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Remixing literacy: Young children producing literacy practices for research participation

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a group of young children's literacy practices as they collected data for an ethnographically principled, participatory research project. Institutions of schooling can 'fix' powerful conceptualisations of literacy within pre-defined boundaries. Educational research into young children's in-school literacy can focus on their socialisation into these 'fixed' literacies rather than children's capacity to develop new practices. During the early stage of this project, the researcher was unable to visit the children's London school due to COVID restrictions. Part of the children's response to this problem was to create photographic texts to show the researcher their classroom. Creating these texts demonstrated the children's capacity to negotiate the 'fixities' of adult-assigned tasks in the 'flow' of their developing in-class literacy practices. I explore these practices from a Literacy as a Social Practice perspective, supported by Corsaro's theory of Interpretive Reproduction and Dyson's concept of 'remixing.' I argue that the application of concepts that allow for a wider understanding of the ways in which children manage fixities and flows in their in-school literacy practices can help educational practitioners plan literacy curricula that supports children's work to meet institutional requirements within their active engagement with literacies.

1. Introduction

This paper demonstrates how closer attention to young children's in-class production of literacy practices can help re-invigorate schooled understandings of children's creative capacity to negotiate tensions between the 'fixities' of adult-assigned in-school requirements and the 'flow' of their developing literacy practices. It proposes that Anne Dyson's concept of 'remixing' offers a helpful conceptual tool for educators working to support young children's in-school literacy development.

Whilst there are some moves towards increased uses of digital technologies, institutions of modern schooling across the world focus attention on the staged acquisition of age-related skills and knowledge, usually in paper-based literacies involving orthographic print (Dixon, 2011; Hassett, 2006; Papen, 2016). This view of literacy is contested by a Literacy as a Social Practice (LSP) perspective, which positions such skills and knowledge as part of a wider social phenomenon (Barton, 2007; Street, 1984). In this view, literacy is embedded in the social setting in which it is practised and contingent on practitioners' priorities for engaging in that setting. From this perspective, one can think of multiple literacies of which the print-based literacy of schooling – schooled literacy - is just one (Barton, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Papen, 2016). However, whilst LSP takes a wider view of what literacy might be, both schooled and LSP approaches to literacy in formal education can begin from a particular type of literacy as a fixed phenomenon and investigate how...
children become socialised into its practices (Dixon, 2011; Papen, 2016). Such an approach can miss ‘...the remarkable cognitive, cultural and linguistic flexibility of young children’ (Gregory et al., 2004a p. 2) as they (re)produce literacy practices to meet the contingencies of their current setting.

More recently, scholars have widened conceptions of literacy further to pay more attention to aspects such as embodiment and practitioners' affective experiences in schooled spaces. These perspectives call into question the boundedness of literacies, describing the fluidity of literacies as they emerge from interwoven relationships of materialities, bodies, physical movements and spaces (Burnett, 2014; Daniels, 2021; Kuby & Rucker, 2020). However, whilst it is useful to move away from literacy as a bounded or ‘fixed’ phenomenon, literacy practices might contain elements of both fixity and flow depending on the circumstances under which they emerge. In this paper I explore a group of young children's development of literacy practices that accommodated their interpretations of fixed, adult-assigned priorities in the flow of their classroom practices.

Closer attention to young practitioners' capacity to negotiate the fixities and flows of literacy practices in schools has two potential advantages for educators. Firstly, the pace of societal and technological change means that the effective adaptation of practices to new contexts, purposes and technologies is an essential quality for humans in the twenty first century (Kolinkat, 2019). The evidence in this paper suggests that even the youngest children in school have a creative capacity to adapt their practices to address new requirements within the flow of their classroom lives, a capacity that might be usefully built on by those designing literacy curricula for the 21st century. Secondly, careful attention to the kinds of things that become significant in children's practices can support consideration of the ways in which schooled experiences might allow for children's continued agentic development of adaptive practice. I suggest that such work can be supported using Dyson's concept of 'remixing.' This is a usefully accessible conceptualisation of the complexity of children's literacy practices that teaching practitioners might apply in their everyday observations of children's literacy classroom practices.

To illustrate this, I discuss a group of Reception age children's (4–5 years) literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984) as they used digital cameras to produce texts describing literacy (explained to them as reading, writing and learning) in their classroom. The children's literacy practices emerged from their early engagement with an ethnographically principled participatory research project and incorporated the fixed requirement to address my researcher's priorities into the flow of their classroom engagement.

The project began during the COVID 19 pandemic in summer 2021. This meant that I, the researcher, was unable to visit the classroom, and the children had some autonomy in their development of literacy practices to address the requirements of the research. One aspect of these practices was to produce the sequences of photographs which are the focus of this paper. These sequences formed texts that mediated the research activity in which the children, their teachers and I were participating. These texts had clear openings and closings and, in some cases, included the use of syntactic devices to sequence individual photographs within longer sections (see below), all of which supported my understanding of what reading, writing and learning was like in the children's classroom. As a project aim is to explore how research into young children's ongoing experiences of literacy in school can become an ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ context for literacy and pedagogical development (Dyson, 2020; Street, 2012), the children's use of the cameras invited closer attention.

2. Literacy in schooling

Schooled literacy curricula tend to focus on children's acquisition of print literacy (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, Dyson, 2020). Individual children's capacities as literacy practitioners are judged on their stepped acquisition of skills and knowledge in areas such as hand-writing, grammar and phonics (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, Dyson, 2020, Papen, 2016). Such judgements are made by comparing what children in classrooms do to age-related ‘standards’ of literate behaviour through ongoing processes of assessment (Dixon, 2011; Foucault, 1977; Henning, 2019). The outcomes of such assessments are critical for each individual child's continuing progress through schooling but have wider implications. In many nations, they inform accountability evaluations of the school, the education authority and even the national government (Hassett, 2006; Edwards et al., 2009; Papen, 2016, Lewis-Fokom & Colvin, 2017; Henning, 2019). The critical significance of these assessments, for so many groups, means that the consequences of children's relative attainment in such assessments can be a matter of social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2005, Demie, 2019). This can focus schools' attention on the specific aspects of print literacy that the assessments measure, and school resources and classroom practices necessarily become focused on securing children's ongoing progress towards such standards. Such powerful institutional processes normalise a specific ‘literacy’ and in doing so create a fixed notion of literacy as a set of skills and knowledge associated with traditionally paper-based texts. This becomes the perspective from which children's literacy practices are observed and evaluated (Barton, 2007; Dyson, 2020; Papen, 2016).

There are two potential effects of this process that are of interest in this paper. Firstly, such institutional processes produce a ‘sameness’ in the curriculum whereby diverse populations of pupils are expected to assimilate with predetermined models (Davis et al., 2020). This means there is little scope within everyday classroom practice to recognise and adapt to children's creative production of new or unexpected practices, no matter how useful or effective they might be. Secondly, children in classrooms are aware of the presence and effects of schooling and are likely to incorporate their understanding of the features of their institutional setting into their in- school practices (Bourne, 2001, 2002, Sarangapani, 2003, Henning, 2019), thus actively participating in the production and maintenance of the ‘sameness’ of schooled literacy. However, the evidence in this paper suggests that young children can negotiate between their own priorities and those that are fixed by adults (Henning, 2019). Developing accessible concepts that capture these adaptive processes has the potential to support curriculum designs that open up opportunities for children to produce creative practices in the flow of their classroom lives that nevertheless support their continued progression towards fixed, high stakes schooled goals.
3. Conceptualising literacy practices

The project from which this data arises aspires to become a partnership between teachers, researcher(s) and children. Such an aspiration requires conceptual tools that can be shared and operationalised by groups of participants with differing priorities for participating in schooled practices. It was designed from a perspective of Literacy as a Social Practice (LSP) within which literacy can be understood as a complex process of engagement with the social world. The key concept here is that of a ‘literacy practice’ (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984). Broadly speaking, a literacy practice is what people do when they engage with reading or producing texts, in whatever form those texts might take. Literacy practices are both ‘recurrent and habitualised’ (Papen, 2016) but also open to change as the practitioner(s) engage(s) with new experiences (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Thus, literacy is dynamic and contingent, rooted in peoples’ priorities for participating in their social worlds. This means that notions of ‘literacy’ need not be ‘fixed’ into ‘sameness’ (Davis et al., 2020; Kuby & Rucker, 2020).

Recent developments in literacy research have explored the hybridity and fluidity of literacy as emerging from complex relationships of human and non-human materialities, spaces and times, offering refreshed perspectives on the ways in which children’s literacies emerge in classroom spaces (Daniels, 2021; Kuby & Rucker, 2020). However, the powerful discourses of schooled literacy described above dominate classroom spaces creating a necessity for children to produce literacy practices that manage tensions between the fluidity of literacy described in recent literacy research and fixities created by the institutional processes of schooling and the unequal power relations between the adults who assign classroom literacy activities and the children who develop practices to participate in them (Barton, 2007; Henning, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Understanding the ways in which young children manage these tensions can shed greater light on the potentials of children’s in-class literacy practices.

In this paper, to make greater sense of these potentials, an LSP perspective is supported by incorporating two further concepts, that of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005, 2015) which is used to understand children’s processes of cultural production, and the notion of ‘reconfiguring’ (Edwards et al., 2009, Sabeti, 2013) or ‘remixing’ (Dyson, 2010) literacy practices from a range of elements to meet people’s current requirements for engaging with texts in the social world.

3.1. Interpretive reproduction

Corsaro’s theory of ‘interpretive reproduction’ suggests that children’s socialisation is ‘...an active process whereby children, as full participants in society and culture, contribute to cultural production and change as they interpret and use the structures of the social world to address their own concerns’ (Corsaro, 2005 pp. 18–19). From this perspective, children actively and creatively produce literacy practices both individually, and collectively within their peer cultures, as they participate in their social worlds. There are similarities between this view and the concept of syncretic literacy as described in the work of Gregory et al. (2004a). Syncretic literacy focuses attention on ‘the fluid and creative interaction of words, ideas and practices to create a dynamic and positive whole’ (Gregory et al., 2004a p. 4). However, the concept of interpretive reproduction allows us to push this ‘fluid and creative interaction’ a little further in thinking about a broader range of elements that children might incorporate into this ‘dynamic and positive whole’. As Corsaro explains ‘...children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by existing social structure and by societal reproduction’ (Corsaro, 2015 p. 18). This reminder of children’s position in social structures allows for a greater emphasis on the specific social settings in which children practice literacy, and how their understanding of those settings, including their understanding of the institutional fixities of schooling, is incorporated into the practices they produce there.

Thus, thinking of children as interpretively reproducing literacy practices opens up a consideration of the kinds of elements that children might purposefully incorporate into those practices. These elements might be derived from cultural traditions (Gregory et al., 2004a); be those traditionally associated with literacy practices, such as skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs and social relationships (Barton, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 2000); be associated with the particular technologies and resources available; or they may be derived from the effects of features of specific social settings, such as the children’s interpretation of the procedures and practices of schooling which shape the literacy they encounter and produce in the classroom.

3.2. ‘Remixing’ literacy practices

The idea of configuring literacy practices from different ‘elements’ or ‘aspects’ is not new. Edwards and colleagues describe how ‘macro’ literacy practices can be seen as being comprised of ‘micro-practices’ which might configured in different ways (Edwards et al., 2009). Sabeti (2013) draws on this idea to describe children’s practices of reading graphic novels. However, I find it helpful to capture this idea by drawing on the work of Dyson (2010), who uses the concept of ‘remixing’ to describe the ways in which children recontextualise material in their composition of written texts (Dyson, 2010). The concept of remixing aligns with that of interpretive reproduction in that it captures the idea of children as interpretively reproducing literacy practices by (re)configuring a range of elements into literacy practices that allow them to negotiate particular social experiences in particular social spaces. It also offers a relatively accessible metaphor for the complexities of configuring literacies that has the potential to be operationalised by diverse groups engaged in classroom learning and teaching practices. Such a theoretical framework means that in-school observers of young children’s literacy practices can shift from models of evaluation that rely on comparing those practices to fixed notions of what it means to practice literacy, to evaluations that consider new or unexpected practices in terms of their effectiveness or otherwise in addressing communicative goals and/or meeting social priorities.
4. Children as ethnographers, a school project

To illustrate this, I draw on photographic data gathered by children in a Reception class in Greater London, UK. The children were participating in the first phase of a University/School partnership which has long term aspirations to create a reflexive space for teachers, researchers and children to generate knowledge about what it means to teach, be taught and learn to read and write in a London primary school. The project is designed to develop over time within the constraints of the differing priorities of each group of participants and has a goal of involving the children in all stages of ethnographically principled literacy research, beginning with data collection. Data collection activities—such as making fieldnotes, keeping reflective journals, taking photographs and interviewing participants—involves language and literacy practices that offer possibilities for children to develop their learning and sensemaking.

This paper presents data from the earliest phase of the research, discussing the photographic literacy practices the children produced to negotiate, amongst to her things, the fixities of schooled processes and research aims into the flow of their own priorities for engaging with the research equipment.

4.1. The research setting

The school community is multilingual and diverse. Seven, mainly South Asian, languages are spoken by the children and their families in addition to English, and aspects of these linguistic repertoires are shared by many of the school staff. English is the classroom medium of instruction. At the time of the first data collection activities, there were eighteen children in the class, working with two teaching adults. I am a monolingual, white, English-speaking woman with a long personal and professional association with the area in which the school is situated. I taught in schools in that authority throughout my teaching career and also worked as a literacy advisor to the local authority responsible for the school some twenty years prior to this research.

Organisation and re-organisation are usual in primary schools, but the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the need for ongoing adaptation (Sharp et al., 2020; Whiteman, 2020; Roberts & Danechi, 2021). It was therefore important to organise the project around the school’s circumstances, working with what was possible within a broad understanding of the project aims and questions. To support participants’ informed consent to participate in the research, information sheets were produced for school staff, parents and children, and translated into the class’ languages where possible. School staff provided further translations. A short video presentation was made of the children’s information sheet to be shared with the participating class. Personal data collected about individual child participants was limited to first names and some images in photographs. Photographs featuring children who had not consented to participate in the research were deleted from the research data set. The research gained ethical approval from The Open University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/3824/Henning) and complied with the COVID-19 Health and Safety requirements of the English government, school and university.

4.2. The theoretical basis of the long-term project

This paper is founded in initial project objectives to explore how children’s participation in ethnographic research might contribute to their in-school literacy development. As the project develops, it aims to involve all participants in generating knowledge about what becomes significant in young children’s practices as they engage with school-assigned literacy activities in classroom spaces. The hope is that this knowledge will be relevant and useful for each participant group’s sphere of interest.

The project draws on two research approaches. The first is that of participatory research, an approach grounded in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Participatory research involves: training children in research skills (Flewitt et al., 2018); in this case those of ethnographically principled research; devising research methods that allow children to express their views in a range of ways (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Hammersley, 2014 p. 9); and focusing on ways in which adults can listen closely and understand what children have to say (Leigh, 2020; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Pinter & Zandian, 2015). The second research approach is ethnographically principled. This approach retains a focus on participant perspectives but reminds researchers that there are limitations to what research participants (adults or children) might be able to articulate about their practices. Hymes (2014) suggested that ‘…the deepest meanings and patterns may not be talked about at all, because they are so fully taken for granted.’ (Hymes, 2014 p. 9).

An ethnographic perspective places emphasis on the importance of accountable reflexivity about how and why research participants interpret and act in the world the way that they do. Ethnographically principled research usually involves the researcher participating in the setting that they are observing (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). In this case that was not possible as England’s COVID restrictions at the time meant in-person visits to schools were forbidden. Thus, this early phase of the project relied on school staff and children to manage its day-to-day activities, with the children adapting to the responsibilities of fieldworkers collecting data on their experiences of reading and writing in school. This might be seen as ‘decentring’ my researcher’s importance in the research process as I had to allow the participants to do what they could for the project according to their interpretations of its priorities and the contingencies of their daily lives.

4.3. Phase 1

Phase 1 of the project, from which this data is derived, was purposefully exploratory, allowing the children to experiment with methods of ethnographic data collection. The children were seen as ‘assigned but informed’ participants in the research (Hart, 1992), meaning that the project was designed and run by adults intending to elicit and respect the children’s views on the phenomena under investigation (Flewitt & Ang, 2020 drawing on Hart, 1992 pp. 85–86), Phase 1 took place over four weeks of the summer term 2021. It
began with me making two ‘visits’ to the classroom, appearing on the class ‘Interactive Whiteboard’ (IWB). I explained that the children would be special types of researchers, called ethnographers, and that I was interested in their experiences of reading, writing and learning, but could not visit the school to gather this information myself.

These two ‘visits’ were followed up by a session where small groups of children talked to me via a video link, in order to ask any questions and chat. In subsequent meetings, I talked to pairs of children about their research activities via a video link on a laptop computer.

Participating in the research was accommodated amongst the many priorities for the class over the project’s duration (with the children’s interest dwindling as the weeks passed). As well as using cameras, the focus of this paper, the child participants were offered Digital Voice Recorders (DVRs) and field notebooks as an introduction to classroom ethnography.

This first phase of the project yielded a data set comprising the children’s DVR recordings and nearly 500 photographs taken by 17 children in the class of 18, as well as my field- and research notes, and interviews with the teacher and children. Analysis of this complex set of data is ongoing at the time of writing.

4.4. Young children taking photographs for research

The first phase of the project was broadly based on a ‘Photovoice’ approach (Einarsdottir, 2014; Alaca et al., 2017; Abma & Schrijver, 2020). This participatory research approach uses photographs taken by children and young people as a starting point for research discussions, often as a way to elicit children’s views on projects (Alaca et al., 2017, Abma & Schrijver, 2020).

Accordingly, on the second of my two ‘visits’ to the class I shared photographs of my work area and we discussed my own workplace reading and writing. I explained that the children would share pictures of where they worked because I couldn’t visit their classroom (recording 25-05-2021). I also shared photographs from my previous research project, talking about how they helped me to think about reading and writing in school. The children talked about what they could see in the photographs, relating them to their own experience.

Using cameras has great appeal to young children (Merewether & Fleet, 2014, Jadue Roa et al., 2018). Taking photographs can help children who prefer to express themselves through means other than verbal language (Einarsdottir, 2014). However, children’s practices of taking photographs are of interest in themselves. For example, Merewether and Fleet (2014) note that the children in their study proved themselves to be competent photographers, taking ‘deliberate, precise photos’; and Jadue Roa et al. (2018) noted that children tend to select the content of photographs with care. Observations such as these align with the evidence in the photographs the children in my study took. There seemed to be barely a wasted shot in the images the participating children captured between them. Furthermore, the children seemed to produce ‘texts’ with their cameras – sequences of photographs with syntactic links between groups of photographs within the sequence (see below). One factor in the production of these texts may have been the use of digital cameras which did not restrict the number of photographs the children could take and offered a relatively large screen that could be used for composing and reviewing photographs.

4.5. Analysing photographic data collected remotely

The aim of the analysis of presented in this paper was to think about what became significant in the children’s production of these photographic texts. My remoteness from the research site was advantageous in that it allowed the children the agency to devise practices to support the research, but disadvantageous in that I was unable to observe the children’s practices directly. However, I have drawn on the evidence available to offer what I hope will be a plausible account.

To explore the children’s sequences of photographs, I organised them into folders by date taken and camera used, labelling the photographs to preserve the order in which they were taken. I uploaded the ordered photographs on to NVIVO, then re-examined them to identify links between photographs. Eleven of the children’s sets of photographs included at least two consecutive photographs that were linked in some way. I identified sequences of between 2 and 17 photographs, with nine of the children producing at least one sequence of three or more photographs. To look at these sequences more closely I returned to the photographs organised in computer folders, viewing them as ‘Extra Large Icons’ to try and understand each child’s overall set of photographs.

To explore what may have been involved in the production of these photographic texts, I combined this analysis of the photographic sequences with notes from my meetings with the teacher, interviews with some of the participating children and an interview with the class teacher at the end of the project. Each camera stamped the photographs with the date and time at which it was taken and these, combined with the images captured, were helpful in understanding how the children took the photographs. For example, a longer interval between photographs makes it possible that a camera had changed hands. The timers in the five cameras were not precisely aligned, and there could be up to five minute time difference between each camera’s time stamps. Furthermore, the batteries in the cameras were changed in week three which reset the timers. Where relevant, I give the timings of the photographs according to the camera time stamp in hours, minutes and seconds.

In the next section of the paper, I explore the kinds of things that the children remixed into the flow of their classroom activities as they produced their photographic texts.

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1 Where possible I checked the camera timers against each other, for example where two children have been capturing photographs of the same subject or have appeared taking photographs in each other’s sequence.
5. The situated practice

5.1. Children's relative autonomy over their photographic practices

The children's research activities took place once or twice a week in the part of the school day where they could initiate and direct their own activities. In such sessions, classroom activities are facilitated, rather than led, by adults. Classroom adults supported the children in using the equipment, but time pressures meant that the adults could not be as involved as they might have liked. The teacher explained:

‘...it was always like/you do this independently because I have to work with groups of children/so there was never a chance that I could go around and see what they're taking photos of...’

(Interview 14-07-2021)

This meant that, whilst the children operated within constraints and affordances of a schooled environment which ‘fixes’ aspects of children’s practices within institutional boundaries (cf Falchi and Siegal, 2014, Henning, 2019), they also had some freedom to develop their own practices without direct pedagogical intervention.

5.2. The children’s ongoing communicative work in the classroom

Whilst the teacher’s role in mediating the project to the children was crucial, the children also worked to understand the research needs. For example, in the initial two remote meetings I had with the whole class the children often interjected to support our communication. My impression was that, in their schooled setting, the children were accustomed to actively engaging in communicative work with adults to organise and participate in classroom activities and that classroom adults supported this engagement.

I felt that the children’s relative autonomy in deciding how to use the cameras combined with their apparent, teacher-supported commitment to effective organisation and communication became significant in the children’s approach to developing photographic practices that addressed the requirements of the research. To illustrate this, I track one element of the project’s organisation – the need to identify the photographer of the researcher photographs - that the children appear to have remixed into their photographic literacy practices as a method of signalling the opening and closing of their research texts.

5.3. From classroom procedure to literacy practice

5.3.1. Identifying the photographer: a ‘fixed’ requirement

During my second ‘visit’ to the class, I needed to establish a way that the children could identify themselves as the creator of their photographs. The children became involved in working out a procedure to do this:
Fig. 1. LR - Rules for using the cameras. Image cropped to obscure figures.
Working out a procedure for identifying the photographer

At lines 8, 10 and 13 different children’s voices confirm they understand what I am saying. However, there is also evidence of more extended interjections (lines 19 and 26). The clearest intervention was from ZB. She begins with the word ‘so’ (14), clarifying what I have said. The Class Teacher intervenes (16), drawing on what ZB has said and then clarifying further, using classroom terminology to describe classroom name cards as ‘self-registration cards’ and ‘name logs’ (17 and 18). In this way, both teacher and children worked my remote researcher’s request into existing classroom practice as a ‘fixed’ requirement for the children’s practices use of the cameras.

5.3.2. Procedural request becomes a classroom rule

After a short holiday and independently of me, the class created a written set of ‘house rules’ for using the research equipment (Meeting notes 21-05-2021). Below is LR’s (child pseudonym) photograph of the rules that were created during the class’ discussion, which were displayed in the classroom for the duration of the project (Fig. 1).

The rules for using the camera are at the top. They read:

Rules for the camera.
1. Switch on the camera
2. Take a photo of your name
3. Flip the camera
4. Take a selfie
5. Take a picture of class and reading and writing.

In an interview in July, the Class Teacher explained how one of the children had taken charge of this event:

_ZU took the lead in establishing class ‘rules’ for using the equipment. One child said they would take a photo of the rules as this was the kind of thing Lucy needs to know_ (Meeting notes 09-06-2021)
Thus, the children were active participants in working out procedures for accommodating the research to classroom life; and at least one of the children thought about my researcher's needs. Once the rules were established, the teacher reinforced them at the beginning of each session where the children had access to the cameras. This meant the children had to accommodate two fixed requirements into their use of the cameras, the procedure to identify the photographer and to meet the needs of a remote researcher. As the children began to engage with the cameras, these points of fixity were remixed into the flow of the children's classroom practices.

5.3.3. Classroom rules become text structure

This procedure for identifying oneself allowed some children to distinguish between research and child-initiated use of the cameras in the flow of their classroom lives.

In the final sequence of photographs taken by NX in the first week of the project, there seems to be a switch from using the cameras for research to using the cameras for more child-initiated activities. The class teacher had observed NX taking her photographs and overheard some of her conversation:

Miss overheard NX telling another child that the ‘Happy Birthday’ frame wasn't working for her picture as it obscured what she wanted to take a photograph of. She changed it to the ‘bubble’ frame and said, ‘This one looks better.’

(Meeting Notes 11-06-2021)

The photographs NX took on this day finish with the sequence in Fig. 2.

In the first photograph (top left) NX tried out the camera's ‘filter’ function as she photographed the outside space. In the second (top centre), she photographed the classroom writing area, and in the third (top right) she ‘signed off’ her research photographs with her name. In the photographs on the second row, the bubbles filter continues to be used. There are only 24 s before the signing off photograph and the next one in the sequence, suggesting NX took both photographs. From the teacher’s observation I believe it likely NX also took the next two photographs, using the bubbles filter. However, even if the camera did change hands at this point the lack of an opening identifier signals that the camera is no longer being used for research purposes.

In the second week of the project there is evidence of more children ‘signing off’ sequences of photographs before the camera is used for child-initiated activities. In one example SZ signed off her sequence at 12.39.56. Eight minutes later there are two photographs taken in the classroom toilets followed by 2 using a headband filter then another selfie of SZ using a ‘hearts’ filter and five further photographs of the classroom without filters, including 2 featuring children in informal poses. The sequence closes at 12.55.44. Once again, it seems that a selfie or photograph of a name card signals the closing of a research text before the camera is used in the flow of more child-initiated activities.

Fig. 2. NX uses the filters. Image amended to obscure figures.
These instances suggest that the children remixed (and possibly shared) practices for using the cameras that drew on elements including classroom procedures and an understanding of a distinction between research and child-initiated activity. Such practices might be seen as ‘off-task’; however, they might also be evidence of adaptive work to remix practices in ways that negotiate fixed points of adult requirements in the flows of child-initiated play.

5.4. Creating sequences - incorporating classroom print literacy priorities

The sequences of photographs suggest that the children also remixed their experiences of the school’s print literacy curriculum into their practices.

In an interview, the class teacher explained how the children were taught to structure stories:

‘...we do a sequencing of the story first, we do it in terms of using pictures and then we use it to orally retell, and we use something called a story map to tell the story. So, they’re very familiar with that. It’s a structure we’ve used all year round for every story that we do.’

(Interview with the teacher 14-07-2021)

One of the children, ZB, referred to this pedagogical approach in an interview, explaining a sequencing activity related to the children’s book ‘Handa’s Surprise’ (Browne, 1995):

‘ZB: We stick them [the pictures] on the book... First you cut them out and then you ... put them in (row) like in a pile and then you get one of them. You have to think which one is the first one and second third and then you stick it on the book’

(Interview with ZB and peer 24-06-2021)

The teaching sequence that the teacher and ZB describe above is designed to move the children through a stepped progression of learning to sequence texts, beginning by using pictures, with the end goal of being able to sequence sentences to in a written story, one of the ‘standards’ by which the literacy practices of children in England are judged (DfE, 2013, 2021).

The examples below suggest that children may have remixed the picture-based element of this pedagogical sequence into their photographic practices as they captured their classroom for the remote researcher.

5.4.1. Sequencing photographic texts

In this example, JD captured each element of a vocabulary activity by moving around the table on which it rested, pointing her camera at what she considered to be significant (Fig. 3).

The four photographs create a sequenced text, showing the viewer each element of the activity. In the next example (Fig. 4), SZ captured the location of a basket of name cards in the classroom before moving closer to show the name cards in the basket, showing the reader of her text the contents of the name basket and its position in the classroom.

![Fig. 3. JD captures the vocabulary activity.](image-url)
This data suggests that the children created sequences of photographs to show particular aspects of the classroom, and their regular experiences of the print literacy curriculum may have been significant in this. If this is the case, curriculum experiences relating to print literacy were adaptively remixed to address the requirements of a new communicative task, showing the classroom to a remote researcher.

These sequences of photographs also remind us of the embodied nature of practising literacy (Flewitt et al., 2009; Rowsell, 2014; Kim & Kim, 2017) as syntactic links emerge from the children’s flow of movement around the classroom space (see Daniels, 2021). Physical movement was key to the creation of these sequences as the children shifted around their subjects, seemingly keeping the researcher’s needs in mind as they did so. The detail of the sequences effectively addresses the fixed needs of the remote researcher yet emerges from the flows of the children’s engagement with their physical environment.

5.5. Variation in shared literacy practices

The examples of ‘signing off’ research photographs above suggest that the children may have shared their developing practices and there is further evidence of shared practice in this last example. Two children, ZB and LN collaborated to remix the fixed requirements of the researcher into the flow of their movement round the classroom, their recollections of a significant classroom literacy activity and their strong positive peer relationship. However, such closely aligned practice does not necessarily mean the children’s approaches to the task were identical.

In around 150 photographs the two children captured their classroom in detail over a 14-minute period. The time stamps on the children’s two sets of photographs suggested they moved around the classroom together, and their photographic texts suggested they often pointed their cameras at the same thing. Both children were eager to talk to me together about their photographs and were
waiting when I linked remotely with the classroom.

In the interview, we discussed the children's photographs of the ‘notes’ made by the teacher during an earlier classroom fruit tasting event (Fig. 5). ZB and LN explained that the posters had been created as the teacher noted words and phrases that the children used to describe their experience that would be useful in their writing later. In our interview ZB and LN recalled which words they had contributed to the poster. ZB had said ‘spiky,’ LN had said ‘sharp.’ In these, as in the other photographs in their sequences, the children had stood together and taken photographs of the same subject. However, their interest in this subject, reflected in the focus of the photographs, varies. LN's photographs (top) capture these words written on the posters before capturing their position on the wall (employing a similar syntactic device to that used by SZ above) whilst ZB (bottom) captures the whole of the posters in their position on the wall, which aligns with the ways in which the rest of her photographic text carefully documents each area of the classroom.

Dyson's use of the concept of remixing is a useful way of thinking about these kinds of variations in the closely aligned practices that can emerge from the flow of children's classroom activity. The concept of remixing was used as part of Dyson's challenge to the ‘individualistic ideology of composing’ in schools (Dyson, 2010) where the reappropriation of material from other sources, particularly popular culture, might be seen as ‘copying’. From this individualistic perspective, LN and ZB's closely aligned practice, emerging from their positive social relationship in a flow of shared activity around the classroom, might also be seen as an instance of children ‘copying’ each other's practices. However, those practices also varied in some respects, in particular in the incorporation of personal interests and interpretations of the fixed requirement to address the remote researcher's interests. Broadening the concept of remixing to encompass a wider range of elements that might become significant in children's practices might help observers finetune observations of shared practices to better understand how children adapt and vary those practices as they negotiate their classroom worlds.

6. Conclusion

The photographic texts the children produced to show a remote adult what reading, writing, and learning were like in their classroom were often comprehensive and met the needs of the research as far as the children understood it. In terms of children's ‘cultural production and change’ (Corsaro, 2005), this practice has been incorporated into the ongoing project. The early research photographs discussed here form part of a larger data set from which findings about children's experiences of schooling might be drawn. As the project moves forward, it is hoped that such findings might be generated by children and adults working together on data analysis.

The discussion in this paper hopes to make two contributions to thinking about young children's in-school literacy practices. Firstly, it offers further evidence of the creative adaptability of young children, an essential attribute for literacy practitioners engaging with the rapid pace of change in the 21st century. In doing so it joins others in calling for a wider conceptualisation of literacy and literacy practices than the standards-focused ‘fixed’ literacy associated with schooling (for example, Daniels, 2021; Gregory et al., 2004a; Kuby & Rucker, 2020; Maybin, 2013). Such research has argued for pedagogical approaches that recognise and celebrate the fluidity and flow of children's literacy practices as they emerge in complex relationships of materialities, spaces times and affects. The evidence in this paper supports such arguments, whilst demonstrating how children negotiate points of adult-assigned fixity in the fluidity of their literacy practices. It suggests a need for further research to build on work that demonstrates the hybridity and fluidity of literacy practices but considers how such fluidity plays out in schooled spaces where children address fixed institutional requirements.

Secondly, this paper suggests that Dyson's metaphor of ‘remixing,’ expanded to capture a wider range of elements of children's practices, offers a flexible and relatively accessible model of literacy that captures the kinds of things that might become significant in children's complex literacy practices. For example, in this case, one element that became significant in the children's practices was the classroom procedure of identifying one's work, which the children had helped to design. The sequences of photographs suggest that some of the children took up this point of procedure to support their negotiation between meeting the fixed needs of the remote researcher and incorporating the cameras into the flow of their classroom lives. The children's capacity to do this may well have been helped by the teaching staff’s commitment to supporting the children's sense of responsibility and contributions to classroom organisation. I suggest that this commitment offered the children a degree of control over their in-class practices that enabled them to negotiate between the fixities of adult-initiated task requirements and the flows of their in-class lives. The flexibility of the concept of ‘remixing’ allows for reflections on the significance of a wide range of elements such as this; including those that may be unanticipated when activities are planned but nevertheless support the effective textual mediation of meaning and social engagement.

A widened concept of practising literacy has the potential to support educators work to support children's literacy development in two ways. Firstly, it can help practitioners understand children's engagement with communicative tasks. In this case, the children remixed elements such as bodily movement; personal interests; the affordances and constraints of the classroom space and the available technologies; as well as their interpretation of the schooled curriculum for print literacy within the context of their social relationships and ways of engaging in the classroom space. Understanding the significance of this wider range of elements of children's literacy practices might contribute to designing pedagogical interventions that support children in further developing those practices. This may not mean further interventions that re-emphasise curricular skills and knowledge (Kuby & Rucker, 2020); rather it may mean activities such as varying the technologies available for mediating meaning, supporting children's social interactions within their peer group, being more explicit about classroom procedures (see Gregory et al., 2004b) or giving children a greater role in designing those procedures. Such variations might support children in further developing their adaptive capacities to meet a wider range of communicative requirements than an overly tight focus on skills and knowledge of print literacy might allow. Such work may have implications, not just for literacy curriculum development, but also for the ways in which children are asked to develop their communicative approaches to engaging with the wider school curriculum.

Secondly, a more flexible approach to curricula planning that allows children to remix practices for a wide range of purposes could
include greater opportunities for children, including the youngest children, to contribute to developing curriculum activities that achieve something meaningful to them in their social worlds whilst still meeting curriculum demands (see Tolentino & Lawson, 2017 and Theodotou, 2019 for examples). Such an approach has the potential to support children's continued creative, purposeful engagement with literacy in all its diversity as well as their capacity to develop practices that adapt to the everchanging communicative requirements of the twenty-first century.

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