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Artifactual Literacies

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Chapter 15: Artifactual Literacies

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*My favourite object is probably a tiny little baby gro, this big.*

*When I had my little girl, she was only two pounds*

*so her babygro fit her Barbie doll now, (ohh)*

*despite the fact she is now fourteen*

*and I can't believe she ever was that small*

*but it reminds me of her*

(a class teacher describing her special object on first day of the My Family My Story project, from Pahl and Rowsell, 2010)

This quote comes from a research study called *My Family, My Story* and it highlights a core theme in the chapter, which is the artifactualy mediated cultural worlds of children (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). We draw on research in homes and communities to present a picture of early childhood literacy that connects narratives and stories to treasured objects. We argue that children's literacy experiences often connect to everyday objects and the meaning-making systems that they offer. We will elaborate on this research and theoretical principles to discuss the following: (1) the turn to out-of-school and home literacies; (2) the importance of valuing children's objects; (3) a review of research on artifactual literacies; (4) an artifactual literacies approach to literacy; (5) design literacies meets artifactual literacies; and (6) a case study of artifactual literacies in action.

Much, if not all, of the literacy practices as experienced by young children happen outside school contexts, and most happen in the home. It is important that the field of
early childhood literacy, therefore, adequately represents the experiences of children at home and acknowledges the diversity of home literacy practices. Early childhood literacy is constructed in the home and school, and while the ‘home’ field is now much more discursively represented in the field, ‘schooled literacy practices’ (Street and Street, 1991) continues to hold sway for many educators.

The Out-Of-School and Home Literacies Turn

Early literacy starts in the home. Children are born, and grow up, in the main, in environments where they live, with a caregiver, parent, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives (Gregory, Long, and Volk, 2004).

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Their early experiences of literacy and language are meshed with their own embodied and tacit experiences of care-giving and receiving. These experiences are cultural (Rogoff, 2003) and shaped by language (Heath, 1983; Moll et al, 1992). Out of these early experiences comes an engagement with literacies of many kinds including written scripts, oral recitation, digital media, and everyday writing. Street described literacy as being ideological, that is, shaped by the community’s social practices. He used the word autonomous to describe how literacy was seen as a set of skills in schools and institutions (Street, 1984). This view of literacy was developed in a number of different studies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gregory and Williams, 2000). Pahl looked at how children engaged in a number of different practices, not just ones that looked like literacy, at home. The children in Pahl’s study used different tools to express meaning, such as a bead map, or a drawing of the Welsh Valley Farm (Pahl, 2002). These tools were used as representational resources to create meanings (Kress, 1997). This type of research demonstrated the importance of literacy being connected to language and cultural practices and drew attention to the way in which children experience literacy in much wider ways than previously realized, while questioning the autonomy of school as the main place where literacy was experienced. Multi-modal research understood
that children use a variety of modes to express meaning which has helped to redefine literacy (Kress, 1997; Pahl, 2003).

**Valuing Children's Objects**

An artifactual literacies approach draws on the concept of literacy as situated and multimodal, but unites this with a focus on material culture, particularly in home settings. As a field of practice and research, material cultural studies offer a particularly rich vein to inform schooling. Schooling is already a materially situated social practice, but it is often separated in content from home. When people tell stories of their lives, they create opportunities for space and place to be evoked and within these spaces, objects exist. People tell different stories about the same object. When a study of narrative is put together with material cultural studies, literacy becomes materially situated. Rachel Hurdley found that people told different stories at different times about the same objects on their mantelpieces (Hurdley, 2006). Daniel Miller found that stories about objects opened a window into people's emotional and social landscapes (Miller, 2008). Shalini Shankar argued that objects did not need to be present to be important—a new car could be indexed in everyday talk as an important object even if not present (Shankar, 2006).

Jackie Marsh (2003) highlighted the extent of the objects within children's worlds, as their popular cultural icons are distributed across a range of products and objects including packed lunch boxes, duvets, curtains, toys and home objects such as mugs and cutlery. This distribution reflects the way in which children experience their ruling passions (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) as culturally mediated through objects. Recently a number of studies (e.g., McCrae, 2008) have looked at the power of objects in children's cultural worlds. McCrae (2008) argues that some objects are seen as ‘safe’ and ‘permissable’ especially within classroom settings, and some objects are more ‘dangerous’ for example, Bratz dolls signal different kinds of cultural worlds, possibly those less [p. 265 ↓] congruent with the acceptable boundaries of childhood and constructions of early literacy and language within early childhood that are allowable (Marsh, 2003; this volume). These objects open up meaning-making worlds for children. Wohlwend (2009; this volume) has shown how play with objects, notably Barbie, can open up textually mediated worlds in new ways, and how the literacy and language practices that spread from this activity are rich and diverse.
We start by reviewing the literature on the use of artifacts in classrooms and homes to make meaning. We define the term ‘artifacts’ and show how, in our work, we have linked it to literacy. We consider its potential as a methodology within early childhood literacy for supporting meaning making. We then move to the production of artifactual worlds. There is an added dimension to documenting material worlds and that is to research the origins, the production of objects such as Barbies and how production orients practice and meaning making.

A central argument of the chapter is that children’s commercial, technological, and hand-made artifacts provide an invaluable lens into their meaning making. In their afterword to *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies*, Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton drew attention to local–global connections and how ‘our interactions with technologies provide the resources for meaning making’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2006: 256). Using Bruno Latour’s translation model (1996), Brandt and Clinton open up a space of analysis to look at ‘how we act by mediating the actions of other mediators’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2006: 254). Brandt and Clinton used this model to inform their argument that multimodality provides a language for talking about technologies ‘as active and ideological social agents toward which readers and writers orient’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2006: 254). We build on Brandt and Clinton’s argument by examining and celebrating children’s material worlds as orienting their understandings of, and pathways into meaning making. Children’s artifactual worlds and the producers of children’s material culture situate children to ways of seeing and mediating their worlds. Here we present new directions for artifactual literacies and highlight where we think the field is going to go next.

A Review of the Literature on Artifactual Literacies

Here, we review the literature that led us to develop the concept of artifactual literacies. We focus on literacy initially but also widen the term to use ‘literacies’ to signal the way in which literacy is multiple and multimodal (Flewitt, 2008). A theory of multimodality allows for ideas to be represented visually as well as in writing. The concept of multimodality grew out of semiotics—the study of signs—and the importance of seeing
all sign making, or semiosis, as composed of an ensemble of modes (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Children’s texts include drawings as well as writing. Texts can be multimodal and have material qualities, as they contain words and images and these both work together to create meaning (Kress, 1997; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Scholars have taken up the challenge of multimodal literacy and have illustrated in their research how meaning makers learn quite naturally through a variety of modes, sometimes in isolation and sometimes combined (Flewitt, 2008; Kress, 1997; Jewitt and Kress, 2003; Lancaster, 2003; Stein, 2003).

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Meaning makers infuse the texts they write with their identities, and passions. In our work we have called this infusion sedimentation, and we have come up with the idea of ‘sedimented identities in texts’ to describe how students bring their own ways of being, doing, and feeling—their acquired dispositions—into writing (Rowsell and Pahl, 2007). The texts that children create have sedimented within them embedded shards of everyday experiences, and these experiences can be found in drawings, talk, and writing.

The process of sedimentation of social practices into modes is one that can be observed happening over time. Literacy practices unfold in material settings and are linked to the habitus. Ethnography is a way of doing research that combines thick description of everyday practice with a close account of cultures, peoples, and places (Heath and Street, 2008). It is situated, involving a longitudinal and considered study that attends to reflexivity, positionality, and multiple sources of data. Through extended study, ethnography provides a window onto meaning makers and their intentions.

When we combined ethnography with multimodality, we realized that a new theory was needed, a theory of artifactual literacies. Artifactual literacies combines a focus on texts as multimodal together with a situated account of literacies as material and artifactual within home, school, and community settings. What has been helpful in making multimodal literacy real has been to bring together multimodality as an account of the material, physical qualities of texts, together with an account of how these texts came into being or were being used, through ethnography (e.g., Kell, 2006; Stein, 2003). Meaning makers engage with text making, bringing identities with them. Looking
simultaneously at the multimodal using an ethnographic perspective necessitates a close study of people, spaces, and artifacts (Green and Bloome, 1997). However, doing so involves a consideration of such disciplines as cultural geography, material cultural studies, visual sociology, and visual and sensory ethnography (e.g., Back, 2007; Christiansen and O'Brien, 2003; Miller, 2008; Pink, 2007, 2009). These disciplines can help to unravel the complexities of understanding artifacts and their link to everyday life in a situated, sensory, and visual way. A cross-disciplinary account of literacy that includes material cultural studies as well as New Literacy Studies opens up the reach of our understanding of young children's early literacy in and out of school contexts. The nature of literacy today is more variegated and multi-faceted than ever, and as a discipline, needs to look across other disciplines to understand contemporary meaning making.

We have therefore benefited from understanding literacy as sensory (Pink, 2009), material (Miller, 2010) and entangled with objects and other forms of inscriptions (Ingold, 2007). These scholars enabled us to take the leap into seeing the artifactual as sensory, tactile, and felt in everyday life and how objects can serve as a link to literacy.

Artifactual literacies can be levered for the public good (Kinloch, 2010; Lewis, 2011; McLean, 2011). It can shift the relationship between literacy and power. Some students have more access to literate forms of communication, and thus inhabit literacy more easily than others. We also draw on the work of Barbara Comber and others to recognize the importance of bringing unheard voices into literacy, for, by interrogating how literacy is situated, inequality can be challenged through critical literacies (Comber, 2010; Rogers, [p. 267 ↓] Mosley and Kramer, and the Literacy for Social Justice Teacher Research Group, 2009). Artifactual literacy as an approach provides educators with a critical way of teaching literacy through a connection to lived lives and everyday experiences.

The Everyday in the Artifactual

The everyday can be strange and complex when it is not your own space or everyday world. We draw our definition of the ‘everyday’ from Bourdieu's notion of the everyday as realized in ‘practice’ (1990) but also as culturally significant, from Williams’ concept
of ‘culture is ordinary’ (Williams, 1961, 2001). Everyday practice is important for educators to take on board. We have found the word *habitus* useful to describe lived experience, the acquired dispositions that shape everyday practice (Bourdieu, 1990). We can include in the habitus such as the following: everyday routines, household chores, household interactions, household literacy practices, calendars on the wall, routinized experiences, religious practices, rites of passage, parenting practices, cooking, and sharing experiences. Bourdieu (1990) described the habitus as a system of acquired dispositions, which, over time, coheres into practice and is inherited and passed down the generations. Bringing an alertness to the meanings created in everyday spaces requires an ethnographic perspective that can inform artifactual literacies. It is a holistic vision. The work of Luis Moll and colleagues has been helpful in articulating the funds of knowledge learners bring from their home worlds into the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005).

Identity is a key aspect of the work in artifactual literacies, in that artifacts and identities are intertwined. Identities reside on a sea of stuff and of experiences. These experiences are intertwined with material culture. Material culture is portable and travels with us. We have particularly noted the importance of objects for the identities of migrating families. Museums can be important spaces in which to validate their identities and articulate new identities. By placing home objects in museums, new kinds of stories can be told, and new identities recognized. Communities carry with them a host of artifacts, and if we pay attention to these artifacts, new voices can be listened to (Clifford, 1997; Macdonald, 2003; Bennett, 2005; Pahl and Pollard, 2010).

What these different ideas provide is a way of looking at early literacy education that is wider than writing and reading (literacy) but also wider than drawing, gesture, oral storytelling, and three dimensional representation (multimodality). This way of working lets in the everyday, in that it acknowledges the material culture that students inhabit out of school. It accounts for the timescales and rhythms of the everyday, in that artifacts can be interrogated and understood in relation to the timescales associated with them.
Artifactual Literacies as an Approach to Early Childhood Literacy

In our work, we use the term artifact and object interchangeably, but we focus principally on the idea of the artifact. The notion of artifact can be defined as a thing or object that:

- has physical features that makes it distinct such as color or texture;
- is created, found, carried, put on display, hidden, evoked in language, or worn;
- embodies people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities, and experiences;
- is valued or made by a meaning-maker in a particular context.

Artifacts bring in everyday life. They are material, and they represent culture. They can link literacy, multimodality, and material culture together, by focusing the lens on meaning making that is situated and material. Artifacts open up stories and give opportunities for telling stories. Every object can tell a story: many objects carry many stories within them. These stories are repeated in interaction and remain continually told and re-told to visitors, changing in the process. Artifacts can connect worlds, as they travel between worlds. When a child connects to literacy and is asked to write a story, this is the end of a long process of meaning making that could begin in a different setting, in the everyday. For example, a child could love toy cars and be obsessed with collecting them. This interest spills into a story about cars. In school this could then be told or written as a narrative text and/or crafted as a digital story.

Artifactual literacy opens a new world that celebrates different sorts of values—the handmade (Whitty, Rose, Baisley, Comeau, and Thompson, 2008), the sensory (Pink, 2009), the storied (Hurdley, 2006), and the material (Miller, 2008). In letting new kinds of disciplines into literacy, literacy looks different. This artifactual approach offers a challenge for curriculum makers to listen to unheard voices. To conceptualize artifactual literacy requires an understanding of literacy as a situated social practice together with
literacy as materially situated. This then brings in the everyday world of objects and stories to create meaning.

Artifacts are sensory. They carry color and smell and shape and these sensory properties also affect meaning. The habitus, the ways of being in everyday life, can be also described as sensory and embodied (Bourdieu, 1990). An understanding of habitus and artifacts within habitus moves the sensory world into centre stage. Practices involve the sensory and require situated understanding of the world that resides in everyday place-making (Pink, 2009). Acquired dispositions that move across generations, such as ways of speaking, gesture, smell, and touch are themselves embodied. A sensory response to artifacts is important when working in material culture. Elliot Eisner talks about ‘somatic knowledge’ as embodied responses to the world (Eisner, 2002). Artifacts smell, they can be felt, heard, listened to, and looked at. Paying attention to meaning through artifacts involves recognizing embodied understandings as responses.

Objects uncover people and epistemologies. Not having respect for an object undermines a way of understanding the world, cutting off from an important line of enquiry. An embodied appreciation of space and place provides a richer and more situated understanding of objects together with an ‘in the world’ appreciation of experiences such as food and visual media (Pink, 2009). This links to the theory by Lanigan and others which has focused on a semiotic phenomenology, that is, a way of understanding experience that is located in the body and is somatic (Lanigan, 1988). What these ideas provide is a way of looking at literacy education that is wider than writing and reading (literacy), but also is wider than drawing, gesture, oral storytelling and three-dimensional representation (multimodality). This way of working acknowledges the material culture that students inhabit out of school.

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Objects are linked to timescales and are also tied to particular places and spaces. These spaces can be intercultural and transnational, and can cross linguistic and cultural boundaries. For example, in a discussion of the enduring value of gold in her family, Ruksana, a British Asian woman, also talked of how she liked to spray her elephants gold, these elephants were a pair of polystyrene elephants that she had decorated and put in her living room, to reflect an aesthetic she liked. However, she
also talked of the enduring value of gold as a core family symbol of inheritance and support. Gold was described jokingly as being like ‘bling’ by another family member. The meanings around gold shifted and were reproduced in different ways in different cultural contexts (Pahl and Pollard, 2008).

Children draw on their artifactual experiences as a resource for meaning making. Artifacts are objects to grow with. Many students have a favorite stuffed toy they recall from early childhood, that they still treasure. Children can identify the stages of childhood through their objects. Here is Sam, age 8, talking about his objects (see Pahl, 2003, 2005):

I've always been changing my subject. When I was a baby I liked wheels, then I liked Thomas the Tank Engine, then I liked Robots, I liked Space then I liked Pokémon through seven and a little bit of eight, then I'm into Warhammer now I've moved on from the rest of my–I was getting bigger all those eight life years.

(Interview, 20 November 2001)

Artifacts lever power different in classroom settings. For example, in a project which involved asking parents and children to work jointly to fill shoeboxes to represent the children's identities called ‘All about me’, conducted with 5–6 year-olds in Bristol, UK, the project team found out that the object boxes opened up new worlds in new ways,

It was noticeable that some of their boxes contained some very personal items–a first babygro, a page from the local paper in which the child had featured in an article on a children's bereavement service, a book called ‘You Are Special’, presented to the child at nursery school.

(Greenhough et al., 2005: 99)

The project enabled the children to bring their home identities into school but also had a powerful role in inspiring writing. Some of the writing was strong and let in new emotional spaces (Scanlan, 2010). Artifacts are entangled within identities and can be evoked and re-animated within narratives. Artifacts can open up new worlds of experience. Talking about artifacts provides ways into narratives that are not always
accessible in other ways. They can be used to encourage children to respect diversity, to find points of commonality across communities and can be used as important starting points for literacy learning. Artifacts are also key ingredients for family stories, that provide meaning and direction for lives lived in communities. Collective and social memories are helped and brought into new spaces through family stories and artifacts (Connerton, 1989; Brooke, 2003).

Sometimes we may not recognize the meaning-making potential of artifacts. For instance, commercial artifacts such as Sponge Bob toys, Dora the Explorer stuffed dolls, Toy Story bedspreads, console games; there are so many media-driven objects that children value and that play a role in their narratives. These objects orient their story-telling, their conceptions of characterization, humour, aesthetics, and notions of design. Children have passion for media and popular culture texts and as educators we need to respect and, most importantly, understand their passion for these artifacts. Hence, we take an equal account of production and reception logic [p. 270 ↓] of artifacts as a window into early childhood literacy.

We argue for the power of artifacts to lever in experiences from outside school and to unite children who might have disparate experiences, creating listening opportunities between children and adults. Artifacts mediate experience in gentler ways. Artifacts sit between human and material worlds and in this way, they are the liminal, in-between, border spaces that allow complex identities to feel comfortable. We now turn to a further field we have identified: that of the artifactual nature of children's worlds as expressed in the designs of the texts they engage in, thus further shifting the artifactual nature of their literacies.

Design Literacies Meets Artifactual Literacies

In the field of early childhood literacy, there has been powerful work by scholars such as Jackie Marsh (2010) and Karen Wohlwend (2009) prompting us to acknowledge commercial artifacts as key objects or artifacts which signal important meaning-making practices by children. Marsh (2010) investigated children's use of virtual worlds that
offer a range of opportunities. Marsh developed a mixed-methods study of multimodal resources in the home tied to commercial juggernauts such as Club Penguin and Barbie Girls. Marsh demonstrated how home sites enable children to create and dress avatars and decorate avatar homes and care for pets. Similarly, Wohlwend (2009) shows how gender identity messages circulate through toys and artifacts that surround young children as consumers. Anne Haas Dyson (2003) argued that literacy educators need to take account of children's engagement with the diversity of literacies in order to successfully make sense of print and text making in contemporary communicational landscapes. From such work, there is an acknowledgement that we need to stretch beyond a sole gaze on schooling, even home cultures, to look at how designers and marketplace producers design virtual worlds, toys, and immersive worlds for young children (Sheridan-Rabideau and Rowsell, 2010; Rowsell, 2012).

Toys, action figures, lunch boxes, t-shirts, dolls, and other objects occupy a treasured place in children's lives and we should examine their role and what they can tell us about children's learning. To examine material worlds, we take account of where objects are situated, how objects are used and we account for their production. Sometimes valued objects or artifacts are hand-made or handed-down, but more often than not, valued artifacts are store-bought and commercially oriented. We described earlier the concept of an Ariadne's thread running between commercial artifacts and media and technology producers. We harness our work applying artifactual literacies in our research (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) to an account of marketplace producers' logic of text production (Sheridan-Rabideau and Rowsell, 2010).

**Artifactual Literacies as a Trigger for Home Meaning Making**

In this small vignette of practice, we describe the way in which artifactual literacies are found in the home. In an ethnographic study on writing in the home, an understanding of literacy as artifactual was derived from the dataset. This case study is taken from a year-long study of four 8–13-year-old girls' meaning-making practices in two homes ('Writing in the Home and in the Street' funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK). In this example Kate describes meaning-making practices in
one of the homes, which is inhabited by Anita, and her husband, Abdul, and their three daughters, who were 12, 8, and 2. Anita’s home is suffused with artifacts. Within these objects, literacy appears but it is often embedded within artifacts.

This home helped develop an understanding of artifactual literacies as they occur naturalistically. As an ethnographer, Kate records her perceptions and fieldnotes using the first person. Here is an extract from an account of the home:

When I walk in, the things on the floor and on the seating area vary. Sometimes there are toys and small books strewn about the floor of the back living room. As part of the ethnography, I asked the older girls to record these objects (see figure 15.1).

There are to be found fragments of script within the toys and artifacts. For example a board book for the youngest child, aged two was inscribed with Arabic letters. The family members attend mosque school, as British Muslims, and their literacies were multilingual. Writing was both fixed and fluid in the home, instantiated in artifacts. For example, I encountered an ‘Etch-a-Sketch’ in which the youngest writes on where the script is wholly artifactual and ephemeral. These objects are relatively fluid, in that they move about, and are sometimes visible, and sometimes are tidied away when the youngest is asleep and the mother does the housework. A computer is placed in the corner, on which the older girls (8 and 12) do their homework and write stories and emails to me, and the mother sends orders for garden products.

This computer is fixed. However, many of the artifactual literacies in the household are fluid. The literacy practices in this household are embedded within the artifacts that surround them. For example, here is a purse-making episode, described by Lucy, 12:

Figure 15.1 Artifactual Literacies in a home
Lucy: Here, I have made a purse
And I can put my money and cards in it
And I have put lots of stickers
And three D stickers as well on
And I have put all my favourite things on this side
And I have put some things I hate and some things
I like on this side
I have got little gems and stars
And little animals and food on
And little signs that say keep out top secret
(film; 4 August 2010)

For Lucy’s sister, who is 2, her experience of literacy is mediated through artifacts. She experiences the textiles and embroidery that the family constantly engages in. This piece of embroidery, for example, was stitched by her older sister and was an example of the many craft activities the family produced (See Figure 15.2 below).
Lucy’s aunt explained in an email how the family’s meaning making was imbued with their family heritage in relation to textiles:

The textile side of our heritage comes from the women in the family. We have older relatives that do appliqué, crochet, embroidery, sewing, and knitting (from the girl's mother's side their grandmothers sister and cousin and from their father side his two cousins who live close by). My younger sister loves craft type of activities and buys the girls a lot of resources to do sewing and fabric work especially on birthdays, Christmas, and Eid

(Written text from the girls’ aunt, e-mail, August 2010)

An artifactual literacies approach can take account of these craft productions, and notice the material nature of the inscriptions that are produced within the home. These productions are located in the everyday, handmade world of artifactual literacies. They can be transported across to school settings, in projects such as the shoebox project, or using a home literacies lens to look at writing. They open up cultural worlds and act as a lever for articulating and represent diverse family ecologies (Lee, 2008).

*Figure 15.2 Embroidery*

**New Directions in Artifactual Literacies**

Here, we highlight the directions we think the field of artifactual literacies is going, and point to some ways forward. We also consider the problematics of this methodology and highlight some research that we think could usefully further the field yet more. We begin by considering artifactual critical literacies, then literacies in relation to place and space
and then examine how artifactual literacies can be levered for the public good in early literacy.

Artifactual Critical Literacies

Critical literacy education is in-place; that is, it accounts for place and space in its methodology. Comber (2010) has used a place-based approach combined with critical literacy to look at the ways in which children's literacies of place can effect social change. This work also involves artifacts.

Critical literacy is about mobilizing that platform using texts; artifactual critical literacy is about mobilizing that platform through artifacts. Artifacts open up worlds that bring in new identities. For example, a further step would then be to interrogate the artifacts in relation to institutes of power. Artifacts could be discussed from the point of view of:

• value—does value matter in the case of this artifact? If not, why not?;
• timescale—what is the timescale of the artifact? Is it intergenerational?;
• space—what spaces has the artifact inhabited, and how has it traveled?;
• production—is the artifact found or newly made? How was it made?;
• mode—what modality is most salient and why?;
• relation to institutions of power—who controls the artifact and its attendant communities?

By asking questions of artifacts in relation to the way they are made, the timescales, and the modality of their making, and linking this interrogation to a design literacies perspective (Sheridan-Rabideau and Rowsell, 2010), it is possible to open up meaning-making spaces for young children which privilege their worlds, be it Barbie, Pokémon, Club Penguin or their grandmother's biscuit tin. For example, a discussion of the role of a Pokémon card in a young person's life could incorporate the various manifestations of Pokémon (cards, games, TV series, dolls, etc.) as well as the ways in which these cards have accompanied the child through life and the role of Pokémon cards at home and at school, and their different uses across domains of practice. This then could extend critical literacy work with young children, drawing, for example on the work of Larson and Marsh (2005) on critical literacy in the classroom.
Place-Based Artifactual Literacies

This way of working moves out of the spaces of the classroom into the connective spaces of community. Barbara Comber (2010) worked with teachers within the tradition of critical literacy in order to focus on place-based pedagogies, to develop what she describes, from Gruenewald, as a ‘critical pedagogy of place’ (2003: 45). This focuses outwards, from schools into the complex and contradictory spaces of communities, with a focus on social justice and visions of change. Children published writing and art to articulate a vision for the communities they inhabited. Students mapped their communities and created multimodal texts that presented alternative visions of what their school, the surrounding areas and play spaces could look like (Comber, 2010).

The perspective from which a community is viewed affects the sense of its space. Children grow up and observe their neighborhoods and communities. Their visions of place and space might not be the same as adults as they encounter their social worlds from a different perspective (Orellana, 1999). We argue that children's experiences of neighborhood means that place, too, is always shifting, as artifacts and experience are rolled up into new life trajectories and experiences. Children walk through the neighborhood, and as they grow older, their experience of place shifts. From looking at the world when sitting in a stroller, a child then walks holding an adult's hands through the mall, experiencing the place-shaped literacies around them. Tim Ingold (2007) talks about ‘entangled’ pathways; that is, he focuses on the making of routes in the sensory experiences of place. Sarah Pink (2009) has described ways in which places can be sensed through participation in practices such as walking, eating, and sharing chores and routines. Place is experienced bodily and the mapping of place through visual methods, such as video camera and photography, and audio methods of recording can call up memories of place that can be collectively shared in classrooms.

Artifactual Literacies for the Public Good

What happens if artifacts are united with a critical literacies perspective? Critical literacies is about accounting for power. Power resides within texts, but also can be
discussed and accounted for during the making of texts and in the unifying of perspectives to collectively create social change. It accounts for different ways of conceptualizing identities, communities, and texts. Critical literacy education is also in place. It means accounting for communities. By walking through a community, looking at visual signs and experiencing a community fully, a deeper engagement with space and place is let in. Within these spaces are artifacts, embedded in public and private spaces. Recent work in spatial literacies include work drawing on the work of Soja (2010) who describes space as a site for creating more equality, or, conversely, the inequalities that are set up through space can be challenged. Massey (2005) talks about the ‘thrown togetherness’ of neighbourhoods. Young children inhabit spaces that are riven with power imbalances. Their worlds can be interrogated using artifactual critical literacies.

By describing our work as being linked to the public good, that is, using an artifactual literacies approach to create spaces for children that are equitable we can make explicit and frame the work in a particular way. This perspective draws on work by Morrell (2008) and Kinloch (2010) in working with older children to identify key artifacts in neighborhoods and make sense of them in relation to sites and distribution of power. For example, in an early childhood context, community walk-arounds can identify where children locate their meaning making and sense of place. They can then draw on these place-making methodologies in their writing (Comber, 2010). An artifactual literacies approach can lever home experiences, the messy, everyday handmade world of home literacies and popular culture and open up equitable meaning making spaces in the classroom (see Nichols and Nixon, chapter 16 this volume; Wohlwend, chapter 5 this volume; Marsh, chapter 12 this volume).

Merging Artifactual Literacies with Design Literacies as a Heuristic for Early Childhood Literacy

What happens when commercially produced artifacts are viewed as valuable heuristics into children's meaning-making? The power of Dora or Scooby Doo lie in their stories,
narratives, designs, and most importantly, children’s remixing of their narratives in their everyday meaning-making. Karen Wohlwend (2009) shows how gender identity messages circulate through toys and artifacts that surround young children as consumers. Through close analysis of commercial texts and products, Wohlwend examines the close connection between commercialized products and children’s meaning-making. From another perspective, Helen Nixon focuses on commercial providers as key networks of information about parenting and children’s development and literacy learning (Nixon, 2011). There will be increasing research focus on commercialized literacy and communicational and artifactual media as key learning tools for children’s literacy development. Combining artifactual literacy as an approach to early childhood literacy with design literacies as accounting for commercial designers’ role in learning will (and should) be a key factor for future research in early literacy.

We have signaled this merging of a field as taking greater prominence as we move further into the twenty-first century. An artifactual-design literacies approach creates a niche field devoted not only to the technologies of choice by children and tweens, but also to an acknowledgement that commercial providers have a voice and play a role in educating young children.

Problems and Questions

In this section we highlight some problems and questions we have identified associated with the field of artifactual literacies. First, we have a challenge in the form of global warming. How can an artifactual-literacies approach work to create sustainability for our children? We have begun to theorize links across from rural literacies and sustainable literacies (Brooke, 2003; Comber, 2010; Pahl and Rowsell, 2012) that then recognize the artifactual nature of the natural world, for example, garden making as collaborative text, which can then unite an artifactual literacies approach with place making (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012)

We would also like artifactual literacies to lever power in the direction of new migrants, and those who are fleeing hostility. Artifactual literacies can also evoke timescales that are long and short, and they can bridge spaces. Artifacts can signal migratory spaces and can be represented in multiple languages and modalities (Pahl, Pollard, and Rafiq,
In that way, they signal the presence of the dispossessed and migratory and signal epistemological realities that are sometimes hidden.

Conclusion

Artifacts position learners differently. Artifacts open up modalities and subjectivities. To extend their argument, Brandt and Clinton talk about how the autonomous model that Brian Street (1993) identified in his work as a universalized, reified notion of what literacy is and should be dictates the kinds of thinking and reasoning that occurs when reading and writing. If there is a print-based, universalized, autonomous model, then it follows that print-bearing texts have the power and the technologies of print are more important than human-mediated actions used to understand and reason with them. However, Latour (1996) and his model of mediation resists the temptation to define technologies acting on something or someone and, instead, views meaning making as more fluid and emergent based on social interaction. As a result, Brandt and Clinton put affordances forward as a more ideological way of seeing how we think and reason with things and technologies. In their words: ‘if we think of literacy technologies as having affordances and if we think of people mediating these affordances, then we have a model for thinking about both human and non-human action’ (Brandt and Clinton, 2006: 255). This is a key notion running throughout the chapter: we think and reason through objects and correspondingly, they shape what it means to be literate. We can also celebrate the diversity of cultural spaces outside school in a way that lets in new kinds of identities, through script, toys, and handmade objects.

This kind of work can then question the settled nature of objects within kindergarten and nursery settings to allow new identities to reside within these spaces and be heard. The writing that stems from artifactual literacies connects to the everyday world of the habitus, it is linked in with the sensory, embodied world of objects and can draw on a wider range of modalities in the meaning-making process. Artifactual literacies in the early years is therefore both a methodology for encouraging writing, a way of understanding the production of meaning making and a window into children's popular cultural worlds that acknowledges the materiality of these worlds. We would like to celebrate artifactual literacies as an approach that lets in diversity and
challenges normative scripts for family life; rather it listens to young children's passions and embedded worlds, and makes them visible.

References


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