Chapter 2
Creating a Critical Multiliteracies Curriculum:

Repositioning Art in the Early Childhood Classroom

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Abstract Traditional early childhood curricula tend to separate the arts and literacy as different meaning-making systems. However, current multiliteracies theory and practice suggests that a broader view of literacy and learning is necessary for 21st century living. The notion of multiliteracies allows us to expand not only our definition of literacy from traditional print views to digital ones but also promotes broader understandings of the arts as semiotic systems integral to meaning making. More importantly, multiliteracies theory moves educators from a curriculum-as-neutral stance to a critical pedagogy stance that encourages young learners to take on a social justice identity from the start. This chapter features the critical multiliteracies research and practice of one teacher and two university educators researching in a first grade classroom over several years. An extended curricular example illustrates how art can be repositioned in early childhood instruction and curriculum to become an integral component of critical multimodal learning. The chapter shows how young children move seamlessly in and out of curricular engagements based on their interests and multimodal needs necessary for functioning in their classroom and the world beyond.

Keywords multiliteracies, emergent literacy, early literacy, critical literacy, critical visual literacy, multimodal learning, semiotics, arts and literacy, arts and identity, transmediation

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Introduction

Classrooms rich in writing, literature, and read-alouds, often create a strong bond between children and books. Following Ray (1999), many teachers have learned to use touchstone, mentor texts that they go back to again and again to highlight features to support students in particular writing techniques. But just as often, it is the children who decide which books will take on a significance beyond the read-aloud or the reader response; which story and experiences with it will be their constant companion to help them grow beyond themselves (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). And so it was with Tori and Karen during their first grade year in Mary Brennan's classroom. From its introduction in the fall and well into their second grade year, *Ruby's Wish* (Bridges, 2001), the story about a young girl growing up in China long ago who is determined to attend university when she grows up, just like the boys in her family, became a tool to think with, a text to transform, and one resource used to shape a new identity. Their story, however, like all others, is situational; it unfolds within a particular sociocultural context in which the teacher and her researcher colleagues were intentional about the ways and means of learning, literacy and change. This chapter analyzes and describes the path taken by Tori and Karen as they lived one year with a teacher and class-mates exploring a multiliteracies, multimodal curriculum with social justice and identity development as the core. Mary worked within a community of practice alongside two teacher educators, Linda and Penny. As a collaborative team, they came together on a weekly basis to explore the theory and practice of a pedagogy steeped in 21st century understandings of what it takes to become a successful citizen in a pluralistic society.

As early childhood educators, we are interested in creating learners "who are agents of text rather than victims of text" (Albers, 2007, p. ix). Critical multiliteracies/multimodal actions not only promote increased abilities in particular sign systems, they encourage the investigation of possible selves. The powerful visual and written texts created by Tori and Karen around a specific focus, allowed them to unpack various systems of meaning and to enact developing identities. They helped us understand that visual literacy and the critical interpretation of visual texts is indispensable in the achievement of a fully realized critical literacy.

An Expanded Theoretical Base Informs Our Inquiries

We approach our research and curriculum work drawing from a rich network of theoretical views, chief among them are: semiotics, sociocultural theories, and multimodal/multiliteracies.

Semiotics

As small children, we lived in a multimodal world. We discovered that art was a language with as much communication power as speech. Later we learned, like oral language, the arts could act as a bridge to reading and writing and that music and movement had the same potential for contributing to our expression of meaning and self. There were so many languages and literacies when we were young, so much playful, joyful movement among them as we began to learn the stunning communication potential within us all as human beings. As we entered the formal structures of school, our languages and literacies were systematically downsized and we were left with fewer semiotic resources from which to draw, just at a time when our meaning-making should have been at its richest, undifferentiated peak.

We live in a society in which language is privileged as the dominant communication system – in and out of the classroom. We value the orator over the dancer and we warn children of dismal futures should they not become proficient readers and writers. Semiotic theory expands our understanding of literacy and communication by gently sliding language from its central position to work alongside other semiotic modes, particularly the arts, with greater parity. Semiotics is the study of signs, how acts and objects function as signs in relation to other signs in the production and interpretation of meaning. Working together, multiple sign systems produce "texts" that communicate ideas. Texts can take a number of different forms (written, spoken, painted, performed, etc) but within each text, it is the complex meaning-relations that exist between one sign and another that breathe life into the communication event.

Semiotics teaches us that every text can be viewed as a multiplicity of signs (e.g., writing is both a linguistic sign and a visual one, an image can be interpreted both visually and linguistically); texts, then, are inherently intertextual. Intertextuality is a semiotic notion introduced by Kristeva (1980). The term suggests that individual texts are not discrete, closed-off entities; rather, every text and every reading depends on prior texts. Kress (2003) points out that individuals are "not mere users of a system, who produce no change, we need to see that changes take place always, incessantly, and that they arise as a result of the interested actions of individuals" (p. 155).

In our research and curriculum explorations, we use semiotic theory to remind us that, when reading a picture book, for example, there are many sign systems operating in one text entity (print, visual display of print, illustrations, photographs); together, these elements come together to create a meaning gestalt. Albers (2007) notes that "Representation occurs across and within forms, and expression of meaning is semiotic" (p. 6). Read aloud time, then, becomes a rich opportunity to not only read and discuss print meanings in relation to the linguistic and visual aspects of print but to read images in terms of how the illustrator uses line, color, light and placement on the page to communicate and their relationship to the print elements. Collectively these systems support particular interpretations.

However, communication very often occurs through combinations of sign systems, juxtaposed to create a more powerful effect. Albers, for example, describes how in the movie, *Jaws*, Spielberg (1975, as cited in Albers, 2007) uses music and visual elements – the shark, underwater scenes, and actors' faces – to strike fear in the hearts of viewers. This combination is so memorable that many adults who experienced it now only have to hear the music to be thrown into some level of anxiety.

Sociocultural Theory

We know from sociocultural theorists (Gee, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986; Wells, 1999) that learning is an active process involving social participation. Dewey (1938) helps us understand that individuals develop by interacting meaningfully with their environment. Children bring prior knowledge and their personal social worlds to the classroom and, as they are involved in the work of the classroom community, they learn through their interpersonal engagements and interactions with multimodal tools. "We have learned that when primary classrooms open up social learning space and encourage collective use of the available multimodal tools of the classroom culture, children and teachers transform and, in the process, transform the very culture of the classroom itself" (Crafton, Brennan, & Silvers, 2007, p. 517).

Wenger (1998) also helps us see the importance of the work of the community and the need for children to engage in inquiry using a variety of learning tools. He presents a theory of learning as participation, situated in our lived experiences in the world. As we all belong to multiple communities and construct identities in relation to these communities, our participation shapes not only our own experience and competence, but shapes our community as well. This reinforces the notion that learning is about identity construction – for the individual as well as the group.

Multiliteracies

A developing body of research about multiliteracies, also called "new literacies" (Kress, 2003), has helped us understand that literacy is multimodal (print, art, drama, language) and multimedial (combining various means of communication such as Internet, music, video) (Vasquez, Egawa, Harste, & Thompson, 2004). Children in the 21st century have to learn to negotiate multiple literacies to achieve work and overall life success (Kress, 2003). They have to learn to consider different perspectives, to analyze and problem-solve complex issues, and to think critically about social issues.

Traditional views of early literacy focus mainly on print. From this perspective, literacy is primarily thought of as decoding and making meaning. However, a different dimension of literacy emerges when it is considered as social practice (Vasquez, Egawa, Harste, & Thompson, 2004). Luke and Freebody (1997) elaborate on this through their four resources model that presents practices necessary for full literacy development. These include:

- Code Breaking (decoding written texts; understanding basic features of language including the alphabetic principles; and understanding broader cultural codes or ways of talking and acting within various communities).
- Meaning Making (constructing meaning through writing, visual representation, digital technology, movement, music, and oral language).
- Using texts (ways that texts are used for cultural and social purposes).
- Critical analysis (texts of all kinds are socially constructed and can be changed or deconstructed. Similarly, readers need to understand that texts position them in particular ways that can be accepted or rejected. Readers have the power to question, consider different perspectives, and resist being positioned to think or believe in a particular way).

As noted by Janks (2000), we need to understand the relationship between language and power and that language is a cultural resource that can be used to challenge or maintain systems of dominance. When this critical perspective becomes a part of literacy practices, literacy must be defined more broadly to reflect, "all literacy events are multimodal, involving the orchestration of a wide variety of sign systems" (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996, p. 14). A multiliteracies classroom includes a focus on community and social practices, on multimodal means of representing and constructing meaning, and taking a critical social justice stance leading to change and identity transformation. It supports teaching for social action, cultural critique, and for democracy, inside and outside of school (Bomer and Bomer, 2001).

It is important that teachers learn to use multiliteracies as tools to help even young children acquire the literacy resources for appreciation, understanding, analysis and action – and to take on the New London Group's (2000) challenge to nurture the critical engagements that are necessary for students to design their social futures and provide them with access to the language of work, power, and community. Children can understand social issues and should learn from the beginning of school that they can make a difference in the lives of others. Through play, art, music, technology, and language, children can address complex issues that concern them and their world (Dyson, 1993).

Social Practices in Mary's Classroom

Tori and Karen were members of a first grade classroom in a northern suburb of Chicago where changing demographics have shifted from rural to a more urban, multiethnic, multicultural community.   With a variety of languages and cultures represented, Mary worked hard to develop a community of practice in her class-room, to provide space for inquiry, support engaged learning, scaffold emerging literacy practices, and help her students learn to care about each other and about the world beyond the classroom. Critical literacy (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Comber, 2003; Vasquez, 2003; Wink, 2005) is part of our research study of multiliteracies as an expanded view of literacy practices. A particular emphasis in Mary's teach-ing was helping the students learn to take a critical stance and to understand that agency is an important outcome of critical work – that they can take action, make a difference, and change what they feel isn't working within their classroom, the school, or their community and beyond.

   As researchers in Mary's classroom, Linda and Penny became participant ob-servers, often working alongside Mary, talking to students, facilitating group work, preparing read-alouds, joining inquiry groups, and participating in the life of the classroom. On occasion, Linda and Penny joined Mary in assessing individual students whose literacy/learning growth concerned us. Other times, they distanced themselves from the learning community, taking fieldnotes, observing and docu-menting the complex interactions through video recordings, and collecting student artifacts to broaden their understandings of student learning and change.

   Mary was intentional about establishing particular social practices in her class-room. She slowly transformed her classroom into a community of practice (Wen-ger, 1998) taking the time to reflect on learning experiences together with the stu-dents, verbalizing her own learning processes and "noticing" out loud what she saw the students doing as a way of validating their talk, collaboration, and inquir-ies. She intentionally highlighted student strengths and made sure everyone knew who the experts were – experts at using technology, drawing pictures, telling sto-ries, dramatizing stories, reading, writing, illustrating, and organizing routines. Inquiry groups were another way students were able to collaborate, problem-solve, and take responsibility for making learning decisions based on their interests, needs, and teacher expectations. Transmediation (Suhor, 1992; Harste, 2000) be-came a central strategy in Mary's curriculum. Transmediation is a process of re-thinking something that is known in one sign system (like print) through another sign system (like art or music). For example, students can use *Sketch to Stretch* (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988) as a strategy to symbolize what a story or concept means to them. As their unique visual representations are discussed together in the classroom, students gain new insight and come to understand something in a new way. Each sign system generates a particular perspective, and contributes something unique to the meaning-making process. Students learn to think diver-gently, metaphorically, and collaboratively as they negotiate meaning and add the

language of each sign system to their interpretive tool box. Rather than a literal representation of a story, a drawing can reflect a way of expanding meaning to other aspects of life.

From the beginning, Mary made a variety of learning tools available for the students to use as they explored topics of interest and importance. For example, Mary had a rotating daily schedule of who would use the 4 computers in the room. She had a box of stories and books the children could select from to engage in Reader's Theater. Students were encouraged to dramatize stories they read or wrote; illustrate and make posters or banners, or use the computer to make pictures for their writing; music was available through a variety of CD's stored in the classroom to set the mood for various subjects; and materials for writing, drawing, reading, and investigating were always available. Reading and writing, drawing, dramatizing, and interacting together were the primary ways in which authentic learning experiences were developed and problems were solved.

Mary also used talk as a powerful learning tool. For example, Mary commented that Gaby's illustrations were filled with color, showing everyone what colors could do to help the viewer feel the warmth and happiness in her picture. From students' positive reaction to her statements, Gaby began to take on the identity of an artist who flooded her canvas with beautiful primary colors – colors that reminded her of Mexico and her family visits. When Mary told Jay that she liked "reading" his picture-story about computer characters, he began to place his characters in various activities in his drawings and revise his story as he authored his visual text. Soon after, he told the class that he might want to be a writer and make a book about all of his computer games at home. Reading pictures took its place alongside reading words as part of the literacy practices in Mary's room. Pictures were a text and words were a text – children were learning to read everything and move seamlessly between the two.

Read-aloud time became an important instructional strategy and Mary used think-alouds during oral reading to help the children learn the language of visual interpretation. Using phrases like "I wonder why the artist used contrasting colors; or placed the pictures this way on the page; or showed the characters taking these actions" helped the students learn to ask critical questions of visual as well as print texts. She found ways to make learners understand that all visible texts have invisible meanings that underpin them and it is their job to discover what those are. Through Mary's guidance, the discourse surrounding visual images gradually became the language of artists and illustrators: What do you notice? What do you feel? What do you think the artist/illustrator wants you to feel? What tools does s/he use to achieve that (e.g., color, line, placement, light source, top frame, vertical and horizontal orientation, multiple perspectives, positioning of people)?

As we all learned more about critical literacy, issues of power, equity, and justice became a more visible part of the classroom dialogue. Inquiry groups provided a way for students to choose areas of inquiry, pursue their own interests, and have multiple opportunities to work together. Early in the year, Linda brought up

the issue of gender and provided a small text set of books and materials that supported an inquiry into gender roles, gender equity, and gender in the media. *The Piggy Book* (Browne, 1986) led to heated discussions about what moms and dads do and the questions that we asked the children became the core questions that were asked when interpreting and interrogating all texts – print, visual, digital, musical, or dramatic.

Bringing Social Justice Close to Home

As the students were learning to critique texts and interpret them from multiple perspectives, Mary helped them connect their emerging social justice awareness to life in their own community. One day she brought in an article from the local community newspaper with the intention of sharing a real life example of citizenship and community activism. Little did she know that this article about an elderly woman about to lose her home would become so important and meaningful for her students and for herself (see also Crafton, Brennan, & Silvers, 2007).

> This experience [Grandma Ruth] is representative of so many opportunities this year for 1st graders to become empowered learners. Opening up space in the curriculum for students to think critically, to care, and to use the tools of 21st century learners was transformational for me. The support of our community of practice, the theory that I revisited, relearned, and was introduced to this year became the support I needed as I returned to teaching the multimodal world of 1st grade (Mary, personal journal, 6/05)

While Mary historically had reserved an honored place in her early childhood curriculum for the arts, particularly drama and the visual arts and connecting them to subject matter learning, the difference now was to recognize their force in identity development, and to deeply engage in the "arts essentials like personal voice, brainstorming, making creative choices and reflecting on their impact" (Booth, 2008). A more fluid movement between text and image and back again became characteristic of Mary's teaching…and when you ask Mary, she is quick to respond that it began with Grandma Ruth.

In mid-December, a local newspaper ran a cover story about an elderly woman who was being evicted from her house and placed in a nursing home apparently against her will. Later articles revealed how a real estate developer wanted to build more expensive homes on this woman's neglected property. Mary felt this article would support the first grade social studies curriculum and its focus on learning about the traits of responsible citizenship as well as her growing interest in critical literacy.

At first Mary was a little hesitant about sharing this article, as the subject matter seemed to be rather adult. But she felt that the work with critical literacy and care supported the use of this compelling story, and she forged ahead. The picture on the front page grabbed the students' attention and the headline caused them to

gasp in horror. Staring straight out of the black and white photo, front and center, Grandma Ruth was declaring, "They can kill me first!"

The first reading and sharing of this story began with a discussion of the headline and the front-page photo. Mary simultaneously discussed how the reporter purposefully used the headline, carefully crafting the words, to grab the reader's attention; and that the photographer used a "demand image" to do the same. She helped her students relate to the headline by sharing ways that they use this same expression, e.g. "Oh, no, I lost my jacket. My mom is going to kill me." Mary also asked her students to tell what they noticed about the woman:

"She looks sad," responded Jordyn.

"She is looking at us," added Kevin.

"What do you think she is saying to us?" asked Mary.

"Help me!" was Brittany's response.

Mary re-read this article several times over the next few days. Her students were engaged—this was a real story about a real person. Together they examined the photo of this woman's home (a smaller photo in the same article). Again they simultaneously discussed word choice and images and wondered aloud why that photo was chosen and what did it tell them about her?

"I don't think it looks so bad," said Ricardo.

"Yes, it does," replied Lizzie, "look at all that garbage!"

"Why don't the neighbors help her clean it up?" asked Daniel.

"Hey look at those old tires," said Jackie.

"It's an 'eyesore'," shouted Kyle, borrowing words from the article. Students liked the expression, "eyesore," the word the reporter used to describe her home. They also noticed that in the article the woman was referred to as "Grandma Ruth". "She looks sort of like my grandma," said Pearl and, from this point on, the students referred to her as Grandma Ruth.

A follow up article elaborated her plight. This article offered a possible solution. A developer would purchase her land and build several homes on it, including one for Grandma Ruth. By this time Mary's students were beginning to understand Grandma Ruth's perspective and Kevin said, "She doesn't want a new home! She wants this one!" This led to discussions about possible solutions, kinds of action that could be taken, and a heated dialogue about fairness, rights, economics, and power. The children drew pictures of possible solutions, and some went right to the computers to create their stories about why this was wrong. Solutions included having an "extreme makeover" for the house, collecting money to help save the house, getting community members to clean the house, and sending Grandma Ruth letters from the class to be courageous and not move out if she didn't want to (Fig. 2.1).
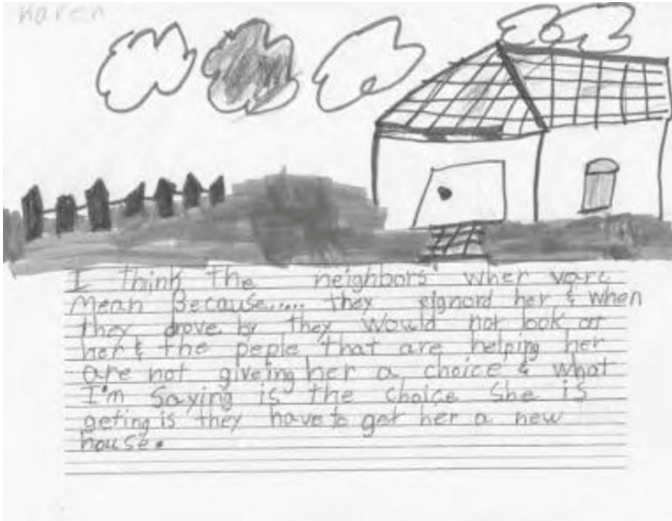
Fig. 2.1 Karen's letter to Grandma Ruth

Under Mary's guidance, the children continued to write stories, prepared a digital slide show, wrote and illustrated letters to the newspaper, and used process drama as a way to explore possible solutions. They danced, acted, drew, wrote, and talked their way to understanding the complexity of the situation and the need for taking social action. One concrete action came when the children wrote a letter to Grandma Ruth and sent it to the newspaper. It was forwarded to Grandma Ruth.

On the very last day of school, the children received a letter back from her, thanking them for caring, for helping her, and encouraging them to be good students and value their education.

<div style="text-align: right">May 25</div>

Dear Mrs. Brennan:

     I thank you very much for being such a wonderful teacher, teaching your young Kings and Queens to love and care for others. It was a wonderful letter I received from you and your Kings and Queens from Kara S. at the newspaper. She is also so wonderful.

     To the Kings and Queens you are teaching, let them know that I appreciate their caring about Grandma Ruth and that I am fine and still fighting the people that want to take my home away from me. You see, I had wonderful teachers, like you, and it has carried me through life's journeys, so keep learning and always be honest to yourself and others and you will get to age 83 with much love and caring. May blessings be with you always.

<div style="text-align: right">With all my love.
Thank you so much.,
Grandma Ruth</div>

P.S. I have kept all the papers and pictures you sent close to my heart.

Four years later, Mary's students, now in 4th grade, continue to ask about Grandma Ruth. The reporter is no longer at the paper and repeated e-mails have not answered questions about her saga…but it made an impact on these young citizens. Recently, Mary asked one of her former students to share the story of Grandma Ruth and his response began… "Well, Grandma Ruth lived in a house that was an 'eyesore' and the government wanted to take it from her, but it was hers …"

Tori & Karen Embark on a Path: Using Text and Image as Tools to Reposition Self

Our work together this first year was purposeful and exploratory. Linda, Mary, and Penny were together in Mary's classroom on a regular basis observing and capturing the dynamic learning in this setting. Conversations and learning outside of the classroom seamlessly transferred back into the classroom setting. Early in the fall, we began to identify and share picture books that highlighted social issues, useful for the critical conversations that would be threaded throughout the school year in relation to a broad range of texts, including art, drama and music.

One purpose of this chapter is to focus on findings revealed in the analysis of multiple, multimodal data sources that point to identity shifts in two students in Mary's classroom. The transcribed dialogues, fieldnotes, pieces of student art, and videotaping of role playing all provided evidence of change.

Daily read alouds were an integral part of Mary's practice. Using literature selected to encourage critical conversations and reflections was a time when Penny and Linda sat outside of the learning circle and observed the dialogue that Mary facilitated. When engaged in critical literacy, the author/reader pays particular attention to how texts represent meanings about the self and others, that is, texts make available certain social roles. She believed, as Harste (2008) noted, that the ability to sound out words and make meaning from texts makes children good consumers rather than good citizens and to be truly literate, children have to understand how texts work.

During reading, Mary invited responses and interpretations of stories using basic questions of engagement like:

Why do think the author wrote this book?
Why do you think the illustrator …?
Who has the most power in the story?
What words/images make you think that?
Who doesn't have much or any power?
Whose voice is silenced?
Why do you think s/he, they don't have a voice?

The sustained critical inquiry about Grandma Ruth had a significant impact on the students. Children recognized, from the start, that the work they did was im-

portant. They listened to the books Mary read to them and had thoughtful discussions. They added new words to their vocabulary and began to use words like empathy, connecting, and caring. Mary developed an expanded text set of picture books and read-alouds pertaining to social issues (see Fig. 2.2). Her read-alouds included books about homelessness, different cultures, coming to a new country, learning new languages, gender, and race.

Favorite Books: Gender & Identity

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Hooway for Wodney Wat by Helen Lester

Koala Lou by Mem Fox

My Great Aunt Arizona by Gloria Houston

Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tomie DePaola

The Piggybook by Anthony Browne

The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister

Ruby's Wish by Shirim Yim Bridges

William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow

Fig. 2.2. Mary's text set of picture books.

Ruby's Wish

In February Mary's students were learning about China and celebrating the Chinese New Year. They were fascinated with Chinese traditions. By this time, her students had engaged in critical discussions around a dozen or more books, and had extended from them into art or drama or personal inquiry. Mary decided to read aloud *Ruby's Wish* (2001) by Shirin Yim Bridges to her class. Ruby is a young girl in Ancient China who defies the traditional female role and achieves her dream of attending the university in a male dominated society. This book had a different focus than the books about Chinese celebrations, but its focus was one with which her students were familiar. It supported the kinds of critical questions and thinking Mary had been encouraging. In one section of the book, the author says:

"… most girls were never taught to read or write." Mary paused to open up space for reader response:

Kevin: (gestures his response with a thumbs down, waving motion, frowning.)

Karen says: "That's really unfair. That the boys get to learn but the girls don't get to read and write."

Tori: (turning to Logan and whispering) "Some times you do that – on the playground, you don't let us play and that's not fair."

Mary: "Let's stop and think about that. What's really happening?

Zack: "Well… I don't know… the boys have to go to school but the girls get to stop, so… the girls get to do what they want, so that's not so bad."

Karen: "Well… no… maybe… but… What if we have an assignment to write and the girls don't have to write then we wouldn't learn how to do it." (pause) Why can't they be together doing the same things?"

Mary: "We've thought about this before with other books – girls having the same choices or opportunities as boys…"

Tori: "Well… like Piggybook and Magic Fish where it wasn't fair but in this book it's more unfair because only one girl got to go."

Logan: "Yeh… maybe Ruby would feel sad that some girls didn't get to go and she might not want to go."

Karen: "Well, she has to go or she wouldn't get to learn."

Eric: "It was unfair at the beginning but fair at the end."

Carmen Luke (2000) states that meanings that readers make of various texts are negotiated in relation to one's different situations and positioning (e.g. adult, child, teenager, male, female, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class) and cultural contexts. In this exchange, Mary gently pushed her young readers to consider what covert messages might be lurking under the words she was reading. Tori quickly made a connection from the text to the playground and her own experience with unfairness. Certainly, first graders of both genders are not novices when it comes to unequal treatment, but Mary raised the bar with this and other books suggesting that boys often have more power than girls in social settings. Karen focused on the injustice of not being able to learn and not having opportunities to read and write while Logan suggested that Ruby may not want to go unless everyone has the chance. Albers (2007) notes that "critical discussions can lead to students' awareness of what they have learned, and with dialogue, they can unlearn beliefs that tend to stabilize culture, gender, race and ideology" (p. 168). The social construction of meaning in this situation laid a tentative conceptual foundation that was revisited again and again by Tori and Karen.

A short time after the reading of *Ruby's Wish*, students were asked to choose their favorite book from a set of read-alouds so they could discuss its meaning with others and then represent their ideas through art. Tori and Karen joined Linda and one boy who lost interest in the activity and wandered to another group. Initially, Tori retold the story of Ruby, her wish, and how the wish was granted. As in the previous dialogue, the comments about it being unfair and how girls should get to do the same things as boys surfaced. Together, Linda, Tori and

Karen decided to draw a picture of Ruby that showed her important traits, like being brave and courageous by standing up to her grandfather and saying over and over again that her life was unfair.

Tori and Karen gathered the art supplies and continued talking about how their drawing could show something so abstract as bravery. They immediately pulled out their red markers, remembering that the color red is an important color in China. Tori recalled the line from the story that said that Ruby still wears a little red each day. Karen added that red is the color of bravery and power. Linda suggested that sometimes size in a picture can communicate ideas like that too and so the young artists used simple lines and color to fill the page with their first image of Ruby (Fig. 2.3). The vertical orientation of their drawing forces the viewer to read top to bottom, first encountering Ruby's sad face with undifferentiated eyes and red cheeks; she is saying "it is unfair". The children's earlier dialogue, Tori's retelling and the first piece of art produced in relation to the literature all provided connected opportunities to make and consolidate meaning in relation to the narrative.

The second image of Ruby came months later as a gift from Tori and Karen to Linda who was now visiting the classroom less and less. During the intervening weeks of image 1 and image 2, Mary had continued to highlight gender issues through an extended unit on China where the students learned that girls were not as valued as boys in that culture. Tori and Karen had also been involved in an extended inquiry group focused on gender issues.

Fig. 2.3 First drawing of Ruby by Tori and Karen (Translation: It isn't fair. It is a true story.)

In this second drawing (Fig. 2.4), Ruby changed from a tearful, frowning girl depicted by simple lines to an older, smiling more sophisticated girl/woman wearing makeup and earrings. This time Ruby is a smaller figure but the whole of the work itself is richer, more textured with Ruby shown in a setting that reveals Chinese culture – Chinese symbols are shown on a wall hanging and close by is a hanging ball with tassels, also an Asian artifact. However, this isn't a pure Chinese setting as a close look at the right of the drawing shows -- two rugs are seen drawn in pink with hearts and stars decorating them – décor more representative of an American girl's home than a Chinese one. Albers (2007) notes that in art with a horizontal orientation, the meaning should be read left to right and the left side often presents information that is already known or given, while information on the right is new information (p. 141). In this image, Tori and Karen seem to be transitioning their understandings of gender from one culture to another; with one foot still in the narrative of Ruby, they have begun to create their own social narrative.

While Ruby is still declaring, "It's not fair" in this picture, the artists have included more writing to express their growing knowledge of gender inequality:

> her Grandfather doesn't understanet
> it's still happening in China.
> All the boy's get's the atteunton.
> She's not being treated right.

Fig. 2.4 Second drawing of Ruby by Karen and Tori

This text not only includes a cross-cultural message, it is an intertextual, multimodal creation reflective of the increasing salience of multiple modes of meaning available in all contemporary text displays (Fairclough 2000). It is worth noting that Ruby's face is dramatically different from the first drawing, particularly the eyes and mouth, which are almost, stylized versions of other images of girls and women found in many popular American magazines. These young learners show that many prior texts influence current ones and that visual literacy as well as print literacy is not only intertextual but intervisual as well. Tori and Karen use a range of semiotic resources at their disposal to create one text; their understandings of what it means to be female in America comes from many places. This is the most powerful reason to engage in critical literacy from an early age, arming all students with the tools necessary to uncover and resist the ways others may seek to position them.

Tori and Karen's final artistic rendering of Ruby came at the beginning of second grade when they produced the text (Fig. 2.5) and brought it to Mary. The critical experiences with text and image they had had in first grade stayed with them throughout the summer and resurfaced one more time in another visual exploration of Ruby. Here, Tori and Karen themselves have entered the text as Ruby was transformed into a Western girl with ponytails not unlike Karen's and a t-shirt with jeans, similar to the clothes both girls wore to school. Gone is the provocative, sexual look and heavy make-up of the last drawing and, in its place, Tori and Karen show an image of a contemporary girl, smiling, once again full-face forward looking out at her viewing audience.
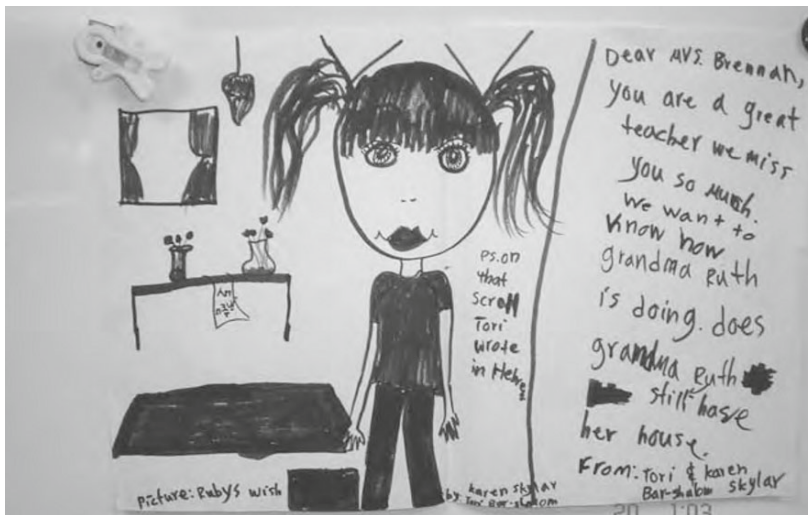

Fig. 2.5 Final drawing of Ruby

The only remnants of the previous texts are their use of the color red and the chopsticks protruding from the girl's hair. The eyes, however, are reminiscent of the second drawing, almost doll-like in their expression, they predictably reveal the continued influence of contemporary texts in their lives. Their label in the bottom left of the picture shows that, indeed, this is still a representation of the meanings they constructed from the book, *Ruby's Wish*, but those critical perspectives have now been internalized. The words to the immediate right of Ruby say: "P.S. on that scroll Tori wrote in Hebrew." This is a strong intertextual, intervisual move by Tori, who is Jewish, to identify herself as integral to the communication.

Bakhtin (1981) tells us that when an author composes a text, he or she also composes a social self. While he was referring to written texts, we interpret this image as both a social and cultural statement about an identity that Tori and Karen have been exploring over time and have finally realized. Revealed in the details and visual codes of this image, we see how reading, writing, talk, and art mediate new understandings of self and the world.

Importantly, Tori and Karen have divided this work into two parts: one primarily visual and the other entirely written. The right side of the text shows a letter written to Mary:

> Dear Ms. Brennan,
> You are a great
> teacher we miss
> you so much.
> We want to
> know how
> grandma Ruth
> is doing. does
> grandma Ruth
> still have
> her house.
> From: Tori Bar-Shalom & Karen Skyla

Considering Tori and Karen's final representation as a whole, it is easy to see that the girls are seeking to reestablish a treasured relationship with their teacher, but a closer look reveals much more. Their work is unified by their concern for social issues. Their semiotic texts are both culturally and personally situated (Albers, 2007), and demonstrate that the experiences these girls have had, the critical conversations, the explorations that revolved around images and purpose was truly transformational.   Without Tori and Karen's first image, it would be more difficult to interpret their last; reading images across representations, like the process of assessing growth in writers, gives teachers and researchers access to a learner's history as well as cues to the topics that would be most productive to discuss. Knowing that many meaningful, multimodal topic-related opportunities happened in the spaces between each of the drawings underscores the value of ongoing opportunities to move among sign systems.   While each picture positioned Tori and Karen as writers and artists, each also provided a reflective opportunity to consider who they are becoming and who they want to be in the future.

Conclusion

Mary's classroom and, specifically, Tori and Karen's work, reveal the parallel processes of the arts and literacy, their reciprocity in the evolution of learning and their impact on identity construction.   What is essential to reading and writing is also essential to art and other semiotic systems: bringing life experiences to bear, focusing on big ideas, drafting, revising, presenting and reflecting. Each sign system brings with it a different potential, its own rhythms of learning, and each alternative construction of meaning a new opportunity to transform the self. Transmediation and the intertextual moves visible in Tori and Karen's art and writing reveal how multiple semiotic systems support personal inquiries. When substantive talk, the creation of images and the reading and writing of literature brush up against one another in a continuous cycle, teachers are provided with prime opportunities to raise current social and cultural assumptions to consciousness and help students relearn oppressive views. Students, then, can enter into an active examination and control of socialized beliefs, challenging them rather than passively accepting them.

Maxine Greene (1995) repeatedly turns our attention to the notion of "wide-awakeness," the awareness of what it means to be fully present in the world. "Meanings spring up all around as soon as we are conscious, and it is the obligation of teachers to heighten the consciousness of who ever they teach by urging them to read and look and make their own interpretations of what they see" (p. 35). Our work raises questions about exactly what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the early childhood classroom.

We know that students today live in an increasingly visual culture. We recognize that the adult world of Mary's students is one that we can only imagine. In Mary's school, first graders attend an art class once a week at the end of the day. Even the time slot allotted for art gives the message that it is not as important as the academic subjects. Our work in language, literacy and the arts is different than the "arts experiences that are inserted into the school day without deep connections to the core curriculum of the classroom (Eisner, 1982, 2002; Grumet, 2004). Primary teachers have traditionally embraced the arts (i.e. music, drama, visual expression) and, yet, at a time when their importance should be increasing, it is waning. Our role as early childhood educators is to provide the resources of all semiotic systems to our young learners. Our research is helping us to see that in today's world this is not only a responsibility, it must be a priority.

Our experiences with Mary's class demonstrate that young children are capable of challenging (or helping to perpetuate) social injustices related to gender, race, and class differences. Issues of equity and social justice are part of young children's lives and are appropriate dimensions of a semiotic curriculum.

When texts that deal with critical social issues are read, discussed, and represented through multiple modes in primary classrooms, they can open up space for children to consider alternative perspectives, make intertextual connections, cri-

tique and analyze author assumptions and develop a sense of self and agency. Tori's and Karen's renditions of Ruby speak to shifts in their identities that may hold promise for their futures as strong, independent, socially aware women.

The children in Mary's class engaged in important work. The curriculum expanded to embrace authentic experiences and multiple ways of knowing and expressing. Linda, Mary, and Penny looked for meaningful ways to integrate the arts with a range of other sign systems— and the students were willing participants. "Every instance of making and sharing meaning is a multimodal event involving many sign systems in addition to language…When we limit ourselves to language, we cut ourselves off from other ways of knowing… Children whose strength is not language are denied access. Children whose strength is language are not given opportunities to extend their knowing and thereby develop new ways to communicate with themselves and others" (Harste, 2000, p. 4).

As teachers and learners we must ourselves be visionary and provide ways for our students to "move gracefully and fluently between text and images, between literal and figurative worlds" (Burmark, 2002, p. 1). Future research opportunities include looking for ways to expand curriculum to embrace the arts. Visual literacy, especially connected with digital literacy, is an area that warrants exploration. As early childhood educators, we have an obligation to look for new social practices, practices that will help to fulfill a dream of a fully functioning participatory democracy. Along with the other authors in this book and colleagues in our own arts and literacy communities, we must continuously challenge ourselves and those who would contain our students within the point of a number 2 pencil.

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