Text and Authorship
Author(s): David Wray
Source: *The Reading Teacher,* Vol. 48, No. 1 (Sep., 1994), pp. 52-57
Published by: International Literacy Association and Wiley
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20201364
Accessed: 13-04-2020 11:06 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

Wiley, International Literacy Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Reading Teacher*

This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

David Wray

Text and authorship

Authorship, in the sense of creation and re-creation of meaning, should be a central focus in any model of literacy instruction.

What sticks in our minds about our experiences of learning to read and write? To explore this question, I asked a group of British teacher education students to write about their first encounters with reading and writing. Some of their accounts concentrated upon reading:

> I don't remember much about reading in the infants school. I think we used Peter and Jane. I remember getting very excited when I brought my first book home from the library. It was the story of Peter Rabbit and my Mum had already read it to me at home. I insisted on reading it to Mum, Dad, and my older brother that night before I would go to bed. I've still got a copy of that book, although the original fell apart through being read so much.

> I learnt to read by reading the instructions for my Meccano set. I wanted to build a crane and there was nobody to help me. I remember struggling with the instruction booklet until I managed to figure it out.

Others concentrated upon writing:

> I wrote a book when I was 6. It was all about dinosaurs. We had been watching a television series at school and after each programme we had to copy out some notes from the blackboard. I decided to write about the programmes in my own words at home. My mother still has the book although it's a bit dog-eared now.

> We used to write stories at school. I liked to write about ghosts and monsters. I remember my teacher telling me that one of my stories was "really gruesome" and I pretended to know what she meant. I got my Mum to help me find that word in the dictionary when I got home and the next day I told the teacher I was going to write another "gruesome" story.

These students remembered the particular texts that they read or wrote. I believe text to be an important feature of early experiences with literacy with strong implications for models and practices of teaching literacy. The need to focus much more closely on the nature of the texts that children read and write has become clearer in the last few years, but in the process several tensions have emerged that have caused debate among teachers and researchers alike. Text is itself a topic for debate.

In this article I shall focus on the central place of text and authorship in a model of literacy instruction. I shall also review the major tension that has emerged from a focus on texts and suggest a concept that might operate as a unifying idea in the instructional model put forward. First, I shall examine the elements of what might be termed a "traditional" model of literacy development, before going on to discuss the place of text within this. Finally, I shall discuss the implications for classroom literacy instruction.

A three-part model for literacy development

Figure 1 represents a traditional three-part model for the development of literacy according to which the teacher teaches the child to read and write in a particular instructional context. Our understandings about each of the three corners of this triangle are now substantial.

Our knowledge about the child's corner is extensive. As a result of the shift in emphasis from study of the products of reading and

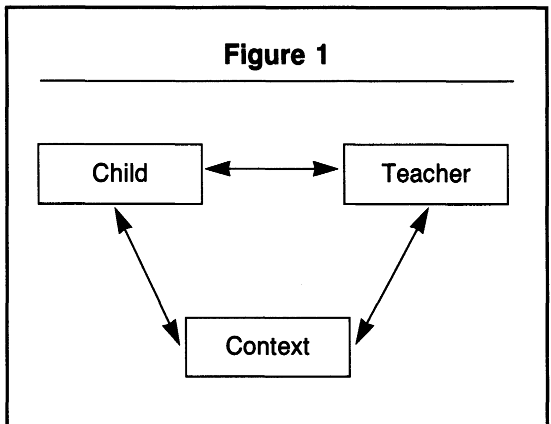
©1994 International Reading Association

This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

writing to study of their processes, we have some well-developed ideas about how children read and write and how they arrive at their understandings of these processes. A view of children as natural meaning-makers (Wells, 1988) now commands wide acceptance, and we have gained considerable insight into how this sense-seeking operates in the learning of literacy, especially in young children (Hall, 1987; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Above all, children are seen as active participants in their own learning, with views about their classroom experiences of which we need to take account.

The role of the teacher has also come under scrutiny, and there has been a discernible shift in emphasis from the teacher as an instructor to the teacher as facilitator, audience, model, and coparticipant. This shift has coincided with a characterisation of the learning process as the social construction of knowledge. The upshot of this change has been that more stress is now placed upon teaching as providing appropriate conditions for learning, which brings us to the role of context.

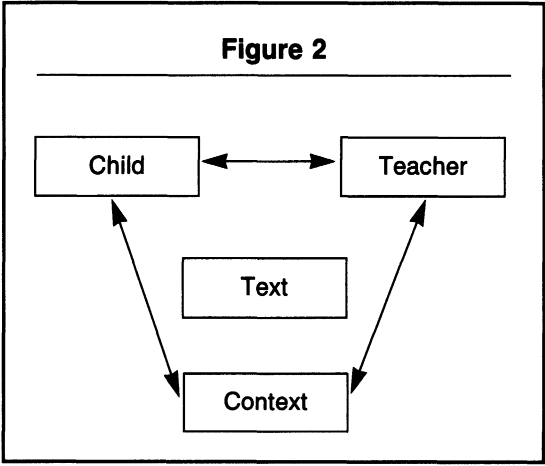
Of the three elements in this model, context (an environment for learning) has recently received the greatest emphasis. Stress has been placed upon providing demonstrations of literacy, upon creating an atmosphere in which children feel safe to learn through experimentation and get regular practice using literacy for real purposes, and upon the careful structuring of support for children's emergent literacy. The features of this environment for learning have been summed up as "conditions for learning" (Cambourne, 1988). Some teachers, however, have taken the message that all they need to do is create a suitable context and children will learn. The reality is that the business of teaching is not so simple, and it is likely that a suitable context is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the efficient learning of literacy. In any case, appropriate contexts are not so easily created. If context is perceived as subjective rather than objective reality (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Medwell, 1993), then there will be as many contexts in each classroom as there are children. Creating contexts will be dependent upon the individual perceptions of the participants in those contexts, which complicates the issue greatly.



The centrality of text

The model so far outlined neglects the role of the texts that are created and re-created in the process of becoming literate. As suggested earlier, text is at the very centre of this process, and Figure 2 locates it in the model. Children read and write texts, teachers teach reading and writing with and through texts, and texts provide a context for understanding, creating, and responding. The term *texts* here does not simply refer to sequences of printed symbols. A more elaborated view of text comes from literary theory (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978), which defines it as the product of the transaction between reader and printed symbols. Text is thus a construction rather than a given (Goodman, 1985). In this sense, text has often been denied the central role it merits in literacy teaching.

Literary theory also stresses the idea that such texts are never autonomous entities but are rather "intertextual constructs: sequences which have meaning in relation to other texts



This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

which they take up, cite, parody, refute, or generally transform" (Culler, 1981, p. 38). It would be possible to conceive of literacy development as being simply a matter of a progressive elaboration of textual and intertextual experience.

Attention to the nature and importance of text has come from two quite distinct directions of interest, which have at times seemed contradictory in their implications. One of these directions might be termed the structuralist approach, as it has involved the close analysis of the structure of texts from a linguistic perspective largely inspired by the work of Halliday. Chapman (1983a, 1987), drawing upon the framework of linguistic cohesion put forward by Halliday & Hasan (1976), has examined carefully the ways in which text is bound together and is not merely a string of discrete sentences or words. Chapman (1983b) has also investigated the degree to which young readers are aware of the range of cohesive ties present in texts and has found that the level of their awareness is a significant element in their development as readers. He suggests that there is a need to take this element of text firmly into account when planning effective teaching programmes.

Also drawing upon the work of Halliday (1978), a group of Australian researchers collectively known as "genre theorists" have looked closely at the ways in which text structures reflect a variety of social ways of making meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). The implication of this work is that, unless some attention is actually given to teaching children to operate effectively within the genre structures upon which society is based, children will be disenfranchised from large parts of wider social life (Christie, 1990; Martin, 1989).

The second direction from which interest in text has come might be termed the authenticist approach, as it has emphasized the importance of real texts, that is, texts written for authentic purposes (as opposed to mere instructional purposes such as basal reader texts). Several notable educationalists (e.g., Meek, 1988) have pointed out the ways in which authentic texts can teach readers many important lessons about reading. One of the major motivations underlying what has been termed in Britain the "real books movement" (closely linked with the whole language movement in the United States) has been the superiority of authentic texts to linguistically controlled basal (in Britain, reading scheme) texts. In writing, similarly, authenticity has loomed large. The process writing approach, inspired by the work of Graves (1983), has placed great emphasis upon children finding their own voices and composing texts which have real importance to them.

The structuralist and authenticist ways of looking at text have seemed to be in opposition to each other, occasionally spilling over into direct confrontation and unhelpful polarity (Bull & Anstey, 1991). Structuralist views have been caricatured as implying a return to the dry, direct teaching of textual features, thus reviving suspicions about the effectiveness and lack of child-centredness of grammar exercises. Authenticist approaches, on the other hand, have been caricatured as being structureless and giving no attention at all to the development of children's awareness of textual conventions. Both these criticisms rest upon misunderstandings and seem to be more an expression of the longstanding clash between traditional and progressive philosophies than of any serious attempt to come to terms with the differing perspectives.

In any case, the two positions do seem potentially to have much in common. In essence they are both concerned with children's responses to and production of real texts. The structuralists have continually emphasized that textual structures only make sense within a context of meaning.

> A functional approach to language does not advocate teaching about language by handing down prescriptive recipes. Rather it is concerned with providing information about the development of effective texts for particular purposes, and providing it at the point of need within the context of real, purposeful language use. (Derewianka, 1990, p. 5)

Both structuralists and authenticists, therefore, emphasize purpose and meaning in literacy development.

They are also both concerned with increasing children's control over their reception and production of texts. For "real books" and process-writing advocates the issue of children's choice is critical. Only by being allowed to make choices about what they

This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

read and write, they argue, can children develop the personal investment in the processes of literacy that is essential if they are to engage in real learning of these processes. For structuralists, children must develop control over the ways in which text is used for particular purposes in society. "To learn to recognise and create the various genres found in one's culture is to learn to exercise choices—choices in building and ordering different kinds of meaning and hence, potentially, choices in directing the course of one's life" (Christie, 1990, p. 3).

A unifying concept

I believe that authorship, in the sense of the creation and re-creation of meaning, is a concept which potentially links together the structuralist and authenticist perspectives. This idea has been at the heart of process approaches to writing for some time (Hall, 1989) and certainly meets the criteria that authenticists would maintain for literacy teaching. Children fully engaged in purposeful writing have been described as acting as "true authors," taking full ownership over the shape and content of what they write; such writing has been termed the "authentic expression of an individual's own ideas" (Moffett, 1981, p. 89). Authorship is also seen as important in reading, as real texts are produced by authors (rather than by committees as tends to be the case with basal readers). Literature-based approaches to teaching reading emphasise authors who are sometimes seen as the true teachers of reading, with the teacher's role being that of helping children and authors come together (Meek, 1988; Smith, 1988).

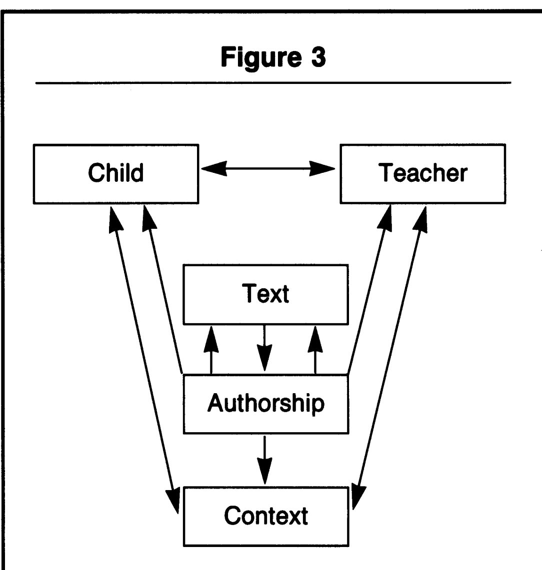
The concept of authorship has been criticised from the structuralist point of view for placing too much emphasis upon emotional expression of ideas at the expense of attention to how these ideas can be expressed effectively. "Concepts like authorship focus on the creation of a text, on the originality of a text, on particular emotional qualities of a text—but not on how a text has been made" (Gilbert, 1990, p. 77). The criticism is that authorship highlights what a created text might do for the writer rather than the reader. This does seem, however, to be a rather limited view of authorship, brought about, perhaps, by a misunderstanding of the importance of the "personal voice" metaphor in process writing theory (Gilbert, 1989). To place voice and creativity at the forefront of new ideas about literacy does not necessarily imply that structure and craft are being ignored, but rather that the balance is being shifted from traditional emphases. Writers such as Hall (1989) stress that authorship involves much more than simply being creative:

> All authorship is complex because it demands making many decisions and orchestrating the results of those decisions into a coherent response. Authors have to make decisions about the context within which they are to write, the meanings they wish to express, the structure of the piece they are writing, and the representation of what they need to say. (p. x)

The concept thus can encompass the concerns of the structuralists. Being an effective author involves making multilevel creative and structural decisions about texts, and responding to an author involves an awareness of the effects of these decisions in created texts.

Implications for teaching

Once the concept of authorship is placed at the centre of the process of literacy development it naturally has implications for the other points of the model and, therefore, for classroom practice. Figure 3 expresses these unifying links diagrammatically. Seeing children as authors and as critics of authors



This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

simultaneously raises the status of literacy activity in the classroom and of children's participation within it. Authorship is the generation of meaning (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988), which implies that children's experiences with literacy must be meaningful for them. Children need to be engaged in the purposeful creation of and response to texts, and their attention has to be deliberately drawn to the ways in which these texts achieve their purposes. Classroom strategies such as authors' circles, peer conferencing, and literature discussion groups all have a role to play in this and can be enhanced by the inclusion of explicit discussion about *how* authors make meaning. In other words, children can discuss authorial craft in the context of wholistic and purposeful textual experience.

In encouraging the development of authorship, teachers need to consider the importance of social interaction. Authors argue and debate about meanings and text construction, even if purely with themselves, and Vygotskian psychology has taught us that this internal activity is preceded by external, social activity. Teachers need to ensure that children have opportunities to engage in these debates about meaning and writing craft. Again, strategies such as peer conferences and authors' circles are useful in this. In most elementary classrooms, however, the most expert readers and writers are teachers themselves. In a model of teaching based upon the notion of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) teachers have a crucial role as expert fellow practitioners, demonstrating, guiding, and supporting those less skillful.

A classroom environment for students as authors will provide a range of contexts in which thoughtful creation and re-creation of a variety of texts can take place. It will also provide a range of audiences and collaborators. There are two key features to such an environment. The first is that there should be a large element of choice. Just as adult authors are rarely assigned topics and adult readers are rarely assigned authors to whom they must respond, so child authors need to be allowed to exercise topic choice in their writing and to choose their own reading material.

The second feature concerns the explicit attention given to text structure as texts are created and re-created. The more that decisions about how a text is constructed are discussed, the more likely it is that such discussion, and therefore such thought, will become a common classroom occurrence. Children who regularly talk to their teachers and their peers about the ways texts work are more likely to bring such constructed knowledge to bear on their individual interactions with texts.

These suggestions are not, of course, curriculum area specific. Children engaged in purposeful work with scientific texts, for example, can also discuss the ways in which these texts achieve their purposes, which will be specific to science. The same approach can be adopted to texts from other domains.

Conclusion

The central message of this article has been that, with text placed firmly at the centre of models of the development of literacy, there is a need for a strong concept of authorship as a means of drawing together the various elements implicit in the model. Indeed, seeing authorship as the generation of meaning suggests that the concept has a wider applicability than literacy development and may be a metaphor for learning itself. If this is so, then there is clearly a need for us to clarify and operationalise the concept across the school curriculum.

Wray, a former primary school teacher, currently teaches at the University of Exeter. He can be reached at the School of Education, University of Exeter, Exeter, EX1 2LU, U.K.

References

Bull, G., & Anstey, M. (1991). Achieving independent learning: Drawing process and genre together. In F. McKay (Ed.), *Public and private lessons: The language of teaching and learning* (pp. 45-53). Carlton, NSW: Australian Reading Association.

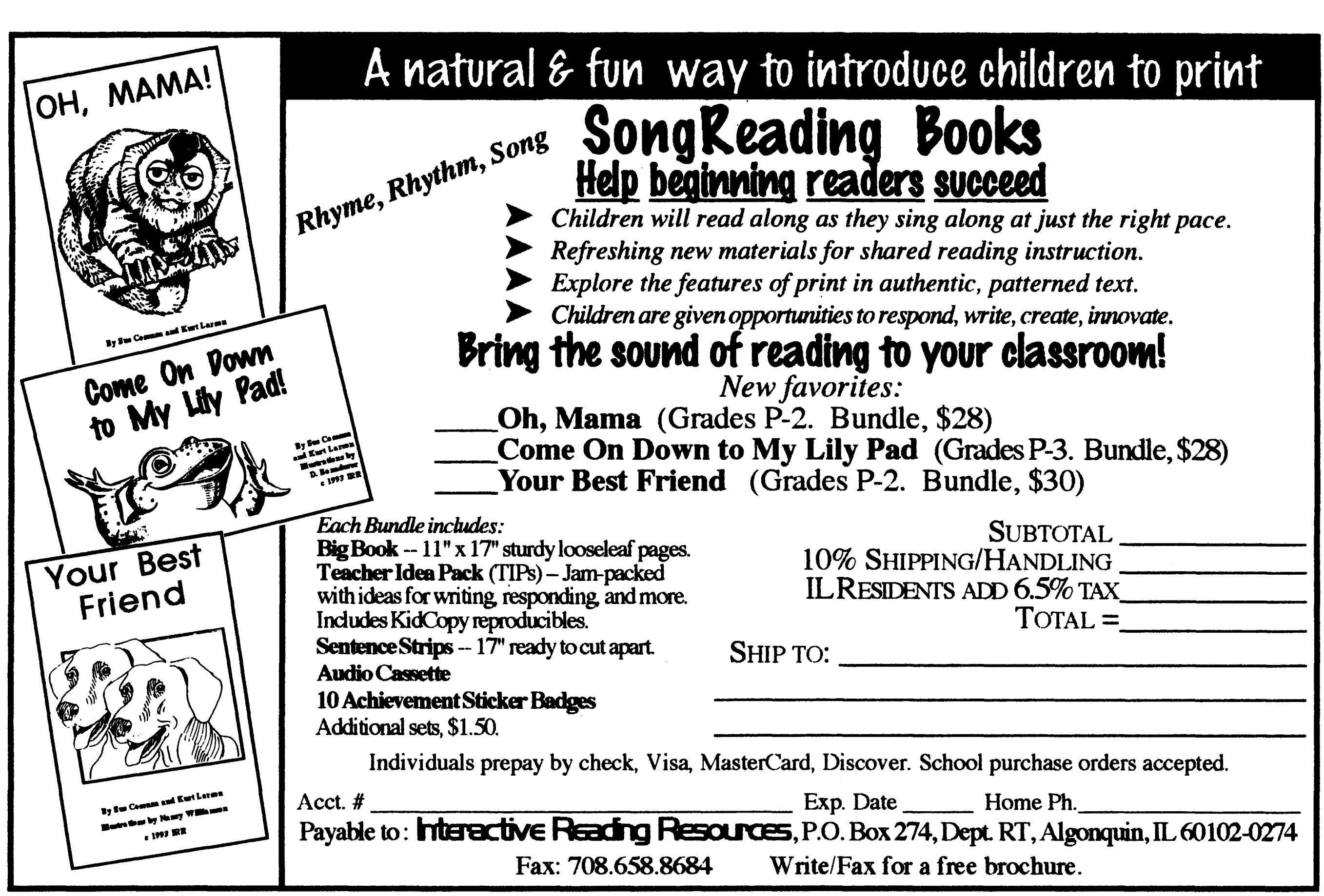
Cambourne, B. (1988). *The whole story.* Auckland, NZ: Ashton Scholastic.

Chapman, J. (1983a). *Reading development and cohesion.* London: Heinemann.

Chapman, J. (1983b). A study in reading development: A comparison of the ability of 8-, 10- and 13-year-old children to perceive cohesion in their school texts. In B. Gillham (Ed.), *Reading through the curriculum* (pp. 165-178). London: Heinemann.

This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Chapman, J. (1987). *Reading: From 5-11 years.* Milton Keynes, Bucks.: Open University Press.
Christie, F. (1990). The changing face of literacy. In F. Christie (Ed.), *Literacy for a changing world* (pp. 1-25). Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.
Culler, J. (1981). *The pursuit of signs.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Derewianka, B. (1990). *Exploring how texts work.* Rozelle, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.
Edwards, D., & Mercer, N. (1987). *Common knowledge.* London: Methuen.
Gilbert, P. (1989). Authorizing disadvantage: Authorship and creativity in the language classroom. In F. Christie (Ed.), *Literacy for a changing world* (pp. 54-78). Hawthorn, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.
Gilbert, P. (1990). *Writing, schooling and deconstruction.* London: Routledge.
Goodman, K. (1985). Unity in reading. In H. Singer & R. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (3rd ed., pp. 813-840). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Hall, N. (1987). *The emergence of literacy.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.
Hall, N. (Ed.). (1989). *Writing with reason.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.
Halliday, M. (1978). *Language as social semiotic.* London: Edward Arnold.
Halliday, M., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English.* London: Longman.
Halliday, M., & Hasan, R. (1989). *Language, context and text.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Harste, J., Short, K., & Burke, C. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Harste, J., Woodward, V., & Burke, C. (1984). *Language stories and literacy lessons.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Martin, J. (1989). *Factual writing.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Medwell, J. (1993). Classroom contexts for writing. In D. Wray (Ed.), *Literacy: Text and context* (pp. 125-135). Widnes, Cheshire: United Kingdom Reading Association.
Meek, M. (1988). *How texts teach what readers learn.* Stroud, Glos.: Signal Press.
Moffett, J. (1981). *Active voice.* Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.
Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social contexts.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text and the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
Smith, F. (1988). *Joining the literacy club.* London: Heinemann.
Wells, G. (1988). *The meaning makers.* London: Heinemann.



This content downloaded from 81.129.37.54 on Mon, 13 Apr 2020 11:06:05 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms