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*The Child, the Heart, the Arts—The Literacy Game:
High Stakes and Risk Avoidance*

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THE CHILD, THE HEART, THE ARTS

THE LITERACY GAME – HIGH STAKES AND RISK AVOIDANCE

Literacy is a really big deal. Schools work hard to make sure every child learns to read and write to, at the very least, a level of moderate functionality. But the aim of most teachers is for students to be able to perform at a much higher level than basic functionality. In pursuit of this worthy endeavour, educators are regularly and extensively drilled on current, or *preferred*, literacy teaching and learning approaches. Much of this instruction focuses on knowing *what* children should be able to do *when* in their education, and *how* specifically to make that happen. The *whys* are also examined fairly strictly, but it can be argued that is through a somewhat slanted lens. There is no argument about the fact that there is a complicated set of literacy learning outcomes for every level of schooling, and teachers have a relatively short time frame to move their students through these narrow and prescriptive achievement levels to prevent them falling behind. Rather than a journey of discovery, becoming literate can feel more like a highly complex obstacle course that favours some students over others. In the knowledge age, high-functioning communication skills are the most highly valued currency system. According to this paradigm, the goal of every educator should surely be to ensure that all students are in the black – fully owning the tools of literacy, with a thorough understanding of the manual.

The pressure on teachers to achieve good results is very real. Consequently, a lot of time and effort is invested in the endeavour. This places even more pressure on an already crowded curriculum. Curriculum areas deemed less important get squeezed out to make room for more instruction and the associated time needed to measure outcomes. Creativity and the Arts are among the losers in this process of rationalisation while literacy and maths would appear to be the winners. In the US, the repercussions of leaving creative, Arts-based practices out of the curriculum have been catastrophic since the adoption of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Whitfield 2009). Current trends in Australian literacy education indicate we are stumbling headlong towards the same alarming outcomes as the US. It is no surprise that creative, Arts-based practices in all curriculum areas, but particularly in literacy are losing out in favour of more skills and drills, more testing.

Certainly, lack of confidence with Arts practices and pedagogy could explain their absence from literacy programs. Temmerman (2006) argues that the constraints from which the Arts suffer in schools – namely time, lack of resources and status – are present in the training of preservice teachers in universities. This situation creates a shortage in the numbers of committed creative Arts practitioners currently entering the profession. Such an outcome is all the more serious because it results in ever-dwindling number of creative Arts advocates in the system, which in turn hampers the opportunity for healthy debate. While support for the necessary inclusion of creativity and Arts-based practices into the curriculum abounds, with numerous studies concluding that such practices improve overall academic achievement (Miller & Hopper 2010, Geist & Hohn 2009) schools have been slow to respond to the research. A study conducted by Oreck (2004) found that lack of training did indeed impact on teachers' integration of creative Arts practices in their classrooms. However, lack of time, resources, and limited exposure to creative Arts practices in the teachers' own school education were also factors. Whilst there are many advocates for the necessary

inclusion of creative, Arts-based practices in our schools, there seems to be little time or space for such practices in a crowded, results-driven curriculum.

At first glance, the Arts and creative pursuits in general do seem terribly wasteful. They in fact depend on the need for critical thought and judgements based on the application of values. Creativity is a process that cannot be predicted, demands many trials, and relies on learning from errors (Robinson 2011). Certainty needs to be left at the door when teachers and students enter a creative space. Measuring outcomes using qualitative methods is subjective, and therefore a challenge. Results may often come as a surprise (delightfully). The reason for this is that central to the process of being creative is the need for individuals to extend, to put themselves on the line, to take risks in order to connect the abstract with what is concrete in their lives (Ditkoff 2008). Ellis (2003) has argued that one reason creative, Arts-based practices are systematically ignored, and as a consequence, undermined, may be the belief that creativity is innate, therefore cannot be taught or fostered. A sign of this is the predominance of literacy classes where students must adhere rigidly to set tasks. Framing literacy learning in this type of context creates other conditions that are equally alarming. Teachers are less able to act as designers of individualised programs, and less able to make decisions about curriculum and pedagogy for the benefit of all students. In practical terms, this translates to teachers no longer acting on their own principles, applying their professional knowledge to inform curriculum decisions, and consequently failing to engage in reflective practices in regard to their educational goals.

Gunzenhauser (2003) suggests that a climate of high-stakes testing, which places more emphasis on scores rather than on achievement, has created a 'default' philosophy of education. Lucido (2010), Grainger et al (2005) agree that teachers are lacking the ability to make decisions. High-stakes testing has a limiting effect on curriculum, or more dangerously, is setting an alternative curriculum, where teaching to the test takes precedence over other learning. Such rigidity is a threat to authentic and meaningful literacy education, which relies on students experimenting and playing with elements of language. The question, then, is how do teachers implement such practices with little freedom to make choices about the delivery of programs?

It's no wonder that in this culture, there exists a great deal of collective anxiety on the part of parents and teachers. Test results are regarded as a transparent and necessary way to measure if students are reaching expected levels of literacy. This is one way to measure if the job has been done *rightly*. Nobody ever stops to consider how we might measure if the job is being done *wrongly*.

ENGAGING WITH LANGUAGE

My position in all this is one of astonishment. I am truly amazed that so many children manage to learn to read and write despite some of the barren and uninspiring teaching and learning environments in which literacy is embedded. That students can connect with texts in seemingly disconnected ways, without what I call the *food* needed for literacy (more on that later) is a remarkable testament to their resilience. What is even more surprising is that despite the disconnection and lack of authentic learning, most students *do* learn to read well. They also go on to be adults who do not hold anything against the written word, and who do, in fact, become

champions of written communication, using it at highly sophisticated level for multiple, functional purposes at work, but also in a range of creative or leisure-related, life-enriching ways.

One could surmise from this that literacy education doesn't need to be interesting, authentic, connected to culture and prior knowledge, or integrated with the Arts. I would instead venture that people are so desperate for communication, be it verbal or written, that they will do almost anything to get it. But to accept that literacy can be taught as an isolated skill is to abandon it to a sterile and repetitive landscape that is fraught with problems. Many children *will* turn away. Damage *will* be done. The remedy for such damage is much harder than prevention.

If literacy is fundamentally a social practice, it must be taught in ways that do not distance it from the full range of students' varied domains of practice, some of which include creative, Arts-based methods. Literacy taught in isolation, and therefore removed from its wider social context diminishes its meaning, as the written word does not exist in isolation from images, movement and sounds. To be truly meaningful, the fabric of literacy must be woven with the rich threads of family, culture and community. This directly involves music, dance, visual art and drama applied in explicitly creative approaches (Tusting & Papen 2008). Misson and Sumara (2006) agree that the lack of creative connections to English curricula has been widely lamented. Successful students are identified by their ability to take directions and arrive at pre-determined answers. In contrast to this approach, creative meaning-making involves collaboration, social interaction, engagement in creative confusion and the use of meta-cognitive processes (Nottingham 2010).

Words and language are intoxicating. They are irresistible. Their power and allure seduce most of us from a very young age. Students learn the mechanics of reading at school, but unless they are given meaningful and engaging opportunities to connect with text in class, they will seek out connections in incidental ways, wherever they may happen. Students' desire to discover and understand is driven not by getting through a spelling drill, but by the need to construct meaning through the many, continuous, day-to-day social interactions that occur at home and in the classroom.

In his interpretation of Vygotsky's theories, Smagorinsky (2007) describes the learning process as a two-way exchange: '*people's thinking shapes their physical and symbolic worlds, and their engagement with those worlds in turn shapes how they (and others) think.*' (Smagorinsky 2007 p.62). The Arts provide a bridge between thinking, what is physical and what is symbolic, in a way that connects deeply with what a child already knows; how their emotions motivate their actions and thoughts. When children are given an opportunity to engage in literacy through the Arts, they are able to draw more deeply on what they know and feel. They are able to construct meaning in ways that feel true. When teachers allow Arts practices to share the learning space with literacy, they are giving students *reason* to stake a claim. When putting marks on a page, using their bodies to respond to music, reciting a chant, making puppets come to life, or picking out a simple melody, students are 'keeping it real'. Along the way, they are finding powerful reasons to read and write.

In the following narrative, Felix hardly knows what is happening to him as he surrenders to the fantasies inspired by the reading of *An Awesome Book* (Clayton 2008), letting colour and image flow through his mind and heart and out on the page through the pastel held in his fingers. But Jodi, his teacher, knows that his thought processes, the range of ideas he is able to generate, his use of vocabulary, and ultimately his motivation to become literate, will all benefit from this choice of

pedagogy. As Felix gets older, he will become more familiar with the process, and will be able to use it deliberately to problem-solve, to self-express more articulately, and to better understand the world and himself.

Tell me a story...

Now I want to know about some ideas you could dream up, Jodi says as she closes the book and props it back on the bookstand. We will write about it. But first you can make a picture and take some time to think a little bit. She reaches for a stack of small, brightly-coloured boxes and some large sheets of paper. Felix's legs and arms tingle, his fingers play with a frayed patch of carpet that's right where he's sitting on the rug in front of Jodi. There is a hum inside his chest, building to a lively beat. The other kids murmur about what they will draw. Felix listens, thinking about what picture he will do. Zach up the back calls out, Hey, Danny, I'm gonna do Optimus Prime.

Soon Felix is sitting at a table next to Madison, a fresh sheet of paper in front of him, and his own box of the irresistible pastels. He slides it open, takes in the familiar scent as the spectrum of colour holds his gaze. His fingers pick at the oily, smooth cylinders. He takes one out and tears off the paper to expose the tip. The white sheet of paper in front of him is thick and satisfying to touch; pristine and so full of expectation.

He knows what to do. Jodi's instructions flash like signposts in his head. Thinking about the book's pictures takes Felix on a swirling tour of his own dreams. One time, he dreamed he was in *Temple Run*, jumping over missing sections of bridge, dodging death monkeys and flying through the air, breathless. His dreams are a lot like stuff on television, or in the video games he plays with Miles when they're at his house, but that's only because his mum lets him. Felix gets to play different video games at home. Ones Mum says are *appropriate*. And she lets him play on the computer, too. When she's doing her work on the laptop and Molly's busy playing, she says, Felix, come sit next to Mummy, draw me a picture on the big computer. And he sits and draws on *Paint*, his grip on the mouse nimbly putting marks on the screen. Sometimes it's a whizzing paintbrush, or the mottled markings from a spray can. Sometimes he covers the whole screen in doodles with a thick marker, or a pencil, clicking on the little boxes, switching colours the whole time. Time goes. And then Mum says, save that one, that's lovely, or, let's print it out for Grandma, so he saves it in the folder named *Felix* on the desktop or prints it out and puts it on the fridge so it doesn't get lost. Other times, he just deletes picture after picture, and starts again. Over and over.

The blank paper stares back at Felix. His gaze drifts upward, way up above the vibrant pictures hanging from strings that span the room, to the white ceiling spotted with faint brown stains. He scratches his head. What could he draw that would be a really good, really way out idea?

Felix likes going fast. He likes it on his bike, and he likes it on his skateboard. He also likes fast video games. Something clicks in his head. His picture will be about a super-fast, super-something...

Close your eyes tight before you start, Jodi tells the class as paper is rustled, feet shuffle under tables, and children fiddle, re-arranging pastels in and out of the paper boxes. Take some time to let some ideas settle in your head before you put a mark on the paper, she says. When you do start, I want you to fill the whole sheet, and make sure you think about the colours. Think about whether you want your colours to be bright and strong, or soft and gentle. However you do it, I want you to make my eyes pop. Look at my eyes now – and she points to her eyes, making them wide, arching her brows high, waiting until all little faces have turned to her and a transient silence descends, her timing as perfect and as slick a seasoned performer – make them pop!

Next to him, Madison has already started, writing her name in red at the top of the page. She selects a pink pastel and starts to draw. Felix looks down at his paper, and images start to form in his mind. He grabs a green pastel, rubs the tip backwards and forwards at the bottom of the paper. Back and forth, back and forth, the pastel is soft, and the colour spreads easily on the paper, a bit like butter on toast. Long, luscious blades of grass soon take shape. Different colours dot the grass; making a kaleidoscope blanket of flowers. Pink, orange, purple, blue, yellow and red. He liked the book Jodi read, he liked the pictures and he liked the words. Now the picture is like a sea, and Felix dives in, swimming among the colours. Each stroke draws him deeper. There's less thinking now, and more going with the marks that are filling the paper. Curvy lines, heavy shading, light rubbing, and suddenly something emerges. Something that goes really fast... A giant silver sled with... Felix's hand hovers over the pastels, now strewn all around his picture on the table... He swoops. Green. Green snake reins for his super-sled. He switches to white. White for the eyes, but as he mashes the pastel on one of the snakes' heads, it doesn't much look like a snake's eye. What's more, the white pastel now has green all over it. Felix puts it back in the box and gives the snakes black eyes instead.

Mine's a video game, says Madison. You can get inside and run around. It's bigger and kind of scary, but it's really fun.

Felix looks at Madison's picture. It's just a series of boxes right now. All different coloured squares. He keeps watch on what Madison does with it as he keeps drawing. The classroom is full of voices, everyone busy, talking, but sometimes it quiets down, and Felix looks up. Everyone looks up. Someone laughs and the room is soon blanketed in chatter once more.

Felix lets out a long sigh as he surveys his picture. With a few, quick strokes, the sled is perched high on the side of the hill, with swooshing marks that make it rocket downwards at breakneck speed. Felix draws himself in the sled. Some brown marks are feathered around his head, and his hair is flying in the wind. A big red smile like a slice of watermelon.

Blue dots for eyes. Felix wants to show the wind pushing against his face, and so he puts grey swirly lines of wind all through the picture, filling the gap between the green grassy bottom and the blue sky top. He peppers coloured dots to make rainbow stars all over the sky.

Jodi appears at his side. She says, tell me something about your picture. What is happening? Tell me about those lines all through the air.

She squats beside him, her hand poised above a new sheet of lined paper, a thick texta in her fingers. Felix speaks the words hesitantly, haltingly, at first, but Jodi asks more questions about the sled, and about the lines in the air. Soon, Felix stops checking his words, and the story comes out about his adventure on the speeding sled, how the wind feels on his face and through his hair, how the ride is bumpy and a little scary.

Jodi writes Felix's words. When she is finished, she reads the words back to him. Felix smiles. The words are familiar, and as he follows her finger while she reads, the letters on the page somehow come together in his mind, connecting with the words coming out of her mouth. They are his words; he made them. And now they are on the page.

* * *

As the weeks pass, Felix will return to the story again and again. It is pinned on the wall with his pastel picture stapled above it, there for everyone to read the words one by one. When he looks at the picture and the words, he will remember the story he told Jodi the day he drew the picture, and he will recognise the words he used in the now-familiar groupings of letters on the lined paper. In the space of time before Jodi takes all the pictures and stories off the wall, Felix will read ever more fluently and with confidence, every word in his own story. The words Jodi wrote that day will come back him in countless other stories Jodi reads the class. Now and again, when Felix writes something new, he will glance up at the wall just to check how a word is written. His friends will have a look at his picture and at his story, and he will look at theirs. Sometimes they read to each other, or tell the story of their dream idea using different words to the ones Jodi wrote. In the quiet moments of the day, Felix listens to the pictures' whispers. They have their own versions of the story.

Days go by, and without Felix realising it, pieces of an unknown puzzle fall into place. Felix can read his own story and that of Madison, and more and more chunks of the stories pinned around the room. He can read. He is a reader, Jodi says. Felix knows it's true, because he didn't dream all those other dreams. Dreams into which he can now climb.

CONNECTING THROUGH THE ARTS

Students who do not engage in meaningful literacy practices at home or at school are in real danger of failing to connect with the deeper and empowering literacy that is the passkey to life. It is not

surprising that students with parents or carers who model successful engagement with written communication at home are more likely to succeed in reading and writing. But we also know there are students without this kind of home advantage. For them, connecting with literacy through the Arts during school time is a basic necessity. Support for this view of literacy education is strong, linking literacy and the Arts with constructivist notions of learning.

Tsao (2008) posits the notion that learning is a social process and that teachers scaffold learning within play-rich environments. The role of play in language experience is paramount. Language experience is the *food* on which literacy learning feeds. Without opportunities to experience, reflect, create and become immersed in creative play, students will become disconnected, and consequently, disengaged from literacy learning. The inclusion of play-based activities in the literacy curriculum help students to make connections between the written word and the arts, facilitating links between the classroom and the home and reaching out into the wider community. Freedom to combine play with language through a range of creative, arts-based experiences, allows students to bridge the gap between the affective and the rational, the objective and the subjective, and give them opportunities to express themselves on a broader scope than if they were dealing with reading and writing in isolation.

There is no curriculum area that cannot benefit from the skills, insights and opportunities for reflection that the Arts offer. Hendrick and Weissman (2010) affirm that creativity supports language and literacy development, a claim that applies to every branch of the Arts. Music has many elements that connect directly with literacy, and which can in turn strengthen learning in both areas (McIntire 2007). Some of the similarities between music and literacy are to do with the narrative of stories being parallel to that of songs or pieces of music. There are beginnings, middles and ends, as there are lyrics that tell the story. Where a picture book captures the imagination with an image, music captures it as powerfully by reaching into the heart. In addition there are numerous opportunities to deepen students' experience of book concepts, sight vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency through the use of music in a literacy program (Kolb 1996).

The visual creativity innate in picture storybooks has delighted children for generations. Picture books are a stalwart of every early years (and, increasingly, middle years) literacy program. Visual image adds nuances and a depth to meaning that words alone couldn't accomplish (Giorgis & Johnson 2001). Students can be involved in creating and making images to accompany stories of their making, as Felix did in his representation of dreams after Jodi's reading of *An Awesome Book* (Clayton 2008). There are also multiple opportunities to explore and respond to text through analysis of illustrations – the visual representations of story. Not to be forgotten is the deeper understanding of literature that can be gained through the dramatization of stories and through expressive dramatic interpretation of texts (Ortlieb et al 2007). Through the creation of images and narratives, students of varying capabilities are able to learn from each other. Visual art can assist with the creative process of writing stories, and opens up opportunities for teachable moments. Teachers and students are natural storytellers. Through stories, lessons are learnt and experiences shared. Through this process, there is growth and development for all involved (King 2007).

When Felix published his story, he joined a collaborative community of narratives. In sharing his tale, both as a visual image and through text, he was able to contribute to the collective voice of his classmates as facilitated by Jodi. A seemingly basic experience such as this can lead to countless opportunities to construct meaning and build literacy skills.

A PLACE AND TIME FOR THE ARTS – A PLACE AND TIME FOR NARRATIVES

Felix's narrative is fictitious, but is constructed from years of my experience working with many children as they take their first steps towards reading; negotiating their way in and around the tricky territory of the symbols and conventions of written language. Felix's story is one way to measure and document outcomes. If the concept of student engagement is seen as such a vital component of teaching and learning, then it would be wise to reconsider how it is applied in the teaching of literacy.

Felix's world is not one of overt disadvantage. It is like that of many children. His mum has little time for herself, and doesn't often read for leisure. She rarely reads to Felix or his sister, Molly. Felix does not live in poverty, and like his friends, has abundant access to technology. Yet, he does not have out-of-school access to a varied range of Arts experiences. Without Jodi's vision in the classroom, Felix's literacy education would be adequate, yet decidedly lacklustre. He would not be at risk of *not* learning to read. His test results would most likely occupy the middle road, with his achievement dots safely in the *expected* range; innocuous but sadly under-realised pearls of potential. By integrating literacy learning with the Arts, Jodi manages to lift Felix's education out of the ordinary and above the lacklustre of many contemporary classrooms. The richness and breadth that the Arts bring to Felix's literacy learning isn't routinely measured or valued by schools. Though assessment approaches in the Arts are abundant, there is little incentive to measure learning outcomes that are about imagination and creativity, even when they are a factor in improving literacy outcomes.

Narrative accounts of how the Arts bring meaning to people's lives cannot be more relevant than when they are applied to children becoming literate. Telling stories, analysing and drawing meaning, is a powerful way to establish the many ways integrating the Arts into literacy education, as well as the wider curriculum, works.

Literacy education cannot be shaken up without the necessary chorus of voices giving life and validity to stories from the classroom. Richardson (2001) lists ten important reasons to write stories. Among these are: The desire to write and consequently discover oneself through an omniscient voice. It is impossible to tell a story – no matter whose – without the narrator's imprint. Writing others' lives will ultimately shape the narrator's own life. The reader, too, will be influenced through the writer's creation of new plot lines. These 'alternate' representations of a life open up possibilities for the reader, enabling them to imagine new ways of being, or to re-examine known pathways more critically. Just as important is the desire to position a story within a socio-historical context, which makes the telling more authoritative, as each narrative possesses both local and historical context.

Narratives might seem unreliable, or at worst, problematic, and in direct contrast with the finite, precise and seemingly reassuring realm of numbers and percentages gleaned from test results. Conversely, it is possible to selectively use numbers and percentages in order to lend weight to one point of view, or to frame another in a negative light. There is, however, much to be gained from narrative that cannot be conveyed through a set of numbers alone. Both the writer and the reader

of a narrative will take away valuable insights and understandings from the experience. A certain degree of reflection and analysis will be necessary, and will most likely result in participants benefiting from the process in highly individualised ways. Narrative choices will influence the outcome. A story written in the first person is generally perceived to be primarily one person's account, while use of the third person implies a more objective observation, inference, and a certain degree of impartiality. This, however, is not always the case, as third person narratives are filtered and framed by the narrator. Thus, such accounts can be more about the narrator than the subjects. Coulter (2009) contends that authorial voice can be written in a way that is not absolute, which allows it to be challenged by the reader. By problematising the researcher's voice, interpretation is encouraged. It follows then, that both authors and readers can benefit from creating and engaging with narratives.

Schaafsma and Vinz (2007), express the power and evocative beauty of narratives in the following passage. It underlines the vital importance of the use of narrative research in conveying and interpreting information outside set boundaries and free of the restrictions of conventional approaches.

We don't want to be so busy looking for answers that we lose sight of the first star, of the nearly perfect full moon, of the little girl, struggling in the back seat, fifth row. She loses power to the weight of numbers and mandates. She is made shallow through interpretation or someone's desire for tenure. Who is willing to be the caretaker of her perspective at all costs? Her story weighs on our desire, honour, and ability to (re)search honestly and for the right reasons. We want no more stories of how story isn't research, of why narrative needs to be analysed and dissected and, as Billy Collins has said of poetry, we don't need to strangle a confession out of story, either. We are thinking that effective narrative gives the reader a door to open and walk through. The reader enters and must be thinking: Take me gently toward meaning; make my feet move, step by step, across the floor. Help me experience what I haven't experienced before. Let me hear the children sing. Let me question my own motivations and feelings. Let me reach down from where I stand and feel the presence of others (p.277).

Ultimately, story-writing is about risk-taking. The act of discovering, and representing on the page others' and personal perspectives can be a disarming process – one crucial to life-long learning. Goodson (2006) believes that we are entering a period for smaller-scale, life narratives that rely on wider, social scripts. Understandings are born out of connecting our personal experience to that of others.

CONCLUSION: INVESTMENT IN CREATIVITY – A NECESSARY RISK

Felix's pastel creation took a bit of time. Enough time for him to think about his dreams, wander off course to unrelated thoughts, and then return to spend time creating an image. The entire process took about fifteen minutes. Fifteen enjoyable minutes that were, arguably, a waste of time. Felix could have written his story without drawing a picture. The teacher had read the picture storybook on dreams, so it could be said that enough time had already been devoted to inspiration. The

students could have gone straight from listening to the text and viewing the illustrations, to writing, or having their story transcribed, as happened in this lesson. What took place instead, in the fifteen minutes that was gifted to Felix and every other student in the class, was a pause. A moment in time devoted purely to opening oneself to possibilities. Without this necessary investment in time – an investment that has no guarantee of solid returns, the door to creativity remains firmly shut.

We may well think: ‘Who cares if the door to creativity is shut? Nobody would notice if it was open.’ But creativity, while seemingly invisible, is very much a tangible force. For some time now, it has been regarded as a necessary quality – the must-have skill for the intelligent workforce of the future. It is a widely accepted notion that in order for countries to succeed economically, ecologically and culturally, governments and businesses must foster generations of creative thinkers (Robinson 2011).

Raising standards while investing time in the creative Arts seems an incongruous notion; two purposes at odds. Teachers who have integrated the Arts into the broader curriculum know otherwise. Though these competing elements – the first, a need to demonstrate an improvement in nationwide standards of literacy through measurable test results, and the second, student-centred, creative learning that is beneficial in a holistic sense – are intrinsically and plausibly connected through the needs and functions of one serving the other, opposing ideologies are at play.

In schools, time is a scarce commodity. In rational terms, one might argue that experiences such as the one given to the class by Jodi are a luxury. Children can draw with pastels at home; they don’t need to give up valuable literacy learning time to do it in the day’s most effective learning window – the literacy hour. But although most children like Felix own some kind of gaming device, not every child has the luxury of unimpeded time. Or a box of pastels.

Narratives – the stories we tell about ourselves and about those with whom we share teaching and learning spaces, bring a necessary equilibrium and clarity to the loaded discourse around literacy education and the Arts. Narratives allow us to *tell it like it is*. The uniqueness of each classroom; the character of every cohort of students; the diversity of our communities. These are the stories we must tell for the sake of our current students and future global citizens.

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