

Ellen and Allison, Montessorians, both read daily to their class and reflected on the power of this immersion into literature:

There is something wonderful about their rapt expectancy. You know the way they'll sit on the mat and listen to a story and so trustingly and so eagerly. It's obviously something that they want and need. I think we need it too. At the moment we're reading Roald Dahl and it's all I can do to stop because they are so eager to keep going. (Ellen 1: 331)

I would always be reading a novel. I'm talking about the power of story. I know that children are quiet immediately when one reads. I don't mean because they are quiet but because they are absorbed….It is part of the power of story that it brings them all together. They are all exploring it together but relating to it in individual ways. This is part of the power of story. And I think you need to both tell and read to really tap that. (Allison: 57)

Demonstration

Cambourne (1988) explained that children need "many demonstrations of how texts are constructed and used" (p.33). These demonstrations can be provided by the speaking of other people or by texts themselves which Cambourne referred to as "artifacts" (p. 47). However, demonstrations would not lead to learning unless children are engaged by the demonstration.

The world is filled with demonstrations and if we engage with one of them we internalise some aspect or portion of that particular demonstration. If we engage with repeated demonstrations of the same action and/or artifact we begin to select other aspects of it to internalise and, as a consequence, we begin to interpret, organise and reorganise our developing knowledge until we

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can perform and /or produce that demonstration or a variation of it. This is another way of saying we learn. (Cambourne, 1988, p. 47)

Cambourne (1988) also insisted that demonstrations must be presentations of language wholes. He says they need to be "whole enough to provide enough information about the various systems and sub-systems of language so that the learner, if he [sic] decides to engage, will have the data available for working out how all the pieces fit together and interact with each other" (p. 48).

Whole language demonstration doesn't mean showing an isolated skill, but skills in context. Using an overhead to show writing a letter would be a demonstration, but so would reading a text and asking relevant questions pertaining to prediction, sequencing, plot, character or grammar and spelling.   Vicky revealed how she modelled text exploration in her work with children considered at risk.

> I go out and find a new book and I write my lessons around it. I know that's not necessarily the way to go, but it's the way I go and it works. The kids get excited about the book, we do all our vocab [sic], we do lots of our spelling, lots of our phonics. It's still pretty structured in that I make sure we're covering all the phonics we should and all the spelling we should, but we do heaps and heaps of comprehension through that as well. At the moment, we're leaping off doing some thinking activities as well, but we're going through a narrative – using that as our vehicle. (Vicky 1: 71)

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Bernadette, a Steiner teacher, used a demonstration of oral poetry to lead into writing. She indicated an awareness that such a demonstration would indicate to the children how aspects of language fit together.

> This term, we will do some writing. They have written their own verse. Or sometimes I will write out a poem, and they have to fill in the words. Noah and his three sons good made an ark… That, of course, is done orally. You might write it on the board, but I would always do it with them orally, because they have to hear it. You can't spell if you can't hear. (Bernadette: 257)

Catholic teacher, Fran emphasised the importance of demonstration using texts:

> If you want good endings, show them good endings; if you want good beginnings, show them good beginnings. (Fran 1: 291)

Montessori teacher, Shawn, also provided examples in her interview of modelling writing for children who would tell her their stories to record. Sometimes children would make picture journals and she would write the labels they requested until they could begin to do this for themselves.

It became clear to me that there are key differences between Montessori classrooms who have not adopted whole language approaches and those who have. Engagement

in non-whole language Montessori classrooms is separate from demonstration whereas in whole language classrooms Cambourne (1988) indicates that immersion and demonstration contribute directly to engagement. For example, in a traditional Montessori classroom, the child may hear the story of writing which may be a catalyst for exploring the alphabet and even parts of speech. However, the story itself is not a demonstration of the integration of language modalities. Demonstrations are the modelling of tasks designed to teach a single concept; this is also referred to as isolating a difficulty. Montessori methodology emphasises that every lesson should begin with a demonstration.   Showing the child has to be the first step toward understanding a concept. Parts of speech, for example, will first be presented through function games – little dramas that show how the part of speech works in our spoken and written language. Montessori indicates that there are indirect demonstrations happening all the time too.   So, for instance, to engage a child in an activity, it should be presented so that the teacher expresses "a lively interest in what she is doing" (Montessori, 1988, 154).

Expectations

Cambourne (1988) claimed that children would be much more successful if we expected them to learn to read just as we expected them to learn to talk – naturally. Meek's views on how a child learns concur with those of Cambourne. As she explained:

Reading is a whole-task learning, right from the start. From first to

last the child should be invited to behave like a reader, and those who want to

help him should assume that he can learn, and will learn, just as happened

when he began to talk. (Meek, 1982, p. 24)

Acknowledging this principle means focusing on real and whole narratives as

contexts for students to learn the parts of language just as they learned about oracy

from real stories.   It means not cutting up the context to bite sized irrelevant pieces

which can impede the child's reading progress rather than nurture it. Years before

Cambourne devised his principles, Montessori (1955/1989b) expressed her fear of this

fragmentation:

At the beginning, short words are given, then longer ones. First simple, then

complex syllables, and so on, are presented. In other words, obstacles are

placed in front of the child at every step. But these difficulties do not actually

exist. The children already know short and long words and all kinds of

syllables in their mother tongue. All that is necessary is to analyse the sounds

and find the corresponding alphabet sign for each. (p. 95)

However, there was still quite a difference between the early Whole Language

advocates and Montessori. Loeffler (1993), writing in America, was concerned that

the whole language advocates were being overly optimistic.

Their assumption is that once children understand what reading is all about,

mapping spoken language onto the written code of the culture, they will figure

out for themselves, with informal help when needed, how the writing system

works. It is my opinion that these people are overly optimistic and that most

children will need more than this incidental information to become successful

independent readers. (Loeffler, 1993, p. 69)

Loeffler confirms that many of the ideas advocated by whole language proponents

such as "reading aloud to them from children's literature, encouraging the

memorization of songs, poems and stories while viewing the written words (usually

using big books), writing from children's dictation, and encouraging children to do

their own writing using pictures, scribble writing, or invented spelling " would be

congruent with Montessori. The real difference, of course, lies in what one believes is

the degree of assistance that the child needs from the environment in order to make

the transition to written language" (p. 67). She implies that Montessori language

activities promote phonemic awareness to a much greater degree than whole language

which focuses only on the beginnings and endings of words.   In Australia, if one

views the wide acceptance of *First Steps, Guided Reading,* and the *Thrass*[44] Project,

in the past decade, it is apparent that as Whole Language classrooms adopt a more

integrated language approach (integrating literature, phonics and grammar) and

advocate more scaffolding, they are developing more similarities to Montessori

classrooms. The expectation that children will learn to read more effectively if

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[44] *Thrass Project* – A WA based phonics awareness programme whereby children are taught to explore

the multiple ways of making the same sound at the same time. Montessori equipment including

phonics booklets advocates a similar approach.

exposed to a meaningful whole before the parts has been maintained, but there is a greater emphasis on scaffolding those parts.

Loeffler (1993) points out that many whole language specialists focused more on reading than writing. However, she notes that Marie Clay[45] has written about the importance of children's writing at this early stage of literacy development which helps the child's "search-and-correct strategies" (p. 71). The Montessori method similarly encourages children to write as soon as they know two consonants and a vowel. Montessori has pointed out in her work that normally one would expect children to write before they can read. Indeed, it is rare to enter a Montessori class and not see children using a moveable alphabet[46] to write stories in invented spelling.

> The correct use of the alphabet in learning to write should only give the simple signs of the alphabet itself in order to put them in direct relation with the sounds they represent…The alphabet in direct connection with spoken language – that is the way to achieve the art of writing by following an inner path. The ability to write will be acquired as a result of the analysis of the words each one possesses, and of the activity of one's own mind, which is interested in such a magical conquest. (Montessori, 1955/1989b, pp. 83-84)

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[45] Professor Marie Clay – Professor Clay, a New Zealander, is one of the originators of the whole language approach.

[46] Moveable alphabet – separate letters constructed of wood or card that can be manipulated by the child to create words. The vowels are a different colour from the consonants in the moveable alphabet.

Shawn made several references to early writers in her Montessori school:

> A little boy who has just started writing in the last month and a half. This is his first year with us. He's four. He really wasn't comfortable doing it before, but now he is. He's not only comfortable. He wrote a variation on the Carl and Chloe stories. (Characters invented by an older child). (Shawn 1: 53)

> There's one little boy who for three years now has written about his cats. He's given them adventurous, mischievous personas. And he writes tales where he puts them in settings all around the world or in different funny situations and sees how they get out of it. (Shawn 1: 43)

In conclusion, one could modify Cambourne's original statement by saying that we can expect that most children will naturally learn to read and write if the environment provides them with a meaningful whole context for motivation, encouragement, and appropriate scaffolding activities for phonetic and phomemic awareness.

Responsibility

By responsibility, Cambourne implied that children learn best when they decide what to learn. He contended children should be given the opportunity to be problem-solvers by choosing what activity they want to pursue to learn what they feel they need to learn. Since each child will be taking something unique away from each demonstration, "demonstrations must be demonstrations of 'wholes' of language

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behaviour. If teachers want learners to make decisions about which part of a demonstration they will engage with, teachers must provide demonstrations which contain all the information from which any learner may wish to draw" (Cambourne, 1988, pp. 64-65). He thus advocated that there should be a variety of language activities from which a child can choose in the classroom. Cambourne asserted that we must trust the child to bring all tools of language decoding into play in reading and writing without feeling we must fragment them for him/her. We must trust that the child will consider semantic cues (meaning through text), syntactic cues (knowledge of language patterns and grammatical structure) and graphophonic cues (letter sound knowledge and visual knowledge) when decoding a text just as he/she considers multiple skills and levels in oral language. Cambourne implied that we must view language "as a network of interlocking systems" (Cambourne, 1988, p. 36) and provide a choice of language activities that respect that children develop an understanding of this interlocking system in different ways. Recent literature in language learning reflected in programs such as *First Steps* and *Literacy Net* would support this integration of cue systems. These programmes also support Cambourne's plea that children have frequent "whole language" demonstrations. However, there is more emphasis in these programmes on providing a range of activities that clearly scaffold the use of language cue systems in acknowledgement that individual children require different amounts of assistance in achieving a competency in using these skills and many seem to benefit from more guided, sequential support.

In the Montessori system, one conveys respect for children by affording them the opportunity to be involved in decision-making for their own work. As in a

Cambourne-inspired classroom, the child has great choice of activities to meet his/her language acquisition needs. However, as mentioned above (see Demonstration), in traditional Montessori classrooms, each activity is distinctly linked to a concept. Prepared activities are based on the classroom context – e.g. grammar boxes where students use parts of speech learned to create phrases and sentences that use vocabulary based on a Montessori environment. Command cards[47] that children read and enact also refer to objects in this environment rather than to a story used for engagement.

Thus, the idea that children are responsible for their own learning is parallel in Montessori and whole language classrooms, but the choices vary. In a whole language class, the choices change depending on the story, whereas in a Montessori class, the activities remain accessible in the classroom to be practiced according to the interest and level of development of the child. In all of the whole language Catholic and Government school classrooms I visited teachers provided choices of activities for the students based on a story or topic discussion that demonstrated a variety of language skills and cue systems. In the Montessori classrooms observed during this study, there was considerable variation in how literature was linked to language exploration activities. In some classrooms that had embraced whole language, a story was often used to provide a whole context and language activities resembled those in the Catholic and Government schools.

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[47] Command cards – cards in sets each focusing on a different part of speech. Verb cards emphasise actions that might occur in the classroom, prepositions ask students to place objects in front of, next to, etc.

Well, so much of what Montessori wrote is so timely even today - the maths, science - it's just so easy to apply it to educational theory today. Language is a bit hard in that Montessori [while] she did believe certainly in whole context, … developed materials that sit on a shelf and have set little cards to look at sentence structure and things like this. I find my whole experience has been that children are not motivated to do that work. At one time, I spent literally weeks finding the most wonderful sentences I could and putting them all in coloured boxes by which parts of speech were in them and putting them on the shelves and the children never took them off ever until I threw all that away and then after I'd read a story I'd make sentence strips. We have computers and photocopies so it was easy to alter the shelf materials depending on what we were studying. If it related to their lives or what we were studying - that might be geology or it might be lizards or it might be a novel we were reading, but if it related to their concerns, they were motivated and they would go and practise these concepts and we fostered this independence – a very big part of child-centred education …So I think I've started to believe that in any type of educational system, we need to ask questions constantly. "Is this still doing what it's supposed to be doing now?" and I think in Montessori I have to say, "No, we need to open our eyes and look at what's happening in the Government system, in the Catholic system. They are using *First Steps*. The children are reading and making wonderful progress. How can we use some of these wonderful ideas and make them ours?" (Allison: 46)

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In other Montessori classrooms, concepts were demonstrated and practised through the standard Montessori equipment, and then concepts reviewed in an experiential way using a story or novel. This was the case in a 6-9 class in Shawn's school.

> The grammar gets kind of dry. By the time you get to the third grade, you can use literature. I have them put symbols over passages from *Charlotte's Web* or there are passages from history that they have to punctuate or put in cursive so we tie it in that way. (Meg – interviewed with Shawn: 187)

In the Steiner classes I visited, each aspect of language tended to be explored as a whole class although there were times when children were allowed to interpret or explore the story studied through choosing an activity such as poetry, drama, art, etc. Sam indicated that he often selected activities to appeal to different temperaments[48], but would find that children didn't choose what one would expect. In a way, this supports Cambourne's view that children will take responsibility for learning what they need to know.

> What I've done is give the four activities. One might be drawing St

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[48] Temperaments – Steiner viewed *the temperaments* as being manifested in the human body and character. The Melancholic have an introspective orientation. The Phlegmatic tend toward stability and inertia and are usually pleasant and good-natured. The Sanguine are associated with an extroverted orientation. They are active, dynamic and dominated by feelings. The Choleric are sturdy and energetic, swing between introverted and extroverted. (Marshak, 1997, pp. 37-38)

Francis beside the Pope, his friend who is dying. I want to touch the
sadness, melancholic feeling. Another one is to act out the part where
St. Francis goes out to meet the wolf so there are all those people there
with sticks and everything. And so that was more aimed at the Choleric. There
were four activities which I thought would appeal to the four temperaments.
Then I said you can choose what you want to do. At the end of the morning,
we shared with the class what was done. So in the drama, they rehearsed it
and performed it. With the drawings, we put those up. Another girl wrote a
poem with my help based on St. Francis' poems. And the others did wax
modeling of the great feast. So they can choose …we are a mixture of those
temperaments plus other stuff – personal and other experiences that come into
it. And I got some lovely surprises. Children I thought were choleric and
would love to get in there and act were doing these beautiful pictures of the
sad, dying Pope. Others I thought were very shy were out doing drama. Some
chose as I would have guessed.   (Sam: 204-208)

Whole language, Montessori and Steiner teachers all share the view that children
assume the responsibility to construct their own literacy knowledge just as they
assumed responsibility for learning to speak. However, there is some difference of
opinion as to what conditions nurture this responsibility. Whole language classrooms
present a demonstration of the interlocking of language, usually through narrative,
and this is followed up by a choice of literacy activities. Some Montessori teachers
interviewed have adopted this model, but others present demonstrations and a choice
of activities to isolate difficulties before drawing concepts together in an experiential

way with a story. The Steiner teachers interviewed tell a big lesson story from which components of language are selected but, in contrast to the whole language classrooms, the class focuses on each concept together. When a choice of activity is provided, it is more likely a response to temperament variations rather than a response to individual variations in learning language skills including decoding cues.

Use

Cambourne claimed that "learners need time and opportunity to use, employ and practise their developing control in functional, realistic, non-artificial ways" (Cambourne, 1988, p. 33). Use thus relates to providing a real purpose, or need for children to use their literacy skills in the classroom and the provision of time for them to fully address these needs without constant interruption.

All the interviewees agreed that language use should be purposeful. Lynne, a Government school teacher, for instance, indicated that she concurred with Mem Fox who strongly recommended that teachers should not have children write letters unless they were going to get an answer. She stressed that we need to write for someone either to be read silently or aloud. "Writers care about writing which has a purpose and an audience. They care about the organisation and clear meaning, about spelling, grammar and punctuation. Writing without purpose and audience means writing without caring, writing without improvement" (Fox, 1997b, p. 125). These views of Mem Fox influenced Lynne in choosing some of her class literacy projects. One of her projects was a collaborative effort between a Year 1 and a Year 6 to create a book based on *Guess What?* (Fox, 1988) with the purpose of presenting it to the teacher described and her class.

Yes, my class was grade one and the other class was grade six. The

Grade ones went through the text and looked at the character and then

chose a character to write the story about. We had a preprimary teacher

who was very different and she really stood out from the average teacher in

appearance (and she would say that). She likes to be different. She would

have bright different–coloured nail polish and very short hair –about one

centimetre and tattoos, beautiful face. And so we decided to write our story

about her. …The children had to brainstorm all the things about her – her

hair, and her nails and the ribbons that she wore and her earrings and basically

put it together like the Mem Fox book. We tried to make up little bits of

rhyme, more than just a verse. More than "Does she wear rings?"   When we

had the buddy classes together, the year sixes worked with the year ones and

each had one page to illustrate. The year sixes did most of the drawing but the

year ones helped to put details in. They basically worked together on it. We

stuck it all together and presented it to Miss Green who was absolutely

thrilled. (Lynne 1: 101-102)

Lynne also shared a booklet prepared by the "superclass"[49] she was teaching at the

time. This booklet was a culmination of a narrative poetry project in which the

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[49] Superclass – used to describe mixed age class of Grades 4,5,6 who were put in a single class for a

year for literacy remediation in 1998. This format was abandoned n 1999 and students were again fully

integrated.

children memorized, wrote out and illustrated their poems and then voluntarily presented them to other classes. Lynne claimed that this was one of her most successful projects with this class because the work was purposeful for the students who gained a heightened self-esteem from the experience. (Lynne 1: 309)

In the Steiner school, Bernadette, also expressed an awareness of the importance of authentic purpose for her children. In Class 3, the children learned the language of the bible stories and then dramatised *Noah's Ark* for their community as well as retelling the story and illustrating it, creating their own book.

> We spent a lot of time on *Noah's Ark* which was a play that we did all in verse. And at the end of it, I asked them to rewrite the story in their own words and they were so powerful. They used biblical forms of language. "And God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening." I mean that has a particular type of rhythmic structure. I tried to preserve all of that when I told the stories. They wrote the most powerful stories. One of the lines was "And the flood took everything to the end." That kind of thing. It just wasn't everyday language. They were able to get into this more than real language. (Bernadette: 44)

In the Montessori Schools, the purpose of a language study is often integrated with cultural studies.[50] The use of language to answer some of the cultural questions gives the language activities authenticity. In addition to relating language to social studies, presentation to other classes and to the parents was also identified as a purpose as in Carol's classroom.

> When we learned story telling, during the year we would present things to the children and the artist would also. …In the end, the children created a whole story tape that we could then present to the parents. It was called a Bread and Butter Theatre and …we had four different Indian tribes. It was from Ohio because we were from Ohio and it was how the great forests of Ohio disappeared. Each tribe would tell its story about how all the woods in our area disappeared and those were the 9-12 children. The 6-9 children helped with that a little bit but mostly they were the chorus in-between because we had four stations …and each one would set up like their camp there. The parents would have their lawn chairs and they would be there and then when it was time for the next one, the parents had to pick up their chairs and move to the next Indian station and the chorus would be the younger children in the 6-9. The younger ones had some chanting they did as the parents moved along. Even the kindergarten were involved in some of this chanting about cutting down the trees as the parents moved along. (Carol: 121)

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[50] Culture and Language – The link between culture and language in Montessori curriculum will be explored more fully in Chapter V.

In some classrooms, purposeful use of language was provided by inviting the children to share in classroom organisational tasks. In my class, for instance, 9-12 year olds prepared, wrote and printed weekly canteen menus. They also periodically wrote a programme for school assemblies, often a forum for sharing original plays and poems. Each week a student (in rotation) would take a turn journalling the class activities and concerns. These are all real purposes far removed from "fillers aimed at drill and practice" (Cambourne, 1988, p. 75).

Cambourne's words were unfortunately interpreted by some teachers to indicate that practice of skills is not purposeful. In fact, what he was likely stressing was that teachers should strive to eliminate the filler without eliminating the practice. Cambourne seems to be most critical of pages in textbooks or worksheets assigned for the purpose of drill or practice without context. McCulla and Walshe (1979) acknowledged that in veering away from out of context practice was partially due to avoiding anything that could not be integrated into a theme. They indicated that this was a temporary phase in the move away from the fragmented traditional curriculum and that ultimately skills should be "treated specifically as the handling of experiences indicate[d] need for them" (p. 20). Eighteen years later Murdoch and Hornsby (1997) were still urging teachers to acknowledge that provision should be made for the practice of skills unrelated to themes if they were needed to enhance understanding. Viewed in this way, one can conclude that if skills are needed, then practice becomes purposeful with the need to communicate effectively creating the meaningful context.

In addition to purpose, the other important variable of *Use* is the time factor.

Cambourne (1988) believed that children should have the time to read and write every

day. From my observations, it seems that scheduling still leads to numerous

interruptions of this process in the Government and Catholic schools. On a follow-up

visit to Lynne's Government school classroom, she bemoaned the fact that limited

time meant that language projects such as poetry or story writing seemed to extend

over a period of weeks. She was wishing that she could allow a whole morning for

language exploration. However, cross setting[51] for maths and language meant that it

was very difficult to allow more than fifty minutes for any one subject. This

experience was in direct contrast to the Montessori and Steiner schools both of which

has a long work period of approximately 3 hours at least once per day. In the

Montessori classrooms, children might be working on a variety of subjects in this time

period, but the provision was there for them to choose to explore a single subject for

much of that time-frame when they were not engaged in a lesson. If the lesson was on

a language-related concept, most of the children would elect to follow on with an

activity related to the demonstration. In the Steiner school, the main lesson would be

presented in the morning. If it was the five-week period of term when the main lesson

was a story or myth, then the morning might be devoted to teacher guided language

activities. If the main lesson was mathematics, then language might be explored for a

shorter time frame in the afternoon. Although the time frame varied, there was

provision for reading, writing, listening and speaking each and every day in every

classroom visited during this study.

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[51] Cross setting – refers to the practice of streaming children by ability from two or more classes for specific subjects such as maths or language.

<u>Approximation</u>

Cambourne (1988) again uses the parallel of oral language to emphasise that making errors is not only normal, it is "absolutely essential to the whole process" of learning to read and write (p. 67). In learning to speak, we go through a series of successive approximations. In learning to read and write, we should be allowed to do this as well in a judgement free, safe and secure environment. Without criticism, the child's environment including dialogue, environmental print and subsequent demonstrations can put him/her into a state of disequilibrium which will lead the learner to revise his/her hypothesis about language.

> Having a go, taking a risk or daring to be wrong in an environment which ensures that your approximation will be warmly and joyously received, is fundamental for learning to occur. Without the freedom to approximate, no progress in learning can be achieved. (Cambourne, 1988, p. 69)

Montessori also viewed making errors as a natural part of learning. In a time when teachers felt that they "must never make a mistake themselves, for fear of setting a bad example," she endeavoured to re-educate her student teachers "to cultivate a friendly feeling toward error, to treat it as a companion inseparable from our lives, as something having a purpose, which it truly has" (1949/1988a, p. 225). To further this shift in attitude towards making mistakes, Montessori incorporated "the control of error" into her methodology.

So we need this rule as a part of school life: namely, that what matters is not so much correction in itself as that each individual should become aware of his [sic] own errors. Each should have a means of checking, so that he can tell if he is right or not…What we know as a "control of error" is any kind of indicator which tells us whether we are going toward our goal, or away form it. (Montessori,1949/ 1988a, p. 226)

In fact, much of the didactic equipment she designed was self correcting to assist children in checking and revising their hypotheses about concepts without feeling threatened in any way. A young child exploring the sensorial activity of the cylinder blocks is self corrected as he/she fits each block into its space as each must be placed sequentially by height or diameter, or there will be remaining blocks that will not fit in the activity. "So this piece of apparatus meets two requirements: (1) that of improving the child's perceptions, and (2) that of providing him with a control of error" (Montessori, 1949/1988a, p. 228). Likewise in matching words or definitions and pictures, there is often a control card for the child to check his/her completed work

Devries and Kohlberg (1987) were critical of Montessori's view on approximation. They noted that Montessori's materials were different from the open-ended constructivist materials in that "self correcting materials present a single problem with one right answer. In contrast, constructivist materials may be used in a wide variety of ways, and problems are more often introduced by children than by the teacher" (p. 287) Chattin-McNichols (1992) called for this view to be modified by pointing out

that many Montessori materials allow for multiple types of explorations and extensions and that there are "scores of different possible activities" available to the Montessori child (1992, p. 159). He also contested DeVries and Kohlberg's view that Montessori education is dominated by "error-free repetition" rather than "error-filled experimentation". He interpreted Montessori's observation that children repeat things when they have mastered them as a testament to their powers of concentration and not necessarily a goal of the teachers (Chattin-McNichols, 1992).

I suggest that Montessori devised self-correcting materials to ensure the safety of children to experiment and take risks and to develop autonomy. Part of this safety net was in allowing materials rather than teachers to supply correction wherever possible. Materials do not vary, but teachers do in terms of experience, preferences and personalities.

Nevertheless, Montessori did recognise that life experiences do not always come with a "control of error"; rather, if one views errors as part of learning, one works steadily towards self improvement. (Montessori, 1988) This view makes Montessori curriculum adaptable to the constructivist approach of open-ended tasks and projects and to the exploration of whole language activities. Admittedly, as soon as one opens oneself to modifying the Montessori curriculum to be more consistent with whole language theory and contructivism, one is paving the way for greater variations between classrooms. Teacher's corrections on children's oral and written language in storytelling (without the use of didactic materials) highlights this variation in intervention.

Chattin-McNichols (1992) noted that intervention in a Montessori class underscores the respect the teacher has for approximation as a form of learning. "After a teacher, through careful observation, has decided to intervene, the goal of the intervention is not to punish, but to redirect the child into work that will absorb him" (p. 64). This consistent definition of intervention, does not prevent variations in that teachers differ in their opinion of when redirection is necessary. Chattin-McNichols (1992) mentioned teachers' reaction to "invented spelling" as an area of variability, depending upon the teacher's training (p. 64).

Shawn, for instance, recorded a child's story as follows:

> I brang my bathers because I like to swim. I brang my ballet slippers because I love to dance. I brang my werewolf hat because I love to wear it. I brang my hat because when I was born, they put that on my head to keep me warm. (Shawn: 17)

Shawn has delighted in this 4-year-old's exploration of language including her attempt to put bring in the same irregular verb compartment as ring. She has decided not to intervene as this child approximates the correct usage of this verb form. She also is showing respect for the child's concentrated work in not interrupting her story. However, when Shawn is having a conversation with the child, it is likely she will use this verb in its correct form to provide a form of environmental correction.

<u>Refinement</u>

Mem Fox (1997b) recommended that one consider adding refinement as one of the

principles of natural learning. She felt that approximation did not sufficiently reflect

the importance of striving for some excellence.

> Refinement is not being well done. I'm still seeing too many pieces of writing
>
> which are marvellous examples of approximation but poor examples of
>
> refinement. It's fine for kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 children to have
>
> invented spelling and lack of cohesion their final drafts but beyond that (for
>
> most learners) surely we can explain that there are standards of 'politenesses'
>
> that have been developed to help make meaning clear to our readers; and that
>
> we have to meet these standards in any piece that goes public." (p. 128)

With older children, Montessorian, Carol, scaffolded the children's choice of words in

collaborative sharing sessions in a way that assisted children in approximating a better

use of language without showing any disrespect for their efforts.

> It's usually a group lesson. We get together and then we start
>
> talking about it and then they go off and write their own and then come
>
> back and share their stories if they want to. Most of them do because we make
>
> it a safe thing for them to do. We try to find things that we like in everybody's
>
> story and then go into the nitty gritties of the
>
> proofreading if we're going to publish it…Yes, and so then when we're doing
>
> … creative writing, then we can go back and somebody has written a sentence.
>
> So we might say "How can we add to that sentence by adding an adjective or

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an adverb to explain a verb?" Most of the time I tell them it's only worth 95

cents so they keep looking for bigger and better words to get a dollar. I don't

give out dollar ones. No dollar words unless they come up with the really big

words. So we use a lot of grammar when we're proof reading because it's like,

What kind of woman was it? Tall, short, fat, old? (Carol: 47-56)

Both Government school teacher, Dan, and Catholic School teacher, Kate, indicated

that children were in the habit of drafting work and then proofreading and editing it

for publication or sharing in some form.

We don't actually do story writing once a week or whatever, it's just whenever

it's integrated. If we decide we want to do story writing the whole term, then it

might be everyday. …They might write their draft for a couple of days and

then we'll publish a piece. (Kate: 64-65)

If you're going to do it right, do it properly or don't do it.

I'm old fashioned in that way. …Number one is planning, Let's think about

what we're going to do, discuss it. … Some people say you have to keep all

their things, drafts. To me they are just working things

that you can throw away. You don't always have to keep them. The end

product should be something you are proud of and something you've taken a

bit of care…proud...You want someone to read it. If it's not presented

properly, no one is going to pick it up so you

might as well not do it. (Dan: 134-138)

Response

According to Cambourne (1988), response refers to receiving feedback about one's efforts to control reading and writing from "knowledgeable others" (p. 33). Although, it is difficult to replicate the response to a young child's first words in feedback sessions in the classroom, Cambourne implies that teachers should endeavour to provide acceptance, celebration,[52] evaluation, and demonstration when possible (p. 77). Making decisions about how to express these four variables requires that the teacher have an underlying sense of appropriate literary expectations for the individual child. Heeding response as a condition of literacy reminds us that children's achievements need to be celebrated, future goals outlined, and appropriate skills scaffolded to attain these goals. Response contributes to meaning for the reader or writer, because it is acknowledgement that the message communicated has been received by the audience. It requires careful listening and authentic feedback.

> Showing a real interest in the meaning of a piece of writing is the first
>
> requirement from any reader to any writer. Criticism of errors in structure[53][54]
>
> should not be forgotten because teaching correct spelling is an essential

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[52] *Celebration* – Fox (1997b) thought *celebration* important enough to make it a separate principle in addition to *response*. She wrote, "Celebrations create a willingness to continue learning. Special days lift the spirits, renew ambition and set new goals" (p. 129).

[53] I would prefer the phrasing "guidance in structure" rather than "criticism of errors in structure" because it is more in keeping with the principle of approximation.

principle of whole language. It shouldn't, however, take precedence over meaning. (Fox, 1997b, p. 127)

Although there is some variation in interpretation, my interviews have presented evidence that the *Principles of Natural Learning* are being employed in Montessori, Steiner, Catholic and Government schools to help children to develop an understanding of text through the complimentary processes of construction and deconstruction. The Principles work to empower students to use reading and writing to negotiate meaning in their worlds.

Do children learn most effectively when they are provided with an integrated approach to language exploration?

"Whole language views listening, speaking, reading and writing as integrated, not separate domains" (Wilson, 1997, p. 118) Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the most empowering literary experiences are likely to be those that provide students with the opportunity to decode through listening and reading and to encode through speaking and writing. My journey into the classroom revealed that the teachers using narrative in all four types of schools were providing these integrated language experiences.

In Lynne's Government school class, I observed a shared book session on *Monkey* by Yvonne Winer (1987). Lynne read the story to the children using a variety of questions and prediction to engender discussion as the story unfolded. So they listened and spoke. Then they reread the story with children taking turns to read the

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pages. Afterwards they had a chance to write the key words of the story by creating monkeys and labelling them. Both Nigel and I, in our respective Montessori classes, shared programmes whereby the children's language work focused on the mythology of a country. In my class, the children read and learned to tell African folk tales which they presented to parents and other children. In Nigel's class, they studied, retold, and compared the creation stories form different cultures. In both Nigel's and my class, they then had the opportunity to write their own tales. One of the catalysts that Catholic teacher, Vicky, used was a large egg from China that the children decided was a dragon egg. They listened to stories on dragons and read some themselves. They then wrote a 'what if' responding to the question, " What if the dragon egg hatched?" Fran, in her Catholic school class, used fables as a language focus.

> [We were] looking at fables and they had to write their own fable.
> They had to write their own moral. So it's really being a reader
> and a writer at the same time. They're both going hand in hand. There's a
> great empowerment in that. (Fran: 107-109)

Sam, a Steiner teacher, reported on a creative writing lesson he did with a Year 5 class that involved telling and listening to some news that in turn was a catalyst for writing.

> I also teach creative writing with Grade 5…As I was preparing the lesson, I
> happened to be at the library where I live. And I happened to look out and
> there was a dog tied up at a bicycle rack and it was muzzled. And anytime
> someone came by, it would look at them angrily.   And I felt sad for it. So I

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began my lesson with it.   I was going to work on this, but I just saw this dog

and it got me wondering. How did this dog, who must've once been a happy

pup get to this stage. And they started to say, "Oh I think the master must

have done this or perhaps it lost its mother..." And I said "Alright, we're going

to write about that." Some of them will use their own stories and some of

them will use their imagination which I think is fine too. It's like creating

their own story. So it leads naturally on from sharing news to doing

their own writing. (Sam: 65)

In addition to linking decoding and encoding in these narrative rich classrooms, many

of the interviewees indicated that they also occasionally integrated the practice of

decoding skills such as phonics and comprehension and encoding skills such as

grammar, phonics, spelling and punctuation with narrative. However, there was

considerable variation in how this was achieved and the frequency with which it was

practised.

The Steiner teachers used narrative characters as metaphor in introducing points of

grammar. However, they would not be looking through a text of the orally told myth

of their main lesson to search for points of grammar. Bernadette, the Steiner teacher

gave the following example of using the class study of Norse mythology to introduce

tenses:

We use story to introduce points of grammar. So, for example, this

time I'll be introducing tenses. I'll use for that the three Norns, which

are like the three fates. And they sit beneath the world tree and they

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weave the web of fate, and their names are Urd, Verdandi and Skuld –

Past,Present, Future. And Urd knows all the secrets of the past, and Verdandi

of the present and Skuld of the future. (Bernadette: 107)

The Montessori schools varied considerably. In a few of the classrooms, grammar

was taught separately through the specific Montessori grammar materials. In Shawn's

school, grammar was taught with the traditional Montessori materials although the

teachers expressed great interest in linking grammar to literary and historic texts.   In

Ellen and Nigel's Montessori schools, Montessori shelf activities were supplemented

with practice books and materials provided by Thrass for phonics study. Allison, on

the other hand, was quite focused on linking grammar study and literature.

I think it is very, very important that all aspects of grammar are addressed.

But, I think they need to be in context and they need to be meaningful and I

think to engage children's interest, story - narrative is the most effective thing.

So I would tend to have everything in some kind of context. Even, for

example, sentence structure. I'm quite happy when we have read a story and

enjoyed it to take sentences out of that story and look at subjects and

predicates. I don't think it ruins a story if it's been really lived and enjoyed

first. I think it makes the interest in the grammar-heightens it tremendously

and I think this is why whole language in Australia has been really effective. I

think the First Steps Programme is a good guide for this kind of learning.

(Allison: 39-42)

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I was interested in reading articles written by Claremont[55] (1993b), a former

Montessori teacher trainer in America. Even, if didactic materials were used to teach

points of grammar, they were constantly interwoven with literature in her classroom –

even as a tool to analyse style. Claremont noted how children "slide into the habit of

mentally translating a word to its symbol quite easily. It leads ultimately, though not

in this first period of literature, to a study of style." For instance, she noted that many

great authors such as Milton have a verbal style whereas Dickens has an adjectival

style. "You do a piece of Dickens with this material and you'll see many blue

triangles[56] showing up." (Claremont, 1993b, p. 89) In classrooms I visited, I did not

see grammar study linked to style in this way and I wonder if this aspect of the

Montessori curriculum has been lost to many training courses.

In all classrooms, spelling seemed to be a combination of word focus from stories as

well as list based spelling programmes. When I observed Lynne's lesson using *Little*

Brown Monkey, I noticed that she used the story very effectively to engage the

children and then to explore words, sound families, and punctuation.   However, to

meet the needs of the children she devised practice sessions as well as narrative

discussions.

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[55] Claremont – a student of Maria Montessori.

[56] blue triangle – the navy blue triangle represents an adjective in the Montessori symbolic grammar

system.

I tend to do more [spelling words] from a story that they're using, or a theme, or topic words. …Every week [we also do] some phonics, and some basic spelling from a word list of basic words. (Lynne 1: 151-153)

In other classrooms, I was again exposed to a two-pronged approach of linking grammar to literature, while at the same time providing support material for practicing grammatical concepts. For instance, on one of my visits to Kate's class, children were given a worksheet on which they were writing various types of questions. These questions were related to *Charlotte's Web* which they were studying. In my 9-12 year old Montessori class, I used a morpheme-based spelling programme once a week with students, but several times a week would focus on words found in stories the children were reading, nomenclature connected with cultural studies or class novels.

The interviewees in this study were conscious of trying to integrate varied aspects of language study with narrative whenever possible. They perceived that their methods contrasted with those of colleagues who didn't use story as a teaching vehicle. Dan remarked that one of the upper primary teachers in his school did not read to her class. Lynne noted that one of her co-teachers emphasised non-fiction to the exclusion of fiction.

One of the interesting things I noticed in the classroom observations was the absence of "filler" worksheets -worksheets not related to a currently explored study. There were very few worksheets used in the interviewee classrooms I visited compared to numerous others that I was visiting at the time in conjunction with my student teacher

supervision duties. I wondered but could not substantiate if this might be because educators who used story extensively in teaching were interested in exploring concepts in a variety of ways – worksheets being only one way. Interestingly, drama was much more frequently used in the classrooms I visited which I had earmarked as narrative classrooms than in classrooms I visited as part of my supervision duties and I wondered if this too might be supported by further research. Kate's Catholic school class performed dramas about saving sea creatures, Nigel's Montessori class performed dramas demonstrating behaviour at camp and Ellen's class transformed the story, *A Piece of Straw* into a drama. In the Steiner classrooms, Sam's class performed a play of *Joseph and the Coat of Many Colours*, and Bernadette reported on her class performing a play about Noah last year and shared the drafts of a play on Norse mythology that they are creating this year.   Writing and acting in plays is a stimulating way not only to integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening, but also to focus on skills such as phonemic awareness and spelling. Surprisingly, among the dozen classes that I visited that were not part of this study, the only drama I viewed concerned Letterland.[57] Narrative-based curriculum appears to foster more varied and creative ways of curriculum exploration.

My own experience has led me to believe that non-narrative-based curriculums do not lead their students toward the same in-depth understanding of their language as do curriculum that use narrative genre as a programme basis. Although, the nature of constructed stories develops with age, the empowering nature of story does not

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[57] Letterland – a commercial program that introduces each letter as a character and suggests plays that support blends such as "th" based on the character relationships.

diminish. Despite great variations in practice, interviews with teachers from all four designated school systems revealed that they view story as an engaging tool to scaffold literacy based on principles linked to oracy including immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, use, approximation, refinement and response. In addition, they use narrative to provide a holistic base to experience the interweaving of the four modalities: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As I explored the power of narrative in enhancing an understanding of language, I became aware of other understandings that are potentially clarified by using story including the understanding of personal journey and links to communities and culture. Many educators have advised that one can use narrative effectively to promote these other understandings. I decided to further explore my interviews with teachers to determine strategies that they had identified for attaining understandings that run deeper than the structure of language for communication.