

JULIE THE PARAMEDIC: HOLISTIC, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND THE FOUR RESOURCES MODEL

A young child lies prone on the classroom floor. A second, in the role of an ambulance paramedic, approaches.

‘Shout and squeeze,’ reminds Julie, a real life paramedic.

The infant ‘paramedic’ kneels and squeezes the “patient’s” shoulder, simultaneously shouting,

‘Shane! Can you hear me!’

The children are members of Claudia Stolfo and Leanne Schulz’ Prep/1 class. For many weeks they have been investigating their local community emergency services. They have enjoyed a wonderful excursion to the neighbourhood fire station and visits to the school by attending service personnel and emergency vehicles. Today an ambulance paramedic complete with ambulance has visited the school. The children have climbed in the back of the ambulance, tried out the ambulance bed, and listened to the ear piercing siren .

So much learning has taken place through this integrated enquiry study. Here in this classroom snapshot, I share with you just one of the classroom experiential texts developed as part of the study – one which was compiled following the paramedic’s visit to the school. It is an example of authentic teacher demonstration of writing following a shared classroom experience. In this example the children share in the composing process by contributing ideas, words and sentences to be included.

JULIE THE PARAMEDIC by Room 3 K/1

We had a paramedic named Julie come to visit Rooms 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Julie brought an ambulance and other equipment to show us.

Did you know that AMBULANCE is spelt backwards on the van so drivers can see it the right way when they look in their mirrors?

Julie taught us.....

If someone is hurt squeeze their shoulder and say their name.

If they don’t wake up, ring 000 on the telephone.

You will be asked, ‘Do you want the AMBULANCE, POLICE OR FIRE BRIGADE?’

You will say ‘AMBULANCE.’

You will need to tell them your location (where you are).

They will tell you to open the front door and wait. DO NOT HANG UP THE PHONE!

We got into small groups and pretended someone was hurt. We used a telephone to ring the AMBULANCE.

Julie then took us to have a close look at the AMBULANCE. She turned the siren on and it was very loud.

We got to have a look inside the ambulance. Some people got to lie down on the bed and sit on the seats.

We really enjoyed the visit from Julie the Paramedic and we have to try and remember these things:

STOP, THINK and STAY SAFE.

SHOUT and SQUEEZE

ASK FOR HELP

CALL 000 in an EMERGENCY

DON'T HANG UP

This classroom text was developed over several days with all children participating. They observed as the teacher scribed their contributions on a large chart. On completion the text was re-read and the children were asked to consider any necessary revisions, before the recount would be published as a class book.

They addressed the following questions:

Does it make sense?"

Is it in the best order?

Do we need all the words?

Is more information needed?

Are the full stops in the right places?

As these drafting and editing issues were attended to, various parts of the text were read and re-read, and so these young students gradually became quite familiar with the text.

When the draft was completed, the teacher spent some minutes teaching to print concepts with the following prompts.

Cover a word.

Cover a long word.

Find a short word.

Can anyone find the word which says 'ambulance'?

Who can find 'ambulance' in another place?

Can anyone point to other words they know?

Can anyone point to a letter they know?

Which letter does 'ambulance' begin with?

Can anyone see letter 'a' in another word?

'Julie the Paramedic' and the Four Reading Practices.

The Four Resources Model of Luke and Freebody (1999) describes reading as four practices, (code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst). Simply put the practices are-

Code breaker: using particular skills and strategies to get inside a text.

Text participant: constructing meaning

Text user: using the text for some life purpose or purposes

Text analyst: analysing text to see how it is shaped to represent people and events in particular ways, and to determine whose perspectives are missing.

'The notion of 'practices' suggests that they are actually 'done' in everyday classroom and community contexts.'

Luke, A & Freebody, P. A Map of Possible Practices: Further Notes on the Four Resources Model, in, Practically Primary Vol 4, No2, June 1999, P 6.

Luke and Freebody argue that all four reading practices are necessary in this modern society. While reading as meaning making (the text participant practice), has long been understood, the importance of the text user and text analyst practices have been appreciated in more recent times.

This model has had major impact on the perceived scope, and the evaluation of, school reading programs. Successful reading programs bring students to competence in all four reading practices. The mix of practices at any one time, in any one

classroom, may not be the same as in the next room. Only individual teachers are in the position to assess their particular student needs and where the focus for instruction may be.

The process of constructing the classroom text shown above, illustrates the potential of classroom experiential texts for engaging students with a broad perspective of reading practices.

The book is a recount of a class experience in which all children took part. It contains photographs in which they feature. Hence they have no problem participating with or understanding, the written text (Text participant), which initially is read aloud by their teachers (Code breaker). Repeated readings of the text together with study of words and word patterns develops the children's abilities to read the text for themselves (Code breaker) In the many re-readings of the book both as a group and individually the children's teachers engaged them with explicit strategies which developed further their competencies as code breakers:

oral cloze

text reconstruction of just one sentence

conducting a print search looking for known words and letters

finding words with similar word patterns ; 'stop', 'safe', 'shout', 'squeeze', all begin with letter 's'; 'show', 'she' and 'shout' begin with letters 'sh' and they start with the same sound; 'taught', 'right', end with 'ght'.

Listening to the book being read aloud and independently browsing through the artwork provides time for the children to reflect on Julie's visit, and the procedure to be observed if ever they find an unconscious person and need to phone for an ambulance. (Text user) The book is used not only by the children to learn about this emergency procedure but also by their families, for it is constantly borrowed and taken home for families to read. Discussion that the paramedic was a woman (the children were expecting a man) sparked investigation as to whether women could be fire officers too. They looked through classroom books about service personnel checking to see if both sexes were represented. (Text analyst).

Simplistic or Challenging Early Literacy Texts.

Increased centralization of curriculum over recent years has seen the focus of teaching move from classroom practice which provides quality education for all, to classroom practice which facilitates the comparison of students across nations. To facilitate large scale comparison of students necessitates some standardisation of class programs. For example, in relation to the measurement of reading achievement, large scale measurement and comparison is easier when reading is defined simplistically as getting the words right, and when all students read levelled reading books.

'As we have learned to revalue readers, we have also come to revalue the power of well-written complex texts in teaching (Meek, 1997). There are attempts to have teachers match text difficulty with reader ability in simplistic ways. The assumption that guides this practice suggests that readers should be spared from reading books and stories that are deemed too difficult- they must be sheltered from "struggling" with texts. The assumption stems from a word-centred view of reading that requires readers to read texts accurately and fluently before moving to those with longer words and sentences, and more complex language and concepts. Taken to its extreme, such a practice denies readers the opportunity to transact with rich, complex stories, and undermines the reader's right to select books based on interest and appeal. It suggests that easy-to-read

texts based on simplistic formulas should comprise the main diet of developing readers.'

Flurkey, A. & Goodman, Y. The Role of Genre in a Text: Reading Through the Waterworks, in, Language Arts, Vol 81, No 3, Jan 2004, NCTE, P 243.

'Julie the Paramedic' is not written to a simplistic formula. It does not contain only words of one syllable. One imagines that if the text of the above class book were shown to different community members who were then asked to nominate for which age students this would be an appropriate reading text, they would not suggest four/five/six year old children. After all it includes long words- 'ambulance', 'paramedic', 'location'.

Let me assure readers, that the young students in Claudia and Leanne's classroom can and do, read this text.

'Julie the Paramedic' is a class text developed as part of an holistic, experiential learning program. Such teaching stands up well to scrutiny which is informed by recent research into language and literacy.

References:

Flurkey, A. & Goodman, Y. The Role of Genre in a Text: Reading Through the Waterworks, in, Language Arts, Vol 81, No 3, Jan 2004, NCTE, P 243.

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