"You know, I could trip and fall onto the track": Inspiring Text Production

Teaser Text:

Innovative literacy pedagogy inspires a young text producer to create multiple texts, in multiple ways.

Abstract:

This article presents the literacy pedagogical approach LAUNCH and reveals its influence on young learners as engineers of literacy learning through text production. Findings are reported from design-based research in a case study of an Australian early years classroom. Using a qualitative orientation, data were generated from video and audio recordings, cogenerative dialogues, and artefacts. Data pertains to a five-year-old boy, his teacher, and Deb [Author 1] in the capacity of coteacher and researcher. This article draws attention to eleven literacy practices, which afforded opportunities to give form to, and express customary, everyday text production such as drawing and writing, whilst introducing new, untried forms of producing text. Central to these literacy practices are pedagogic actions that conceptualise ideas about how teaching and learning text production modalities might occur in the early years of schooling.

Keywords: text production, multimodal, early years, literacy pedagogy, children's literature

Pause and Ponder

- How do your learners produce text?
- What children's literature could you use to inspire learners' text production?
- How might LAUNCH principles be re-imagined to suit your educational context?

Text Production in Current Times

Deb's doctoral research came from pedagogical obstacles throughout years of working as an early years teacher in Australia. It was commonplace that literacy teaching involved a privileging of printed text. For instance, Deb regularly engaged her young learners in paper-based reading and writing activities such as recalling letters and sight words from flashcards, filling in commercially-produced phonics worksheets, and writing sentences using standardized starters such as "I play" and "I like".

For some educators, teaching reading and writing in the way of printable worksheets and commercially-produced workbooks has become the go-to pedagogic practice. In Jay and Knaus's (2018) qualitative Australian study, early years educators reported feeling compelled to narrow their teaching in order to meet early formal literacy knowledge and skills. In consequence, Australian researchers Baroutsis and Woods (2019) argued that the re-establishment of literacy teaching, dominated by print-based text, is subtly gaining strength. However, this change in thinking about literacy teaching is about more than literacy as a linguistic way of communicating, but rather a change in the production aspects of literacy. For Baroutsis and Woods (2019), there has been a thinly veiled shift that has been largely ignored, that being the re-growth of paper-based text production.

In Australia, learners' paper-based writing performance is reported through the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This standardized measurement of writing provides data relevant to learners' attainment of text forms and specific writing knowledge and skills (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2019). So, there is a strong focus on the productive dimensions of writing and print.

Pushing the Boundaries of Productive Dimensions of Text

Deb's study draws upon Bernstein's theorizations of *what is text*. For Bernstein, text is defined as being "anything, which attracts evaluation" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 18). What is constituted as text is reflected through any judgment, hence any evaluation. Therefore, text can include words with moving images, sound, colour, and a range of photographic, drawn, or digitally created visuals (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Text can be digital-based, paper-based, or live (Kress, 2010).

It is clear that Bernstein's conceptual idea of text nests comfortably with contemporary notions of multimodal text (Kalantzis, Cope, Chan, & Dalley-Trim, 2016; New London Group, 1996). When learners produce text with high modality there is potential for externalization of innate competences. Multimodal text can potentially reveal learners' cognitive and linguistic abilities as well as affective and social competences (Bernstein, 2000). The ontological consequence of this is that learners are seen primarily for who they might become, as opposed to who they might be as text producers.

Text that externalizes a plethora of learners' competences seemingly is in conflict with centralized control of productive dimensions of writing and print. This is apparent in Australia's national curriculum. Although the Australian Curriculum acknowledges the affordances of producing words in multiple modes, linguistic abilities carries a significant portion of the practical

load of text production. For example, in the foundation Year, the context of Deb's study, the Australian Curriculum asks learners to use "familiar words and phrases to convey ideas", show evidence of "letter and sound knowledge", "experiment with capital letters and full stops", and present "illustrations that strongly support the printed text" (ACARA, 2019).

Bernstein's theorizations of text led Deb to think about such centralized control of learners' text production. Specifically, whose voice is valued when writing and print tasks are set? When pedagogic actions are explicit, teachers control what is valued and what learners are able to produce. Teachers take up a "position of authority" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 259). Implicit pedagogic actions permit learners' apparent control to externalize cognitive, linguistic, affective, and social competences in the form of text (Bernstein, 1975). Thus, explicitness and implicitness have potentially different effects that establish different productive dimensions of text.

Pedagogic Innovativeness Around Text Production

Preparing young learners to be producers of text requires innovative pedagogic work. Pedagogy should acquaint learners with the potential and possibilities afforded by multiplicity of modes including traditional paper-based texts such as drawing and writing, and new, untried modes including, oral, visual, and audio (Yelland, 2018). As argued by Kress (2010), learners have no difficulty in shifting amid multiple modes.

This is significant as learners are already savvy users of different text production modalities. They are capable of harnessing words, image, and digital communication at home and in their community. Learners are already observing family and friends' use of email and texting on smart phones and other screen-based digital devices. Through experience, learners are comfortably managing digital activities and digital interactions (Collier, 2018; Danby et al, 2013; Kucirkova, 2017).

It is critical educators act pedagogically to permit young learners' choice of text production modes to show their cognitive, linguistic, affective, and social competences. Although research has showcased pedagogic actions (Baroutsis & Woods, 2019; Collier, 2018; Yelland, 2018) there are reality-current barriers. One is the view that teachers are watching schools, educational organizations, and media outlets fixate on standardized high-stakes paper-based writing tests. A second challenge is performativity pressure to teach writing forms and features to help learners do well on such writing tests (Jay & Knaus, 2018).

This leads to the third challenge. Teachers are seemingly compelled to eschew exploration of what is means to produce text in favour of teaching writing knowledge, skills, and processes. But

Pearson, Moje, and Greenleaf (2010) contended that text production should be more about pedagogic actions to permit the externalisation of different ways to make sense of and bring about something. In such case, learners will develop an enriched sense of what it means to produce text.

Deb's doctoral research stands as one exemplar of pedagogic actions that broaden epistemically recognized forms of text. By epistemically recognized Deb means the thoughts and beliefs within the teaching community, such as privileging paper-based as a form of text, over for example, spoken or visual images, linked with audio, visual, spatial, gestural, and tactile text forms (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Kress, 2010).

The particulars of Deb's study are presented, followed by description of LAUNCH, an innovative literacy pedagogical approach to encourage production of text. LAUNCH offers a pedagogic framework for action through 11 literacy practices. Early Years teachers can adopt and adapt these practices to bring emphasis to what is means for learners to produce text.

LAUNCH-ing An Innovative Pedagogy Inspired by Google

LAUNCH is new, and has not been previously presented in any educational context. LAUNCH is an acronym for: (L) latch on an idea, (A) ask questions and search for answers, (U) use your creativity, (N) never be afraid to fail, (C) collaborate and cooperate and (H) have a blast. In developing LAUNCH, Deb was drawn to American multinational technology company Google, and their ways of creating occasions for engineers to act as creative directors, independent thinkers, and leading innovators.

At the time of Deb's study in mid-2017, Google had eight continually evolving principles of innovation. She wondered if a reimagining of the principles may offer an alternate way of teaching young learners to think about text and act as producers of text. In collaborative partnership, Deb and her coteacher re-imagined Google's eight principles and when clustered together they formed LAUNCH – an acronym whereby each letter represented one principle, as revealed in Table 1.

LAUNCH allowed the literacy practice of text production to grow out of the classroom environment, and the young learners within that environment. It started with an idea, a thought, or a problem that needed attention. Young learners were encouraged to nurture their idea, to love it, and to see it grow. Deb wanted them to think big, be a visionary, and let their ideas run wild.

LAUNCH-ing the Research

Design-based research (DBR) was utilized in an exploratory case study of an Australian Preparatory classroom. By way of background, the Preparatory Year is the foundation of early years

4

education in Australian schools. Preparatory learners are 5 years-of-age by 30 June in the year they enroll. DBR's purpose, according to Anderson and Shattuck (2012), is to build and form theory and develop design principles to "guide, raise awareness of, and improve practice and research in an educational context" (p. 12). The research aimed to explore the literacy pedagogical approach LAUNCH, and its influence on the text production experience of 14 learners.

The methodological approach taken to develop LAUNCH was McKenney and Reeves's (2012) DBR micro-cycles. By way of background, micro-cycles are cyclical in nature, with repeated cycles of: (1) analyse and explore; (2) design and construct; and (3) evaluate and reflect. Data were generated through video and audio recordings, cogenerative dialogues, and artefacts. LAUNCH occurred over a four-week timeframe with three or four lessons per week, generally lasting for approximately 60 minutes.

LAUNCH-ing Jake's Idea

Jake (all names are pseudonyms) is one of 14 learners in an Australian Preparatory classroom. Jake's class is located at an independent school, which delivers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years (PY) program. The IB PYP aligns with Australia's national curriculum, and is validated as a learning framework. Miss Walton, Jake's teacher and Deb's coteacher, is an advocate for literacy teaching that values learner home, school, and community activities, interests and capabilities. Jake is the focus of this article.

Miss Walton and Deb spent about two weeks reading and re-reading selected literature to Jake and his classmates. In collaborative partnership, Miss Walton and Deb sought books with appealing illustrations and interesting narratives. LAUNCH principles underpinned by themes such as ideas, creativity, and failure can be difficult for young learners to conceptualize, so books needed to hold their attention long enough to invite philosophical discussion and reflection.

Then, Jake and his classmates were introduced to six LAUNCH principles. Each principle was represented by a letter, which formed the acronym LAUNCH: (L) latch on an idea, (A) ask questions and search for answers, (U) use your creativity, (N) never be afraid to fail, (C) collaborate and cooperate and (H) have a blast. The principles were discussed using happenings from the selected children's literature. Visual prompts, as shown in Figure 1, laid the foundation for a shared vocabulary to communicate thoughts and ideas about text production.

When it came time to LAUNCH after morning calendar work, Jake and his classmates were gifted time to think, talk, and sketch: What is my idea and how can I bring it to life? Ben was worried about chipping his tooth when biting down on gumballs, the hungry ibis

birds were causing havoc for Russell in the lunchtime eating area, and Scotty didn't know if a Tyrannosaurus Rex was taller than his house. For Jake, he worried that the painted yellow lines on the edge of the train platform were the only way to remind him to keep back from the platform edge. "Miss Walton the yellow lines will not keep me safe... you know, I could trip and fall onto the track" he announced.

What follows is a contextual snapshot of Jake's text production experience supported by the LAUNCH principles. It is important to note that Jake did not enact these principles in linear order. The LAUNCH principles are not to be considered as an unyielding process for text production. The rationale for this is that the classroom is dynamic and complex, and as such, there is not one way the principles would, or could work for Jake and his classmates.

(L) Latch onto an Idea

To increase Jake's awareness of ideas we read *What Do You Do with an Idea*? by Kobi Yamada. This book inspired Jake to find an idea, to nurture it, to love it and to see it grow. Jake quickly latched onto the idea of facing a problem in his lifeworld. When Deb asked, "what will become of your idea Jake?" this simple, yet powerful question created an opportunity for Jake to respond and express his thoughts, and justify his position. Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- What is an idea?
- What makes an idea significant?
- How might you care for an idea?
- How have ideas changed your world?

With guidance and support, Jake found visuals of train platforms via Google on Deb's iPhone. He noted that almost all of the images included a yellow line: the unsettling so-called safety feature. These digital images were used as evidence of the problem. When Jake talked about using the iPhone to "mark up" these images, Miss Walton and Deb were offered a glimpse of how he might give form to, and choose to produce text with digital technology.

(A) Ask Questions and Search for Answers

The books *Rosie Revere, Engineer* (Beaty, 2013) and *Iggy Peck, Architect* by Andrea Beaty showed Jake how to search for answers, by asking questions. When Rosie the budding engineer asked herself if she could build a contraption to help her Aunt fly, this question was tricky, but

worth her attention. Like Rosie, Jake felt his idea needed attention when he said, "....you know, I could trip and fall onto the track!" Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- Is there ever only one answer?
- Do you think questions always have answers?
- Where/how can we look for answers?
- Who might help us?
- Can answers always be found?

Using self-selected paper-based materials, Jake sketched a solution for a kid-safe train platform. To help Jake think critically about his designed solutions, Miss Walton acted as a resource and implicitly put forward open-ended questions. She listened as Jake told her in quite practical terms about his design – what he did, why he did it, and how it would keep kids safe.

In subsequent sketches, Jake labeled parts of his design: gate, button, stick, train, Mum and me. This was evidence of Jake drawing on the "interdisciplinary nature of literacy" (Hill, 2014). To explain, Jake called into play foundation year English, Science, and Mathematical knowledge. He told Miss Walton how objects (gate and stick) might move (up, down, forwards, and backwards), and what materials (paddle pop sticks, pipe cleaners, toothpicks) would/would not be suitable for his 3D model of a kids-safe train platform. Jake's text externalized his content knowledge, while showing his affective ability as a designer and producer of a designed solution.

(U) Use Your Creativity

To develop Jake's creativity we read books in the Creatrilogy by Peter H. Reynolds: *The Dot*, *Ish*, and *Sky Color*. These books showed Jake creative thinking through tinkering, experimenting, recording, speaking, and generally trying different things. Jake was gifted time to frame his ideas, externalize his thoughts, and use his creativity. Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- What makes an idea creative?
- What materials could I use to be creative?
- How can you be creative?
- Where can I be creative?

In collaboration with Jake and his classmates, Miss Walton, and Deb collaboratively devised "I can" statements to help better understand this principle. The language was age-appropriate; it was repetitive, and most importantly, came from the strengths, interests, and capabilities of learners. The

"I can" statements offered insight into ways Jake might produce text. They gave Jake apparent control to choose what texts he wanted to produce.

The following "I can" statements showcase Jake's production of text in different forms, all of which could potentially attract evaluation.

- I can draw: visually depicted things, people, and places
- I can design: sketched paper-based and digital-based design solutions
- I can write: labeled sketches, made lists of materials
- I can ask: sought construction advice and iPad instructions from Miss. Walton
- I can build: constructed a 3D model of his design solution
- I can tell: described design details, responded to others' questions, expressed opinions and feelings, clarified positions
- I can record: video and audio-recorded his design solution using an iPad
- I can capture: took photographs of his design solution using an iPad, took a screenshot of a train platform

Jake's text production involved an array of oral, paper, and screen-based digital texts. Implicit pedagogic instruction permitted Jake to produce different forms of text. For example, he sometimes chose a particular text form, but abandon it, and then chose a different type of text. Not satisfied, for a second time Jake abandoned his text; however, then returned to his original text. This pendulum-like movement allowed Jake apparent control over externalising his cognitive, linguistic, social, and affective competencies (Bernstein, 1975, 2000).

Some of these texts were familiar forms to Jake, such as drawing, writing, constructing, and telling, and aptly externalized his competencies and capabilities. Others were new and experimental, and required explicit instruction. For example, when Jake wanted to produce a video and audio recording explaining the rationale for the kids-safe train platform, he needed explicit instruction around locating the camera icon and manipulating playback and volume controls.

(N) Never Be Afraid to Fail

To help Jake feel okay with the sometimes-uncomfortable feeling of failure, we read *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires and *The Book of Mistakes* by Corinna Luyken. These books showed Jake that trying and failing repeatedly could spark inspired thinking and creativity.

Jake's initial failed paddle pop gate design was celebrated with much enthusiasm. Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- What does it mean to fail?
- Can failed ideas become successful ideas?
- Is failure a reason to give up?
- Is it OK to fail?

Jake's failures were viewed as opportunities for him to self-reflect. When his paddle-pop gate fell apart, Jake reconsidered his chosen materials and design choices. Open-ended questions helped Jake understand where and why his design was correct or incorrect, flawed or faulty. Then, Jake was left to explore pathways until it became clear what needed to be done to solve his design problem. Failing necessitated Jake to manage the shift between failure and exploration. For Jake, this movement helped build patience and perseverance, and grit in the face of text production problems.

(C) Collaborate and Cooperate

To enhance Jake's awareness of collaborating and cooperating with others we read *Beautiful Hands* by Kathryn Otoshi and Bret Baumgarten and *Iggy Peck, Architect* by Andrea Beaty. Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- What makes a good collaboration?
- Can sharing ideas help other's ideas to grow?
- Is working together better or worse than working alone?

When Jake explained the functionality of his gate to his classmate Joel, a time of togetherness sparked capacity for immediate responsiveness.

Joel: How long would you put the gate?

Jake: It's going to be 1,2,3,4,5,6,7....and maybe we should put the button here.

Joel: Why?

Jake: Cause' the kids can reach it.

Joel: OK.

Jake: It can open and shut.

Joel: What about the blind kids...they won't know where the button is. What if they go past the gate?

When Joel asked, "what about the blind kids...they won't know where the button is", Jake's lived experience triggered a questioning of his designed solution. Jake was catapulted into the chaotic nature of re-exploring his idea; he was bumped from complacency, and forced to rethink the *what*, *how* and *why* of his design. Jake revisited previous paper-based sketches, and in collaboration with Joel and Miss Walton, discussed where to add a motion-activated audio sound telling the visually impaired how to locate the gate button.

(H) Have a Blast

The book *The Cow Tripped Over the Moon* by Tony Wilson reminded Jake to have a blast! When Cow trips and mis-jumps, he never gives up, and in the end, celebrates his success with an evening party with his friends. Like Cow, Jake showed effort, hard work, and persistence and was rewarded by finding an idea, nurturing it, loving it and seeing it grow into a curated collection of texts. Questions for philosophical discussion and reflection included:

- How can you measure success?
- Can you have fun, even when you fail?
- What does having a blast look like and feel like?

To celebrate, Jake proudly shared his assortment of oral, print, and digital texts with the school Principal, other teachers and their learners, his peers, and the wider school community at the LAUNCH extravaganza. Jake's texts included paper-based drawings and lists, and new, untried forms of producing text, using digital technologies such as a video-recorded explanation of his designed solution for a kids-safe train platform. Jake's 3D designed model sat as the centerpiece of his display.

LAUNCH-ing Text Production Practices

Table 2 details the practices implemented by Miss Walton and Deb, which encouraged Jake's oral, print, and digital design and production of text. The aim of these practices is to contest the re-emerging idea of literacy being based in paper and present an alternative of what it means for learners to produce text. The practices are powerful for the reason that they are a move away from an explicit picture of what learners should know, feel, and do when producing text. Of significance, educators can adopt and adapt these practices to suit their elementary classrooms.

LAUNCH-ing the Conclusion

The LAUNCH text production practices provided Jake with an opportunity to produce an assortment of text. Through these practices, Jakes was able to externalize different modes of expression. By so doing, Jake experienced a broader, more exploratory approach to text production. Multimodality was the unifying feature of text production, and digital technologies such as iPhones and iPads were viewed as being complimentary to, rather than being pitted against, paper-based production.

The significance of this work is the notion that teachers must push the boundaries of productive dimensions of text. It is critical educators act pedagogically to permit young learners' choice of text production modes to externalize their cognitive, linguistic, affective, and social competences. The ontological consequence is pedagogic philosophies of ways in which pedagogic actions can inspire text production, and most importantly, understandings of discovery of text production beings.

Take Action!

1. Focus learners' attention on favourite children's literature. Match character traits with LAUNCH principles.
2. List ways learners produce text. Discuss how ideas of what text is, affects their text production choices.
3. Examine text production through a focus on learners' interests and hobbies. What sorts of texts do they encounter engaging in these activities and hobbies?
4. Analyze current evaluation of text production. Is there scope for learners to externalize their expertise using different modes? How might rubrics be re-imagined to suit this?
5. Educators in higher year levels could choose books with a more sophisticated rule of LAUNCH themes: *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2010) and *George's Marvelous Medicine* (Dahl, 2007).

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More to Explore

- Schmidt, E., & Rosenberg, J. (2014). *How Google Works*. London, Great Britain: John Murray Publishers. This book explores Google's principles of innovation. How might these principles be re-imagined to suit your educational context?

- Educators working in diverse contexts might choose to explore more diverse and inclusive books, which meld with LAUNCH themes, to reflect their classroom: *Calvin Can't Fly: The Story of a Bookworm Birdie* (Berne, 2010) and *The OK Book* (2007).

Table 1

A Reimagining of Google's Principles of Innovation

Google's Principles of Innovation	Reimagined Principles
Focus on the user	
Open will win	(L) Latch on an idea
Ideas come from everywhere	(A) Ask questions and search for answers
Think big, start small	(U) Use your creativity
Never fail to fail	(N) Never be afraid to fail
Launch early and iterate	(C) Collaborate and cooperate
Be a platform, float all boats	(H) Have a blast
Make it matter	

Table 2

LAUNCH Practices to Encourage Text Production

LAUNCH Practices	Jake's Text Production
We observed and listened.	We intently listened to Jake, to hear and encourage what was important to him. Observing and listening externalized Jake's inherent strengths and capabilities through his choices of oral, print and digital production of texts.
We provided implicit and explicit instruction.	Jake needed both implicit and explicit instruction. For example, when he wanted to record his explanation of his 3D text, he required explicit instruction of portrait orientation and zooming on the iPad then, was delegated control to explore those functions.
We offered diverse places and spaces.	To stimulate Jake's text production, he had freedom to work in a multitude of spaces such as at group tables, on beanbags in the classroom library, or on the carpeted floor. Sometimes, he worked in spaces outside the classroom.

We made available print, digital, and live resources.	Jake was given freedom to explore resources needed to produce text. These resources included paper, digital, and live resources. Sometimes, Jake was not at all attracted to paper-based resources, instead choosing to work with live and digital resources.
We made available experts.	At times, we did not have the answers. We found experts within and beyond the school community. For example, when Jake needed construction advice, his Dad provided valuable know-how. Together, they shared ideas and problem-solved.
We urged cooperation and collaboration.	We provided opportunities for Jake to flourish through creating an environment that allowed cooperation and collaboration. However, we acknowledge that, at times, Jake needed time to work alone, particularly when constructing his 3D model.
We allowed self-pacing.	Jake had his own sense of time. This permitted Jake to self-pace time required to meet and understand new content knowledge, skills, and processes. He also encountered time to make choices, and face the affordances and challenges of those choices.
We allowed control over knowledge from different disciplines.	We didn't limit Jake to experiencing English knowledge. As Jake produced text, he experienced knowledge, skills and processes from content areas including Science, Mathematics, Technologies, and Art.
We celebrated failure with much enthusiasm.	We wanted Jake to find a balance between drawing on competencies and capabilities, while trying something new, even if it meant failing. When Jake did fail, we celebrated. For Jake, failure was a chance for new thinking about producing texts.
We used children's literature as a didactic prompt.	Children's literature permitted Jake to understand the LAUNCH actions. The literature laid the foundation for the development of a shared vocabulary to communicate ideas and thoughts about the LAUNCH actions.
We accepted pedagogic uncertainty.	The classroom is a complex and unpredictable space, and at times, required us to work in uncertain territory. We had to be open to going along with Jake's strengths and abilities around oral, print and digital production of text.

Figure 1

LAUNCH Principles to Encourage Jake's Text Production

(Artworks by Dr. Sue Pillans: www.drsuepillans.com)