

## Chapter 2

# First Literacies: Art, Creativity, Play, Constructive Meaning-Making

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**Abstract** In this chapter art and play are considered children’s ‘first languages’, and therefore are placed at the centre of a curriculum for young children. Through art and play, children represent thought and action, which underpins their later understanding of the ‘second languages’ of reading, writing and numbering. Key issues such as image-making, graphic action, imagination, narrative, empathetic engagement and internalised thought are analysed as evidence of children’s construction of knowledge through art and play. Symbol making is the essence of being human. In children’s art and play, their symbol use captures their sensory modes in emotional and embodied ways, as children know their worlds and their place. The chapter addresses how children’s creation, manipulation and meaning making through engaged interaction with art materials are precursors to learning to read and write and, as first languages, should not be discarded nor replaced. The notion of creativity is explored in relation to pedagogical approaches. In a climate of testing regimes that emphasise ‘academic’ achievements, teachers are encouraged to not lose sight of imagination, pretence, constructive meaning making, holistic teaching and being a co-player and co-artist.

**Keywords** Art • Literacy • Creativity • Creative pedagogies • Play • Meaning-making

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## Introduction

Painting is just another way of keeping a diary... For those who know how to read, I have painted my autobiography

-Pablo Picasso, 1965

Once I started to incorporate the patterning and design work from my area, well, that made me feel whole as a Gunnai person, as a Gippsland person. And that's what art will do to you. [...] we've all got different styles of work and [...] if you can learn a little bit about Aboriginal art you'll be able to tell where some people come from because of the different styles... Sort of like reading a map.

-Ray Thomas, 2009

When Picasso invites us to read his painted autobiography, he challenges the reader to interpret images—to receive and relate to the visual signs he has used to express meaningful messages. When Australian Indigenous artist Ray Thomas invites us to read his painting to understand where he comes from, he asks us to pay attention to his way of expressing. He connects his style of communication with other Indigenous artists. He explains that, in order to understand their meaning, the viewer needs fluency in interpretation—to understand that when Indigenous artists paint their country they capture and map more than the naked eye can see.

Likewise, when young children create art, they can be expressing astonishing conceptual understanding and imagination, well beyond what they can communicate through language, even language in narrative form, and much earlier than can be communicated by them through written language (Brooks, 2005; Kress, 1997; Matthews, 2004; Wright, 2010). This way of seeing children and their communication undermines the more traditionally accepted ways of seeing young children as 'deficit' or 'not yet', on a continuous path of progress, developing as they grow. It is presumed that as they get older, children acquire more knowledge and skills, and at increasingly sophisticated levels. In opposition to these views, this chapter will focus on very young children's existing, sophisticated capacities for literacies and their interpretive and expressive fluency using symbolic forms. It will feature how the arts are central to a curriculum for young children.

This ideology is particularly relevant given the current trend where the curriculum appears to be shrinking while, at the same time, it is becoming more and more crowded. Calls for getting 'back to the basics' generally relegate the arts to the sidelines as a 'frill' or an add-on to the 'real work' of learning, or something to be set aside until after the more 'academic' content has been covered. Indeed, placing the arts at the centre of the curriculum is anathema to views of curriculum that separate and hierarchically rank different types of knowledge. It challenges the notion that young children's learning must begin with the simple and progress to the more complex. Rather, the arts might more appropriately be regarded as children's 'first languages'—their primary ways of seeing and knowing the self and the world, and the means to interpret and express meaning. To be denied one's first language is not without its consequences. Most significantly, ignoring the first languages of children blinds us to the complex, abstract and sophisticated thoughts and feelings of children as they

work with ‘first-order’ signs or symbolism (Vygotsky, 1978, 1934/1987, 1997) such as picturing, storying, dancing, dramatizing, and making music.

Art is one of the oldest and most fundamental forms of human expression and communication. At its core, art is embodied experience through action, which is a form of intelligence that underpins all other forms of reasoning. Through art, young children demonstrate foundational ways of understanding symbols, systems, and connections, and their fluidity in using these for expression and communication is fundamental to their ways of being. More than a frill or a means for ‘enriching’ learning, the arts are a distinct way of thinking. Because of the play-oriented, compositional characteristics of art making (and this is meant in a broad sense to include composing in any art form), the arts are essentially the literacy par excellence of the early years of child development (Wright, 2007).

Very young children, who have not yet learned to read and write and are still developing their ability to speak, can use art forms in very accomplished ways. As many have noted (cf. Anning & Ring, 2004; Kress, 1997; Matthews, 2004), infants and very young children generally draw prior to acquiring skills of reading and writing text (i.e., letters, words, phrases, sentences). They use first-order symbolism fluidly, across modes, and indeed ‘the act of representing thought and action while drawing actually strengthens children’s later understanding of literacy and numeracy’ (Wright, 2010, p. 7).

One way of thinking about the arts is as a language—a means for communicating, expressing. In this sense, the arts are loosely analogous to reading and writing, however the processes are based on different symbol systems. Reading and writing—using alphabetic notation—are the visual representation of the verbal system. Vygotsky (1978) described reading and writing as a ‘second-order’ symbol system that serves as a handmaiden to the ‘first-order’ symbol systems of drawing and speaking (Adoniou, 2013). There is an increasing evidence base that confirms that most children use the ‘first-order’ symbol systems with great skill in their early years, but these systems often become deemphasised in favour of the ‘serious business’ of learning the second-order symbol systems. Yet, the arts must not be left behind as ‘child’s play’. As children progress up the education system, their ‘core learning experiences’ of painting, drawing, dance and song should be given a central position within the curriculum, alongside reading, writing and ‘rithmetic. This is because the arts and the ‘3 Rs’ offer different affordances of learning (i.e., differing potentials for representation and communication of different kinds of meaning) (Dyson, 2013; Kress, 1997), all of which are of equal importance. Indeed, the first-order symbol systems enrich and inform learning in the second-order symbol systems.

This chapter makes links between art, creativity and young children’s first literacies. It is the magic and mystery that surrounds the arts and creativity that interests us in this chapter, and we focus particularly on how young children’s capacities and creativity are surfaced and encouraged through the act of meaning making in artistic domains. As Wright (2010) describes this:

In a sense, every instance of representation through art is new and creative. Although drawing involves a ‘set of rules’, children never just mechanically apply rules when they make an artwork...This is why composing through art is such an important and fundamental form of creativity. (pp. 2–3)

Yet art not only provides children with creative opportunities to express and communicate their thoughts and feelings; more fundamentally, art provides a significant avenue for children's constructive thinking. This essential link to overall academic performance undermines the legitimacy of the current regimes of testing that ignore the arts, and yet are impacting so significantly on curriculum in schools and before-school settings.

This chapter also questions some of the contradictions inherent in education 'systems'. There are currently policies and curriculum documents that pay lip service to 'creativity' while at the same time making very little time or space for explicit teaching of skills or processes for creativity. The weak link between the schooling process, creativity and knowledge/skills in the arts can be illustrated by a brief example drawn from Unit X, a subject offered in art education to first-year university students. One student, who had completed 12 years of schooling, did not know that the colour pink is produced by mixing white with a little red (see McArdle, 2012). If we adhere to the arguments presented above, which suggest that students should have access to a range of 'affordances of learning', one could say that schooling has failed this student. Even if one were to believe that the most basic/pragmatic reason for education is to prepare students who are job ready, without a basic arts/creativity education they are under-prepared for work—as teachers, architects, IT programmers, engineers, and almost any career or profession, now or in the future. This lack of preparation for career prospects raises concerns surrounding fairness and equity within a system of education that should aim for success for all students across a diverse range of learning proclivities.

The importance of embodied and empathetic learning through play in the curriculum is also addressed in this chapter. The argument here is that play is so fundamental to learning, that to take play away from young children is to rob them of their 'first language' for communication and meaning making. By replacing play with an academically oriented curriculum that breaks communication down into singular and simple stages (e.g., alphabet drill), we underestimate the intellectual capacities of young children. The connection between creativity, art and play is most visible in the early years, but should not cease to be important as children get older. This fluidity and crossing over between modes continues throughout our lifetime.

The chapter also includes some thoughts on the role of the teacher in supporting children's development in the arts. The role of the teacher makes the difference in talking back to the testing regimes and advocating for the important place for play in the learning and teaching of children, well into the early primary years of schooling. Playful teachers and creative teaching will not only encourage development and mastery in the arts and creativity, but will actually teach for creativity with intent, purpose and measurable outcomes.

## **Creativity and Creative Pedagogies**

The trouble with creativity is that it is difficult to describe, making it also difficult to assess. It might be said that it is easier to determine the absence of creativity. What some call creativity in young children, others see as play, freedom, purposeless

mucking around (Banaji, 2011, p. 37). This binary logic sets creativity in opposition to ‘real’ learning, the latter of which often is viewed as academic progression within a sanctioned tradition (p. 37).

One ‘solution’ to some of the complexities involved in defining creativity is to distinguish between ‘high’, or ‘Big C’ Creativity, and other activity which is considered ‘low’ or ‘little c’ creativity (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Big C Creatives are the ‘greats’ (e.g., Picasso, Einstein, Beethoven), and this creativity is special and absolute. Little c creativity is more to do with the everyday, and everyone can be creative—in their choice of clothing, cooking a meal, gardening. Little c creativity can be fostered, increased and measured (Craft, 2000).

Yet others argue that we cannot collapse creativity into the everyday and the mundane (Negus & Pickering, 2004); rather, creativity is only certain things (to be judged according to agreed-upon criteria for creativity) and certain times (an idea at the right time in the right place) (pp. 44–45). More recently, creativity has come to be framed as an intellectual attribute (Pink, 2006), and has been linked directly with economic discourses. Creativity, for instance, is perceived as value adding (Florida, 2002), as when employers advertise for ‘creatives’ to work in their office/team/organisation to give them the edge in business, bids and tenders, design, and problem solving. Architects, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, teachers, hair-dressers—all are required to be creative. These versions of creativity are variously product oriented, or involve combinations of personality traits.

By contrast, a more ‘Eastern’ concept of creativity is less focussed on innovative product creativity (Weiner, 2000). Instead, creativity is seen as a state of personal fulfilment, the expression of an inner essence (Lubart, 1999, p. 340). Japanese *kata-based* learning underlines the mastering and perfecting of unchanging sets of techniques and skills and principles, all at once. Kata learning puts a premium on the richness of the inner experience rather than the uniqueness of the external performance (Matsunobu, 2011, p. 45). This creativity of imitation seems to be in direct contrast with the Western notion of creativity through innovation and divergent thinking.

The inherent divides in attempts to define creativity might be sidestepped if we are open to the idea that all of these possibilities, and more, can be contemplated as ways of teaching for creativity. Russ (2003) argues that young children’s play ‘has been found to facilitate insight, ability and divergent thinking’ (p. 291). The creative act can require both cognitive and affective processes, at once. The ways in which young children play with language, toys, roles and objects require that they cross divisions, invent new combinations of ideas and objects, try out solutions without certainties, and sometimes practise and practise.

Even though definitions and understandings of creativity may differ, it is possible to trace commonalities in pedagogical approaches that nurture creativity. A sequential approach will break down complex tasks into stages, where learning builds bit by bit or piece by piece. In contrast, it seems that, across a range of contexts, holistic teaching and learning is commonly understood to be conducive to creative thought and production. The following three examples illustrate the possibilities enabled by a holistic approach. *Kata*-based learning leads to creativity through the learning of

form and mastery of models (Matsunobu, 2007). This creativity of imitation is taught holistically, not through a step-by-step sequenced process of learning (Matsunobu, 2007; Murao, 2003, cited in Matsunobu, 2011). In learning a *karate* kata, students experience the whole sequence of fighting moves from the beginning, utilising their entire bodies. They do not first learn one section, perfecting that before progressing to the next section of the sequence. The first piece they learn may be as difficult as the last piece (Matsunobu, 2011, p. 49).

Similarly, Guy Claxton (2002) urges teachers in the UK to stop explaining, and build learning power in children by expecting that they will work out solutions, after being provided with a picture of the whole task. In a project where an artist worked with recently arrived refugee children, assisting them in English-language acquisition, researchers noted that the artist did not break down the task into simple linear steps but, rather, demonstrated the whole task (digital portrait) to the students, before they dispersed to work on their own (see McArdle & Tan, 2012). Such examples contradict the traditional school curriculum, in which content often is organised in a sequential manner, from easy to difficult.

Whether the focus of creativity is understood as product or the more 'interior' goals for the self, from an educational perspective, the shape of the curriculum will have an influence on creativity. Child-centred approaches to learning and teaching celebrate creativity as part of progressive and activity-based learning experiences. A holistic approach to pedagogy will cross divisions between art and mathematics, physical activity, numeracy, languages and music, philosophy and poetry.

However, the hierarchy of disciplines/subjects in traditional schooling structures and systems has historically diminished the importance of the arts in the curriculum. This marginalisation of the arts can be a problem but, ironically, it also can be seen as an advantage (McArdle, 2008). The advantage is that arts educators can choose a holistic approach to their pedagogical practices, while interpreting the mandated curriculum, with its expectations, standards, and measures. Although this might be tolerated in arts education, in literacy education it seems that the stakes are higher, and with this comes requirements for more controls, more measures, and a more staged understanding of teaching and learning. The next section of this paper zooms in on the relationships between the arts and literacy, particularly for young children.

## Literacy and Art

Even though the arts are not commonly coupled with literacy in policies, curriculum frameworks or timetables, some see English classes as the place in school to engage with questions of imagination, creativity and innovation (see Kress, 2011, p. 212). The dominant medium now, according to Kress, is the screen (computer, phone, video, games console), where once it was the page (book, newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, newsletter). To continue to teach unbending adherence to norms (e.g., forms of writing, modes of reading, dissemination or publication) seems of little use in periods of rapid change (Kress, p. 214). There is now a choice between sending

a message by text, speech or image when using a phone. How are those choices made? What is the appropriate content for Facebook postings? Who is the imagined audience? As Kress points out, most messages now make use of more and other modes of representation and communication than those of speech or writing—they have become multimodal.

Yet young children have been using multimodal forms of communication since long before Facebook and mobile phones existed; and early childhood educators have long seen the arts and play as the modes for these first languages. The arts and play should not be positioned as old fashioned or outmoded. Rather, they must be given a central place within the early childhood curriculum as they embody constructive thinking in action.

Through drawing, for instance, there is a reciprocal relationship between children's image making, graphic action, imagination and language. Through their depictions on paper, children simulate actions, bodily sensations and feelings through a kind of empathetic engagement (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007) with the drawn characters and the events that unfold. In this way, drawing is foundational to children's internalised thought. Children construct knowledge through enacted forms of being, meaning and communicating while engaging with art making. This is similar to what Picasso meant when he said that he painted his autobiography. Through drawing, young children make marks that capture their thinking, feelings, imagination, and actions.

Such symbol making is the essence of being human. Drawing, as a graphic symbolic system, is an important vehicle for children's communication and comprehension of complex meaning. Art educators, such as Wilson (2007), have long recognised that children draw to know—to create and express complex meanings about themselves and their worlds. Symbol making captures children's sensory modes in emotional and embodied ways. As Goodman (1969) reminds us, 'what we know is felt in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped in our minds [through] the invention and interpretation of symbols' (quoted in Buckham, 1994, p. 140). Ray Thomas (2009), the Australian Indigenous painter quoted at the beginning of this chapter, alludes to this when he explains that the painting makes him "feel whole as a Gunnai person", at the same time as it maps the place where he comes from. Such emotional engagement between artists and their art seems strongly linked to the embodied nature of the art-making process itself and the relationship this has with understanding self and world.

Such intersections are described by a number of theorists. Merleau-Ponty (2002), for instance, argues that perception and representation are structured by the acting body—the embodied agent—in its purposeful engagement with the world. Similarly, Vygotsky (1999) describes how the practical activity of drawing develops the 'mind'. This is because drawing is a volitional, goal-directed, sign-and-tool-mediated action—in other words, the creator of art chooses the content and form of the work and the drawing materials are used to generate signs that have meaning to others. Drawing provides a very important medium for engagement and a means for children to depict and, thus, come to know the world and their place within it.





**Fig. 2.1** Shooting a Criminal (boy, 7.8) (By permission of the artist)

Langland-Hassan (2011), in a similar vein, conceives visualisation as a form of sensorimotor reasoning. Through art, for instance, motoric thought and feeling are projected onto the page through the use of signs that stand for objects and events. This notion of ‘drawing of imagery and movement’ is also found in the cognitive linguistics literature, which defines perceptually grounded concepts in terms of image schemas. One such example is the Source-Path-Goal schema (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). This schema is illustrated in Fig. 2.1, where the gun (source) yields a bullet that makes a dotted line (path) to the criminal (goal) on the roof who, in turn, leaves a visual schema of his fall through space toward the ground.

Embodied cognition and schema theory are significantly relevant foci in the fields of early childhood and art education. These theories are grounded on the view that concepts are built in children’s minds and are based on the conclusions children draw from their experiences. An example of children learning from experience is how they learn about gravity and distance by repeatedly tossing an object onto the floor from their cribs or high chairs and, in so doing, exploring vertical trajectories—how far an object drops, how long it takes, and what happens on the point of impact.

Similar concepts of gravity and distance are illustrated in Fig. 2.1, and reflect the young artist’s awareness that the jump/fall of the criminal should be represented as an arc-shaped pathway, similar to how one dives off a high cliff. Schema-oriented researchers, such as Arnold (2010), have investigated similar patterns in children’s spontaneous play and activities, which are mostly patterns of action, but which also





**Fig. 2.2** Trampolining (girl, 5.0) (By permission of the artist)

include visual patterns. One such pattern, or schema, is Transporting, where an infant might carry a pile of toys back and forth between her parents, who are sitting at opposite ends of the room, and then represent this action by drawing horizontal, back-and-forth marks on the page (Athey, 1990).

Other types of schema of young children, which extend to mark making on paper or on other surfaces, include: separating, connecting, containing, enveloping, vertical/horizontal/diagonal and going through. Matthews, in particular, has applied such schema in his study of the art of infancy (2004) and the movie-making development of children aged 2–3 years (2006). A diagonal schema is illustrated in Fig. 2.2 where a 5-year-old girl represents herself in a suspended state while jumping on a trampoline. Such diagonal positioning is a relatively common scheme used by children to illustrate a part-way-up/part-way-down state, as when being suspended in the air or when falling down.

In a large study with children aged 5–8 years, Wright (see Wright, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2014) has explored similar schema-based theoretical threads. Her close scrutiny and analysis of children’s drawings and their processes has illustrated that topological and dynamic aspects of children’s drawings are represented through spatial-temporal schema such as front/behind, close/distant, above/below, inside/outside, connected/disconnected, vertical/horizontal, proximal, surrounded, and trajectory/point of arrival. From this research stem three key principles that feature aspects of multimodal literacy and the symbiotic relationship between graphic, embodied and narrative forms of meaning making, namely:

1. Children graphically assemble actions to represent (a) the physical/spatial location and structure of events, (b) the flow of time, (c) relationships between

characters or objects in specific contexts, and (d) the classification of things in relation to other things. Such meaning is embedded in the children's use of indexical terms in relation to these action assemblies, namely: (a) location ('this, that, here, there'/'near, far'), (b) time ('before, after, now, then'), (c) identification ('I, you, he, she, they'/'it, this, that'/'the one, the other') and (d) organisation ('these, those, they').

2. Children enact meaning with the body through the use of: (a) gesture, small-scale motor actions of the fingers, facial expression, (b) descriptive action (e.g., pointing at a drawn object and moving the hand across the page to indicate its action or relocation) and (c) dramatization (e.g., enacting the drawn figure's movement, such as moving fingers upon the page to 'walk' up drawn stairs),
3. Children expressively narrate their 'live' meaning making through: (a) vocalisms (e.g., emphases through change in pitch, volume or tempo of speech), (b) onomatopoeia, often with accompanying actions, (c) figures of speech (e.g., 'heavy sky') and (d) repeated words for emphasis ('long long long hair') or to accompany a graphic action (e.g., 'colour, colour, colour'—as a verb).

Wright's research is evidence that children communicate using a number of different signs and symbol systems. For those who know how to see, careful attention to young children's drawings can show traces of identities, agency, drawing to know, changes of mind, self, and representation.

Through their drawing, children sometimes combine everyday experiences with imagination in a projective-reflective state. This type of thinking and feeling involves representation using signs that 'stand in for specific features or states of affairs' (Clark, 1996, p. 43). For instance, when children draw themselves as other characters, including animals or fantasy creatures, they are not just pretending to be another, but are acting 'as if' they have imagined characteristics, agency and a range of identities. The capacity to play with ideas like this is highly significant for children's exploration of possible selves and identities (Edmiston, 2008; Sutton-Smith, 1997). As they draw and play, children empathetically position themselves in relation to others and manipulate the feelings, moods and mind states of their drawn characters—real or fictional (Wood & Hall, 2011). These capacities are highly relevant to literacy development. Stemming from children's first symbol systems, these ways of seeing and thinking and feeling can help children come to apply sophisticated ideas to the second-order symbol systems of literacy and numeracy. The next section focuses on how teachers can nurture empathetic, embodied representation and reasoning in children through a focus on art.

## **Teachers' Work: Teaching Art/Literacy/Creativity**

What is art? Historically, art has always been contingent and contentious, and today, with new technologies, the answer to the question of what is art is fluid and changing. Nevertheless, for most of the twentieth century, learning through art (e.g., learning history through drama) was seen as a fit with most progressivists. The emphasis was

on the experience of the learner, rather than the product, and self-expression and creativity were seen as means of enhancing personal growth (Abbs, 2003). These ideas dominated arts education at that time (Flemming, 2011, p. 181).

Faced with the long history of ambivalence over the importance of the arts in schooling, advocates for the arts have made many cases for quality arts education programs. According to Fleming (2011), general educational benefits of engaging with the arts are fairly widely acknowledged, although empirical research to date has not provided conclusive findings (Comerford Boyes & Reid, 2005; Eisner, 1998; Harland et al., 2000; Winner & Hetland, 2000, cited in Fleming, 2011, p. 181). Consequently, another curriculum ‘solution’ for those who struggle to have the arts take its place in the curriculum, not on the edges, is to dissolve art into creativity and culture. While currently enjoying ‘capital’ in the curriculum, creativity and culture can be put to work adding value to the arts. The problem here is that creativity and culture do not add up to all that is entailed within the arts. For others, art needs no justification in terms of anything else (Goodman, 1984, p. 157 in Kerlan, 2011, p. 121), and they insist that the worth of art is in art itself.

The problem with learning through the arts is that this too undersells the arts, narrowing and distorting its nature and its process, relegating it to a means for acquiring other (more important) knowledges. This chapter is not an argument for learning literacy through art, or vice versa. Rather, art and literacy are complementary—they enrich and inform each other and should be comprehended and applied as ‘a package’ (i.e., as parallel, symbolic forms of learning and knowing). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the arts are loosely analogous to reading and writing, however the processes are based on different symbol systems. In the last decade or so, there has been a strong recognition of this and a gradual paradigm shift toward multiliteracy research which addresses the different semiotic affordances offered through different semiotic materials (i.e., differing potentials for representation and communication and how particular properties lend themselves to representing different kinds of meaning) (Dyson, 2013; Kress, 1997).

Nonetheless, current Australian policies and structural systems in education continue to reflect the older paradigm leading to dominance of reading and writing as goals of education (Lankshear & Knoble, 2003). This narrow approach is supported by the measurement of literacy and numeracy through ‘On Entry’ and NAPLAN<sup>1</sup> assessments of children. These testing regimes extend to cross-national competitive scoring and, according to these measures, Australian children’s learning ‘lags behind’ their counterparts in other countries. Ironically, Finland, one of the ‘top-scoring countries’, has recognised the importance of the arts and play—and has achieved successful TIMSS and PIRLS results.<sup>2</sup> The two are not antithetical. We argue that one explanation for Australia’s poor performance could be that insufficient emphasis is given to first-order symbol systems at a critical period in children’s development when children also are required to engage with ‘second-order’ systems.

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<sup>1</sup>On Entry assessment – identifying essential literacy and numeracy skills; NAPLAN – National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy.

<sup>2</sup>International results in Mathematics and Reading. For more on this, see <http://timss.bc.edu/>

A recommended new approach to early childhood pedagogy would emphasise children's embodied experience through drawing. This would include a focus on children's creation, manipulation, and changing of meaning through engaged interaction with art materials (Dourish, 2001, p. 126), through physical, emotional and social immersion (Anderson, 2003). While art is a precursor to learning to read and write (Kress, 1997), it should not be abandoned when reading and writing become available. Rather, art should be regarded as a foundational way for children to understand and use symbols, systems, connections and ways of being.

Such a perspective will require an epistemological shift toward a deep appreciation and understanding of play and playfulness and the significance of these in relation to embodied, empathetic literacy learning. Vygotsky (1931/1994), for instance, suggests that creativity requires patience and an appreciation of the playful, and perhaps the fanciful and the unsubstantial. However, a creative curriculum is not a 'free for all' where anything goes. Teachers require particular knowledge and skills in order to enable creative processes in themselves and in the children with whom they interact (Banaji, 2011, p. 40). As in all areas of the curriculum, all teachers must have the confidence and professional knowledge to enact all areas of the mandated curriculum, including the arts. A quick search of early years' curriculum frameworks in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Sweden and England shows that, across these diverse contexts, commonalities include the featuring of play, creativity and the arts. The question for teachers is: How do they design and implement a curriculum for young children that makes space for creativity and the arts, particularly if their own education has left them not knowing to mix white with red to make pink?

In a classroom where teachers spend an average of 550 min per week instructing with an emphasis on drill in phonemic awareness, drill in grapheme/phoneme generalisations, alphabetic knowledge and knowledge of basic print conventions (see Luke, 2010), it would seem that opportunities for creative engagement with ideas and processes can be relegated to the sidelines of the curriculum, if featured at all. Yet, what would a classroom look like where young children are becoming literate, retaining their 'first languages', making choices for communicating their ideas and knowledge using multimodal means, and engaging with creative processes and with a range of symbol systems and signs?

This chapter concludes with four 'nudges' for teachers working in a climate of testing regimes that emphasise 'the basics' and ignore the rest of the curriculum; a climate characterised by a timetable with a finite number of hours for delivering instruction; and a climate that celebrates creativity but allocates minimal hours to the arts or creative learning. There are enough existing sets of indicators, benchmarks and 'standards' that currently work to shape teachers' actions and decision making. It is not the purpose of the following list to add to these requirements. Nevertheless, for those who are convinced that creative ways of teaching and learning offer a rich and enjoyable experience of education to any group of learners that will include a wide range of learning styles and capacities, then the ideas in this list might work as useful hints or nudges.

1. Imagination and pretence, fantasy and metaphor. There are many different ways that children play. As well as organised games, and games with rules, children need time to daydream, pretend, and play with ideas. Some children need help with learning how to do this. Others need time to develop their ideas, and try out new ideas, change their minds, share their dreams. In a classroom where all learning is literal and there is no room for imagination, then signs and symbols are difficult to grasp.

A creative curriculum will not simply allow, but will actively support, play and playfulness. The teacher will plan for learning and teaching opportunities for children to be, at once, who they are and who they are not, transforming reality, building narratives, and mastering and manipulating signs and symbol systems.

2. Active menu to meaning making. When young children play and draw, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two—one informs and enriches the other through a process of immersion and a type of improvisational give and take. Clearly, there is more to children's drawing than meets the eye. Indeed, the process of the playful unfolding of content and form is as important as the end artefact of the drawing itself.

Yet not all drawing is for the same purpose (Knight, 2008), similar to how writing is different according to purpose (e.g., shopping list, letter, email, essay, novel). Perhaps one way to understand the many purposes of art is to illustrate features that are applicable across all ages. For instance, contrary to the developmental age/stage schema that relegates 'scribbling' to babies, adults often continue to scribble in the form of doodling. Other contrasts of the purposes of art are illustrated by how Pictionary drawings are different from sketching a landscape; and plans for a house are different from a 'mud map' that provides directions to a new friend's house. What all of these forms of art making feature is the relationship between visualisation and action. In a classroom where children can choose to draw, write, paint or play in the way that suits their purpose and/or mood, literacy learning and arts learning will inform and support each other.

3. Intentional, holistic teaching. The holistic approach urges teachers to 'stop explaining' and avoid breaking all learning down into carefully staged bits and sequences. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the teacher has no role to play. On the contrary, a creative curriculum requires a creative teacher, who understands the creative processes, and purposefully supports learners in their experiences. Intentional teaching does not mean drill and rote learning and, indeed, endless rote learning exercises might indicate the very opposite of intentional teaching. What makes for intentional teaching is thoughtfulness and purpose, and this could occur in such activities as reading a story, adding a prop, drawing children's attention to a spider's web, and playing with rhythm and rhyme. Even the thoughtful and intentional imposing of constraints can lead to creativity.

4. Co-player, co-artist. 'Being' is a key concept that frames the new national Early Years Learning Framework for Australian children aged from birth to 5 years, and reminds educators of the importance of understanding children as current citizens, with capacities and capabilities in the here and now. Sometimes the only way for the teacher to know and appreciate children and what they know is to be

present and in conversation, interacting with the children as they draw. Teachers must try to avoid letting the busy management work of their days take precedence and distract them from the ‘being’.

A space for new actions and abilities seems to open when an artist works, as an artist, with children. When MacCrea (2013) shared her artist’s collection of found objects with very young children, she created a special interactivity with the children, where she and the children inspired each other, taking risks, trying out creative thinking, and together co-constructing meaning and relationship. When the teacher plays alongside the children in the sandpit, the creativity and learning dialectic enables the teacher to ‘nudge’, suggest, share thinking and judgments (“I’m going to try to make mine stand up on its own”). The message is that here is a place where it is OK to ‘muck around’, take risks, be wrong, try things out, loosen up—for the children and for the teacher.

These four ‘nudges’ are proposed as possibilities for bringing together many of the fundamental issues discussed above. In particular, they are nudges for teachers to make deliberate connections with children’s first literacies of art and play. With these four points in mind, teachers can plan a curriculum that supports all children’s learning. Such approaches actively encourage the creative, constructive thinking involved in meaning making through these modes, which are fundamental to the parallel development of the second-order symbol systems of reading, writing and numbering. Such symbol making is the essence of being human. In children’s art and play, their symbol use captures their sensory modes in emotional and embodied ways, as children know their worlds and their place. Such embodied experience through action is a form of intelligence that underpins all other forms of reasoning. To deny this form of reasoning is to deny children their first language and to underestimate them intellectually.

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