

E-Literature for Children

Enhancing digital literacy learning

Len Unsworth

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Preface

Children's literature can bridge the inter-generational digital divide in the English classroom. The digital multimedia world of the world wide web (www) and CD-ROM technology is enhancing and expanding the story worlds of literary narratives accessed primarily through the reading of books, as well as generating exciting new forms of digital narrative such as hyperfiction and electronic game narratives. Some established authors of children's literature such as Jon Scieszka and Paul Jennings and Morris Gleitzman have linked recent book publications to related online games and others like Libby Hathorn have published online literary game narratives like *The Wishing Cupboard*. The burgeoning of children's literature sites on the web reflects not only the popularity of children's books and other forms of literary narratives but also the integral part played by the web in children's experience of such story contexts. But the evidence is that the majority of teachers, even younger, recent graduates, are in need of guidance in seeking to make effective use of the computer facilities that are now widely accessible in their schools and classrooms. At the same time, more and more children routinely use computers outside of school to access a variety of forms of digital narrative on CD-ROM and the web, and more and more they are communicating their experience around story via email, 'blogs' and various forms of electronic forums and chat rooms. There is an opportunity to bring the complementary expertise and experience of children and teachers together in their shared enjoyment of exploring children's literature.

This book shows how teachers can use e-literature in the classroom to enhance and extend the engagement of computer-age children with the enchantment of the possible worlds of literary narratives. It is concerned with the interface of pedagogy, computer technology and children's literature as well as new forms of literary narratives for children on CD-ROM and the web, including hyperfiction and electronic game narratives.

While the orientation is one of practical support for classroom teachers, it is ‘research-led’ support, reporting the results to date of a range of ongoing studies by the author dealing with the nature of image/text relations and their role in the construction of literary narratives, an evaluation of online resources for developing children’s literacy and literary understanding, relationships among conventional book and computer-based versions of ostensibly the same literary narratives, explicating the various types of online digital fiction available for children, and the development of a typology of electronic game activities linked to literary narratives for children. Much of the research methodology, principally web searches and multimodal analyses of digital narratives, involves recent linguistic and visual semiotic description of the meaning-making resources of language and image, which are very accessible tools for literary interpretive work and literacy learning that can be readily mediated to children. Hence their description here is oriented to their use as pedagogic resources. The research outcomes are illustrated with comparative exemplars from the data and summary frameworks to facilitate classroom application as indicated in the following brief chapter outlines.

The first chapter introduces the broad frameworks that will assist teachers in managing effective classroom programs using digital resources for developing literary understanding and literacy learning. These are the *organizational*, *interpretive* and *pedagogic* frameworks. The *interpretive* framework is described more fully in Chapter 2. This framework addresses the increasingly integrative role of language and images in the construction of literary meanings in electronic and book formats. It describes the verbal and visual grammatical analyses alluded to above in relation to both research methodology and resourcing teachers and students with functional interpretive tools. The *organizational* framework describes the articulation of conventional and computer-based literary narratives for children and adolescents. The main categories of articulation are electronically *augmented*, electronically *re-contextualized*, or electronically *originated* literary texts. Chapter 3 explicates the nature of electronically augmented literary texts describing various ways in which published books, their story worlds, compositional contexts, and readers responses and interactions with them are now extensively mediated via the web. Chapter 4 deals with literary texts in book format which have been re-contextualized in digital form on the web or CD-ROM. Two research outcomes of direct benefit to teachers are reported in this chapter. The first is a documenting of the sources of such re-contextualized literary texts on the web, as well as a listing of some

exemplars in CD-ROM format. The second research outcome is an explication of the means by which re-contextualisation processes involving the choices and positioning of images and, to some extent, the editing of text, actually constructs different interpretive possibilities across ostensibly the 'same' story. This kind of explication becomes a key resource for developing active, critical reading among students. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with electronically *originated* literary texts. In the fifth chapter, five types of e-narrative, two types of digital poetry and e-comics are described and illustrated. The types of e-narratives re-defined in terms of their compositional features, inform examples of the types of learning experiences which can be developed around their distinctive digital narrative forms. Chapter 6 distinguishes video games as defined by Gee (2003) from electronic game narratives that are related to literary narratives (which may be either distinct from or integrated with the game). The modest data sample of games on which this research was based has yielded a tentative typology of electronic game narrative activities (summarized in Figure 6.1). This initial account enables teachers to see how various kinds of games can be related in different ways to different dimensions of the stories from which they are derived (or the stories the games themselves actually constitute). Samples of classroom learning tasks based on such relationships are briefly outlined. While Chapters 1 through 6 have been oriented to classroom applications of developing understanding of various aspects of e-literature for children, Chapter 7 draws together these ideas in examples of practical planning of programs of work for children at different levels in the primary/elementary school. The sample programs are presented with a view to encouraging and provoking more innovative explorations by teachers in their own professional practice.

Much more collaborative work is needed in interfacing research and teaching in this area of the English curriculum. The exponential rate of change in the nature of ICTs and their impact on both the nature of literary texts and the contexts in which these texts are experienced, emphasizes the crucial agentive role of both teachers and students in defining and pursuing a research agenda of such practical social significance. It is hoped that this book will stimulate critically constructive responses to, and envisioning beyond, what is presented here to maintain and enhance a vibrant engagement of 'net-age' students with past, contemporary and emerging forms of literary narrative.

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This work would not have been possible without the ongoing remarkable support of my wife, Loraine.

My colleague, Dr Angela Thomas, has sustained and extended my interest in exploring the role of e-literature and online literary resources for children and adolescents through her enthusiasm for, deep understanding of, and incisive scholarship in, the nature of young people's engagement in the digital world.

I should also like to thank the following for permission to use previously published material:

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The text from the first two pages of *Wolstencroft the Bear* is reproduced with permission from the author, Ms Karen Lewis. Karen Lewis is the author of several mystery novels, including *A Scarlet Woman* and *A Fatal Affair* published by Treeside Press, *Lingering Doubt* by Felon Books, and *Never Seen Again* by London Circle Publishing – all Detective Neil Slater mysteries. She has written the *Wolstencroft the Bear* and *Elmira the Bear* series for children. She has also written *A Strange Disappearance* for young adults, and her suspense thriller *Hit and Run* won a radio play competition. She makes her home in Vancouver, Canada.

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Children's literature and literacy in the electronic age

Introduction

The ways in which children and young people interact with literary texts are being profoundly influenced by the internet and the world wide web (www) as well as other aspects of contemporary Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In fact, the impact of ICTs is changing the nature of literary texts and also generating new forms of literary narratives (Hunt, 2000; Locke and Andrews, 2004), including some video game narratives (Gee, 2003; Ledgerwood, 1999; Mackey, 1999; Zancanella *et al.*, 2000). However, it is not the case that the literary interests of the digital multimedia world are replacing books as a presentation format for children's literature (Dresang, 1999; Gee, 2003; Hunt, 2000). Rather, what we see emerging are strongly synergistic complementarities, where the story worlds of books are extended and enhanced by various forms of digital multimedia, and correspondingly, some types of digital narratives frequently have companion publications in book form. In Margaret Mackey's (1994: 15) words 'Cross-media hybrids are every where.' She points out that children come to school already used to making cross-media comparisons and judgements whether the stories are about Thomas the Tank Engine or Hamlet, and that

To talk about children's literature, in the normal restricted sense of children's novels, poems and picture-books, is to ignore the multi-media expertise of our children.

(Mackey, 1994: 17)

However, 10 years later, although literature for children and young people maintains its significant role in state and national English curriculum documents, such documents are silent about literary narratives in the digital sphere (Locke and Andrews, 2004). There is also relatively little use of ICTs

in teaching literary texts in schools, according to national studies in Australia (Durrant and Hargreaves, 1995; Lankshear *et al.*, 2000). On the other hand, online and other digital media resources for working with literature in the classroom are burgeoning, access to appropriate computing facilities in schools in Western countries is becoming routine, and there is an emerging research literature dealing with the interface of ICTs, literature and literacy education (Jewitt, 2002; Locke and Andrews, 2004; Morgan, 2002; Morgan and Andrews, 1999). To bridge the gap between many students' experience of literature in the digital world and their classroom experience, beginning teachers who have more familiarity with ICTs, as well as established teachers, who are less familiar with ICTs but have great expertise and experience in working with literature, need access to *organizational*, *interpretive* and *pedagogic* frameworks that will assist them in managing effective classroom programs using digital resources for developing literary understanding and literacy learning. The purpose of this book is to contribute to the development of these frameworks. This chapter provides an overview of key elements of the frameworks, which are then discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters, with examples from online narratives, teaching resources and suggestions for teaching/learning activities. The first stage of the overview here deals with an *organizational* framework describing the articulation of conventional and computer-based literary narratives for children and adolescents. The second stage outlines *interpretive* frameworks addressing the increasingly integrative role of language and images in the construction of literary meanings in electronic and book formats. The third stage deals with *pedagogic* frameworks, beginning with the online contexts for developing understanding about different dimensions of literary experience, and then addressing the management of learning activities derived from such contexts in extended programs of classroom work.

Describing the articulation of book and computer-based literary narratives

Here we are concerned with the relationships among literary materials on the web, on CD-ROMs and in books. From time to time in this book mention will be made of movie versions of various literary works and their availability as DVDs, but the focus will be online and CD resources. It is useful to think about the relationships among literary texts and digital media in terms of three main categories. The first refers to electronically *augmented* literary

texts, or perhaps electronically augmented experience relating to literary texts. This category is concerned with literature that has been published in book format only, but the books are augmented with online resources that enhance and extend the story world of the book. This kind of augmentation is most frequently provided by the publishers and/or the authors themselves. Sometimes it involves information about the genesis of the story, further details of artefacts or additional information about characters, and sometimes it involves presentation of selections from the story in print or by the author, or someone else, reading a sample chapter or segment, to entice the potential reader to invest in the whole story. The ways in which books are augmented with such online enhancements are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The second category of relationship among literary texts and digital media is the electronically *re-contextualized* literary text. In this category, literature that has been published in book form is re-published online or as a CD-ROM. The online re-publication takes a variety of forms. Many works that are now in the public domain because copyright laws no longer apply (usually because it is more than 50 or 70 years since the death of the author) have been transcribed or scanned and located in online digital libraries. The most widely known of these is the Gutenberg Project (<http://gutenberg.net/>), but there are many other such online libraries, including some specializing in books for children. These resources are detailed in Chapter 4. The scanned books contain the original images, but since copyright is not an issue, some other sites provide the texts of these stories with new images interpolated. These online versions of published books can be accessed free of charge. The second type of online version of published books is usually contemporary stories that are provided by publishers and can be downloaded at a cost. It is also possible, at a modest cost, to download audiofiles for many current titles, including classics like Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* (Wilde and Gallagher, 1995), as discussed in Chapter 7. Some books are also published as audio only CDs, such as Stephen Fry's reading of the Harry Potter books, published by BBC Audio Books in the United Kingdom. But most CD-ROM versions of literary texts include images and text, which vary to a greater or lesser extent from those in the book versions. In some cases the images are static, simply transposed from page to screen. This is the case with *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1994) for example. In other cases the original images from the book appear as animations on the CD as in *The Polar Express* (Van Allsburg, 1997). In this CD the animations activate automatically, but in others like *The Little Prince* (de Saint-Exupery, 2000b), the animations are controlled by the mouse 'clicks' of the viewer. In some

cases novels for mature readers such as *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937; Steinbeck Series, 1996) have been re-presented as CD-ROM versions including images throughout. Literature *re-contextualized* as CD-ROM presentations is discussed in Chapter 4.

The third category relating literary narratives to digital format is the digitally *originated* literary text. These are stories that have been published in digital format only – on the web or CD-ROM. Relatively few such stories appear on CD-ROM. Some notable examples (James, 1999) such as *Lulu's Enchanted Book* (Victor-Pujebet, n.d.) and *Payuta and the Ice God* (Ubisoft, n.d.) are discussed in Chapter 5. The great variety of literary narratives for children and adolescents published on the web can be categorized as follows:

- *e-stories for early readers* – these are texts which utilize audio combined with hyperlinks to support young children in learning to decode the printed text by providing models of oral reading of stories and frequently of the pronunciation of individual words;
- *linear e-narratives* – these are essentially the same kinds of story presentations which are found in books, frequently illustrated, but presented on a computer screen;
- *e-narratives and interactive story contexts* – the presentation of these stories is very similar to that of linear e-narratives, however the story context is often elaborated by access to separate information about characters, story setting in the form of maps, and links to factual information and/or other stories. In some examples it is possible to access this kind of contextual information while reading the story;
- *hypertext narratives* – although frequently making use of a range of different types of hyperlinks, these stories are distinguished by their focus on text, to the almost entire exclusion of images;
- *hypermedia narratives* – these stories use a range of hyperlinks involving text and images, often in combination.

To this list must be added some types of video games, defined in Chapter 6 as electronic game narratives. The development of new forms of literary narrative in the context of electronic games has been a focus of a recent study (Ledgerwood, 1999; Mackey, 1999; Murray, 1998; Zancanella *et al.*, 2000). Examples of these forms of e-fiction as well as e-poetry and e-comics are discussed in Chapter 5, and electronic game narratives are discussed in Chapter 6.

All three of the above categories relating literature to the resources of the web and CD-ROM technology vary from monomodal (print only) to multimodal presentation, involving print, images and sound. The digitally *re-contextualized* and digitally *originated* e-fiction also vary along the continua of linear to hyperlinked and from conventional story structure to innovative game narratives. The *organisational* framework describing the articulation of book and computer-based literary texts for children and adolescents is summarized in Figure 1.1.

Interpreting the joint role of images and text in constructing literary narrative

Over the last decade images have become increasingly prominent in many different types of texts in paper and electronic media. Recent publications of popular fiction and new editions of classic literature are now frequently richly illustrated. This can be seen in novels such as Terry Pratchett's Discworld Fable *The Last Hero* illustrated by Paul Kidby (2001), and the edition of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* illustrated by Alan Lee (2002), as well as in illustrated novels for young readers such as Isobelle Carmody's *Dreamwalker*,

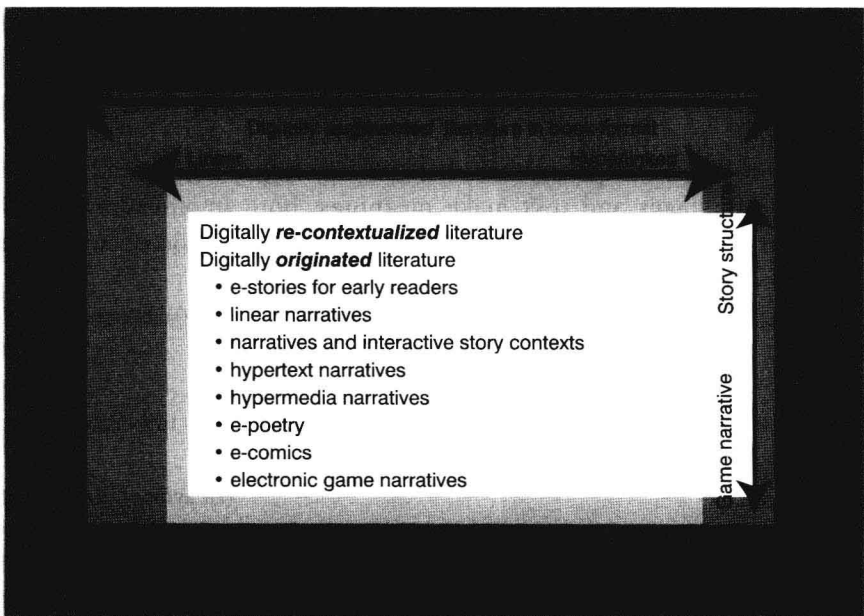


Figure 1.1 Describing the articulation of book and computer-based literature

illustrated by Steve Woolman (2001). The kinds of images and their contribution to overall meaning vary with the type of narrative. However, overwhelmingly, both the information in images and their effects on readers are far from redundant or peripheral embellishments to the print. Because images are used increasingly, and in a complementary role to the verbal text, it is now inadequate to consider reading simply as processing print. The need to redefine literacy and literacy pedagogy in the light of the increasing influence of images is widely advocated in the international literature (Andrews, 2004a, 2004b; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Goodman and Graddol, 1996; Lemke, 1998a, 1998b; Rassool, 1999), drawing attention to 'the blurring of relations between verbal and visual media of textuality' (Richards, 2001). Writing about *Books for Youth in a Digital Age*, Dresang noted that:

In the graphically oriented, digital, multimedia world, the distinction between pictures and words has become less and less certain.

(Dresang, 1999: 21)

and that

In order to understand the role of print in the digital age, it is essential to have a solid grasp of the growing integrative relationship of print and graphics.

(Dresang, 1999: 22)

There is also a strong consensus that the knowledge readers need to have about how images and text make meanings, both independently and interactively, requires a metalanguage, or a grammar, for describing these meaning-making resources.

In the book *Tellers, Tales and Texts* (Hodges *et al.*, 2000) Bearne noted that:

Once readers develop a metalanguage through which to talk about texts they are in a position to say – and think – even more.

(Bearne, 2000: 148)

And earlier in his classic study, *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, Perry Nodelman noted that the interpretation of the narrative role of images in children's books would be enhanced by

the possibility of a system underlying visual communication that is something like a grammar – something like the system of relationships and contexts that makes verbal communication possible.

(Nodelman, 1988: ix)

The development of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2001; Martin, 1992; Martin and Rose, 2003; Matthiessen, 1995) and its application to work with literature for children (Austin, 1993; Hasan, 1985; Knowles and Malmkjaer, 1996; Stephens, 1994; Williams, 2000), as well as the extrapolation from SFL of a grammar of visual design for reading images by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and its application to work with children's literature (Lewis, 2001; Stephens, 2000; Unsworth, 2001; Unsworth and Wheeler, 2002; Williams, 1998) has brought Nodelman's earlier wishes to reality. The interpretive frameworks offered by this work, and their use in understanding the role of images and text in constructing meanings in literary narrative, will be introduced in Chapter 2.

Towards a pedagogic framework for e-literature and classroom literacy learning

The interpretive tools provided by functional descriptions of verbal and visual grammar introduced in Chapter 2 enable teachers and students to read literary texts grammatically, so that they are able to read the 'constructedness' of the texts, simultaneously focusing on the 'what' of the story and the 'how' of its verbal and visual construction. Throughout this book, suggestions for learning experiences designed to support young readers in developing this interpretive, grammatical reading will be introduced in the context of the foci of the subsequent chapters – classic and contemporary stories online, emerging literary hypertext for children and electronic game narratives. This perspective on developing children's literary understanding and concomitant literacy development is a particular innovative feature of the research reported in this book and does not currently find explicit expression in the online resources for using e-literature in the English curriculum. Nevertheless, there are richly inspiring online resources for extending children's literary experience, and the approach in this book is to co-opt such resources for infusion with the above perspective forming a basis for enhancing children's experience of e-literature in school contexts. This section of the chapter addresses the nature of a pedagogic framework for using e-literature in the