

# **Literacy Forum NZ**

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Cover photograph;  
*Story time with "Poppa".*

## From the President

Kia ora colleagues

Welcome to the first issue of Literacy Forum NZ 2019. I hope you all have had a relaxing Summer break and now you will already be full on into term 1.

We are pleased to bring you another issue of great professional reading that includes a range of quality articles from our 2018 conference, “Literacy Landscapes” in Palmerston North.

This year the Canterbury Literacy Association will be delighted to host “The Arts as a Bridge to Literacy”, NZLA’s 42nd National Conference which will be held in Christchurch at Rangi Ruru Girls’ School in Merivale. Registration details about the conference are up on the website and look out for the ‘Call for Workshop Submissions’ coming soon.

The NZLA Executive is very grateful that the extremely generous Marie Clay Literacy Trust has given us \$15,000 for the 2019 Conference Awards. \$12,000 of this is for Early Career teachers (up to and including six years teaching experience) and \$3000 is for Experienced teachers. Every Council will be awarding 1 x \$1000 MCLT Conference Award for Early Career teachers and NZLA will be awarding 6 x \$500 MCLT Conference Awards for Experienced Teachers across New Zealand to attend the NZLA 42<sup>nd</sup> National Conference in Palmerston North. To apply for either of these awards please contact your local Literacy Council for more information. Contact details for Literacy Councils are on the back cover of this Literacy Forum NZ or on the NZLA website.

The next Regional Leadership Workshop will be held in Christchurch on Saturday 30 March 2019 for Councils in the central North Island. Leadership workshops held in previous years have been very well received with participants gaining a lot from the sharing and discussions. I will be in touch with the local councils in these areas very soon with more details.

This is the time of the year when most Literacy Associations are holding their Annual General Meetings. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank those members who put up their hand and help on their local Association’s committee. Your work is very much appreciated. If you are not a member of a local Literacy Association committee, maybe this is the time you could consider joining. The old saying “Many hands make light work” very much applies to our committees - the more active committee members you have the less work it should be for everyone. Belonging to a well-run committee can be very rewarding and many life time friends have been made from being on committees with your colleagues. Please consider joining your local Literacy Association if you are not currently a committee member.



All the best for a wonderful 2019

Joy Hawke, NZLA President

# Advocating for children: Not all literacy interventions, approaches and resources are equal

*Janet S. Gaffney, Suzanne Smith, Frances Commack, Annabelle Ash, Margot Mackie, Sonia Mudgway*

*Advocacy is not separate from teaching children, it is what allow us to teach our children.*

(Amy Smith, 2013, Teacher Leader, Madison Country Schools, Kentucky)

At the 2018 New Zealand Literacy Association's (NZLA) National Conference in Palmerston North, the first author (first name) gave a plenary presentation titled the same as this manuscript. When invited to submit a manuscript to the *Literacy Forum*, NZLA's journal based on this presentation, I invited a few educators, who attended the keynote, to engage as dynamic thought partners and co-authors. We (F, S, A and M; first names) offer our reciprocal musings on teachers' roles as advocates for children to prompt and extend your thinking, whether or not you were able to attend the conference.

Teachers are advocates for children in teaching *and* selection of literacy interventions, approaches and resources. Teachers serve an essential role as members of an informed school team with responsibility for decision making about literacy learning within their local context. In the workplace of schools, colleagues engage with others within a set of shared assumptions that create the culture of learning and teaching.

The advocacy role of teachers will be discussed along with criteria for critically appraising teaching approaches and resources that facilitate literacy processing. Empirical research, school and classroom contexts, children's competences, and teachers' theories of learning guide selection of interventions, approaches and teaching resources. Which resources are worth the effort? Which ones are worthy of children's time? Why does it matter? In complex systems, a change in one part of the system has ripple effects at every other level of operation that expands or limits optimal learning of each child. Students' learning is what is at stake.

Educators are quite clear that they are advocates for the children they teach, the ones in their respective classrooms or in their charge as Reading Recovery, Resource Teachers of Literacy, Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, or Special Needs. Advocacy casts a wider net when teachers join with principals, assistant principals, Boards of Trustees and community members to make resource decisions for the school, Kāhui Ako or school cluster. Literacy teams are responsible for selecting and evaluating literacy interventions, approaches, curriculum materials and commercial resources that are used

across classrooms. These school-wide decisions are often accompanied by corresponding professional learning development (PLD). Resource decisions, therefore, have pedagogical, curricular and economic impact on every student, their whānau and educators in a school or school cluster.

Teachers are essential contributors to these school teams. Teachers, who are leading the way, are often in non-positional roles without leadership titles. They are the teachers who their peers seek out for guidance, collaboration and innovation (Gaffney, Price, Abd-El-Khalick, Frericks, & Sundeman, submitted). The challenge for teachers, who are leaders, is that they derive their expertise from their classroom experience, “yet unless they venture out of it, connecting and relating to other adults in the school, they do not fulfill the power in their teaching role” (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006, p. 66). An expansive view of teaching advocacy beyond the realm of a classroom creates space for teachers to understand and influence systemic change. “Change must be conceived at the level of a system, but change can only be achieved at the level of an individual” (Gaffney & Paynter, 1994, p. 24).

*FC: Advocacy for children . . . what is your definition?*

*JG: To act in support of another's interests*

*SS: Teaching is advocacy on a daily basis.*

*JG: And, extends to children beyond individual classrooms through*

*collective decision-making about literacy practices that impact the sector, school and cluster levels.*

*MM: Being advocates for children is a privilege. It is our role to critically appraise teaching approaches, programmes and resources that we use. I ask myself, “Do I?”*

Before continuing to read, engage in this targeted reflection: Think of a resource, programme, curriculum or approach that you have recently chosen to use with a class, small group, or an individual child and respond to the following questions.

- How did you hear about it?
- Why did you choose it?
- Did it work?
- How did you decide if it worked?

The most important question is “why”. Why did you choose it? Then, consider if your measuring stick for “working” corresponds to the reason you chose it.

*FC: Teachers have to constantly keep asking, “Why”? Why do they work? Why don't they work? Is it the right intervention for the child? This links well with The Golden Circle (Sinek, 2009). Often in schools, we do what has traditionally always been done, what is easy or what is most time effective. Sometimes we don't always see the results that we want to achieve or that have been achieved previously. It really made me think deeper about some interventions that I have previously used and I wonder if the achievement could have been different if I had thought deeper about the approach.*

*JG: Sinek's “Golden Circle” is a set of three concentric circles with “Why”*

*in the centre, “How” in the middle circle and “What” in the outer circle. Thinking and talking about teaching in professional discussions is often focussed on ‘what’ to do and ‘how’ to do it rather than addressing the central question: “Why?”*

**SS:** *We must rigorously inquire into and evaluate interventions, approaches and resources to meet the complex and diverse needs of all our learners. We are accountable for the resources we choose and must not be caught up in the ‘how’ and ‘what’ or oversimplify alternatives. “Why” must remain central to our decision making.*

**SM:** *Am I asking my team the right questions to challenge their thinking? I continue to encourage my team to question and challenge my decisions (and not be afraid to assert their opinion when they are passionate about the progress of a child).*

A thoughtful, critical and collective approach is needed to appraise resources, particularly commercial ones, that are used in teaching. Quality assurance procedures can be undertaken in the selection of resources **before** they are purchased or adopted full scale in Year-level classes or across a school or schools. The literacy team fact-checks advertisements, research claims, alignment with the stated purpose(s) and with the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, MoE, 2007) and Effective Literacy Practice (MoE, 2003a and b) and the contextual fit with the school. These assurance procedures

are protective devices to avoid being seduced by fads, unwarranted claims, flash trends, packaged programmes, gimmicks and testimonials. Assuring quality of resources protects children and youth from ineffective teaching, teachers from unproductive PLD and schools against the waste of funds.

On the websites and brochures of commercial resources and the back covers of professional books, descriptors, such as evidence-based and research-based, are highlighted. As advocates, who act in the service of children and youth, and their families, members of the literacy team would have responsibility for confirming these claims. Duke and Martin (2011) offered a clear distinction between research- and evidence-based. When claims are made that an approach, intervention or material has a research base, this means that the authors have identified one or more sources in the literature, which may or may not be empirical, to back up aspects of their resource. Thus, a professional resource may cite a handful of related references that address the importance of a curriculum area, such as comprehension or writing but are not providing support for specific recommended practices or tools in the book or kit. “Evidence-based” or “research-tested” requires a higher standard of use than “research-based”. Evidentiary claims require empirical studies of specific recommended practices or resources using systematic procedures in similar contexts.

Imagine a scenario on a teacher website in which a teacher asks teachers to recommend resources they use for writing. A respondent might say, “I use

“x”. The requesting teacher says, “Do you like it?” The respondent gives an acclamation, “We are very happy with it.” Another teacher adds. “We use it, too!” The initial teacher says, “What school are you in? Can we bring a team to visit?” Within a few hours, 16 educators have joined the conversation and expressed excitement about the resource, desire to visit the school or intent to purchase. As an advocate for children, some different responses might be “Why did you choose this resource for your context?”, “What competencies of the children did you want to expand?” “What can children do now that convinced you that it ‘works?’” “Do some children benefit more than others? How do you explain the differential benefits? “Will you share the studies that you read in your decision-making?”

While we would like to think that literacy resources are being thoughtfully selected as fit-for-purpose and the learning context with evidentiary support, the influx of packaged programmes and downloadable resources that are narrowly targeted for groups (e.g., bi- and multi-lingual and cultural, ethnic, dyslexic, oral language) belies this assumption. Programmes are designed to teach members of groups as if they are the same and will follow a predetermined sequence of learning. Assumptions about groups, in learning as in life, are misleading in terms of individuals (Gaffney, 2016). Programmes are designed to meet *needs*, or deficits, of group members rather than extending each individual’s array of competences. The latter leverages children’s learning momentum and leads to sustainable

learning, the former requires individuals to proceed through the same sequence that is building a foundation on sand (deficits) rather than a solid footing (competences). “Good teaching . . . arises out of the understanding teachers have of their craft and never out of prescriptive programs” (Clay, 1998, p. 130).

As advocates, a community of colleagues could agree to pay attention to their own unintended assumptions conveyed in language about children. When a label, for example ESOL, is used as a descriptor of a child, is the conversation focussed on building on the child’s linguistic competences in their heritage language/s and other related funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Podmore, Hedges, Keegan & Harvey, 2016; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011) and on their current competencies in English? “The concept of funds of knowledge . . . is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, ix-x [*italics in original*]).

One way to readjust teaching from a focus on needs, or deficits, is to take seriously the challenge of identifying and focusing *only* on children’s competences. This suggestion comes with a caution that this shift in mindset and teaching is not easy, and will take time, commitment, determination and creativity. Engaging in advanced professional learning is best undertaken with colleagues who will share their collective wisdom and accountability.

The Window for Examining Learning-Teaching Interactions was designed by



the first author in 2005 to graphically depict the complexity of the relationships between a child and teacher's behaviours and cognitions (Clay, 1991, p. 233).

*AA: The window of learning-teaching interactions stood out for me. In Reading Recovery and classroom teaching, we notice a child's actions and behaviours, then the teacher responds depending on the needs of the child. Considering what the child does and thinks has helped me to wait before I respond.*

*JG: As we closely observe what a child does or says, the challenge is to notice and leverage the child's responses that represent new and emerging competencies without being distracted by difficulties.*

*SS: When you touched on learning-teaching interactions, I was particularly interested in a child's reality vs. our perception of what they think. What can we do and look for to best understand their thinking?*

*JG: We can only make inferences about a child's thinking from what they say and do; a reminder to be tentative in our interpretations of another's behaviour. Our interpretations map more closely on a child's thinking when we listen and observe closely over time and identify patterns of responses.*

*FC: As a teacher, I pride myself on the relationships with my children and their families. You mentioned that "we need to have a theory of each*

*child we teach" and "our job is to figure out the sense the child is trying to make of the world". As I start a new year, this is something that I keep in front of my mind. I need to establish relationships with all my children and their families, spend time learning about them, how they learn and how they view themselves as learners and how they see the world around them. This will give me a much better understanding of what is going to work for them and why it will work. I will be able to cater for my children in a much deeper level.*

*JG: Teachers could build rapport with children without going to that deeper level of understanding the relationship of learning and teaching. Theories of learning and teaching offer explanations for groups of children. A colleague and I have proposed that a personal theory of each child is required—a Theory of Callum, Marcus, Cecelia, or Tiantian—particularly when a child's progress stalls (Gaffney & Jesson, in press). The Window offers a frame to analyse learning-teaching interactions to explain THIS child's learning, drawing on the child's language, cultural and specialized content expertise, knowledge and ways of knowing.*

Teaching is an artisan craft (Gaffney, 2015). As with other artisan crafts, such as boat builders, pouanamou carvers, and glass blowers, developing high quality in the complex craft of teaching is multifaceted. How do we use experience,

intuition, and learning sciences to refine our teaching craft?

Reform must be built upon a theory of pedagogy that teachers can take to depth. In this way, the theory can provide teachers with an ongoing means of addressing new demands on their practice, rather than simply providing them with a set of practices they are expected to replicate regardless of context. (Bishop, O’Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010, p. 60)

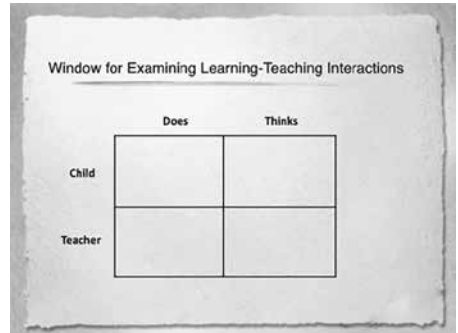
SS: *The depth of our pedagogical theory then gives us the power, as artisans, to address the constant demands of practice. No matter where we are in our pedagogical understanding it is the grounding of ‘why’ that reminds us to maintain a standard of curiosity and rigour. This includes regularly clarifying our ‘why’ and seeking increasing depth in our pedagogical theory as well as being leaderful in our dialogue with others so that we all keep moving forward.*

SM: *If we engage in collective leadership, we can centre every decision we make back to children.*

JG: *One colleague identified a shift in the teacher–education landscape from teachers as advocates to teachers as moral agents (Kubanyiiova, 2018).*

SM: *We have to stand tall for our children. And, grow our capacity of “knowing what to do” (Chappell, 2014; as cited in Kubanyiiova, 2018).*

Our challenge is to “transcend the boundaries among teachers, leaders and political authorities in a way that allows us to nurture, challenge, encourage, and develop every student entrusted to our care” (Reeves, 2008, p. 1).



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# Va'atele: Enabling Pasifika literacy success

## Rae Si'ilata

Ki te taha o toku matua, no Ngati Raukawa, no Tūhourangi, no Otaki ahau. Ki te taha o toku whaea, no Fiti, no Savusavu ahau. Ki te taha o toku tane me aku tamariki, kei te hono ahau ki Hamoa.

*On my father's side I come from Ngati Raukawa, Tūhourangi and Otaki. On my mother's side from Savusavu, Fiji. Through my husband and children I connect with Samoa.*

### Storying our land

A well known Hawaiian proverb states: 'A'ohe pau ka 'ike i ka hālau ho'okāhi: 'Not all knowledge is learned from one school'. The theme for the 2018 New Zealand (NZ) Literacy Association's conference in Papaioea/Palmerston North, Manawatu was 'Literacy Landscapes'. In my keynote address, I asked the question, 'What is the world view or prior knowledge that informs your understanding of this idea?' Styres (2019) states that:

Storying is essentially the ways we narratively describe ourselves as Indigenous peoples locally, nationally, and globally. Land is at once storied and relational informing the social, spiritual, and systemic norms and practices of a particular culture-sharing group in relationship to their places... Indigenous people exist in deeply intimate and sacred relationships with Land... it is the relationship with Land that comes before all

else.... Storied landscapes form spatial and temporal tracks left by our ancestors that can be read with as much care as one reads the narratives of classical history (p. 28).

It is appropriate to consider the question about worldview and prior knowledge in light of long term calls by tangata whenua (people of the land) to teach local tribal place-based histories, and more recently, a petition by the NZ History Teachers Association for the teaching of Māori and colonial history in schools: "The New Zealand History Teachers' Association believes too few Kiwis understand what brought the Crown and Māori together in the 1840 Treaty, or how their relationship developed over the decades since – partly because schools are not required to teach it" (Redmond, 2019). As I considered the idea of 'literacy landscapes', I was reminded of indigenous storying and literacies that possibly did not spring automatically to mind for most teachers and academics at the conference. Why? Because not all knowledge or histories of local landscapes are valued in the same way by New Zealand schools, or by NZ educators. Stories of landscape histories are often told through books; however for Māori and Pacific peoples, storying or storytelling was an important languaging practice, well before stories were written into books. It is often through storying and remembering stories that tikanga or cultural knowledge is shared. Frequently, storying also had embedded whakatauki or proverbial

sayings that spoke through metaphor, hidden truths about human behaviour, and ways of being that supported people to live through tikanga (correct customs or protocols) in pono or tika (true or right ways).

### Haunui-A-Nanaia

Māori history and stories relating to the landscapes of the Manawatu and Horowhenua tell the journeying story of one man: Haunui-a-Nanaia, “who was the ancestor of the Te Ati Hau a Paparangi people of the Whanganui region” (Rangitane, Education, 2015). Hau named many of the maunga (mountains) and the awa (rivers) on his journey across the motu (island) in pursuit of his errant wahine (woman) Wairaka, who had run off with a slave. Some say that he began his journey in Whanganui meaning Big Bay or Harbour, then moved on to Rangitikei: which had been a day (rangi) of striding (tikei) – and then to Turakina (to be felled, or thrown down) where he used a fallen log as a bridge. In his pursuit of Wairaka he came to the Manawatu River, where the water made his heart (manawa) stand still (tu) because it was so cold. He carried on and named the Ohau River after himself (the place of Hau). At Otaki he put his staff in the Otaki River to measure the depth (the place of the staff). Then to Waikanae – where he saw the silver flashing of the kanae (mullet) in the wai (water). Then he climbed up the hill (now known as Rimutaka) – naming it Remutaka (to sit down). As Haunui sat there, he looked toward Lake Wairarapa and the reflection of the sun caught his eyes and

made them water. It was this incident that led to the name – Wairarapa: the rarapa (flashing) of the wai (water). As Hau journeyed from there, he came to a river crossing where he sat and felt remorse. Looking into the water, he was sad as he saw Wairaka’s face reflected back at him –: Wai o Hine Wairaka (Water for his woman Wairaka) referring to the tears he shed. We know it today as ‘Waiohine’. Hau then carried on up the east coast on his way home (Rangitane Education, 2015). In this story of Haunui-A-Nanaia and his naming of the landscape, we find not only information about the environment – but also a Māori worldview or way of seeing the world, to do with time and place; deep connection to the land, to tupuna (ancestors), memorialised through the naming of landscapes that reveal both ancient history and the geographical features of those named places.

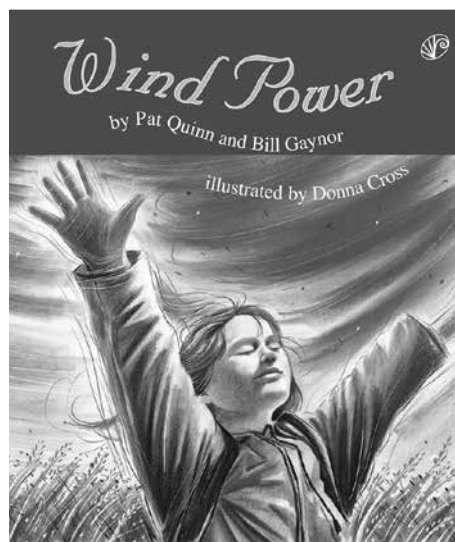
### Connecting with children’s prior linguistic and world knowledge

In considering some of the modern landscape features of Papaioea/ Palmerston North, the conference committee selected the wind turbines of





the Manawatu as a key image connecting with the ‘Literacy Landscapes’ theme and gifted all participants a rock painting of wind turbines and hills. A text titled “Wind Power” (Quinn & Gaynor, 1995) was used in New Zealand classrooms for a number of



years, as a guided reading text to support inquiries into the use of wind turbines to generate electricity. In the teacher’s notes for this text, suggested questions for introducing the text included:

“How would you get power from the wind?” and “What is the girl doing?” My colleague once told me a story of being in a class with Pasifika children, where a teacher introduced this book by showing the front cover image of a girl with raised hands, and by asking the question, “What do you think the book is about?” Some of the Pacific children in that class responded with, ‘It’s about praising the Lord.’ They were drawing on their funds of knowledge, connecting to the image, to make an inference that the book was about praising God, rather than about the power of the wind to generate electricity. It would have been more helpful if the teacher had initially supported those children to make prior knowledge connections to the schema or underlying theme of the book.

When considering text choice, writing foci and class inquiries, we need to not only think about the stories behind ancient landscapes, but also reflect on the ‘re-o-scape’ of NZ’s changing demographics. The specific prior linguistic, literacy and world knowledge systems held by children in many linguistically diverse classrooms in Aotearoa NZ need to be explored

and validated to enable meaningful connection making between children's existing funds of knowledge and text knowledge. A few years ago, a teacher in one of my Bilingual Education classes told me that one of her Pasifika children when writing an asTTLe writing assessment titled, 'The Belle at the Ball', wrote, "The bell ring. I pick up my ball and go inside." Obviously his 'kete of prior knowledge' for 'belles and balls' did not connect with the assessment writer's schema!

## **Responding to NZ's linguistically diverse student population**

The Ministry of Education's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) funding allocation to schools for the period 2 funding round in August 2018 was for 47,807 students in 1,485 schools. These students represent 176 different ethnic groups, 175 different countries of birth, and 135 different languages. Within the 1,485 schools, numbers vary greatly with three schools having 300+ funded students, 12 schools with 200-299 students, and at the lower end: 580 schools with 1-9 students (Ministry of Education, 2018). These ESOL funded totals represent only a portion of the linguistically diverse or emergent bilingual student population currently at school in NZ, as not all bilingual students are funded by the ministry, due, either, to having completed their funding allocation, or, to not meeting the funding criteria.

The (2018) Education Review Office (ERO) report on responding to linguistic diversity in Auckland

found that there was an overall need for early learning services and schools to improve their response to 'culturally and linguistically diverse learners', and to support their acquisition of the English language. Auckland is New Zealand's most culturally diverse city, with over 100 ethnicities and more than 150 languages spoken on a daily basis. Most services and schools knew who these learners were and had, to some extent, taken steps to respond to their language and culture. However, "only 37 percent of services and 58 percent of schools intentionally promoted learning by using a home language or cultural lens to support the learners' acquisition of English, and to promote engagement with the learner, their parents and communities" (p. 5). Although ERO's report focused on Auckland schools, it is likely that other regions in NZ face similar challenges regarding the need for teachers to learn how to validate, normalise and utilise the full linguistic repertoire of emergent bilinguals at school.

## **Remembering NZ's literacy teaching history**

In order to enable linguistically diverse learners within NZ's classrooms to experience schooling in culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) or culturally revitalising ways, it is helpful to remember the legacy of one of the historical figures of NZ's literacy teaching past. Sylvia Ashton Warner left a legacy focused on the essential value placed on the beliefs, languages, and cultures of the child at school. Her pedagogy in rural schools with Māori



children used the words the children themselves brought to school (their ‘key vocabulary’). Her students learned to read their own words. Ashton-Warner supported her students to write books that valued and maintained their cultures and beliefs, whilst also providing a pathway to reading in English. Ashton-Warner stated in her seminal text, *Teacher*: “First books must be made of the stuff of the child” (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 34) (Si‘ilata, Gaffney & Stephenson, in press).

### **The Pasifika Early Literacy Project**

Since 2014, the Ministry of Education has contracted a team of researchers and

such as Franken, May & McComish (2005, 2007) and Si‘ilata (2006, 2007, 2014, 2017). Cummins argued that the boundaries between languages/dialects are fluid and socially constructed, and that as emergent bilinguals gain access to their two languages, these languages become fused into a single system (the common underlying proficiency (Cummins, 2008). He found that creative translation activities and “translanguaging” have a role to play to enable learners to create multimedia texts that communicate in authentic ways in both L1 and L2 [the first language and second language]” (Cummins, 2008, p. 65). “Translanguaging” originated with Williams (1996, 2000), who used it

*“...they had not previously valued or utilised the linguistic resources that Pasifika learners were bringing with them to school.”*

professional learning and development (PLD) facilitators from the University of Auckland to work with teachers of Pasifika children in Tāmaki/Auckland schools to support them to draw on their own linguistic repertoires, as Ashton Warner did: Through bilingual storying; through the writing and reading of their own bilingual stories; and through the reading of Pasifika dual-language texts that provide windows into their own and other’s worlds (Si‘ilata, Gaffney, Stephenson & McCaffery, 2015). This work built on the international work of bilingual writers and researchers such as Baker (2011) and Cummins (1986, 2007, 2008) as well as local researchers

in Welsh-medium education to name a pedagogical practice that switches between language modes – for example, reading is done in one language and writing in another. In essence, it teaches students to receive curriculum content input in one language and output it in another mode or genre in another language (Si‘ilata, 2014, p. 22). Teachers realised through the PLD project that they held existing beliefs about their children’s language and literacy capabilities. Often, they had not previously valued or utilised the linguistic resources that Pasifika learners were bringing with them to school. One teacher reflected deeply on how her

changed beliefs and pedagogical actions had impacted her students:

*The bottom line is I failed this child and I have changed. Now I am really emotional about this because if I failed him how many other children have I? And I've noticed that every single one of my children are now moving... And this has all taken part in the last month or so... It's happened... And often we think we know it all. Actually, we don't. I used to think I was a damn good teacher and you woke me up on that day. I had to have a really good check of myself and my teaching practices and what was working and what wasn't, and how I could change it and to this day it has affected me so greatly... The year 0-1's shouldn't be at level two yet. See all those names up there? See how he has changed in his writing? Oh, my goodness, did you listen to those children? Did you hear the confidence? They are teaching me so much. Their language, their lifestyle is being acknowledged and accepted in our classroom and I've actually got goose bumps just thinking about it, because it has changed them... And it has changed me.*

## **The Va'atele Framework**

The Va'atele Framework was utilised in the Pasifika Early Literacy Project as a framework on which to strengthen teacher practice. It was developed in my doctoral work (Si'ilata, 2014) which focused on Pasifika learner success, and demonstrated accelerated literacy achievement (Si'ilata, Dreaver, Parr, Timperley & Meissel, 2012), through the work of effective teachers,

improvement teachers, principals and PLD facilitators who supported Pasifika children to succeed and to become literate in linguistically and culturally sustaining ways.

The Va'atele Framework uses the metaphor of the double hulled deep sea canoe in relation to Pasifika learners and their experiences at school. The double hulls and the voyaging of the deep-sea canoe are compared with Pasifika learners' passage or journey through the schooling system as bilingual/bicultural people. Ideally these Pasifika learners would be in school settings that support the development of their bilingualism, biliteracy and biculturalism, enabling success not only in the world of school, but also in the world of home and community. One hull may be seen to represent the language, literacy, culture, and worldview of home, while the second hull is representative of the language, literacy, culture and worldview of school. As with a va'atele, both hulls/ va'a (or languages, literacies, and cultures) should work in unity to ensure the safe passage of the people on board. The platform/fata built over the two hulls is a bridge that helps to hold the whole va'atele together, thus enabling the hulls/ va'a to move through the water as one vessel, while also providing the stability needed to sail through any storm (Si'ilata, 2014, p. 251).

Dimensions and indicators of effective practice for Pasifika learners were developed from the literature and from the research findings, and were used to analyse teacher practice. The dimensions included:

- Knowledge of Pasifika learners
- Expectations of Pasifika learners
- Knowledge of Pasifika bilingualism, second language acquisition and literacy learning
- Instructional strategies, including Pasifika languages as resources for learning
- Pasifika connections with texts, world, language, and literacy knowledge
- Partnerships with Pasifika families/aiga and community knowledge holders

This set of six dimensions of effective classroom practice for Pasifika learners, each elucidated by two indicators, were used to consider all of the evidence collected, and were then applied to the Va'atele Framework. The description of effective teacher practice described in the dimensions and elucidated through the indicators was developed primarily through a top down process informed largely by the relevant research literature. However, these indicators were checked in a more bottom-up process against the practices of the effective teachers, who were known to be successful in promoting accelerated student achievement in literacy. The original six 'dimensions of effective practice' for learners in general, are described in *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1–4* (see Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 12). The six dimensions of effective literacy practice were modified to make them more specific to Pasifika learners and to validate the utilisation of their linguistic and cultural resources within the New Zealand education space (see Table pp. 20-21). These

Pasifika-specific dimensions were used as the overarching framework for the analysis of teaching practice, and form the lens through which the data from teachers and the observations of their practice were analysed and the results articulated.

#### **Dimension 4: Use of instructional strategies including Pasifika languages as resources for learning**

In the initial project pilot (Si'ilata et al. 2015), a number of (non-Samoan) teachers read Samoan texts with their students, by using digital sound files of the texts that provided models of correct pronunciation. Some teachers asserted that they were now more open to utilising children's total language resources, as well as family and cultural knowledge and experiences in the classroom. Other teachers said that they had developed greater awareness about their children's bilingualism, and were now viewing it as a resource rather than a problem. Teachers supported their learners to connect their own funds of knowledge with the schema in the book, and enabled them to utilise the text structure to tell and write their own bilingual digital stories using iPads. The transcript below illustrates *Dimension 4a: Teachers explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pasifika home languages and oral practices*. It is an example of 'digital translanguaging' (students using both receptive and productive bilingual modes to create their own bilingual digital books, using a Samoan dual language reading book as a catalyst and model:

Table 1:  
Dimensions of Effective Practice for Pasifika Learners applied to the Va'atele Framework  
(Si'ilata, 2014)

Dimension	Indicators	Representative part of the va'atele
Knowledge of Pasifika learners	1a) Teachers analyse and use English language and literacy data in their practice. 1b) Teachers analyse and use Pasifika home language data and family/cultural funds of knowledge.	The hull/va'a of the va'atele as the foundation of the vessel – the uniqueness of the canoe is specific to the hulls and the knowledge of the builder to craft it according to the conditions in which it will travel.
Expectations of Pasifika learners	2a) Teachers set high, informed expectations for student learning which build on Pasifika learners' aspirations and values. 2b) Teachers build effective teacher-student relationships that focus on learning and build Pasifika learner agency.	The mast/tila that connects the hulls/va'a with the sail/la, enabling it to withstand the strength of the wind and to act as a solid base from which to furl the sail.
Knowledge of Pasifika bilingualism, second language acquisition, and literacy learning	3a) Teachers know about Pasifika bilingualism, second language acquisition, and literacy learning. 3b) Teachers use evidence from student data and from practice to design learning sequences, and monitor progress in relation to Pasifika learners' language and literacy needs.	The sail/la that enables the va'a to catch the wind – combining the strength of the hulls/va'a and mast/tila, with the height of the sail, and the power of the wind to enable greater speed and success toward the journey's end.

<p>Use of instructional strategies including Pasifika languages as resources for learning</p>	<p>4a) Teachers explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pasifika home languages and oral practices.</p> <p>4b) Teachers explicitly teach strategies for written language, including use of Pasifika literacy practices.</p>	<p>The paddles/foe that are used by the paddlers to advance the va'a when there is no wind, and that use the water to generate the motion through which the va'a sails.</p>
<p>Supporting Pasifika connections with text, world, language, and literacy knowledge</p>	<p>5a) Teachers support Pasifika learners to make meaningful connections with Pasifika cultures, experiences, languages, literacies, texts and worldviews.</p> <p>5b) Teachers provide opportunities for Pasifika learners to transfer knowledge, languages and literacies from one context to another.</p>	<p>The platform/fata that connects the two hulls so that they sail as one vessel, enabling the progress made with one hull to benefit the other hull.</p>
<p>Partnerships with Pasifika families/ aiga and community knowledge holders</p>	<p>6a) Teachers collaborate with Pasifika families/aiga in identifying student learning needs and valued outcomes.</p> <p>6b) Teachers build reciprocal relationships with Pasifika families/aiga and community experts to utilise their knowledge at school.</p>	<p>The keel/ta'ele running from stern to bow, which helps the va'a maintain its stability and straight movement despite the conditions – keeping the va'a 'grounded' and secure.</p>



[Teacher with new entrant five-year-olds creating their own digital stories about themselves using the dual language Samoan text as a structure]:

Teacher: *Off you go, you guys carry on.*

Children: *Yay! (Reading the story they have written on their ipad): 'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. Here is my school bag.*

Teacher: *Okay do you maybe need to record that one again if you can't really hear it?*

Child 1: *You need to delete it.*

Teacher: *Okay so delete that one. You guys have another go at the sound file.*

Teacher & child together: *'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. (Here is my school bag).*

Teacher: *Wanna play it and see what it sounds like?*

Children play their sound recording: *'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. Here is my school bag. 'O la'u pusa mea'ai lea. Here is my lunch box. 'O la'u tusi lea. Here is my book.*

Teacher: *Let's see if they've got their sound file (plays the file). Awesome. You guys are way ahead. Let's read it together (uses the digital text on the interactive whiteboard to read with students):*

Teacher & children: *What's this one? We can read this one; we're clever. 'O la'u tusi lea. And what does that one mean? Here is my book.*

Child: *How do you know how to do it?*

Teacher: *Because Mrs Roberts has been practising at home!*

Child: *Are you Samoan?*

Teacher: *No sweetie, but I'm learning.*

Child 2: *She's English. She's from England...*

Teacher: *Yes, cos even though I'm a teacher, I never stop learning either. I have to go home and do homework too.*

Child: *Cos you're a English. You're from England.*

Teacher: *I am from England, yes.*

It was evident that the teacher's willingness to put herself in the position of the learner, to privilege the linguistic knowledge of the children, and to create opportunities for them to connect their Samoan linguistic and conceptual knowledge with their English language and literacy acquisition had a major impact on the children's willingness to utilise their linguistic resources at school. The use of those linguistic resources had a direct impact on their English language acquisition and on their biliteracy development. They were also prompted to consider their teacher's and their own linguistic and cultural identities as a result of reading dual language texts together.

## Concluding thoughts

For Pasifika learners at school in Aotearoa New Zealand, enacting the metaphorical double-hulled canoe, (or linguistically and culturally sustaining environment that privileges bilingual and biliterate goals over monolingual ones), is more likely to elicit effective outcomes than an 'English only' approach. In order for Pasifika learners to be successful at home and at school, they need to strengthen and build capacity and capability in both. We need

to transform our schools by challenging the hegemonic agenda that still privileges western knowledge over indigenous and minority language group knowledge systems. English-medium classroom teachers need to normalise and utilise community languages, multiliteracies, family and cultural knowledges within the valued knowledges and pedagogies of schooling, making them central to the educational endeavour. Pasifika, and other linguistically diverse learners can be highly successful at school. Their utilisation of their language, biliteracy and cultural resources is fundamental to that success. Teachers can learn how to teach Pasifika learners effectively, and in particular ways that connect with and build on their languages, cultures, and identities, so that they can learn through a curriculum that both teaches their worlds, and provides windows to other worlds. Only then, will these children and their families understand that success at school does not require their languages and cultures to be left at the school gate.

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# Kiwis, Geckos, School Journal, Annuals, Susan Paris, and me, Kate

## *Kate de Goldi*

Kia ora, Talofa lava, and warm Pacific greetings. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

I considered a number of different titles for this talk, none quite right, and then, this last week while working with a group of public librarians I focused on some of the writers I particularly admire and who have influenced me as both a reader and a writer, and came to EL Konigsburg – to whom I often want to pay homage. I was struck all over again by the jaunty, prolix titles of her early novels, which, to me at least, embody so much that is vital and ungovernable and important in great writing for and about children – particularly in the current book economy where writers' necessary urges are ruthlessly hostage to marketing doctrine. So in the spirit of Konigsburg's fabulous *Jennifer, Hecate, MacBeth, William McKinley, and me, Elizabeth*, this talk is called: *Kiwis, Geckos, Annuals, School Journal, Susan Paris, and me, Kate*

I'm going to think aloud about children's literature here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, its past and present, and its sometimes awkward and contested relationship with education, by way of the project I've been collaborating on over the last several years, and with an eye on the global and local book economy, too.

I went for a thinking run one day in November 2014. I wanted to think about the novel I was writing, but of course it

never works that way. Instead, I kept coming back to four fledgling writers I knew, all working on projects for children. Three of them were writing fiction, acquainting themselves with their voice on the page, discovering their fictional preoccupations. They were all reading widely in the form too, roaring through the enduring backlist of children's literature, appreciating more deeply the contours of the form. The fourth writer was a diarist and essayist, whose occasional pieces on art, on the existential *and* the everyday, were limpid and layered and – to my mind – perfect for young readers – but had never gone beyond private distribution because contemporary publishing for children in Aotearoa has somehow never developed a creative non-fiction component. Why ever not, I wondered?

What were the publication prospects for these writers? They all write for that satisfyingly omnivorous audience, the middle reader, the ones between 'confident solo' (let's say 7 or 8 years), and what I think of as the 'immediately pre-hormonal,' let's say 11, 12 years. Their work is original, quietly complex, and beautifully crafted, with vocabularies that challenge and delight. It is not melodramatic or crisis-driven. It's not concept or design-driven. It has no toilet humour, aliens, horses, or fairies. It is immensely deft and subtle, often funny. It has emotional and psychological substance. It is – and I make no apology for

this word – literary. But it is also, perhaps, ‘quieter’ than much current writing for children, the many offerings I think of as headlong, even hectic. A publisher with antennae set to the market and ‘trending’ titles (that is, 99 percent of publishers) would hesitate, well aware that the books for this audience making the most noise and filling bookshop shelves are overwhelmingly series titles – formulaic, slapstick, fantastical, generic – and, of course, a delicious part of childhood reading. (Grown up reading, too, for that matter).

But these books and their authors tend to crowd out the rest; they shout over the top of the more nuanced fictions, the stories that shape an intelligence and a moral compass, the writing that accustoms readers to complexity, to the myriad moral shadings of human being. The current market doesn’t run in favour of those four hopeful writers.

Moreover, in New Zealand, as elsewhere – though perhaps more woundingly here – children’s publishing lists have, in the last decade, substantially diminished, or withdrawn to Australia, or closed up shop completely, side-lining their experienced and deeply read editors (and, sadly, leaving a number of mid-career writers stranded). In any case, literary fiction publishing for the 7-12 age group has, over the last decade, measurably slowed – in inverse proportion to the number of YA and picture books tumbling forth. There’s a complex confluence of reasons for this, but YA’s explosion is, in some part at least, due to publishing’s inherent conservatism – its bottom-line induced need to carry on reproducing past successes, or to furiously scope other publishers’ successes and try

to replicate them. Hence the torrent of derivative fantasy, dystopian, and operatic realist fiction triggered by the successes of a few brilliant, innovative authors. It’s understandable – traditional publishing and bookselling have been in tumult over the last decade, shoring up against the encroachment of digital platforms, behemoth online booksellers and discounts wielded like weapons. And YA’s subject is turmoil, trial, and alteration – an attractive one in this turbulent historical moment. At its worst, we get disease-of-the-week weepies or overwrought souls punching their way blindly to self-realisation; at its very best, you have the transformation stories of, say, Elizabeth Knox and Frances Hardinge, in which the febrile years of adolescence become the stage set for the play of big ideas, and stories are wrought with the full tool-bag of literary craftsmanship. On the other



end of the seesaw is the picture book with all its nursery charm or sophisticated beauty; often the highly curated child of several doting parents: artist, writer, editor, and designer. At best: the work of Shaun Tan – startlingly original, philosophical, disturbing. Or *Hairy Maclary*, a perfectly pitched on-the-knee story with seamless integration of image and text, that rewards countless re-readings and becomes part of childhood’s DNA. At worst: over-aestheticised, arid design triumphs with little story or language adventure. Or, homogenous verse stories with indifferent design and production values, the bastard child of the marketing and accounts departments.

Somewhere between these two – the demarcations are porous – lies middle fiction, the prototypical children’s literature, whose tropes were laid down at its curious beginnings (it being the changeling offspring of English clerics – George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll and Charles Kingsley, writing, they believed, for an adult market). Of course, all really good children’s books have always been read by adults, too. And plenty of ten-year olds have vaulted out of their cohort and raided the YA and adult shelves – or for that matter, the picture book bins at the library. But any list of Great Children’s Books is dominated by stories written for that matchless period when a child is still free from the tyranny of adolescent self-examination, when they still look outwards, collecting, collating, codifying, and commentating the world around them – the mysterious world, fashioned by those most perplexing animals: adult humans. And it is usually these books and this period that solidify the lifelong reading

habit: the capacity to be alone but never lonely. The appetite for exploration and happenstance. The habit of discernment through comparison and contrast. An expanding vocabulary with which to name and think. A sense of literature as both mirror and window. You will all remember this period. Certainly, it was those reading years that constructed me, as both a reader and a writer, and helped lay, somehow, the coordinates of my character.

The post-War period of the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an astonishing flowering of literature for this age group, and a critical substructure to name, explore, and buttress it. By the late 1970s New Zealand children’s fiction and illustration was also experiencing its own cultural flowering, when (in an inversion of the current climate) a fully-fledged and purposeful publishing industry met the story firepower and sophisticated draftsmanship of – to name just a few: Barry Faville, Janice Marriott, Tessa Duder, Bill Taylor, Gavin Bishop, Robyn Belton – and the quartet who represent the summit of that golden period: Maurice Gee, Jack Lasenby, Joy Cowley, and Margaret Mahy. From these four came that cascade of characters who are now part of our cultural DNA: Laura Chant, Tycho Potter, Hannah and Shadrach, Jonasi, Mr Wilberforce, Kitty Wix, Harry Wakatipu, Denny and his gang. The New Zealand book world has mutated many times around them but Joy, Jack, and Maurice, all in their eighties, continue to produce work of considerable invention and depth.

They’re still doing the heavy lifting for NZ middle fiction, in part because they can. They’re established. They’re cherished and bankable names on a publishing list.

But mostly, they're preeminent, I believe, because they have always written what they must – the stories that propel them to their desks, that are insistent messages from their unconscious, translated and crafted with rigour for the page. I'm not saying they have closed their eyes to the commerce of publishing and the sense of an audience – quite the contrary: they have needed to earn an income from books. But they have won audience on their own terms – by writing books that needed to be written, not by anatomising a consumer group. And I suppose you could say their good fortune was to write at a time when publishing investment in a writer was a long-term commitment.

I don't believe that commitment to children's books as a *literature* is nearly so evident in today's book economy, and particularly in books for the middle reader. As ever, there are notable exceptions to the general trend – the aforementioned national treasures and a few others here, and some startling writers outside our country: Geraldine McCaughrean, Polly Horvath, Ursula Dubosarsky, Jerry Spinelli, to name just four. The most likely place to find these authors, though, is the public library, not your bookshop. I understand the problem. Bookselling's a parlous business. Certain determinations must be made. Some writers' works may only be fleetingly in stock. Some writers won't make it to print because their work sits uneasily within current publishing perceptions. Too restrained. Too dense. Too demanding. Too *literary*. Add to that the idea of the writer as a commodity, a social media presence selling themselves as much as their work. And the persistent notion that middle readers must always be

'entertained'. And fewer or deceased New Zealand children's lists in multinational companies. Add all that up and you have a dispiriting scenario. Perhaps the most dispiriting part of all, is the patronising assumption that middle readers most want formula and froth. Not to say farts. They want it *sometimes*. We all want it sometimes. And why does the description 'literary' cause so much discomfort when it's attached to a children's book?

When literary middle fiction remains unpublished or disappears beneath the clamour of series fiction and other books fashioned according to the dubious priorities of a marketing department, a great number of things are lost from the page. Nuanced character. Complex ideas. Rich and challenging vocabulary. Layered story. Metaphoric and symbolic substructure. The music of writing. Tonal subtly. Moral shading. Existential growth.

[I'm quite aware that this litany amounts to a pedagogic mission statement. Too right. But I'll come back to that.]

There have been other losses for children's publishing in Aotearoa over the last twenty years. Vanishing review space. (God Bless *New Zealand Books*, and more recently, *The Sapling*). Fewer books reviewed. Plot rehearsal and age recommendation in place of analysis. And what about those very helpful intermediate publications – magazines, story collections, curated anthologies – the publications that provide a platform for the work of developing writers? With one exception – the *School Journal* – there are none now. There were never many. It's painfully true, too, that New Zealand – outside the universities – has little critical infrastructure nourishing the form, so that most writers publish

into a vacuum; there is no broad cultural discussion, no grunty public dialectic about the form and substance of our literature for young people, to encourage and inflame its practitioners. And it seems very difficult for the children's book community (writers, publishers, booksellers, blogs, awards panels, funding agencies) to move beyond pieties or boosterism in regard to the New Zealand form. Actually, there is almost no talk about the form. Over the last fifteen years, the children's author conferences have been largely preoccupied with the business of *business*: the market, what it (allegedly) wants and how one might deliver to it. Building profile, blogging, strategising for international publication. Story, language, image, *texts*, are almost never under discussion. At the most recent Aotearoa/New Zealand Publishers' conference the forum on children's publishing was full to bursting, because, unlike the rest of the industry, children's publishing numbers are climbing. And what was the subject under discussion? *How can we give children what they want?* Could there be a more wrong-headed question? In the golden ages of children's publishing, publishing charted the way ahead; it wasn't supine in the face of crass market values.

All this rolled round in my head as I ran.

At some point, and now I can't remember why, I suddenly thought about the annuals of my childhood, those glorious pot pouris of reading across a variety of forms, including plenty of comics (publications that were slightly frowned on in our house). *Girl's Crystal*. *Princess Tina*. *Pinky and Perky*. *Beano*. I remembered particularly a *Bunty* annual – in my sister's Christmas pillowcase when she was eight, and which she was still occasionally reading when she was eighteen, because, she said – and perhaps this has been the enduring pleasure of annuals – it was like Mary Poppins' carpetbag, throwing up unexpected treasures, apparently forever. Mysteriously, there was always something she hadn't seen before.

We should make an Annual, I thought. A miscellany of stories, comics, essays, poems, art, games, how-tos and other diversions. A *contemporary* miscellany, in the playful spirit of the old annuals, but without their noxious imperial, Anglophile, gendered values. A *literary* miscellany that would bring entirely new work, by New Zealanders, in a variety of forms and moods to a smart, hungry New Zealand cohort that was currently underserved. A



miscellany that would provide a much-needed outlet for established practitioners and new ones.

I knew immediately who We should be. The only publisher who would entertain a publication of this nature – a complex design challenge, expensive, and unprecedented in Aotearoa – was Gecko Books, a unique entity in this country, whose brand promises ‘curiously good’ books. I have always liked the indefinables in that phrase, *curiously good*. It’s Gecko – in the shape of Julia Marshall – who has sought excellent children’s titles around the globe, translated and published them in Aotearoa and sent them out again into the English-speaking market. Characteristically, Julia was entirely enthusiastic about the annual project.

It was interesting to be up close to Gecko’s determined brand – at work in children’s publishing here for more than a decade. Julia’s ‘mission’ was avowedly to introduce into the New Zealand cultural bloodstream a kind of book for children

quite different to our canon: meditative, intellectually playful, philosophical, sometimes frisky, always aesthetically sophisticated. Books wrought by European sensibilities, you might say. You could see this as a stealthy bit of literary and cultural imperialism. Or just a new piquant element in the book production soup that has, in turn, prompted creative departures by some New Zealand writers and illustrators for children – resulting in books which have, in a tidy circularity, then been published by Gecko Press. I’d argue that *Snake and Lizard* by Joy Cowley and Gavin Bishop, Barbara Else’s Fontania series, *Dappled Annie and the Tigrish* by Mary McCallum, *The Longest Breakfast* by Jenny Bornholdt & Sarah Wilkins, for just some examples, wouldn’t have been published here without the presence of Gecko. Gecko has made a home in New Zealand for a certain kind of writer and their books. Smart publisher that she is, Julia Marshall’s rubric ‘curiously good’ – evocative, but cunningly mutable – enables her to build a list guided by the real criterion: her own idiosyncratic instincts. These are as quicksilver as the notion of ‘curiously good’ – though just as reliable a publishing vision as any – and such is their sureness that over thirteen years the reading public has come to *feel* just as surely as their progenitor what the Gecko brand is.

What it *isn’t*, is perhaps easier to articulate – and working with Julia on the annual project – always fascinating – clarified this. Gecko does not in any way do ‘Kiwi’ (lower and upper case K) – neither the bird, nor any of the ubiquitous motifs and themes of New Zealand children’s publishing – or at



least not self-consciously. And – even more staunchly – Gecko is avowedly allergic to any suggestion of the ‘teaching moment’ within trade publication. I have always been with them on the former. Impossible not to think, when surveying the New Zealand picture book scene – and to paraphrase CS Lewis in his famous critique of Tolkein’s *Ring* - ‘too many f...ing anthropomorphised kiwis.’ But what about imaginative writing as morality text or instruction manual? Well, to quote the old saw: if you want to send a message, use the postal service. Of course one doesn’t overtly *teach* in imaginative work. Goes without saying. I’ve been a little haunted, too, for some years, by a bracing conversation with a German post-grad student of children’s literature, in which she’d held New Zealand children’s literature up for inspection and found it pickled in educational zeal. I can’t remember the name of this dauntless young woman but I’ll call her Eva.

"What *is* it with your children’s literature?" she said to me one evening after a children’s literature event. *So* obsessed with the teaching moment and so lacking in the imaginative flight of the kind beloved in European literature. ‘Where’s your *Baron Munchausen*?’ she asked, accusingly. ‘Your *Struwwelpeter*?’ As is so often the case, my response came only the next morning in the shower, where many thrusts are parried and arguments won. ‘What about Jack Lasenby?’ I thought. His glorious counter-cultural creations – Harry Wakatipu, Uncle Trev, and Aunt Effie, larrikins all, peddling fantastical exploits and explanations.

But Lasenby’s tricksters notwithstanding, Eva did poke an old bear; she

echoed a grumble that dogged NZ children’s literature for many decades and is asserted quite baldly by Betty Gilderdale in *A Sea Change*, her pioneering survey of 145 years of New Zealand children’s literature: ‘...New Zealand fiction for the young,’ wrote Gilderdale in 1982, ‘is overwhelmingly didactic and earnest in intention.’ That is quite the ticking off.

Perhaps, speculated Eva that evening, perhaps the culprit is Aotearoa’s success with educational reading programmes, its focus on *literacy*, and its cultural preoccupation with the functional – a legacy no doubt of the settler experience. Yes, she said, warming to her thesis, literacy and pedagogy consistently trumped *literary* considerations in the practice and critical assessment of our children’s literature; thus, antic, untrammled story and language is largely absent from NZ children’s books; instead, a tendency to the worthy, to helplessly instruct, reins in language play and story reach.

This is all eminently debatable, of course. For a start, Eva had glided right over the aforementioned golden quarter-century, those voices which arose immediately following Gilderdale’s survey, when the relative plainchant of NZ children’s literature broke into some pretty interesting polyphonics. And what about Margaret Mahy? I might have said to her – there was some stonking imaginative flight and language pyrotechnics. Though



Eva, smart girl, would doubtless have called Mahy for the outlier she really is. Someone, as Margaret put it herself, who occupied an imaginative and existential fault line: she was most decidedly a New Zealander but one whose creative engine had been built by story cultures on the other side of the world, whose muse demanded the immaterial, and agents of anarchy – pirates, witches, lions, and sorcerers – not paddocks, pukeko, or punga. So, while in the fullness of time Mahy has been properly acknowledged as a great children's writer and an important intellectual presence in our culture, nevertheless it took trade publishers outside of this country to recognize her genius, and for a good deal of her writing life her own culture – busy with a cultural nationalist programme – did not recognize her as a *New Zealand* writer.

But anyway, Eva had found final impregnable proof of our children's literature's love affair with the pedagogic. And of course! she said in summary – your primary, your most enduring and loved title for children is an *educational* publication. She waved the *School Journal* at me and retired in triumph.

Interestingly, Julia at Gecko, too, has always viewed the *School Journal* with metaphoric crucifix and garlic in hand – as a publication exemplifying how *not* to proceed with trade books for children. A kind of anti-manifesto. Too earnest. Too teacherly. Too flat-footed. And too obviously intoning New Zealand culture.

I've had sundry shower conversations with absent Eva since our encounter, and a few with Julia, too. Sure, I have conceded, literacy and learning concerns have always coloured the practice and assessment

of our children's literature – especially in its long infancy; and a discernable strain of that tendency survives still in libraries, bookshops, classrooms, and book awards. And – notwithstanding Mona Minum, Falter Tom, Anthony Holcroft's *Orchards of Heaven*, and a large chunk of the Mahy oeuvre – it is true that our children's literature tradition has been overwhelmingly, sometimes thuddingly realist. And perhaps, we have been too easily satisfied with the mere fact of Aotearoa/NZ experience merely 'being on the page'. True, too, that action and the material world have been much favoured over interiority. And probably, yes, an affection for the edifying, extractable theme has too often trumped stylistic and linguistic nuance. Our children's non-fiction, for example, has stayed very straight – often drear – in voice, design, and imaginative reach.

Then again, isn't it all a matter of degree and deftness. To disavow the 'teaching moment' – *education* – in children's literature seems utterly specious, not to mention ahistoric. All writers and artists for children (and publishers) whenever, wherever, embark on each project with bulging baggage: they bring their lived experience, their learning, their belief systems, moral compasses, and cultural biases. Educational intent of one sort or another is always at work and in every text. Education may have been more explicit, even doctrinal, two hundred years ago but writing and publishing today is just as intentional: story, language, and image are the tools of persuasion: listen and look and learn, they say, this is *my* view of the world.

Moreover, to be grudging about the *School Journal* is, I think, to misunderstand



the history and fruitful entwining of education and trade publishing for children in Aotearoa. Certainly, the Journal is loved and venerable (112 years old), and without question has great cultural significance. It has been – and soberingly, increasingly is again – potentially the ‘first and only contact with literature and the arts’ for many New Zealand children. I’m paraphrasing Clarence Beeby, the progressive educationalist whose visionary policies ushered in the Journal’s great post-war period. It is undeniable, too, that the Journal has always been propelled by educational purpose. It has necessarily published work that complements classroom and curriculum needs. It is the *school journal* after all, compiled in four parts for use across every primary and intermediate school cohort.

I have never believed, though, that the *School Journal* represents proof positive of our children’s publishing’s default to the prosaic and pedagogic. Happily enough, I think the reverse has most often been the case. A survey of its editions over the last sixty years – as Greg O’Brien provided in his excellent centennial history of the Journal, *A nest of Singing Birds* – is powerful evidence that the *School Journal* has for the last 70 years delivered to children in Aotearoa art and writing of the first order. Certainly – and crucially – the publication has been *the* great, and often sole, nursery for emerging children’s writers and artists over that time – not least Margaret Mahy who had entire editions devoted to her work. Importantly, too, successive editors



have sought work from writers and visual artists whose customary audience is an adult one, quietly reminding those who cared to notice that successful work for children is not the sole province of designated children’s writers and illustrators. Moreover, as a miscellany of story, poetry, drama, non-fiction, photography and art, the *School Journal* remains the only platform that has consistently provided a diversity of voices and forms (or literacies to use the educational sector’s word) for young readers. It has both mirrored to New Zealand children their place, their history, and their lived experience *and* opened a window on different realities, in Aotearoa and beyond. It has been a lifesaving alternative home for New Zealand children’s literature and art – warm, steady, appropriately disciplined and imaginatively adventurous – when trade publishing has been unable to properly parent.

It made instant and perfect sense to me, therefore, that the crucial person to bring on board in the making of an annual for young readers in Aotearoa was the

current commissioning editor of the *School Journal* – someone who regularly curated a miscellany for intermediate school students, someone who would relish a publication that picked up on the Journal’s estimable features – including material that reflected Aotearoa in all its 21<sup>st</sup> century plurality – but a publication that would be unshackled from the Journal’s one (understandable) limitation – the requirement to feed a cluster of competing needs: Ministry, a six-stranded curriculum, parents, teachers, and every kind of child in school. Susan Paris, editor of Parts 3 and 4 of the *Journal* was perhaps the only person who could have steered the *Annual* project home, fluent as she is in the delicate dialogue of commissioning and editing, enmeshed in the story and language world of the cohort we were aiming to excite, and with more than a decade’s experience in bringing a complex publication to print five times a year. In very real terms, the *Annual* – though midwived with generosity and skill by Gecko Press – is the true child of the *School Journal* – School Journal Unplugged, you might say – not only because it was conceived in the Journal’s likeness, but because its editors were comprehensively shaped by the Journal during their own education. There were godparents, too – both high-minded and productively wayward. The Puffin Annuals of the mid ‘seventies, two publications that drew on Puffin’s stable of remarkable artists and writers, including – in another lovely circularity – New Zealand and the *School Journal*’s own Jill McDonald whose buoyant work provided the cover art. We were also heavily influenced by *The Goodies Annual* 1974, anarchic, irreverent, ridiculous, and necessary.

As my earlier mission statement about literary values might suggest, Susan and I went about *Annual* with the heat and purpose of evangelicals. We wanted a game-changing publication – one that suggested a new way of thinking about the pre-teen and their reading life. The *Annual* was to be the very definition of reading for pleasure – but we took it as axiomatic that pleasure and learning are not mutually exclusive. Of course it would be educational too. It’s base precept was that middle readers would have diverting material in familiar forms – visual and written – but they could and should also be challenged and delighted by forms they likely hadn’t come across before – art commentary, historical photos, personal essay, flash non-fiction, satire: entertainment and education plaited together.

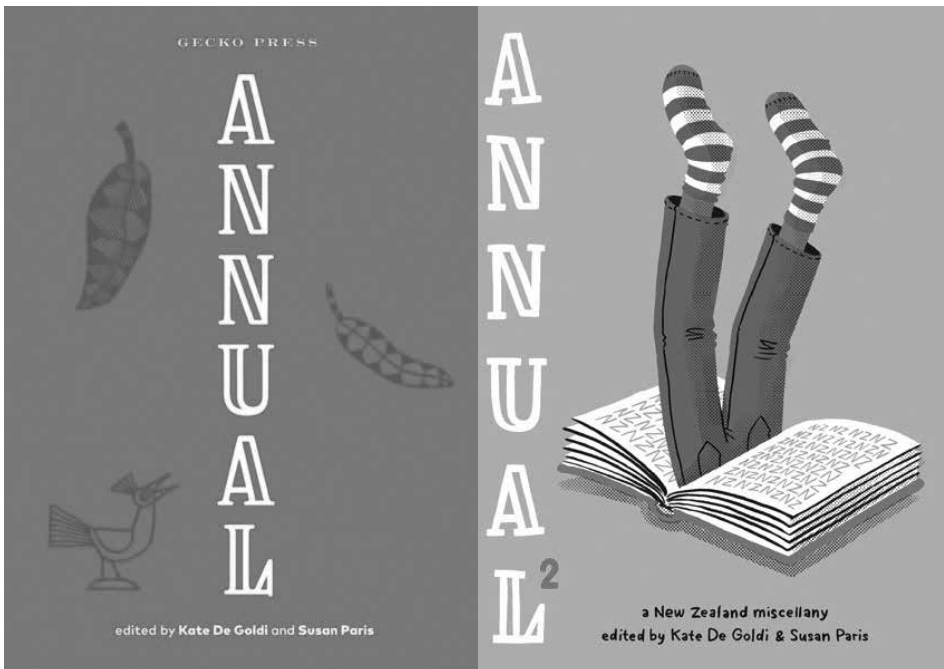
We had a strong sense of our reader. We would commission with that 9-13 year old reader at the forefront of our thoughts, but with an unshakeable belief, too, that good material fundamentally resists age banding. The *Annual*’s reader might also be seven or seventy. They could be a seasoned reader or looker, we reckoned, or an incipient one; or with luck, they might be someone with an undiscovered reading self waiting to unfurl, someone who would be drawn to the variety of moods between the covers, who would browse and linger, then settle to a piece; someone who would come and go, each time finding, mysteriously, a new piece that satisfied their developing self – just like my sister with her *Bunty*.

We knew that the age group we had in mind was sharp, multi-literate, questing, playful, imaginative, insatiable, and up for anything – whimsy, seriousness, beauty, silliness. These readers snarfed series books

for their comfort and reliability, but they were hungry for narrative and linguistic challenge too. They also had available the most time for reading they would ever know. We knew all this, not because we anatomised or focus-grouped that reading audience, but because we had once been those readers ourselves. We proceeded on the basis that the only reliable way to produce original and satisfying material for, say, an 11 year old is to closely interview your own 11-year old self.

We needed to curate *Annual's* content, rather than invite submissions. In order to ensure as far as possible a balance of material – in form, theme, gender, setting, culture, mood – we would provide briefs with gentle parameters, then match them with appropriate contributors – writers and artists who appreciated both the

comfort and discipline of constraints but who could produce from a brief something that was demonstrably their own. Secondly – we would publish alongside established authors *new* voices for children, including those whose customary audience was adult but whose work suggested they were well acquainted with the ‘young eye’ – the eye so necessary for a pre-adult readership – those practitioners who had a strong sense of both wonder and absurdity at work in the world. We wanted very much to challenge the conventional wisdom – in Aotearoa at least – around what might be ‘suitable’ for children. We also wanted to keep close the idea that a reader, young or old, need not understand everything immediately – that really interesting writing and art invite many return visits, new shadings revealing themselves as the reader grows.



*Annual* and *Annual 2* have been bestsellers. There *was* an appetite out there for multiple reading forms for young readers. And there was certainly an appetite for rich reading experiences, ones that challenged and surprised. Other hunches were confirmed, too. Miscellanies can offer something for everybody, adept and reluctant readers alike – readers with a visual bent, readers who want the propulsion of narrative and those who relish the heightened language of poetry, readers who want their funny bones tickled, those in contemplative mood, those who want the diversion of a game or puzzle. Moreover, unlike a novel, a miscellany is not a confronting or onerous prospect for the reluctant reader. Those readers can commit to short reading times but still experience the satisfaction of completion – a story here, an article there – and come back later for more.

First and foremost the *Annuals* are for reading pleasure and adventure. We wanted all the obvious forms – stories, poetry, articles, how tos, diversions, and glorious illustration. But we wanted new forms, too for younger readers – essay, flash non-fiction, satire, parody, and pieces about art. We got it all in spades.

There's excellent nonsense in both *Annuals*. A rhyming ninja. A surreal snapper floating in the summer sky, magic parsley and emergency haiku and a board game with a naked grandmother. A zebra with an inferiority complex, Invercargill cyclists dressed in monkey suits, a dog driving a car, a knitted digestive system, a taxonomy of New Zealand biscuits and slices with faux scientific names, and Kate Sheppard on the sausage sizzle outside the supermarket. I think Eva would be pleased.

There is artwork of richness and variety: The Ponsonby Madonna, a cardboard Rangimatua, a rainbow of tivaevae, a spraycan whare and whanau, Henry Christian-Slane's brooding images of the Central Plateau, Gavin Mouldey's maps and Jonathon King's sheep farm in space.

And that high-minded litany I recited earlier: nuanced character, rich vocabulary, layered story, metaphoric substructure, language play and the music of writing, complex ideas, moral shading, tonal subtlety – I believe it is all in play. In:

Steve Braunias satire: 'Selfies' starring Lorde, Taylor Swift, and Richie McCaw.

Joanna Orwin's *Seeds*, a story that considers the narrow options for colonial girls.

James Brown's found poem composed entirely of lines from school newspapers.

Sam Duckor-Jones' wistful meditation on his beanie collection.

David Larsen's dazzling speculative fiction in which Mozart is kidnapped and taken to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to hear Prokofiev's 'Classical Symphony'.

Bernard Beckett's essay on logic puzzles and how to fall in love with maths.

Ben Brown's tender memoir about his mother and the family's white rabbit, Honky.

Whiti Hereaka poignant story, *Stargazing*, about rites of passage and summer holiday rituals.

Barbara Else's spiky fiction about mean girls at boarding school.

Lloyd Jones' deft mix of the instructional and the sensuous in his essay on how to body surf.

'The Glove,' by Damian Wilkins, a pitch-perfect story about a family's complicated response to grief.

Greg O'Brien's 'Get rid of Fetu Fotofoto Day', a sumptuous visual and lexical mash up that invites wonder and imaginative adventure.

The grunt and rhapsody of birth amid a West Coast storm in Renata Hopkins story 'Mud Prayer'.

I'll finish by laying the credit for all this where it should properly be: with the contributors to the *Annuals*, the artists and writers. Astonishingly, out of the seventy-three people we approached, all but two were up for the gig. All took our briefs and made them decidedly their own. Most exceeded expectations. Most wonderfully, several new writers and artists for children have jumped into bigger projects prompted by their *Annual* piece.

The *Annual* is made for reading aloud: an important part of classroom literacy and nurturing a love of literature. It seems right to go out with Lynley Edmeades' beautiful poem on awakening in a tent, 'Island', which contains all the sleepy solitariness and cresting anticipation of childhood, time elongating and the day opening out marvelously.

## Author

**Kate De Goldi** is one of New Zealand's most celebrated authors. She has published a range of short stories, collections and novels for adults and children. De Goldi's novel *The 10pm Question* (2008) was published to critical acclaim both in New Zealand and overseas, quickly becoming an iconic piece of New Zealand literature. De Goldi has been extensively involved with numerous programmes, committees, and organisations focused on creative writing, education and New Zealand literature.

### *Island*

It's always yellow inside  
and the nylon is an island  
for the to and from the grass.

In the corner, some sand  
from last summer's foot-stick  
and that forgotten sock.

Night makes a planetarium  
of torch dust mosquito,  
of hand toe torso.

Morning is gentle nose.  
Sun on sleeping-bag-red  
with the lurk of grass.

When the zipper goes  
the yellow goes  
to green, to blue

to day, to this  
now, this now,  
now this.



# What to watch out for in children's publishing in 2019

*Rob Southam*

I know we are all completely serious about children becoming readers for life and building that all important school to home literacy connection, so for us by far the biggest trend for 2019 would have to be finding the right book at the right time for every child!

What follows is a look at **10 global trends** coming through that could help make that all important school to home connection much more possible, and definitely much more fun!

## 1. Old favourites and back list books

It's vital not to ignore this trend and note that within the children's book industry there is great longevity for some of our all-time favourites; books like *Hairy Maclary*, *The Little Yellow Digger*, *Pig the Pug*, *The Very Cranky Bear*, series like *Harry Potter*, *Geronimo Stilton*, *Pokemon*, *Tom Gates*, *Captain Underpants*, and books from the likes of David Walliams, Ahn Do,

Reina Telgemeier, Roald Dahl, and Tom Gates, will continue to absolutely delight readers in years ahead. They have found a joyful place in hearts and minds that lights an emotional spark and will help motivate children to read more.

## 2. Humour

Nothing typifies this trend more than Craig Smith's *Wonky Donkey*! What a world-wide ride it's been for a book first published by Scholastic NZ in 2009. After the Scottish Granny read *Wonky Donkey* on YouTube last year *Wonky Donkey* became such hot property it was virtually impossible to get hold of, with rapid fire reprints going on around the world. It topped all book sales in the USA across all genres, not just children's books, for several weeks, beating the likes of Lee Childs and John Grisham. It is still # 1 on Amazon and number # 1 on the American Bestsellers list, and it's the # 1 best-selling children's book in the UK. As I write this it



is # 2 behind *Harry Potter* on Amazon UK, and It has also topped bestseller lists in Australia and South Africa. The Wonky Donkey phenomenon has been truly mind boggling!

It's little wonder that humour is the bedrock of engagement for children. These books elevate fun and pleasure and addictive reading behavior more than any other single trend. There is so much to look out for in 2019 in this genre with positive storylines that communicate joyfully to readers. As an example make sure you look out for Australian comic Cal Wilson's new book: *George and the Great Bum Stampede!*

### 3. Fantasy

As we all know fantasy is a stalwart in children's book publishing. The fantasy genre maintains its popularity for 2019, and will never go away. Magical realism and creatures such as unicorns and dragons lead the way for 2019. Fantasy is a story telling genre that explores the beauty of being unique, of escaping to an alternate world, of staying true to oneself, of making a stand and making decisions often against great odds.

### 4. Positive Story Lines:

This trends acts to counter some of the unkindness and stress that can be around in our children's lives. There is a lot of room for love and empathy, for an emphasis on sharing and inclusiveness, confidence and fun, in the world of children's books as we move into 2019.



Here's some news for you around a picture book with a really positive story line. *Alpacas with Maracas* has been chosen as the Australian and New Zealand 2019 Simultaneous Storytime book. You will find information in Scholastic Book Club and on the Scholastic website about registering for this inspiring and free event on Wednesday 22 May 2019. The aim is to get well over 1 million kids engaged in reading this book at the same time across two countries, and we are asking for your help in your school. We are looking for as much support as possible to achieve this terrific goal and smash last year's number of just over 1 million readers.

### 5. Kid friendly non-fiction

These titles aim to place the reader in a time, place or situation across various topics. They distill the huge amounts of information young readers are faced with into chunks so that they can understand complex topics and build their own



knowledge and curiosity about the world they live in. The emphasis is often on activity and self-help.

### 6. Strong female characters

Expect more fiction titles that feature strong female protagonists that not only empower girls but also act as role models for both girls *and* boys. As an example of the trend Captain Marvel will be in cinemas in March 2019 alongside books that herald the first solo female Super-Hero lead in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The Captain Marvel film and books promote themes of self-discovery, bravery and teamwork, and this is a long awaited and much hyped debut because of Captain Marvel's rich, 40 year history in Marvel comics. Another example is the Girltopia series which is life-affirming fiction for upper primary girls with its deft blend of suspense, humour and action. In terms of picture books, Stacy Gregg has produced a delightful strong minded pony hero for young readers with *Minny Whinny, Happy Birthday to Me*.

### 7. Diversity

Books that feature empathy, courage and resilience will grow in popularity and feature children of different backgrounds, religions, and ethnicity. As our society becomes more diverse it only makes sense that our children's literature will be too.

### 8. Mysteries and Whodunits

This trend took off in 2018 and is set to continue strongly. In fact 2019 is set to be an incredible year for this genre. We will be looking to see very funny, as well



as mysterious, spy whodunits that should keep our kids' reading on the edge of their seats! Rhys Darby led the way at the end of 2018 with his wacky mystery spoof, *The Top Secret Undercover Notes of Buttons McGinty*. And Jack Heath is an absolute master of thrilling action packed whodunits.

## 9. Gaming

Minecraft books sat on the New York Times bestseller lists in 2018 and the books continue to attract great numbers of readers. There is diversity across the whole Minecraft brand comprising fiction, diaries, mysteries and non-fiction. *Redstone Junior High* is a new unofficial graphic novel for Minecrafters. Fortnite players too can branch out into a book environment and navigate their way around the island learning to secure their position and explore the main hotspots in *Secrets of the Island*

## 10. E-Books

We will see a more diverse offering in E Books, with a growing trend being the development of more augmented reality and interactive experience for readers, sitting them beautifully alongside traditional books.

And alongside all these exciting trends it seems fitting to end with a quote from Timothy Rasinski, Professor of Literacy Education at Kent State University. He states "Those who work to help children become fluent and joyful readers are, in my opinion, doing the same essential work as medical doctors who help their patients breathe."

## Author



**Rob Southam** has a wealth of experience in the literacy sector, both as a classroom teacher and in her career with Scholastic New Zealand. Her work on literacy and making reading a central part in children's lives is acclaimed both locally and internationally. She has presented at International Conferences on the subject of boys and literacy, and throughout New Zealand to educators and parents on ways to increase every child's potential as a reader.

Rob has achieved national tributes. She is the 2014 winner of the prestigious Storylines Betty Gilderdale Award for her outstanding contribution to children's literature. She holds a Citation of Merit from the New Zealand Literacy Association, and although a non-Rotarian, she holds Rotary's highest award, being named as a Paul Harris Fellow for her contribution to literacy in New Zealand.

Rob's current role is as an Ambassador for Scholastic New Zealand.

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*"The ability to read, write, and communicate connects people to one another and empowers them to achieve things they never thought possible. Communication and connection are the basis of who we are and how we live together and interact with the world."*

International Literacy Association

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MARGARET MAHY MEMORIAL LECTURE 2018

# Narrative and nourishment: story and self

Barbara Else

*The inaugural Margaret Mahy Memorial lecture was established in 2014 to honour Margaret Mahy's significant contribution to the world of literature for children and young adults. In 2018 acclaimed author Barbara Else delivered the lecture in Christchurch.*

Margaret Mahy herself said many wise words about literature for children. I hope my thoughts and anecdotes will add to an increasingly important issue, if only in the questions I've gathered about reading and audience.

Some months ago I started thinking about what the mother's voice might mean in terms of storytelling. I scribbled on a post-it note: *the mother's voice – the constant in a world of increasing size and surprises*. I had no idea where the words might lead. Then Rachel King asked if I'd present this lecture and suggested: 'something about *Go Girl*, gender and imagination in storytelling.'

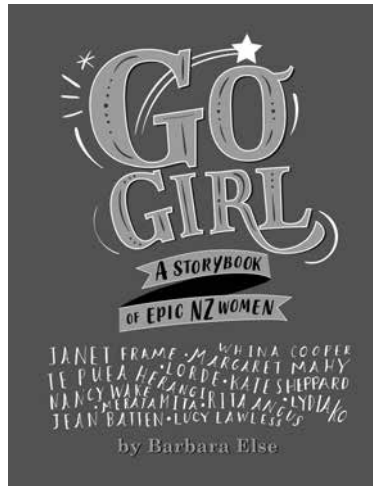
'The mother's voice' had a group of companions. Off they set. With each new tale in *Go Girl* the writer's challenge is to find a voice or way of telling that a reader agrees to connect with. The story needs to bring you into - a particular relationship, an isolated space of just you and the words. Even a realistic story creates its own new

world, shaped differently from the actual world, for the purposes of what it needs to say in its own voice. But how strange it is that there are similar stories in many cultures, saying similar things to the different audiences. Or is it?

Even before it's born an infant is likely to recognise its mother's voice. With normal development babies in utero hear at about 18 week's gestation. At around 25 weeks they can react to voices and sounds. Try going as I did, several months pregnant, to a thunderous stage performance of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Even pre-birth, babies will

be in range of the everyday rhythms of conversation. There is a pattern to vocal utterances, the soft or sharp, lazy or rapid, high and joyful, or deep and serious moments of our days. Different voices with their own rhythm and timbre could grow familiar.

According to a note in Brian Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories*, in controlled



conditions it was shown that even 45 minutes after birth, newborns can try to mimic expressions. (But not if it's done by a robot!) Even at minutes old, they showed they were social beings with a need to engage and respond. A few weeks old, most healthy babies make that very clear. Say a simple word – *hello* – see a baby focus on your mouth. After a moment they try to shape theirs to copy yours. Months later they'll learn how to push air out at the same time to make the right sound! Talking!

The earliest stories a baby hears about its own life go something like this:

*“What’s the matter? Let’s pick you up. You need a nappy-change. Off it comes – phewph! Let’s clean you up – and here’s a new nappy ... nice and fresh. Now what shall we do?”*

It’s a minimalist tale, only about function, what’s going on at that moment. But during it, something happens to the baby’s benefit. There’s an opening situation. And a development. Then a resolution that leads to – who *knows what* in the next chapter of the tiny life? Given narrative about what they’re doing in the present, babies start to understand language. That early social experience engages the brain on several levels.

Adults are not always aware of toddlers and young children listening and observing. Conversation. And gossip: ‘*someone*’ did ‘*what?*’ Gossip takes the everyday to another level. It’s about action or behaviour we may not have expected. It puts us in touch with the unusual, the outer world. Even though some gossip may well be ‘fake news’ the listening child learns how to gauge those stories by how

other listeners react. Gossip makes us imagine and be amazed. When it’s over we come back to reality. But the boundaries of knowledge have been prodded. We’ve been made aware of possibilities.

## Brain Networks

In 2015, Dr. John S. Hutton of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center ran the first study to use a functional magnetic resonance imaging scan (fMRI) specifically to look at cognitive stimulation in the home and the brains of 4-year-old children. It was a small study that looked at how three kinds of storytelling activated four brain networks. It involved audio books, animation, and picture books.

The four brain networks were:

- language
- visual *perception* (the ability to interpret the surrounding environment by what you see)
- and visual *imagery* (constructing mental images when learning new information in order to recall it better later).

The fourth network, the ‘default mode’ was the most important.

This is internal reflection or how something matters to you.

With *audio books*, the language network was activated but overall there was less connectivity between the networks. Children were struggling to understand. With *animation*, there was a lot of activity in audio and visual perception but again not much connectivity between all four brain networks. Hutton interpreted this as the animation doing all the work for the child. The child’s comprehension of the story was worst.

With *illustrated picture books* there was increased activity between and among all 4 networks: language, visual perception, imagery, and the default mode. Words and pictures together bring images to life inside the mind. The results in Hutton's experiment weren't as good overall as scores achieved for pre-schoolers when they were read to on a parent's lap. I wonder – the rumble of voice, being so close to the parent or care-giver, could be an echo of pre-birth and new-born experience.

Hutton's experiment suggests a great deal about the need for community, in terms of story-telling to children. The right social setting and the right presentation help us best engage our brains early, in the default mode that he called 'the seat of the soul – internal reflection, how something matters to you.'

I heard of a foster mother caring for a 12 year old girl who had trouble reading. The foster mother persevered with books – but with no sign of success. Then one day, the girl glanced up from a book with a look of awe. 'When I read,' she said, 'I get pictures in my mind. Does that happen to you?'

That story gives me chills. Until that moment the child had been deprived of the experience of the power of reading. But it wasn't too late. How wonderful that mother was – kind enough, strong enough, aware enough, to persevere. Reluctant readers are possibly less skilled at processing language, at forming mental pictures, or reflecting on what they read. But the connectivity that develops imagination can be activated, even if it's later than usual.

I've always needed to read fiction, to be engaged in lives and deeds that echo my

own or widen my mental horizons. Almost certainly, this is tied into my awareness from early days when my parents read me A. A. Milne's poems. In a way that enchanted children, Milne wrote about the everyday – twined together with the impossible.

The king pathetically says: 'I only want a little bit of butter for my bread.'

The wise little boy warns his mother: 'You must never go down to the end of the town unless you go down with me.'

It taught me to carry stories and possibilities in my mind.



## Rebel Girls

In March last year I confronted a huge gap in my childhood reading life. Let me explain. That month, I had an email from Penguin Random House NZ. The

children's publisher told me about the overseas success of *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*.

The authors 'in a fairy-tale manner' told the true life stories of 100 women, historical and contemporary, from all around the world, any race or culture, who had succeeded in discoveries, adventures, and professions. PRH been brewing ideas for a local version, up to 50 women. The aim: to encourage girls from age 7 to 17 to widen their aspirations about careers and professions. Would I be interested in coming on board as the writer?

The writing style was to be a blend of non-fiction and fiction and they

wanted the stories told in 'an engaging and descriptive way'. There was a list of possible people to include already, but they wanted their writer to have input into who she thought would be worthy to be included. Then came: 'The catch is that our deadline for the text is mid-July.'

Many thoughts beset me, under a surge of rage and despair that such a book wasn't available when I was a girl. What could I have done sooner and better if it had been? Fright, not knowing if I could do the kind of research necessary – I write fiction, not non-fiction. Certainty that I could do the 'fairy-tale manner.' Completely blank as to what they really meant by 'engaging and descriptive.' Deep certainty that if I said 'no', when the local version was published with another writer's name, I'd be a jealous mess. But the deadline was crushing. Give 3 weeks for a contract to be signed, and it would leave only 14 weeks to research, write and revise all the profiles. 'Engaging and descriptive' profiles. Of women not yet even selected.

I was never going to say no. Because: women's stories. Local. It is so important to hear our own stories. Stories about what is possible. At primary school I loved true stories. When Mr Arnott said, 'Silent reading time,' I'd almost teleport to the class library shelf and grab a history book: tales of Horatio holding the bridge, Charlemagne, Sir Francis Drake exploring. Token females were Florence Nightingale and Mme Curie. I never wanted to emulate them – I'd have been a terrible nurse, even worse as a scientist. Otherwise it was lots of blokes, conventionally-heroic.

Oh, there was Joan of Arc but who would want to emulate her?

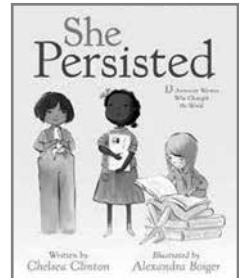
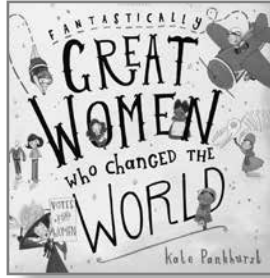
In fact, at age 8, I tried to write, direct and star in my own Joan of Arc play. It never came to performance. At the one and only rehearsal in the school hall, I leaned on a vaulting horse, and cried: 'Men! Come to my aid!' The French and English armies, 8 year old boys, ignored me completely and kept roaring after each other with imaginary swords. It probably offered me early significant insight into different needs of story depending on gender – and I have questions about that later.

What was happening in the world outside, then and earlier? Only recently are we hearing some of it. In the First and Second World Wars women had helped hold domestic life together, in the home as ever, but also in jobs that had been done by men. Wars over, men returned, wanted their jobs again, and fair enough. But women seemed quietly pushed back behind their front doors. Or they were doing highly-valuable work behind other doors.

Two examples: In 1935 in the States, the precursor to NASA hired 5 women to be their first computer pool at Langley campus. The NASA historian says: "The women were meticulous and accurate... and they didn't have to be paid very much."

In the early 80s I heard from my physician-researcher husband who seemed to think it unremarkable, that Nobel Prize winners, Crick, Watson and Wilkin's discoveries about DNA were not theirs alone. There had been a woman, Rosalind Franklin, whose work had never been adequately honoured.

More and more, such stories have become an avalanche. Recently I read



about a 19<sup>th</sup>C Scottish portrait painter, whose ground-breaking work the Royal Academy refused to exhibit, simply because she was female. Stories about women, overlooked, even deliberately hidden. Why was the world like that?

Staring at that email last year, I felt it was decades, centuries beyond time, to address and redress the lack of women's stories. To fill that gap. As I began work on *Go Girl* a joyful global tsunami of books like *Rebel Girls* was already rising. *Great Women Who Changed the World*. *Women in Science*. The marvellously titled *She Persisted*. I discovered how hard our own women persisted, struggling to – follow their dreams? One such woman was Margaret Mahy.

Here is one of the stories from *Go Girl*:

"Margaret Mahy. 1936 – 2012

Once upon a time a baby with mysterious powers was born in Whakatane. Her name was Margaret. It was some years before her powers were revealed – she could write stories that carried readers to fantastical worlds. When she was little Margaret wanted stories to be true so badly she tried to convince other children she spoke the languages of animals. Though she wanted to be a writer, she

thought it would never earn much money. She had better make a living at something else. First she tried nursing. She tried hard. But it didn't suit.

So she went to university while she thought about what next, and loved learning about philosophy and folk tales. At last Margaret decided the best thing would be a job with books. She became a librarian. Margaret saw everything as an adventure. For example she said that librarians dance on a ridge – on one side there is order, on the other lies chaos. She never married but had two little girls. After a busy day at the library, she'd race home to cook for her daughters. She fed the dogs, cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, birds and whatever else was around at the time. Then she tucked her girls into bed.

Finally she could rush to her desk. There till late at night Margaret wove her word-enchantments. An American publisher saw some of Margaret's stories from the *School Journal*. Like a fairy godmother with money rather than magic, the publisher flew to New Zealand to examine everything Margaret had written. 'The Lion in the Meadow!

And this one, and these, must be published as books,' she declared.

Margaret's early picture books made her famous almost at once. Her first two novels each won the Carnegie Medal. But it was still a while before Margaret could afford to spend all her time writing tales of adventure and fun for children from toddlers to teenagers. She won prize after prize all over the world. The list is so long it would never fit on a page unless the print was so small that even a mouse would have to squint.

The great NZ writer whose work is honoured in the title of this lecture, achieved remarkable success. But her journey seems less like following dreams and more like labouring uphill for years on a dark night with a load that hardly lightened".

## Go Girl

Writing *Go Girl* was like being a stage manager – figuring out when, with each story, to open the curtain to show the reader how a particular woman managed to break barriers. How she coped with failure, how she persisted. None of the women showed stereotypical female ways of behaving. They had individual approaches, motivation and personalities. The word limit for each was 350 words (1 A4 page). With some, like Margaret's, I wrote very condensed biographies. But a storybook needs variety, a mix of approaches to give the book quiet moments, exciting moments.

Every story needed its own voice, one that spoke of the 'character' of the woman. I wanted a range of modes of telling to reflect the range of women who

march and dance and struggle over the pages. Some could be more imaginative, perhaps focussed on a single incident, like the Jean Batten tale. Or with a refrain – Lisa Tamati, ultra-marathon runner with, 'oh really?' Or with an image to focus the life, as I came upon with the story hardest to write, Helen Clark's. I finally read that when she became a Minister, a cheap old briefcase had been left behind in her new office. Rather than buy a fancy new one, she insisted she'd use this second-hand one – it was just right for the job. And so was that image, right for my job.

When I'd said 'yes' to writing *Go Girl*, my next thought was, 'there must be diversity.' Racially, culturally, of course. But I wanted any reader who opened the book to find someone like them. I wanted the shy girl. The girl who rushes at everything and finally finds something to focus on. The girl whose family didn't expect her to amount to much. The girl who could never be bothered with fuss. The girl who was the first in all her family to go to university. The girl who managed to rise out of tragedy. I've always maintained that no subject matter is too awful for children. What matters is the way the author treats it. I had to write about the NZ Land Wars, Ahumai te Paerata, Maori warrior – and not upset 7 year olds, the lower range of the book's readership. I had to write about Beatrice Tinsley's terrible choice between family and career. And Sophie Pascoe's accident.

Researching for *Go Girl*, I saw an overview of NZ history, at least from the Land Wars to the present. I saw the generosity and compassion of women: Dr Margaret Cruikshank, first woman GP; Dame Mira Szaszzy with the Maori

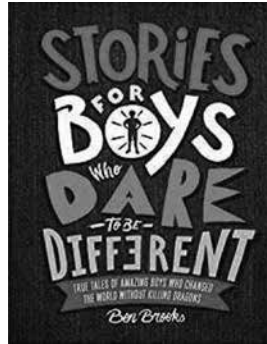
Women's Welfare League; Dame Whina Cooper; Beatrice Faumuina moving from her success in sport to set up ways to help younger Pasifika women and men; and way back – Elizabeth McCombs, first woman MP in Christchurch. Most dear to me became Rita Angus, who refused to go overseas because, 'it is important for me to be a woman artist in this country.'

When news broke about *Go Girl's* coming publication, I read on social media: 'Do we really need a local version of *Rebel Girls*?' Yes. Our New Zealand stories. About our women. Booksellers have told the publisher and myself about, for instance, seeing Asian NZ girls, off-handedly flicking through the book, stop – at a face like theirs. Pasifika girls, suddenly frozen at a page with – a face like theirs. I've heard of sports-mad girls racing through the sports-women stories first then devouring all the other profiles. I've heard of mothers carrying the book to the bookshop counter saying: 'I have to buy this for my daughter.' And daughters saying: 'it's for my mother.'

At an event at the Hutton Theatre in Dunedin with one of the illustrators, Phoebe Morris and one of the profiled women, orca specialist Ingrid Visser, I saw girls marching in, copies of *Go Girl* clutched like warrior breastplates. Overwhelmingly, I saw those girls engaged by the reality of a book full of our own stories that they felt related to them directly. Stories that say, in that quiet space that's just you and the page, 'If you choose, you can do this too.' I've heard of a boy who took *Go Girl* to school and told his class: 'This book is for any child who's been told they can't do something.'

## Gender and Imagination in story

When girls and boys are between say, 5 and 9 years old, they often ask, 'tell me about when I was little.' If you oblige, their faces show a mix of pleasure and equally-delicious embarrassment. Because hearing their own stories helps them place themselves, ground themselves, it gives them context, helps their sense of self.



Naturally we need stories for boys too. Stories that show the range of male endeavour. I'm not surprised that this year Quercus, UK, brought out *Stories for*

*Boys Who Dare to be Different*. And NZ's *Oh Boy!* will be out soon. But on social media and in person I've heard some anger that boy's stories along the lines of *Rebel Girls* and *Go Girl* are being published now. The argument is: 'It's too early, it isn't fair. Give women more time in the spotlight.' I partly agree. But more strongly, I feel our boys can't be blamed for the attitudes of the past. They need to see a range of approaches to life, to success. Don't punish them by depriving them of a balance.

Rigid ideas about how men or women ought to behave are no help to us. These books show that the evil twins, toxic masculinity, a syndrome that promotes violence, and its sister, toxic helpless passive femininity, don't have to reign over us. But... do boys need different types of



story, told in a different way to the way girls' stories need to be told? There is a lot to consider, trying to figure out what's going on.

In March this year, a local website for children's literature, The Sapling, published a piece by Elizabeth Heritage on 'Gender (im)balance in NZ children's books.' [www.thesapling.co.nz](http://www.thesapling.co.nz)

She found fewer female protagonists in books for children. And she pointed to studies that said the dearth of female characters gives boys a sense of entitlement and lowers girls' self-esteem and occupational aspirations. As I said, a lot to consider ... One question is: are parents, teachers, librarians and publishers unconsciously (or consciously) doing something that turns boys away from female protagonists? Because received wisdom says boys don't read books with girls as leads.

Yet in a discussion on the NZ library list-serve, most of the participants disputed this. A male librarian at an all-boys school said that especially in fantasy and science fiction, boys didn't care who the main character was as long as it was 'a good story.' Kyle Mewburn told me her books with male protagonists tend to sell better. Stacy Gregg's publisher packages her novels about girls and horses, Barbie-like, in pastel colours. Of course very few boys would pick them up, and plenty of girls wouldn't either. A school librarian challenged boys to ignore the latest cover. They did, and were so impressed they asked for more Stacy Gregg books.

I checked my own writing for bias. When I began writing it was short stories, all but one with male protagonists. I suppose I'd been unconsciously copying

what most NZ authors I'd read actually did – write about men. Once I realised – with a bit of a shock – I wrote short stories with women protagonists. This was after my little family's return from 3 years in California, when I met Fiona Kidman who gave me important encouragement. It seemed while I'd been away women authors here had sprung up in a somewhat bleak landscape to add colour and wit. (They have kept on springing!)

My adult novels so far have women protagonists. The first was even called *The Warrior Queen*. (I should say: the draft title was 'The Parrot's Version' – I was telling the woman's side of the marriage train-wreck. Her spouse would have had an entirely different view of it. Ex-spouses invariably do, and he was definitely going to be an ex-spouse.)

## The Travelling Restaurant



When I began writing the first of my fantasy books for children, *The Travelling Restaurant*, I deliberately chose a boy protagonist. There are active female characters

in key roles. But I wanted to show a boy succeeding not by using force, but by using his wits and caring for others. I had no real expectation the book would ever be published. But here's another anecdote. On a Children's Book Award tour for *The Travelling Restaurant*, my first talk was in a primary school library. I began my

spiel ... 'Jasper isn't very good-looking, his parents don't seem to think he's very bright...' Yikes, I thought, this won't grab them. I glanced up. Even the handsome, highly-able-looking boys were sitting up wide-eyed. But at the end of my talk, a lot of the girls stayed to ask questions and the boys vanished. Oh well ... A librarian rushed after them and came back with a grin. They'd all lined up at the reserves desk. The following year the principal told me: 'You might not be especially pleased to hear this but *The Travelling Restaurant* is our most-stolen library book.' It intrigued me that a story about a vulnerable male had hit a spot.

## Story and Voice

Story and voice: in a piece of writing, voice is tone and register. The writer's choices in this regard help to carry and give shape to the subject matter. If we don't trust the voice or find it relevant, we don't buy into the story. One of the key aspects to any successful story for children is that it gives agency to the child, or child-like figure at its centre. It authenticates the experience of being a child. It gives a voice to children and speaks to them.

I don't want to read about shoot-'em up heroes or sports warriors, male or female. Nor do many boys. They like novels with plots that have puzzles to solve, or barrels of humour, or both. After they're 8 or so, boys tend to prefer non-fiction. But many simply want to play 'Fortnite' or be outside making their own stories in their exploits on the playground and sports field, rather than reading which seems passive. Does it matter if they don't read, either fiction or non-fiction? Can they be

encouraged? I don't know. I just have two remarkable examples that illustrate each end of the silken ribbon of reading and story, and what children get from it.

In a piece called 'Tales from Grimm' published in 1975 Janet Frame describes herself at 7 years old. Her new friend Poppy picked a book out of a pile of coal sacks, shook off some slaters and gave it to her. It was *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. All those stories, together! No pictures! A real book! Janet describes how much the stories meant to her, the plunge into each first sentence, the terror of realising she was half-way through a tale, unable to go back, she had to go on ... Poppy taught her bad language too, and Janet's parents made her return the book. But Janet said the stories themselves were not returned. The magic of them stayed inside her.

Now to Frederick Douglass, an American social reformer, abolitionist, writer, statesman. He was born in 1818, a slave, and of course treated like property. When he was 12, Sophia Auld, wife of his then owner, taught Frederick the alphabet. When Hugh Auld heard, he refused to let the boy have any more lessons. Young Frederick realised: "Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave". He taught himself to read because knowledge is power. Reading – the ability to read – is certainly power. It's a theme in my next children's novel, in fact. I had trouble bringing that manuscript to a state where settings, characters and action came together. I put it aside to write *Go Girl*.

I went back into the novel. I found that having faced the dark material in *Go Girl's* real life stories helped me confront the material in the novel – a boy on the cusp of becoming a man, gaining

independence from the toxic neediness of his mother. I'd better add here that she isn't entirely human.

Back to voice, to tone and register. The first voice is the mother's voice – and boys are meant to separate themselves from the mother. There are as many ways of doing that as there are boys. Girls too are meant to separate themselves from dependency, to self-determine. And we're far more aware these days of children figuring out their gender. What about the range of all of them, the voices and stories they need to hear? The thing is, stories for children should give voice to their concerns. Children in all their diversity, at all their stages, need and deserve that.

Publishers say they want to publish books about diversity. Whether they do or not is a matter of financial risk. For instance, in this tiny local market, it would be hard to sell enough picture books about gender diversity to break even. It needs brave publishers to give an outlet to diverse voices. To give variety to what's offered on the literary table. If a child doesn't read at all, it is worrying. But if you or I don't buy into a particular writing style, or subject matter, why should we read it?

If a child does read, but it's nothing but comics, like insisting on a diet of mental canned spaghetti, I don't think grown-ups need worry too much. Learning to relish reading can be like learning to appreciate broccoli. At some point, the taste buds develop and a yukky vegetable might transform into an item of delight. Just keep putting it on or near the child's plate. And for goodness sake, if you want them to eat it let them see you eating it. Or reading, reading something, and getting something out of it. Of

course, it's not that easy. Some children just don't turn to reading for strength or replenishment. It's worth noting here: generally men don't read as much as women. Recent NZ Book Council figures prove that.

Another anecdote, about reading tastes. Duffy Books, as most of you will know, give free books to primary schools. A publishing friend of mine helped box up some Duffy books and heard this: it wasn't much use sending fiction to the very low decile schools, in that particular area at any rate. The children read virtually no fiction. But they would grab non-fiction. I thought, maybe they need affirmation about the real world, their place in it, before their imaginations can begin to explore possibility. So, again, local true stories have a role in giving context to the lives of our young people.

Some of you will know of David Riley, 'Reading Warrior' – a local educator who saw Pasifika boys struggle with reading. He began writing his own books just for those boys, and now works with literacy and reading recovery. I saw him one-on-one with two very different boys about 10 years old, each shivering with despair that they couldn't read. David talked to them softly, with utter concentration. In turn each boy smiled through tears and left, head up, shoulders back. Yes, they were going to do it. David's books, true stories about sports people, do the trick. He says, if boys are interested in the subject matter they don't know they're reading.

The best story for each child is whatever challenges and affirms that child's inner self and coaxes it into the wider world. 'The home run book' is a term snaffled from American baseball. It's the book that

gives one positive reading experience that can make a child a committed reader. It takes a piece of luck, a dedicated teacher, or an inspired librarian to find the right story. School librarians work like secret fairy godparents, finding the right gift for the right child.

As well as any gender tendencies around reading, of course you see different needs and responses in all the age groups: pre-school, primary, intermediate and young adult. Lewis Carroll, first to write directly for children, gave us Alice, who visited Wonderland then went through the Looking Glass. His child characters questioned the adult world and the madness of grown-ups. That's exactly what children up to about twelve ought to do, while they observe the adult world and figure out how it operates.

I believe that up to early adolescence, children prefer the voyage and return story pattern. They need the glow of hope, to know that safety is there in the end. I wonder if hope fosters imagination which in turn can foster hope. Those more adult books that a child *can* read might not be big on hope.

You hear from proud parents that a child has an adult reading age. That's good. But there's reading burn-out.

A mother told me her 12 year old girl had been an avid reader, forging through all the series her friends were into, *The Hunger Games*, *His Dark Materials*

by Philip Pullman, many others. Those books can be read and understood by 12 year olds and younger. But emotionally and psychologically, those abrasive, sometimes depressing books are not designed for younger children. They were wrong for the girl, even damaging. She stopped reading. The mother began reading aloud with her girl, a *mid-grade* fantasy series with voyage and return, about families reuniting. Now the girl was reading for herself again. There's a reason for middle-grade fiction, written especially for that age group.

YA books are for teenagers learning what it's like to move into the adult world and take those responsibilities for themselves. Book covers, if they don't actively encourage a range of gender to turn to the first page, at least shouldn't subliminally discourage any group. Teenage issues are teenage issues wherever, however, whoever. Certainly, reading can open doors on tragedy. I saw my younger daughter, about 14 at the time, awash with tears. I stopped dead and asked what the matter was. She held up a copy of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* – she was at the last pages. I crept away to let the experience flow, and we talked about it later.

Even younger children need sad and scary reading experiences, in safe surroundings. To worry that Cruella de Ville will have her gorgeous black-and-white spotted coat, soft as the pelts of 99 Dalmatian puppies. They need to read how Pongo and Missus, mum and dad Dalmatian work hard to save their own puppies and every last other one! By contrast: children need to fall about laughing at Terry and Andy on



the umpteenth floor of their treehouse. Those characters have amazing ideas, try to put them into practice, and deal with the consequences. The voice of the stories is anarchic and authentic – and the books are largely pictorial. But – or and – those stories give the child characters agency and say it's ok to be a kid.

Our boys and girls need to read **local** authors, like Des Hunt, about good warriors,

eco-warriors, set in our context, the NZ landscape. They need to read Fleur Beale's

books – an all-boys school loved *I am Not Esther* - used it for years. And her *Speed Freak*

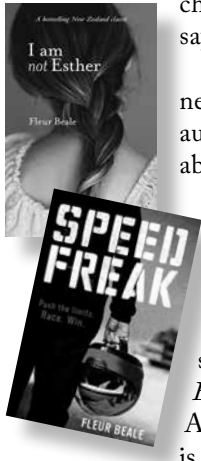
is a strong story about male role models. A reluctant boy reader might not even know he's reading. I also believe children need to read fantasy. Though it's not set in the real world, it is still about real-life emotions, family and relationship difficulties. When moral and ethical problems are at that other-world distance, they might even seem clearer to a child reader.

Very few stories suitable for children were written at all before the development of the fairy tale, in the late C17<sup>th</sup> – when the traditional spoken tales began to be written down by many authors. The best-known is Charles Perrault with *Contes de Ma Mere*. But he was outnumbered and even preceded by several women, like Marie-Catherine, Baroness d'Aulnoy. (So why should Perrault be the best known? – just asking.)

In fairy tales from all around the world there are key differences between girl and boy main characters. There is of course the typical character of the third son, and of Jack, the 'every-boy' who wins through by showing empathy, using wit as much as strength. There are similar tales about the third sister. There are also Cinderella tales. There is Bluebeard's wife, and Little Red Riding Hood. Tales in which a girl or young woman defends herself against oppression by male figures and sometimes by other women (like ugly sisters).

The original wise old women storytellers, the 'gossips', couched social problems of women in ways which other women could understand.

Everyday problems, everyday stories, moving to imagination-stretching marvels that work the muscles in the mind and that deep network. Children need it all, don't they? Now more than ever? I have seen myself the lack of language stimulation through conversation and story and reading aloud deprive the children of a well-off, intelligent family. The most awful modern curse must be that your parents may be addicts to their smart-phones and never encourage you to have a vocabulary. A recent article in the Guardian said: 28% of 4 and 5 year olds in the UK cannot communicate in full sentences. It's enough to make writers wonder why they keep going. So many questions.



Not enough answers. I've always written for children and adults. Now and then I'm told 'that's unusual' (I don't think it is) or asked 'what's the difference?' I sometimes sense the speaker feels I go down-market writing for children, as if it's somehow shameful. So far I've bitten back amusement. Though it can feel as if I've been brushed by an invisible electric fence. The simple answer is, there's no difference. Each story that wants to be written just asks for its particular audience. But writing for children can be more playful. There are fewer restraints on subject matter, on imagination.

There are more restraints in the way of responsibility to your audience. You write for children but you are an adult. You have to exercise more judgment on what you write and why, because the audience doesn't have as much reading experience, as much life experience. You cannot tell them what to think. You cannot preach. You cannot fudge. You must be aware of your audience in a way that you just don't when you write for adults. I'd say writers for children are very aware of the market, and ask themselves: 'will boys read this, are the female characters active enough?' But I quote the Otago University Arts Fellows web-page. The question for all creative work – music, dance, art, and writing for adults and children is: will it 'challenge, provoke and reassure, and tell us who we are?' All those things that the mother's voice originally does, or ought to do.

Storytelling continues that process. Writing is alchemy. Any author creates a voice – the reader hears, sees and feels.

Writing for children is a double journey.

It hopes to create a voice that can be trusted.

At the same time, for the writer it can be a way of trying again to find the enchanted inner world of being new to story, to the first discovery of the deep level. That challenging space.

## Author



**Barbara Else** writes for children and adults and is co-director of the TFS Manuscript Assessment Service. Her awards include an MNZM for Services to Literature, and the Margaret Mahy Medal. She has held the Victoria University Writing Fellowship and the University of Otago College of Education/Creative New Zealand Children's Writing Fellowship. Her latest book is *Go Girl – a storybook of epic NZ women*. Due out in April is another children's novel, *Harsu and the Werestoot*.

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*"When reading, we don't fall in love with the characters' appearance. We fall in love with their words, their thoughts, and their hearts. We fall in love with their souls."* Anonymous

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# Ramping up reading for pleasure

*Debbie Roxburgh*

What exactly is reading for pleasure? It is the reading that we do of our own free will, for the sheer joy that we get from the act of reading. This is reading for reading's sake; reading without the imperative of an assessment, a book review, or a report. I'm talking about reading to escape, meet new people, and explore new places, different times and areas of interest. Stephen Krashen (2004) describes this as free voluntary reading (FVR).

There is now a substantial body of evidence about the extraordinary transformative effect of reading for pleasure. Research points not only to gains in cognitive development, academic achievement and better employment prospects, but also to the poverty-busting effect for those in disadvantaged circumstances. There is also a growing awareness of the power of reading for pleasure in building social and emotional skills, and enhancing our general health and well-being. The resulting increase in social capital for children, young people and adults builds a stronger network of relationships allowing our society to function effectively.

In its annual literacy survey of over 42,000 children in November/December 2016 the National Literacy Trust found that children who read for pleasure are more likely to read for interest and achievement than because others had told them to read. Interestingly in this survey socio-economic background made no difference to the number of children who said that

they enjoyed reading for pleasure (58.3%). Responses to the survey indicated that children who enjoyed reading were four times more likely to agree that reading is cool, they get excited when they read and that reading helps them better understand about the world.

Well-known in the area of reading and well-being is Nicola Morgan, an internationally-acclaimed author and authority on teenage wellbeing, how stress impacts performance, effects of screens, social media and reading for pleasure. Nicola has coined the term 'readaxation' to describe reading for pleasure as a deliberate strategy to reduce stress levels. Schools have adopted this idea with one school turning its library into a holiday-themed "Readaxation Resort" for International Bookweek. Students responded positively to this commenting that the changes made them want to visit the library more often. "Others schools have encouraged students to use Nicola's readaxation diary to see whether reading an enjoyable book is a useful way to reduce stress. Using the diary students record their stress levels/feelings before and after reading for about half an hour a day for seven days, then decide whether reading is a useful stress-busting activity for them.

## **Know yourself as a reader**

As readers, we all have reading preferences.

An important stage of developing as a reader is building an awareness of what you like to read, and when, and why you

like to read. Adults can generally answer these questions about themselves, so the challenge becomes how to support students as they develop awareness of themselves as readers. Steven Layne (2009) suggests “igniting a passion by knowing your students”. He recommends using an inventory where students record their attitudes to reading, the sorts of books they like to read and the topics that they would like to learn more about – the scope and style of questions are adjusted to suit different ages of students and may range from circling topics that interest you on a printed list, to answering the question “If an author could write a book just for you, what would it be about?”. The information provided by each student then guides reading conversations and book recommendations.

Teachers and librarians could fill out the same inventory about their reading preferences, or perhaps answer these sorts of questions to reveal their reading personality e.g. where and when do you do most of your reading for pleasure? What books do you re-read? How would you describe your reading style? (Read every page or a skipper?). Imagine if you shared this information about your ‘reading self’ with students and they in turn shared with you. What might be the outcome?

## **Reading role models and reading conversations**

To be reading role models (able to share what you have read, and talk about what you plan to read next) it’s important that teachers continually add to their knowledge of children’s and young adult literature. Reading widely in both fiction

and non-fiction provides fuel for these reading conversations with students, sets a powerful example and fuels enthusiasm.

Reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationships between teachers and children, and children and families. In 2016, Coastal Taranaki School initiated a project of recording teachers talking about themselves as readers including sharing a favourite book, or one that had special meaning for them. These short videos were first played at whole-school assemblies and then posted on the school library website. Following the introduction of these videos there was a significant increase in conversations about books and reading between staff and students, along with increased demand for the titles that had been promoted.

## **Choosing what to read**

In the *Kids and family reading report* an overwhelming majority of children (ages 6-17) agree that their favourite books, and the ones that they are most likely to finish, are the ones that they choose themselves. Nearly three-quarters of the same children say that they would read more if they could find books that they like.

Successfully browsing, previewing and selecting is a critical first step towards reading engagement, and choosing ‘the right book’ to borrow can be a challenging first hurdle to overcome.

Think about your favourite book store and how satisfying it is to go straight to the section that appeals to you, confident that there will be something there to pique your interest. Consider following this model, arranging your library



collection by genre so that students can quickly and independently find a book that interests them.

Arranging books by genre provides a scaffold, or short cut, in the selection process. It doesn't result in students limiting themselves to reading within a genre, as establishing real reading preferences will come from wide reading experience.

Vital in the process of supporting students as they choose what to read is ensuring that they have access to a diverse collection of books where they recognise themselves and their life experiences, see people who are different in time, place and experience, and build an understanding of themselves and their world.

What else can libraries do to support children as they choose what to read? Offer support and guidance as children browse the collection or “shop” for books to read next, discuss books and recommend titles e.g. if you enjoyed *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney then try..., and institute generous loan limits that allow children to borrow a variety and quantity of books. Readers are more likely to take a risk and try something new if they are allowed to borrow a generous number of books.

## Five strategies to try

### *Work in teams to discover new titles or genres.*

1. Select a range of different genres to introduce to your class.
2. Arrange approximately 4 books per category on tables (1 category per table).
3. Working in teams, students decide which of the 4 books has the best

cover or best blurb or best start (first page).

4. After 5 minutes each group moves to a different table to repeat the process using a different selection of books
5. As students become more skilful with this process, reduce the time at each changeover. Result - students are introduced to a wide range of previously unfamiliar books. Teachers who used this activity reported that students enthusiastically read a wider range of books.

## Genre based book clubs

As a change from the usual style of book club that meets regularly through the year, try running one-off events that are based around a particular book. These events may involve some pre-event activity or reading, and could feature multiple activity stations (including discussion) around the library. A recently published graphic novel or book with a recently released movie adaptation could be a good one to try.

## Lucky-dip reading

A great cure for regimented reading habits is to choose a book you know nothing about. But how to make that appealing? Try wrapping some under-used or undiscovered titles in plain paper or newsprint and encourage students to pick from your “lucky-dip”. Some schools add a label showing the first line of text to the wrapping, or include a tip e.g. “turn to page 37”.

## Crowd-sourcing

This most often means taking a task that is performed by an employee and outsourcing it to a group or community.

In reading for pleasure terms this could be: peer-to-peer recommendations and book-talking where students promote books they have enjoyed and advise each other on what to read next. These recommendations could also feed into the selection of books for the class or school library. Some schools have extended the crowd-sourcing concept to class libraries by encouraging students to contribute outgrown books from home – with parents' permission!

## **Collaborations**

In addition to working with your school librarian, develop a relationship with your local children's librarian and invite them to visit your class to share their reading recommendations. Children's librarians are strong reading role models for students and visits are opportunities for positive reading conversations with someone from outside the school community. Visits will also help students grow their network of reading influencers.

## **Services to Schools supporting reading for pleasure**

<https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/lending-service>

One of National Library's Services to Schools strategic priorities is reading engagement. Our whole-school and anytime title loans provide resources to encourage and develop a love of reading, and to support students with inquiry.

## **Whole-school resource loans**

These contain resources to support the development of inquiry skills and reading for pleasure. Schools order these loans once a term.

## **Reading engagement 'top-ups'**

Every school can also request a reading engagement 'top-up' with their whole-school loan. This is a selection of up to 75 great books matching your school profile, and is in addition to your whole-school resource loan allocation.

## **Anytime title requests**

Schools use our anytime title requests to order specific books from our schools' lending collections. These may be books to support individual students' specific reading needs or interests. There is no limit to the number of anytime title requests a school can make.

## **Making the most of these extra resources**

### *Test driving new authors/genres*

Requesting authors or genres that are unfamiliar to students creates an opportunity to promote different styles of writing, or introduce a class to previously undiscovered authors. Providing access to diverse collections of resources encourages students develop their 'literary palates' without putting extra strain on the library or class budget.

### *Support classroom programmes*

Request additional resources for a class e.g. a class working on developing their procedural writing skills could use a selection of craft, cookery, and construction books for inspiration and examples.

### *Extend or support target groups of readers*

Use one of the topics in a whole-school loan to provide books that offer extra

support and practice to identified groups of readers e.g. those who are transitioning from picture books to early chapter books; or provide extra reading for an extension group using the anytime title requests.

### ***Reading for pleasure loans to teachers over summer***

Request books that teachers can read to expand their knowledge of children's and young adult literature. Act on their recommendations of favourite titles, and add these to your school library collection.

### ***Enrich the school library collection***

Borrow thematic collections that increase the range of books available for students. Use these extra resources as the basis for displays, for genre based book clubs or to provoke discussion and further investigation.

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## **Author**



**Debbie Roxburgh** is part of the National Library of New Zealand, Services to Schools team of facilitators, providing professional learning and development, information and advice to schools in the lower central North Island. Her role includes facilitating connections between school communities as well as the wider educational community to support reading engagement, digital literacy and innovative library learning environments. Debbie is passionate about helping all students discover the joys and rewards of reading for pleasure and life-long learning; and the role of libraries, especially school libraries, in helping this happen.

# Literacy Landscapes - National 41st Conference Report

*Sarah McCord*

For three days during a mild and calm spell in October, Palmerston North hosted over 220 delegates, presenters and exhibitors for the 41st National Literacy Conference. I was privileged to work with a roopu (team) of dedicated educators alongside our conference organiser for over two years as we planned this conference for our colleagues in education. Many on our roopu were part of the 2004 Manawatu conference committee, such is the dedication to literacy in the Manawatu and the bond we all have. We had a lot of fun planning every little detail to

make the experience a pleasure for all who attended.

Local councils around the country host a national conference on behalf of the New Zealand Literacy Association each year. Every conference is a little different and every conference is a place for educators to connect, learn and grow professionally. We are very grateful for the ongoing support of delegates, sponsors and exhibitors at each conference.

On the 3rd to the 5th of October 2018 we joined together at the Awapuni Function Centre where we were treated



*Our conference committee*

to a feast of learning, fun and wonderful food! Each day we were enriched by passionate and inspiring workshop presenters and keynote speakers. We were overwhelmed by the number of people who applied to take workshops,



*Rita Palmer, conference M.C.*

and the quality of each session was outstanding. Ngā mihi nui, thank you all!

After our mihi whakatau and opening addresses we handed over our conference to our amazing MC, Rita Palmer. Rita kept us running to time, and entertained and inspired as she led us all through our conference experience.

Our conference got underway with Dr Peter Johnson's powerful keynote address. He reminded us about engagement, self regulation and the choices we make in the language we use that result in a self extending system

of literacy development. Then Dr Bernadette Dwyer challenged us with the need to be proactive with mirroring students' experiences in today's digital world if we want to reach and connect with them. We ended day one with a light hearted presentation from local entrepreneur, Suzie Johnston. Suzie had us in fits of laughter! Then we held the first ever teachers' Lit Quiz hosted by the Kids' Lit Quiz Master himself, Wayne Mills. More hilarity as teams competed against each other.

Day two was underway with Professor Janet Gaffney's moving presentation that made us dig deep and reflect on our practice as teachers and ask ourselves if our approach is the right one for each learner. Following this Rob Southam delighted us with an appraisal of newly published books that are inspiring young readers. Rob also took us down memory lane as she shared some of our old favourites. The afternoon was all about authors! We were fortunate to be joined by a group of outstanding New Zealand authors for our author symposiums: Gavin Bishop, Des Hunt, Sally Sutton, David Hill, Kate De Goldi and David Riley treated delegates to rich and inspiring insights into what inspires them and drives them to write. We ended day two with a night of wearable arts, Japanese drummers, Bubbles, Bites and Banter at Palmerston North's jewel; Te Manawa.

On the final day of the conference Dr Rae Si'ilata began the morning with her moving presentation that left conference delegates reaching for the tissues. Rae shared insights into Pasifika literacy success and some of the hurdles our Pasifika children encounter in our

education system. Then we were treated to the world of Donovan Bixley's mind as he shared how creates and develops his ideas and books. Our final session was from Nathan Mikaere Wallis who deepened delegates' understanding of the many changes children's brains go through as they grow; how this brain development enables them to read, and what is needed in children's lives to support this.

The 41st NZLA conference roopu and our conference organiser, Rosemary Hancock, thoroughly enjoyed organising the conference. We are very grateful to our sponsors and exhibitors, workshop and keynote presenters; Kaumatua; Wiremu and Trieste Te Awe Awe, Nga tamariki o te Huinga Manu; Ross Intermediate School Kapa Haka with Whaea Jay and Whaea Paiana; our NZLA National Executive; and to our delegates for joining and supporting us.

Ngā mihi

Sarah McCord, Conference Convenor  
On behalf of our roopu; Judy Aitken, Margot Mackie, Sonia Mudgway, Rita Palmer, Jan Watts and Viv Wimms.

## Author



**Sarah McCord**, Principal, Ruahine School. Sarah joined the Ruahine team at the beginning of 2018 after a number of years as principal of a rural school near Whanganui. She began her career as a new entrant teacher in North Canterbury and since then has taught in the Manawatu area. Sarah holds a masters degree in educational leadership and loves working with people to help them be the best they can be! Sarah has a passion for literacy, the arts and rural education. In her spare time she enjoys gardening and cooking, and is currently learning the piano and a martial art.  
principal@ruahine.school.nz





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## **NZ Literacy Association 42nd Conference, Christchurch 2019 Workshop Submissions**

Interested in presenting a workshop?

.... then please fill out the form at <https://nzla.org.nz/> giving as much information as possible. This will allow us to complete the fullest picture on the Workshop you are offering. The overarching themes for the conference workshops are...

- Learning through the arts - drama, storytelling, visual arts, puppets, dance, music...
- Love of literature- inspiring our students with a love of literacy and learning - library, engagement, authors, illustrators, creativity, rich literature, poetry...
- Sharing our practice-based inquiries and research - including spiral of inquiry, NZLA research, Kāhui Ako research...

All workshops will be an hour duration

*Workshops submissions close Monday 6 May*

If you have any questions, please contact:  
[sophie.orourke@waitakiri.school.nz](mailto:sophie.orourke@waitakiri.school.nz)

### **The Marie Clay Literacy Trust conference workshop presenter awards**

*All non-commercial NZ workshop presenters will be eligible to enter a draw for one of five \$1000 prizes. Draw supervised by the Conference committee. The Trust will not engage in any correspondence. Winners will be announced at the closing ceremony.*

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— Terrell A. Young, President, United States Board on Books for Young People, and Professor of Children's Literature, Brigham Young University

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Nicola Daly is senior lecturer in Education, University of Waikato. Libby Limbrick is former head of the School of Arts, Languages and Literacy, University of Auckland. Pam Dix is chair of the Avil Trust, Kenya, and also chairs the UK section of IBBY.



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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Oi Frog!**

*Kes Gray, illustrated by Jim Field*

ibsn 978-1-98-854220-1

Hodder Children's Books, London 2015

ISBN 978 1 444 91086 5, picture book

*Reviewed by Jan Watts*

If you are looking for a book for younger children with top scores for fun, silliness and hilarity, then *Oi Frog!* is the one. It has children in fits of

laughter, and they very quickly begin to innovate on the ridiculous rhyming text.

Frog, previously confident that he could sit where he liked, suddenly is told by a very bossy cat with extremely fixed ideas, that all animals have special places to sit, and that the rules around this are not in any way flexible. Frog contests cat's edicts, explores other possibilities, asks a fatal question and the story doesn't end well.

The story bounces along, and Jim Field's illustrations are full of mischief as he pictures the characters of cat and frog and depicts animals who are not at all happy with their designated places.

Read it - your children will adore it. And when you can't get enough, head straight back to your favourite book shop for *Oi Dog!*, *Oi Cat!* And *Oi Duck-billed Platypus!*

**The old man**

*Sarah V, illustrated by Claude K Dubois*

Gecko Press, Wellington, 2018

ISBN 978 1 776571 91 8

Hardback picture book

*Reviewed by Jan Watts*

This is a thought-provoking and moving story which encourages discussion about poverty, compassion and justice.

An older man sleeping rough walks along the city streets trying to warm up after a wet and bitterly cold night, checking out rubbish bins for food to try to assuage his hunger.

He tries to catch up on some sleep in a park, but police move him on, and when he tries a shelter for the homeless he is turned away because he cannot remember his name. Just when it seems his day can only get worse, he is noticed by a young girl who speaks to him kindly, gives him an unexpected gift and accidentally reminds him of his name, restoring both his hope and his identity.

The water colour pencil illustrations in grey and sepia set the scene and background the story which is told with minimal text.

This story can be a tough read, and may be confronting to adults, making us think about our own reaction to homeless people, but it is a great discussion starter for children across a range of ages, and a great text for exploring the idea that “human beings are more than their circumstances” (Kirkus starred review).

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## News from the Councils

### Southland

The NZLA Annual Meeting was held in Wellington in June. The Southland Council was represented by Gina White as delegate and Joyce Wakelin as observer. Wonderful to have new people attending as this is spreading the knowledge base and part of our strategy to build our succession plan.

The NZLA conference in Palmerston North was attended by Diane Goffin our Dame Marie Clay Early Teacher Recipient. I know Diane was looking forward to the keynote speakers and had quite a dilemma choosing the workshops she wanted to partake in.

### Nathan Wallis

Our term 1 event was a great success with Nathan sharing his wisdom, humour and commonsense approach to brain development. He had a morning session that looked at brain development from 0 - 7 years and in the afternoon delving into the mysterious workings of the teenage brain - very fascinating. We had a wide

range of people attending, members of the public as well as from primary, secondary schools and Early Childhood sector.

### NZLA South Island Leadership Workshop March

This was held in Invercargill this year. It was great to catch up and share ideas and knowledge with all the other South Island associations.

### Author & Illustrator Workshop - Term 2

David Elliot and Raymond Huber were our guest writers, the writer workshops for years 5 - 8. These were well attended by students from throughout Southland. David held an illustrators' workshop on the Saturday morning for some very keen and budding illustrators.

### Dreamweaver Programme

The Invercargill Licensing Trust has continued their sponsorship of Liz Miller's Dreamweaver storytelling programme in schools in Invercargill and Bluff. The programme is now underway. Liz is renowned for holding

captive audiences of children with her passion for storytelling. Tania Faulkner-McKenzie will work alongside Liz again this year delivering stories, gaining more experience and skills. Many of the children now attending a Dreamweaver session have parents who also have fond memories listening to Liz telling stories to them when they were at school.

### **Literacy Symposium - Teachers for Teachers**

Our inaugural Literacy Symposium was held in 2017. It was very successful and the feedback was teachers want this to be a regular event. A decision was made to do this biannually and already we are in the process of planning for next year. The date for this is Saturday 18 May 2019.

### **International Storytelling**

Once again the very capable sub-committee of Liz, Tania and Daphne brought to Southland the International Storytellers, Diane Ferlatte from California and Anna Jarrett from Australia, both outstanding storytellers. Each year, the committee endeavors to have the storytellers visit different schools throughout Southland and in 2018 they told their stories to children at 3 Invercargill schools, and two rural schools. This event is becoming a well-known part of this Arts Festival. Liz is the driving force behind this event, and Southland owes her a great deal for her continued passion for the power of story.

### **Ko Wai Au? Who Am I?**

A literacy/visual art competition was held in September, with the theme being “Ko

Wai Au? Who Am I?” Entries were for Years 1-3, Years 4-6 and Years 7-8. The quality of entries overall is very strong and are yet to be judged, a feat I do not envy as there are some amazing art pieces and the creativeness of our tamariki never fails to astound. The winning pieces will be displayed at the City Library where we also will have the prize giving..

### **Books for Babies**

Funding for the books has been from donations from Southland Community Trust, The Invercargill Licensing Trust Foundation and the Matura Licensing Trust. Each newborn baby in Southland is given a quality picture book along with a welcome letter for parents explaining the value of literacy in the home and library information. We continue to receive extremely positive feedback from the new mums.



Southland Literacy  
ASSOCIATION

Lorraine Dallas

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### **Waikato**

Term three saw a lovely celebration lunch to honour two of our WLA members for special accolades. Wendy Carss and Joan Gibbons. Joan received a Service Award that the WLA nominated her for and what a very worthy recipient. Joan has been an active part of the WLA for many years and first joined the Waikato Reading Association in 1971. She joined the WRA committee in 1984. She has been the editor for the Literacy Forum (NZLA journal) which she held for 12 years.

Joan has just resigned from the Waikato Literacy Association committee this year in March 2018. This marks 47 years as a member of the association and 33 years on the committee.

We also acknowledged the recent appointment of Wendy Carss to the International Literacy Association (ILA) Board of Directors. This is a huge honour and one of only three New Zealanders who have achieved this; one being the notable Dame Marie Clay. Heather Bell has also had the honour of being on the Board, from the Auckland Council was able to join us for the luncheon.

We are thrilled to have Wendy continuing to support the WLA and directly share with us some of the global literacy issues.

Here are a few words written by Heather Downing from Matangi School, Hamilton, who received a Marie Clay Early Career award to attend the 2018 New Zealand Literacy Conference held in Palmerston North:

“This conference was amazing. I have been inspired, validated and encouraged throughout the NZLA conference and I am incredibly grateful. Peter Johnston’s presentation about engaged, self-extending literate communities caused my heart to flutter as I discovered through his work and research, reasons for a teaching style that I am naturally inclined to. This was a validating and powerful discovery, one that has opened my eyes to other kindred spirits with matched teaching practices and priorities to my own.”

We have just had a great turnout to our Jane van der Zeyden event in Term 4 – “HELP with ELLP!” Jane is a Speech Language therapist and Literacy

facilitator. She shared her wealth of knowledge which will support many teachers using the English Language Learning Progressions (ELLP) effectively. An event that really supported teachers. Over 100 teachers and learning assistants were able to share top tips from Jane. These are some of the key points she outlined during her presentation:

- Each stage takes at least two years to progress through for an English language learner and that teachers must remember that stages do not match curriculum levels.
- Don't be fooled by competent social speakers. It takes 5-7 years to gain proficiency with academic language.
- Vocabulary learning is the key - plan for vocab to be introduced alongside current areas of inquiry.

Jane also reminded us about the many wonderful resources available from the MInistry of Education, and in particular, the pages in the blue and green books that highlight "where to next in writing," after all, teaching is what we need to be focusing on once we've made an assessment judgement.

The team work really hard to provide our region with relevant workshops. We have finalised our events calendar for 2019 and are looking forward to some time with family and friends before we kick off next year with a presentation by Michael Irwin, author of “Educating Boys”.



Todd Burton  
Waikato Delegate

# What were we reading in 2009?



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Cover photograph: Opening ceremony for the 32nd NZRA Annual Conference

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Cover photograph: Students from Year 4 at Marist School working on their blogs.



