ORIGINAL PAPER

Transition to school: children's perspectives of the literacy experiences on offer as they move from pre-school to the first year of formal schooling

Lynette Patricia Cronin[1] · Lisa Kervin[1] · Jessica Mantei[1]

Abstract

The importance of children experiencing a successful transition to school is well established in research literature. Central to this is including the children themselves in the conversation about their learning and ensuring they develop a sense of fit and belonging to their new school environment. The findings shared in this paper sit within a larger study of examining children's perspectives of their literacy experiences at the time of transition to school. This paper reports the perspectives of two children, firstly in their pre-school (prior-to-school) setting and then again in their Kindergarten setting (the first year of formal primary schooling in New South Wales). The study draws on the theories of literacy as a social practice and describes literacy as events and practices. Digital storytelling was used as the main data collection method to capture the children's voices as they annotate images, describing their chosen literacy events in each educational setting. Findings revealed that whilst some children have a confident and successful initiation into the literacy events and practices of school, others may not. Herein are substantial messages, firstly, that we need to listen to children so we can support their transition to formal school and secondly that teachers need to better understand the literacy practices of children in pre-school to more effectively support them as they transition to Kindergarten.

Keywords Early years · Transition to school · Children's perspectives · Literacy events · Literacy practices

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✉ Lynette Patricia Cronin
  lcronin@uow.edu.au

[1] Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

1 Introduction

Throughout the past several decades much has been learned about the importance of children experiencing a successful transition to school for long-term positive, social and educational outcomes (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dockett et al., 2014; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Turunen, 2014). More recently, transition to school research highlights the importance of including children's perspectives (Ahtola et al., 2011; Dockett et al., 2014; Margetts, 2014; Murray, 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Staff (OECD), 2017). Children's feelings, opinions and concerns about starting school (Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2007), their social skills (Danby et al., 2012; Harrison & Murray, 2015) and their self-regulation strategies (Booth et al., 2019) have been reported on. However, less is known about children's perspectives on the literacy events they engage with as they move from pre-school settings into Kindergarten (the first year of formal primary schooling in New South Wales). This paper reports on the literacy opportunities available to two children in their pre-school setting and then again in the first few months of Kindergarten, and their perspectives on the literacy events they engaged with as they transitioned from one educational setting to another. Three questions guided the research:

1. What literacy opportunities are available for children in the pre-school and Kindergarten settings?
2. How do children view the literacy opportunities available to them in the pre-school and Kindergarten settings?
3. What are the implications for transition as children move from one setting to another?

The educational significance of transition to school is a potential bridge between two different curricula approaches (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Pre-school educators and school teachers plan literacy learning experiences within the context of their respective curriculum frameworks and whilst it is well established that continuity of learning is an important factor in children's successful transition from pre-school to Kindergarten, we do not know enough about children's perspectives of their experiences at that time. In this paper, continuity is understood as "experiences and learning that build on what has gone before" (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017, p. 33). This suggests the importance of finding out about the experiences children have had and ways to address coherence of experience for children at the time of transition to school. Literacy experiences across educational settings at the significant time of transition should allow children to feel confident and flourish as valued individuals (Murray, 2015). However, as the change in the curriculum and pedagogy from pre-school to primary school is distinct, children may experience discontinuities in their literacy learning and with an absence of bridging between the experiences in the two phases of education, children are at risk of making an abrupt transition to formal schooling (Dockett et al., 2014; Fisher, 2009).

If the learning experiences on offer in the new school setting are familiar, children are more likely to feel confident and successful, but if the learning experiences are unfamiliar then children may feel uncertain about their ability to participate effectively in those learning experiences (Dockett et al., 2014). Children's views are particularly valuable in understanding how they experience the literacy learning on offer and how they position themselves as confident, competent learners or otherwise in their new school setting. Children's experiences with literacy in the first weeks and months of Kindergarten have the potential to impact the success or otherwise of their broader transition into primary school (Turunen, 2014).

2 Literature review

Literacy experiences in pre-school are traditionally play-based and are planned by educators with the interests of the children in mind. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) guides Australian pre-school educators' planning decisions in early years settings. Within this framework, educators are encouraged to plan experiences for children to actively construct their own learning in the context of play, building on experiences with language and literacy from their families and communities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Defined in the EYLF, "literacy incorporates a range of modes including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, reading, viewing and writing" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 38).

Literacy experiences in the primary school are guided by the nationally mandated Australian Curriculum (AC) (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2019) for students from Foundation (the first year of formal school) until their completion of Year 12. This curriculum framework reportedly has been designed to connect with the EYLF and to acknowledge, value and build on the diverse learning experiences children bring with them to school. The English strand of the Australian Curriculum focuses on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking and writing. However, during English teaching sessions, the learning is often compartmentalised and development of reading and writing skills is prioritised in the early years of primary school (New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), 2017).

One example of a compartmentalised approach to learning in use at the time of this study is the Language, Learning and Literacy in the Early Years (L3) Program (NSW DEC, 2009). The program introduced in the first year of formal school advocates explicit and systematic instruction based on assessment data to target reading and writing learning. In English sessions, children are taught in small groups of three students with short, explicit lessons in the "engine room". The engine room is the name given to the area where the small group teaching takes place. Teachers organise the classroom environment in ways that provide students with opportunities to work alone, interact with peers, or participate in small groups, whilst the teacher is in the engine room. These literacy activities are independent of the teacher and are classified as "choice" and "must-do" activities.

2.1 Literacy and transition

Research confirms that continuity of curricula from pre-school to school settings has a positive impact on children's learning, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy (Ahtola et al., 2011; MacKenzie, 2014). However, despite Australian Government intentions to align the EYLF and the AC, pre-school educators and Kindergarten teachers have differing approaches to pedagogy and what is expected of the children as they interpret curriculum frameworks (Ahtola et al., 2011; Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Brundett 2015). The pre-school educational context emphasises play and more child-centred methods, whereas literacy in school trends traditionally towards more formal and academically orientated instruction, with a teacher-directed focus and practice (Hännikäinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Wohlwend, 2010). This may not be evident in all Kindergarten settings; however, in New South Wales, the setting for this current study, curriculum documents points towards instruction that is explicit and direct for teaching literacy skills and understandings in the early years of school (NSW DEC, 2011). Additionally, the reduction in opportunities for children to direct

their own learning and learn through play in school means that children may experience feelings of disconnection from the learning in their new environment (Dyson, 2018; Nicholson, 2019).

To avoid an abrupt start to literacy learning in Kindergarten, transition planning needs to take into account ways to address coherence in children's experiences and support for the inevitable changes (Boyle et al., 2018). Paying attention to children's voices, this study explores literacy events/practices that support continuity and discontinuity across the transition period and implications for educators and teachers working to support smooth transitions for children.

2.2 Gaining children's perspectives through digital storytelling

Digital storytelling was used as the main data collection method in this study to capture the children's voices as they annotated images of their chosen literacy events in both pre-school and Kindergarten. Digital stories are "short, personal multimedia presentations created through the capture of image (still and/or video), which the creator then edits on a computer with video editing software to include a spoken narrative" (Kervin & Mantei, 2015, p. 1). Digital storytelling can be a powerful communication tool that blends elements of traditional story-telling, oral language and gestures with new technologies (Meadows, 2003). It is used throughout the education sector to create media rich stories as self-representations of their creators (Kulla-Abbott & Polman, 2008) and research reports that digital storytelling can enhance learning in early childhood settings (Yuksel-Arslan et al., 2016). Kervin and Mantei (2015) used digital storytelling in an early childhood setting to gain insight into the ways children experience their pre-school setting. In their study, the children were asked what they liked to do in the pre-school and with the help of the researchers, they created digital stories that represented the children's perspectives on their lives in their early childhood community.

3 The study design

This qualitative case study was conducted in two distinct phases across the initial school transition period. Phase 1 was conducted in the preschool setting and phase 2 was conducted in the school setting. Participants included seven children (in the larger study) who the researcher followed across the transition period. From the larger study, two children (Maddy and Ivory) were chosen to be presented as cases in this paper because of the different ways they participated in the literacy events in both educational settings, and what they had to say about their experiences. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used in choosing the two partici-pants to show interesting variation of the case data. An overview of the research phases and participants reported on in the larger study is provided in Fig. 1.

Following ethics approval and informed consent from the pre-school service directors, children in their final term who were transitioning to the same local primary school the following year were identified and informed consent was obtained from parents. The children were also invited to give verbal consent to participate and at regular intervals the researcher checked in with the child's willingness to continue. If the child was reluctant to engage with the researcher at any point in the data collection, the researcher would respectfully move away and attempted to reengage with the child at another time. The teachers (4) across three Kindergarten classrooms also consented to participate.
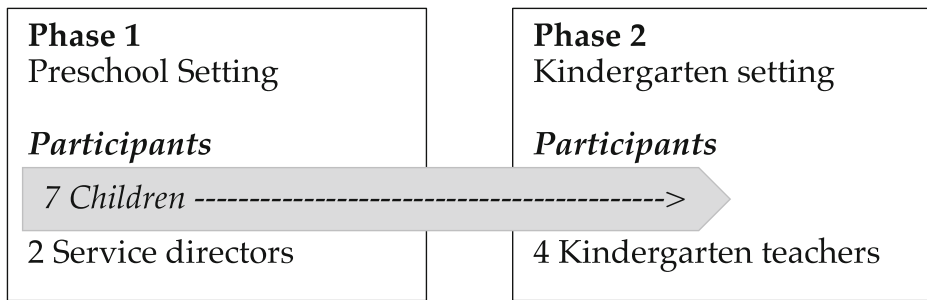
Phase 1 Preschool Setting	Phase 2 Kindergarten setting
Participants	*Participants*
7 Children --->	
2 Service directors	4 Kindergarten teachers

Fig. 1 Research phases

3.1 Phase 1

Phase 1 was conducted across five visits in the preschool setting. Data were collected in the form of observations using field notes, audio recordings and photographs. Unstructured interviews and conversations with children were interwoven during observations as open-ended questions were asked, such as "I noticed that you are ... can you tell me about that?" Following initial observations, focus group interviews with the service directors and child participants occurred and then subsequent digital story making.

The focus group interview framed the task of creating a digital story for children by giving them an example of what they were working towards (a digital story) and a literacy lens to view the various activities in which they participated. A sample digital story was created to (i) provide a model and (ii) act as a stimulus for discussion in the focus group interviews. It consisted of images of participants during literacy events. The oral annotation, spoken by the researcher described each image as the way children used "words" in the pre-school centre. For example, accompanying an image of the children sitting together drawing pictures the researcher recorded the words "we use words when we talk about the pictures we are creating." During the focus group, the children were posed the question "how do *you* use words in preschool?" After viewing the sample digital story, the children were invited to share how they used words in the experiences they enjoyed in the centre.

3.1.1 Digital story creation

Based on Mantei and Kervin's (2010) data collection method, the children in this study created individual digital stories to identify and describe the literacy events they enjoyed, within their learning environments. The children's perspectives were seen through multiple modes of meaning (images and language) used in the digital stories to provide avenues for their ideas, opinions and feelings to be expressed through story and digital media (Centre for Digital Storytelling, n.d; Mantei & Kervin, 2010). Children chose, directed and posed for photographs of themselves participating in their favoured literacy events (taken by the researcher using her iPhone camera, downloaded to a secure laptop and immediately deleted from the iPhone). Each child was then helped to sequence their images, and to record an oral script in connection with earlier conversations, using the images to stimulate their recall and bring the modes together using iMovie. This process is outlined below:

1. capturing up to 10 images of "literacy" events in their setting (photographs directed by the child)
2. downloading these on the computer into iMovie and ordering the images (with the child)
3. recording an oral script for each image (with the child)
4. exporting a final product as a QuickTime movie.

Certain limitations are acknowledged in using digital storytelling with young children. Firstly, the use of the technology to create the digital story required adult support. This meant that some children were initially reserved in their talk with the researcher as a new person in their setting and the oral annotations the children assigned to the images were in some cases brief. Additionally, the time taken for this process meant that some children were unable to sustain attention and the process was required to be done over two sessions. A quiet space was also required to create the digital story with each child. This proved challenging in both educational settings; however, spaces were found that were observable from the main teaching areas but sufficiently private for the children not to become distracted.

3.1.2 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews are beneficial when the interactions among the interviewees are likely to generate useful discussion and when the participants may be less inclined to offer information individually (Creswell, 2007). This is especially true for young children whose social interactions and language skills may be somewhat limited (Greene & Hogan, 2005). In this study, the children's young age and with the researcher being relatively unknown to the children were factors in the decision to conduct focus group interviews. Therefore, this study made use of stimulus to engage the children in conversation. There is a danger in small focus groups that the views of the children may become parallel (Greene & Hogan, 2005); however, every effort was made to listen carefully and value each child's contribution, ensuring there was equity in sharing the conversation.

3.2 Phase 2

Phase 2 was conducted across six visits in the school setting during the English session of the Kindergarten classrooms. Data were collected as in phase 1 in the form of observations using field notes, audio recordings and photographs. Unstructured interviews and conversations with children were interwoven during observations as open-ended questions were asked, inviting the children to talk about and show the literacy events they enjoyed participating in during the English session. Following initial classroom data collection, focus group interviews with the teachers and child participants occurred and then subsequent digital story making.

Photographs taken of the children participating in literacy events during the initial observations were used as a stimulus for the focus group discussion. The aim was to capture the children's reactions to their change in setting, and their perspectives on the literacy events available to them. The pre-school educators and parents were identified as a potential audience for their stories.

3.3 Theoretical framework

This study draws on the theories of literacy as a social practice and describes literacy as events and practices. Seminal research from Heath (1983), Gee (1996) and Street (2014) found that literacy skills cannot be divorced from social contexts and are in fact particular constructs, rooted in the ideologies and social and cultural contexts of homes and communities. Heath (1983) used the term "literacy events" to describe those experiences that can be observed in social activities, in particular contexts, mediated by texts for particular purposes. Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 9) added to Heath's description, and defined literacy events as those that are "observable, regular and repeated, and mediated by written text". A related concept, literacy practices are the broad notions of knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes that cannot be observed but underpin literacy events

and may be inferred from the observed literacy events (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). In this study, literacy events and practices provide a lens through which to view how children engage with the literacy events on offer, and what these events mean to children in the different social contexts of pre-school settings and formal school settings.

3.4 Data analysis

The literacy opportunities available to children within the boundaries of their educational contexts were explored and analysed using a conception of literacy as comprising particular events that are observable, regular, often repeated and mediated by some form of text (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Within the context of this framework, literacy events were identified in all data sources and findings were extrapolated in connection with the perspectives of the children as participants, the events they chose, what they said about those events and the implications for the children as literacy learners as they transitioned from one educational context to another. Data tables were created to connect the observed literacy events to the teaching programs in each setting and relevant syllabus documents, the EYLF Outcome 5 (pertaining to literacy development) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) for pre-school and to the Australian Curriculum English (ACARA, 2019) content, from the NSW English Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum (NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), 2019). These data informed the range of literacy opportunities available to the children that were observed across both sites. Focus group interview transcripts and field notes were carefully organised and codes assigned to reflect the purpose of the study and in relation to the research questions (Merriam, 1998).

Each scene of the digital stories was analysed to understand the nature of the literacy event from the child's perspective and themes were recorded as they emerged in relation to the research questions. The researcher was interested in what literacy event each child chose to be included, what the connection was between the chosen image and the child's assigned oral script, and how each child's description provided insight into their perception of themselves as a literacy learner. See Fig. 2 as an example of Maddy's pre-school digital story analysis.
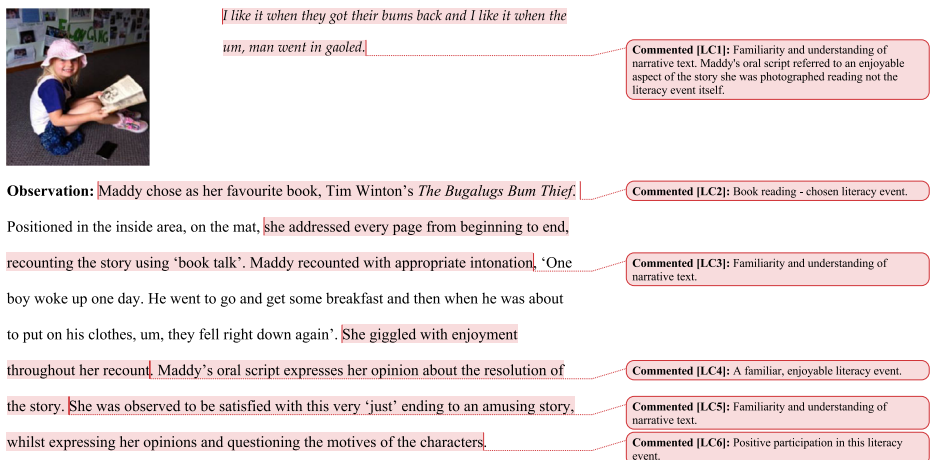

I like it when they got their bums back and I like it when the um, man went in gaoled.

Commented [LC1]: Familiarity and understanding of narrative text. Maddy's oral script referred to an enjoyable aspect of the story she was photographed reading not the literacy event itself.

Observation: Maddy chose as her favourite book, Tim Winton's *The Bugalugs Bum Thief.*

Commented [LC2]: Book reading - chosen literacy event.

Positioned in the inside area, on the mat, she addressed every page from beginning to end, recounting the story using 'book talk'. Maddy recounted with appropriate intonation, 'One

Commented [LC3]: Familiarity and understanding of narrative text.

boy woke up one day. He went to go and get some breakfast and then when he was about to put on his clothes, um, they fell right down again'. She giggled with enjoyment throughout her recount. Maddy's oral script expresses her opinion about the resolution of

Commented [LC4]: A familiar, enjoyable literacy event.

the story. She was observed to be satisfied with this very 'just' ending to an amusing story,

Commented [LC5]: Familiarity and understanding of narrative text.

whilst expressing her opinions and questioning the motives of the characters.

Commented [LC6]: Positive participation in this literacy event.

Fig. 2 Maddy retelling the *Bugalugs Bum Thief*

Analysis of the digital story transcripts provided insights into the ways children participated in each literacy event and how they understood the literacy opportunities available to them. The links from these images to the aural texts in which the children's voices were heard provided a deeper level of meaning making. Consequently, the digital stories provided a deeper understanding of the children's perspectives of each literacy event and a deeper level of analysis for the researcher (Haggerty, 2011).

4 Findings

The study aimed to explore the literacy opportunities available to two children (Maddy and Ivory) in their pre-school setting and then again in the first few months of Kindergarten. Of interest were the children's perspectives on the literacy events to understand how they participated in both familiar and unfamiliar literacy events at the significant time of transition. Digital storytelling as the main data source, along with observations documented as field notes and photographs, and focus group interviews were collected in each setting. Findings demonstrate that as children transition to Kindergarten, if the literacy events on offer are familiar, they appear comfortable to participate. Likewise, understanding the rules and routines around unfamiliar literacy events support children to feel confident to participate. The findings are presented as literacy events identified by Maddy and Ivory in their digital stories, and their perspectives on the literacy events identified in the analysis of their digital stories for each phase of the study.

In both educational settings, Maddy and Ivory had access to the same literacy opportunities; however, the literacy events they chose to share in their digital stories for both settings were distinct. In pre-school, they were free to choose from the literacy events provided by the educators across the indoor and outdoor areas. In Kindergarten, they experienced a combination of teacher-directed literacy events and those provided by the teacher to choose from within the English session under the mandated L3 program (NSW DEC, 2009). The children referred to themselves in the oral scripts recorded as part of their digital stories. This meant that the use of pseudonyms in reporting this paper would be ineffectual. Parental permission was sought and granted use of the children's names for reporting the findings in journals and conference presentations. The intention of this section is to build a description of each case, that is each child's literacy events and perspectives in the pre-school setting and then to follow with a thematic approach in discussing each child's chosen literacy events as they transitioned to the first year of school.

4.1 Phase 1: Pre-school literacy events

Maddy was five years of age and was the youngest of three siblings. She was observed as a participant five times during the phase 1 data collection period and chose eight separate literacy events to create her digital story. Ivory, also five, lived on a small acreage of land with her parents, two older siblings and one younger sibling. Data collection revealed Ivory had a keen interest in the natural environment and creative pursuits that resonated with family experiences and life on the family property. Ivory chose nine separate literacy events to create her digital story. Table 1 presents an overview of Maddy and Ivory's chosen literacy events and associated text modes captured in their pre-school digital story.

Table 1 Literacy practices in the pre-school setting

Literacy event	Maddy	Ivory
Visual and 3D text creation	• Creating a playdoh gingerbread man and reciting the rhythmic story • Painting, gluing, and glittering a paper plate	• Drawing people • Painting people running in a sun shower • Drawing a bird, colouring and glittering • Painting a monster • Making a playdoh butterfly • Painting a butterfly
Story book reading Make believe play Song and dance	• Retelling the Bugalugs Bum Thief	• Christmas picture book browsing • Making cakes in the sandpit • Singing and dancing to her favourite song Madame Zelda
Oral text creation	• Retelling the *Three Little* Pigs on a felt board • Conversation with an educator whilst washing the trucks • Talking about friends whilst on the playground • Talking about healthy foods whilst having morning tea	
Written and visual text creation	• Drawing Rapunzel and an accompanying story about Rapunzel	

Maddy and Ivory described the literacy events they enjoyed in pre-school using a simple and familiar language structure "I like" to begin most of the oral annotations assigned to the images, evidence that their choice of literacy events was motivated by familiarity and enjoyment. Maddy's chosen literacy events included her creation of oral texts and connection to stories using written, visual, aural and tactile modes. However, Ivory's chosen literacy events revealed her preference for independently creating personal texts that expressed ideas and meaning mainly through visual and tactile modes, using a range of media: paint, pencils, sand, play dough, craft materials and movement.

4.1.1 Maddy

Most evident from Maddy's choice of literacy events was her love of *story* and how she made connections to familiar stories across a range of different text modes. Maddy referred to stories she had heard or viewed in four of the eight annotated images in her digital story. For example, she described her favourite book, a Tim Winton novel The Bugalugs Bum Thief. Maddy's enjoyment and familiarity with the text was apparent in the intonation and expression in her voice as she recounted the story, expressing her opinions and using book language to evaluate characters (see Fig. 3).

Maddy's connection to familiar stories was evident when she retold the story of The Three Little Pigs whilst moving felt pieces around the board. She described it as "so you put stuff on here to make a rhyme". Maddy also experimented with written text to accompany a drawing of another familiar story, Rapunzel. As she drew Rapunzel, the witch and the prince, she explained "and then I draw a prince inside it because who's going to save her?" Once again, Maddy demonstrated her understanding and enjoyment of narrative text.

Maddy appeared confident and independent in choosing and self-directing the creation of a variety of texts. For example, she carefully described the process of creating a three-

Fig. 3 Maddy retelling the *Bugalugs Bum Thief*

dimensional text "I like doing the painting. I like doing glue and putting on tissue paper and putting more glue on and then I will put the glitter on the top". Maddy's strong oral language and ability to confidently converse with peers and adults was demonstrated in several literacy events. Whilst sitting at the morning tea table, she explained to an educator and the other children " I like eating healthy food and I like drinking milk to make my arms strong and I like saying may can I leave the table". Also, in helping Bec (an educator) wash the trucks, Maddy was observed to be confident engaging in extended dialogue, in this social literacy event.

4.1.2 Ivory

Most evident from Ivory's choice of literacy events was her love of creating visual texts, particularly those that represented the natural environments. Six of the nine events she chose to include in her digital story were of her creating visual and three-dimensional texts. Ivory appeared confident and independent in choosing and self-directing the creation of these texts. For example, Ivory confidently described what she had painted, "I like to paint pictures and do a sun and a person and making the person run and trees and a sun shower" (see Fig. 4).

In another example keeping with the nature theme, Ivory created butterflies from play dough exclaiming "I like to paint. I like to do butterflies with play dough" Here, she silently focused on her creation, demonstrating visual perception skills, again revealing her interest in nature and her ability and enthusiasm for creating artistically.

In other literacy events, Ivory chose a Christmas picture book, scanning the pictures but making no comment on, or reference to, the story. She made "cakes" in the sandpit

Fig. 4 Ivory painting people running in a sun shower

where she engaged in conversation with friends, negotiating the construction and sale of the cakes. Ivory spoke of her enjoyment of music and dance when she explained "my favourite song is Madame Zelda and I like to sing, um, Madame Zelda and I like to dance to it". Ivory's choice of literacy events revealed her to be drawn to creating personal visual texts and artefacts and enjoy a range of different literacy events in play. Other than writing her name, Ivory showed minimal interest in creating written text with her preferred text mode being visual.

4.2 Phase 2: Transitioning into the literacy practices of school

Maddy and Ivory transitioned from pre-school where they were able to make choices about participation in a range of literacy events on offer and decisions about the product and process of their personal text creations, to their new Kindergarten setting that offered a more structured routine of both familiar and unfamiliar literacy events. Both children chose eight literacy events to share in their school digital story (see Table 2).

Table 2 Literacy practices in the Kindergarten setting

Literacy event example	Maddy	Ivory
Independent story book reading	Reading *Possum goes to School* (choice activity)	Reading her home reader (choice activity)
Teacher-directed written text creations	Guided writing of a short sentence with the teacher	Teacher-directed writing of the fete story and drawing a picture
Teacher-directed visual text creations	Colouring a watermelon stencil pink (must do)	Painting a self-portrait for Grandparents' Day (must do)
	Teacher-directed painting and decorating using magazine cut outs (must do)	Teacher-directed drawing of Hairy Maclary (must do)
Encoding and decoding written texts	Matching letters to pictures (choice activity)	Making the word "am" with magnetic letters and writing the word on a whiteboard (must do)
	Drawing pictures that begin with the letter p (must do)	Guided reading with a small group in the engine room (must do)
	Word writing on a mini whiteboard (must do)	
Physical play	On the playground equipment talking about the rules (choice activity)	
Colouring activity		Tracing her hand and colouring (must do)
		Rainbow fish stencil (choice activity)

4.2.1 Familiar literacy events with a different purpose

Like pre-school, the sharing of stories was a regular literacy practice in Kindergarten and provided continuity of experience for the children. The interest Maddy demonstrated with story in pre-school continued albeit with a new focus. Maddy was observed enjoying picture books with friends and during the literacy event, she described what was happening in the book and the funny antics the possum character was up to; however, in annotating the image for her digital story, she began by saying that books are for learning new words (see Fig. 5). It was apparent Maddy was

Fig. 5 Maddy reading *Possum goes to School* (choice activity)

Fig. 6 Painting a self-portrait for Grandparents' Day (must do)

beginning to appropriate the discourse of school and learning was now a focus for literacy events.

For Maddy, the enjoyment of stories, whilst still apparent, appeared now to be a secondary feature of books. The purpose of the literacy events as the need to *learn* featured in three other scenes of Maddy's digital story. In the phonics activity she explained "this is a must-do job, and you have to find the letter and match it with the picture. And you've got to learn". During guided reading, Maddy explained the need to learn saying "this is the engine room and the books help us to learn to read a lot", and again during word writing on the mini white board ".. if you just want to learn that word just write it on your board ...".

Ivory's school digital story showed that she was still drawn towards those creative literacy events she enjoyed in pre-school, signalling continuity of learning for Ivory. She expressed her love of painting and showcased this literacy event exclaiming "I painted a picture of me for Grans' Day. I love to paint pictures" (see Fig. 6).

4.2.2 New ways to participate

In Kindergarten, many familiar events were now teacher planned and directed rather than self-directed by the children. The visual texts Ivory chose to include in her digital story were teacher directed. In one literacy event, she explained the process "I did a circle and a tail and did some legs and did a circle and it was Hairy Maclary". Ivory described how she created an image of the main character (from Hairy Maclary by Lynley Dodd) (see Fig. 7). It was evident that Ivory enjoyed the teacher-directed experience and valued the opportunity to learn a new artistic skill. In other literacy events, Ivory described colouring a worksheet and tracing and colouring her hand. She was observed to be confident in creating these visual texts; however, there was no opportunity observed for Ivory to demonstrate her expertise with personal visual texts creations, as opportunities to create personal visual texts were offered only peripherally in this Kindergarten context.

Fig. 7 Ivory's teacher-directed drawing of Hairy Maclary (must do)

4.2.3 Rules around participation in literacy events

By adopting the language of school and knowing the rules and routines associated with the literacy events she participated in, Maddy demonstrated an understanding of the expectations of her new environment. The phrase "I like" used by Maddy in her pre-school digital story was now replaced largely by "you have to" with reference to the literacy events. She used stronger modality in her school digital story. In one example she stated "...you have to find the letter and match it with the picture. And you've got to learn". Maddy explained the rules of another literacy event saying "the watermelon has to be coloured in. But if it's still pink it will not *look* good when the meeting is on and you have to colour it..." In another literacy event, Maddy commented about adding her own touch to a visual text (clearly against the directions for the activity). She stated "... you had to decorate the first bit before you put on the magazine, 'cause then um, it won't look that pretty with just paint. ... I didn't want to take off the head. I just put on a new head". Understanding her new role as a learner supported Maddy's confidence within the new learning environment. She was at ease as she explained the rules and routines particular to different literacy events in Kindergarten.

4.2.4 Experiences with unfamiliar literacy events

Ivory's school digital story revealed the literacy events in Kindergarten required her to make meaning through experimentation and engagement with written symbols. Formal experiences with written text were unfamiliar for Ivory and this appeared to affect her confidence when participating. Usually a fluent speaker, when Ivory annotated the images about literacy events involving written texts in her digital story (four teacher-led encoding and decoding written text activities), her voice slowed and was quite staccato like. Ivory's tentative voice gave the impression she was not confident with these literacy events. When Ivory chose to read her home reader for her digital story (PM reading level 3 The Photo Book), she spoke tentatively about it with the same wavering voice, saying "I - Mrs Lead helps me read a reader. Then I take it home". Ivory chose to describe her participation in a similar event and again spoke of help from the teacher "I like to read in the engine room and Mrs Lead helps me. We write the words together". These findings were not surprising as

Ivory was not one to initiate literacy events that involved decoding and encoding of written texts in her pre-school setting and represented a discontinuity in learning for her.

Overall, the findings detail significant literacy events identified by Maddy and Ivory at both phases of the study. Drawing mainly on data from the children's digital stories, a comparison of continuity and discontinuity in literacy events occurred across phases. Importantly, these findings show how the children engaged with unfamiliar literacy events and navigated new ways of participating in familiar literacy.

5 Discussion

This paper is set out to explore the literacy opportunities available to two children (who were part of a larger study) in their pre-school setting and then again in the first few months of Kindergarten. Of interest were the children's perspectives on the literacy events they engaged with, to understand how they participated in both familiar and unfamiliar literacy events at the significant time of transition from pre-school to Kindergarten. As expected, literacy events featured similarities and differences across settings as educators and teachers enacted curriculum requirements of each context. Listening to what the children had to say about the literacy events in both educational settings revealed insight into the ways they experienced literacy learning and how that positioned them as learners when they moved into the new school environment.

Maddy and Ivory reflected positively on the literacy events they participated in, across both settings. With similar findings, Harrison and Murray (2015) concluded that most children reflect positively on their experiences in the first few months of transition to formal school. This is reported to be especially so when children have a good understanding of the rules, routines and expectations of the first year of school classroom (Booth et al., 2019). It is common for children to rely on their knowledge of school structures to feel confidence in the first few months of school (Einarsdóttir, 2002; Harrison & Murray, 2015; Margetts, 2014). Findings indicate that Maddy understood her new and different role as a learner and the constraints of the new learning environment, and this supported her confidence to engage in the new learning experiences.

Children's valued practices from pre-school are sought by them in the new school environment and adaptations are made according to new ways to participate (Dyson, 2018). Ivory expressed her enjoyment of creating visual texts in Kindergarten and Maddy continued to enjoy stories, albeit there were new ways to participate in these familiar literacy events. These familiar literacy events provide continuity of learning and experience that supports children's feelings of confidence and self-efficacy in the new learning environment (Ahtola et al., 2011; Boyle et al., 2018; MacKenzie, 2014).

Further to this, Dockett et al. (2014) reported that children will more likely feel successful and confident in their abilities if events are familiar to them. Findings suggested that this was true for Ivory, who was more tentative about engaging with unfamiliar literacy experiences and appeared to lack confidence during participation in new literacy events. Literacy events that are unfamiliar to children can lead to discontinuity at the time of transition causing children to be at risk of developing a frustrated and negative attitude towards school (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Research evidence emphasises that continuity of curricula impacts children's self-efficacy as learners especially in literacy (Ahtola et al., 2011; Boyle et al., 2018; MacKenzie, 2014).

However, findings also revealed that the opportunity to experience new ways of engaging in literacy events can also be a positive experience (Pramling & Williams Graneld, 1993). Rather than viewing the restricted choice of teacher direction and rules around the creation of texts as a negative

aspect of the school literacy event, Ivory spoke positively about following the teacher's directions when creating visual texts. In this instance, the literacy event provided Ivory with an opportunity to extend her knowledge and the data revealed that she took pleasure in learning new ways of creating texts. This finding is supported by Pramling and Williams Graneld (1993) who reported that the most valued aspect of beginning formal school for many children was the opportunity to learn new things.

However, less opportunities for children to direct their own experiences with texts in the school setting means that some children's literacy knowledge may not be recognised and valued in school settings (Dyson, 2018). In this Kindergarten class, it appeared that the value of self-directed visual texts was minimal in comparison to teacher-directed visual texts and the focus on written texts during the English session. One wonders if Ivory's confidence to participate in the new learning environment would have been supported if opportunity to demonstrate her literacy expertise in creating personal visual texts to communicate meaning was available. Mackenzie and Veresov (2013) argued that teachers often do not view the creation of visual texts as a valid way to communicate meaning. Further to this van Oers (2007) contended that when the texts children create have personal meaning to them, their literacy learning is enhanced.

The use of digital stories as the key data collection method provided a powerful means of self-expression and a clear vehicle to hear the voices of the children whose voices may be interpreted differently in other forms of data collection. Seeing the children in the context of the image and hearing their voices annotating the visual texts allowed for the capture of a broader scope of meaning (Haggerty, 2011). Whilst the oral script may in some cases have been limited, the conversations that were included during the literacy events, and the creation of the digital stories, added to the rich layer of data for each child in the process of digital story creation.

5.1 Limitations

With only two child participants and two educational settings, the outcomes of the study reported in this paper are not generalisable to the wider population. However, the small sample size enabled an in-depth, rich description to be built, as stories of these particular "cases" located within their specific educational settings were captured (Creswell, 2007). In this study, children's agency as experts in their own lives was recognised. From a developmental perspective (Piaget, 1959), some may consider the age and hence the probable vocabulary knowledge of the participants may have hindered their ability to articulate their responses verbally during the unstructured and focus group interviews. However, through triangulation of the data using observations and photographs in addition to child and educator focus group interviews, a fuller picture of the child participants' views was obtained.

Gaining the perspectives of children through talk alone can be difficult and may not represent their thoughts and opinions accurately. However, through digital storytelling, the children's voices can be heard uninterrupted as they describe their participation in literacy events in both their familiar and new educational settings. The inclusion of children from different pre-school educational contexts would allow for a greater variety of literacy events associated with their contexts and a more diverse set of findings may be possible.

6 Conclusion

The young children in this inquiry shared their preferences for the literacy events they engaged with in the pre-school and in the first year of formal school through digital storytelling. Insight was given into

the different ways they engaged in, and reported on, the literacy events on offer in these two different educational contexts. It is evident that there were both similar and different literacy events available for the children to engage with at the time of transition, and insight was obtained into how the children adapted to the new ways of participation in the more formal learning environment of school.

From the findings shared in this study, it is argued that children need time and support to become familiar and comfortable with the literacy learning experiences in the new school environment at the time of transitioning to school. This paper contends that teachers need to better understand the literacy practices of children in pre-school and plan time to find out about the children and the interests and expertise with literacy they bring with them to school. This knowledge will inform teacher planning for coherence of children's learning experiences and support for the inevitable changes of the more formalised school learning environment. This has implications for curriculum planners to make more explicit the pedagogical strategies for teachers that are needed for those critical weeks and months as children transition from pre-school settings to school to provide opportunities to build on children's experiences to support diverse pathways into school literacy practices.

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