

Educating the Young Child

Advances in Theory and Research, Implications
for Practice

Volume 12

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Marilyn J. Narey

Editor

Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood

The Creative and Critical “Art”
of Making Meaning

 Springer

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Foreword

When it comes to learning, there is no “one size fits all.” While this assertion may seem to be common sense, the daily reality of children’s lives in schools frequently stands in stark contrast to this basic precept. In recent years, the divide between play-based approaches and didactic approaches to instruction during early childhood has, if anything, grown wider and deeper. The Alliance for Childhood (2009) found that, in US kindergartens, the time allocated to direct instruction in literacy with print and mathematics was six times the amount of time allocated for child-initiated and child-directed activity. The early childhood curriculum has narrowed considerably in the wake of the standards movement. To illustrate, an observational study of 450 pre-K through second grade students found that children spent approximately 40% of their school day listening and watching and a little over 27% of their time completing written assignments. Direct instruction by teachers was observed 55.2% of the time, and play-based learning activity was observed less than 1% of the total classroom day (Alford, Rollins, Padron & Waxman, 2015).

As a result, contemporary teachers are caught in a philosophy-reality conflict (Hatch & Freeman, 1988); in other words, there frequently is a discrepancy between educators’ beliefs about optimal learning conditions during early childhood and what young learners are expected to do (Cross & Conn-Powers, 2014). This dichotomy results in considerable consternation because, if teachers unquestioningly do as they are told, they fail to reach and teach diverse groups of young children. On the other hand, if teachers openly resist the mounting pressures to teach to the test, they risk the disapproval of administrators and policymakers. When educators assert a more child-centered philosophy, those in power frequently cite “evidence-based practice” as their claim to authority. These claims, however, are seldom founded on a thorough understanding of a complex body of research. The very fact that some stakeholders refer to evidence-based practice—as if there were only one, right pedagogy—underscores the flaws in this argument. As this book will so cogently argue, there are many paths to learning. Multimodal experiences, particularly those focused upon the development of children’s capacities to produce and interpret visual texts, are critical to twenty-first-century learning. Expert teachers

draw upon multiple modes—rather than blindly adhere to a single approach—because this is the way to ensure that all children experience success as learners.

As the authors of this volume amply demonstrate, there is a way to avoid the rocky shoals of polarization and find a place where teachers can deftly navigate the needs of young learners and, at the same time rely on a complex body of research. Stated plainly, it is possible to respect young children’s ways of knowing while meeting academic standards. Indeed, contemporary early childhood education reconciles theory, research, and practice. It can be defined as “a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values” (Buisse, Wesley, Snyder, & Winton, 2006, p. 3).

The problem with unrelenting teacher-directed, overly didactic methods focused upon verbocentric views of language, literacy, and learning is that they gloss over individual differences in learners and undermine learner engagement in the process. If we define engagement as “the amount of time children spend interacting with adults, peers, and materials in a developmentally and contextually appropriate manner” (McWilliam & Casey, 2008, p. 3), then it is easy to understand why teachers cannot afford to sacrifice it. There is a large, consistent body of evidence to suggest that active engagement in learning yields more positive learner outcomes, including improved behavior, better social interactions, and higher student achievement (Brown & Mowry 2015; Kelly & Turner 2009; McWilliam & Casey 2008). Indeed, much of the power of multimodal approaches has to do with their capacity to more fully engage diverse groups of young learners. Respecting young learners exerts a positive effect on the three components of learner engagement, namely, (1) interest, (2) concentration, and (3) enjoyment (Shernoff, 2013). When children are regarded as meaning makers, they “see and feel the benefit of their teachers listening to them, collaborating with them,” and this “has a positive impact on their engagement, motivation, and personal development” (Quinn & Owen, 2014, p. 19).

In 2009, when the first book on multimodal perspectives of language, literacy, and learning was published for the *Educating the Young Child* series, it was enthusiastically received by early childhood educators. Now, based on the success of that edited volume, the editor has worked with a distinguished group of educators from throughout the world to revisit the timely and important topic of young children as meaning makers. Multimodal approaches hold the greatest promise for reconciling the dichotomies that are divisive in the field of early childhood education: teacher directed vs. child directed, play based vs. standards based, and covering the curriculum vs. reaching and teaching all children. Meeting the needs of diverse groups of young learners calls upon early childhood educators worldwide to base decisions not on sound bites from empirical research or unexamined past practices but on a best evidence synthesis of current theory, research, and practice. The latter is what this book is all about.

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Preface

In 2009, *Making Meaning: Constructing Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning Through Arts-Based Early Childhood Education* was published as the second title in the scholarly series, *Educating the Young Child*. The explicit focus upon multimodal language, literacy, and learning put forth in that original edition set it apart from other books on early childhood literacy and/or arts, and the book's unique "multimodal" frame continues to draw wide interest across the globe. The book's enduring appeal and persistent relevance to a broad international readership prompted the development of this second edition with a new title that underscores the emphasis on multimodal understandings of children's meaning-making through visual textual forms.

New Voices Expand Second Edition

Expanding the innovative lens of multimodal meaning-making that distinguished the 2009 text, this second edition, entitled *Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood: The Creative and Critical "Art" of Making Meaning*, brings together additional voices from around the globe. New chapters by respected authors from Slovenia, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States, along with updated versions of several foundational chapters from the original volume, offer readers important insights into the role of visual textual forms in developing multimodal constructs of language, literacy, and learning. As in the first edition, this text offers a provocative sampling of perspectives constructed by talented authors whose fields of expertise include literacy, semiotics, the arts and arts education, child development, museum education, technology, psychology, creativity, and early childhood education. Informed by their years of professional experience as teachers, teacher educators, artists, administrators, and researchers, the authors bring authentic understandings of the children, adults, and contexts about which they write.

The new chapters were purposefully selected to build upon the ideas and contextual perspectives that were advanced in the first edition. From exploring how a young child from China engages in art making to make meaning of his immigrant experience in Australia to examining how teachers explicitly teach the process of multimodal meaning-making through dialogue and the analysis of YouTube videos and from engaging young children as coresearchers with their mother to providing insights into working with children in crisis, the new contributors to the second edition extend the range of contexts and topics that enriched the original volume. As readers seek to provide educational quality for all young children in our increasingly complex world, *Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood: The Creative and Critical “Art” of Making Meaning* presents the opportunity to examine the wide range of thought-provoking ideas that these distinguished authors have explored in a variety of early childhood contexts.

Purpose of the Book

As articulated in the first edition, the purpose of this volume is threefold: (1) to provoke readers to examine their current understandings of language, literacy, and learning through a multimodal lens; (2) to provide a starting point for constructing broader, multimodal views of what it might mean to “make meaning”; and (3) to underscore the production and interpretation of visual texts as meaning-making processes that are especially critical to early childhood education in a twenty-first-century global society.

Primary Audience

The focus of this book (from its title to the selection of issues examined in its chapters) is purposefully approached in a manner that will appeal to a broad and diverse audience. University-based educators will find this scholarly edition a valuable text for graduate coursework and an excellent supplement for advanced undergraduate courses. Like the first edition, this second edition is an important resource for students in a variety of teacher education programs, including early childhood, language/literacy, art, and museum education. Further, professional development providers, administrators, and professional learning networks (PLNs) will discover that *Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood: The Creative and Critical “Art” of Making Meaning* is a rich volume for in-service professional study. Additionally, the new edition offers researchers and scholars a diverse sampling of studies from across the globe and provides early childhood advocates and policymakers with critical insights into early childhood language, literacy, and learning.

Unique Multimodal Perspective

Unlike some other texts that address art or literacy learning in early childhood, *Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood: The Creative and Critical “Art” of Making Meaning* is unique in that the volume’s multimodal lens:

- Challenges the early childhood education community to reexamine commonly-held beliefs about children’s visual texts (“art”) and traditional definitions of “literacy”
- Demonstrates how multimodal meaning-making processes are critical to children’s development, twenty-first-century education, and issues of social justice
- Presents a rich sampling of international perspectives by distinguished authors from varied disciplines who work in early childhood contexts across the globe
- Features authentic examples of research-based practices with toddlers and preschool- and elementary school-aged children in diverse environments
- Underscores the integral role of educators, parents, and policymakers in supporting young children’s multimodal meaning-making processes

Further, the concept of multimodal “meaning-making” presented in this book is not limited to the processes and products of children, but also encompasses ways adults across multiple fields of education work to make meaning, for example, co-constructing and evaluating curriculum, theorizing and developing research methodologies for studying children’s work, investigating contextual influences, or designing preservice teacher development.

Organization of Book

This second edition begins with a new foreword by **Mary Renck Jalongo**, a distinguished scholar in early childhood education, the editor in chief of the *Early Childhood Education Journal*, and a co-editor of Springer International’s book series, *Educating the Young Child: Advances in Theory and Research, Implications for Practice*. Following the organizational structure of the original volume, the body of this new edition is arranged into three main parts: *Beyond Words, Contexts and Layered Texts*, and *Visions*. Extending the original format of the work, editor, **Marilyn J. Narey**, bookends these three parts with her new introductory chapter, “The Creative ‘Art’ of Making Meaning,” and adds a concluding chapter, “Multimodal Visions: Bringing ‘Sense’ to Our 21st Century Texts.” Dr. Narey’s introduction offers a starting point for constructing multimodal perspectives of language, literacy, and learning, as she lays out the foundational understandings of the relevant constructs: meaning-making, multimodality, and creativity. Citing the disconnect between the proliferation of visual textual forms encountered within our twenty-first-century culture and the verbocentric orientation of many adults who

influence young children's learning, she supports the book's designated focus on visual textual forms (drawing, 3D models, photographs, sculpture, digital images). Her authentic examples of multimodal adult-child interactions during early phases of a toddler's drawing development offer informative insights for both early childhood professionals and parents and give practical form to the discussions of theory and research. In her concluding chapter Chap. 16, Dr. Narey draws attention to the challenges in undertaking a work that advocates for a multimodal view of teaching and learning, including the education community's seeming confusion surrounding the construct of multimodality, as well as the modal limitations of a traditional book format. She then underscores how the book's authors meet these challenges with their cogent descriptions and their thoughtfully selected images. Dr. Narey goes on to integrate these contributing authors' diverse and compelling accounts of children's experiences with visual texts into a synthesis of ideas that inspire further development of individual and collective multimodal visions. These new introductory and concluding pieces by the editor serve to adeptly frame the informative and insightful chapters that make up the body of the book in Parts One through Three: *Beyond Words, Contexts and Layered Texts, and Visions*.

Part One: Beyond Words

The chapters included in *Part One: Beyond Words* engage the reader in considering the diverse functions of children's multimodal meaning-making. Within these individual works, authors examine how children work to understand emerging problems encountered in their world, including explorations of identity, society, and the physical world. **Margaret Brooks'** Chap. 2, "Drawing to Learn" (reprinted from the first edition), demonstrates how multimodal approaches to learning promote children's higher mental functions as they explore common objects and pursue ideas generated through multimodal processes. Through her analysis of her 5-year-old students' evolving drawings of flashlights and light trap constructions, Dr. Brooks provides insights into how children's simple spontaneous concepts of the physical world give way to more complex and sophisticated understandings as they seek to make meaning through individual and collaborative multimodal investigations. Chapter 3 brings the distinguished voice and expertise of **James Haywood Rolling, Jr.**, to the scholarly discussion of multimodal meaning-making. Bridging children's outer and inner worlds, Dr. Rolling recounts his experiences as a teacher working to encourage young children's meaning-making in a New York City elementary school art studio. In his chapter, "Sacred Structures: Assembling Meaning, Constructing Self," Dr. Rolling demonstrates the critical role of a pedagogy of "structures supplanting structures," through poignant stories that reveal children's explorations of their own changing identities within shifting and evolving notions of the societies to which they belong and help to create. Chapter 4 is an updated version of "Creating a Critical Multiliteracies Curriculum: Repositioning Art in the Early Childhood Classroom" by **Linda K. Crafton, Penny Silvers, and Mary Brennan**. This powerful example of a multimodal, arts-based approach to teaching

critical literacy in a first grade classroom focuses upon a carefully constructed community of practice built on social justice and identity development. In Chap. 5, **Kristine Sunday** underscores the relational process of children's drawing. Dr. Sunday argues for the interconnectedness of modalities, underscoring that one modality cannot be addressed without the other. Through examples of children in kindergarten through grade three working in the collaborative space of a Saturday art program on a university campus, she demonstrates how the social practices of making meaning are highlighted and extended.

Part Two: Contexts and Layered Texts

Part Two: Contexts and Layered Texts includes chapters focused upon the authors' explorations into the diverse and often complex environments that influence children's multimodal meaning-making. This second part of the book begins with Chap. 6, in which **Susanna Kinnunen** and **Johanna Einarsdóttir** offer intimate insights into working with young children in the home, as the mother, a researcher, engages her young daughters as coresearchers of their drawings of their daily lives. Through rich examples drawn from Dr. Kinnunen's research diary, video, and other data, the authors share the evolving multimodal stories that surface in their ongoing research. In Chap. 7, "Young Children's Drawing and Storytelling: Multimodal Transformations that Help to Mediate Complex Sociocultural Worlds," **Rosemary Richards** presents her research of how a young boy from China engages in art making to make meaning of his immigrant experience in Australia. Dr. Richards contrasts the child's experiences at school and at home to offer insights into how children's visual texts can facilitate meaning-making in ways that support children's social identity. Next, an intergenerational art class for elders and young children in Canada provides the context for **Rachel Heydon's** and **Susan O'Neill's** presentation of their ongoing research in Chap. 8. In this work, "Children, Elders, and Multimodal Curricula: Semiotic Possibilities and the Imperative of Relationship," coauthors Heydon and O'Neill offer discussion surrounding the need to bring elders and preschool-aged children together and to provide opportunities for using communication technology as a means of expanding literacy options for both groups. In Chap. 9, **Brigita Strnad** focuses on the art museum as the context for multimodal meaning-making. Descriptions of educational activities at Maribor Art Gallery in Slovenia offer valuable understandings of how adults and children interact with the visual texts of contemporary artists. As senior curator and head of the museum's education department, she brings an exciting perspective that is relevant to parents and early childhood professionals, alike. In Chap. 10, "Children in Crisis: Transforming Fear into Hope Through Multimodal Literacy," **Donalyn Heise** focuses upon the critical subject of creating supportive learning contexts for children who are experiencing homelessness. Dr. Heise offers examples from years of research into a variety of settings where she worked with learners who were homeless to illustrate how multimodal meaning contributes to resilience and transformation of perspectives.

Part Three: Visions

In *Part Three: Visions*, the authors look to the future as they investigate strategies to develop early childhood teachers' understandings of how children's many languages, literacies, and learning may be developed through the arts. First, in Chap. 11, **Kimberly M. Sheridan** presents her updated chapter featuring the Studio Thinking Framework derived from research at Harvard University's Project Zero. Dr. Sheridan explains how eight studio habits of mind, typically developed in intensive high school art classes, can also be encouraged in the early childhood classroom. She describes how applying a Studio Thinking Framework to common activities, such as block building or drawing, contributes to young children's meaning-making as children become more observant, engaged, reflective on their work, and willing to explore and express ideas. In this updated chapter, Dr. Sheridan shares an example from her recent research in the MAKESHOP space at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh to illustrate how the studio approach works in early childhood contexts. In Chap. 12, **Christina Davidson, Susan J. Danby, and Karen Thorpe** explore practices necessary for educators to support children's multimodal meaning-making during classroom use of digital technologies. In their chapter, "'Uh oh'—Multimodal Meaning Making During Viewing of YouTube Videos in Preschool," the authors demonstrate their use of conversation analysis to investigate the multimodal resources employed by the children and their teacher to accomplish individual and shared understandings of video events and extended opportunities for children's learning. Next, in their updated chapter from the first edition, **Kathy Danko-McGhee** and **Ruslan Slutsky** draw attention to the importance of providing stimulating classroom environments that support and promote children's meaning-making. They implement, examine, and compare two approaches to determine the greatest impact on the preservice teachers' abilities to plan environments and discuss the results. Chapter 14 offers insight into the crucial role of teacher educators as **Kelli Jo Kerry-Moran** reflects upon her 10-year journey striving to incorporate multimodal literacy into the teacher education classroom. Dr. Kerry-Moran's ongoing quest to understand multiliteracies and bring meaning-making into preservice education highlights challenges in changing prevailing teaching approaches and altering rigid curriculum paradigms. In Chap. 15, "'Struggling Learner'...or Struggling Teacher?," **Marilyn J. Narey** critiques current early childhood teacher preparation as she examines common "theories in use" regarding children's visual texts ("art") and poses the question: *does teacher education adequately prepare early childhood professionals with the substantive arts learning needed to support young children in multimodal language, literacy, and learning?* Flipping the problem frame to position the adult as "struggling," rather than the child, she suggests structures for critical review of early childhood teacher education programs and practices.

Second Edition Continues to Encourage Multimodal Perspectives of Meaning Making

From the introduction, through these chapters in *Beyond Words, Contexts and Layered Texts*, and *Visions*, to the final concluding chapter, this second edition work, *Multimodal Perspectives of Language, Literacy, and Learning in Early Childhood: The Creative and Critical “Art” of Making Meaning*, evolves to reveal nuances of theory, research, and practice. As we continue forward in the new millennium, these diverse chapters, individually and collectively, offer starting points for each of us in our global early childhood education community to construct, and reconstruct, our multimodal perspectives of language, literacy, and learning as we make meaning with our young children and with each other.

Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Marilyn J. Narey

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