'Baddies' in the classroom: media education and narrative writing

Rebekah Willett

Abstract

When teachers allow students to write stories that include elements of popular media, we must ask what to do with these media elements once they have entered the classroom. This article relates findings from a classroom study focusing on children's media-based story writing. The study looks at children as producers of new media texts and describes their activities as a form of 'media education'. The data show that through their production of media-based stories, the children are reflecting on their consumption of media. Furthermore, the children's media-based stories make explicit some of their implicit knowledge of new media forms. Lastly, the children's stories provide ample opportunities for teachers to engage in important discussions about media within the framework of existing writing programmes.

Key words: writing, media education, primary education

Why embrace popular culture?

Many teachers breathed a sigh of relief when the Pokémon phenomenon finally started to wane. No more school accessories adorned with strange cartoon creatures, no more cries of 'Pika Pika' on the playground, no more decisions about whether or not to ban card trading, and no more stories with incomprehensible plots and unpronounceable (yet perfectly spelled) names. However, Pokémon has only been replaced by Digimon and now Yu-Gi-Oh in a series of products starring in children's popular culture, which at times are so pervasive they cannot be separated from children's everyday lives.

Pokémon typifies a market saturation strategy that incorporates various forms of media, and therefore varying resources for children to draw on, as they negotiate their culture into schools. Integrating visuals, music, and even a special linguistic style, Pokémon comes in the form of linear narratives (novellas, cartoon shows, and movies), computer games, cards (for collecting, trading, and playing), and the various accessories through which children display their fandom. If children are constantly subjected to these pervasive media forms outside of schools, should schools not be places of haven, places in which children do not have to compete with each other for who has the most valuable card, places which present and encourage 'quality' products such as classic literature and art?

One argument for using or allowing popular culture in the classroom centres on the opportunities it offers for engaging children whose experiences and competencies may not fit with the traditional literary canon and school skills. Marsh and Millard (2000) suggest that when popular culture is excluded from schools, many children may feel alienated by the differences between the literacy practices in the school environment and those found in the home. A limited view of children's peer culture assumes that children's identities, partially defined through interactions around media, can be left behind when children walk through the school door. There is also an assumption that children want to and are able to take up an identity that is defined within school discourse. There is no room, in this view, for a child who has a positive peer identity, but who struggles with academics.

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that the benefit of using popular culture is to reach 'alienated' children. Accepting children's culture is an important part of developing a broader view of literacy, a view that is essential, if not inevitable, in the modern world. Millard (2003) describes how new generations of children are experiencing a whole range of literacy practices that will look increasingly different from schools' practices, if schools' view of literacy is not transformed. Calling for the creation of 'a literacy of fusion' Millard implores teachers to fuse "aspects of school requirements and children's interests into what becomes both a more tasty and a more nourishing diet" (2003, p. 6).

Kress (1997) discusses the importance of viewing texts as children do – that is, as multimodal. "In a multimodal system, the child has a choice as to which aspects, angles, features, to focus on, to highlight for herself or himself" (1997, p. 97). According to Kress, viewing texts as multimodal allows children to make meaning from them. It is important to know that children see different forms of media (stories, videogames, cartoons, movies etc.) as equally plausible bases for written texts and will use them in negotiations as such. Bearne and Kress (2001) describe how different modes of representation offer different 'affordances', that is, different possibilities for use and engagement. By accepting

children's culture into the classroom, teachers can begin to see the multimodality of texts and the different affordances of a variety of modes of communication.

Through this broader view of literacy, teachers are able to draw on children's experiences, which then allows them to show respect for children's ideas and culture. Making use of their media experiences in the classroom allows children to express themselves, not just as students, but also as social individuals, and gives teachers more space to draw on varying cultures, personalities, and values. Furthermore, in a constructivist sense, teachers are building on students' previous experiences and knowledge, helping them to make sense of the literacy surrounding them and extending what they already know. In such a community of respect, children can feel comfortable and confident to develop their literacy. So drawing on children's experiences, which includes accepting popular media in classrooms, will benefit all children, not simply those who may feel alienated from school practices.

Another reason for schools to embrace popular culture is the high motivation that comes from using texts that are familiar and have high status within children's peer culture. This gives teachers the opportunity to engage with issues in ways that are relevant and urgent for children. Anne Haas Dyson describes class discussions which examined ideas about 'fairness and goodness', literary elements, genres, and ideology (1997, p. 183). She writes, ''The children's willingness to share their opinions in the forum was supported by the presence of images rooted in popular culture, images that the *children* had expertise in'' (1997, p. 182, emphasis in the original).

Play offers children chances to be powerful, spontaneous, independent, and creative; and in a hierarchical setting of a school, these may be rare opportunities for children. Cathy Pompe writes, ''In disappearing from school, playfulness took with it the opportunities for personal projection and identification, the negotiating space where anything could be made to happen, which used to make the curriculum friendly and resonant'' (1996, p. 119). Children's engagement with popular culture offers them a space in which to play and fantasise. Free writing time shares some of the features of play, and can be seen as a time to chat with friends, play with Beanie Babies, relive a recent James Bond adventure, and fantasise about pop idols. This time is valued by children, as is evidenced by their extreme interest in open writing activities such as journals (see for example, Graham, 2003). To use Mary Hilton's phrase (1996), in many senses, popular culture offers teachers and children the opportunity to engage with very 'potent fictions'.

Clearly there are many advantages to embracing and exploring popular culture in schools and moving toward Millard's vision of a literacy of fusion. However, many questions arise when popular culture enters the classroom, and teachers need to consider how to address these concerns (cf. Lambirth, 2003). It is difficult to know how to help children when they write stories based on cartoon television shows, such as Pokémon, which make little or no sense to an unknowing adult, but perfect sense to a fellow Pokémon fan. Children's media-based stories appear problematic by school literacy standards: they contain implausible characters and plots, unnecessary violence, lack of development, far too much dialogue, and insufficient description (see Graves, 1994). How much depth could a child develop about a Pokémon character? One possible answer to the dilemma of wanting to embrace popular culture, yet not knowing how to align it with the traditions of schools, is to consider media education.

Research context

An important step for teachers to take when allowing media into the classroom is to see children as active readers and producers of media texts, rather than passive consumers. Recent media coverage of studies of the effects of children watching too much television have warned about increased levels of ADHD, obesity, and 'slow development', reinforcing the widely held view that children are passive consumers of media (Gentile et al., 2004; Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2004; Walker, 2004). However, in this article, the stance I take comes from a media and cultural studies perspective that focuses on the meaning-making involved in reading media. In this view, neither the text nor the viewer is the determiner of meaning. The viewer is not affected in a predetermined way, but neither is the viewer completely free to create any meaning from a given text. Particular readings of text are 'invited' by dominant discourses, but alternative readings are also produced within the field of the viewer. At the same time as viewers are choosing their positions, or actively reading media texts, they are also being positioned by the surrounding discourses.

So, for example, in the study on which this article is based, a group of boys chose to write a story based on *The Simpsons* cartoon. Their interpretation of *The Simpsons*, a funny and boyish text, is produced partly through notions about masculinity and children. The presence of toilet humour, for example, is considered immature and tasteless by the children's parents, who raised concerns with me. So by writing a Simpsons story, including toilet humour in order to stick to the genre, the boys are positioning themselves as rule-breakers, going against the wishes of their parents and many teachers, and also expressing a particular form of masculinity within their peer culture.

However, what choices do male viewers of *The Simpsons* have? Either they find the show funny or they do not, and if they do not then they are resisting (or simply not identifying with) the dominant discourse around

masculinity, where it is a boyish thing to laugh at toilet jokes (see also Newkirk, 2002). So although the fans of *The Simpsons* are actively reading the text as funny, not as disgusting and tasteless, their choice of interpretation comes from a limited range of options. In summary, from a media and cultural studies position, "Meaning is seen . . . not as given by the text, but as constructed in the social process of reading" (Buckingham, 1993, p. 18).

Methodology

This article is based on data collected as part of a larger study that looked at children's use of popular culture in their creative writing in the context of school. Using methods from teacher-research and ethnographic traditions, I collected data from the class I was teaching, focusing on six children aged eight to nine. Data collection included observations of social interactions, photocopies of stories children wrote, interviews with children, group discussions, tape-recordings of children talking while writing stories, and a diary of my experiences as a teacher-researcher. Using a form of discourse analysis, I focused on three areas in my data analysis: the writing process, media consumption and production, and identity work.

In this article I will discuss part of one story, called 'The Baddies', containing various forms of media, written by a 9-year-old Swedish boy, Oyvind. (All students' names are pseudonyms.) I include only the first three pages of the story (Figures 1–3), as these demonstrate the literacy practices I discuss, and the whole is too lengthy for such analysis here. I describe Oyvind's experience of writing 'The Baddies' as a process of production of new media that involves analysing media and making explicit his knowledge of various media forms.

Children as media producers

So what happens when readers of media become writers? Various studies describe the processes that occur when children produce media-based narrative texts (Buckingham et al., 1995; Dyson, 2003; Grace and Tobin, 1998; Moss, 1989). These studies start with the premise that children are not merely copying texts. Production involves using media in order to construct meanings from texts, explore identities, and gain and share pleasures. When their teachers allow them to write media-based stories, children are able to become producers of their own media texts. This process of production involves a certain level of analysis of media texts, including choosing and synthesising various texts, transforming and reinterpreting them, and negotiating media into classroom structures.

The choices Oyvind made in his story 'The Baddies' show that he was following a particular genre, the
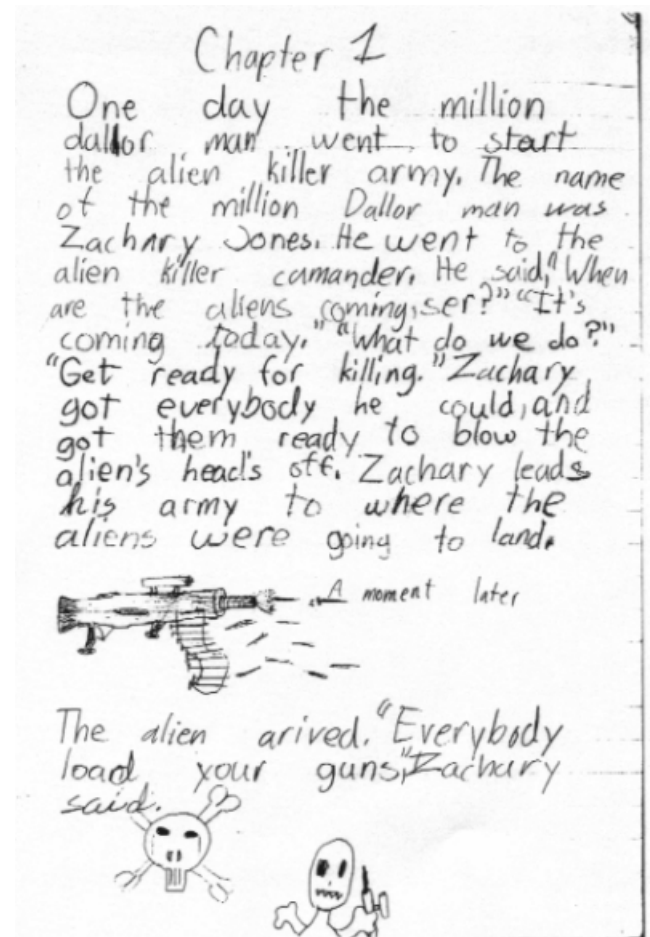

Figure 1. 'The Baddies' by Oyvind (age 9), p.1

'earth versus alien shoot 'em up'. To produce his own text in that genre, he had to think about various elements, including language, character traits, plot, and setting. The phrase 'one moment later' is reminiscent of comic book transitions. He combines characters from several different sources: aliens, the million-dollar man, and Terminator. Later in the story he uses many forms of media, adding elements of videogames including mazes and hand-held video consoles. This synthesis of media forms is not only creative: it also shows that Oyvind was analysing these other media forms, to see which elements he could use and transform to fit into his school story.

Bearne and Kress write, "Children, it seems, follow the inherent *logics* of the modes: they use image for representing the spatial arrangements of salient elements in the world; and they use speech-like writing for representing the temporal arrangements of significant events in the world" (Bearne and Kress, 2001, p. 91, emphasis in the original).

This is an accurate description of what Oyvind is doing in his story. 'The Baddies' shows that he was recognising the multimodal nature of texts and the differing affordances of various text types. For example, the illustration offers more affordance for such a battle scene than does a written description. In the drawing

Figure 2. 'The Baddies' pp. 2–3

> Chapter 1
>
> One day the million dollar man went to start the alien killer army. The name of the million
> dollar man was Zachary Jones. He went to the alien killer commander. He said, "When are the
> aliens coming, sir?" "It's coming today" "What do we do?" "Get ready for killing." Zachary got
> everybody he could, and got them ready to blow the aliens' head off. Zachary leads his army to
> where the aliens were going to land. (illustration - a moment later) The alien arrived.
> "Everybody load your guns," Zachary said. (illustrations) The aliens are attacking. "Fire one!"
> The jets shot an alien spaceship. "Yes!"

Figure 3. 'The Baddies', pp. 1–3

we can "hear sounds, see movement and feel the bright flashes of explosions" (Eve Bearne, personal communication). Therefore, it is appropriate to use extensive illustrations *as part of* this story. By using varied media in their stories, children are exploring the logics and affordances of different modalities and engaging with, negotiating, and making meaning from the various media practices that surround them.

As Oyvind transformed the variety of media texts to fit his story, he was reinterpreting the media forms. Children use, engage with, and interpret a single text in a variety of ways (Buckingham, 1993; Kress, 1997). For example, videogames are not just sources of play for children – they offer visual images, dialogue, and imaginary worlds. They can be used to fantasise, to generate new stories, and as a cultural resource for talk with peers. A study by Robertson and Good (2003) shows that using role-play computer games as a prompt for writing helps young writers to develop characterisa-tion and dialogue between characters, and is particularly helpful for children with low literacy skills.

However, as Juul (2001) argues, although computer gamers can tell stories from their playing sessions, and games have narrative elements, there are fundamental differences between games and narratives. As opposed to the temporal logic of verbal narratives, computer games follow a spatial logic and are often about moving around spaces with no set sequence of events. So Oyvind's story is bound to be non-temporal, given the sources on which he is drawing. In writing a story in which characters die and come back to life, get lost in mazes, encounter various surprise 'baddies' for no particular reason, and above all, stop playing abruptly, Oyvind is using the affordance offered to him in videogames.

If we accept that children are exploring and analysing media forms as they create their own media-based

stories, we may ask how conscious these acts are. How do we know that children are actually thinking about their choices and doing some sort of reflective analysis of media? It is hard to tell. When an educator (or researcher) asks children in school whether they are thinking about what they are doing, children adopt a school discourse which may only pay lip service to the type of thinking that we as educators are hoping for (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994). However, I interviewed Oyvind and all my other students at the end of the year about their story-writing experiences, and one theme that emerged from interviews was the amount of negotiation involved in writing stories in the classroom. Oyvind's story clearly is not the kind that is modelled explicitly through lessons I taught, or implicitly through the types of books found in schools. Oyvind had a lot of negotiating to do in order for his story to fit with school standards on some level. As I will describe in the following section, his negotiations and discussions show how he is engaging with and critiquing various discourses surrounding children's media.

Children writing violence – "That's what the game has in it!"

One of the most contentious topics of the story that Oyvind (and other boys) negotiated into the classroom was violence. Anxiety around children and media violence is fuelled by research that falsely claims a causal relationship between children's consumption of media violence and violent behaviour (Hodge and Tripp, 1986). Particularly after numerous school shootings (e.g. Dunblane, 1996; Columbine High School, 1999), I noticed an increased anxiety in the parent population at my school about children playing with anything resembling a gun. Thomas Newkirk (2002) also describes the extreme reactions in North American schools to children who include 'violence' in their writing, reactions that have ranged from children being placed in juvenile detention to referring children for counselling. Children's ideas about violence and the way they negotiate what might be categorised as 'violence' into their stories reflects the discourse from school, home, and media.

Children in my class told me that other teachers do not allow guns or killing in stories. During the interviews that I held at the end of the year, I raised this issue and asked, "What would you say to teachers when they say your stories are too violent, there are too many guns and too many people getting killed?". Essentially I was asking the children to critique the panic position in relation to violence in their stories (see Barker, 1997), and they had plenty to say. One of the basic arguments was that they were following a genre. If they were writing an alien versus earth story it makes sense to have killing in it. Or, in the case of videogame stories (a new genre which my class created and labelled), they said things such as "that's what the computer or video

game has in it . . . you couldn't say, James Bond walked in with a gun, nobody tried to shoot him, he walked up took something, he walked out, they didn't try to shoot the plane, so he went away, and he didn't kill anybody" (child in interview). Through the use of school discourse, in this case around genre, the children were negotiating 'violence' into the classroom, and at the same time analysing 'violence' in their texts.

They also had developed strict ideas about the degrees of violence that were allowed in school stories. The girls in the class told me that excessive and gruesome violence is not allowed:

> Marcia: it couldn't be like . . . everybody in the whole world died because the Martians came down to earth
> Betsy: you shouldn't write every single detail
> Marcia: you couldn't write like he screeched as the dagger went flying through her ear and came out the other ear or something like that

Oyvind and a friend said that the way people are described as being killed is important, arguing that writing 'people die' is much less violent than writing 'someone was shot in the head'.

> Roy: you could do killing, but not like 500 times in a story you can only do them like five ten a couple . . . 'the man came up and shot him in the head' it wouldn't be as violent as that it would just say 'the man blew up the building and there were some people who died in there'
> Oyvind: you can't just come and say 'the man shooted at the person's head and blood squirted out'

Thomas Newkirk's interviews with children include remarkably similar discussions in relation to degrees of violence allowed in stories; in the case of Newkirk's interviews it was the amount of blood that was regulated (Newkirk, 2002). Statements such as these show that children are engaged in debates about media violence. Interestingly it was not through a class discussion that they had come up with these 'rules for killing in stories', but through their production of the stories in the context of a classroom.

Room for discussion

I would like to point out here that the kinds of questions I asked and the responses I received indicate the possibilities for engaging children in debates about children's media culture. Because many writing programmes include time for students to share their stories with the class, teachers can ask such questions as part of their writing programmes. This seems an obvious point – you can engage children in good discussions during sharing time. But when I was teaching and following works by Donald Graves (1983, 1994) and others, my colleagues and I asked the children the same questions whenever they had finished sharing a

story: ''What did you remember about the story?'', ''What did you like about the story?'', and ''Do you have any suggestions for improvement?''.

It is shocking to think about the opportunities for discussion missed through this limited view of audience feedback. When I interviewed my students at the end of the year, I became aware of the amount of analysis that was taking place when they were writing, and the discussion potential in their media-based stories, discussion that could be called 'media education'. It is important to note that these are debates that children want to engage in. If we think of literacy in a broad sense, as including movies and their experience of narrative on computer games as well as conventional writing, such debates help students make sense of their literacy experiences. There are many other questions that children are more than happy to discuss in reference to their stories, many of which involve a media studies approach.

For example, looking at Oyvind's story, we could discuss whether he was being creative or just copying the various 'alien versus earth' movies. He included many elements from Arnold Schwarzenegger movies (Terminator, 'hasta la vista, Baby', drawings of bazookas). However, he insisted he was not copying other texts. We could then investigate the word 'creative'. Within the primary classroom, children are often expected to find some inner untainted source for their creativity to produce 'quality' texts. Similarly, in media studies, it is often only those students who produce a critical or 'oppositional' text who are seen as showing worthwhile understanding of media texts. Buckingham, Grahame and Sefton-Green (1995) describe how this view of copying as 'unthinking' is partly based on teachers' resistance to allowing children to produce texts based on media fads, which are often completely unfamiliar to teachers and seen as a threat to their authority, and partly on the ignorance of the processes which occur when children imitate or produce texts.

One of the statements that several children made during the end-of-year interviews was that writing helps increase creativity, and I jokingly asked how they knew their creativity was increasing, to which they had no answer. This type of interaction indicates that there are spaces and opportunities to explore media-related discourses, as well as looking at discourses embedded in the literary canon of schools.

We could also discuss elements of Oyvind's story as parody. Jenny Grahame sees parody as an important textual form for students who wish to share the pleasures of media texts, particularly in school settings (Grahame, 1995). According to Grace and Tobin (1998), parodies not only provide children with pleasure, but also both in the production and the sharing with classmates, parody ''provides a space for critique and change. It may pose questions, challenge assumptions and offer new possibilities'' (Grace and Tobin, 1998,

p. 49). Through parody, which Grace and Tobin, using Bakhtin's analogy to carnival scene, describe as being produced in ''a playful carnivalesque context'', children can be seen not as reflecting their perceptions of what the world is really like, but as playing with power, expressing their desires, and acting out their concerns.

During the interviews held at the end of the year, children in my class were ready to enter into discussions about school practices and discourses. These discussions arose spontaneously out of a general reflection with children about the writing process. Their statements indicate a complex understanding of school practices and discourses that I could have worked with as a teacher. The time was ripe to examine the discursive field of the classroom with the children, and perhaps to deconstruct some of the practices of school and of their peer culture.

Similarly, teachers can help children make explicit the ways they are using multimodal texts, and they can examine the affordances offered by different modes. Teachers can get children to reflect on their choices and so move towards a critical understanding of their literacy practices. Teachers could work with children to identify various qualities in their texts that challenge a binary view of gender. For example, in Oyvind's very 'macho text' he has friends who come to the rescue, as in girls' friendship stories. There is even an edge of romanticism when he is writing about friends: later in the story he has written himself and his best friend, Roy, as characters, and unfortunately, Oyvind gets shot. He writes, ''Roy was in the chamber with Oyvind who was dead. Roy said, 'Farewell friend'''. Using media may be a very useful avenue to explore questions about identities and discourses.

Conclusion – viewing children's literacy practices

One of the implicit assertions I have made is that educators' and researchers' definitions of literacy must include visual and media literacies, as well as recognition of the importance of the social and cultural contexts of those literacies. Anne Haas Dyson (2003) argues that there are serious problems with viewing literacy practices as a linear set of skills centred on decoding phonemes and comprehending only the limited literary canon of schools. In such a limited view, many of the literacy practices in Dyson's descriptions, as well as the stories from my own students, would be dismissed as problematic and developmentally immature. Dyson argues for a 'developmental remix', using a metaphor from the music industry to indicate the creative possibilities for deconstructing and reconstructing our view of children's literacy practices (Dyson, 2003, pp. 175–180). Using Dyson's terms, the baddies who entered my classroom reflected Oyvind's attempts to draw upon the variety of symbolic references in his life, to negotiate creatively the unofficial references with the

official school-based ones, and to communicate with his peers.

By accepting popular culture, teachers allow children to tap into sources that are meaningful and important, ones that children can feel confident to discuss. More importantly, however, popular culture contains the new literacies that surround children in the twenty-first century, and it is those literacies that children draw on to make sense of their world and to become confident learners. If we want our children to become powerful writers and critical thinkers about their literacy practices, we must first uncover those practices, see what the children are doing with popular media culture, and confidently explore these new practices with the students, as well as with their parents, our colleagues, and decision-makers in the wider world.

References

BARKER, M. (1997) The Newson Report: a case study in 'common sense' in M. Barker and J. Petley (Eds.) *Ill Effects: The media/violence debate*. London: Routledge, pp. 27–46.

BEARNE, E. and KRESS, G. (2001) Editorial. *Reading literacy and language*, 35.3, pp. 89–93.

BUCKINGHAM, D. (1993) *Children Talking Television: The making of television literacy*. London: Falmer Press.

BUCKINGHAM, D., GRAHAME, J. and SEFTON-GREEN, J. (1995) *Making Media: Practical production in media education*. London: English and Media Centre.

BUCKINGHAM, D. and SEFTON-GREEN, J. (1994) *Cultural Studies Goes to School: Reading and teaching popular media*. London: Taylor & Francis.

CALKINS, L. M. (1991) *Living Between the Lines*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

DYSON, A. H. (1997) *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture, and classroom literacy*. London: Teachers College Press.

DYSON, A. H. (2003) *The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write: Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.

GENTILE, D., WALSH, D., ELLISON, P., FOX, M. and CAMERON, J. (2004) 'Media violence as a risk factor for children: a longitudinal study'. Paper presented at the American Psychological Society 16th Annual Convention, Chicago, Illinois.

GRACE, D. and TOBIN, J. (1998) 'Butt jokes and mean-teacher parodies: video production in the elementary classroom' in D. Buckingham (Ed.) *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond radical pedagogy*. London: UCL Press pp. 42–62.

GRAHAM, L. (2003) Writing journals: an investigation. *Reading literacy and language*, 37.1, pp. 39–42.

GRAHAME, J. (1995) 'Original copy: re-selling sounds' in D. Buckingham, J. Grahame and J. Sefton-Green (Eds.), *Making Media: Practical production in media education*. London: English and Media Centre pp. 105–139.

GRAVES, D. (1983) *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Oxford: Heinemann.

GRAVES, D. (1994) *A Fresh Look at Writing*. Oxford: Heinemann.

HILTON, M. (1996) 'Manufacturing make-believe: notes on the toy and media industry for children' in M. Hilton (Ed.) *Potent Fictions: Children's literacy and the challenge of popular culture*. London: Routledge pp. 19–46.

HODGE, B. and TRIPP, D. (1986) *Children and Television: A semiotic approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

JUUL, J. (2001) 'Games Telling stories?' *Game Studies*, 1.1, http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/

KRESS, G. (1997) *Before Writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy*. London: Routledge.

LAMBIRTH, A. (2003) ''They get enough of that at home'': understanding aversion to popular culture in schools. *Reading literacy and language*, 37.1, pp. 9–13.

MARSH, J. and MILLARD, E. (2000) *Literacy and Popular Culture: Using children's culture in the classroom*. London: Paul Chapman.

MILLARD, E. (2003) Towards a literacy of fusion: new times, new teaching and learning? *Reading literacy and language*, 37.1, pp. 3–8.

MOSS, G. (1989) *Un/popular Fictions*. London: Virago.

NEWKIRK, T. (2002) *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, literacy, and popular culture*. Oxford: Heinemann.

POMPE, C. (1996) ''But they're pink!'' ''Who cares!'': popular culture in the primary years' in M. Hilton (Ed.) *Potent Fictions: Children's literacy and the challenge of popular culture*. London: Routledge pp. 92–128.

ROBERTSON, J. and GOOD, J. (2003) Using a collaborative virtual role-play environment to foster characterisation in stories. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 14.1, pp. 5–29.

Royal Australasian College of Physicians (2004) 'Children and the media: advocating for the future', http://www.racp.edu.au/hpu/paed/media/print.htm

SMITH, F. (1984) *Reading that Helps Us Teach: Joining the literacy club*. Reading: Reading Centre.

WALKER, D. (2004) Hey, teacher, leave those parents alone. *BBC News Online Magazine* 2004/05/04, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/magazine/3683145.stm

CONTACT THE AUTHOR:
Rebekah Willett, Institute of Education, University of London, London Knowledge Lab, 23-29 Emerald Street, London WC1N 3QS,UK
e-mail: r.willett@ioe.ac.uk