Week 6 – Reflection

I have found Children’s Literature Studies to be an interesting and exciting unit so far and it has made me see literature in a whole new way and realise the large benefits it offers to children. In relation to my engagement in the unit, there are some things I will stop, start and keep doing in order to achieve the best results in this unit.

Stop:
In the on-campus tutorials, I feel that I need to stop allowing others to answer questions and contribute more to class and group discussions. Doing this will allow me to engage more in the content and contribute my ideas and opinions to my peers.

I also feel that I need to stop holding back when reading aloud. I need to become more confident when reading aloud. As reading aloud is a skill, I need to ensure that I practise it often to make sure I am achieving this. It is important to know what tone and enthusiasm a particular text is intended to be read with and it is essential that I understand how to do this.

Start:
When reading a book, I never really think about the visual or critical literacy that is present in the book. I think I need to start looking more deeply at books and realise that the author and illustrator have a purpose behind everything they do. It is important that I know what features are present in a book in order to use the right books to teach children the necessary skills and knowledge that they need.

I also need to start focusing on choosing quality children’s literature and begin exploring more recent literature. A lot of the books I have used in my blog entries have been books that I had when I was a child. It is important for me to start viewing more current literature rather than falling back on more familiar choices.
Week 5 – Critical Literacy

Critical literacy can be described in many ways. My understanding of critical literacy stems from the definitions written by Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday (2010). I understand critical literacy to be reading with an awareness of the purpose behind a text and the position it places the reader in. It is a type of “forensic science applied to literacy text” (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010, p.534).

Critical literacy is not about criticising a text, but rather about looking for signs and clues about the point of view of a text. A person who is critically literate would examine texts for signs or clues about the author’s attitudes (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). These clues include – word choice, choice of personal pronouns, description of place and if the text makes the reader want to do something, such as hold a particular belief, like or dislike a group of people or buy particular products (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). What an individual takes away from a text will vary from person to person. This depends on what attitudes are brought to the text and how these influence the reaction to the text (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). Authors make deliberate choices about how they present their text and they choose what will be seen by the reader or viewer as positively or negatively portrayed (Rowan, 2001).

Critical literacy includes visual literacy, the reading and understanding of a visual society and cultural literacy, the knowledge of the world and diverse ways of being (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). It is present in a number of different text forms. These include – visual, verbal, prose narrative, poem, picture book, speeches, film or drama (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). Critical literacy “pertains to discerning how texts are constructed and how they influence” (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010, p.535). It is also known as the “doing with the text” (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010, p.535).

John Marsden and Shaun Tan’s The Rabbits (1998) is an example of critical literacy. The story could be understood in different ways depending on what the reader brings to and takes away from the story. On one level, the story is about a large group of rabbits taking over another animal’s habitat. There is a small amount of text on each page and the illustrations play a large role in telling the story. The tone of the book forces the reader to read the book in a sad tone, which makes the reader feel anger towards the rabbits. It is evident that there is an intentional choice of words throughout the story. On another level, The Rabbits (1998) tells the story of colonisation from the perspective of the colonised and the effect man has on his environment. The author aims to promote cultural awareness and the illustrations reflect friendliness and curiousness, which eventually turns to darkness, anxiety and confusion.

References:
Visual elements are the “visual components of a text” (ACARA, n.d., English Glossary). These include – placement, salience, framing, representation of action or reaction, shot size, social distance and camera angle.

*Where the Wild Things Are*, written and illustrated by Maurice Sendak (1963), uses many visual features to add meaning to the story. These include – framing or cropping (shot size), line, angle and colour.

At the very beginning of the book, Sendak divides the two page spread into a page of text and a page with a picture. Framing and cropping is clearly evident in these beginning pages. These pictures are in the centre of the page and are cropped down. Throughout the book, the pictures begin to take up more and more of the page until it is fully covered. This element makes the pictures appear to grow with Max’s journey to where the wild things are.

The cropping also allows for the reader to focus on a direct point which prevents the reader from having to look at other elements. The text informs the reader of things that are cropped out of the picture. For example, Max’s mother calls him “WILD THING” (Sendak, 1963) but in the picture the reader only sees Max alone in his bedroom. Therefore, the reader assumes that his mother is in another part of the house. In the middle of the book, Sendak uses full page spreads of illustrations rather than including words. This is effective in showing the ‘wild rumpus’ and also shows a passing of time as the pictures change from night to day and then back to night. The illustrations in this section offer the reader enough information to not need words to explain what the characters are doing.

Sendak uses lines in each illustration of the book. The lines shown suggest direction and show movement. This element shows that there is action and movement within the illustration and lead the eyes towards this. For example, on the first page, much of the background behind Max is lined but there are very few lines used on the white parts of Max’s ‘wolf suit’. This draws the eye towards Max because he stands out from the rest of the picture. The lines in the book are also used to show shadowing, which adds depth and reality to the pictures.
The angle of the illustrations varies throughout the book. The angles in this book are used to show height and enable the reader to gain a sense of power, position, vulnerability, movement, direction and emotion. When Max first sees the ‘wild things’ he is shown to be looking up at them. This indicates to the reader that Max has a lack of power and the wild things are the dominant characters. Once Max tames the wild things with a magic trick the illustrations show the wild things sitting down, which shows Max has become the more dominant character.

The colours Sendak has chosen to use throughout the book change as the story unfolds. The colours indicate the time of day that the events take place in the story. They are effective in indicating the passing of time to the reader.

References:


All photographs taken by Penelope Izard.

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**Week 3 – Language Features**

Language features are “the features of language that support meaning” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), n.d., Glossary). Language features are used to define a text and shape its meaning and they vary depending on the purpose of the text, its subject matter, audience and mode or medium of production (ACARA, n.d.).

Slinky Malinki, Open the Doorby Lynley Dodd (1995) uses many language features. These include: repetition, rhyme, onomatopoeia, imagery, ellipses, verbs and punctuation. I have chosen to discuss repetition, rhyme and verbs.

There is obvious repetition used throughout the book. Repetition can be useful in engaging and involving children in the book. Once the child becomes familiar with the repeated section, they can join in and read the book with the teacher. The repetition in Slinky Malinki is shown in the example below:
"Slinky Malinki jumped high off the floor, he swung on a handle and opened a door." (Dodd, 1995, p.6,10,14,18,22)

This example is present six times throughout the book, which definitely enables enough time for children to become familiar with it and join in before the end of the book. The word ‘then’ is also repeated several times in capitals to follow on to the next page. The capitalisation of the word makes it more dramatic and following the word with an ellipsis (…) indicates an unfinished thought. The ellipsis adds to the dramatic feel throughout the story and further engages the reader as they are interested to find out what the characters got up to next.

There is a clear rhyming pattern used throughout Slinky Malinki (Dodd, 1995) that creates rhythm when reading the story. The rhyming varies on particular pages of the book but generally the 2nd line rhymes with the 4th or 5th line. An example of this is:

“They crept up on cushions and vases of flowers, they battled with curtains for hours and hours.
THEN …” (Dodd, 1995, p.20)

In this example, flower on the 2nd line rhymes with hours on the 4th and 5th line. Rhyming is important in children’s literature to help children develop their phonological awareness and this book is filled with fun rhymes that children can identify (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010).

Verbs play a large part in this book. The verbs used in this book could extend a child’s vocabulary as some are less commonly used in everyday language. Extending a child’s vocabulary is important as it offers them a better understanding of different words, therefore giving them more to use themselves in conversation or writing. Examples of these are: shredded, fought, jumped, swung, opened, tangled, hung, paddled, slid, tipped, rolled, bowled, tattered, battered, scattered, crept, battled, stirred, knocked, scratch and rustle. This book would be good for a lesson on verbs as they are present on a regular basis.

Slinky Malinki, Open the Door by Lynley Dodd (1995) offers many language features for children to develop their language. The language features used in the book enhance the story and engage the reader with the suspense of what the characters will get up to next.

References:


Children's literature is fundamental in the early literacy development of children. It was found that children who are read to from an early age are more likely to become early readers and better develop their literacy development (Hill, 2006). Reading aloud to children offers opportunity to model correct reading techniques and proper pronunciation of unfamiliar words. Children's literature is a “vital part of a lifelong participation and life enriching engagement in literature” (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010, p.466).

Where is the Green Sheep? by Mem Fox and Judy Horacek (2004) and Hairy Maclary’s Rumpus at the Vet by Lynley Dodd (2011) are two books that I believe would aid a child’s language development.

Where is the Green Sheep? (Fox, 2004) encompasses the use of rhyming and fun repetition, which are two techniques that can improve a child’s language development. Identifying rhyming is an important step for children in developing their phonological awareness and it allows them to play around with the words and create rhythm. Reading this book aloud to children would enable them to identify the rhyme and rhythm in the story that they may not pick up if they were reading the book themselves. The repetitive question of “Where is the Green Sheep?” allows children to recognise the phrase and join in which further engages them in the story. Where is the Green Sheep? (Fox, 2004) also uses opposites such as up/down, thin/wide, scared/brave, near/far, sun/rain and these are shown in the illustrations which enables the child to see the differences in the opposing pictures. There are also a range of coloured sheep which develops a child’s ability to match words with the colours shown in the book.

Hairy Maclary’s Rumpus at the Vet (Dodd, 2011) also uses a large amount of rhyming. If a range of Hairy Maclary books were being used, children would see repetition from story to story from the animals featured in the book, such as ‘Hairy Maclary from Donaldson’s Dairy’ and ‘Muffin McLay’. The book also features some words that may be unfamiliar to children such as cantankerous, troublesome, tweak, bottlebrush, Poppadum, scampered and kerfuffle. These words are words that children would not see very often and offer opportunities for children to increase their vocabulary and comprehension. Reading this story aloud to children would enable them to understand pronunciation of unfamiliar words. The vibrant illustrations offer the opportunity for children to also develop their visual literacy and add meaning to the words on the page.

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