

A sticky end

A learning story

Child: Joshua

Teacher: Chrissy

Joshua peered over my shoulder as I read the book *The Icky Sticky Frog*.²¹ The plot involves the frog spotting his hapless prey and then slurping them up with his long, sticky tongue. Near the end of the story, the frog spots a butterfly. However, this time, instead of the frog eating his quarry, a fish gulps down the frog. Joshua looked at the last picture for a while and then he said, “The butterfly is smiling.”

“Mmm,” I agreed. “Why do you think that is?”

“I think the frog should be smiling, but he’s inside the fish.”

“Do you think the ending should be different?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Josh.

“What do you think the ending should be?” I asked, as we continued to look at the sorry state of affairs.

“I think the fish should eat the butterfly!” said Josh, his eyes lighting up with glee.

Short-term review

We often look at books and read stories around the tea table when the groups are small and receptive. Josh was itching to put his bag away and play outside, but the book captured his interest. I found his comment about the ending of the book very interesting as it has also touched upon a note of disappointment I feel when reading some stories (*The Gingerbread Man* is one that comes to mind ...). I found a handout that was supplied at a recent workshop I attended on literacy. The handout described four roles of a literate person. (Later, in 1999, Luke and Freebody changed this descriptor to “four literacy practices”.²²)

One of the roles is that of text analyst, where the participant challenges the view represented in a particular text. And I guess Joshua did just that. We recognise that literacy involves so much and that it is not only about reading and writing. It involves the ability to look critically at texts too.

What’s happening here?

Chrissy reads a story to a small group of children. Joshua and Chrissy then discuss the story.

What aspects of noticing, recognising, and responding to literacy learning does this assessment exemplify?

This is a conversation between Chrissy and Joshua, initiated by Joshua, who has noticed that “the butterfly is smiling.” The teacher recognises that this is an opportunity for exploring Joshua’s understanding of the story and for encouraging him to give his opinion about it. He responds by suggesting what he thinks should have happened (“the frog should be smiling”) but didn’t. Chrissy asks for clarification: “Do you think the ending should be different?” She then documents the discussion, adding her opinion about disappointing storylines. Perhaps revisiting the documentation will encourage further discussion on this topic.



What does this assessment tell us about literacy learning (using a Te Whāriki lens)?

Joshua stops on his way to play outside – the book “captured his interest”. He is illustrating a capacity to pay attention and to be involved, as well as to consider and invent a new ending for a story. The Well-being/Mana Atua strand of *Te Whāriki* includes the outcome that “children develop a growing capacity to tolerate and enjoy a moderate degree of change, surprises, uncertainty, and puzzling events”.²³ Books are a valuable way to provide opportunities for this development. The teacher is giving Joshua permission to express his own ideas and to take a playful interest in stories, aspects of the Communication/Mana Reo strand.

How does this assessment exemplify developing competence in literacy?

This exemplar illustrates the literacy practice of “critiquing and redesigning”. The teacher’s analysis refers to Luke and Freebody’s early categorisation of the “roles” of a literate person (later changed to “practices”). She comments on the role of a “text analyst”, where the participant challenges the view represented in a particular text. Joshua understands that texts are constructed by authors, whose views can be challenged and changed.