Finding joy, meaning and confidence in writing: Using embodied arts-based practices with children in the primary grades.

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Abstract

The experience of joy and shared joyful moments benefits children's learning, development and wellbeing. Learning through the arts is often collaborative and embodied as the arts engage the senses, imagination and creativity in meaning making and expression of ideas. This paper reports on a study which explored the use of arts-based practices in teaching writing with children mostly aged seven to nine years. Teachers intentionally adopted arts-based practices to reconnect with active, embodied and creative ways of exploring content and connect multiple ways of meaning making for children. This research affirmed that children benefitted from intentionally adopting arts-based practices to help facilitate student's writing.

Keywords

literacy; writing; joy; arts-based practices; early childhood

Statements and Declarations

Compliance with Ethical Standards: This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of The University of Southern Queensland (ETH2022-0243).

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Introduction

Early learning has long been recognised as active, dynamic and holistic as children make meaning through relationships, play, interactions with others and sensory exploration of the world around them. The experience of joy and shared joyful moments benefits children's learning, wellbeing and development (Little & Karaolis, 2024). The arts, through embodied (individual's subjective and felt experiences of their bodies in action), creative and collaborative experiences is increasingly recognised in research, scholarship and professional practice for opportunities to develop meaning making, self-confidence and transformative learning (Dinham, 2022; Vygotsky, 2004). Despite this valuable connection, there is still research demonstrating a tension between literacy and the arts, especially with an increasing emphasis on high stakes testing of literacy (Barton & Ewing, 2017).

There has been research in Australia demonstrating the "opportunities to create a positive and productive relationship between the arts and literacy" (Barton & Ewing, 2017, p.225). Research has also provided "a list of cognitive capacities, dispositions, and attitudes that have been found to be implicated in arts learning" (Burton et al., 2000, p. 229). Dinham's (2022) study on arts pedagogies highlighted how the use of these pedagogies promotes: students' own experiences, ideas and interpretation; students' agency in the processes of creative thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, critical reflection and creation; dialogic processes; and engaging students as co-constructors of learning. Looking specifically at writing within a literacy context, research has demonstrated that creative practices offered by the arts can be used to enhance and support the teaching of writing in classrooms (see for example, Dunn & Finley, 2010; Lee et al., 2017). By interacting with these practices in creative and generative ways, children can improve their writing skills and develop a deeper understanding of the written word. The arts can be utilised to explore real and imaginary experiences and bridge the gap between oral and written expression (Watson & Delaney, 2023).

In this paper we move the focus to how arts-based practices help to foster meaning, confidence and joy in children's writing. The research question for this project was: What emerges when teachers lead with arts-based practices in integrating teaching and learning in a unit of work? From that question, the focal point of this paper emerged; children finding joy, meaning and confidence in writing. We argue that the creative processes offered by the arts can be used to enhance and support the teaching of writing in classrooms. By interacting with each other in creative and generative ways, children can improve their writing skills and

develop a deeper understanding of the written word. Drama and visual arts practices can be utilised to explore students' real and imaginary experiences and bridge the gap between oral and written expression. In this paper we take the concept of arts-practices beyond merely benefitting and motivating children's writing to examining how these practices can actually bring joy, meaning and confidence.

Arts-based Practices

The arts foster creativity and imagination in learning and provide children with the language to express and communicate their understandings of the world. In this paper, we define the term arts-based practices as a way to use the arts as a process of investigation that leads to new shared knowledge (Adams & Owens, 2021). Eisner (2002) describes these practices as aesthetic, creative experiences that support and make learning memorable. In turn, they also provide opportunities for children to explore and blend their thoughts, feelings, and actions, thinking through imagery and movement, turning action into representation. The use of visual and physical expressions promotes conceptual understanding and meaning making to allow children to express and articulate their ideas effectively (Wright, 2011).

In this research study we intentionally developed lessons incorporating arts-based experiences for the opportunities they presented to the students, and which in turn, could be drawn on, extended and revisited throughout the teaching term. Visual arts practices included walking maps, line drawings and collages. Drama practices included freeze frames, improvisation, performances and interviews (see Table 1). Only the walking map and freeze frame practices are discussed in this paper.

The Arts and Literacy

Some research has claimed that the arts and literacy have an unsteady relationship (Barton & Ewing, 2017; Burton et al., 2000), with the arts oft regarded as 'extra' or 'soft' curricular (Barton & Ewing, 2017) and 'nonessential' as opposed to the essential nature of literacy (Whitelaw, 2017). Within the arts integration literature there has been much debate, with some declaring that arts integration affords learning opportunities, whereas others argue the arts neither needs nor should be, servants for other subjects (Jusslin, 2022). In this study we were deliberate in ensuring that both the arts form and the writing (literacy) were seen as equally important. As Burton et al. (2000, p. 255) state: "To diminish one is to diminish the possibility and promise of them all".

A number of school-based research studies have documented how creative 'art-full' pedagogies have been successfully used with literacy learning (Grant et al., 2008). Studies have been documented along the breadth of education from prior to school settings (Phillips et al., 2010; Theodotou, 2024); primary (elementary) school (Jusslin, 2022; Lee et al., 2017); secondary school (Whitelaw, 2017); alternate educational sites (Smargorinsky, 1997); through to higher education (Kędra & Žakevičiūtė, 2019). In this paper, we refer only to studies conducted in the early years (birth to Age 8, or in Australia, up to the fourth year of compulsory schooling, Year Three). A wide variety of arts practices have been utilised in these studies including drama (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019); role-play (Grant et al., 2008); visual art (Dunn & Finley, 2010; Grant et al., 2008; Smargorinsky, 1997); sculpture (Dunn & Finley, 2010); dance (Jusslin, 2022), and music (Whitelaw, 2017). Studies have also occurred across the gamut of literacy learning including reading, writing and saying, we focus only on writing for the purpose of this paper.

Writing and the Arts

The writing process is a complex multifaceted task (Aitken & Martinussen, 2013) which can cause significant problems for some children (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Dunn & Finley, 2010). Vygotsky noted that written language is difficult for children, and potentially more difficult "when a child is compelled to write on a topic assigned at school" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 45). Writing involves a process of higher-order skills like generating thoughts, choosing a topic, creating an outline, composing a draft, editing and redrafting which also involves lower-order skills such as spelling and handwriting to finally produce an end product and all involves cognitive factors, such as working memory (Aitken & Martinussen, 2013). This final piece needs to meet the criteria of a logical sequence of events, alongside correct grammar, paragraphing, structure, spelling, and command of vocabulary. In other words, the writing process presents a significant cognitive load (Trainin et al., 2006).

Much of the research on student writing and the arts focuses on using the arts as a "radically different approach" (Lee et al., 2017, p. 159) to counteract traditional writing education that is controlled by government and policy imperatives related to improving student achievement on standardised tests (Grant et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2017; Scherff & Piazza, 2005) and where writing instruction is product oriented (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Lambirth's (2016) survey of 565 primary school aged children in South-East England found

that children perceived there was a 'correct' way of writing, and their views demonstrated a strong skills and compliance discourse which will only result in their alienation from writing.

Using arts-based practices allows students to use creative processes such as developing, designing, composing and constructing ideas in order to create meaning. Dunn theorised that if children who struggled to write could note their initial story ideas in a format other than words on a page, they would then be able to use their cognitive energy "to manage the process of describing story characters, setting, the main event, and drawing a cohesive conclusion" (Dunn & Finley, 2010, p. 33). Research has demonstrated that the use of drama in writing has been shown to: positively impact children's vocabulary (Dunn et al., 2013; McNaughton, 1997); to increase motivation (Cremin et al., 2006; Winston, 2004); and to provide greater ease and flowing of ideas in the writing process (Cremin et al., 2006). A study in the United States of America examined third-grade students' participation in an eight-week story-writing and drama-based programme (Lee et al., 2017) and showed that self-efficacy increased for children who participated in the programme. They were more positive about beginning the writing process, their generation and revision of ideas improved and the number of ideas, words and descriptors these children used, compared with a control group, increased. Smagorinsky (1997) noted that the arts (in this case drawing, dancing and drama) take on "new roles as legitimate academic forms of representation aside from the linguistic symbols that had provided the basis" (p.102) for students' language arts representation previously. Trainin and colleagues (2006) noted that when students integrated arts with writing they were more engaged, and it resulted "in a positive impact on their writing in general and their vocabulary and length of the writing specifically" (p. 147).

An Australian study (Grant et al., 2008) noted that time for "'art-full' exploration and play" (p.68) allowed students to become more socially confident and articulate in their reading, responding and writing. Research on assisting struggling writers (see for example: Dunn & Finley, 2010; Fu & Shelton, 2007) have noted that the use of visual arts practices used in the idea generation and planning stages promoted confidence, stamina and writing skills (Fu & Shelton, 2007). Dunn and her colleagues (2013) summarised the benefits drama can have on children's writing as: enhanced motivation to write; greater quality in terms of cohesiveness, narrative structure, vocabulary and character development; quantity of writing increased, more diverse and complex registers utilised; and keener identification with characters and a stronger sense of empathy.

One literacy project in the United Kingdom looked at process drama to facilitate primary school children actively co-constructing meaning as they moved between the roles of authors, actors, directors and audience (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019). A group of Year Three students and their teacher experimented with process drama through the engagement of the children in freeze frames to act out a story about the Romans and the building of walls in their history lesson and was followed by purposeful writing in their journals for half an hour. It was noted that the children's writing was more dynamic and reflected their embodied experiences leading to more sophisticated story-telling such as building tension and thwarting of the reader's expectation (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019). This study highlighted "that when children's writing is based upon an embodied experience within process drama, the children are able to capture that experience through an emotionally convincing point of view" (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019, p. 75).

Joy in learning

Learning and school are not "deserts of emotion" (Rantala & Määttä, 2012) and whilst they may have traditionally been kept separate from teaching (Rantala & Määttä, 2012), recent research is showing that positive emotions, such as joy, can stimulate learning (Cronqvist, 2021). There is no generally single accepted definition of joy in the research literature (Karjalainen et al., 2019; Nordström, 2024). Joy, according to Engels (as cited in Little & Karaolis, 2024, p. 82) "involves meaningful engagement, connection to other people, involvement in one's community, a sense of purpose and accomplishment, ability to make one's own decisions" (Cronqvist, 2021; Nordström, 2024). A Finnish two-year ethnographic longitudinal study of 19 seven eight-year-old children, showed that the joy of learning is multidimensional, and they summarised their findings in ten theses of joy (Rantala & Määttä, 2012). Amongst these theses, Rantala & Määttä, (2012) posited: that "the joy of learning comes from the experience of success" (p. 93); "the joy of learning enjoys an environment of freedom" (p. 94); and the company of peers is a premise for experiencing the joy of learning.

Being part of a community is important for children. Learning and wellbeing are reflected in their emotional-social development and interpersonal interactions (Clement, 2023). Joy is experienced through being with others. Joy is relational rather than a purely individual phenomenon (Karjalainen et al., 2019). Feeling connected is fundamental to well-being and thus learning (Cronqvist, 2021). A Swedish phenomenological study of joy in learning for children aged nine to twelve years noted that "when children *understand*, '*own*'

and get *support* in their learning process" learning can be joyful (Cronqvist, 2021, p. 63). Furthermore, this same study also found that when children related with their peers, laughed and did fun things together they experienced joy (Cronqvist, 2021). This sense of having fun also relates to freedom, which can be construed in a variety of ways (Kuby et al., 2015). Freedom can also refer to allowing the child to be creative and independent (Cronqvist, 2021). Last, the experience of success or praise can also bring joy (Cronqvist, 2021). Csikszentmialyi's (1997) work on flow and happiness very early on noted the link between experiencing success and the joy of learning.

Methodology

This paper reports on the processes and outcomes of a study which explored the use of two arts-based practices in teaching an integrated unit of work in three classrooms of students (n=67) aged seven to nine, in one primary school in Australia. Three teachers, the school curriculum leader and researchers planned an integrated English and History and Social Sciences (HASS) unit of work which lasted one school term of ten weeks. In doing so, teachers intentionally adopted arts-based practices to introduce and explore English and HASS curriculum content and ways of knowing and meaning making. The role of drama and visual arts practices was to provide embodied, creative and collaborative opportunities for learning. The integrated unit culminated in an individual assessment task of a multimodal text. The assessment required the children to write a text and draw illustrations that incorporated both narrative and non-fiction elements. The topic was chosen by the children and related to the broader inquiry question, 'How do we live more sustainably?'

Participants and data collection

The research project was undertaken with three Year 3/4 combined classes at a primary school in Queensland, Australia. This means that the students were aged between seven and nine and have been in formal compulsory schooling for four or five years. Three teachers, the school curriculum leader and researchers participated in the project which began by collaboratively developing a unit of work, utilising the teachers' HASS curriculum knowledge and understanding of their students, alongside the researchers' expertise in designing and using arts-based practices in teaching and learning. Data collection consisted of interviews with teachers at two points in time and classroom observations, which also included teachers' photos of student journals, drawings, artwork and student reflections. It is the student work given to the researchers by the teachers that are the data discussed in this

paper and not the teacher interviews. All student work collected by the teachers formed part of the children's school work within this unit.

This table (see Table 1) outlines the lead arts-based teaching activity of the week. The columns indicate links between the arts practice and writing. Whilst the children were introduced to these arts practices in the week indicated, teachers returned to these practices during a number of lessons, revisiting learning, and practising skills. Throughout this process we bore in mind the words of Barton (2015, p. 64) "art is not always a concrete representation of the artist's ideas and feelings. The process that an artist goes through in order to produce an artwork is a vehicle by which to express a personal story or journey."

Table 1: Unit overview indicating lead arts practices and the link to writing

WEEK	ARTS PRACTICE	LINK TO WRITING	TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITY
1	Visual arts - Walking map	Visual mapping, symbolic representation of shared experience	Children took a slow walk through the local forest area, paying attention to sensory noticing. In small groups, children made maps of the school and bush setting where they had been, using line drawing and labelling.
2	Drama - Freezeframes	Embodied visual image	Whole group introduction to drama convention of freezeframes, using the previous walk as stimulus.
	Visual arts - Line drawing	Simplifying drawing	Children worked from photos of freezeframes to make line drawings focusing on shape and outline.
3	Drama – Freezeframes	Story sequence	In small groups, children created freeze frames from the unit text, *Rivertime* by Trace Balla (2014), to show beginning, middle and end. The text was read during the week.
4	Drama – Improvisation	Improvising action to create a scene	As time travellers, children emerge from a time machine fifty years into the future. On their return they enact a scene to show what they encountered. During the week, children wrote a script to accompany the scene.
5	Drama - Performance	Connecting devised actions and text in a scene	In small groups, children performed scenes of the future.
6	Drama - Interviews	Commentary and narrative	Interview conventions were modelled to students and practised in small groups.
7	Visual arts - Collage	Visual symbols, expression	Individually, children made self-portraits from found and natural materials representing themselves in a more sustainable world
8	Visual arts Drama - Improvisation	Commentary and narrative	Children curated individual collages into group artwork then improvised presentation as museum guides to share the messages of the artworks.
9	Visual arts	Commentary, simplified messaging	Children reflected on learning of the unit and wrote a simple message to the Earth on a leaf. Leaves were collected and curated into artworks. Children then had the choice to pass the message to someone else through the gift of the leaf or to gift the message to the place where the leaf was collected.
	Weekly reflection		Students were encouraged to reflect on leading arts-based activities with symbols and short statements.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis methods were used in this study and were primarily deductive. Whilst traditionally inductive methods are used, qualitative researchers are beginning to use more deductive analytical approaches (Fife & Gossner, 2024). In this study, we were interested in seeing if and how using arts-based practices could bring joy to children in creating their multi-modal assessment task. Deductive analysis was deemed appropriate for analysing our data in order to respond to our question as we had already identified other research that had posited theses about joy in children's learning (Cronqvist, 2021; Karjalainen et al., 2019; Nordström, 2024; Rantala & Määttä, 2012) and we were interested to see if we could determine if any of these theses could be identified in our data.

As outlined by Fife and Grossner (2024) our early data analysis involved a full immersion in the data by the three researchers which we achieved by multiple readings of the data and group meetings to discuss our thoughts and to further examine the data together. At this stage we operated both inductively and deductively, "carefully examining the data for evidence of new concepts not included" (Fife & Gossner, 2024, p. 6) in the existing theses of joy we had identified in the research literature. In the next stage of analysis, we organised our data around the themes (theses) of joy posited by Rantala & Määttä (2012) and Cronqvist (2021). We were then able to determine whether evidence from our data supported, contradicted, refined or expanded (Fife & Gossner, 2024) these pre-existing theses of joy found in children's learning.

In this paper we report on two arts-based practices that aimed to support children's writing and to replace the alienation that Lambirth (2016) claimed has occurred in primary schools between children and writing with a sense of joy. The data used in this paper are the artefacts - children's work examples as well as the children's reflections, written individually after each week's lesson. The identifier used for each piece is A (for Artefact) – WM for walking map; - FF for freezeframe; - GT for graphic text, followed by a number that was assigned to each child's work. The reflections are labelled R – week number – then the number that was assigned to each child's reflection. Please also note we have written the children's work exactly as they have with spelling and grammatical errors.

Findings and Discussion

The study's research enquiry focused on how arts-based practices in drama and visual art, can be included in the English curriculum for Year 3 and 4 (ages 7-9) students, with the

aim of enhancing and amplifying their writing skills. The process of utilising arts-based practices to develop and enhance the student's writing skills was based on incorporating activities in the teaching programme to stimulate creativity, imagination and critical thinking. By engaging in these arts-based practices, children were afforded the opportunity to explore diverse perspectives and develop and enhance their ability to communicate ideas effectively through written expression. In analysing the data, we found that two arts-based practices, namely walking maps and freezeframes, improved the overall connection between the curation of ideas and the expression of these ideas in written form. These two practices emerged as key practices and the data indicated that students achieved a deeper understanding and connection with the teaching material. By using these art-based activities, students translated their ideas more effectively into writing and demonstrated heightened comprehension and engagement in writing. We next present a portrait of how these two practices contributed to the aims of the study.

Arts-based practice 1 – Walking Maps

The first arts practice conducted with this class was their creation of a walking map. Walking maps are a way of learning through movement (Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016) and it, like mapping, "is an embodied experience carried out from a particular point of view" (O'Rourke, 2013, as cited in Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016, p. 343). Embodied experiences which, from place-based learning experiences, allow students freedom, and thus allowing joy (Rantala & Määttä, 2012), in the outdoors and promote curiosity, active engagement and attachment to the natural world (Yanko, 2023). Located on school grounds is a remnant of forest and this experience began with a discussion about the significance of the place and the role the school plays in supporting ongoing conservation efforts. Children were invited to share their feelings toward the forest in a group discussion before taking a slow, sensory walk to the forest and back to the classroom. As well as providing the children with a sense of freedom and joy by learning outside of the classroom walls, the slow strolling can also contribute to an "unfolding of stories" (Ferguson, 2007, as cited in Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016, p. 345). During the walk the children became attuned to attentive listening (Yanko, 2023) as well as observations.

In small groups, children made maps of the school and bush setting where they had been, focusing on recalling features, location and what was noticed through the walk. The process of walking and then representing that in a map form allowed the children "to respond

to and interact with" (Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016, p. 344) the environment and thus allowed for a "method of aesthetic observation and play" (Pérez Miles & Libersat, 2016, p. 345). Some of the groups chose to include natural elements on their map, such as leaves they had collected on the walk as seen in these examples (see Image 1).

Image 1: Walking map with found objects (A-WM-5)

Research has noted that "walking is inseparable from other embodied practices of listening, voicing, writing, and drawing" (Lasczik et al., 2023, p. 4). The students' awareness of their senses could be noted in their sense of touch, such as use of leaves in the above

Image 2: Noticing roughness of bark (A-WM-5)

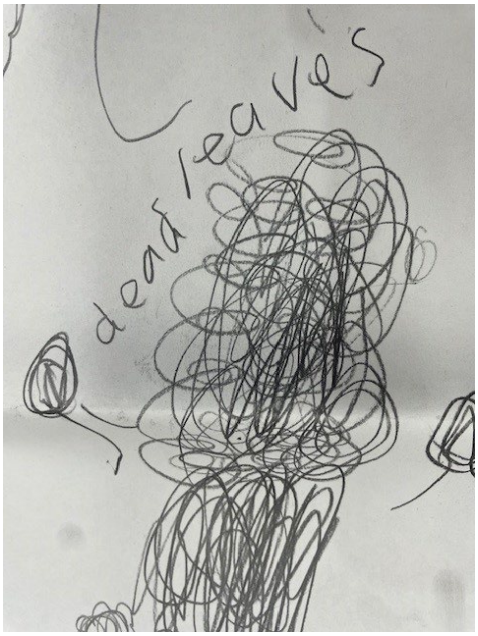


Image 3: The crunching of dead leaves (A-WM-12)

examples, as well as through their drawings where some of the children tried to replicate the roughness of bark (Image 2) or the pile of crunching dead leaves (Image 3). The other sense that came strongly through in the children's maps was sound, which was represented on the maps visually through a drawing, such as the aeroplane in Image 4 as well as through the use of written text like "bbrmmmmm" (see Image 4) to replicate the sound of an aeroplane flying overhead whilst the children were on their forest walk.

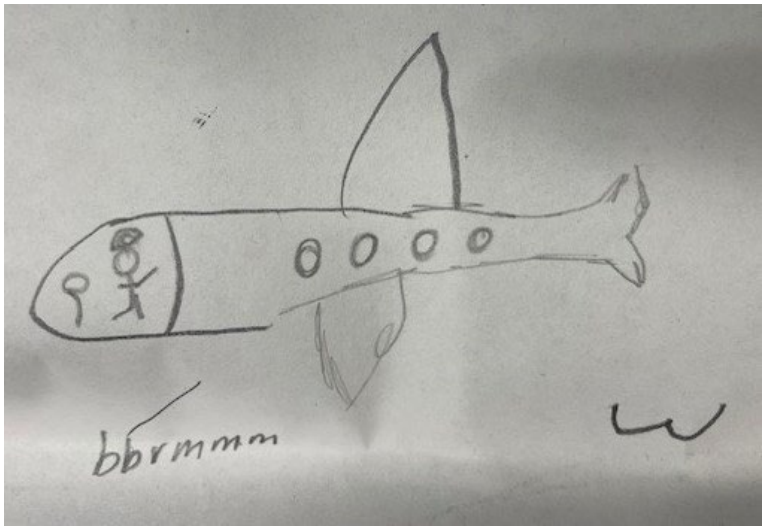
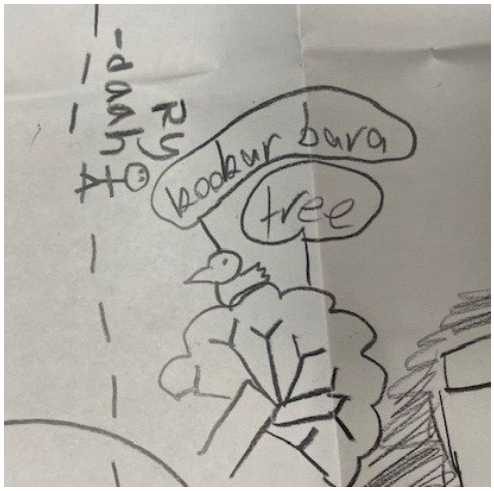


Image 4 – Aeroplane (A-WM-15)

Research in walkography suggests that walking slows down our pace of thoughts and illustrates the closeness between "wandering and wondering" (Yanko, 2023, p. 99). This is then shown in the reflection of one child who wrote: "i [I] really likked [liked] making the maps because i [I] felt so relaxed" (R-1-14). Emotions were noted by other children, with one writing, "when we where [were] going on a walk with every one I felt many grate [great] emotshons [emotions]" (R-1-3).

The visual map itself is a form of narrative and for many of the children this was mostly a realistic and factual narrative (see Image 5), however in some groups' maps we observed elements of fictional narrative coming into play such as in Image 6 where the tree is given a face and its branches and twigs become arms and fingers. It can also be seen in Image 4 above where the children have drawn a pilot in the cockpit of the aeroplane.



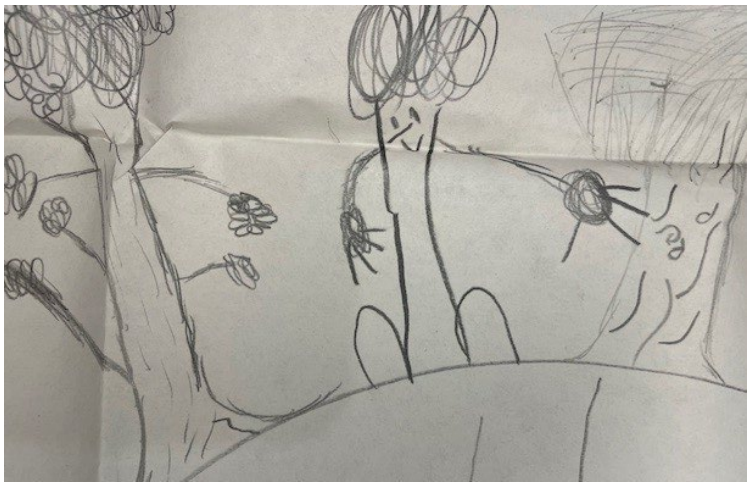


Image 5 – Kookaburra in a tree (A-WM-1) Image 6 – Friendly tree (A-WM-12)

The children enjoyed the task, particularly being able to go outside the classroom. “I felt happy that we could walk outside” (R1-14) and “we felt free walking around” (R1-32). Some children also noted particular aspects of the walking they enjoyed beyond freedom, such as the silence, “I felt carm [calm], happy. Becuse [because] it was silent.” (R1-6); and being one with nature, “I liked when we were looking in the nature” (R1-23). This sense of joy found in freedom clearly aligns with Rantala and Määttä’s (2012) thesis that “the joy of learning enjoys an environment of freedom” (p. 94). For some children, the thing they reflected on was being with others and noticing the fun they were all having, “I saw that every one was having fun” (R1-36) and “I loved making the maps because it was artsy and groupy” (R1-39). The students’ comments demonstrate the sense of joy they felt in being together with their peers, thus agreeing with Karjalainen et al.’s work (2019) showing that often joy is relational and that much of the joy in learning is when they all support each other (Cronqvist, 2021). The act of drawing was also seen as enjoyable by the children, “I felt so happy drawing on the map” (R1-3) and "I fillt [felt] happy and creativ[e] doing the artwork it was relly [really] expriring [inspiring]for me and i [I] fellt [felt] so happy doing it” (R1-11). This happiness and joy experienced by the children may certainly have impacted upon and stimulated their learning as posited by Cronqvist (2021).

Arts-based practice 2 - Freeze frames

Drama freezeframes, also known as still images or tableaux, were used several times during teaching to embody ideas and enhance creativity and encourage critical thinking (Craft, 2001; Grainger, 2004; Heathcote, 1991; O'Neill, 1995). Freezeframes are considered a

drama convention (process drama) that enables students to physically express emotions, ideas, and concepts through their bodies. As students collaborate to create the freezeframe, they engage multiple senses in the learning process, which enhances and supports overall comprehension and retention. Dobson and Stephenson's (2019) research noted that the use of freezeframes allows children to have "an 'embodied' first person experience of 'emotion in action' which generates new meaning and understanding" (p. 70). Other research on the use of process drama to enhance students' writing shows that it can increase children's motivation to write (Dunn et al., 2013) and can "empower writing in a range of genres" (Grainger, 2004, p. 91). The incorporation of this particular arts-based practice involved four phases:

Phase 1: Collaboration to generate ideas collectively and utilisation of visuals/pictures to inspire general ideas.

Children were introduced to the convention of 'freeze frames' by collectively drawing on memories of the walk and the notion that we can make images with our bodies. Initially children were invited to recall the walking experience and make an image of a memory. Discussing the freeze frames both helped children to verbally share their individual experiences as well as introduce the idea that stories connect text and images.

In the next drama lesson, children were presented with a series of visually stimulating images on the topic of caring for the environment, which related to the text studied in English and their HASS topic. The images served as a springboard for collaborative brainstorming sessions and proved instrumental in igniting creativity as students discussed possible ideas presented in the images. These images provided the students with a starting point to consider the "who, where, and what" to scaffold ideas in a structured narrative.

This small group setting enhanced the inclusive learning environment, supported the creation of ideas (Duffy, 2014), and empowered students of all abilities to participate and contribute actively. We observed that students who may have been hesitant to voice opinions in a large setting found their voices amplified within a small group. One student wrote: "I liked how my group had all difrent [different] actions and that they tried there [their] best" (R2-24). Students also reflected on how collaboration and working as a group supported the creation of new ideas and joy of learning. "I saw that everyone was doing there [their] best in there [their] drama act and that everyone in the addience [audience] was congratulating the

actors" (R2-9). By participating in the small group freeze frames the sense of joy found in collaborating and experiencing success (Rantala & Määttä, 2012) can be seen.

Phase 2: Creation of a series of freeze frames to structure the stories with a beginning, middle and end Students created three freeze frames in small groups to show the three stages of the narrative story – the beginning (who) middle (where) and ending (what). These freeze frames were shown in a consecutive manner (one after the other) to tell the story where the actors do not use speech but show the "picture" by embodying the ideas. This can be seen in Image 8 where the students used their bodies collectively to create a mountain.

Through the creation of these freezeframes, the students transcended the limitation of language, relying on the power of imagery and embodiment to convey their stories. Each image served as a snapshot of their ideas, capturing the essence of their ideas and allowing them to express these clearly without the need for verbal explanation. By embodying their ideas in the still images, the students not only brought them to life but gained a deeper understanding of their own narrative. These findings align with previous research that also demonstrated that embodied experiences led to more sophisticated storytelling (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019) and enabling the students to organise their ideas in a logical sequence which facilitated a clear and coherent structure.

Children felt empowered and confident in contributing and collaborating creatively towards their storytelling and idea creation and we noted the sense of joy experienced by the students participating in the freezeframe activity. The children reflected on this experience: "I felt happy and chilld [chilled] while we were doing actions" (R2-10), and "I liked laughing my head off because it was ridiculus [ridiculous]" (R2-29). There was a mixture of emotions experienced during the process drama lessons noted by: "I felt good nerves [nervous] happy exided [excited]", again highlighting the thesis that the positive emotion of joy can stimulate learning (Cronqvist, 2021). We observed that these activities served as opportunities for further inspiration and creativity. The students not only celebrated their own achievements but drew inspiration from their peers, which sparked new avenues of exploration. The process freed the students from the constraints of conventional verbal communication, infusing their narratives with a creative energy that was enthusiastically embraced.

Phase 3: Incorporation of the freezeframe images to reinforce story development

During the session, the classroom teachers actively documented each group's freezeframes by taking photos of each which served as valuable aids in the students' writing process. These photos provided tangible support for the children, offering visual cues and reminders of the process. The photographs were used to create the first "writing" of the stories. These visual aids served as a catalyst for the initial stages of story development and provided the students with a tangible starting point. The embodied still images prompted the students to translate the visual narrative and create a structured written account with a clear beginning, middle and end, thus enabling them to organise their ideas in a logical sequence and facilitate a clear and coherent generic structure. Moreover, the photos enriched their textual descriptions, comprehension and engagement with the storytelling process. Images 7, 8 and 9 showed how the freezeframes were used to translate the embodied ideas into writing a narrative for each image (beginning, middle and end).

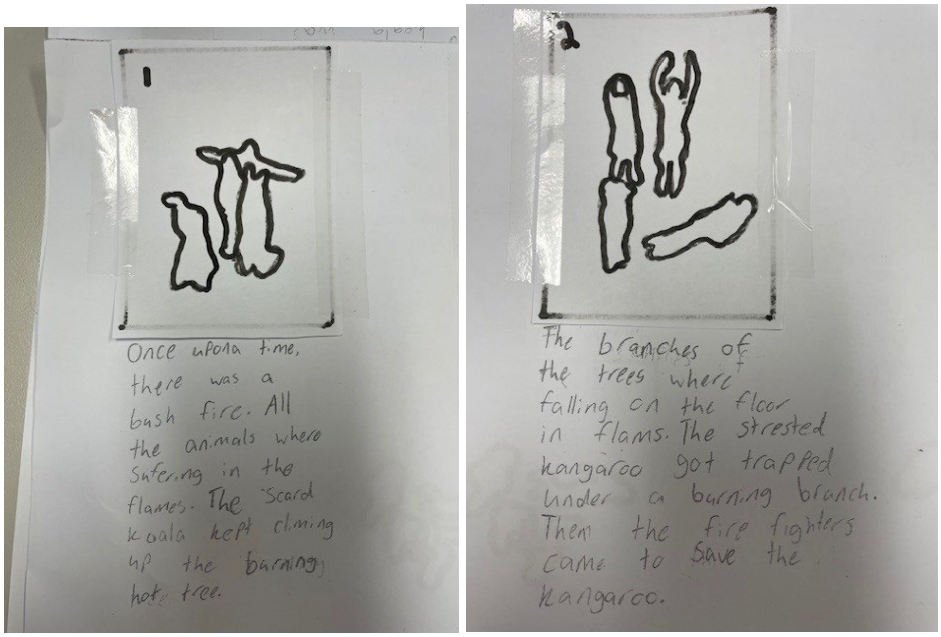


Image 7 - Freeze frames with student narrative text (Beginning) (A-FF-4)
Image 8 – Freeze frames with student narrative text (Middle) (A-FF-5)

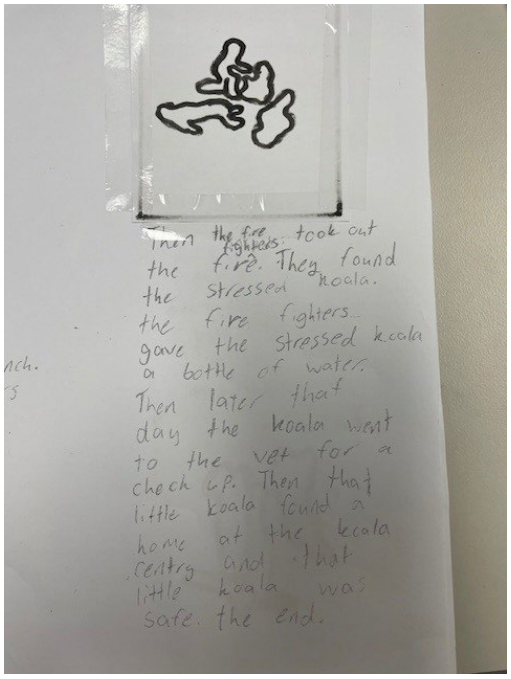


Image 9 – Freeze frames with student narrative text (End) (A-FF-6)

A heightened level of engagement from the children was observed through these "new" ways of telling their stories. Children commented on the satisfaction of collaborating as a group to work together and weave their individual ideas into cohesive narratives. One student commented on the enjoyment experienced in the making of the freezeframes "because we did not make it out of cardboard we made [it] out of people" (R2-17). Joy was also experienced through the use of their bodies, as one student reflected: "I liked we got [to] use are [our] bodys [bodies]" (R2-1) and the freedom to "made our own ideas" (R2-23). They also enjoyed the sharing activity where all the groups showed their freezeframes to the rest of the class. The act of sharing ideas fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas within the classroom.

Phase 4: Using phase 1 - 3 practices to produce a multimodal text

Bridging the gap between visual representation and written expression, the process followed in phases 1 - 3 empowered students to construct their ideas in such a way that a cohesive and creative written account was produced. The findings demonstrated that the scaffolding of learning through arts-based practices can significantly enhance students' understanding and comprehension of how to compose an effectively written text as noted in previous research (Cremin et al., 2006; Dunn & Finley, 2010).

Image 10 exemplified the final product, showcasing students' ability to integrate their arts-based learning experiences such as mapping, brainstorming, freezeframes and storyboarding into a well-organised sequential narrative.

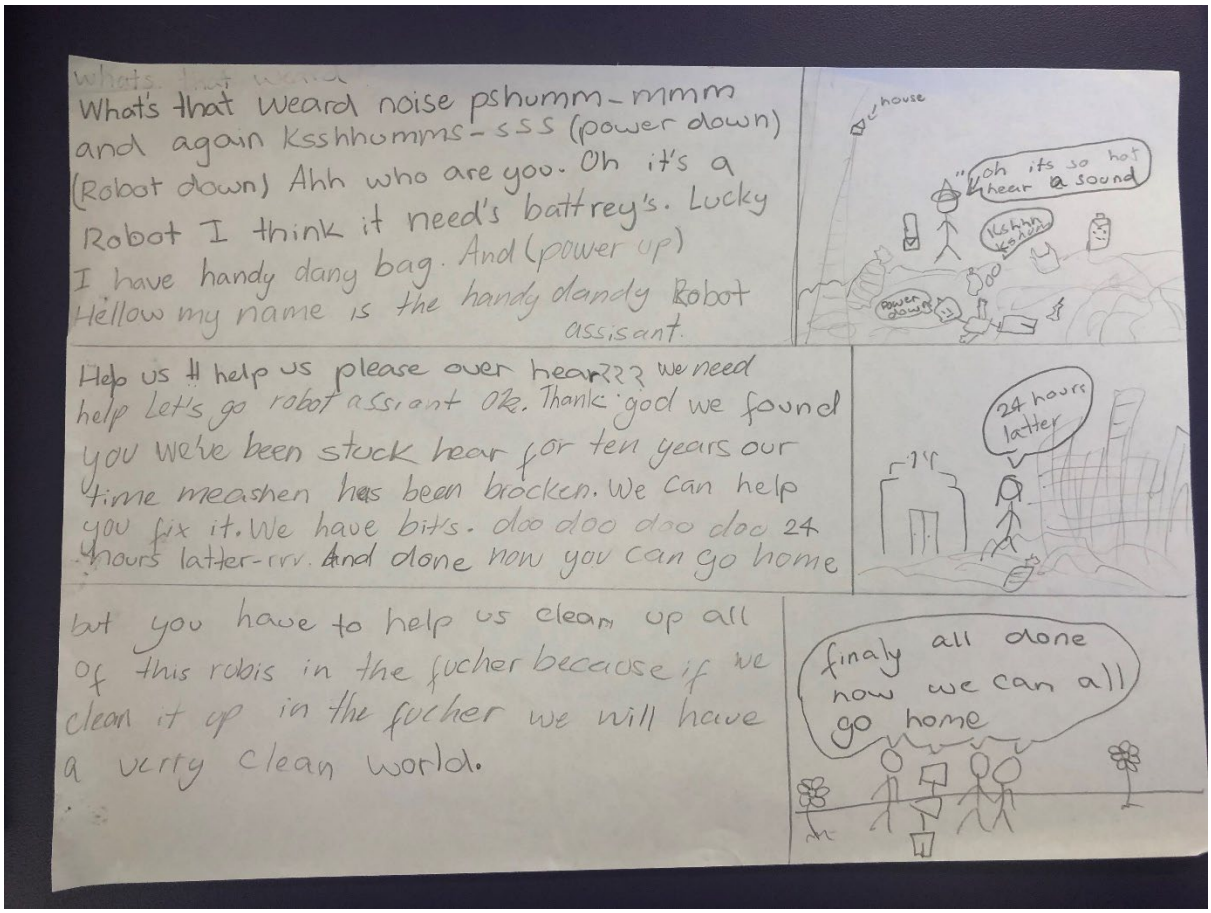


Image 10 – Text and illustrations in narrative piece (A-GT-53)

Conclusion

This study contributed to the early childhood literature by focusing on pedagogical approaches and the responses of children aged seven to nine. It presented an in-depth descriptive case study of primary teachers working collaboratively with school curriculum leaders and researchers in one school. Data analysis revealed three key themes that support the joy and success of writing through art-based practices: collaboration within the classroom amongst students, freedom to use creativity and the embodiment of ideas and the achievement of student success and joy in completing writing tasks.

The study highlighted that collaborative group work and the joy of shared learning facilitated by arts-based practices enabled ideas for storytelling ideas to emerge from shared

experiences, dialogue and emotional connection to narratives. This approach fostered a sense of joy and purpose in collaborative work. Regular use of collaborative and embodied group activities throughout the unit of work supported children's success in devising images, stories and text and thereby enhanced their enthusiasm and enjoyment in writing. Engagement in arts-based practices was shown to enrich the writing process, making it a joyful and fulfilling learning experience.

Whilst this study provided an in-depth, descriptive examination of the integration of arts-based practices, it is limited by its small sample size consisting of one school site, three classroom teachers and 67 students. Nevertheless, the findings strongly suggest that incorporating arts-based practices into learning can enhance pedagogical practice to achieve joy in writing projects. These practices not only make learning more engaging but also provide opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary, imagination and critical thinking skills. By integrating the arts into writing activities, teachers can foster a holistic approach to literacy education while empowering children to become confident and proficient writers.

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