

Affirm your younger students as readers and writers as frequently as possible.

- Before the start of the school year, prepare your classroom with a display of some of the many signs and symbols that your students will already know and be familiar with. These could be any of the following, and you may like to include only two or three particularly significant signs.
 - Traffic signs: Stop, Give Way, street signs, roadwork signs, school signage
 - Shop signs: Aldi, Target, Woolworths, Bunnings, newsagent, chemist, butcher (if your local shopping area still has such businesses)
 - Take-away foods: MacDonald's, Dominoes, Pizza Hut, Subway, Oporto, pizza, hamburgers, fish and chips
 - Car, truck and machinery names and logos: Toyota, John Deere, Ford, Suzuki
 - Food labels: Vegemite, Weet-Bix, corn flakes, milk, peanut butter – whatever the current food fads are
 - Snack foods: Doritos, CCs, Nutella etc.
- Group appropriately if you have included a variety. Leave them without comment until a sharing time together. Ask the students to look around – they may need time to explore the display - and to recognise the signs and symbols they can read.
- Ask students to tell about these and the meaning each has. This is authentic opportunity for moving directly into talking and writing about students' literacy knowledge. They will be eager to share, to talk and to write about their experiences. (Sedgwick 2010 p.3)
- Have writing materials on hand for the first weeks of Term 1, in particular (but all year, in general). Telling, writing and recording are as critical a part of the early daily activities as reading stories is. It establishes what school is about.
- Take the opportunity to complete some early observations/assessments – writing/drawing samples will give plenty of information about text knowledge. Base-line data such as this can be matched to English outcomes and ACARA's [Literacy Learning Progression](#).
- Establish conventions about talking and listening, turn-taking and building on the responses of others.
- Go carefully – the reading and writing selves these learners have developed are fragile.



- Change this display frequently in the early days (that's why it will be easier for you to have only two or three very obvious and significant elements on show). Repeat the above.
- As the term progresses, include images of covers of books that you and they are reading in class – the shared experience of story will hold extra meaning, particularly from those first days at school.
- Extend to multi-modal texts by displaying stills from TV shows/games/movies. While meaning and symbolism are important, 'Peppa Pig' provides perfect phonic practice, while 'Moana', 'Maui' and 'Moto Nui' mean more because of the movie, 'Bluey' (ABC TV) uses alliteration effectively.

This type of display and the interest that will be generated open the opportunities to introduce elements of reading and comprehending text such as

- letter-sound correspondence,
- interpretation of symbols and signs, and
- reading for inference ('What does this symbol mean?' 'Where have you seen this sign?' 'What does Mum/Dad do when they see this sign?').

This is authentic literacy - making meaning from the signs and symbols around us, and meaning that derives directly from the child's familiar context.

Direct relevance

Use such a display at any time to ensure learning about text is directly related to students' own experiences.

You can cut out all other displays in the classroom with the introduction of this strategy. After the early weeks, gradually add information or charts which have direct relevance to the work you are doing with the students.

Put up each display with the students, so they know what it is, why it is there, and how to use the information. Include names of students in the class, your name, a timetable, days of the



week, birthdays and months of the year, numerals, signs we know, our favourite food, parts of the body, etc.



Challenge the given

- When setting up displays, throw in some interesting possibilities:
- If you absolutely must focus on one ‘sound’ at a time by having a display of words or a table with items utilising that letter, break out of the pattern of only using the initial letter. (Show me the evidence that ‘a sound a week’ helps children learn how text works).
- For example, for the letter ‘b’ and the /b/ sound, use children’s names that have the sound prominent, and include ‘Gabby’, ‘Fabiano’, ‘Bobby’, ‘Sebastian’, ‘Bluey’, ‘Bandit’ and ‘Bingo’ (characters from the ABC TV series ‘Bluey’), and other words that are in the children’s vocabularies (or will be once they are exposed to them repeatedly in context) – Blue Heeler, brontosaurus, cobweb, zebra, quibble; items such as bananas, bent nails, bobby pins, beetles, pebble. Book reading to your students around these sounds and ideas build vocabulary and alphabetic/symbolic capacity.



- The exploration of colour should not begin and end in the first year of school – keep exploring with dyes, paint, crayons, and other materials; the history, development, symbolism, and tradition – there is a world of colour out there. Jon Callow includes a brief introduction to the use of colour in his excellent *The Shape of text to come: How image and text work* (2013, pp64-66).
- A standard colour display can be banal for kids who already have this knowledge. Make the learning for all children an exploration and celebration of that colour. Construct pipe cleaner ‘glasses’ with the children, cutting and pasting coloured cellophane for the lens; have playdough in that colour; paint using that colour only; explore the works of artists who have used one colour powerfully – Pollock’s ‘Blue Poles’ demands impersonation, Picasso’s ‘blue’ period examples evoke moody responses and emulation, and Cossington-Smith’s ‘Interior in yellow’ could provide the basis for a homework assignment; wear that colour and its variations for a week; only use that coloured pencil, crayon, paint, paper, fabric, and colour in any of the online drawing/painting apps available to explore the varieties of tone and shade; take photos of playground trees and flowers, collect leaves and examine and report on the different greens; use colours cut from paint colour charts – group the reds, and note the names of these and the references; use the cards to explore the playground - children find all the examples of that colour.
- Prepare and label a very ‘blue’ display as ‘This is a display of red things’. Take note of how long it takes for students to notice. Then talk about why you might have done this, why and how labelling is important, and what you and they can do to alter the sign so it is true. (see Sedgwick 2010 p.25)
- In early years classrooms, make a display of the titles of the significant members of the family who actively care for the children. ‘Mum’, ‘Mummy’, ‘Mama’ (in Arabic, written and read from the right as 'ماما'), ‘Papa’, ‘Dad’, ‘Daddy’, ‘Baba’ (one of the Arabic terms for Papa, in Arabic, written and read from the right as 'بابا' – there is no /p/ sound in Arabic so take care with Arabic first language speakers) ‘Nanna’, ‘Grandpa’, etc. Ask your local language teachers to assist with displays in the languages the students are learning. Use multicultural texts to support your EAL/D learners and their families, and your own learning about other languages (see link in Resources below).
- Add photos, and captions such as ‘This is ...’, or ‘Is this ...?’ Talk about who these people are; find the titles of these people in all the first languages of your students. As soon as possible, get the students to write their own captions to their drawings and photos. They



are already writers as well as readers, and this is purposeful writing. (see Sedgwick 2010 p. 4)



General advice - keep it useful

Don't wallpaper your room for the sake of having something there. If it is irrelevant to immediate learning, it is irrelevant to your students. Put up those displays when you need them. Leave space. Your students will have ideas for how to fill it – ask them. Keep the focus on learning – for your interest, see UNICEF link in Resources, below.

- Put at student head height anything you want your students to read and use as reference. If there is no space because of windows or other physical elements of the classroom, put onto laminated cards for the students to use at their desks. High spaces need large, clear displays, otherwise they are unreadable.



- Don't cover windows with stuff unless the light coming through is a particular feature of the display, as with silhouettes. Our kids need as much natural light as they can get. See above for solution.
- Avoid commercial charts. They do not necessarily reflect what you are doing in class based on Australian curriculum standards, even if they might state that they are. Be vigilant when salespeople insist they know better than you. They don't. They want to sell stuff.
- Get some information on how to make great displays. Ask colleagues who do great displays, consult art teachers, advertisers, and others in the know, to teach you how. There's sure to be an artist, designer or graphic artist among your class's families. Set a homework assignment each term to include ideas from parents, carers and grandparents as to what could be on the walls.
- Don't go for commercial coloured papers and borders (see point above – the word 'commercial' is the clue).
- Read Jon Callow's *The shape of text to come: How image and text work* if you are very keen about examining and teaching all aspects of visual literacy effectively. The classic textbook for investigating image is Kress and van Leeuwen's 1996 text, *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*.

As the NSW English syllabus states, in *Knowledge, understanding and skills*

Through responding to and composing a wide range of texts and through the close study of texts, students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills in order to communicate through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

NSW English syllabus p.13

Our students come to school with much literacy richness. Our classroom displays can build on this, and support our children's access to a vast range of texts.

Resources

Callow, J. (2013) *The Shape of text to come: How image and text work* Newtown: PETAA

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London: Routledge.

Multicultural texts: The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature has just launched Australia's first database of culturally diverse children's books [here](#)

Guardian (2015) *Schools around the world* at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2015/oct/02/schools-around-the-world-un-world-teachers-day-in-pictures>

UNICEF (2016) *Where children learn: 25 photos of classrooms around the world* <https://www.unicef.org.au/blog/stories/july-2016/where-children-learn-photos-classrooms-around-world>

References

ACARA (2017) *National Literacy Learning Progression* at <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/national-literacy-and-numeracy-learning-progressions/>

Callow, J. (2013) *The shape of text to come: How image and text work*. Newtown: PETAA

NSW BOS (2012) *English syllabus K-10* Sydney: NSW Board of Studies (now NESA)

Sedgwick, F. (2010) *100 Ideas for Teaching Literacy* in series 'Continuum One Hundreds', Continuum International Publishing Group: UK