



## Viewing Beyond the Narrative Content: Young Children Discuss a Popular DVD Text

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JENNIFER BISHOP AND WINIFRED JACKSON

**ABSTRACT:** *This study argues that visual literacy is a necessary component of critical literacy and opportunities to begin developing both these literacies can occur when a mentor engages young children in discussion during viewings of DVD text from the children's own popular culture.*

### INTRODUCTION

New Zealand education has a strong focus on early literacy and most literacy educators would agree that they want their students to become critical readers of text in all forms, genres and modes. There would be less agreement on how to reach this aim, or what it actually means. Our discussion begins by establishing the socio-cultural context in which literacy is learned, the variety of literacy practices and their relationships to power, and the focus of a critical literacy approach. We describe the 'four roles' model and its relevance to teachers of literacy. Because the study focuses on visual literacy there is discussion of the significance of media literacies in our society. Our discussion then moves to consider the place of visual language in the curriculum documents for primary and early childhood education, and presents literature that questions the confidence of teachers in this area. Next we present evidence of the changing literacies of our society and we add some points of reassurance that the visual literacy of film can be supportive of traditional print texts. This leads on to explanation of the visual code features that were the focus for the study. The study is described, and some data transcripts are discussed for what they reveal of the children's understandings and shifting concepts of the visual language techniques and codes used in the texts.

### LITERACY PRACTICES ARE CULTURALLY SITUATED

A socio-cultural perspective views literacy learning as an enculturated process. It occurs at individual and community level through oral, print, visual and multimedia literacy practices (Makin & Jones Diaz, 2002). The term 'literacy practices' is used for this diversity of language modes and usages (Ludwig, 2006). Language and literacy are used for 'discourse' or communication by 'connected stretches of language that make sense' (Green, 2000: 3).

Literacy practices, and what is learned through them, are not neutral but have a value which varies depending on its similarity to the literacy practices and outcomes dominant amongst the leaders of that community. Gee (1999) uses the term 'Discourse', with a capital D, to indicate the forms of language and literacy behaviour that carry social value in particular cultural contexts.

These Discourses are ideologically-based, which is to say that they are dependent on the social and cultural assumptions held in common by the dominant group (Green, 2000). The value placed on certain sorts of literacy is thought to underlie some of the educational difficulties facing children whose literacy practices are not those of the dominant, or powerful, group.

## **CRITICAL LITERACY**

Critical literacy involves 'analysing relationships between language, social groups, social practices and power' (Knobel & Healy, 1998: 4). Its focus is on power relationships that are within everyday social practices. Societies are multicultural and multi-ethnic and New Zealand's is no exception (Census Data 2006). This means that there are many literacy practices but not all are equally powerful or valued. The critical literacy approach advocates the study of the cultural practices and literacies of the society in which the learner is situated, and critique of social literacy practices can begin with children of early childhood- and primary school-age (Jones Diaz, Beecher & Arthur, 2002; Green, 2000).

Critical literacy as an approach has responded to the need for learners to gain success and self-esteem from their literacy practices. It calls for 'an awareness that learning about texts and texts themselves seem natural but are not' (Ludwig, 2006: 4). To become critical requires one to be able to stand back and view texts as artefacts and this ability to think critically needs to be applied to literacy in all its forms.

### **The 'four roles' model**

Freebody and Luke (2003) present a model which recognises that 'effective literacy in a complex print and multi-mediated society requires a broad and flexible repertoire of practices' (p.56). The model sets out four 'roles' or literacy practices that a learner can use or 'resource' (p.56). These roles are as code breaker, participant in text meaning, functional text user, and critical text analyst. They need to be integrated, and are not hierarchical or developmentally based. Some contexts may support natural acquisition of a literacy practice or there may be need for explicit teaching of the various roles (Freebody & Luke, 2003; Ludwig, 2006). Each of the roles is necessary but not sufficient for a full programme for literacy. The model provides a systematic framework against which teachers can assess their effectiveness in providing students with experience and guidance in the four roles. Educating children to become critical thinkers and critical about literacy in all its genres and media forms creates the potential for them to become users of the dominant discourse. Becoming aware of the power relationships of that discourse places an individual in a stronger position from which to counter, or even subvert, those relationships as may be necessary for the individual's own development.

## **MEDIA AND VISUAL LITERACIES**

The literacy focus in this study is that of visual language in a picture storybook and in the film code of a DVD text. Media texts are multimodal, combining modes of communication, especially visual (still or moving images) and audio (sound, music and speech). 'Media are undoubtedly the major contemporary

means of cultural expression and communication: to become an active participant in public life necessarily involves making use of the modern media' (Buckingham, 2003: 5).

To relate this to a New Zealand context, television ownership is assessed as 98% of households owning at least one set and the average amount of time children spend viewing television has been established as 2 hours 24 minutes per day (Tetley, 1997). This figure does not take into account viewing of video and DVD which can, and does, take place at any time. Walters and Zwaga (2001) report that international data shows children's access to, and use of all media forms has increased rapidly, and New Zealand children would be no exception to that trend.

The ubiquitousness of the media means it is 'embedded in the textures and routines of everyday life' (Buckingham, 2003: 5). This makes media a particularly valuable source of everyday texts which have relevance to young people and which are available for analysis of the literacy practices encoded within them.

## **VISUAL LANGUAGE IN NEW ZEALAND CURRICULA**

In New Zealand the national curriculum document, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994) identifies three strands of language to be taught: oral, written and visual. Visual language covers the viewing and presenting of static and moving images. The inclusion of the visual language strand acknowledges its increasing significance in our – and our children's – world.

### **Teachers' content knowledge**

Models of teachers' knowledge hold that both subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are necessary for effective teaching (Sherin, 2002). There is evidence to show that primary teachers are not confident in what to teach in the area of visual language. Teachers of English at year 5 reported Viewing as what they least assessed (2%) compared with Reading (68%) and Writing (51%) (Dunn, Strafford & Marston, 2003). 'The low frequency of assessment for these functions was clearly not related to perceptions of low importance, but was rather due to difficulties with the actual assessment of the function, such as a lack of resources and of knowledge of how to assess it in a valid and reliable way' (Dunn, Strafford & Marston, 2003: 59).

A survey of topics taught in visual language found that primary teachers preferred to keep to traditional static images such as posters and picture books (Finch, Jackson & Murray, 2003). This study also found that teachers made very little use of moving image texts. Only 17% of respondents used video or DVD in their classrooms more than once a month and all of them used it only for content and not for teaching about form and features of visual language. This conservative up-take on moving image texts confirms the difficulty of implementing curriculum change (Eisner, 1994).

### **Introduce visual language from early childhood?**

An argument of this article is that critical literacy education should be introduced as a 'natural' part of literacy learning and that this can, and should, begin in

early childhood. Early childhood education recognises that literacy is socially constructed and gradually acquired from experiences starting at birth (Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999). The curriculum for early childhood education in New Zealand, *Te Whaariki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) (*Te Whaariki*), establishes four principles: empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships. Its focus is the individual child 'whose learning begins at home' (p.9). Although *Te Whaariki* has a determinedly holistic philosophy, Hedges and Cullen (2005) concluded that 'increased focus on subject content learning is not incompatible with early childhood pedagogy and philosophy, particularly if the content relates to children's interests' (p.77). Children bring their 'popular' culture with them to a centre or school and introduce it through their play, in the narratives they act out, and the character roles they like to assume (Bromley, 1996; Paley, 1984). Popular culture texts provide a resource for teaching and learning about the 'subject' of visual literacy.

## **LITERACIES FOR THE FUTURE**

There are changing views of literacy which extend beyond learning to read and write, although those skills remain essential. Makin and Jones Diaz (2002) argue that early childhood teachers need to include literacy relevant to the kind of 'everyday and popular literacies' that the children will meet (p.329). '(T)echnology and multiculturalism, the new economies of information and services ... are making images more significant than writing in many domains of public communication' (Kress, 2000: 8). Children need skills to deal with 'reading' CD-ROMs and DVDs which challenge the traditional directionality of reading from left to right and top to bottom. To read them, our eyes must follow salient visual cues and icons (Makin and Jones Diaz, 2002). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) give examples of newspaper publications where there is a reversal of the traditional print/picture relationship, with images now dominant, supplemented by only a few words of written text.

The prevalence and impact of visual media in our communities justifies teaching about how it works as text. This needs the reader to be aware of form and content, and to be alert to the purpose of the text's producer. However, Buckingham writes, 'It is quite extraordinary that the majority of young people should go through their school careers with so little opportunity to study and engage with the most significant contemporary forms of culture and communication' (2003: x). Media studies, offered in the secondary school curriculum, is too little, too late, to create a society of critically literate citizens.

## **A REASSURANCE: VISUAL LITERACY SUPPORTS TRADITIONAL WRITTEN LITERACY**

### **Narrative features**

Both written and visual literacy develop knowledge of stories and generate talk about stories. Sharing stories with children is recognised to be a pleasant and positive way of enriching children's literacy, and one which develops awareness of different types of narratives, character types and plot structures (Adams & Jackson, 2002). 'The ability to make connections between texts and personal experience is vital for children's literacy learning' (Torr, 2004: 182). Vygotsky

states that it is through the talk in a social context that concepts are formed (Bromley, 1996). Mediated exposure to story texts gives experience in using decontextualised oral language and patterns of language that allow a child to generalise, infer and predict (Torr, 2004). There is also valuable exposure to new vocabulary and varying syntactic structures (Adams & Jackson, 2002). Using language in this way gives children ownership of it, the notion that Vygotsky refers to as internalisation (Howard, 1998). The language in film is oral, and its meaning supported by visual context and codes. This medium makes valuable world and word knowledge accessible to the child.

### **Cognitive growth from repeated viewings**

Favourite DVD texts allow for viewing and re-viewing. A study of 4- and 5-year-old children found that after four viewings they 'improved in their memory for the chronology of the story, as well as their comprehension of characters' motives, emotions, and actions' (Mares, 1998: 122). Complexity in characterisation was better recognised by those who viewed four times than those who saw the text once only. Howard (1998) found Piaget's theory on schema and the need for equilibration a useful concept for recognising how children grow cognitively as they accommodate new ideas and clarify their original assumptions about a text.

### **Popular visual texts motivate reading of print text**

Bromley (1996) comments on the trend for moving image to provide a child's first meeting with texts which are later met in their printed form. An increasing number of classic picture books are now animated. Often, when discussing a story, children will say, 'Oh, I've seen that', rather than that they have read it, or had it read to them. Enjoyable experience of the visual narrative text can lead children to the written text. We have observed new entrants sit down to read the picture storybook versions of *Finding Nemo* because such a book has become accessible to them after they have seen the movie or the DVD. Especially when children have begun learning to read, the moving image version is what will often drive them to the written text. *Harry Potter* is a case in point where teachers report primary age children avidly reading these huge tomes after having seen the film version. 'If we accept that paths negotiated by children on their journeys into traditional literature are complex and multi-modal, we should not ignore the fact that reading of one medium may help to reinforce the reading of another' (Sefton-Green & Parker, 2000: 52). The pleasurable nature of the child's first meeting with the text provides a strong motivation to engage with it in all its forms.

## **VISUAL LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TO THE STUDY**

The intention of this study was to explore young children's recognition of three of the techniques used in creating reality in visual texts: movement, sound and focusing viewer attention. Throughout the discussions the broader question of what is 'real' in the film kept emerging, particularly in relation to sound effects so this was included in the discussions as they developed.

Adults are assumed to be aware of how visual images are constructed but the skilful nature of the construction is such that the content (or what is shown) engages attention and makes the form (or how it is created) 'invisible'. Static

and moving images use many similar techniques in their creation and share much of the terminology but there are some production techniques specific to moving images, such as movement of camera (Fiske, 1998), and music and sound effects (Sefton-Green & Parker, 2000). These technical aspects work to heighten character development, action, and setting (Fiske, 1998), and encourage our willing suspension of disbelief.

### **Modality**

Modality is a term used to refer to perceived reality. It has been defined as the product of a series of judgments about reality, based on cues that indicate the message's validity and reliability (Buckingham, 1996; Davies, 1997; Harrison, 2003; Whitley, 1996). Children progressively develop modality awareness, and many 5-year-olds are actively forming and refining their own theories about how reality is constructed in static and moving images, depending on their prior experience (Buckingham, 1996; Chandler, 1995; Howard, 1998). Children do particularly notice cues to modality such as animation, lively music, and sound effects (Sloutsky, 2003). They may know that animations are not real, but will find it difficult to articulate how animation is constructed (Lorch, 1994; Schreier & Groeben, 1998). Developing understanding of media effectiveness is a gradual process which should culminate in critical awareness that the apparent naturalness has been skilfully constructed.

### **Visual language: formal codes**

#### *Movement*

Movement can be shown in an illustration through shape, line and composition (Mann, 2002; Ministry of Education, 1996a), but movement in DVDs is enhanced in other ways. The camera may pan or tilt to give the viewer the feeling of scanning or looking up at a character, or it may track a character so the viewer feels they are there, on the spot, watching. The sensation of action can be exaggerated through quick changes of focus on different characters (Ministry of Education, 1996a).

#### *Sound*

Sound is an added feature which effectively enhances engagement (Mann, 2002). It includes dialogue, music and sound effects (Ministry of Education, 1996a). Sound can reinforce action or mood (Bromley, 1996), perhaps creating suspense. Silence, or the absence of sound, can also be very powerful, adding emotion and tension to the scene (Harwood, 2004).

#### *Focus of attention*

We are using the term 'focus' rather loosely to include shot-type or field size and composition within the viewing frame. Close-up illustrations or camera shots have the power to emphasise what is significant at that time and focus attention on it, increasing tension, or capturing facial expressions and emotions (Fiske, 1998; Ministry of Education, 1996a). This creates a depth of understanding of a character (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993; Harwood, 2004). A wide or long shot is often used for the opening scene, providing information about the setting where subsequent scenes take place. Composition of scenes or illustrations draws attention to particular elements (Callow, 2003; Westbook,

1995) through the way characters are placed in relation to each other, or to objects.

## THE STUDY

### Purpose

The study arose from the belief that an awareness of how static and moving images create their effects can form a starting place for developing critical understanding of the media that surround us. The imbalance between children's home DVD viewing and any visual language teaching they receive at school raises the question of what intuitive awareness children have acquired of the techniques and codes used in creating film narrative. The subjects in this study had only recently left the early childhood context so findings have the advantage of being relevant for educators in that sector as well as in the junior primary school.

### Methodology

This research took the form of a case study. The subjects were three children, two girls and a boy, all aged 5 years. They were the youngest in a mixed year one and two class. Permission to carry out the research was gained from all parties involved and due ethical processes were followed to inform and reassure all participants. The researcher was known to the children as she was one of their teachers. The study involved the children in viewing a *Hairy Maclary* DVD, reading a *Hairy Maclary* picture storybook, and discussing these texts with the researcher. The class had read and listened to *Hairy Maclary* stories earlier in that term. Five brief sessions were held within a two week period to suit the children and discussion was recorded. Sessions were held in school time in a withdrawing area and the tone was informal. The picture book version of *Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness* (Dodd, 1991) was used in Session 2 so that the familiar static images could be used to make connections to the illustrative technique of the moving image text. Other sessions showed the DVD of *Rumpus at the Vet* (Dodd, 2004).

### Discussion of results

This discussion begins with examples of peer influence on children's ideas then considers specifically the topics of modality, movement, sound and focus of attention. The transcript data uses italics for the researcher's comments.

#### *a) Examples of peer influence on children's ideas*

The children responded to the viewings and questions in individual ways. They used each other's answers as springboards for rephrasing an idea, as here, referring to the eyes of the other characters:

N: They all on, they're all on Hairy Maclary.

S: They're all looking at Hairy Maclary. (*Session 3*)

And here, altering answers to fit with those of the others:

*Did it look like he was hurt?*

S: Yes.

T: No. Yes. (*Session 1*)

*Now tell me something that is not real?*

All: Ummmm ....

N: Fantails.

T: Pigs. (*Session 1*)

T's 'pigs' builds on N's 'fantails' – (although N actually meant 'fairytales'). One child's response can influence another's.

*b) Modality*

Initially it might have seemed that the modality of the DVD text was clear cut. The characters are animated illustrations and the children understood that the animation was not real.

S: Because, um, the mice aren't real, it's just a story.

T: No, cos it's a, cos it's a, just a movie.

*And are things not real in movies?*

N: No, you call it a fantail. (*N's word for 'fairy tale'*)(*Session 1*)

S: Oh cos it's just pretend. (*Session 4*)

N had a clear idea about the constructedness of animation ('made') but thought of it in concrete terms.

*How real is Hairy Maclary?*

N: Just made.

*He's made?*

All: Yeah

*How is he made?*

N: Like wool.

*T and S nod agreement.*

N: Sacks

*Mmmm...*

N: And blankets

T: Fluffs. (*Session 1*)



N later shifted from these ideas of concrete objects. Here are her Session 4 responses to a question about how the animals were made to move in the DVD:

N: They just draw the shape, colour it in, and have it on a stick.

He videoed it.

They painted her and put her there. (*Session 4*)

This idea seems to have been influenced by previous discussion about the illustrations and the illustrator's techniques. The other children agreed with her ideas in the first session. In the Session 4 viewing, they had great difficulty with this question, responding by describing the current action (the content). They did not elaborate on N's theory this time. S eventually made an attempt to link it to prior knowledge of computers.

S: You can move the mouse, you can just click something. (*Session 4*)

*What's not real on TV?*

N: Programmes. Like kid's programmes. SpongeBob. Simpsons.

*Why are they not real?*

N: Cos they just made them look like they're real. (*Session 1*)

N's response illustrates the difficulty for a child of articulating the idea of something seeming real in some aspects, but not real in others. The programmes she has named are ones where the characters conspicuously don't 'look like they're real' to an adult, but N's statement reveals that they seem real in some way to her when she watches them.

### *c) Movement*

An adult reading an image can see movement being constructed through the representation of part of an action. With support, the children were able to articulate these cues in the picture storybook, *Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness*.

*The illustrator has a special way of drawing to make us think things are happening. With her special way of drawing, who's moving in this picture?*

N: The girl.

T: The cat.

S: No! The person.

*How did the illustrator make you think that person was moving?*

T: The g, he, the g, the person was walking.

*How do you know that person was walking?*

S: Um. Because the illustrator drew its legs.

*Drew his legs. And what do his legs look like?*

N: It looks like this (Demonstrates).

T: His legs going like that (Demonstrates).

S: So he looks like this (Demonstrates). Maybe.

*And can we see all of him?*

All: No. (Session 2)

On page seven there was only a foot and a bit of trouser leg illustrated, yet the children could 'read' it as in motion. Their ability to mentally reconstruct the whole from the part (metonymy) shows them applying their understanding of this semiotic code (Branston & Stafford, 1996).

The children were confident in reading the movement indicators in the illustrations, and N anticipated future movement.

S: Because he's got his head up and his paws up. (p.5)

T: Oh, he's running around and then he jumps up. (p.9)

N: And if the person stood on that (*the leash*), he would fall over. (p.7)  
(Session 2)

This next transcript shows the adult supporting the children into reading the swirl of colour that represents Hairy Maclary's shadow (because he is in full flight) (Gibbons, 1999) and the route his scampering has taken. By the end of this conversation children have voiced their own understandings and taken ownership of the idea.

*The illustrator has done something with the colour, underneath Hairy Maclary. To make us think Hairy Maclary is moving.*

S: Um, um, those bits (points to white).

N: Cos there's colours under him.

T: There's yellow, and it's slippery and sand like that.

*Slippery like sand?*

T: Yeah, and it's like yellow butter.

S: Yeah, and there's some white.

*Yes, now ...*

T: And it's white like clouds, and if he walks on it it's still going to be slippery.

*Yes, it might be.*

*Look at the way this colour goes. See this colour, follow my finger. What is happening with this colour?*

T: It, it, it's painting.

*It is. See how it goes?*

N: It's, it's a shadow.

*It is like a shadow.*

T: The, the persons are getting up and it's a shadow.

*That's a good idea.*

*Watch my finger, and follow the dark colour around. What can you see happening?*

S: Um, that's Hairy Maclary going around there.

T: Oh, he's running around and then he jumps up. (Session 2)

By Session 4 children were able to link mood to the pace of movement.

S: That dog cannot run cos he's not allowed to run cos he's got a sore knee.

T: Cos he's sad cos he can't run around. But he be happy if he run around.

*Do they move fast if they're happy?*

T: Yeh.

In Session 4 the adult asked how animals were made to move. N's response of a drawn figure on a stick was discussed above for its awareness of constructedness. S and T can only explain by retelling the actions – the content – of the film's narrative.

S: The bird bite his tail, and, and he's jumping up and down.

*How did the producer do that? How did he make them move?*

N: There's like a stick and um

T: They moving.

*How is it moving?*

T: With their hands.

N: They just draw the shape, colour it in, and have it on a stick. I've seen a DVD of Nemo and that's how they did it.

*T, how did they make it move?*

T: Um, um they move.

*Yes, but how?*

T: The tail is moving.

*What did the producer do to make the tail move?*

T: Cos it was wriggling.

*It was, but how did he make it look like it was wriggling?*

T: Cos the bird bite it.

Now, still in Session 4, in relation to another scene, the children again explain movement as a consequence of the characters' actions. Then they refer to technology to provide an answer, but the enduring effect of the characters' 'realness' is still apparent.

*How did the producer make them move?*

S: Um, um Hairy Maclary was jumping up and down.

*How did the producer make him jump up and down?*

S: He was jumping up and down cos the bird bite his tail.

*That's right. And how did the producer make that happen?*

S: The producer made it, because the producer made Hairy Maclary jump up and down.

*How did the producer make Hairy Maclary jump up and down?*

S: Hairy Maclary was sitting like that and the bird pulled a hair out of his tail and he went like this.

T: He jumped.

*Is this a real dog?*

All: No.

*So how did the producer make him move?*

S: Oh cos it's just pretend, cos my mother tells my brother it's not a real story, it's just pretend. It's a fairy tale story, cos it's not real.

*So how can he move if he's not real?*

S: You can move the mouse, you can just click something.

*So when we look at this (mice running) how does that happen?*

S: He kicked the mouse out of the cage and the mouse went up the knee.

*It did, and are the mice real?*

S: Yes. No.

*How did the producer make that happen?*

N: He videoed it. (Session 4)

Notice that S has now used the word 'producer'. The researcher's question of 'Is this a real dog?' caused disequilibrium because the responses had been based on 'content of a story'. Logically, another reason was needed, so S and N drew on their understanding of the technological magic of the 'mouse' and 'video'.

#### *d) Sound*

Although an adult is cued into 'hearing' or imagining sound from a book's illustrations, this was not an intuitive concept for the children. Their initial response was to read expression, but S eventually made the appropriate sound for unhappy cats.

*What sound do you think the cats are making?*

T: Those two are happy, and that one's happy and those are all happy.

N: Except that one.

T: Except that one, and

S: SSSSSSS. Because that one's not happy and that one's not happy, that one's not happy, that one's not happy. (*Session 2*)

The children were aware of the DVD sound track. At the start of Session 5 limited vocabulary and knowledge of correct terminology sometimes made it difficult for the children to explain their thinking.

*What kinds of sounds does the producer put in to make us think it's real?*

N: Um, he just like make them like like real as.

*So what are you hearing?*

N: He's put the bird noise and the mice noise.

S: Yeah.

*And he put them in because ...?*

N: So you know what's there.

*Now we'll listen to the music. The sound of the mice and the birds – that's sound effects.*

S: Oh, I've never heard of that.

N: I have. (*Session 5*)

N, again, had a greater understanding that DVDs are constructed. Here the researcher uses the term 'sound effects' again, and S shows that she understands its meaning.

*Did you hear that sound effect?*

N & S: Yeah.

*What was it?*

S: It was sneezing, and when it sneezes, and the one, the white one, he went 'achoo!', it's going into the house. (*Session 5*)

This next exchange shows N explaining the sounds in a DVD. She is unaware that something different could be used to make the sound.

*You know the sneezes, and the tweets of the birds, and the mice squeaking? How do they do those sound effects?*

N: They made up birds and mice, they got some birds and mice, birds and mice. (*Session 5*)

Throughout the viewings, the children had difficulty separating form and content. This exchange is about the dog with the splint on his leg.

*Did you hear his foot going clump?*

N & S: Yes.

N: Cos he's got a wood stick.

*So how would they do the sound effect?*

N: Um, so he they would just get a stick and put it on their legs.

(Session 5)

The same type of explanation was given for the vet's footsteps.

(DVD narrator: *Out came the vet*)

*Did you hear her footsteps?*

N & S: Yep.

*How did they do that?*

N: They, they walked around. (Session 5)

The cockatoo's rattling of her beak on her cage was such a strong noise that it generated the imaginative metallic response from S.

*How do they do that, S? Got any ideas?*

S: Because she was, um, I heard the sound when she was rattle her beak because, because her beak is silver.

*Is she really rattling her beak?*

N & S: Yeah.

*Is she real?*

N & S: No.

*If it's not real, S, how are they making that sound?*

N: I don't know why. They just rattling their heads.

*Rattling something.*

N: Or a beak. (Session 5)

Again, the children's answers comes back to a 'real' cause from the 'unreal' character. Sound effects proved a difficult concept for children who do not yet have experience of how a foley artist can add sound effects to a film.

#### *e) Focus of attention*

When viewing both the picture book and the DVD, the children were generally able to articulate the purpose of the techniques used for drawing the viewer's attention. When discussing the long establishing shot, on page 1, T quickly pointed out the most important part of the picture. The composition in that picture is balanced with a tree and car on each side of the hall, and the hall door central. The figure carrying the cat is small in terms of the total scene but the figure's centrality and movement are recognised as the visual focus.

*What do you think the illustrator wants you to look at here?*

T: The person taking the cat in. (Session 2)

And N knew why Hairy Maclary was the only thing on page 29, although this is also clearly linked to the content.

N: Because he was the winner. (*Session 3*)

When asked how Hairy Maclary was feeling in that picture, there was an automatic response of 'happy' but when told to look more closely, the sad expression was acknowledged. (Hairy Maclary has won the 'Scruffiest' prize at a cat show!)

*Why do you think the illustrator has drawn a big close up picture?*

*Why has he zoomed in on him?*

N: Cos there's only one of him.

*How do you think he's feeling?*

Happy.

*Look at his face.*

S: Sad. (*Session 3*)

Repeated viewings and adult mentoring had worked to improve their reading of the images. N showed some understanding of how the close up effect is achieved and she also picked up the word 'zoom' and invented her own term for zooming out.

*How do they get it close up?*

N: Um, with putting that thing ...

*Zoom?*

N: Yep.

N: Zoom on the mouse. (This 'mouse' is one of the characters)

*What's happening now? (Zooming out)*

N: Backing up. (*Session 5*)

Near the beginning of the DVD the camera pans the scene, focusing on each animal. T seemed to understand that the purpose of this technique is to set the scene. The clip is viewed and re-viewed.

*Now there's one thing at the beginning I want to show you.*

*What's in that scene? (Camera zooms out on Hairy Maclary)*

T: He's far-er.

*That's right, did you see it move back? See that again.*

T: It's closer and far-er.

*Watch the camera, what's it doing? (Camera pans room)*

T: It's going around.

*And why do you think the camera went like this? (demonstrates panning)*

T: Cos they're looking at all the sick animals. (*Session 4*)

Direction of gaze can lead a viewer to the focal point of the action (Harrison, 2003) and the children were able to articulate what the characters' eyes were doing in the illustrations on page 7.

S: That cat's eyes are down in that cage, and that cat's eyes are on and that cat's eyes are on ...

N: They all on, they're all on Hairy Maclary.

S: They're all looking at Hairy Maclary.

S: And there's a, and there's a cage with two cats in it.

*Where are their eyes looking?*

N & S: At Hairy Maclary.

N: Because he looks like a dog.

S: And he's not in a cage.

S: And they're going excited, cos that one's going up.

*And where do you look?*

All: At Hairy Maclary. (*Session 4*)

## **SUMMARY**

The children enjoyed the stories and viewing the texts. The transcripts reveal that the meanings the children make are intelligently constructed and logical from the way things seem to them. Also they reveal that the children's understanding of real and not-real is a complex matter and there are times where the two beliefs are held simultaneously because the child does not yet – and cannot yet – have a full understanding of the levels of constructedness involved in creating moving image texts.

In the course of the discussions the children heard and used new and specific vocabulary. They learned about techniques to indicate movement present and past (the swirl). They articulated their understanding of narrative pace, and how a part represents the whole. They recognised that narrative pace can match plot action and mood. They changed their opinions. N's shift from 3-D and concrete to 2-D pictures was a shift towards understanding. They had begun thinking about how technology might make things happen. They deepened their understanding of the text through repeated viewings and by looking more closely at the focus – although Hairy Maclary's shamefaced look may require a bit more life experience before that is fully understood. Schema disequilibrium leads to cognitive growth (Howard, 1998).



## **CONCLUSION**

Critical literacy requires the ability to read texts in all media and genres. Visual literacy, like written literacy, benefits from early mentored introduction. The study found the children were engaged in three of the roles of the 'four role' model (Freebody & Luke, 2003). They were code breakers – of the visual and film codes in the texts. They were participants in text meaning, taking meaning from the images. They also made a start towards becoming critical text analysts as they were introduced to the idea that the texts were created by someone, not just the author, but the illustrator and a producer.

Video and DVD can bring children's popular home culture into the classroom and children's knowledge of their favourite moving image texts provides a context for genuine conversations to take place with the mentoring adult. The teacher can judge where learning is being acquired, or may need some explicit teaching.

Young children meet static and moving images ubiquitously in their everyday lives and their futures lie in a differently literate world from that of their parents and grandparents. Recognition of techniques is a step towards understanding of the features and purposes of media images. Knowing a narrative is constructed does not detract from its enjoyment or engagement for a child (Whitley, 1996). Adult movie-goers are also evidence of that – especially when they cry!

Literacies are socially constructed and gradually learned. Visual literacy is one of the routes towards becoming a critical viewer – a viewer can enjoy the richness of the visual language of the community while also analysing its validity and reliability as a source of 'truth'. The 5 year-old children in this study show how capable and keen they are to learn.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jenny Bishop  
*Dargaville Primary School*



Jenny Bishop is a Senior Teacher of year one and two students at Dargaville Primary School. She has recently completed a postgraduate degree, focusing on educational technologies. Her long career in teaching has included some years in early childhood education, an area in which she also gained professional qualification. In her teaching she has a particular interest in the development of visual language and early literacy in young children.

Jenny Bishop  
Dargaville Primary School  
Portland St  
PO Box 75  
Dargaville  
New Zealand  
jmbkiwi@gmail.com

Winifred Jackson  
*Massey University*



Winifred Jackson is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Educational Studies at Massey University College of Education. Her main teaching focus has been language and literacy papers in primary and early years teacher education programmes. Her current research interests are in visual language and early literacy. She has a strong background in English literature but finds this no barrier to appreciating moving-image texts which are so relevant in young people's popular culture.

Winifred Jackson  
Massey University College of Education  
Private Bag 11-222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
w.b.jackson@world-net.co.nz