

# Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies

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Building a literacy narrative

Submitted by

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## Dedication

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To:

My grandmother, Ivy Ibbotson (1904 to 2001), Chair of the Towns Women's Guild, creator of The Minus One Club, Comedian, my moral compass, literacy champion and patient enabler who taught me how to be

Karl and Luke, providing purpose, pride and patience

Danielle and Michelle for fuelling my spirit and self-belief

Vanessa, my best friend since early childhood who we lost,  
unexpectedly, during the period of this study

Paul, my inspiration from as long as I can remember

Keith for his ongoing, steady unfaltering support and encouragement

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Thank you to my friend Gina, who improved my ability to build the capacity of others, modelled what a brilliant manager looks like and continues to support and champion me as one of the most wonderful women I know.

# Abstract: Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies

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The aim of the study reported in this thesis was to identify the value of the concept of 'signature pedagogies' to understanding the multiple experiences and perspectives that underpin the creative approach to the teaching of writing of an arts organisation. Drawing on data in the form of life history vignettes, I examine the ways in which the personal intersects with the professional within a wider policy context to inform a distinctive pedagogic approach which aims to tackle inequalities in literacy education. In doing so, I make an original contribution to the field of arts education by developing the concept of 'signature pedagogies' in relation to arts practice, making recommendations about the need for greater recognition of the role of individual identities in shaping pedagogy and arts pedagogy in particular. The thesis also contributes three key recommendations to the field of arts education in relation to literacy and the teaching of writing and provides a new tool for supporting reflection by arts educators so that they can make explicit and also develop their own practice.



# Contents

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Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies	0
Dedication	0
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract: Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies	3
Contents	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1. <i>Structural overview of the thesis</i>	9
1.2. <i>The foundations behind the literacy model?</i>	10
1.2 <i>Creation of Grimm &amp; Co</i>	11
1.3 <i>The magical story of Grimm &amp; Co</i>	13
1.4 <i>Leadership and governance</i>	14
1.5 <i>Funding</i>	15
1.6 <i>Grimm &amp; Co's signature pedagogy</i>	15
1.6.1 <i>A creative pedagogy</i>	15
1.6.2 <i>Philosophy informed signature pedagogy</i>	16
1.7 <i>Definitions of literacy across the UK</i>	18
1.8 <i>Socio-economic literacy context</i>	22
1.9 <i>Local level socio-economic factors affecting Rotherham</i>	24
1.10 <i>Early milestones</i>	26
1.11 <i>School engagement</i>	30
1.12 <i>Out of school engagement</i>	31
1.13 <i>Grimm &amp; Co Grows Up</i>	32
1.14 <i>Next Steps</i>	33
1.15 <i>Grimm &amp; Co's signature pedagogy foundations</i>	34
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>36</b>
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	36
2.2 <i>Policy context: How has literacy been defined in recent policy and curriculum in England?</i>	37
2.2.1 <i>Literacy league tables</i>	37
2.2.2 <i>A spatial framework to benchmark progress</i>	39
2.2.3 <i>The National Curriculum</i>	39
2.2.4 <i>High Stakes Testing</i>	40
2.3 <i>Policy makers' valued literacies</i>	43
2.3.1 <i>Measuring literacy fluency – a policy perspective</i>	45
2.3.2 <i>Could policy become the pedagogy?</i>	49
2.3.3 <i>Autonomous schools</i>	50
2.3.4 <i>Impact of technical, functionalist approach on the child as learner</i>	51
2.3.5 <i>Disrupting the functionalist approach</i>	53
2.3.6 <i>Traditional vs contemporary literacies</i>	55

2.4	<i>Literacy as meaning-making</i>	56
2.4.1	New Literacy Studies: Critical literacy in the context of meaning-making	57
2.4.2	Appreciating the funds of knowledge	58
2.4.3	Multiliteracies	59
2.4.4	Inherited literacies	60
2.4.5	Multimodal literacies	62
2.5	<i>Dynamic Literacies, Dynamic Pedagogies</i>	64
2.5.1	Changing lives one story at a time – the narrative imagination	65
2.5.2	Social imagination as literacy pedagogy	67
2.5.3	Starting from the child	71
2.5.4	New Literacy Studies – recognising familiarities and difference	73
2.5.5	Teachers and child agency	74
2.5.6	The motivated child	75
2.5.7	What counts as real writing?	76
2.5.8	Literacy repertoire	78
2.6	<i>Signature pedagogy</i>	78
2.6.1	Pedagogy	79
2.6.2	Defining signature pedagogy	79
2.6.3	Signature pedagogies in arts based literacy education	79
2.6.4	Changes in signature pedagogies	80
2.6.5	The origins of Grimm & Co’s signature pedagogy	81
2.7	<i>Summary</i>	81
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>		<b>83</b>
3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	83
3.1.1	Motivation behind the study	83
3.1.2	Methodologies: Why choose autoethnography?	84
3.1.3	Inspiration	85
3.2	<i>The inside story</i>	86
3.2.1	Reflexivity	87
3.3	<i>Life fragments</i>	90
3.3.1	Not an exact truth	91
3.3.2	Scriptive things	91
3.3.3	Shifting power	92
3.3.4	Deep dive	95
3.4	<i>First encounters with autoethnography</i>	96
3.4.1	Autoethnography as educational research approach	97
3.5	<i>Criticisms of autoethnography</i>	100
3.5.1	A response to criticism	101
3.6	<i>Reflexivity</i>	102
3.6.1	Emerging pathways	103
3.6.2	The personal voice	104
3.6.3	Disclosure – opening and closing doors	104
3.6.4	The Hokey Cokey	106
3.7	<i>Data – the enactment of autoethnographic research</i>	106

3.7.1	Artefactual triggers	107
3.7.2	The tapestry of memories	107
3.7.3	Artefacts at hand	108
3.7.4	Artefacts replaced	109
3.7.5	Memories as a stream of consciousness	110
3.7.6	Experiential memories	111
3.8	<i>Claim to knowledge</i>	112
3.8.1	Criss-crossing policy	112
3.8.2	Honest insight	113
3.9	<i>Ethical considerations</i>	114
3.9.1	Wider reflections	117
3.9.2	Summary/Conclusion: Note to reader	118
<b>Chapter 4: Data: A signature pedagogy platform: arts/literacy habits of heart, mind and hand re-encountered through memories</b>		<b>121</b>
4.1	<i>Introduction:</i>	121
4.2	<i>A pocketful of stories</i>	122
4.3	<i>Museum of me</i>	124
4.4	<i>The baby book</i>	127
4.4.1	Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet	127
4.4.2	Collecting memories	129
4.4.3	Lists and happenings	131
4.4.5	I can spell a lot of long words but my writing is atrocious	132
4.5	<i>Destination, teacher: An imagined narrative</i>	133
4.6	<i>Take a u-turn when possible.</i>	134
<b>Chapter 5: Spinning Yarns: An analysis of the stories that weaved an arts-based signature pedagogy</b>		<b>137</b>
5.1	<i>Introduction:</i>	137
5.1.1	Audience/reader	139
5.1.2	Narrative	140
5.1.3	Signature pedagogy for a rich literacy repertoire	140
5.2	<i>Change lives, one story at a time</i>	141
5.2.1	As shared literacy experiences	141
5.2.2	Repetition	142
5.2.3	Dolls as meaning making artefacts	142
5.2.4	Emergent story literacies	143
5.2.5	Stories for inclusive pedagogy	144
5.3	<i>Use of imagination</i>	146
5.3.1	Social imagination	146
5.3.2	Narrative imagination	148
5.3.3	Summary	151
5.4	<i>Narrative influencer roles</i>	152
5.4.1	Literacy Patrons	152
5.4.2	Teachers as Literacy Sponsors	154

5.4.3	Literacy champions	157
5.4.4	The role of child influencers	157
5.4.5	Narrative Swerve	159
5.5	<i>Starting from the child – a cultural toolkit</i>	162
5.5.1	Literacy repertoire as lifelong funds of knowledge	162
5.5.2	Habitus	164
5.5.3	Literacy as power – an inherited belief	165
5.5.4	Loaning and owning	167
5.6	<i>A literacy ecology, a creative environment</i>	167
5.6.1	Immersed in literacy	167
5.6.2	Valued purpose	168
5.6.3	Summary	169
5.7	<i>Writing for purpose</i>	170
5.7.1	Motivation and power	170
5.7.2	The smell of books as reward	170
5.7.3	Identifying and appreciating the funds of knowledge	171
5.7.4	Literacy confidence and courage	172
5.7.5	Real writing = neat and tidy	173
5.7.6	Audience consciousness	173
5.7.7	Audience providing purpose	175
5.7.8	Summary	175
5.8	<i>Alternative literacy identities of a child</i>	176
5.8.1	School as an island	176
5.8.2	A Third space – the bridge between	177
5.8.3	Summary	178
5.9	<i>A playful pedagogy</i>	178
5.9.1	Freedom to explore	178
5.9.2	Creative pedagogies that allow for improvisation	179
5.9.3	Accommodating improvisation	180
5.9.4	We take fun very seriously	180
5.9.5	Summary	181
5.10	<i>Scope for further thought</i>	182
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusions</b>		<b>183</b>
6.1	<i>Findings</i>	183
6.1.1	Stories	185
6.1.2	Imagination	185
6.1.3	The role of influencers	186
6.1.4	Child Agency	187
6.1.5	Repertoire	188
6.1.6	Home literacies	188
6.1.7	Purpose – a reason to write	189
6.1.8	Playful but not childish	190
6.2	<i>Contribution</i>	190
6.2.1	Autoethnography of childhood memories as method	191
6.2.2	Components of an arts-based signature pedagogy	192

6.2.3	Neoliberal, policy driven curriculum	192
6.2.4	Further aspects drawn upon	193
6.3	Limitations of the study	193
6.4	<i>Implications and opportunities</i>	194
<b>Acknowledgement of collaborative work within the thesis</b>		<b>194</b>
<b>References</b>		<b>197</b>
<b>Appendices</b>		<b>230</b>
	<i>Appendix 1: Inspire Rotherham Strategy/Plan</i>	230
	<i>Append 2: Grimm’s Magical Story</i>	241
	<i>Append 3: Rotherham Demographics</i>	264
	<i>Append 4: Wordle demonstrating teacher’s perceptions of barriers</i>	273
<b>Figs: Tables and illustrations</b>		
	<i>Fig. 1: Percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, by eligibility for free school meals and by gender, England, 2012-2018, Marmot, 2020, p.38</i>	22
	<i>Fig. 2: Grimm &amp; Co’s Apothecary to the Magical, Rotherham, Yorkshire, England, 2019</i>	27
	<i>Fig. 3: Inside the Apothecary to the Magical</i>	27
	<i>Fig. 4: The Giant’s Staircase: The Imagination Gym</i>	28
	<i>Fig. 5: The Writers’ Closet – a playful, breakout writing room</i>	28
	<i>Fig. 6: The Writers’ Pad – inside/outside classroom space for writing</i>	29
	<i>Fig. 7: Grimm &amp; Co’s home, the Emporium of Stories, pre-construction project</i>	31
	<i>Fig. 8: Grimm &amp; Co’s blackboard welcome to the story</i>	124
	<i>Fig. 9: Nan and me, my second summer</i>	125
	<i>Fig. 10: Museum of Me: Artefacts of my literary repertoire</i>	128
	<i>Fig. 11: My baby book – writing without the alphabet</i>	131
	<i>Fig. 12: Diary of a special moment in time: I am at school now</i>	132
	<i>Fig. 13: Santa brought me...</i>	134
	<i>Fig. 14: My writing is atrocious</i>	135
	<i>Fig. 15: Mackey’s identified reading repertoire, extracted from One Child Reading, 2016</i>	169

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## 1.1. Structural overview of the thesis

The evidence presented in this thesis is directed towards exploring the conditions, the practices, the habits, the influencers and the artefacts that influence the heart, the mind and the hand (Shulman, 2005, p.57) and result in the distinctive (signature) pedagogy of an arts-based literacy charity for the teaching of writing or literacy/ies.

The introduction chapter of this thesis firstly introduces the origins, objectives, leadership and funding model behind the charity, Grimm & Co, setting the scene for the landscape within which the arts-based pedagogy, discussed in this thesis, is utilised, acquainting the reader with the purpose and particular model. The introduction further explores the definitions of literacy including the wider socio-economic context that determines the curriculum prescribed for mainstream schools. I conclude this chapter with a brief around Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy foundations.

In Chapter 2 I review the literature which is relevant to the themes explored within the study. This chapter is divided into 6 sections. Section 2.2 explores the actual policy context in England and how literacy has been defined and positioned in discourse of policy makers and critique around this. Section 2.3 examines policy maker values around literacies and begins to examine the discourse around policy measurement of literacy and its resulting pedagogy. Section 2.4 considers socio-cultural literacies, literacy as meaning-making, specifically looking at new literacy studies, funds of knowledge (home to school practices), multiliteracies, inherited literacies and multimodal literacies. In 2.5 the focus is on dynamic literacies, dynamic pedagogies, setting the groundwork that continues through to 2.6 as this chapter discusses discourse of defining signature pedagogy, resulting in the origins of Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy.

In Chapter 3 I set out the methodology for this study and the methods employed to present this autoethnographic study from criticisms to reflexivity. This chapter presents the model used, the claim to knowledge and ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4 I present the data in the form of re-encountered memories and images that support this data, including images from the baby book, used as an artefact that demonstrate extracts of writing.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the stories presented in the data that weaved (influenced) Grimm & Co's arts-based signature pedagogy. In Chapter 6 I draw together the findings and pull together the data with the signature pedagogy. I also show how the study has contributed to arts-based pedagogy research in wider contexts and the benefits of using this methodology to gain insights into children's practices ethically. In conclusion, the final section of the thesis presents the findings, contribution, limitations of the study, implications and opportunities.

## **1.2. The foundations behind the literacy model?**

In 2009 I embarked on a new, two year position as Director of Literacy Programmes, to direct a project, called '*Inspire Rotherham*', that would explore and test creative approaches to literacy with a goal to improve outcomes for the children of a town, Rotherham. The mission: to improve children's literacy levels for the most disadvantaged communities across Rotherham within 2 years, mostly measured by improvements in key Stage 2 'Standard Assessment Test' (SATs) results. The assumptions: a) bridging the gap for the most marginalised children and young people would help to make a difference across the local authority, b) creativity would be the vehicle with which to do this. The resources to do this included: two years remaining on the programme, a 2 year budget of £2.5 million from Regional Development Agency funds (Yorkshire Forward) and the machinery of a local authority and its access to data for support. It was a dream secondment for a literacy educationalist, with a firm belief bias towards the importance of culture and creativity in education. The personal, underpinning goal was to test theories, examine the factors and practices that made the greatest difference and present the findings so that the case could be made with policy makers to inform strategic planning, curriculum decisions, pedagogical approaches and plans for the wider educational landscape. Prior to contract I set out my priorities – the core of which would be the importance placed on the explore and test function of this work, scaffolded with wider research, informing and influencing commissioning of works throughout the process.

The project: My role, as Director and Commissioner of the project began February 2009 and completed May 2011. A tender process to secure the evaluator and research lead concluded with a contract with Kate Pahl and a team of Research

Assistants from the University of Sheffield. Throughout the project, evaluation findings from quantitative data analysis, surveys and ethnographic studies, informed the direction of commissioning and programmes until October 2010 at which point the findings were conclusive and would inform the final months of planning to create the legacy work and outcomes from the project. However, during this final year the Labour government had been replaced by a coalition Conservative/Liberal Democrat government and austerity measures for the UK had led to the October 2010 spending review setting out plans to abolish Yorkshire Forward, as one of the quangos being axed under the new regime. The partnership of organisations who had previously been keen to learn from the findings in order to create a legacy strategic plan from the project determined that there would be no further resource to take this forward. The role ceased, the project ended, the legacy would sit on the pages of a strategy, shelved and filed within the archives.

## 1.2 Creation of Grimm & Co

An illustrated strategy<sup>1</sup> demonstrated the outcomes of the action research project over two years, including the statistics and SATs results that follow. The strategy illustrated the elements of success that had been established from the data analysis as underpinning the evaluated and quantified results for children from the most deprived postcodes across the borough. Quantitative examinations were commissioned activities had taken place and demonstrated the greatest changes occurred with the most marginalised children within the 10% most deprived communities, indicating unprecedented levels of positive shifts in SATs results for those residing within the 10% most deprived postcodes. Data collated within SATs result findings by the local authority for the 10% most deprived children reported that there was an 18% shift for literacy and for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) this was increased to 22%. In drilling down to further explore the key actions that had taken place within these communities evaluations demonstrated the following common observations from case studies gathered; a) use of imaginative spaces which transported children/young people away from their 'every day'; b) radically different experiences; c) energised learning that inspired and motivated to learn; d) mentoring

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<sup>1</sup> Inspire Rotherham Illustrative Strategy (Quick guide)



– opportunities for individual support/feedback and small group work; e) having the reason to write – a tangible outcome and reason to write provided greater motivation to do so, and coupled with children experiencing the product of their work being enjoyed by others, their confidence and self-esteem as a writer grew; f) capacity building approaches – developing confidence in self; and particularly in schools, shifts took place where teachers felt empowered to inject enthusiasm and creativity into their delivery. Further findings demonstrated that where out of school learning experiences also took place, with elements of the above, increased and unprecedented individual confidences were reported.

The challenge of this story was set. How could a literacy model be built from the studies, utilise the research and bridge the gap between those children and young people who attain results, opportunities and life chances, and those who do not? How can this model ensure every young person has the opportunity to be all they can be? To cut a very long story short, Grimm & Co was formed as a charity in 2014 and its foundations are rooted in this significant action research project, together with a driven belief stemming from the rich and lived experience from child to adult of the outcomes of this research in action. This experiential motivation and drive fuelled a life changing decision for me to move away from the security of my job and to set course on a rocky, initially unpaid, unfunded path to create the model that would be the legacy of this work, a literacy destination in Rotherham.

The research underpinning *Inspire Rotherham* focused on the factors that resulted in this significant shift and the outcomes presented a core set of approaches and principles, creating opportunity to change narratives. Grimm & Co was born out of three strands combined together. The findings of this action research, additional consultation with communities around Rotherham (including a Pop Up Story Shop) and some additional inspiration from the 826 Valencia model, created by Dave Eggers in San Francisco. Collaborations with 826 Valencia led to opportunities for reflection with like-minded organisations world-wide. However, Grimm & Co is independent, participatory in its approach, responding to local needs and developing its own programmes and methodologies to suit the communities it serves. Grimm & Co's

mission is to change lives, one story at a time – aiming to unleash imaginations and champion the writer in every child.

### 1.3 The magical story of Grimm & Co

So, what is it? The magical story, written by Jeremy Dyson (celebrated writer and Grimm & Co Trustee)<sup>2</sup>, tells of how Graham Grimm created the apothecary in 1148, just before lunch time. Graham is still around and this story is brought to life by every team member and volunteer for all who encounter Grimm & Co.

The story behind Grimm & Co, although fictional, is important across all that the charity does. The story provides the backbone on which all planning takes place. It enables the playfulness and imagination provocation that takes place from entering the shop through to each part of the building, and provides the licence to be playful and have fun.

The serious side of the story is that it affords clarity of brand and a core philosophy that is easily remembered, as it is acted out every day by everyone. In any event of the need for a decision on many aspects of the work, members of the charity ask themselves: what would Graham Grimm do? First of all, Graham would do all that he could to understand and learn more about his communities in order to serve them as well as he could.

As a young person the experience begins when first entering Grimm & Co's Emporium of Stories which recently (29/02/2016 in mortal years) became visible to humans. Many experiences occur in Grimm & Co's Emporium of Stories but if you are entering as a scholarly apprentice of words and wonder then you will go through the secret door, brush off the cobwebs in the Imagination Gym, climb the giant's bookcase and arrive in the beautiful Writers' Pad and here is where your journey begins – your quest is to find the writer within your walls.

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<sup>2</sup> It's Grimm Up North (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2) attached as appendices

Grimm & Co uses writing as a tool for resilience, confidence building, narrative self-reflection/development, self-esteem, aspiration building, alongside the development of the skill of writing for academic purpose opportunity, well-being, creativity and for enhancing economic opportunity.

#### **1.4 Leadership and governance**

Grimm & Co is a registered charity (1154990) and company limited by guarantee (8765731). As a children's literacy charity, Grimm & Co embraces stories to champion the writer in every child. The charity delivers artistic, imagination-provoking activities that aim to ignite the motivations of children, young people (and more recently the families and carers around them) to enjoy reading and writing, building confidence, skills, resilience, and aspirations. Grimm & Co is based in the heart of Rotherham town centre to be close to those who need it the most and the communities of Rotherham are the priority, but the charity's reach is across Yorkshire and beyond. Children enter Grimm & Co with their imaginations, and leave as published authors.

The board of trustees (currently 11) meet at least 4 times per year and there are additional sub-committees with board representation who are given specific powers of delegation but all key strategic decisions are put to the board. Trustees have lead roles across key areas of the organisation, dependent on current priorities. For example, a current priority is the capital project so the board sub-committee meet every 2-3 weeks, led by an expert in property development and capital project management. Further sub-committees include the programme delivery/evaluation sub-committee and the finance and audit sub-committee.

The organisation's charitable objectives are:

- To advance learning for the public benefit in literacy
- To act as a resource for young people up to the age of 18, by providing advice and assistance and, organising programmes of learning and education and other activities as a means of:

- advancing in life and helping young people by developing their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as independent, mature, and responsible individuals
- advancing education
- relieving their unemployment
- To promote social inclusion for the public benefit by preventing people from becoming socially excluded, relieving the needs of those people who are vulnerable or / and socially excluded and assisting them to integrate into society

## **1.5 Funding**

Grimm & Co's funding model is borne out of a strategy, created to optimise a diversity of income sources that acquires restricted funds/grants and unrestricted income, creating greater autonomy and core funds. The charity achieved Arts Council England, National Portfolio status in 2017 which provides a contribution of unrestricted core funding each year with reapplication requirements every 4 years. Further restricted public funds are accessed through grants, e.g. National Lottery Community Fund requiring a rigorous application process. Trusts and Foundations have also supported Grimm & Co's programmes, including the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn and The Tudor Trust, again accessed through successful application routes. Further, unrestricted income is provided via a) donations: individual one off donations, regular giving and corporate gifts; b) earned income: retail sales, contractual income.

## **1.6 Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy**

### **1.6.1 A creative pedagogy**

The positioning and expectations of an arts-based literacy charity such as Grimm & Co differ from those within schools. Grimm & Co sets out to embrace and encourage creative, socio-cultural approaches as positive learning experiences and is not bound by the policy frames and regulated assessments that monitor school performance. Therefore, the charity, within the parameters of its mission, is free to develop its own teaching and learning method, curriculum and evaluation practices to achieve its objectives. Thomson, et al., (2009, 2012), discuss how schools tend to function

around particular objectives, exercises and tests, designed to determine what level pupils have achieved and call this the default pedagogy (Thomson et al., 2009) as a fall back model for teachers. They further claim many arts movements (Creative Partnerships programme, Philosophy for Children movement) set out to disrupt this default by bringing different ways of being, doing and knowing into schools (Thomson et al., 2012, p.13).

Grimm & Co's facilitation of learning takes place in a variety of settings and includes learning in schools directly with children and young people and also with teachers to support their approach to creative pedagogies. Grimm & Co also delivers learning activities outside of school time, directly to children and young people and to families, so the model is not exactly aligned with that of the Creative Partnerships programme which brings a hybrid or creative approach into default school pedagogies. Although Grimm & Co is not solely designed to develop hybrid pedagogies with teachers there are many synergies in the affordances the arts pedagogies provide. Thomson, et al., (2012), list these affordances as events, activities, associations, conversations and processes of making meaning, which allow children and young people to choose to act in ways which allow them to gain a new embodied understanding of who they are, what they could do now, and what they might do in the future (p.52) and this sits comfortably with the aims, philosophy, beliefs and practices of Grimm & Co's creative pedagogy. However, there are many characteristics that underpin Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy.

### **1.6.2 Philosophy informed signature pedagogy**

A signature pedagogy holds key themes which are common enough to warrant being called a signature (Thomson et al., 2012, p.12) but unique enough to fit to a particular profession's approach or practice (Shulman, 2005). Grimm & Co's philosophy frames the platform, purpose and practice that are the elements of Grimm & Co's distinctive signature pedagogy. A core foundation of the arts charity's pedagogy is not to teach in a didactic method of simply passing on knowledge but to facilitate learning through the use of collaborative, participatory approaches that build the capacity and confidence of the learner. This 'facilitative, enabling transfer of knowing, being and doing' (Thomson, et al., 2012, p.11) sits comfortably with

Shulman's (2005) take on signature pedagogy as enabling habits of the heart, mind and hand. However, Grimm & Co's distinctive signature pedagogy is borne out of a philosophy, communicated as a core set of beliefs:

Grimm & Co's philosophy begins with its mission, 'to change lives one story at a time' with an overarching objective to 'champion the writer in every child'. The mission sets out the method and the objective outlines the philosophy behind the pedagogy as enabling with the emphasis on the ultimate outcome of unleashing the talent within.

As schools are framed by policy and regulation that inform and influence their pedagogies, Grimm & Co is framed by its goal to support children and young people's literacies in the aim to develop their socio-cultural skills and capital. The *Inspire Rotherham* project demonstrated quantifiable shifts in measurements of literacy attainment that would equally be valued by schools. However, these test attainment measures only formed part of the story behind the building of this charity as these measurements focus on the technical literacies of applying reading and writing, whereas Grimm & Co's core function is complementary to the school's agenda as its focus is on the socio-cultural, meaning-making literacies rather than the technical aspects taking priority.

The beliefs have been additionally informed by further consultation with communities and other, like-minded organisations (826 Valencia). There is also a key factor in the development of these beliefs in that they are inevitably influenced by the experiences of the arts educationalists that influence the pedagogy, continuously influenced and informed by evaluation of their effectiveness followed by reviews, revisions and tweaks. However, the philosophy behind the signature pedagogy remains the same.

### 1.6.3 Grimm & Co's Pedagogy at work

The philosophy is further defined by the beliefs that underpin ALL planning, engagement and evaluation of impact from the business plan through to creative workshop delivery the core set of beliefs create the habits of the heart, mind and hand (Shulman, 2005) that assure a strong and central mission for all arts facilitators to return to.

We believe in...

- Using stories to give every child, from every background, a voice.
- Starting from the child's own cultural toolkit (their experiences and their own imagination).
- Enabling a creative environment – an ecology of rich literacies surrounding the child – authentic but playful.
- Supporting and enabling the influencers on the child - inspiring whole communities to get involved in children's development.
- The power of the imagination to ignite new possibilities and imagine potential narratives.
- Providing purpose – a reason to write.
- Challenging expectations and aspirations
- Taking fun seriously

(Source: Grimm & Co business plan, 2021 – 2023)

These core beliefs, stitched together, each as vital as the other, form the foundation of Grimm & Co's creative but distinctive signature pedagogy, fortifying its methodology, consistency and capacity to bring about positive change.

## **1.7 Definitions of literacy across the UK**

The relationship between Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy and the national context for literacy in the UK was arguably juxtaposed until 2019 on the introduction of 'cultural capital' into the Inspection Framework for schools, defined by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in England. Ofsted is the regulator for children's services and skills that inspects services provided by schools (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about>). I will return to this through the literature review within this thesis but at this point I will continue to explore how literacy is defined in the UK.

For statutory connected or monitored organisations (e.g. schools, local authorities) in the UK the context for literacy definition and how it is measured, tends to follow the

international measurements set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and measured through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), described by OECD as:

an internationally standardised assessment, jointly developed by participating economies that is administered to 15 year olds in schools, conducted every three years to assess the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society.

The OECD provide the definition of literacy as:

A particular capacity or mode of behaviour: the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. (OECD <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/41529765.pdf> 2020).

This definition behind the key benchmarks for UK's policy-makers, seems wholly focused on the textual decoding and information-processing competencies for achievement and development purposes. The OECD places specific focus on the importance of using printed information as the core objective in being literate. Therefore, as the measurements within this are England and Northern Ireland's success markers, to what extent does this filter down through their definitions?

At England's policy level of definition Ofsted set out their plans for regulating schools and learning in their 'Distance Learning Materials, Reading, Writing and Communication' (DfE, 2011, V4). Here they explore the definition in the context of schools, also referring to the Wolf Report when answering, 'What is Literacy':

In the early discussions of the intended changes to Ofsted's inspection of schools, 'literacy' was used as a catch-all term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it simply as 'the ability to read and write'. The recent White Paper perhaps puts it into context better: 'When young people



compete for jobs and enter the workplace, they will be expected to communicate precisely and effectively.’ (Para. 4.50) There is a clear expectation, when taken with the response to the Wolf Report quoted above, that young people leaving the education system at 16, or more likely 19, will have the requisite literacy and communication skills to be employable and to be effective in that employment. (DfE, 2011, V4)

Ofsted refer to the Oxford English Dictionary definition as a ‘catch-all term’, possibly implying this is comprehensive or maybe they consider it too ambiguous but as they go on to describe the Wolf Report’s definition as ‘better’, one can presume it is the latter. The ‘better’ description is solely about the economic, employability value of literacy by adding ‘communication skills’ for the purpose of employability.

The wider values and benefits of literacy, implied by the National Literacy Trust or many academics in this field that refer to the ‘socio-cultural’ literacies are not discussed within these learning papers, intended for the Ofsted Inspector, instead choosing the term that is wholly concerned with the workplace. As Government inspectors of education, could the narrow functionality objective imply that this is the singular lens they will use to examine the effectiveness of education on children’s literacies in practice – if the definition of their success factor is readiness for the workplace will they incorporate other uses of literacy as they inspect schools? My concern is that the socio-cultural literacies, crucial for whole-child cultural development will not be valued, replaced by prescriptive, technical literacies. I will revisit this within the body of this thesis, particularly within the literature review chapter.

In 2019 it was announced that changes would be made to the way schools would be inspected in England and that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) would also inspect the delivery of ‘cultural capital’ within the curriculum. The inclusion of this during inspection was in the draft of the schools inspection handbooks (2021) where cultural capital was described by the Department for Education as the ‘essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens. It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement’ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national->

[curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4#the-national-curriculum-in-england](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/432222/curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4#the-national-curriculum-in-england)).

Whilst it is welcome news that there is recognition of the importance of creativity, as it is so closely aligned to 'achievement' and 'the need to be educated citizens' I fear it is likely that the interpretation might not value the elements of the pedagogy I discuss within my analysis chapter as I unfold the approaches of my own literacy childhood. Therefore, these types of pedagogies continue to be at risk of being lost within the educational landscape in the race for global competitiveness and the need to demonstrate competency in the technical skills attained by pupils in schools.

In the drilldown from the global definition which seems concerned mainly with text competency, comprehension and employability at the core, what of the wider definitions of literacy? The UK's National Literacy Trust, an independent UK charity, focuses on disadvantaged children, and though they too are concerned with reading and writing, their definition also encompasses the wider uses and definitions of literacy. The definition explained by the UK National Literacy Trust (2019) as 'Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world'. (National Literacy Trust, 2019). The reference to speaking, listening, reading and writing moves away from solely text based literacy definitions, but instead allows for multi-modal practices and meaning making. This notion of meaning making provides a more comfortable definition for my own purposes, perhaps because it offers opportunity to consider and respond. It affords the notion of exploring, experiencing, imagining and finding our own understanding of our surroundings and the world. This definition fits with the socio-linguistic nature of my own work, aligned to the National Literacy Trust's classification and as a charity their particular group of interest are those who are disadvantaged. It is interesting that this wider meaning of this term is associated with a Trust who work with the more disadvantaged groups. It is this definition I am more drawn to as someone who also works with groups, considering literacy in socio-cultural terms, much greater and more encompassing, rather than merely as a measure of economic participation alone. The definitions are clearly value-laden, purposeful, and fit the criteria that each will use within their practice. However, if all were embraced and equally valued, the curriculum might enable a more permeable pedagogy (Dyson,

1993), beneficial to many rather than the few. I will return to this within the literature review chapter of this thesis.

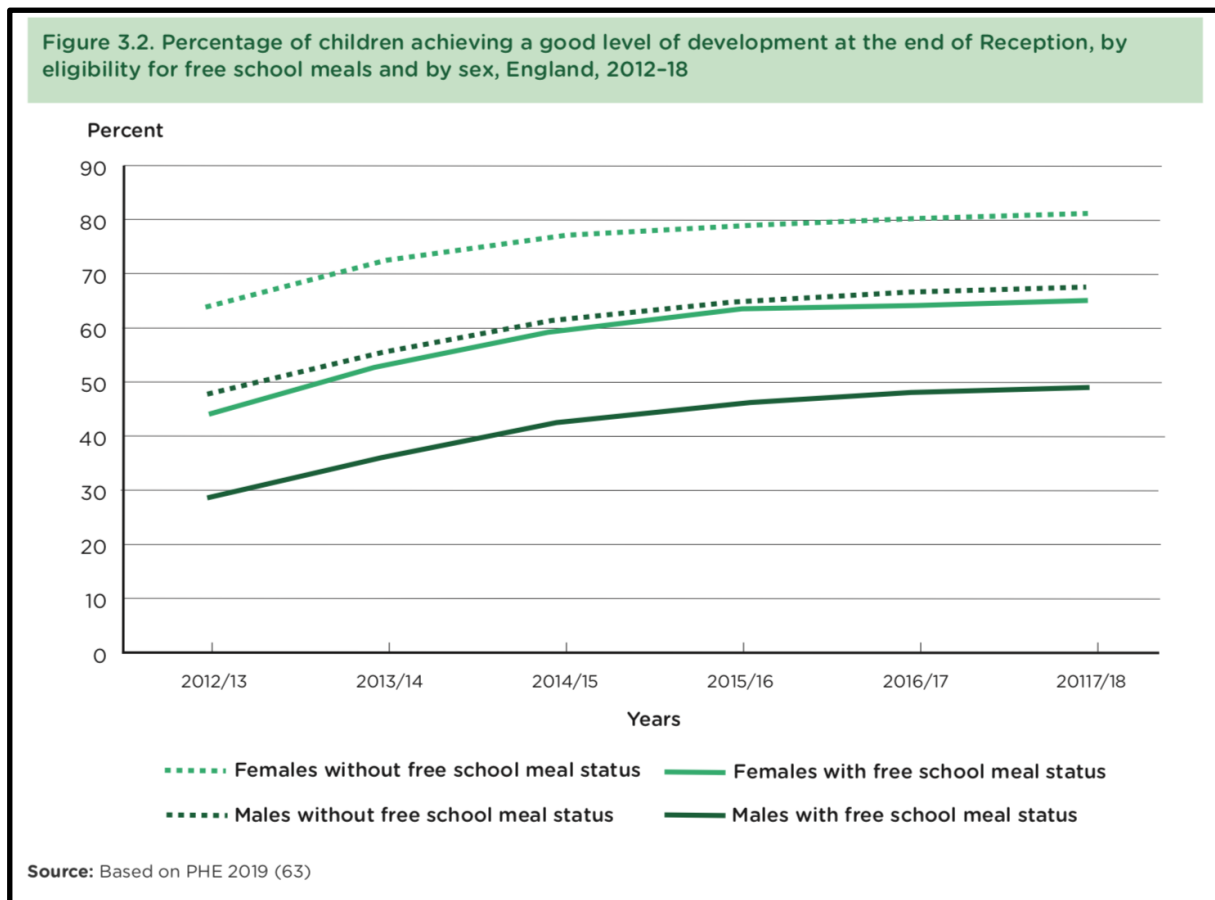
## 1.8 Socio-economic literacy context

There is a multiplicity of data supporting the notion that there is a strong connection between poverty and low literacy in the UK and that this can be cyclical through generations. In 2010 the Marmot Review into 'Health Equity in England' proposed the key factors behind social and economic inequalities, overall judged by life expectancy (Marmot, 2010). Marmot (2010) stated:

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to begin primary school with lower personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills than their peers [...] These children are also at significantly increased risk of developing conduct disorders that could lead to difficulties in all areas of their lives, including educational attainment, relationships and longer-term mental health. (p.64)

Marmot used the indicator of children in receipt of free school meals (a commonly used measure of economic poverty in families of school aged children) of 'how socioeconomic deprivation has an adverse impact at each stage of educational development' (Marmot, 2010, p.64) stating there is a 'strong relationship between the level of deprivation in a geographical area and educational attainment' and more recently in the 'Marmot Review – 10 Years On', Marmot cites the 'strength of evidence linking experiences in the early years to later health outcomes' as the 'priority area'. The report states, 'strong communication and language skills in the early years are linked with success in education, higher levels of qualifications, higher wages and better health', (Marmot, 2020, p.38) which once entering school will 'persist and deepen during their school years' (Marmot, 2020, p.38). A measurement of progress in England, used by Marmot, is the rate of children achieving at least the expected level of development at the end of their initial year in school in communication and language, physical development; personal, social and emotional development, literacy and mathematics, all of which are tracked as early learning goals. Rates overall show

an improvement since 2010 but remain consistent with socioeconomic inequalities, as Fig.1 illustrates below:



*Fig. 1: Percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, by eligibility for free school meals and by gender, England, 2012-2018, Marmot, 2020, p.38*

The number of children growing up in poverty is on the rise. An average of one in five children, 22 percent in 2017-18, and this was prior to the period of the global pandemic, Covid-19, and the yet-to-discover outcomes of measures taken during this unprecedented time. ‘Rates of child poverty, a critical measure for early child development have increased in England since 2010 and are now back to their pre-2010 levels’ (Marmot, 2020, p.42). The report cites clear and significant differences in regions across England with Yorkshire and the Humber performing worse than the national average.

## 1.9 Local level socio-economic factors affecting Rotherham

Rotherham's population was estimated at 263,400 in 2017 and is projected to grow by 2.5% to reach 270,000 in 2026<sup>3</sup>. The ethnically diverse population has doubled in size between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, and continues to grow. This is most evident in the central area of Rotherham where new migrant communities have settled alongside established ethnic minorities. Agencies working in the area need to take account of differing cultural needs and barriers that can limit access to services, such as limited English skills and different attitudes to health. The greatest levels of diversity are seen in the borough's children and young people, illustrated by the fact that 16% of the school population are from ethnically diverse backgrounds. In many centrally based schools in Rotherham, the ethnically diverse community is now the majority.

Rotherham is one of the 20% most deprived districts in England which the Indices of Deprivation 2015 demonstrate is driven mainly by high unemployment, low qualifications and skill levels and poor health. The inequality gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the borough has grown as deprivation has increased since 2007. Deprivation is reflected in high levels of financial exclusion, debt problems and fuel poverty (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019).

The link between poverty, educational attainment and basic skills is stronger in England than in any other developed country, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (specifically the IDACI, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index). The IMDB states 29 areas of Rotherham are in the top 10% of deprivation in the UK and 13 of these areas are in the top 3% of deprivation across the country. Rotherham also has higher levels of 'looked after children' (children in the care system) compared to statistical neighbours and England averages.

The National Literacy Trust state children who are the most engaged with literacy are 3 times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who are least engaged (39.4% vs 11.8%) <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/mental-wellbeing-reading-and-writing/>.

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<sup>3</sup> Rotherham Demographics (with sources)

According to the 2018 Ofsted report <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2761996> approximately 25% of Rotherham's children and young people under the age of 18 are living in low-income families. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is 17% in primary schools (national average is 15%) and 16% in secondary schools (national average is 14%). Levels of children placed under measures for their protection in the area was 2,612 at 31 March 2017 and recently the town has seen a significant increase in children being placed in care to 92 per 10,000 children. The health of the Rotherham population is generally poorer than the English average. This leads to growing pressures on health services, social care, informal care, supported housing and other services. Life expectancy, although lower than average, has been increasing. Rotherham is one of the worst-performing places for digital inclusion in England.

Rotherham is less well-served than other areas when it comes to local cultural facilities, particularly when compared to neighbouring areas: Sheffield, Doncaster and Barnsley. In 2012, the Council's arts and tourism services were cut, just as early reports about the Child Sex Exploitation scandal were emerging in the press. It is only since the intervention of Commissioners and the reformation of the Culture Sport and Tourism department that new investment has begun. Cultural engagement is currently significantly lower than the national average, placing Rotherham in the bottom quartile. For adults this is 38.1% of the adult population. Furthermore, of those places which have not yet received CPP investment, Rotherham is third from the bottom in the north, and the lowest in South Yorkshire. Engagement in Rotherham breaks down as follows (Source: Rotherham Cultural Strategy, appendix 4):

- 27.43% have spent time doing a creative, artistic, theatrical or music activity or craft, compared to a national average of 34.67%
- 41.44% have attended an event, performance or festival involving creative, artistic, dance, theatrical or music activity compared to a national average of 52.22%
- 27.49% have used a public library service compared to 35.01% national average
- 34.83% have attended a museum or gallery compared to 46.5% national average.

( Rotherham Cultural Strategy, 2019, appendix 4)

Currently there are high levels of deprivation, set to become more challenging over the next decade, especially in the restart of the economy and continued effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are many challenges facing the communities within Rotherham and the South Yorkshire areas, especially in the most deprived areas.

The measurement used by the UK government for literacy is the attainment level achieved at age 11 through Standard Assessment Test (SATs) results of primary age children moving on to Secondary school. The latest statistics available on the Department for Education school comparison site (2019) demonstrate Rotherham's primary school pupils achieving -1.3 levels below the national average in reading and -0.3 levels below average in writing ([https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/?\\_ga=2.11529783.2006557017.1635170867-2000593798.1635170867](https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/?_ga=2.11529783.2006557017.1635170867-2000593798.1635170867)).

It is within the above context that Grimm & Co was founded, based on the outcomes of the *Inspire Rotherham* research and resulting recommendations that demonstrated significant levels of progress in narrowing the educational literacy gap for children from the most disadvantaged areas of the town. The project and aligned funding ceased in May 2011 so I examined the research, drew on the experiences and successes within the project together with the pedagogies I had witnessed whilst overseeing the work and began to develop the foundations of a literacy charity that would build on the legacy of this work and develop its next steps to create a literacy destination for children and young people in Rotherham and beyond.

### **1.10 Early milestones**

From a Pop Up Story Shop to the opening of a permanent story destination, the journey took place between 2011 to 2016. I delivered a host of presentations on the plans to undertake community consultation and further action research which resulted in the local authority allocating an empty shop to the project. I created a social enterprise in the name of the action research project, *Inspire Rotherham*, for undertaking consultation with the communities of Rotherham to further inform,

influence and shape the model with opportunities to test the plans directly with children, young people, families and stakeholders across the communities. The shop needed to be inviting, accessible, inclusive and story focused. The communities embraced the concept and the opportunity to truly participate in this consultation that would see it through to the reality of the model.

A TED Talk by Dave Eggers, [https://www.ted.com/talks/dave\\_eggerts\\_my\\_wish\\_once\\_upon\\_a\\_school?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_eggerts_my_wish_once_upon_a_school?language=en), provided a possible concept and an exciting twist to the model that further inspired the design with a fundamentally important factor that the model he'd created was naturally aligned to the signature pedagogy behind the outcomes of the evaluation and further consultation driving the Grimm & Co model. I contacted the 'Pirate Supplies Store' at 826 Valencia and the alliance commenced. The children, through all consultations, persistently drove the agenda for the magical theme that would dominate the entrance to the literacy space, a shop where magical beings are welcomed and served. Presentations to all key drivers and possible stakeholders at the local authority, local businesses, potential funders, potential trustees were all contacted.

On 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2016 Grimm & Co's Apothecary to the Magical opened its doors officially for all – magical and mortal beings. The shop provided a welcoming space and all you need to enter is to enjoy the opportunity to suspend your disbelief, leave the chaos of real life at the door and engage in the playfulness (<https://grimmandco.co.uk/our-story/>) of a real shop that supplied products to the magical and mortal.





Fig 2: Grimm & Co's Apothecary to the Magical, Rotherham, 2019



Fig. 3: Inside the Apothecary to the Magical





Fig. 4: The Giant's Staircase: The Imagination Gym



Fig. 5: The Writers' Closet - a playful, breakout writing room



Fig. 6: The Writers' Pad - inside/outside classroom space for writing

### 1.11 School engagement

The curriculum began with one school activity which would welcome a class group of children to a tour of the apothecary, a stretch of their imaginations in the gym, followed by a disembodied, voiced provocation from the fictional characters, Grizelda or Graham, and a mission to create twenty eight (or whatever number was in the class) stories by lunch time. If this could happen then their stories would be illustrated, published and handed to them with their name as the author on the cover, by lunchtime and of course they would have the added bonus of exiting down the beanstalk (a curly, large green slide) if their stories were creative enough to feed the magical beings. Throughout this activity volunteer story mentors work with small groups or one-to-one to encourage every child to have their voice heard and a joint story is created to the point of the cliff hanger. At this point all children work individually on their own ending, bringing back the characters they'd particularly liked and providing an interesting ending. This workshop is the Story Making Workshop. The children would enter with their imaginations and leave as published authors.



So popular was this workshop that Grimm & Co didn't need to market the activity. School bookings came thick and fast for the workshop, leading to requests for return visits. This meant the next stage of programme development was required and in working with Grimm & Co's writer, Jeremy Dyson, the team developed further workshops for all age groups. From Comedy Writing to Dragon's Den, the demand grew.

The request from Grimm & Co to teachers is to sit back and spend time, observing their pupils within the session. As a result, teachers consistently reported unprecedented changes, especially from those who typically disengage in class writing sessions or educational activities. Gasps and tears came from teachers, shortly followed by requests for Grimm & Co to deliver training sessions for teachers on the methodologies behind Grimm & Co's pedagogy. This was a significant milestone for Grimm & Co as it led to the development of 'Chapter and Verse'. Grimm & Co's teacher development programme, funded and supported by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation to build courage and creativity into the curriculum to support the development of children's cultural capital, alongside the prescribed technical aspects of the literacy curriculum.

## **1.12 Out of school engagement**

Throughout my experience as an educationalist, working with vulnerable and more marginalised communities has been a key strand of work. The first challenge is to reach those communities who are often left behind by finding and developing activities that are relevant to their needs, their interests and their culture if you are to engage, retain, progress and create meaningful impact for all children. Grimm & Co, simply had to exist and be authentic to reach and engage the children and families of Rotherham. Waiting lists grew from zero to hundreds within weeks of opening and the majority of these families on this waiting list resided within the postcodes classed as being the most disadvantaged across the town (Appendix 4). Programmes and activities took place after school, weekends and as holiday clubs. Workshops for reimagining, from Unthinking to Script Writing, all resulting in a publication, a professional production and lots more. Requests rolled in for family workshops,

festival attendance and additional requests to work with younger children to support families and children at an earlier stage. These further requests piled up in the daily emptied suggestion box for Grimm & Co to grow to meet this demand. Demand was consistently at least three times what the capacity would allow. This, coupled with a strategic goal to move away from a reliance on public funds led to the need to identify and attain the use of a larger building that would enable the space to provide an immersive literacy experience for all who visit and with additional revenue raising possibilities that a shop, café, book shop and educational children's parties might bring, also creating greater capacity to undertake free out of school activities for children and engage three times the number of schools from across the region.

### **1.13 Grimm & Co Grows Up**

Further to requests, additional, and continued consultation with communities generated worrying feedback that the magical frontage of the shop might be a barrier to some faith communities. This, coupled with the need to grow, led to a proposal to find alternative accommodation by the end of the lease break period on the property. At this point a grade II listed gothic, very large church (Fig.7) became available in the centre of Rotherham. A business plan and capital project plan developed, planning permission for the scheme and change of use was granted and a grant was secured from the Arts Council England Small Capital Grants to purchase and begin works on the building. A local donor contributed a further large sum, meaning that the project began to look viable. As the Covid-19 pandemic struck Grimm & Co purchased the building.

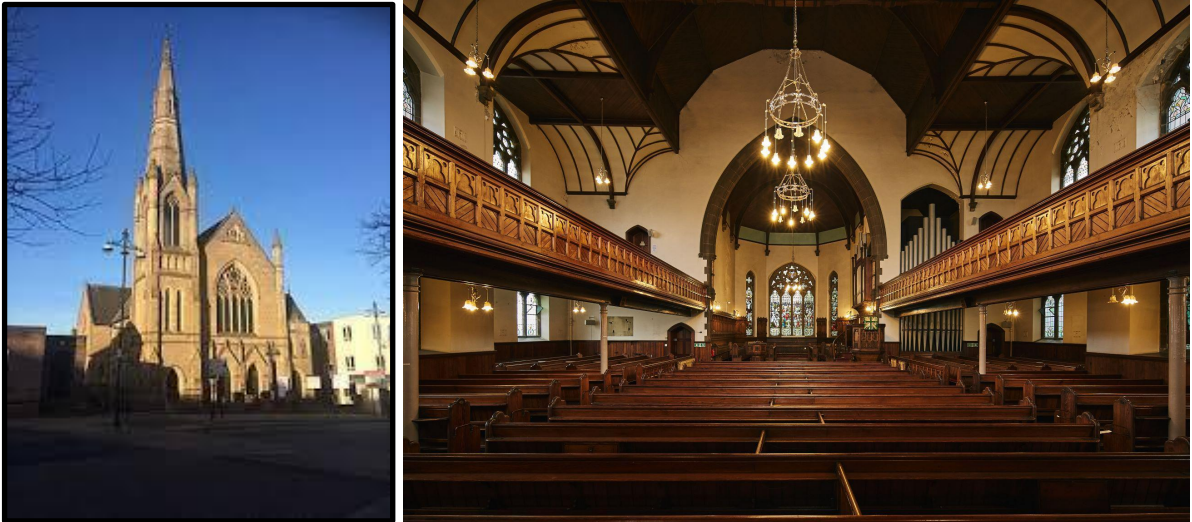


Fig. 7: Grimm & Co's home, the Emporium of Stories, pre-construction project

### 1.14 Next Steps

The saga continues as Grimm & Co's team and volunteers moved across to the newly acquired building in August 2020. The capital plan has begun with the likely opening of the centre by November 2022. Eighty percent of the funding is in place with further funding plans to secure the final element of the fit out/furnishing of the centre.

Grimm & Co's Emporium of Stories will tower above the ceremonial town hall square with topiary adorned towers, arched entrances and a story telling foyer that draws you into the story market square with a Book Nook, the Apothecary to the Magical nestled in the corner, and Feastery with tables where story themed food and drink is served. A further, curtained medieval castle-like space provides storying activities for children/families and there is a secret door, through which the Imagination Gym and Writers' Pads can be accessed and a beanstalk (also known as a slide) will return you to the mortal world.

The programme will retain all the elements of the original creations with further additions to include family learning and working with children at a younger age, supporting the Early Help agenda for the area by building the capacity of families and carers to support children with language and communication through stories. A further outreach programme has also been developed with a decorated story trailer and

theatre that can pop up in communities across Rotherham and beyond, taking Grimm & Co mobile to undertake further consultation and build strong relationships in communities that are often left behind.

### **1.15 Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy foundations**

There are multiple experiences and perspectives that underpin the creative approach that has been adopted as Grimm & Co's characteristics within its distinctive signature pedagogy. As the founder of this arts based charity I recognise the factors that have influenced and informed the approach were developed as a result of a combination of the following:

- 1) The outcomes of the *Inspire Rotherham* action research project and the recommended actions (Appendix 1);
- 2) Further consultation following the conclusion of the *Inspire Rotherham* project. This consultation was undertaken in schools, with families and directly with children and young people through the pop up story shop between 2012 and November 2013;
- 3) The personal and professional characteristics of my own narrative as an arts practitioner that have inevitably shaped the pedagogy.

In the process of undertaking this research I increasingly recognised that my own narrative in relation to literacy and writing in particular are evident in the work and the foundations that underpin the signature pedagogy. In order to explore this further and understand the multiple experiences and perspectives that underpin this approach I determined the greatest learning could take place through an exploration of the personal experiences that form the explicit characteristics of 'signature pedagogy' of one arts educator.

This autoethnographic study has enabled me to take a deep dive into one child's (me) literacies and the pedagogic moments woven throughout the narrative of this child and resulting adult arts educator. As a result, I am able to better understand how my own personal experiences and perspectives have intersected with wider reading, public consultation and engagement with policy and resulted in a particular pedagogic practice now associated with Grimm and Co.

By sharing and discussing my own personal literacy narrative, it is possible to better understand the pedagogies that underpin Grimm and Co's practices and this in turn provides a new tool for supporting reflection by arts educators to make explicit and develop their own practice.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by defining the key thematic areas of literature that consider and debate the contextual definitions and approaches to literacy pedagogies discussed within the thesis. I consider the literature from a policy context on curriculum, literacy (definition and values) and pedagogy then move on to explore literacy as meaning-making. This sets the scene to delve into dynamic literacies and dynamic pedagogies, ending with a review of signature pedagogies within the wider context of professional practice.

Discourse analysis is woven throughout this chapter from the outset as in how the language used by policy makers can be a key factor in communicating the values and principles which set out how policy will be perceived, actioned and measured. Discourse analysis is further used as a method to examine the purpose and effect of different types of discourse from the policy makers (including the effects of policy on teaching and pedagogy) through to discourse of academics and potential effects of the wider body of knowledge on an arts-based pedagogy.

Within the context of education, in this chapter I examine what it means to be 'literate' in the 21st century from an English Government Educational policy point of view. I explore motivations and benchmarks referred to by policy makers and the extent to which these influence the prescribed curriculum of literacy education. I identify literature on how these benchmarks translate into pedagogy and academic theories and the effects of this on teaching and ultimately on children and young people. I spotlight literature that defines literacy as a practice and within the educational context, from technical, functional literacy to socio-cultural literacies.

Definitions of literacies have developed over time. For academics including Street, (1984, 1995); Gates, (1997); Heath, (1983); Hicks, (2000), literacy is defined as a social and cultural practice, traversed with multi-modalities (Jewitt and Kress, 2003, Pahl and Rowsell, 2005) continuously advanced with globalised multiliteracies (Cope

and Kalantzis, 2012) and greater possibilities made available through digital literacies (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, Marsh, 2009, 2010, 2013). These academic definitions seem juxtaposed with the technical, linear and constricted focus of language and representation (Ehret, et al., 2018; Leander and Bolt, 2013) as defined through the formal literacy that children need for success within the current educational system in England and Ireland. I unravel the theories around this juxtaposition and its effects on pedagogy and the literacies of children and young people.

In section 2.2 I examine the educational regime that exists in the United Kingdom as a result of a policy driven agenda with a focus on a neoliberalist, market driven, outcome based curriculum that is driven by performance measurement that feeds the knowledge economy. By neoliberalism, I refer to the economic framing of education within a free market competition around human capital as the commodity. I will examine this strategic tide, not only affecting the UK, and its potential to impede development of meaningful values-based education and social inclusion from the wider research presented by academics around education and literacies.

Finally, within this chapter I present critiques around literacy pedagogies, drilling deeper into the signature pedagogy that is the focus of this study to gain further insight into the wider research on these areas and potential alignment with another research based framework (Burnett and Merchant, 2015) for an inclusive literacy pedagogy.

## **2.2 Policy context: How has literacy been defined in recent policy and curriculum in England?**

### **2.2.1 Literacy league tables**

Education Policy in England, has shifted towards an economic need (Ball, 1998), and in the global race for 'human capital' (Wildavsky, 2010; Collier, 2007; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) this market led approach influences the curriculum framework for schools. Assurances are provided through 'target setting, accountability and comparison' (Ball, 1998, p.123) measures are monitored and exposed through league

tables, ensure 'performativity as a principle of governance' (Yeatman, 1994, pp. 111) as described by Ball (1998), 'steering at a distance' (p.123).

The state of the UK's literacies is a 'longstanding obsession, well-documented in any number of surveys' (Cameron, 1995; Crystal, 1984; Milroy and Milroy, 1985; Crowley, 1991) with strong opinions from policy makers on definitions of validity that has led to a politically steered course for the way literacy is taught in schools (Cameron, 1995; Fairclough, 1995, Hilton, 2008).

The HM Government, UK, 'Importance of Teaching' White Paper (2010) foreword by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of that time, refers in the first paragraph to how 'much of the education debate in this country is backward looking: have standards fallen?' but then goes on to say that 'what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors'. This White Paper (2010) continues to debate benchmarks regarding the comparative status with global neighbours and sets the 'authoritative allocation of values' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p.7) which provide a steer for a review of practice leading to reform of policy. Such reform began with the Chief HMI Ofsted Inspector, Michael Wilshaw, in his speech, March 2012, discussing benchmarks with international league tables (PISA), further announcing a new paper on literacy, 'Moving English Forward', stating 'We need to renew our national drive for higher standards of literacy so that England can reclaim its place at the top end of the PISA league table' (Wilshaw, 2012, p.5).

It is interesting to note that these global market comparisons are central to policy making and standard setting when in 1996, Lawton and Gordon (p.138) recognised that there was no 'universal standard of literacy', implying the need for benchmarks which could be monitored and judged against on an international basis. Arguably, this has since been the focus of England and Northern Ireland Government's Department for Education since the emerging emphasis on international benchmarks and resulting alignment to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), In England, 'PISA, it is claimed, is of central importance to policy-making' (Baird, et al., 2016, p129).

### 2.2.2 A spatial framework to benchmark progress

Ball (2008, p.25) suggests that globalisation forms a 'spatial frame' within which policy discourses and resulting formulation are set, further arguing the particular implications for education in the discourse and development of policies, created as a result of globalisation 'and through the idea of the knowledge economy' (Ball, 2008, p.25). Changes to national curriculum and moves towards assessment since 1997, seem increasingly linked with international agendas (Lauder, et. Al. 2006: Whetton, Twist and Sainsbury, 2000) that determine what counts as literacy fluent. Tickly (2004, p.193) defines such global economics-driven policy as 'a new imperialism', with the potential to be challenged by grass roots social movements that represent 'globalisation from below' (Tickly, 2004, p.193). Further into this chapter I return to Tickly's idea of 'globalisation from below' in the context of '21<sup>st</sup> century literacies' (Burnett and Merchant, 2015) which presents a pedagogy framework potentially more suited to the globally accessible communities that children and young people negotiate in their everyday lives.

The political shift that aligned policy to globalised benchmarks and advisory policies, determined by PISA, created a market based language of competition and capital for the English Government's Department for Education, which links education to the knowledge economy. PISA is used as 'a tool that encourages the construction of meaning in education, which objectivises social meaning and allows the legitimising of decision making in education' (Afonso and Costa, 2009, p.55). Carvalho (2009) agrees, asserting the construction of meaning, legitimised through the PISA angle, disseminates specific economic values 'through a battery of indicators and application of conceptual frameworks' (Carvalho, 2009, pp. 70 -71). Carvalho (2009) outlines these frameworks as a common set of values and language, assessed by results against indicators that determine a policy defined standard, and resulting judgement of what counts as literacy fluency when framed within a global market, economy driven benchmark system.

### 2.2.3 The National Curriculum

The introduction of the National Curriculum (2010) in England and Northern Ireland (updated for English, 2014) established an alignment to the PISA benchmarks, whilst attributing the key indicators that would act as the indicators of measurement, assessing literacy fluency in England and Ireland. In setting these indicators the policy makers moved swiftly to introduce further reform to schools that would have a significant effect on the way they are judged and managed, affecting the resulting pedagogies adopted by schools.

At the same time that this newly prescribed curriculum would be introduced, the move to greater autonomy was introduced in the White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' (2010). The Minister for Education labels this paper as a direct response to conclusions from the 2009 PISA survey (Gove, 2010) with an emphasis on the expansion of the 'free schools' programme which Baird (2016) agrees, 'was in line with the survey's conclusion that schools with autonomy worked better' (p.129). However, this new culture of autonomy was accompanied by further reform in the form of performance indicators, directly linked to this new curriculum, made public through league tables and providing the basis for inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Moss (2017) asserts, 'the trajectory to number-driven reform has left schools struggling with the difficulties that numbers on the public stage produce' (p.63). Whilst the notion of autonomy suggests greater choice, this was accompanied by increased emphasis on policy determined measures. Additionally, in this scenario, the resources (including local authority school improvement services) that provided direct leadership and pedagogy support to schools would no longer automatically be centrally resourced. Moss (2017) claims, 'this has done nothing to lift attainment' (p.63).

#### **2.2.4 High Stakes Testing**

Wyse and Torrance (2009), in exploring consequences of national curriculum assessment for primary education in England claim

the evidence suggests that the current intense focus on testing and test results in the core subjects of English, maths and science is narrowing

the curriculum and driving teaching in exactly the opposite direction to that which other research indicates will improve teaching, learning and attainment (Wyse and Torrance, 2009, p.224).

They further explain that improvements in scores/tests/assessment results is not necessarily indicative of real improvements in educational standards, stating their range of studies 'indicate quite the reverse, that coaching for the tests has restricted the quality of teaching and learning and that as test scores have risen, educational standards may have actually declined' (Wyse and Torrance, 2009, p.225). This juxtaposition between policy driven practices and research based recommendations for literacy learning seems particularly strong across this decade, suggesting a tension that underpins the pedagogy.

As a result of this building divide, there are calls from academics to policy makers to examine the impact of the educational policy and this and the resulting pedagogical decisions and effects on children and young people. Dyson states:

educational policy is not a decontextualized document, a "disembodied thing," as McCarty explains (2011, p.xii); rather it is a situated and dynamic process, enacted through practices and imbued with ideologies and attitudes that influence people's arrangement for, and choices about, children's use of language (Dyson, 2016, p.174).

Dyson and McCarty's statements discuss how the values of the policy makers, the choices they make and the language they use are intrinsically connected with the communities that are judged by these.

Dyson (2016) reflects on how the National Curriculum and resulting assessments are interpreted then navigated by teachers at every operational decision point: 'policies are embodied in the moment-to-moment decisions made by teachers who are accountable to their supervisors but also, of course, to their children' (p.174). This may accurately reflect the situation where autonomy and interpretation have a role to play. Dyson (2016) continues to offer as 'most troubling' the macro level set policies by legislative mandates that stress 'accountability as defined by achievement test

scores' (p.174). A move towards test scores, benchmarks and an accountable regime has developed over time, each reform built on top of the last in a competitive drive from policy makers to improve standards.

A key landmark for accountability was in 1988 as a new Education Reform Act introduced a National Curriculum with published attainment targets in England and Northern Ireland. The impact of this regime on learning was noted by academics, including Doddington and Hilton (2007) who state that 'This was the beginning of new formalised knowledge for primary aged children and a ladder of targets to be 'driven up' in a newly imposed subject taxonomy' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.47). Towards the end of pupils' Key Stage 2 (at age 11) school experience, children in the England and Northern Ireland state-aided education system would take compulsory tests from 1997, when the New Labour government introduced measures and testing which have continued to be further prescribed by subsequent governments. This testing was further developed in 2013 as the coalition, Conservative/Liberal Democrat government determined a more prescriptive testing regime following the Bew Report (DfE, 2011) which recommended testing of grammar, spelling and punctuation as the technical elements of language, stating there are 'clear, "right" and "wrong" answers' (DfE, 2011, p.60), with many references to the use of 'Standard English' (SE) and this testing would directly relate to the National Curriculum.

Moss (2017) asserts this regime sits within 'a pervasive culture of accountability, propped up by rhetoric about raising standards' (Moss, 2017, p.3). Academics such as Moss (2017) and previously, Doddington and Hilton (2007) argue that the shift towards the emphasis on tests has had a detrimental effect on education in England, asserting this 'punitive use of high stakes testing' leads to uncertainty and 'compounds what is not working' (Moss, 2017, p.63). Doddington and Hilton (2007) raise a further interesting point around the effect of the emphasis on test results and league tables on teachers, referring to 'a considerable rise in anxiety among teachers as they now struggled with the performance of children in their care in tests and targets' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.49) a theory further examined by McDonald (2001) citing these high stakes assessments as a source of anxiety and stress for students.. Cushing (2019) reports 'many teachers feel insecure about their own subject

knowledge' (Cushing, 2019, p.172) and reports on criticisms of 'the amount of metalanguage required' and of the 'decontextualised grammar content' (Cushing, 2019; Bell, 2015, 2016; Safford, 2016). This unrest and anxiety, arising from an imposed performative remodelling of primary education has created a target based regime that could be compared to any corporate, market based model. Teachers are judged on their ability to ensure pupils progress according to the curriculum assessments. Considerations of their pupils' assessment measures is the most critical element of teacher performance, monitored through management and judged through transparency of these results and regulatory, Government inspection. High stakes testing is a significant dynamic through schools, now dominating their cultures, and so is a key factor when considering pedagogy as it is an inevitable force, standing as the outcome that will drive the method.

### **2.3 Policy makers' valued literacies**

The emphasis on the importance of the use of what has been referred to as 'good', 'correct', 'proper', spelling, punctuation and grammar is not a new concept to England's policy makers, traditionally valued as standards, discussed and recorded throughout the last century. Through the ages there are examples of perceptions played out within key texts, demonstrating the importance of Standard English, determined by correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, as the acceptable language within the boundaries of education and a dichotomy of beliefs seems to exist between groups, campaigners, researchers for the value of linguistic identity and what is often referred to as the 'right wing' (Cox, 1994, p.22) view of correct grammar. Some have paid homage to the multiplicities of language identified with local identities of accent and dialect, recognizing that these have their place, and that sensitivities must be used around these but even though many researchers have recommended a more liberal approach to language teaching (Trudgill, 1975; Cox, 1989; Kingman, 1988; Street, 1995) there has been a consistent approach, and in more recent times, a greater push towards the importance of modelling 'Standard English'.

The United Kingdom's government commissioned reports by Kingman (1988) shortly followed by Cox (1989) discussed grammar at length. Kingman's (1988) report



provided a fresh viewpoint which challenged 'old fashioned, traditional grammar' education in 'Setting the Scene' (p.3) and referring to how they have organized and presented their report, Kingman stated 'Nor do we see it as part of our task to plead for a return to old-fashioned grammar teaching and learning by rote' (Kingman, 1988, p.3). However, there is demonstrable support throughout the report, and within the same paragraph, of a 'recognition and accurate use of the rules and conventions. Command of these rules and conventions is more likely to increase the freedom of the individual than diminish it' (Kingman, 1988, p.3). Hot on the heels of the Kingman, 1988 report came the Cox report, 'English for ages 5 to 16' (1989), commissioned by England's Education Secretary to make recommendations on attainment targets and programmes of study for the English component of the new National Curriculum. Across the report's references to Standard English, there is an emphasis on children having an 'entitlement' in stating 'many important opportunities are closed to them if they do not have access to Standard English' (Cox, 1989).

The Cox report had some bearing of influence on the National Curriculum for English (HM Govt, 1990). However, it is reported by Cox himself that his report was not received with enthusiasm. The key change involved the emphasis on 'grammar' as Cox exclaims, the Education Minister, (1988) printed on the first draft of the Cox committee report, 'the programmes of study for writing should be strengthened to give greater emphasis to the place of grammatical structure and terminology', which Cox describes as a 'PR exercise in response to 'the cry of the moment' from right-wing Conservatives'. Cox cites Graham and Tytler's book, 'A Lesson for Us All: Making of the National Curriculum' (1992), as claiming Cox's Working Group 'had simply failed to grasp that nothing else than a firm commitment to grammar, however it was described, would be acceptable to government' (Cox, 1994, p.23). Cox further maintains political, rather than real needs, were the drivers for change, 'should I have adapted our report to satisfy the prejudices of politicians in opposition to professional advice about the real needs of children? For me and my Working Group such behaviour was out of the question' (Cox, 1994, p.23). This narrative has survived the test of time and the waves of governmental changes, with the strength of conviction within the policy makers often rejecting the recommendations presented within commissioned reviews where there was a hint of movement away from this model.

More recently, in a study conducted on the teaching of the 2014 National Curriculum for English, Cushing (2019) reports how the introduction of assessments and compulsory tests and a 'radical increase' (p.170) in the amount of grammatical knowledge that students and teachers are expected to know about.

The next section of this thesis discusses the current policy perspective in England and the uncanny similarities with Cox's experience of a different time but still relevant today.

### **2.3.1 Measuring literacy fluency – a policy perspective**

The National Curriculum (2010, updated for English 2014) paper further defines the framework and overarching principles of language and literacy with a key emphasis on expected levels of attainment, detailed within English language conventions. 'Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using Standard English' (Department for Education (DfE), Nat. Curriculum. England, 2010). The National Curriculum English Programmes of Study (last updated 2014), contains eighty eight pages for the primary phase curriculum alone. The 'statutory requirements' list the assessment criteria of what 'pupils should be taught to' achieve spanning sixty pages, including twenty two dedicated to spelling followed by a word list, phonetic alphabet, and a further six pages of statutory terms 'to be introduced around grammar' (DfE National Curriculum, England, 2010 – reviewed 2014).

Andrews, et al., (2005), claim, 'since the publication of the Kingman Report (Department of Education and Science, 1988) there has been a conviction amongst curriculum writers and policy-makers in England that grammar teaching to young learners of English is a good thing... that talking about language is helpful in understanding language and, in turn, in improving its use' (p.40). However, Perera (1984), summarised in Wilkinson (1971, pp.32-35) reported 'de-contextualised grammar teaching, unrelated to pupils' other language work is likely to do more harm than good'. Further stating, 'technical terms in grammar seemed to confuse rather

than enlighten young people' (1984). Cushing argues against the execution of this into tests and the use of Standard English:

My criticism in this paper is not in the fact that children are learning about grammar, but how grammar is framed and presented in these tests and in the primary curriculum, with particular concerns around decontextualized language use (whereby invented examples are used to typically demonstrate a point about grammatical structure), identification of grammatical features without reference to meaning and the primacy of SE (Cushing, 2019, p.171).

Cushing seems concerned with assessment driven separation of practice and meaning making for the children and young people receiving this type of learning, based on assessing the ability to memorise meaning behind the technical aspects of literacy. However, the Department for Education introduces the notion of 'functional, systematic' (Halliday, 1975) use/application of grammatical concepts as follows:

The grammar of our first language is learnt naturally and implicitly through interactions with other speakers and from reading. Explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language. Building this knowledge is best achieved through a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking. Once pupils are familiar with a grammatical concept (for example 'modal verb'), they should be encouraged to apply and explore this concept in the grammar of their own speech and writing and to note where it is used by others. Young pupils, in particular, use more complex language in speech than in writing, and teachers should build on this, aiming for a smooth transition to sophisticated writing (DfE, The National Curriculum in England, Appendix 2, 2014).

A particular criticism, voiced by academics is this need for pupils to learn how to label the language (highlighted by the DfE paper above) and the challenges this poses to

teachers. Many of whom are in disagreement with the need for this as a component of children's 'literacy repertoire' (Robinson, 1997; Burnett and Merchant, 2015, Mackey, 2016). It is claimed above, the 'grammatical concept (for example 'modal verb')' (DfE, 2014) aids in producing more 'sophisticated writing' (DfE, 2014). The validity of 'sophisticated writing' is measured by the assessment markers within the eighty eight pages of curriculum as the ability to learn these labels and use within given contexts, in accordance with the functionalist (Halliday, 1975) approach.

In the context of these current measures, Bulman, et al., (2021) argue, 'what is valued, how standards are defined and measured, and what actually constitutes the very best is troubling' (2021, p.3) and in considering this curriculum in current times state that this 'raises questions about whose needs are actually best served by the current arrangements' (Bulman, et al., 2021, p.3). Bulman, et al., question the rationale and values behind these standards and the assessment of such. This is supported by Wyse, further advocating that 'politicians with responsibility for literacy should ensure that their policies reflect this evidence, rather than unduly base policies on personal ideology that leads to practices that are at best far from optimum, and at worst damaging to learners' and societies' best interests' (Wyse, 2017, p.207). Wyse and Bulman and colleagues use terms such as 'troubling' and 'damaging' in their discourse on policy driven literacy education, placing emphasis on the significance of what they consider to be detrimental impact. Goodson (2015), referring to England's policy makers, attests,

they exhort us to believe in 'school improvement' and 'educational change'. Yet most schools are not improving and what we see behind the promotion of change rhetoric is a vicious pattern of continuity in terms of which groups succeed and which fail (Goodson, 2015, p.35).

Bulman, et al., (2021), and Wyse (2017) go further in questioning the rationale behind the policies and those who determine these within the context of education. Bulman, et al., (2021) question 'whose needs are actually best served' and Wyse goes further to suggest policies are based on 'personal ideology' (Wyse, 2017, p.202).

The emphasis on 'Standard English' and 'learning about language' is further highlighted in the following paragraph extract drawn directly from the national curriculum framework (2014):

Pupils should be taught to control their speaking and writing consciously and to use Standard English. They should be taught to use the elements of spelling, grammar, punctuation and 'language about language' listed (National Curriculum in England: English Programmes of Study, DfE, 2013a, 6.2, p.10).

Wyse (2017) advocates an alternative to this statement, 'Pupils should be encouraged to speak using language forms appropriate for the context of interaction, that omits the need to emphasise or learn the terminology around the grammar, but rather focuses on the contextual and social aspect of literacy' (Wyse, 2017, p.202). Wyse suggests discarding the need to label the language, but instead to go directly to using the language. Snell (2016) also states we are in a position 'of a government that is taking a narrower 'benchmark'/functional approach to literacy and a 'heritage' line in relation to literature' (2016, p.300).

In further considering Standard English, Snell (2016) in considering the National Curriculum for England framework document (DfE, 2013a, 2013b, published, 2014) marks that there is 'increasingly little reference to speaking and listening, with almost exclusive concentration on reading and writing skills' (Snell, 2016, p.300) which indicates an assumption within the school curriculum that reading, writing operates separately to speech. This narrow approach to what is valued across this prescribed curriculum does not reference the recognition of how children draw on their knowledge of the spoken language to help them (Snell, 2016; Britton et al., 1975; Tough, 1977).

Here I have demonstrated a few examples of discussion on curriculum and pedagogy amongst many, where academics who recognise and advocate for literacy pedagogy in social cultural models contend the current, increasingly technical model as flawed for a variety of reasons including its emphasis on metalanguage or labelling the terms within Grammar, the prescriptive use of language away from familiar context and the

lack of attention to the importance of speech as fundamental to support language development.

### 2.3.2 Could policy *become* the pedagogy?

So far I have discussed policy, policy makers, values and the beginnings of a policy driven pedagogy within the National Curriculum for England's statutory indicators. I have introduced the notion of the National Curriculum determining the learning of technical terms within a functionalist pedagogy. The following explores the impact of this National Curriculum and accompanying assessment measures from teacher to children.

Taylor and Clarke report from research undertaken by Cremin and Myhill (2012) which 'interrogates beliefs about, and attitudes to writing in schools and disrupts the functionalist narrative' (Taylor and Clarke, 2020, p.p.15-16). In this article Taylor and Clarke discuss research presented by Cremin and Myhill (2012) which examined children's perceptions of their writing in school. Findings demonstrated children viewed themselves 'passively as receivers and producers of written texts for school' (p. 83), which Cremin and Myhill suggest demonstrates 'writing is experienced as a necessary part of the curriculum but not something that relates to children's own interests'.

Burnett and Merchant (2020) question the impact of this curriculum, and assessment, on classroom pedagogy, 'in contexts in which literacy attainment is judged in relation to international comparators (e.g., PIRLS, PISA), it seems that there is a real danger of reducing meaning making to a set of relatively simple skills that are easy to assess' (Burnett and Merchant, 2020, p.272). Here, they assert that in the desire to meet performance indicators the meaning making pedagogy is limited to what is needed for assessment purposes only. This indicates that perhaps the policy has *become* the pedagogy, a method that helps pupils to learn the rules, 'a performance model of pedagogic practice' (Bernstein, 1974). Bernstein describes this pedagogy as one 'that focuses on the explicit transmission of uncontested and dominant knowledge' with 'undue emphasis on outputs' (Bernstein, 1974), which could perhaps be aligned with

the traditional didactic, model of 'transmission pedagogy' as defined by Kalantzis (2006b) as promoting 'mimesis – the transmission and acquisition of the rules of literacy' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.183). Cope and Kalantzis discuss how the 'back to basics movement' has reversed education to the 'halcyon days of traditional schooling' that results in 'social sifting and sorting against a singular and supposedly universal measure of basic skills and knowledge'. Cope and Kalantzis describe this as the return to 'didactic "skill and drill" curriculum that jams content knowledge to fit the tests' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.183). This notion of movement and didactic delivery, seen as traditional, begins to explore what impact this curriculum and its resulting emphasis on tests has had on pedagogy. If teachers are measured by their results and these results are demonstrated in pupils' ability to label and use grammar in particular contexts then inevitably this rule learning will take precedence. Hilton (2001) states, 'activities such as filling in worksheets, writing in missing words and learning to spot adjectives and verbs' as being typical as pedagogy in primary literacy education in order to achieve the objectives and deliver to assessment. However, Bloor (1979) undertook further study which demonstrated that these activities are unlikely to 'improve children's ability to write or to enhance their performance in national tests' (Bloor, 1979), further supporting Hilton's theory that children 'taught to spot adjectives or add connectives' (Hilton, 2001, p.5) to prescribed sentences will not perform well in national assessments or in their wider worlds.

### **2.3.3 Autonomous schools**

There is consensus that the new autonomous regime relies on performance and regulation to monitor schools, rather than the previously directed, monitored, supported system. Bulmer, et al., (2021), Burnett and Merchant, (2020), Moss, 2017, Wyse, (2020), Taylor and Clarke, (2020), assert the type of pedagogy adopted is now reliant on, and determined by the experience, beliefs, values and confidence of teachers to wrap this prescribed, technical and functional action within a social-cultural pedagogy. 'Literacy, it is implied in the curriculum, cannot be left to chance, and it is the role of the education system to ensure that every child is equally well equipped' (Taylor and Clarke, 2020, p.15). I would like to spend a moment to hover on this notion of what we consider as 'well equipped' in terms of literacy. If it is the ability to label

grammatical terms and use a 'modal verb' in the 'correct' way, how might this prescribed curriculum model impact on teacher's pedagogy and more importantly, how will the child use this beyond their educational experience, in their own life and for future opportunities? Is this 'literacy repertoire' (Robinson, 1997; Burnett and Merchant, 2015, Mackey, 2016) sufficient to equip children for life?

The emphasis on ensuring a less didactic, more authentic, critical, engaging pedagogy that develops the social-cultural literacies of children for the world around them relies on the culture of leadership in the school and the training, attitude, courage, approach and freedom of teachers. Bulman, et al., (2021) advance this reflection on teachers, claiming 'the success of such approaches depends on the enthusiasm, experience and creativity of teachers' (2021, p.3). Their views also identify the priorities and opinions of teachers, stating 'longstanding professional commitments in language and literacy teaching is at least as important as rethinking the curriculum when advocating for literacy provision more suited to current times' (Bulman, et al., 2021, p.3). As teachers grapple with what academics describe as technical/functional dominant aspects of the literacy curriculum, the emphasis is on those teachers to interpret the policy and resulting curriculum, within a wraparound pedagogy that whilst not necessarily appreciated by the policy makers, enables differentiation and the social cultural aspects of meaning making for the children in their care in order for their learning in the classroom to connect to the contemporary world in which they live. The next section of this thesis explores this notion further.

#### **2.3.4 Impact of technical, functionalist approach on the child as learner**

As introduced in the previous section, many scholars, exploring the effects of this assessment based National Curriculum on pedagogical approaches to writing emphasise this functional (Halliday, 1975) method as a deficit model, especially when it this accompanies the technical aspects of literacy and is the dominant force behind the pedagogy. Those advocating the social-cultural, meaning-making models of pedagogy, especially when considering a 'child-centred education' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007) write of the misalignment of this current regime with the needs of the child as learner. Taylor and Clarke (2020) exemplify:



The sense of a child as a holistic learner whose social experiences are key to their literacy development does not align well with the prevailing discourse in schools about the need to teach particular skills and functions (Taylor and Clarke, 2020, p.15).

Dobson (2020) and Taylor and Clarke (2020) refer to Lambirth's (2016) research which 'examined the discourses surrounding writing in primary school and identified an overwhelmingly functionalist approach, in which children felt that success was measured in correct spelling and punctuation, in good handwriting and in meeting the requirements of the teacher' (Taylor and Clarke, 2020, p.15).

Dobson (2020) engages with Lambirth's research further, stating, 'there are critiques of this neoliberalist curriculum affecting both children's engagement, purpose for learning and anxiety levels' (Dobson, 2020, p.456). Dobson further cites the study by Lambirth (2016) which concluded that primary school children 'saw little or no purpose in the act of writing', viewing as purely a 'technical exercise' focused on spelling and grammar, leading to the children feeling 'alienated from the act of writing' (Lambirth, 2016, p.230). This research by Lambirth (2016) demonstrates a disappointing reflection of disenfranchised, disenchanted pupils who do not feel engaged with the literacy curriculum and is directly opposed to what Dyson refers to as the 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993). Dyson refers to this permeable curriculum as one 'which children's interests and skills can become part of the official curriculum' (Dyson, 2020, p.123).

In examining curricular conditions and children's responses, Dyson (2020, p.123) describes the curriculum as becoming 'more structured, major influences being, first, the looming prospect of achievement tests and, then, state appropriation of Common Core benchmarks' and further recognises the resulting move to 'textbook-driven, skill-oriented lessons' and advocates that whilst this is not wrong, alone it does not provide opportunity to further 'meaning-making' (Dyson, 2020, p.123), further stating that 'in this 'skills ladder' environment there is no place for the recognition of child knowledge and know-how that does not easily fit on a step up the ladder' (Dyson, 2020, p.125).

What Dyson describes as an uneasy fit is the lack of attention to or recognition of the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, et al., 1990, 1992) the children possess from their lives beyond the classroom. This notion of 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, et al., 1990, 1992) is explored further within this thesis as an aspect of dynamic literacy pedagogies.

Ball (2018) describes the current state of English education as 'muddlesome' and 'incoherent' with teachers expressing feelings of being let down and compromised, stating that teachers are:

delivering an impoverished curriculum, to children who are increasingly stressed by the demands of performance, many of whom experience low levels of individual well-being, without any clear sense of purpose and value, other than that which can be calculated from test scores and examination grades (p.234).

These challenges for teachers, as described by Ball, demonstrate a general feeling of resigned compliance from educationalists in meeting the requirements imposed, potentially at odds with their own values and beliefs as a teacher. This research undertaken by Lambirth (2016), discussed within this chapter on page 230 and by Dobson (2020) supports the fears of academics many discussed throughout this literature review, from Wyse (2009) to Taylor and Clarke (2020), Moss (2017) and Hilton (2008) in illustrating the outcome of functionalist literacy pedagogy model, further influenced by an emphasis on outcomes (Bernstein, 1974) at the cost of social cultural, meaning making models of pedagogy.

### **2.3.5 Disrupting the functionalist approach**

In referring to the current curriculum-based approach I have thus far considered a curriculum based on the technicalities of reading and writing and that the pedagogy that is often adopted as a result of the prescribed National Curriculum papers uses 'functional' literacies as pedagogies determined by the policy makers and adopted by schools. Lawton and Gordon (1996, p.108) explore 'functional literacy' as 'the level of skill in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life'.

This term, coined for this context by Halliday (1975), referring to genre-based applied literacies, describes a systematic learning of the meaning and purpose of writing, understanding its use and context within a given set of rules.

This notion of functional literacy is based on using the rules that already exist, the world as it works and understanding the model to apply in a range of contexts. This, to me, seems problematic in that it suggests a static-ness to this model. Learning to use what is already shaped rather than exploring and discovering beyond these boundaries. This may support children in understanding, and perhaps applying these rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar as the order of how things have been. Taylor and Clarke (2020), reflecting on the research outcomes of Cremin and Myhill (2019) discussed above, suggests that ‘research continues to interrogate beliefs about and attitudes to writing in schools and disrupts the functionalist narrative’ (Taylor and Clarke, 2020, p.16).

A further question for me is, to what end does this pedagogy cross the borders to *new* ways of thinking? As Marsico and Bruner (2017) highlight in their manifesto for the future of education state:

Education is the outer border of human development, but it is the only border that is never crossed once and for all. It is a borderland of indeterminacy. It is our unreachable horizon that moves with us. At every step, as we move forward to a new, higher level of education, the horizon is moving as well (Marsico and Bruner, 2017, p.763).

Bruner (2007) advocates that:

the powers of mind reach their fullness not simply in accumulation – in what we come to know – but rather in what we can do with what we know, how we are enabled to frame possibilities beyond the conventions of the present, to forge possible worlds (Bruner, 2007, p.2).

This model of meaning making takes literacy to a new realm, enabling true and relevant application within the context of the learner’s own experiences, interactions,

aspirations and communities of practice and is quite different to a systematic, functional approach.

It is this wider sense of meaning-making that disrupts the notion of functional literacy as the optimum and singular pedagogy, the questions are, a) as other parts of the globe are switching from functional pedagogies to more liberating, creative, imagination provoking and child-centred pedagogies, is England in danger of standing still whilst other nations advance their creativity; b) who decides what the world of education should look like? c) is it possible to fold in other pedagogies but continue to meet the needs of children, young people and the world around us?

### **2.3.6 Traditional vs contemporary literacies**

I have discussed how policy maker views on literacy have remained static for many decades leading to a traditional view of literacy determining educational policy in England. I have established that in this imposed curriculum model for primary children's fundamental, statutory requirements expect that children learn existing, traditional rules of Standard English grammar, spelling and punctuation that have remained static for centuries. For example, the process of standardisation for spelling has hardly changed since around 1650 (Stubbs, 1980, p.70), codified in dictionaries in the eighteenth century (Snell, 2016, p.300). So it is clearly argued that these traditionally prescribed assessment-led regimes and subsequent pedagogy are focused on a traditional view of an alphabetic, text based, rule learning system that adopts the functionalist approach to try out these rules in given contexts. However, how do we develop children's ability to make meaning of the world around them? How do we engage their imaginations to create, design and problem solve their way through life? How do their multiple communication mediums in this digital, rapidly changing world, fit with this traditional model of learning?

Cope and Kalantzis (2009) discuss the traditional pedagogies as providing a 'retrospective view' for learners, relying on 'successful transmission and acquisition of received conventions and canons' (2009, p.177). They see the 'old literacy' model of 'repetition, replication, stability and uniformity' clashing with what they discuss as 'the

moment of design' that, in contrast, brings a freshness to the world, seeing 'creativity, innovation, dynamism and divergence' as 'normal semiotic states' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.177).

Burnett and Merchant add that current policy imposed regimes tend to privilege traditional literacy skills and printed texts often to the exclusion of new or digital literacies in education (Burnett and Merchant (2015, p.271). However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century age of globalised communication this imperialist (Trickly, 2004, p.193) education policy faces a real, potential challenge from the ground up, 'globalisation from below' (Trickly, 2004, p.193) as social practices of communities may no longer harmonise with the curriculum outcomes. This lack of harmony is exemplified by Bulman, et al., (2021) with a particular emphasis on digital literacies, as they further contest, 'in England statutory expectations for literacy education place little emphasis on contemporary modes and media of communication and, as such, are out of step with contemporary life' (p.3). The current use of digital literacies for children and families in their homes in England is increasing rapidly. This increase was exacerbated recently through the Covid-19 global pandemic that led to speedily created shifts to the use of digital media as lockdowns forced schools to find alternative ways to reach and engage with their pupils. However, the use of this medium to support the curriculum varies significantly across schools.

As children and young people are progressively negotiating a globally accessible community, how relevant is the current curriculum and resulting pedagogy to the future lives of the pupils it affects? Where are the opportunities for social-cultural literacies, for meaning making that enables authentic, relevant critical pedagogies, developing new ways of thinking, problem solving, negotiation and the literacy repertoire needed to negotiate and navigate a rapidly changing world, a globalised community? Literacy as meaning-making seems a long way from the classroom as teachers focus on pupils' progress, measured through their ability to place many fronted adverbials rather than their ability to write an engaging story.

## **2.4 Literacy as meaning-making**

### 2.4.1 New Literacy Studies: Critical literacy in the context of meaning-making

Roberts (2005) discusses literacies as being distinguishable 'from each other by the assumptions and practices – ways of being in the world – that give their distinctive form' (2005, p.34). Kellner (2002) states that literacy is about 'gaining the skills and knowledge to read and interpret the text of the world and to successfully navigate and negotiate its challenges, conflicts and crises' (Kellner, 2002, p.157), whilst Scribner and Cole (1981) describe literacy as being 'the application of [...] knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts' (Scribner and Cole, 1981 – quoted in Rodriguez Illera, 2004, p.51).

Barton and Hamilton's grounded theory of literacy describes it as 'a set of social practices' that are 'historically situated' (Barton and Hamilton, 2000:8, p.13). Chu (1999, p.343) argues that 'literature on literacy reveals that its conceptualization is social in nature'. Literacy research is recognising the constant transformations, shifts in practices and the opportunities literacy affords, as affirmed by Newman and Beverstock:

If anything is clear from looking at the large body of literature on literacy, it is that the very idea of literacy has changed, and continues to change. Increasingly, literacy is being seen as a social phenomenon, as opposed to an isolated process of decoding/encoding text. Literacy research is beginning to take into account social context and social change. (Newman, Beverstock, 1990, p.8)

Street (1984) describes literacy as a 'set of social and cultural practices, not simply a skill learned through formal schooling and detached from other social constructs' (Street, 1984, 1995). Practices in the school and in the home provide opportunities as homes increasingly provide platforms for experimental uses of literacy. In the home, family life weaves literacy across its 'everyday stream of activities' (Ellam et al., 2004) where the purposes, values, and the roles families take may differ from the cultural capital required by the formal literacy that children need for schooling, especially within the aforementioned policy framework (Heath, 1983; Hicks, 2000; Wason-Ellam, 2001).

Ellam, et al., 2004, assert, 'Community literacy appears to be a complex and dynamic dimension comprising a family's social, geographical, and economic spaces and the extent to which those spaces may be affected by the family members' access to services, resources, and information'. These 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, et al., 1990, 1992), created from negotiated and navigated home communication practices could provide greater opportunity for expansion of children's repertoire if utilised by schools, embracing social practices alongside the rules of English grammar, a notion embraced as New Literacy Studies.

Marsh (2017, p.76) acknowledges how literacy as a term has gathered alternative and additional definitions over time. However, Marsh also reflects on the contemporary, emerging consistencies, essentially within the context of literacy learning and development, asserting:

A number of models of 21st century literacies exist, each of them reflecting consistent elements of meaning-making, including: communication and creative innovation using a range of semiotic forms; the production and analysis of multimodal and multimedia/transmedia texts; the ability to engage in critical reflection and problem-solving, and the ability to network. (Marsh, 2017, p.76)

This notion of meaning-making draws on the concept of textual, social, material, digital, physical complexities (Burnett, et al., 2014) with recognition of how meaning emerges through the coming together of (Escott, et al., 2021, p.15) 'people, places and things' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.67). This moves away from a more static, traditional model of literacy pedagogy, instead embracing the social-cultural model of meaning making.

#### **2.4.2 Appreciating the funds of knowledge**

In further considering the coming together of people, places and things I include, and further examine in this section the concept of 'funds of knowledge', developed by Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Moll, 1992; Moll and Gonzalez, 1994) as 'material and

intellectual resources that exist within communities and are essential to their existence' (Moll, 1992, p.214). Moll and colleagues describe these as 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (Moll, et al., 1992, p.133). Appreciating children's funds of knowledge celebrates the knowledge they possess and recognises them as 'skilful and resourceful teachers and learners' (Gregory, 2004, p.11). In recognising that the child is not an empty vessel to be filled but instead arrive with knowledge of their own, experiences already negotiated and a literacy 'repertoire' (Bulman et al., 2021, Mackey, 2016) that brims with accumulated practice. These kinds of knowledge - beyond the classroom - Nieto (1999) insists are valid and should be acknowledged and understood as legitimate and relevant to learning taking place within the classroom. It is this repertoire that enables the child to critique literacies and learning from a situational perspective, making the learning familiar and relevant, whilst building on the foundations that will equip them for their future. However, this is also a factor which Doddington and Hilton (2007) suggest provides 'rich and real educational experiences are essential because these promote enjoyment in learning which helps to create open, interested persons who enjoy engaging with the world' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.57).

### **2.4.3 Multiliteracies**

In 1996, the New London Group advocated an approach to literacy pedagogy that offered a response to the multiplicity of forms of communication and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity through the presentation of 'a pedagogy of multiliteracies' (New London Group, 1996) as a programmatic manifesto.

The New London Group, in setting out their reasoning behind this theory, defined part one of multiliteracies as 'multilingualism' recognised as an increasingly significant phenomenon that 'required a more adequate educational response in the case of minority languages and the context of globalisation' (Cazden, 2006b; Ismail and Cazden, 2005, Cope and Kalantzis, 2009). Cope and Kalantzis describe part two of multiliteracies as recognising the 'social world, and its contemporary forms increasingly multimodal, with linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial modes of



meaning becoming increasingly integrated in everyday media and cultural practices' (2009, p.166). The New London Group were interested in 'the growing significance of two multi dimensions of literacies in the plural – the multilingual and the multimodal' (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.166). Again, looking at each part of these New London Group theories the notion of changing literacies is apparent and critical to pedagogy, a striking contrast to the current system of education in England. As Kress asserts, 'teaching literacy as a stable, autonomous system of conventions and rules, while textual practices in society are fast changing, is inappropriate to the communication needs of students' (Kress, 2000a). Cope and Kalantzis (2009) agree, recognising that in the pedagogy changes that they suggest there is a need to embrace multiliteracies in order to keep in step with contemporary practices, stating:

As a consequence, the traditional emphasis on alphabetical literacy (letter sounds in words in sentences in texts in literatures) would need to be supplemented in a pedagogy of multiliteracies by learning how to read and write multimodal texts which integrated the other modes with language (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.166).

As Volk and De Acosta, (2004, p.26) attest in their 'conceptual framework', 'literacy as a social and cultural process' exists in 'multiple forms' (Baynham, 1995). These 'multiple literacies' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) 'vary within and across settings. School-identified literacy is privileged in most contexts while other literacy practices may be invisible to educators, labelled irrelevant or even detrimental to young children's developing competence with text (Gregory, 1999; Street, 1999; Compton-Lilly, 2003)' (found in Gregory, et al., 2004, p.26). These scholars are not proposing that the 'alphabetical literacy' pedagogy is replaced but instead it is enriched by welcoming and integrating these other modes of language that exists in the 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, et al., 1984) where learning takes place, bringing practices, already familiar to children, across the threshold of the school learning environment.

#### **2.4.4 Inherited literacies**

In considering inherited literacies I am reminded of a phrase a family member often used when referring to the baggage or experiences, interactions and learning that they have inherited. "I didn't just crawl out of a shoe box you know". Indeed, we all carry inherited literacies around with us. 'We come to every situation with stories, patterns and sequences of childhood experiences which are built into us. Our learning happens within our experience of what important others did' (Gateson, 1979, p.13)

In exploring the conditions for socially constructing our literacy narrative, one perspective on this is offered by Holland and Lave (2001) whose sociolinguistic approach includes that of 'practice' and 'identity'; as they perceive identities as historical and 'contested in practice; locally and in wider, 'enduring' struggles' (p.6). They imagine we are 'authoring ourselves [...] the world, and ourselves in the world' (p.10). However, this socially constructed literacy narrative is also responsive to our surroundings and the people around us and our interaction with them together with what we learn.

Bakhtin has an interesting take on this sense of the impact of others in our inherited literacies and maintains the importance of the 'dialogic context' and how our utterances are dependent on the utterances of others, explaining further there are 'two texts', the words that have been spoken by others, 'the taste of others' words, and the social context from which they derived' (Bakhtin, 1986, p.92). The people around children, acting as influencers of childhood provide this dialogic context that will have bearing on the narrative adopted.

An aspect of the memories, introduced within the data chapter of this thesis, considers the influencers on the child's inherited literacies, described as 'heritage literacy', by Rumsey (2010), claiming this term 'seeks to articulate how 'folk models' and physical artefacts are passed between different generations' (Rumsey, 2010, p.139). Pahl and Rowsell (2010) agree, 'artefacts come alive in interaction. Artefacts create a pedagogical space that invites sustained meaning making', (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p.55). Rumsey highlights the importance of people and objects as having a significant role within the development of a child's literacies. 'Heritage literacy looks at how literacy practices move between generations of an individual family or community'

(Rumsey, 2009, p.139).

Inherited literacies are not only gained by families or across generations but also within the communities and peers in the social relationships and interactions with others which helps us construct our literacies through an accumulation of learned literacies. Lave and Wenger (1991) propose as the concept of 'communities of practice', 'a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (p.98). Gregory, et al., (2004) suggest communities of practice are defined by more than relevant skills and knowledge within these communities but also consist of 'the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage' (p.9). Wenger sees learning as 'a process of social participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as the learners construct their cultural practice from 'peers as well as masters' and from 'peripheral participation to full participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.29).

#### **2.4.5 Multimodal literacies**

A rapidly changing world provides opportunities to engage in many ways and with many communities with the continuous emergence of new and emerging forms of communicating, the inclusion of multimodality as a form of meaning-making (Jewitt and Kress, 2003) seems critical. Kress originated thinking on multimodality and discusses new technologies that have meant the page being replaced by the screen as the dominant site for communication (Kress, 2003). Kress explores modes that do not necessarily contain text as in the alphabetical model but also might include music, image, dance amongst further examples of the variety of modes (Kress, 2003, p.46). Multimodality has been embraced by many academics, welcoming the opportunity for meaning making through a range of 'culturally and socially fashioned resources for representation and communication' (Kress, 2003, p.45), including Pahl and Rowsell (2012):

Multimodality is a taken-for-granted part of communicative practices. When children compose in the classroom, their composing process is accompanied by play, gesture, drawing and talk. Students may use

drama, songs, photography, multimedia, such as Facebook, blogs and wikis and digital storytelling as well as everyday practices such as texting, emailing and craft activities to communicate meaning. (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.60)

Of course, this list is not exhaustive and in the context of digital literacies the type of modes, and uses of such, increases rapidly as new technology and trends appear onto the market and are swept up by the consumers with an increasing and evolving repertoire for engaging with this media.

Lapp et al., (2012) state that in order to fully function requires using literacies that 'include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to adapt to changing technologies including all aspects of life' (Lapp et al., 2012, p.367). In the case of digital technologies, these skills strategies require a level of digital skill competence, but also require the confidence and versatility to switch communications from one application to another. Leo, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack (2004) noted, 'As the medium of the message changes, comprehension processes, decoding processes, and what 'counts' as literacy activities must change to reflect readers' and authors' present-day strategies for comprehension and response' (Leo, et al., 2004, p.1572). This might determine the need for greater interaction with digital medium in schools as it is becoming increasingly important to include literacy as digitally mediated (Coiro et al., 2008; Davies and Merchant, 2008). However, it is not necessarily the case that schools have embraced digital media, as Burnett and Merchant (2018) agree, 'It has been argued that schools are places for face-to-face interaction, sanctuaries from a complex world and places in which the pervasive forces of new media should not be allowed to enter' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.7). This idea of refuge is one that dominated the landscape two decades ago but is changing as confidence in safe use of digital media grows and recognition that schools will be left behind as:

new media technologies are already part of children's experience: using them in schools builds on their skills and understandings of their use thereby providing important continuity with their out-of-school-lives (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.7).

The proficiency being developed outside of school affords opportunities for advancing the pedagogy but there is resistance amongst many teachers. However, more recently, as discussed briefly, earlier in this chapter, there has been a forced turnaround for many teachers. The enforced school closures of the Covid-19 pandemic pushed learning platforms to the online domain, leading to some teachers becoming advocates as a result of experiencing some of its potential (Bulman, et al., 2021, p.5). However, for many, this shift has not continued to be maintained, reverting immediately to their default pedagogies from before.

Pedagogies, determined by traditionally focused policies and resulting curriculum dominate the primary education landscape and I have discussed the impact of this on the resulting literacy pedagogy that has contracted to a didactic, functionalist approach. However, I argue that this alone will not equip the children of today for the world of today, let alone tomorrow's world. Children will need to draw on a literacy repertoire that does not only include how to label English Grammar, spell accurately and punctuate appropriately as they will be communicating in a globalised context, dominated by digital technology and the need to negotiate and navigate constant change. A child needs to be endowed with a literacy 'repertoire' (Burnett and Merchant, 2015; Mackey, 2016) for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I argue that literacies and pedagogies need to become more dynamic if children are to have any opportunity to develop this repertoire, relevant for life and opportunity.

## **2.5 Dynamic Literacies, Dynamic Pedagogies**

So far I have explored the landscape of education, including constraints on primary education teaching and its relationship with policy. I have presented discussions on literacy pedagogies as meaning making, social cultural models that equip children with a literacy repertoire for life. This thesis discusses the development of a signature pedagogy for the teaching of writing or literacy/ies so it is key at this point to delve into the dynamic literacies, dynamic pedagogies that influence and inform this signature pedagogy. What follows through this chapter, is the review of literature that builds a signature pedagogy to equip children with the literacy repertoire that is relevant,

inclusive and embraces their creativity and imagination.

### **2.5.1 Changing lives one story at a time – the narrative imagination**

This section of the thesis rests on the use of stories as an instrument of Grimm & Co's mission, providing the golden thread that weaves through the signature pedagogy. It is a significant underpinning element in this thesis of what I refer to as 'dynamic literacies, dynamic pedagogies' so worthy of further exploration within this chapter.

I would like to introduce the notion that stories are a familiar activity that are used and practiced in many ways and forms. As Booker states:

We are prepared to devote untold physical and mental resources to reaching out into the furthest recesses of the galaxy, or to delving into the most delicate mysteries of the atom [...] one of the greatest and most important mysteries is lying so close beneath our noses that we scarcely even recognise it to be a mystery at all. At any given moment, all over the world, hundreds of millions of people will be engaged in what is one of the most familiar of all forms of human activity. In one way or another they will have their attention focused on one of those strange sequences of mental images, which we call a story (Booker, 2004, p.2).

However, I believe stories are under-examined as a medium within literacy pedagogy and they have the potential to embrace and engage with children's own narratives and identities. The level to which stories are shared is often held responsible for our identity, meaning, cultural belonging, ability to empathise and our levels of literacy skills and this thread will appear throughout this chapter, embroidered across the literature as it appears within Grimm & Co's mission, 'Changing lives, one story at a time'.

The use of stories as a vehicle for pedagogy and learning is central to Grimm & Co's philosophy as a medium used in many ways to engage and be inclusive. Stories come in many forms, are shared orally, illustratively, through texts and performance and in

embracing technological advances there are constantly emerging media which allow us to share stories on a wider and greater platform. Stories are all around us, in objects, memories, the food we share, the drink we drink. Hardy maintains narrative as a primary act of mind:

Narrative is crucial in life and in literature. Our ordinary and extraordinary day depends on the stories we hear. One piece of news, a change of intention, even a revision of memory, a secret, a disclosure, a piece of gossip may change our lives (Hardy, 1975, p.16)

While Goodson (2010) argues that we are surrounded by stories, until our own lived experiences *become* the stories, our legacy beyond our lives, stating: 'When we are born we enter into a world of stories: the stories of our parents, our generation, our culture, our nation, our civilisation' (p.2).

This cyclical storytelling continues through families as we use stories to help the children in our care to learn, 'how to be, how to think, how to imagine, how to feel, how to remember, using stories in many different forms' (Parry, 2013, p.1). Machin and Messenger Davies (2003) agree with this notion of stories as 'the way that we understand ourselves and the world around us' which they agree, is 'done through the exchange of stories and the more complex values that they allow us to share, plan and reflect upon' (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003).

Shifting the lens to focus on educational attainment, Wells (1987), following a longitudinal study of 32 children, stated, 'an early knowledge of story was the most influential indicator of later educational achievement' (Wells, 1987), a statement later adopted by the United Kingdom Literacy Association as a slogan for its web pages (Brady and Millard, 2011, p.18). This study highlighted a link between 'early' experiences of stories and attainment of qualifications in school, suggesting the importance of stories as part of children's repertoire, worthy of further examination to inform educational practices.



The 'modern role of fiction is an important question' (Mackey, 2003, p.627). Mackey (2003) recognised when exploring story boundaries and narrative interpretation whilst working with readers, aged ten to fourteen. Mackey, in examining their response to narrative texts of a range of media reports, 'I observed a recurring phenomenon: In a variety of ways they repeatedly stepped in and out of the fictional universe of their different stories' (Mackey, 2003, p.591). This criss-cross between fiction and factual narrative, Mackey (2003) describes as providing opportunity for reflective narrative.

One particular view is that of stories in the development of empathy (Nussbaum, 1995). Liddle, Nettle and Szarkowicz refer to the academic link between stories, imagination and empathy,

Specifically, some hypothesize that the ability to imagine the thoughts and feelings of other people may be influenced by a child's ability to understand and process stories (Liddle and Nettle, 2006; Szarkowicz, 2000)

Machin and Messenger Davies (2003) agree, humans live out stories or fictions of everyday life, seeing imagination at the basis of this capacity. They continue, 'humans construct stories as we tell about what happens to us. And it is by telling stories that we come to get to grips with the cultural stories and cultural characters that inhabit them' (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003). This suggestion of cultural development and growth, sits comfortably with the idea of stories as providing a 'cultural toolkit' (Carrithers, 1992), derived from imagined stories. Bettelheim (1976) referring to this cultural toolkit endorses children's fairy-tales as 'serving this purpose'. It is the idea of stories as the cultural toolkit that threads across all pedagogies that I present in this final section of the literature review.

### **2.5.2 Social imagination as literacy pedagogy**

In a world where some children have very limited experience to draw on within their critical literacy repertoire I explore the idea of 'social imagination' (Green, 1995) as a method for new imagining and reimagining. Stephenson and Dobson (2020) refers to Sen's notion of 'critical agency' (Sen, 1999, p.297) attesting that developing coping

strategies to face life complexities is crucial in a constantly changing world 'but we are lacking curriculum spaces to 'practice' agency and develop a range of 'critical capabilities' (Sen, 1999, cited in Stephenson and Dobson, 2020, p.470). Dobson's study explores the notion of 'social imagination', a term coined by Green (1995), further explained as imaginative learning that affords opportunity to explore beyond the boundaries of what exists 'as it envisions creating possibilities, the idea that something 'other could be' and this is linked to hope and change' (Stephenson and Dobson, 2020).

There is a consensus amongst academics (e.g. Ball, 2003, 2018; Dobson, 2020; Dyson, 2016; Moss (2017) and Hilton, 2008)) supporting the critical, social cultural pedagogy that the current curriculum is squeezing out the opportunity for creativity. This dichotomy of practice between what is described as the current 'regime of performativity' (Ball, 2003, cited in Ball, 2018, p.235) and the optimum pedagogy is described in greater detail by Eisner. Eisner (2002b) emphasises the importance that should be placed on 'exploration' rather than solely on 'discovery' placing value to 'surprise' rather than 'to control', on 'distinctive' rather than 'standard' and on 'metaphorical' rather than that what is 'literal', an education culture focused on 'becoming' rather than solely on 'being', with greater value placed on 'imagination' than on the 'factual' and on 'valuing' rather than 'measuring', offering an artistic vision of education 'regarding the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached (Eisner, 2002b).

Freire (2005) proposes, 'imagination helps curiosity and inventiveness, just as it enhances adventure, without which we cannot create'. Dubin and Prins (2011) agree, 'imagination is necessary to create' (Dubin and Prins, 2011, p.25). Freire (2005) continues to state the significance of imagination as part of the teacher's pedagogy, 'teachers must give creative wings to their imaginations, obviously in disciplined fashion. From the very first day of class, they must demonstrate to students the importance of imagination for life' (Freire, 2005). Eisner (2002a) agrees, further protesting the current contrast to this notion within schools, discussing the tendency 'to emphasize facticity, correctness, linearity, concreteness' (Eisner, 2002a) as

pedagogies that conflict directly with what Eisner argues are the centrality of imagination to our 'cultural development' (Eisner, 2002a).

Ellsworth (2005) discusses imagination within the field of education as 'thinking experimentally', aligning with Freire's ideas around 'open dialogue' through which 'students may develop critical consciousness and new understandings of themselves and others' (Freire, 1998). Freire discusses this as recognition of self as 'unfinished', or as Greene (1995) wrote, 'I am what I am not yet' (Hancock and Gregorio, 2001). Being open to the use of imagination as a critically valued pedagogy implies a boundlessness and freedom, often wrapped up with ideas like fantasy and make-believe and the idea of the vulnerable, developing mind in contrast with adult thinking (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003, p.106). Machin and Messenger Davies continue to state the 'implications of this are that children are seen to inhabit different worlds and have very different abilities to adults' (2003, p.106). 'The years from three to six are generally recognised as the golden years of pretend or make-believe, play; at no other time in life is a human being so thoroughly involved in the world of fantasy' (Hughes, 1991: 81).

Machin and Messenger Davies (2003) were concerned with the 'limitations' adults place on children's ability to delve, study and investigate through the use of their imaginations. They advocate imaginations as a space to experiment and explore, to learn and develop our 'cultural toolkit' (Carrithers, 1992), providing experience, language, 'paradigmatic thought and narrative thought' (Bruner, 1990) where it might not be available in the world of reality. This exploration, through fictional worlds as places, experiences, interactions can be imagined other than they are (Greene 1995, Horton and Freire, 1990) raising possibilities for what might be.

The use of the imagination as a playground of the mind to safely (physically) try out possibilities and scenarios is explored psychoanalytically in Bettelheim's (1976), *The Uses of Enchantment*, which states 'fantasy allows children to contemplate moral and social issues at a safe distance in the land of make-believe'. Dewey (2005) believed that the engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes activity more than mechanical. Dewey asserted,

Imagination is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world that is moving in uncertain ways. (Dewey, 2005, p. 278)

So, used as experimental experience, imagination crosses the boundaries of fiction with reality. Perhaps a reason that children are the experts at using their imagination is that they have a greater ability to block the every-day realities that enable the suspension of disbelief. As further explained by Dewey:

It starts from the blocking of efficient overt action. Then each habit, each impulse, involved in the temporary suspense of overt action takes its turn in being tried out. Deliberation is an experiment in combining and recombining “selected elements of habits and impulses” finding out what the various lines of possible action are open and where each of them may be expected to lead. (cited in Scheffler, 1974, p. 218)

The ability to suspend disbelief, value and prize imagination and utilise as a way of experiencing and testing scenarios in the world, is seen as a skill in itself that can be honed in children from an early age, from narrative to social imagination, given the appropriate conditions to varying degrees, as described by Dyson (1997)

Children have agency in the construction of their own imaginations – not unlimited, unstructured agency, but, nonetheless, agency: They appropriate cultural material to participate in and explore their worlds, especially through narrative play and story. (Dyson 1997, p. 181).

The imagination as agency but also as vehicle for freedom is further explored by Dobson (2020) when examining children’s discourse (Gee, 2010) following activity which encouraged and enabled their use of imaginations. Dobson wrote that a significant finding was how ‘children linked their ‘agentic freedom and achievements’ to the use of their imaginations’ (Dobson, 2020, p.469) and was struck by how their

responses portrayed the immediacy of this freedom. The discourse data Dobson refers to, is exemplified as 'setting my imagination free', 'breaking free' and 'I feel like my mind's escaped from captivity' which were all responses by children (Dobson, 2020, p.469). This consistent reference to being 'free' as a result of these activities implies the children felt empowered and able to go beyond any restricted boundaries. As a dynamic pedagogy, social imagination could begin to address limited aspirations, reimagined narratives, potentially breaking cyclical habits within communities. The possibilities and potential for this dynamic pedagogy, used appropriately, are endless.

### 2.5.3 Starting from the child

As Mackey (2011) points out,

if children are not allowed to find ways to make their stories their own, to place their understanding with their own bodies into their own local landscape, we may be moving backwards as well as forwards, in spite of our many media riches and the plethora of literacy toys piled up in many western homes (Mackey, 2011, p.305).

I begin from the position of appreciating children's 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg 1990), in starting from the point of the child, here I am exploring the validity in language beyond the walls of the school, valuing what children already know (Heath, 1983; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Moll, et al., 1992), possess and continue to build within their communication repertoire (Robinson, 1997; Burnett and Merchant, 2015, Mackey, 2016). This notion of starting from the child, this literacy pedagogy recognises the knowledge, experiences, capacity and repertoire that the child has already developed outside of school, then builds on this to recognise, not only what the child brings with them but how, when given agency, they will build on this in ways relevant across their experiences. This is often referred to as child-centred learning.

In considering 'child-centred learning' Doddington and Hilton (2007) suggests 'the value of what children, conceived of as persons in their own right, bring to their learning experiences in school' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.100). They further stress the

'importance of teachers taking children's prior experiences into account, but also working with an understanding of how children encounter ideas, things and other people through their experience' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.100). The exploration of this need to incorporate children's social and skill-based literacies, developed in the home, is further explored as a natural resource for schools. Anderson and colleagues argue that there is a 'lack of congruence between the ways that families use literacy to negotiate the daily activities in their own lives and the ways that literacy is assessed in school' (Anderson, et al., 2010). This is further supported by Rodriguez and colleagues (2009), who champion the importance of practitioners being able to 'build on existing patterns of interaction that parents already use'. Children and young people bring 'ways of doing' literacy, reflected in their own communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) of school and home life, these 'ways with words' may disadvantage some children if they do not align with schools' 'ways' (Heath, 1983). This alignment between home and schools could pose challenge to schools as it would mean the introduction of radical change from the current school pedagogies which currently provide limited opportunity for reflection of children's home practices.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed schools working to a static curriculum, driven by assessment and how this is leading to a rigid, didactic style of literacy pedagogy. In direct contrast and in continuing the theme of the child-centred approach, Dyson (2020) discusses the value of a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993) which intermingles children's interests and skills with the official curriculum. Dyson describes what is valued as 'real' writing by children and argues that in a skill testing pedagogy 'there is no place for the recognition of child knowledge and know-how that does not simply fit on a step up the ladder' (Dyson, 2020, p.124).

Kress claims that the actions of the child should be acknowledged and 'understood as productive and transformative of their own representational resources, as well as of those of the community around them' (Kress, 1997, p.16). Compton-Lilly, et al., (2012) argue that recognising the power of this as a tool for active negotiation is critical for family literacy activities. One such 'existing pattern' (Rodriquez, et al., 2009) of interaction that many parents already use, in a multitude of ways, is that of sharing

stories.

#### 2.5.4 New Literacy Studies – recognising familiarities and difference

New Literacy Studies has developed from foundational studies in social anthropology and sociolinguistics (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Michaels, 1986) and ‘focuses on how acts of reading and writing are best understood as culturally mediated activities rather than as discrete and decontextualized cognitive skills’ (Moss, 2020, p.41).

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) discuss New Literacy Studies (NLS) as:

different literacy practices associated with the home, workplace and community, as well as schools and the importance of drawing on individuals’ own experiences and cultural identity to help them access mainstream language and literacy teaching and learning (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005)

Pahl and Rowsell (2005) characterise the ways that teachers can build bridges between home literacy practices and school learning as ‘third space theory’, envisioning NLS as giving a ‘pedagogical argument for schools to give greater emphasis to home and community literacy approaches’. Bearne and Marsh (2007) present an agenda which involves re-examining assumptions and definitions of learners and their literate identities; ‘recognizing the friction of difference as a necessary component in reshaping educational policy and practice; accommodating diversity; developing partnerships for collaborative and co-operative practices; and re-examining the texts and practices that make up the literacy curriculum’ (Bearne and Marsh, 2007, p.140).

In considering NLS I also consider digital literacies. The emergence, and speedy development of digital technologies affords both challenge and opportunity for educators (Bearne and Marsh, 2007, p.113). Educators, rather than be out of step with contemporary literacies that exist in their children’s communities (Bulman, et al., 2021, p.3) might benefit from ‘the rich mix of technologies’ that enable ‘effective participation’ (Bearne and Marsh, 2007, p.113) and inclusion. However, the caveat to this pedagogy is that digital literacy requires access to resources. Marsh suggests:

In failing to address digital literacy practices in the curriculum, schools are disadvantaging those children who do have limited access to technology outside of the classroom (Marsh, 2007, p.279).

Marsh and Bearne (2007, p.113) further recognise that literacy practices have the potential to empower or disempower, stressing the importance of children having access to digital technologies within their literacy pedagogy, providing opportunities to engage creatively and authentically as central, not merely as 'hooks to traditional patterns and outcomes' (Marsh and Bearne, 2007, p.113). This recognition of digital literacies as an integral mode of practice is shared by many scholars, most recently including Bulman, et al., (2021), Burnett and Merchant, (2020). This notion of engaging authentically with the child as central also brings into question the resources children have access to, outside of school and how this might affect their opportunities to learn and develop. This leads to the need to focus on child agency and delve deeper into the literature around this.

### **2.5.5 Teachers and child agency**

Somerville (2012, p.11) discusses how teachers' knowledge of children's home lives is limited and further claims 'new teachers did not connect to the communities and places in which they began teaching'. Somerville's findings concur with my own observations when I question teachers about the lived literacy context of their pupils, their references are informed by their own observed behaviours of the pupils, the data that accompanied the pupil, i.e. whether they have free school meals or the postcode in which they live. The community of home literacy practices surrounding the child are imagined 'through binary stereotypes as either a warm place of belonging, or an abject place of welfare and disadvantage' (Somerville and Rennie, 2012). Somerville further determines, 'by imagining the communities in this binary way, they were unable to connect to the complexity of children's lives as they were expressed in their classrooms' (Somerville, 2012, p.12). There are 2 aspects to this that connect with this study, a) the need to start from where the child is at, taking on board their own experiences and the influences on their literacy capital. Without this, assumptions



could be made, opportunities to expand their learning into their wider experiences are lost and the learning journey may also be devoid of ownership and so the value and deeper conceptual learning could be limited; b) schools and their interaction with communities and places. Without this interaction, again there is a danger that assumptions will be made and the community resources outside of school will not be utilised, or acknowledged by the school.

### **2.5.6 The motivated child**

A critical element of Grimm & Co's pedagogy is that of starting from the experience and position of the child (Escott, 2021, et al., p.16). The Reggio Emilia 'pedagogy of relationships and listening' (Rinaldi, 2001a) is based on an image of the young child as a competent, intelligent social being from birth. This strong image of childhood suggests a pedagogy which encourages educators to focus on enhancing the competencies and respecting the rights of young children, rather than merely focusing on meeting their needs (Malaguzzi, 1994). Castañeda agrees and expands:

Even an infant is not simply the raw natural material of the future adult subject it will become but rather an entity that is the effect of the agency of nature and the discursive matrix through which it is formed and reformed. The infant 'is' a subject and has subjectivity that is particular to this interaction, such that everything from culturally specific birthing practices to particular modes of embodiment, including racialization, gendering, sexualization, and so on, are constitutive of this entity as an infant. (Castañeda, 2002: p.171).

In considering the notion of the agency of the child being considered, released and even celebrated as embedded into the pedagogy of literacy education one might unleash greater ownership, determination and motivation (Doddington and Hilton, 2017). A number of researchers have linked perceptions of self-determination and personal control to increased intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000), cited in Bobbitt Nolen (2007, p.259). Bobbitt Nolen continues:

This relationship may be particularly important in the domain of composition. In contrast to reading, a central component of motivation to write is interest in expressing one's feelings, ideas, and perceptions. In order to do so, one must maintain some artistic control and have the freedom to exercise one's imagination. Silva and Nicholls (1993) found that creative self-expression was the dimension most strongly related to intrinsic commitment to writing among college composition students. (Bobbitt Nolen, 2007, p.259).

Nolen's study (2007) agrees with this approach as resulting in, students being 'encouraged to be independent and in control of their own writing, developing identities as writers' (Nolen, 2007, p.259). For Grimm & Co this is critical to the outcome so informs the methodology to the level that it is the mission to 'champion the writer in every child' (Escott, et al., 2021, p.16).

### **2.5.7 What counts as real writing?**

Earlier in this chapter I presented the views of Cremin and Myhill (2012, p.83), Taylor and Clarke, (2021, p.15) and Dobson (2020, p.456) in examining the findings of studies on discourses around children's writing in schools. Here, in the interest of exploring children's perceptions and potential effect on their literacy learning, I delve a little deeper into the findings of these studies and expand on some of the contrasts between theories and practice, discussed earlier in this chapter.

Cremin and Myhill (2012) findings demonstrated children 'appeared to view themselves somewhat passively as receivers and producers of written texts for school' (p.83), Taylor and Clarke (2021) suggest this indicates writing is experienced as a 'necessary part of the curriculum rather than 'something that relates to children's own interests' (Taylor and Clarke, 2021, p.16). This study was followed by research from Lambirth (2016, p.230) who found an 'overwhelmingly functionalist approach, in which children felt that success was measured in correct spelling and punctuation, in good handwriting and in meeting the requirements of the teacher'. Lambirth (2016, p. 230), further reported the primary school children 'saw little or no purpose in the act of

writing', viewing it as purely a 'technical exercise' which focused on spelling and grammar meaning they felt 'alienated from the act of writing' (p.230).

There is a common thread from Lambirth's work to that of Dyson (2020) whose article, entitled "this isn't my real writing': The fate of children's agency in too-tight curricula", based on research in America had remarkably similar outcomes to that of the research outlined above, undertaken in England. Dyson reports from her child case study that what was considered, to be "real" 'in school had to do with 'what was a part of the official world, read (by the teacher), and appreciated or, a better word perhaps, evaluated (according to bench- mark criteria)' (Dyson, 2020, p.120). Dyson continues,

in school, "real" writing was not grounded in the intentional act of symbolic representation and communication—the agentive acts that fuel symbol development (Vygotsky, 1978); rather it was grounded in the more constrained intention to please the teacher (Dyson, 2020, p.120).

I now turn to the opposite side of the coin, as suggested by these academics as practice that currently exists in schools. Cremin and Myhill suggest the need to develop teachers as writers 'increase their understanding of the craft of writing' (Cremin and Myhill, 2019). Dyson asks;

what changes are necessary to make official writing wilful, intentional composing, that is, what could make it the sort of intention-driven "realness" that drives meaning-making? (Dyson, p.120)

Dobson (2020, p.458) reflects on additional research undertaken by Cremin, et al., (2006) and Crumpler (2005) into creative writing which Dobson asserts, 'advocates competencies such as motivation relationships, purposeful learning, a sense of control and, specifically, learner agency' (p.458).

In attempting to address, and shift the static approach to one that embraces practices that celebrate children's writing, Dyson calls for a 'permeable curriculum' (Dyson, 1993):

...in which children's interests and skills can become part of the official curriculum. Moreover, children themselves benefit from the anticipation of an audience for their work, whom they hope will laugh, or feel sympathy, or simply be informed (Dyson, 2020, p.125).

This notion of engaging children's unofficial practices as part of the official curriculum incorporates child agency whilst providing the opportunity for children to advance their writing through their own practices. Taylor and Clarke (2021) suggest, 'the ways in which children use language to tell their own stories and to express point of view is as yet under-researched, especially when the writing is freely chosen and has not been set by a teacher to meet a particular purpose' (Taylor and Clarke, 2021, p.15). This is indeed the case as practices are developing across organisations such as Grimm & Co. However, I have found the research and literature on writing for pleasure, motivation to write and advancement only recently (within the last decade) receiving any significant attention.

### **2.5.8 Literacy repertoire**

Burnett and Merchant discuss the 'concept of practice as action or activity' using the notion of 'repertoire, which stands for all the different communication media with which we engage' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.8). They further consider the 'differences and similarities in children's experience across different channels of communication' and how they 'might make choices or move seamlessly between them' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.8). They refer to Otsuji and Pennycook's definition, "conventionalized constellations of semiotic resources for taking action – that are shaped by the particular practices in which individuals engage' (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010: 248) as useful, stating this definition of 'repertoire is firmly grounded in the individual use of practice of socially recognised communicative acts (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.8).

## **2.6 Signature pedagogy**

### **2.6.1 Pedagogy**

Pedagogy is not only teaching method, curriculum or assessment practice (Leach and Moon, 2008) it is also how these are made into patterns of actions, activities and interactions (Schatzki, Cetina and Savigny, 2001) at each interface between teacher/facilitator and learner (Thomson, et al., 2012). Pedagogy encompasses relationships, conversations, learning environments, rules, norms and culture (Facer, 2011; Moss and Petrie, 2002) and has the capacity to extend beyond school to community and public settings (Ellsworth, 2005; Sandlin, et al., 2010). Alexander (2008) describes the use of the term in Britain as a narrow focus on process, whilst Thomson, et al., (2012) opt for the broader definition of the term that encompasses the more capacious definitions used in European educational traditions, teaching 'habits of mind' (p.10). For the purpose of this thesis I have also adopted the wider definition as not only process but also ways of being, of making meaning that is not necessarily a linear transfer of knowledge but is permeable, engaging, embodied.

### **2.6.2 Defining signature pedagogy**

Shulman (2005) defined the specific, characteristic forms of teaching and learning as signature pedagogies, originally explored from research on how differing higher educational disciplines educated professionals into their field. Shulman, supported later by Golde (2007); Guring, et al., (2009) discovered that there were common pedagogical approaches across clusters of disciplines with distinctive practices (Thomson, et al., 2012). Shulman further defines the critical aspects of the 'three fundamental dimensions of professional work to think, to perform, and to act with integrity' (Shulman, 2005). Shulman further discusses signature pedagogies as those which engage students to form habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand (p.53).

For the purpose of this study I have taken this concept that has been developed on a professional/higher education platform, and applied within the context of an arts-based literacy field.

### **2.6.3 Signature pedagogies in arts based literacy education**

These practices set out to do more than inculcate knowledge as they also create conditions which enable thinking, doing and being that embraces traditions, conventions and more. Thomson, et al., (2012) in examining creative practice in arts based learning state ‘there was something distinctive about creative pedagogies as a handwritten signature’ (p.10). Thomson’s description of creative practitioners’ signature pedagogies address how they embody professional norms and conventions...

Signature pedagogies are both **epistemological** – that is they deal with things that we have to know and know how to do – and **ontological** – that is they are about the way we are in the world and the ways in which we orient ourselves to being and making meaning in the world. Creative practitioners also have, in our experience, a particular **axiological** commitment – that is they value collaborative and cooperative ways of working (p,11).

Combining the above domains of learning creates practitioner possibilities for conveying and orienting themselves, enabling facilitative transfer of knowing, doing and being that the practitioner brings to the practice, enabling and empowering others through this more immersive, meaning making engagement.

#### 2.6.4 Changes in signature pedagogies

As signature pedagogies embrace a habitual approach to learning and being, it is important that practitioners equally engage with changes that impact on the environment in which they exist. Shulman (2005) discusses how policy shifted in hospital care as an example, as traditional values, prior to the millennium, embraced the development of a bedside manner as patients’ hospital stays would tend to be prolonged but more recently this has shifted to a policy drive to move patients out of hospital and back into their homes, the emphasis on the importance of the bedside manner has changed.

Policy direction is not the only reason change occurs as new technologies are rapidly changing and become more readily available for the use in teaching, learning and

communication there is a need to consider and engage with these changes. Changes in popular culture affect the way we live. In 2020, the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant and lasting effect on society and on education (Bulman, et al., 2021). Changes create an opportunity for reviewing and revising the fundamentals within pedagogies, creating new habits that sustain their relevance and optimise resources available to optimise outcomes for all.

### **2.6.5 The origins of Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy**

This thesis is concerned with the signature pedagogy behind Grimm & Co and through the close lens on the childhood and early literacy narrative development of myself as an arts/education practitioner and professional I explore its foundations. The habits and approaches that have developed my own habits of mind, heart and hand formed through the development of my own literacies, of learning from others, of being empowered through this approach but also from observation. Shulman (2005) further recognises the 'apprenticeship of observation' (p.57) as powerful in developing a signature pedagogy. This modelling of practices provided a reference framework on which to scaffold my own development and the signature pedagogy I have brought to my practice. The foundations from which my own signature pedagogies were built underpin the philosophy, practice and habits of the arts- based literacy charity I founded which is partly why I am exploring this in this thesis. This pedagogic platform will offer the basis for exploration throughout this study as examining the foundations from which signature pedagogies were built as the personal intersects with the professional within a wider policy context in relation to arts practice.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter I have considered the literature around policy maker values and the impact of these policies on literacy pedagogy and further effects on teachers and children and young people in primary education.

Current policy is driven by global economic skills benchmarks in the race to improve standards and this has determined a prescriptive curriculum, technically focused on the traditional uses of literacy. Further to this, policy makers regulate through high

stakes testing and these assessments check attainment and progress of children against the criteria laid out in the curriculum.

The literature I have presented around these target- driven systems discusses how this policy driven approach can reduce teachers to 'technicians' who 'deliver to achieve results' rather than focusing on the principles of learning that create meaningful learning experiences for children. Teachers are reported as being let down and compromised (Ball, 2018, p.234), experiencing low levels of well-being (Dobson, 2020), lacking in clarity of purpose and value, judged by league tables (Doddington and Hilton, 2007). This performative culture out-ranks meaning-making, creative and culturally rich pedagogies that are advocated within the literature framed as 'dynamic literacies, dynamic pedagogies'.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Autoethnography: Living, telling, retelling, and reliving mark the qualities of life (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.187)

In this chapter I set out the methodology for this research study and explain the rationale for this particular methodology as opposed to alternative approaches. I have explored the philosophy behind the choice of selecting the 'life fragments' (Brogden, 2006; Tierney, 2010; Nutbrown, 2011), the memories that act as data for this study. These memories provide an autoethnographic, narrative account of the experiences that built my own literacy repertoire and have aligned to the signature pedagogy that is now the core backbone of the literacy charity I founded. I will delve into the ethical considerations, including safeguarding against unwanted disclosures, paying attention to the limitations and freedoms of this methodology. Finally, this chapter will tackle reflexivity and the limitations of the study.

#### 3.1.1 Motivation behind the study

My research examines the underlying experiences that underpin the development of the signature pedagogy and the founding of a literacy charity that has as its mission to 'champion the writer in every child'.

The research is rooted in the educational and community landscape that grapples with conflicting understandings of literacy which inform policy and curriculum and increasingly result in a pre-determined, technically focused, assessment driven, literacy education for children and young people (Moss, 2021, Luke, et al., 2013). Ball (2013) maintains that literacy in schools has evolved as a method by which children's skills can be 'calculated and compared' (p.47). Ball also refers to Hoskin's (1990) term, a 'grammocentric world', describing the value weighting of the literacy education system towards a more technically focused defined literacy, which in turn will be the measure used to calculate competency.

There is an economically driven attempt to raise standards and to measure progress through benchmarks determined through high stakes testing accountability regimes (Moss, 2004, 2021). These measures are used against a backdrop of data on the demographics of children and young people to examine performance of schools in narrowing the gap for those from the most socially disadvantaged communities. However, Andrews, et al., (2017) claim progress has been slow with a widening gap for children who experience long-term disadvantage. Haberman (1991) suggested that

content-driven teaching results in economically disadvantaged children experiencing a 'pedagogy of poverty' with tightly controlled routines in which teachers give information, ask questions, test, assign seatwork, mark work, settle disputes and punish non-compliance (1991, p.292).

The definition of literacy competency from policy makers affects the practice of pedagogy and the resulting lottery of experience for pupils, determined by the influencers on their learning experience, at home and in school (Moss, 2021). As standards are determined by an economically defined version of what counts as being literate (Moss, 2004, Ball, 2013), the need for locally set, arts-based pedagogies that counter potential deficits has never been so great. It is within this contrasted environment that this study is set.

### **3.1.2 Methodologies: Why choose autoethnography?**

Autoethnography can be defined as the study of the self (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9) and 'involves the deep interpretation of one's own motives and subjectivities' (Rumsey, 2010, p.138) together with contextual experience, which 'attempt to situate – indeed create – personal experience in a cultural frame' (Herrington, 1997, p.581). Coming to this as 'both participant and researcher' (Rumsey, 2010, p.138) afforded an opportunity to undertake a deeper examination of my experiences, specifically exploring the people/influencers and the extent of their roles, the experiences of childhood that build my literacy repertoire and the impact on my narrative identity both

within and outside the school context. By then applying this to the context of the workings of the story charity I subsequently founded, I hoped this study would provide a rich understanding of the pedagogies that built my own literacy narrative, further understanding the links to this child and the founding of a literacy charity.

### 3.1.3 Inspiration

An early inspiration for this study was Nutbrown's, 'A box of childhood: small stories at the roots of a career' (Nutbrown, 2011). Nutbrown's notion of the 'root' (in her case of an academic career) had particular resonance for me.

I chose these stories because I want to use them to explore something of what lies at the root of an academic career in early childhood education and, perhaps more importantly, to argue that research in this field needs to push out from the safer boundaries of established methodologies and seek out the small stuff of childhood, in order better to disrupt the crafted gaze (Holmes 2009) and differently influence policy, practice and research which involve young children's learning towards a more democratic and respectful response to children. (Nutbrown, 2011, p.241)

Tierney (2010) argues that understanding the specific context of one life is paramount to the understanding of larger economic and social conditions, stating 'a good life history should be provocative and enable the reader to think about the issues raised in the text rather than try to answer them as if one's life can be summarised in an essentialist fashion' (Tierney, 2010, p.130). This supports the notion of this autoethnography as a tool for exploring the specific to understand how this informs the global (Tierney, 2010). However, it is important to maintain the notion that in doing so 'we must still make limited, historically situated knowledge claims [...] by claiming to be less rather than more, perhaps we can tell stories that ordinary people will actually find more believable and useful' (Foley, 2002, p.487). I do not claim that this study represents the context of others, I see it purely as a deep insight into the

building of one child's literacy narrative that might provoke further debate or exploration.

### 3.2 The inside story

In undertaking a qualitative approach of autoethnography I bring myself into the composition, reading and analysing of the data which is a very different concept to the interdisciplinary postmodern methods for reading and analysing data which determine that the role of the researcher be 'reconceptualised' or 'decentred' (Usher, et al., 1997). It could be argued that in autoethnographic studies the researcher is 'not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text, but instead is historically positioned and locally situated as an observer of the human condition' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) from within. The researcher is positioned within the context of the study, providing exclusive access to their personal deep experiences, the inside story.

I feel it is important to acknowledge that the methodological decisions have origins in a preferred style of working and reading of research, leading to the appreciation of rich studies by researchers in the field of ethnographic studies in literacy, including Brice-Heath (1983), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Purcell Gates (1995), and Pahl and Rowsell (2010). The research approach will dig around the 'local funds of knowledge' (Gonzales et al., 1995; Moll, et al., 1992) which recognises and respects the knowledge situated within the community context from which practitioners, researchers and policy makers can learn so much. In order to unwrap these gems of knowledge I felt that as the participant I needed to fully engage with the context, aim and meaning of the study, telling my story within a given discipline, surrounded by the theories of others to explore these experiences as data providing greater contextual depths from an insider view.

In exploring methodologies, life history inquiry (Goodson and Sikes, 2001), at first sang to me as an appropriate way of demonstrating the voyage of discovery with particular points of interest, laden with determining constructs, sometimes imposed by the wider landscapes of political shaping, others presenting meaning interpreted and re-

presented by myself. These experiences have provided reasoning beyond theory into practice and have influenced and guided the processes.

It is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved. (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p.11)

As the founder of an arts based literacy charity, using previous research together with my own experiences that led to this work, I initially felt that the questioning of others within this journey, interpreted through my own lens, triangulated with political/social conditions, would provide a triangulated method that would place myself a little removed from the research.

When a photographer who seeks to portray the human condition by taking uncontrived portraits of human life, makes a public presentation of her work she presents both an interpretation that is guided by her own theoretical constructs and positioning, and invites viewers to also engage in an act of interpretation informed by their own theoretical positions and experience, based understandings. (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p.11)

However, I soon came to realise that this 'one step removed' approach was indeed rhetoric as my bias would be present throughout the research, and if this was the main reason for doing this then it would be more prudent to hold the lens closer to the source to enable a richer and honest exploration behind this journey with the ability to draw on the 'whole' journey rather than from a particular aspect.

### **3.2.1 Reflexivity**

The result of this turnaround decision is that the study will explore the literacy narrative, through artefacts and stories, representing memories, presented as narrative inquiry, weaving auto-ethnographical experiences appropriately through the examination in order to provide richer, contextual meaning from one life's key literacy experiences.

'What is autoethnography?' you might ask. My brief answer: research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political. (Ellis 2004, xix)

Ultimately the researcher brings their own thinking into the frame of research and it is important to recognise this and to ensure regular review through a reflexive lens to acknowledge where my own experiences, knowledge and meaning might impact, whilst being mindful of the balance of this not being 'all about me' but instead about the factors surrounding my experience.

there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of and between the observer and the observed. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 21)

The experience from which I draw has been a voyage of discovery with particular points of interest, laden with determining constructs, sometimes imposed by the wider landscapes of political shaping, others presenting meaning interpreted and presented by myself.

My position as the researcher needs to be explicitly clear throughout along with any changes to my thinking, awareness of bias, especially in relation to political agendas or literacy background. Although it is important to bring an element of reflexivity into the study, it is equally important to elevate my thinking to being open to other interpretations of the data and context than my own. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) discuss this within the formation of study claiming that the researcher should 'construct an account of the culture under investigation that both understands it from within and

captures it as external to and independent of, the researcher' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.9 –10). Griffiths and Morwana (1998) discuss bias presence as inevitable, whilst advocating openness to the reader to ensure values are explicit:

Bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgement help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research. (Griffiths, 1998, p.133)

Reflexivity will be key in attempting to disseminate a body of knowledge that is to be taken seriously.

As an educator with a particular interest in levelling opportunities for those marginalised or often left behind I have found myself navigating through the increasingly globalised educational policies of the last thirty years, gathering experience from observations, evaluations and research, exploring and testing theories, practices and pedagogies along the way. It is inevitable that these experiences would influence my personal beliefs, motivations and the underlying principles on which I have based my practice. However, as I have alluded to, this experience has been a journey and not always linear. Ethical assurance of conviction can only be gained by continuous testing, exploring, evaluating and moving with the tide of progress and change.

Throughout this journey I aimed to seek out the key pillars of pedagogy as practices that could potentially enable a literacy rich environment that engages and advances socio-economically marginalised children and young people. These pillars have been present throughout my experience as an educational facilitator but on examining the memories and artefacts of childhood I discovered these pedagogies were also present throughout my own personal journey as a child growing up with economic disadvantage. These pedagogies have influenced my own literacies and have dominated the landscape in which I work. The links between the two experiences, a juxtaposition between these and the policy driven, prescribed curriculum

measurements in England led me to turn to autoethnography as my preferred research methodology for this study. This would afford a rich, deep dig within the experiences of these pedagogies from a child to an educationalist.

### 3.3 Life fragments

Prior to starting the study I began to question the pedagogical decisions I had made and the rationale behind the motivation to create this literary arts charity that had felt like swimming against an educational, and political tide. Recent reflections on my own childhood, recent professional experiences, and the way these have informed my own work and perspective had been preoccupying me, during my EdD studies. Nutbrown (2011a), in an autoethnographic study relates,

what I'm really interested in here is why I recall these particular life fragments (Brogden, 2006; Tierney, 2010) and if they have left me with something that I have brought into my adult life and my career in education and furthermore, if there is anything in this exploration that can inform research practices and methodologies and seek better to understand aspects of work with young children . (Nutbrown, 2011a, p.4).

I opted to undertake a kind of audit, reflection of key moments in my own experience, paying attention to the way these have informed my own professional identity as an arts-based practitioner. Also, the way these have been realised as pedagogic practice for Grimm & Co., following Nutbrown's lead, for this study, 'life fragments' (Brogden, 2006; Tierney, 2010; Nutbrown, 2011) as specific socio-cultural literacy experiences remembered, relating to my own literacy development and professional identity. In order to do so I have adopted an autoethnographic approach.

The initial concern around autoethnography was that in using this relatively recent methodology, could I reassure readers that the fragments of this story were factual, as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000 when discussing narrative inquiry: 'we, as readers, are left to wonder how much is life experience and how much is literary



construction [...] fictional expressions of literary forms?’ (Clandinin and Connelly, p.18, 2000).

### **3.3.1 Not an exact truth**

In exploring the truth, autoethnography could arguably be furthest from the positivist approach which assumes a single, knowledgeable truth or reality that can be understood. It cannot claim to be scientific and free from bias or subjectivity (McLeod, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Autoethnography tends not to be scientifically recognised as empirical data that would be habitually numeric, seeking rules which apply uniformly (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). A positivist approach separates the observer from the observed in the pursuit of objectivity. In contrast, the constructionist approach is that there is not one single truth but numerous truths, often embracing more personally engaged research (Cohen et al., 2007; Ritchie, et al., 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Described as an alternative venue for marginalised voices (Hayano, 1979), Ellis , et al., (2011) define the embracing of autoethnography within the research world as representing a ‘crisis of confidence’ in the research community, inspired by the move away from positivism, believing that research can be value-neutral, towards post-modernism as researchers ‘questioned their ability to be completely objective when studying others, noting the tendency for researchers from powerful dominant groups to use oppressed groups for their own purposes, with little regard for the populations studied’ (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p.6). As moral and ethical discussions on facts and truths represented by social scientists, the acceptance of autoethnography as research methodology is growing. The door opens for autoethnography as ‘one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist’ (Ellis, et al., 2011).

### **3.3.2 Scriptive things**

For this study I have attempted to unearth a grouping of particular memories, mostly supported by material artefacts that act as both 'tools, prosthetics for complex acts of cognition' (Mackey, 2016, p.19) and material artefacts which hold an account of experience as 'scriptive things' (Bernstein, 2011, p.8) that act as encounters of literacies and suggests we can rekindle the use of a scriptive text, 'using archival knowledge and historical context to determine the documented, probable, and possible uses of a category of object' (p.8).

To examine, and possibly discover lived practices of everyday life that might have seemed 'ephemeral and untraceable' (Bernstein, 2011, p.8). Whilst my memories may fall under both of these categories at times, this scriptive element that I was able to recover for part of the data provides the foundations of a rationale on which to build my analysis. As Mackey identified in writing her autobiobiography, 'warping is inevitable, but warping is part of everyone's story of literacy. The experiment of revisiting these packages of potential, past and present, is worth trying'. The rich, deep dive into my own personal experiences, supported by the presence of the original artefacts, where possible, provides a close account of a particular narrative of a particular time and whilst not attempting to generalise this account to others, I have persevered in the hope, as for Mackey (2016), that the outcome of this effort 'offers the potential for understanding literate development in innovative and exciting ways' (p.18).

### **3.3.3 Shifting power**

My original plan was to undertake the creation of autoethnographic accounts solely through literacy artefacts, my own and those of a group of carers/parents/grandparents on a family learning course as a participatory research project. These artefacts would be gathered, found, drawn, made as representations of literacies from our narratives to act as prompts and memory nudges, with which to examine the literacy influences and influencers on our lives. I arranged the research with a cohort from a socio-economically deprived community, self-identified as having marginalised childhood experiences. I set this project up as a self-reflective learning programme that would endeavour to support the cohort's critical thinking about how

their childhood experiences and the direct effects on the literacies of the adult might influence their practices in the future as influencers and carers of others. I had promised that I would also undertake this study alongside the group and as the initial conversations unfolded I began to feel uncomfortable. I had begun to explore the ethics of the study prior to starting the project by discussing potential benefits, challenges and processes with a smaller cohort of 3 potential participants, as I was attempting to recognise both myself and others 'in a way that honours and respects the site and participants' (Creswell, 2005, p.448).

A key intention had been that I would listen to the other participants and hear, and act upon any concerns that might emerge from disclosure, being a co-researcher on the project, sourcing materials, dedicating time or any emerging concerns or issues that I had not pre-considered but might transpire from co-researchers/participants. I began to realise that the person with the greatest motivation, experiences to draw on, understanding of the topic and benefits from undertaking the study was myself. There was also an element of disclosure that might reveal issues, present discomfort and would likely highlight difference across this group. There was a clear power relationship that would hover above the research like a cloud of discontent, impacting on the participation and engagement of others.

I began to consider potential lasting effects on participants and how I could mitigate against this. Sheffel (2011) states, ethnographic research 'involves negotiation when entering the research site, a promise to leave the site undisturbed and also a deeper consideration of issues such as bias, power and trust' (Scheffel, 2011, p.55). I would argue that it is not possible to leave the site 'undisturbed' in any circumstances where the researched is in full knowledge of the research as there will inevitably be an element of change in varying degrees but in some way for all concerned and this, coupled with the notion of power was another consideration in my choice to revisit my methodology. From the introduction to negotiation, the space and interactions around the activity are changed from the original action. By introducing the concept of reflection through research, the community and actions will change. As Frank (1999) states:

Students will see classrooms one way, teachers another and ethnographers a third way. In juxtaposing these views, we come to see what is real from a variety of perspectives. To understand that there is never a completely objective account is to realise multiple perspectives (Frank, 1999, p.4).

These multiple perspectives and the importance of ensuring all participants would benefit without any potential for negative outcomes concerned me as the planned participatory project would require a joint, group, autoethnographic disclosure. I was concerned about the power relationship within the group and my sense of current privilege. The group had also asked if their children could also participate so they could judge themselves against each other for their effectiveness on influencing their children's literacies. The alarm bells rang louder on this as I began to consider the children's agency within the exercise and the shifting expectations, emerging from the exercise through discussion, let alone an emerging discourse with an air of competition or self-judgement.

The issue of power is also discussed by Edwards and Alldred (1999), 'underlying much of the discussion of consent for childhood researchers is a concern with issues of power – to treat children as active subjects of research rather than passive objects, to hear their voices, and to respect and empower them' (Edwards and Alldred, 1999, p.266). In recognising this I looked to see how children could share this power, perhaps as researchers of their own literacy influencers and influences but in isolation from others. Knupfer (1996) considers this in her exploration of ethnographic studies of children, citing three difficulties that researchers encounter when doing ethnography with children.

1) How do ethnographers enter the children's worlds, 2) to what extent do we as researchers observe and participate, thus changing the children's worlds; and 3) how do we write the ethnography to most fully present the children's perspectives (Knupfer, 1996, p.135)

However, I continued to grapple with the ethics of this methodology, asking myself, where the motivation, choice of topic, method, and the outcome of the study would provide the greatest gain. This was undoubtedly with myself. So, for the purposes of this study I decided that I would pursue a different, but manageable learning route with the families that would benefit *their* needs rather than mine but continue with the ideas that had inspired them. I returned to my own study, peered into the suitcase I had begun to fill with artefacts of my own literacy journey and in reminiscing around these objects I soon realised they held the potential for a rich, deep dive into an account of a literacy narrative that would enable insight from a literacy practitioner with marginalised beginnings.

### 3.3.4 Deep dive

The more I reflected the more I realised I had already begun to use myself as the object for this study, able to resonate with the fieldwork. Rather than impose this on others, for the purpose of this study, I would draw it back onto myself as an autoethnographic focus on the journey I had taken through a deep dive into the memories I could share. It would be a smaller scale knowledge base in terms of cohort, but with a deeper representation from what Denzin and Lincoln refer to as a 'previously silenced group':

New epistemologies (such as autoethnography) from previously silenced groups remove the risks inherent in the representation of others, allow for the production of new knowledge by a unique and uniquely situated researcher, and offer small-scale knowledge that can inform specific problems and specific situations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). (Cited in Wall, 2006, p.149)

This examination of a singular path, together with wider research affords research opportunities without the boundaries and potential bias bleed or influence from researcher to the researched. There are many challenges in attempting to research the experiences over a lifetime of children from socially marginalised communities.

However, by placing a lens on the subject as myself, I could provide a rich, deep dive into the research, able to provide insights into childhood experiences from within, with minimal harm to anyone else. The ethical position would be mostly focused on myself and considerations over any disclosures and how they might be perceived by others. However, that could be mitigated to avoid any harm to myself.

As a literary educationalist, interested in stories, I find the qualitative, narrative history approach particularly suited to me. This style of research posed an opportunity to dive deep into the personal pathway within the lifetime of a shifting narrative and to explore the particular elements of the phenomenon investigated within this study as a singular focus.

The core subject matter of this study is the signature pedagogy (introduced in chapter one of this thesis) that built a literacy charity, created as a result of informed experiences that motivated me to found this charity and influenced the foundations, values and principles on which it was built. Therefore, the significant encounters that shaped this work, are a key factor for reflection and by engaging in this memory examination, together with the wider, relevant research into this field, I have attempted to learn more about the reasoning and principles behind the body of work.

The thesis presents five memories as data, drawn from my childhood and early narrative shaping professional experience, spanning over fifty years, demonstrating the 'turning-point moments' (Denzin, 2014a, p.35) and key influences and influencers that have informed the signature pedagogy of the charity I founded.

### **3.4 First encounters with autoethnography**

I have already mentioned the impact of reading my first experience of autoethnography as methodology, Cathy Nutbrown's 'A Box of Childhood: Small Stories at the roots of a career' (2011a). Reading this was a revelation to me as it utilised a research approach using childhood stories, reflected and explored through artefacts, that presented the origins of a career, the influencers and influences of a childhood upon the eventual career of the adult. I was fascinated and as a result this reading further

inspired me to read more autoethnographic research, including various works of Margaret Mackey (2011, 2016) which provided some of the most rich, insightful, truthful accounts I had read, that could draw directly on data and link this data as attributes to an accumulated narrative. Nutbrown (2011a) on considering autoethnography as a reflective practice for educators claims that as educators of children and young people you 'should' undertake this reflective practice, stating

Children need well educated educators who engage in professional and sensitive reflection, who think about their work and who respond to new ideas and new experiences drawn from reflection on their practice and relevant research. (Nutbrown, 2011a, p.177).

As Nutbrown (2011a) concentrates wholly on particular childhood memories she reflects on Poulous', (2008) 'sense in which the stories here are not stories of a particular person but of 'all of us', in that there are many, many 'ordinary' fragments of childhood in our memories' (Nutbrown, 2011a, p.177) and ends her paper with a 'plea that academics working in the field of early childhood education consider what might be gained by breaking out of the confines of more traditional (and safer) qualitative research' (p.177). Nutbrown argues that as 'ordinary stories of the small stuff of childhoods become more familiar. Then there may be a chance that the ordinary lives of young children are better understood, not through 'spying on our children' (Enright, 1948) but through an honest and reflexive telling of ordinary tales of our younger selves' (Nutbrown, 2011a, p.144).

### **3.4.1 Autoethnography as educational research approach**

Nutbrown (2011a) and Mackey (2011, 2015) are adept at using autoethnographic accounts as research methodology that provide data of their childhood memories as knowledge paths of experiences, artefacts, influences, influencers that shaped their literary narrative and how these accounts might support further studies, developments and direction around literacies. Goodson (2015) is also an advocate for autoethnographic approaches in educational research, and particular to my own

context of navigating a value-laden educational environment where ‘the teacher’s work is being technized and narrowed’ (Goodson, 1997, p.111) argues

in attempting to address the dichotomy of structure and agency, there is a need to provide qualitative accounts of practitioners in order to explore how, and to what extent, their own trajectories, life histories and professional identities influence their practice, mediate policies, and negate the effects of ideology and power. (Goodson, 2015, p.36)

Goodson sees the benefits to research of educationalists, as actors within the educational system, using narrative inquiry in making ‘meaning of their own lives and professional practice’ and to ‘elucidate pre-figurative practice, politics, discourse, and language through narrative inquiry’. Goodson (2015) further claims

The benefit of this is that it offers us detailed pictures of subjective realities, and also allows us to highlight alternative practices and oppositional discourses that are often overlooked, or brushed aside, in official discourse. (pp.36-37)

The choice of methodology in gaining richer insight was becoming clear, as identified by Sparkes (2000), autoethnographies “are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (p. 21)

It was important that the study had meaning and brought new knowledge to the field rather than being ‘merely descriptive and devoid of a theoretical base’ (LeCompte, 1987, p.52) and that I would be able to ‘disentangle all of that history and to determine the conscious and unconscious motivations for my work’ (LeCompte, 1987, p.49). Mackey (2011) explains this within an example:

personal reflection that is not my main aim in this project (though I am sure it cannot be completely eliminated). Rather than aiming for the personal memoir, I am more invested in examining the advantages



of particularity that can arise from an intense focus on a single example  
(Margaret Mackey, 2011, p.291)

For the purposes of this study I have drawn from my own personal childhood memories and continued to embrace other key memories, not necessarily from childhood, that are significant to the focus of this work and have developed a clear bias, conscious or otherwise, on the chosen elements of the signature pedagogy of Grimm & Co. The study has enabled clarity of consciousness that has brought realisation to my research, and in turn to my practice. This study has already begun to influence the developments of my practice and that of the charity's work with schools and communities. Using myself, memories and an opportunity for critical reflection, as Pelias (2003) states, 'lets you use yourself to get to culture' (Pelias, 2003, p. 372) and has created an interplay between the moments of realisation within the study and ways these moments can influence and inform the communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

As someone who champions stories it seems appropriate to choose chapters of my own story and the medium of storytelling as the methodology for this doctoral thesis. Inextricably linked and increasingly recognised as a valid research tool it now seems an obvious choice for this thesis, as Wellington succinctly states:

The notion of 'telling stories', and especially of making meaning through this process, has a long history, pre-dating the written word: the travelling storytellers of old were not merely entertainers but valued members of dispersed communities who were entrusted with passing on the cumulative wisdom of their culture from one generation to the next. Despite modern methods of information storage and retrieval which might seem to render the practice of storytelling obsolete, the importance of this practice is increasingly being recognised as both an educational and a research tool. (Wellington, et al., 2005, p.117)

However, criticisms of this approach remain and continue to be aired within the research community.

### 3.5 Criticisms of autoethnography

For positivists, qualitative research is flawed as opposed to empirical, quantitative methods. In 2006 Sikes maintained that 'qualitative research is, perhaps, in some quarters, even more out of style than it was in 1994' (Sikes, 2006, p.112). Troyna (1994) outlines the key problems when looking at qualitative research methods:

there is a view which is already entrenched and circulating widely in the populist circles [...] that qualitative research is subjective, value-laden and, therefore, unscientific and invalid, in contrast to quantitative research, which meets the criteria of being objective, value-free, scientific and therefore valid (Troyna, 1994, p.9).

Sikes (2006) claims that engaging in any qualitative research methodologies which are seen as unapologetically subjective, particularly, perhaps autobiographical, autoethnographic approaches and research which uses narrative, fiction, poetics and performance are especially dodgy' (Emihovitch, 1995; Richardson, 1997, Sikes, 2006, p.112). Autoethnography is often seen as too subjective to meet the scrutiny of rigorous research. Hammersley (2005) suggests that the educational research community needs 'to have boundaries to defend itself [...] from researchers who want to write imaginative literature, poetry, or political tracts, and pretend that these are research' (Hammersley, 2005, p.152). McLeod (1999, 2011) shares concerns about methodological rigour, critical distance, authenticity and clarity of the kind of knowledge generated. Shields (2000) disputes its epistemological standing. Gans (1999) accuses the autoethnographer of 'avoiding hard work' and describes this research as the act of 'being on an ego trip' (Gans, 1999). Atkinson (1997) argues it can be overly romanticised and we need to put it in its place. Many others describe as banal, navel gazing, narcissistic, self-indulgent (Shields, 2000; Sparkes, 2002; Madison, 2006, Vickers, 2002).

### 3.5.1 A response to criticism

Alternatively, Sparkes (2002) states this methodology enables 'self-knowing or self-sacrificing rather than being a self-indulgent act'. Forber-Pratt (2015) claims it is 'not a cop out or for the faint of heart'. Others make a case for autobiographical approaches in order to study cultural experiences and identity in greater depth (Erikson, 1968; Katz, 1996; Spickard, 2001; Boylorn and Orbe 2014).

LeCompte, (1987) argued in favour of autoethnography with an interesting observational comparison, an example that might be a little more acceptable for positivists, 'everyone's life consists of a sequence of opportunities taken and not taken and these can be analysed in the same way as economists examine the opportunity costs and benefits made in the market place'. (LeCompte, 1987, p.48)

In the context of educational research, Goodson (1997) suggests many previous research methodologies in education pale into a misrepresentational background in comparison to the experiential story of the actor in role, claiming, it as

laudable that new narrative movements are concentrating on the teacher's presentation of themselves. This is a welcome antidote to so much misrepresentation and re-presentation in past scholarship and it opens up avenues of fruitful investigation and debate. The narrative movement provides then a catalyst for pursuing understandings of the teacher's life and work . (Goodson, 1997, p.112).

The decision to focus on one's own memories as a research methodology continues to be a controversial topic, 'traditional scientific approaches, still very much at play today, require researchers to minimize their selves, viewing self as a contaminant and attempting to transcend and deny it' (Wall, 2006, p.147). Therefore, this type of research relies on a sense of honesty and reflexivity if it is to be taken seriously as a body of knowledge. The responsibility is placed on the researcher to be clear about their positionality within and around the research, so I admit that for this research it is

not objective, it is subjective, but in telling the stories from memories of a life lived I hope to share the processes and pedagogies from experiences that provide further reflection from a given circumstance, often difficult to capture. It is therefore, critical to ensure reflexivity throughout the thesis and I have endeavoured to do so.

### 3.6 Reflexivity

*Reflexivity*, to acknowledge that 'the knower is part of the matrix of what is known' (DuBois, 1983, cited in Tindall, 1994, p.151). In its typical use reflexivity provides opportunity for the researcher to position themselves within their research and explore how this might have influenced the process and outcome of such research. Lapadat (2017) defines the 'reflexive researcher' as one that acknowledges that 'their own objectivity is a fiction' (Lapadat, 2017, p.592) further advocating that 'they say "I" in their research writing, aim for transparency, attend to voice, present their interpretations as a constructed text, and resist the temptation to produce authoritative accounts or interpretations that generalize' (Lapadat, 2017, p.592). In this respect the autoethnographic methodology goes one step further, writing, and weaving the researcher into their research, 'shifting the focus of inquiry from the other in the field to the situated self' (Lapadat, 2017, p.592), 'reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect' (Denzin, 2014, p. 22).

Wellington states, 'We, you, everybody, come to everything we do with 'baggage', with histories that are at one and the same time, our own and those of the societies and cultural groups in which we live' (Wellington, et al., 2005, p.20). From deciding on the question to determining the method of inquiry, I am centrally placed within this study and bring my baggage with me. What is also crucial to the authenticity of this research is that this study is grounded in current policy context. However, the memories as data, and resulting pedagogies stand alone, wrapped in the relevant academic literature on each approach, situated within an environment of socio-economic marginalised communities and mould breaking literacy narratives. Wellington, in considering life history studies further refers to the 'crucial interactive relationship between individuals' lives, perceptions, experiences, beliefs, values and the various

identities they negotiate for themselves, and the social, cultural and historical contexts in which those lives are lived' (Wellington et al., 2005, p.20). Many of the experiences of childhood are imposed, given experiences rather than negotiated and their socio-economic position also plays its part, as Marx stated, 'men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Karl Marx, 1969 [1845], p.389). Therefore, each experience is built on top of another so what has gone before is relevant to the present.

### 3.6.1 Emerging pathways

This contextual relevance became clear as I delved into my memories through the artefacts that represented them. The impact of practices experienced by the child presented within the earlier childhood memories could be recognised as evident within the demonstrated practices of the more recent memories. The building of a literacy repertoire became a key focus of this study as these building influences were unearthed, shaping the direction of the study and the focus within. A further example of emergent themes, was the development of understanding around the pivotal role of the influencer(s) on the child/young person's literacy narrative. The roles and power of the individuals around the child has been discussed by many academics in relation to family members, and essentially parents (Nutbrown, et al., 2017) but in this drill down into one child some clarity emerged about the cyclical literacies within a family and the role others also play in reinforcing, championing, determining factors within the narrative of the developing child.

I needed to respond to the findings of the data and respond to the emerging contextual pathways then look wider into others' research around these and deeper into the stories to explore further in tandem with this research. This very personal journey, and my own voice, must also join a community of other voices to discover how, in what way or indeed *if* the tellings of these stories mirrored the theories of others.

### 3.6.2 The personal voice

The study maps the significant moments, life fragments (Brogden, 2006; Nutbrown, 2011) that have influenced the practice, taking the role of witness, explorer and narrator, I am ethically motivated and grounded (Adams, et al., 2013) and aim to make a difference. Frank (2016) states, 'storytelling requires a commitment to speak the truth' (Frank, p.21) and Lapadat (2017), in reflecting on Frank explains, 'through personal narratives, others witness the narrator's traumas, epiphanies and turning points' (Lapadat, 2017, p.592). For myself, from rediscovering the artefacts of my childhood, with imprints that provided reflection through a new lens I was able to rediscover my childhood and a linear connection across my journey into my current career that I was previously unaware of consciously, though clearly unconsciously influenced. Malaguzzi, when considering each child's reality claimed 'You never come in an isolated way; you always come with pieces of the world attached to you'. (Malaguzzi, 1994, p.53). This contextual landscape is important.

### 3.6.3 Disclosure – opening and closing doors

As an autoethnographic study I set out my memories as the subject, there is no contaminant except the bias (unconscious or otherwise) that I attempted to address throughout. 'Concerns about the situatedness of the knower, the context of discovery, and the relation of the knower to the subjects of her inquiry are demons at the door of positivist science. The production of [what has always been considered to be] legitimate knowledge begins by slamming the door shut' (McCorkel and Myers, 2003, p. 200). Determining what elements to disclose was more of an ethical consideration. Considering which significant discoveries were a) important to the study; b) relevant to the study; c) authentically sourced; d) comfortable for disclosure (for myself and the reader).

In determining the study's inquiry question, I examined the dominant force that provides the motivation to continue to develop insight in order to articulate this effectively to others. I knew, that in order to maintain my focus I would need to be curious and it would need to be meaningful to my practice with potential to influence

others. Wall describes this as ‘the discovery of an intense interest, a passionate concern that is not only personally meaningful but has broader social implications’ (Wall, 2006, p.150).

Vickers (2002), claims the personal voice can explore experiences that otherwise may be difficult to capture. Wall (2006) states the researcher’s self-research could be truer than the outsider’s, providing an engaging story that captures the essence of the study and goes deeper than one might ethically feel comfortable to do when researching a.n.other.

Rather than seeking to escape subjectivity, teachers and teacher education researchers of the new millennium are considering autoethnographic techniques precisely because of the qualitative genre’s capacity to engage first-person voice and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as one finds oneself entrenched in the complications of one’s positions (Pennington, 2004; Romo, 2005; Winograd, 2002). Autoethnography is close to the action via ‘inside emotional experience’ (Ellis and Bocnher, 2003, p.230). Denzin (1997) outlines traditional reflexive social science as turning ‘everyone into the object of an analytic gaze. Autoethnography turns the gaze inward on self within the wider context where ‘experiences of self occur’ (Denzin, 1997, p.227). Hughes and Pennington conclude ‘it provides opportunities for close examination, understanding, and dissemination of the inner worlds of those engaged in critical self-reflexive inquiries’ (Hughes and Pennington, 2017, p.26).

The process of reflexivity is an acknowledgement by the researcher that ‘all findings are constructions, personal views of reality, open to change and reconstruction’ (Tindall, 1994, p.151). Ellis (1991) argues, that an ‘individual who has lived through an experience and has consuming, unanswered questions about it can use introspection as a data source’. Wall (2006, p.148) concurs, in the matter of voice and representation, ‘we could argue that an individual is best situated to describe his or her own experience more accurately than anyone else’ (Wall, 2006, p.148), removing the potential influence, steer, bias bleed of the researcher, who in interpreting the data from the subject, could infect the research. McLeod (2011) discusses a ‘self-dialogue’ between ‘an experiencing self and a reflexive self’ (McLeod, 2011).

### 3.6.4 The Hokey Cokey

Ellis refers to this reflection on self as a 'critical edge' (Ellis, 2004, p.295), important in attempting to see the matter within your study with a degree of separation that enables a thorough critique. This separation is critical in considering the reader's reaction, ensuring a sense of questioning, using the 'so what' factor as the starting point to examining the truth and reasoning behind the presented data and reflection on the data. I would also advocate the revelation discoveries that take place when revisiting memories through a historically reflective study produce opportunity to re-experience the memory with the hindsight of its consequences triggers the need to go in and out of memories. As in the popular song I see this as the Hokey Cokey experience – putting your whole self in-out-in-out, shake it all about, turn around and start again. As epiphanies (Lapadat, 2017) occurred as a result of the data I explored the wider body of knowledge that explored the tellings of these stories to ascertain a greater understanding within the wider research context. In doing this, as the writer I was seeking the fragments that bring significant data/rationale, viewing this experience, re-experiencing through a new lens, reviewing and developing newly informed insights that enriched and provided a sharpened version of the study.

### 3.7 Data – the enactment of autoethnographic research

The approach I attempted to adopt in my endeavour to ensure this study would avoid the 'potential perils of autoethnography' (Hugh and Pennington, 2018) is the analytic method. Anderson (2006) discusses 'analytic autoethnography' as "ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (p. 375). The data providing reflection for this project was gathered through the use of artefacts and memories – oscillating between junctions/experiences on the journey and the landscape and political agenda around this, sketching the illustration which brings the journey of this model to life.



### 3.7.1 Artefactual triggers

My first task involved assembling the materials of the literacy memories of my childhood, the varied forms of imprinted practices. The use of artefacts also mitigated against potential bias bleed from my personal accounts or from those memories replaced by the added whispers of others. As Nutbrown reflects, ‘ what we remember as adults about our childhood is often mediated by what we are told about ourselves as children: Here we are thinking of how children ask parents over and over again ‘Tell me again about the time . . . ’ (Cathy Nutbrown, 2011. P.27).

Pahl and Rowsell (2010) explore artefactual literacies, stating, ‘Identities are the seas of stuff and of experiences. These experiences are intertwined with material culture’ (p.8). Pahl and Rowsell reflect that ‘people told stories that were often linked to artefacts, and these artefacts themselves told stories of loss, displacement and migration [ . . . ] When people move across borders, objects remain powerful in their memories, which are evoked in their stories ’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p.8). I began to gather artefacts that had meaning relating to my literacy narrative

In considering which data to reflect on I first needed to seek out the artefacts that remained in existence and would provide data for the inquiry and opportunity for reflection. Many of the artefacts of my childhood were disposed of at the time of my early adulthood but some key objects had remained, rarely engaged with but consciously close at hand.

### 3.7.2 The tapestry of memories

I began my data collection by drawing the patchwork of my personal literacy journey. The first was littered with experiences and charged with emotional responses (Pahl, 2010) as a flip chart paper filled quickly with many words and illustrations that represented relevant stories from birth through to young adulthood. Each, acting as a brick, some more significant than others. Some memories were of a one off moment and others were of a practiced act remembered.

The paper was too full. It was crammed to the edges with many memories that felt daunting when looking at this as a data set for my thesis. So I began to identify, and circle the most significant, impactful of the charted experiences to filter the key memory triggers, worthy of digging into further. I started a new flip chart page and created hexagons for each of these memories, placing in some sort of linear order that charted particular life fragments that, when stitched together, became stories of action that provided theories of context to fortify patterns of domination (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.86). From this pattern of five hexagons, some were memories that could be written as accounts of happenings, whilst others were represented in artefacts.

These artefacts, 'scriptive things' (Bernstein, 2011, p.8) could ensure 'greater disciplining of the memories' (Mackey, 2016, p.19) but, although I didn't realise at the time, would also provide profound, insightful data from which to draw. Some were artefacts that had survived and were at hand but others were illustrated in my memory and would need to be found to replace the original artefacts.

### **3.7.3 Artefacts at hand**

The artefacts at hand were found in a large box, rarely rummaged through and housed in the loft of my current home. The first that linked to the memory hexagons was a small box of photographs with four black and white images in which I appeared. Across the hexagons there was a common, sometimes underpinning and sometimes the most dominant factor that appeared in my memories and that was of my grandmother. A memory of my grandmother (Nannan) holding me in her arms in a garden. This was my second summer and the time that my primary care switched from that of my birth parents to that of my grandmother. This represented a significant moment in my narrative as the dominant literacy influencer became my Nannan.

There were two further artefacts that triggered a volt of nostalgia. The first of these was a battered old hard suitcase that I used to keep my treasured things safe. This was complementary to my book shelves but allowed me to have some things close to me, under my bed for easy retrieval, as and when I needed them. This was where my most treasured books, diaries/journals, games, teddies and toys would live.

The most significant artefact that provided the greatest wealth of insight into my own literacy influences, influencers and fluency was a battered, stained, powder blue, baby book providing a small volume of scripted memories as accounts of my childhood. Reading this book through the lens of this study provided many moments of 'epiphany' (Lapadat, 2017, p.592) that are key to the significance of this body of knowledge.

#### 3.7.4 Artefacts replaced

Not many of the original artefacts of my childhood remained so I needed to replace the textual materials that represented these life fragments of my childhood. I used the old suitcase that had protected my most treasured artefacts as a child and this act in itself helped to filter out those objects that held lesser meaning to accommodate those that held greater significance.

To create the best, most complete, shifting, contingent, plural and multifaceted understanding of interpretive processes that I can develop, it is worth testing the value of making a detailed, principled and theoretically informed investigation of one interpreter's specific collection of textual materials (Mackey, 2016, p.5).

I found that it was important to me to find the closest representation of the text available and this meant looking for books and their dust covers that were almost exact replicas of those original items I had held in my hand. In order for these objects to act as true, nostalgic memory nudges that evoked richer memory recall when held and viewed, they had to be authentic.

Krips (2000) asserts, 'books are more than the narratives they contain' as they 'are likely to be one of the objects through which the young child comes to interact with the world' and as such is 'capable of returning the past to us through its existence as an object that we remember from our earliest years, one which may come to represent the past for us' (p.16). The act of rereading books from our childhood is also discussed by Buzbee (2006) who asserts

The books of our childhood offer a vivid door to our own pasts, and not necessarily for the stories we read there, but for the memories of where we were and who we were when we were reading them; to remember a book is to remember the child who read that book (pp. 36-37)

However, although I revelled in the nostalgia and re-visiting of my childhood I also looked at these books as representing a component of the literacy repertoire of my present day. This re-grounded my reminiscence and influenced the thinking behind the data chapter.

I wrote a list that could travel with me so that I could seek out the items in charity shops, second hand book shops and online. I knew the style, the illustrations, the colour of each book and this was the same for album covers, comics, games that I looked for on my list. I felt a pang of excitement and emotional release when I found the exact version of the artefact I sought. This was developing into a precious resource that represented the key artefacts of my narrative, a museum of me! It needed curating and only I would be able to do this so I wrote labels to accompany each item that would explain the story behind it and the uses of the artefact to support the object in being and becoming a memory trigger within the data capture for this thesis.

### **3.7.5 Memories as a stream of consciousness**

The next stage of data gathering involved writing the five distinct memories as an insight into happenings as stories of activities that took place. For the first memory I undertook this task as a stream of consciousness to allow the flow of the memory without any distraction of the current world around me or awareness of the audience. Again, it was important that it was a truly, authentic account of a time in so much as is possible when recalling memories of our childhood. As Krips (2000) asserts,

Our memory – which includes memories of childhood – runs like a thread through our thinking and experiencing. In this sense, we are never free of our past. We are, however, fully capable of reimagining and renarrativising it; thus when we come across a book we loved as a child, we meet it from a long perspective, with the accretions of time and socialisation upon us (p.15).

It was important to maintain the authenticity of the story being told in so much as I was able to do so. This flow, afforded from a stream of consciousness provided the first draft for me to unpick, question my memories and remove any elements of these fragments that were less clear or potentially re-narrativised. However, although I acknowledge the accounts are subjective, many materials and stories are inevitably excluded and my bias in telling these stories, however unconscious or conscious, is present.

### **3.7.6 Experiential memories**

I used discourse analysis, including explorations of theories around autoethnography, supporting and opposing as research methodology within social science contexts. This helped to finally crystallise my own research methodology and set the direction of gathering experiential memories.

Whilst exploring discourse on this relatively new approach I explored Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Creswell's (2007) recommended approach to narrative inquiry I strove to identify the key themes which emerged from the work – using the practices within Grimm & Co as the model for reflection of memories against an arts based pedagogy.

In the subjective data I attempted to denote possible reasoning from the 'specific' to the potential more 'generalised' fields, whilst being conscious of recognising that empirically I could only attempt to seek out the 'hypothetico-deductive' (Gomm, 2009, p.172) in looking for what is 'highly likely' to be true rather than claiming that the scenario/fact would be true every time. This guarded against problems which can occur within an inductivist approach (Vickers, 2006) and post-positivists may argue is not possible as we cannot achieve absolute certainty.

As Eisner (1991) suggests,

The thematic structures derived inductively from the material [...] can provide the conceptual hubs around which the story can be told ... the stories told around these thematic situations can then be used as material for a summary account of the story as a whole (p.191).

In this autoethnographic account, using memories as the data behind the research, I have mostly leaned towards a more abductive analysis approach where I have reached the most reasonable explanation and reasoning from a lived experience to the outcome and most probable connection to the signature pedagogy of this arts based practitioner.

### **3.8 Claim to knowledge**

#### **3.8.1 Criss-crossing policy**

The final stage revisits the wider theories through discourse analysis of neoliberalist, policy determined landscapes and resulting practices within the context of the macro level literacy environment, whilst maintaining the micro level experience of the child, the teacher, the practitioners within this arts organisation, created to address the shortfalls.

There is a constantly growing body of knowledge in existence about literacy, in terms of educational policy and pedagogy from various points of view. Peer reviewed journals such as 'Literacy', 'Literacy and Language' 'Journal of literacy research', 'First Language', 'Journal of Early Childhood Literacy' and 'Journal of Research of Reading' are just a few which regularly feature articles on research undertaken into policy versus practices, language around literacy and specifically around pedagogies of reading and writing.

I do not claim that this research is a totally new topic or that the methodologies, no matter how recent in their developments, are original to the field of study. This body of knowledge in its widest sense of home literacies, school literacies, reading/writing

development and intergenerational transmissions of literacies, has generated huge levels of research over many years. This thesis planned to expand on that body of knowledge within a focus on this particular pedagogy as a method in developing literacy capital. The drill down for this study placed a lens over the experiences, influences, influencers and key, significant components (life fragments) and their role in the acquisition of literacies. I used my own personal experience from childhood through to the founding of a writing charity, Grimm & Co as the vehicle to explore the key themes within this study.

It is my hope that this study recognises and demonstrates that there are personal histories and fragments of experience which, amongst many factors, also shape disciplines and arts practice. The resulting pedagogies in turn influence the teaching and learning of children's literacies and in building an understanding of the provenance behind signature pedagogies in the context of arts and education I endeavour to build on the knowledge that already exists.

### **3.8.2 Honest insight**

It is hoped that the rich exploration of my own personal experience, a start which was financially poor but literacy rich, has provided honest and reflective insight from a childhood identity that would be labelled as marginalised in society and is often challenging to obtain objectively. I used autoethnography as my chosen method, not because it is easy or to naval gaze but quite the reverse, in order to examine this life and the influencers/influences that developed this champion of literacy, which according to benchmarks used today, was against all the odds. Lapadat (2017) explains the benefit of 'insights' into the stories of lives previously untold, 'in their care to not exploit the experiences of others or make them vulnerable, autoethnographers have turned the spotlight on themselves. In this way, autoethnography has brought into the conversation topics and insights that formerly were hidden' (Lapadat, 2017, p.593). Nutbrown (2011), in examining her journey from childhood to early childhood academic states, 'at heart is the issue of identity; bound up in the autoethnographic process is the exploration of identity, by asking questions such as: Who am I? Who was I then? What am I about? Where do my beliefs and values come from?' (Nutbrown,2011, p235). Like the ball bearing in a pin ball machine, I have never

consciously, prior to undertaking this study, acknowledged the synergy between the literacy interactions of my personal journey and the signature pedagogy of the charity I founded. However, the epiphanies revealed in peeling back my memories hold a story to be told that could unlock the gateway to wider research. I'm sure I will not be the only individual that arrived into adulthood laden with rich experiences despite a childhood of poverty. By telling this story to a wider audience I hope to 'shape individual perspectives and influence collective actions' (Lapadat, 2017, p.593). Further studies that encourage examinations of this kind might begin to develop a value base for elements of literacy pedagogy and their place in differentiating across demographics that can be further explored to compare one story with another and plot the key pedagogies that make meaningful difference to the fluency of individuals.

I also attempted to enable the transfer of findings to support further research into pedagogies and policy around literacy. Punch (1998) argues, 'the concept of *transferability* is often preferred to generalizability in qualitative writing' (Punch, 1998, p.261).

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

The focus on oneself removes many issues around reflexivity which are apparent when the researcher places the focus on others. However, there is an inevitable element of risk in choosing the autoethnographic methodology as this study will potentially dig deep into the writer's personal life, exposing encounters, happenings, circumstances and behaviours that might have previously been hidden to others. This exposure could be harmful to the writer, creating vulnerabilities, as discussed by Sikes (2006).

Giving readers personal information through research writing is not just problematic in career terms. It can also have repercussions in other areas of life in that it may change how someone is perceived, result in the attribution of different identities, and consequently affect academic and social standing and personal and professional relationships (Sikes, 2006, p.114)



For myself, assumptions are often made regarding my childhood experiences, education and adult career path and these assumptions could not be further from the reality. However, prior to writing this study I have rarely shared these realities for fear of being judged. The desire to undertake this study to provoke new ways of thinking, together with the reduced career anxiety of aged maturity and measured reflection on disclosure led to the decision to share this data. Though, the selection of which memories and data would be shared did come into play. As explicitly demonstrated by Nutbrown (2011):

There are other stories of course, but these here are the ones I'm up for sharing. In selecting which of my stories to tell, there is an element of Goffman's (1959) notion of 'front'. These are small and simple stories that I am content to make public, and which do not affront any 'front' I wish to maintain as professor, mother and daughter (Nutbrown, 2011, p.240).

The ethics of consequence has formed a considerable element of choice in which memories I can comfortably use with prevention checks and balances in place, requiring a 'continued dialogue with self' (Cannella and Lincoln, 2011, p.87).

Further vulnerabilities can arise through unexpected emerging realisations/memories that could be harmful. Sikes and Hall (2020) discuss the need to prepare for this:

We also need to be aware that auto/biographical investigations that may not initially look likely to be emotionally and psychologically disturbing – that come too close to comfort because they touch on our own and participants' lives – can become so and be ready to recognize when this happens (Sikes and Hall, 2020, p.170).

Further to the heightened importance of self-awareness is the need to be prepared in case any issues or discomfort occurs as a result of delving into past memories. The preparation involved planning in a schedule of engaged dialogue with my university supervisor for the thesis with regular discussions on emotions around these particular memories and the level of disclosure I was prepared to expose. Dilemmas of disclosure inevitably occurred across this study 'repeatedly questioning and reflecting

on my ethical decisions' (Ellis, 2007b, p. 5) I attempted to protect their identities and my relationship with them, ensuring privacy, where appropriate, and consent, where identities were revealed. Decisions on what to show and what to keep secret (Ellis, 2007b, p.6) are a critical element to this and the willingness to let something go, should appropriate ethical permissions/considerations lead there. Ellis (2009b) proposes open and repeatedly re-examining, leading to ethical decisions within each context. Ethical dilemmas are inevitable so I have endeavoured to take full responsibility for all aspects of this process to ensure 'a complex portrayal and interpretation of the communities we study, including our place in them' (p. 13).

Another consideration in using this methodology was the ownership of the study. In autoethnography one might argue that the ownership is implicit and inscribed throughout the research as discussed by Lapadat (2017):

As the researcher and participant are one and the same person, the collection and interpretation of personal data allows the participant to speak in his or her own voice. The researcher is not appropriating the participant's voice or misinterpreting the participant's experience, because the researcher is the participant, the source of the data. Accordingly, it can be argued that the autoethnographer owns this inscription of the story, the perspective, and the voice, rather than having them filtered through another's perspectives, agendas, interactions, and interpretations. (Lapadat, 2017, p.593)

However, it was equally important to consider the goal of the study to elicit ethical action, both from myself and from others. In doing this it was critical to consider the wider community of this research, the body of knowledge that already exists and the landscape in which it resides, grounding the theoretical, whilst maintaining the emotionally evocative and analytical presentation of the data. I hope that through this honest, often emotional reflection, the authenticity of the story is perceived as real. I have endeavoured to only use memories and artefacts which I could honestly illustrate as genuine, without embellishment or shocking revelations. These, amongst other factors for consideration, required my continuously ethical lens with which to review

and check research practices to ensure possible distortions were prevented where possible and where problems arose that this was exposed within the research story rather than swept under the carpet.

Further considerations include the use of data which involved others, including ethical use of responses, interactions and conversations within organisationally produced workshops and evaluations on impact or the use of my own observations of behaviours and others within practice. Where names have been used I have sought permissions and received ethical permissions through the university for the process, forms and permissions I have used. For all other references anonymity has been applied. As this involved the context of reflection on my own childhood experiences I have maintained anonymity where possible. However, there are inevitable family connections that were challenging to conceal. In those cases, I have maintained mindful representation, considering others so as not to cause harm, 'breaking hearts' (Ellis, 2004, p.176) in any way but at the same time being 'lovingly honest' (Ellis, 2004, p.177), and to ensure this I adopted an underpinning check system of 'do no harm' (West, 2002) to myself or to others.

### **3.9.1 Wider reflections**

Ellis (2004, p.135) writes: 'Good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative and therapeutic.' However, Ellis also recognises 'autoethnography does not proceed linearly' (p.119) can be complex and likened to being sent 'into the woods without a compass' (p.120) but suggests researchers take time to 'wander around a bit and get the lay of the land' (p.120). I have found, in developing this study, the research has been fluid and evolving, leading to unexpected wider exploration of emerging fields of inquiry.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to autoethnography as 'action research for the individual' (p.754) and advocate the use of wider enquiry which provides an understanding of the gaps in literature that can be answered only through personally focused inquiry. Ellis and Bochner, (2000) maintain autoethnographic research can include 'short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose' (Ellis and Bochner,

2000, p.739). In the case of this study the artefact used (baby book pages) provides a snapshot of my own writing at stages of my early childhood, giving scope for textual analysis that is technical and socio-cultural as the inner workings of my childhood mind were exposed. The policy discourse and memories concerning the founding of the charity and the determined pedagogy inevitably drew on additional knowledge that I held around these wider conversations within this study.

### **3.9.2 Summary/Conclusion: Note to reader**

I have outlined the methodology, the concerns this methodology brings in the community of research and the ethical considerations that have dominated my waking hours, pouring over material decisions throughout this research. However, I would like to take a moment to remember that the significant reason for this study is to reach you and evoke an engagement that leads to action. I have chosen a research methodology that requires significant exposure of a child, under privileged in many ways but rich in others, to examine the key factors that led to this child, written off by herself in early adulthood, becoming an educationalist and charity founder, championing literacies for socio-economically disadvantaged children, young people and families. This is my story and as Carter explains, I have attempted to ensure a true reflection that stays on mission.

And for those of us telling stories in our work, we will not serve the community well if we sanctify story-telling work and build an epistemology on it to the point that we simply substitute one paradigmatic domination for another without challenging domination itself. We must, then, become much more self-conscious than we have been in the past about the issues involved in narrative and story, such as interpretation, authenticity, normative value, and what our purposes are for telling stories in the first place. (Carter, 1993, p. 11)

It is my hope that as the reader you can connect and potentially recontextualise what you know about yourself and the pedagogies that were present in your literacy experiences, in light of your encounter with my experience (Bochner, 1996).

As Sikes explains when considering motivational reflection, 'When deciding to research a particular topic, as well as reflecting honestly on why they want to do it, researchers need to think carefully about what use any findings may be put to by others, and to consider whether any potential moral or ethical problems could arise' (Sikes, 2006, p.110). I hope that this research is the beginning of a movement that identifies other individuals with stories to tell and shapes the discourse on policy, pedagogy and bridging the gap of socially marginalised communities.

' Auto/biographical approaches require constant, inclusive and shared interrogation of what is known, and how we come to know it. The objectivist, scientific myth of the detached, dispassionate researcher has gravely damaged and constrained the stories we tell.' (West, 2001, pp. 247 - 8). I hope that this method goes some way to converting those at odds with autoethnography as method, as this provides an insight of a journey, a story of a signature pedagogy.

Human beings are storying beings. We make sense of our lives and the things that happen to us through narratives which provide links, connections and coherence in ways that we find meaningful. As Donald Polkinghorne puts it, 'narrative descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.5).

Auto/biographical perspectives challenge the idea of a detached, objective biographer of others' histories. Michelle Fine (1992) insists that ' we are human inventors of some questions and repressors of others, shapers of the very contexts we study, co-participants in our interviews, interpreters of others' stories and narrators of our own' (Fine, 1992).

In placing myself at the heart of this study I have been able to dig deeply within one particular life, explore the influences and influencers within this life from the people, materials, interactions and experiences of a child through to adulthood through the life fragments of a singular life. I hope that, as Mackey attests, 'we can learn many

important general truths from an in-depth singular study, and I explore as many as possible of the full set of materials with which I became literate' (Mackey, 2016, p.4) in order to do so, along with the memories and lives of others that accompanied these texts.

## Chapter 4: Data: A signature pedagogy platform: arts/literacy habits of heart, mind and hand re-encountered through memories

### 4.1 Introduction:

The following are snippets of stories, each telling of a significant pocket in time that shaped my own experiences or presented 'turning-point' (Denzin, 2014a, p.35) moments and ultimately impacted on my motivations and the contributing factors, leading to the creation of Grimm & Co.

Each memory was selected as telling an event that played a significant role, some acting as an amalgamation of memories that demonstrate a continuity that formed my own 'funds of knowledge' (Molls and Greenburg, 1990). This insight into my own collected literacies that formed my narrative is intended to explore key elements of pedagogy that develop a rich literacy 'repertoire' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018; Robinson, 1997). Whilst others reveal interruptions that formed a significant narrative disruption resulting in rethink or redirection. What they have in common is that they all directly influenced the construction of my own narrative. I hope to provide some resonance or curiosity to the reader that might trigger exploration of their own narrative and the literacy repertoire they have developed to draw on the effects of pedagogies and the uses of literacy as 'catalyst to effect change' (Reissman, 2018).

These memories are not meant to convey any sort of truth, but offer an insider glimpse (Nutbrown, 2011; Henderson, 2018) that is my own theory, analytical interests and resonance with the audience (Linde, 1993; Henderson, 2018).



Fig 8: Grimm & Co's blackboard welcome to the story

#### 4.2 A pocketful of stories

Setting: 1969 - 1973, Park Hill flats, central Sheffield, Yorkshire, England + Aunt's/Uncle's Fulwood, Sheffield.

My Grandmother (Nan), from age sixty five, was my carer for 90% of my awake and sleep time from the age of two and a half to age twelve, so will inevitably feature across discussion of my personal narrative as a constant influencer. We were financially poor, and in modern times I would be labelled a 'looked after child'. We lived on Nan's state pension. Little did she know when becoming a grandmother that she would find herself returning to a parenting role with her two year old granddaughter. My starting point was a high rise inner city block of flats in the centre of Sheffield with a large picture window, overlooking a busy train station that amused my imagination, creating background stories for the people who criss-crossed the platforms. The distance blurred the characteristics of their faces but their costumes, gait, poise and speed gave the basics of their imagined characters that Nan and I placed into a continuous, looping story that connected some to others. Many characters had a background story, some



sad, some extraordinarily happy, most invoked greater curiosity and interest which led to new threads about their imagined lives, developing empathy for the characters, their lives that we had created and an appetite to repeat this activity over and over again as a shared experience, often dressing dolly pegs (shaped clothes pegs) as these characters to bring them to life.



Fig 9: Nan and me, my second summer

Early memories of this flat, nested within a notoriously impoverished high rise building are strong and of happy times. Saturday began with breakfast! Half a grapefruit with sugar, followed by egg and soldiers (buttered, toasted bread fingers) for breakfast. Our eggs, once emptied by the soldier dips, were quickly turned upside down in the egg cup, a face promptly drawn on the shells then turned to each other to have a conversation where each character would discuss their puppeteer and plans for their day ahead. A walk through the park to feed the ducks and the birds would include close inspection of bug holes, the effect of the seasons on the leaves with a heavy, large magnifying glass that accompanied most journeys. After lunch we would take the number 51 bus to visit Aunt Doris and Uncle Charles who lived in a leafy, middle class area of Sheffield and had a large garden where I would inspect the pond for signs of fairy activity, followed by a game of snooker in the presence of a map of the world, as Uncle Charles told stories of adventures that might take place in each country, from America to Zimbabwe.

After tea we would be driven home where, with an audience of Nan, Aunt and Uncle, I would deliver a heavily constructed ballet performance to Johann Strauss' Vienna Waltz or The Blue Danube costumed with a dusky pink negligee buttoned around my neck and left to hang as a cloak which could be used as wings or a sense of movement to assist me in telling the story of the swan dancing around the lake before being chased by the evil forces, always ending with toes touching head as a prompt for applause, followed by a discussion of the story being told. Two stories of swans often merged as I recalled and replayed the stories of the ugly duckling emerging as a graceful swan that would be tormented by wicked entities taking on many shapes – from an armchair to a standard lamp – representing shapes of monsters who would always be defeated in my stories. A story would be jointly read at bedtime, then I would continue to read until falling asleep. This was a simple Saturday. My lived experiences were narrowed by our financial means but my imagined experiences were wild, full of adventure, interpreted and lived through many modes but experiences nonetheless. We were financially poor but we were literacy rich.

### **4.3 Museum of me**

Setting: 1967 - 1986, representing age 0 to 19. Various homes around Sheffield, England.

I developed and delivered a family literacy project in 2014 with the objective that families would research the experiences, interactions and memories of their childhood literacies that had shaped that part of their narrative. They did this through artefacts as a shared experience with their children/grandchildren. They chose a receptacle for these that would house them but open to show others as an autoethnographic representation of their pathways. To engage fully with this project I also produced a curated version of this artefact which told the visual story of the literacy engagements I had experienced, mostly from the age of five and above. Choosing these resources was part of the process, from remembering to selection, the choices I carefully made were built on those acts/resources/interactions that I recall as 'significant' memories, meaning those which had played a repeated role in my literacy narrative. Once

chosen I had to find artefacts, some were still in my possession but many were lost so had to be sourced. My nostalgic, emotional reaction to the reunion with these objects confirmed their significance further as they held deep meaning for me when I was able to locate and hold the exact same version from the images within my memories (Kripps, 2000, p.15). These memories were displayed within and around an antique suitcase, with song sheet bunting of the verses of 'Vespers', nursery rhymes, albums and singles of songs played repeatedly by the arm of the record player swept to one side, a roll of random comics secured with elastic bands (important as this was how they were purchased), books included *Black Beauty*, *The Naughtiest Girl in the School*, my teddy bear with silent squeak, amongst many others. I wrote labels to explain their function and their role and it was important to me that these were displayed as treasures, beautiful and inviting, each a story in its own right, combined to display a narrative, my literacy narrative or as I named it, 'museum of me'.

It is interesting to note that this study took place prior to Margaret Mackey's autobiography, 'One Child Reading' (2016). However, there are deep synergies that resonate for me as I read Mackey's text and most certainly influenced the decision to include this within this study and my decision to choose auto-ethnography as method.



Fig 10: Museum of Me: Artefacts of my literary repertoire

The act of remembering and collecting reawakened my senses, reopening memories of smells, taste and touch and the 'visceral prompts' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.79) of emotional links to each of these 'artefactual literacies' as every object told a story (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) and in the writing of the labels flames of excitement were reignited. This museum of me represented some of the most critical elements of my childhood to teenage literacy repertoire.

One particular item had taken more time to locate than others. I found it was important to me, in creating this collection, that I located *the* version of Grimm's Fairy Tales (Grimm, 1877) that I had owned as a child. This led to every outing including a charity shop dash but eventually I resigned with a version that did at least have the illustrations of my memories (by Arthur Rackham). However, I knew this wasn't the exact same version as my original had a story that I remembered clearly as a strange story entitled, 'Clever Elsie'. It took a few months more before I tracked down the version I had

searched for, only to find that I'd owned three versions and in each the stories had slight differences, from illustrations to content. This prompted memories of reading the same story with three different titles but the version of Clever Elsie always made me laugh at its absurdity and the irony of the title as Clever Elsie was, in fact, not very clever at all.

#### **4.4 The baby book**

Setting: 1968 to 1975, Park Hill flats, central Sheffield, England to Hillsbrough, Sheffield, England.

##### **4.4.1 Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet**

From the earliest memories I recall that writing, in, around, and away from my home, was everywhere (Holdaway, 1979; Harste, et al., 1984; Wells, 1986; Pahl and Rowsell, Gregory, et al., 2004, Geertz, 1983)! Whilst walking, Nan pointed out road signs and helped me to work out the words until I found ways to make the word patterns from letters (Geertz, 1973; James, 2001). From dawn till dusk the reading and writing of words helped us to get through our day. In order to eat we wrote shopping lists, read labels on tins and jars then followed recipes and wrote new ones. The clack of the letterbox, followed by a thud, exclaimed the volume, and type of mail that would be poured over after breakfast. From postcards to letters and bills which would be read quickly then filed for action and added to the 'to do' list. Neighbours knocked with the paper of the day, pointing to pertinent stories that evoked anger, sadness or laughter, shared over tea and a morning biscuit.

My tuppence-bought, pre-loved, comic roll, tightly held with elastic band, held a compendium of mysterious treasures, from Beano to Twinkle, I was never disappointed, poised with my crayons at the ready to complete the competition or draw one of the characters. A chapter of a story book from the library, followed by correspondence with friends, family or pen pals on fresh, dove-white Basildon Bond with my favourite pen. A game of Happy Families, progressing in later years to

Scrabble would demand a regular (authorised by Nan) rummage through the huge and heavy Oxford Concise Dictionary to check I could use tiles carrying the greatest currency and ultimately win the game. Decisions over evening television viewing would be made by reading through the Radio Times and placing red ticks on those which would give us the greatest entertainment. Finally, the twilight hours would unlock the current diary to log the high and low lights of the day, followed by the treat of the next chapter of the story book, until my eyelids commanded sleep.

The need to engage with words became apparent to me at an early age as Nan often told people, “Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet”. In Nan’s explanation of this she talked of how I was determined to hold a pencil and mark paper before I could walk. One story Nan would repeat is that I would request sheets of note paper and sit alongside Nan, whilst she made her lists. Mimicking this practice, I would make marks on the paper in lines and babble in explanation to Nan (and the wider family) what these were. The words of these babbles were sometimes recognisable as ‘La La’ (Nannan) or ‘Lolat’ (chocolate) and the swirls of pencil marks would accompany our shopping trips.

At the age of twenty months I was forming linear lines of letters and crosses in my hurry to catch up with the grown-ups. Illustrated in the baby book (kept by my birth mother, and completed occasionally on visits) that recorded moments of my early childhood (Fig.4) this page was completed by me at twenty months and the variations are starting to emerge from my practiced scribbles. Immediate attempts at the letter ‘N’ followed by ‘A’ were possibly first drafts of ‘Nannan’, pursued by repetition of line practice, then a return attempt at new letter formations, immediate gratification of the drilled preparation.

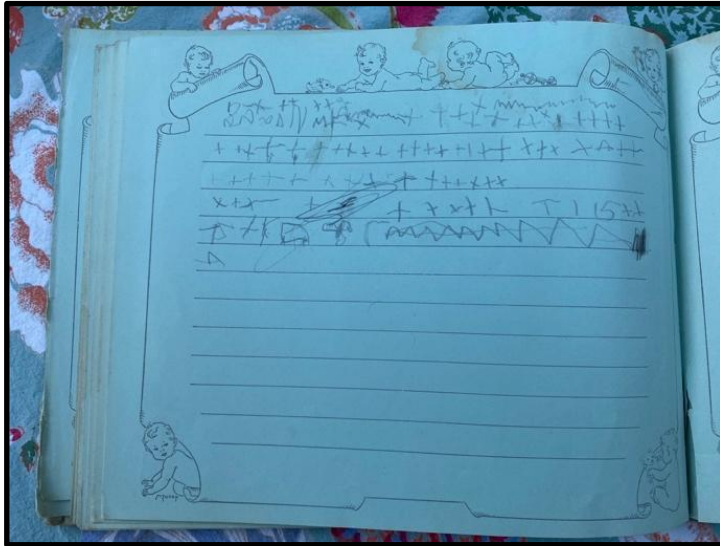


Fig. 11: My baby book – writing without the alphabet

#### 4.4.2 Collecting memories

My childhood memories and senses are crowded with literacy practices and the excitement around them. From the freshness and cotton-bright joy of a new page and my ink footsteps across it, to the intoxicating, crisp, linen fragrance of new books that fogged the corridors of the shelves in Andrew's Book Store, a waft of these smells springs a nostalgic reminiscence to my thoughts.

A trip to Andrew's book store and stationers involved a bus journey on the 51 bus through to the city centre. I remember walking around the gigantic pillars of Sheffield's grand City Hall to a very brown, brick building on Holly Street. As the vertical red sign with ANDREWS capitalised in white and hung on the corner of this building came into sight, I recall the butterfly flip of excitement, with knowing anticipation of what was to come. This was a very special event that accompanied the achievement of gold stars in school or a preparation visit to equip me for the new school year. Either way it meant 'stationery' and 'books' that I could own, smell, dive into, practise on and treasure. It also meant a lengthy two hours (minimum), wandering around the two floors of the shop, finding nooks where nobody would see me pressing my nose into a book or a notebook to inhale the pleasurable smell of an untouched story.



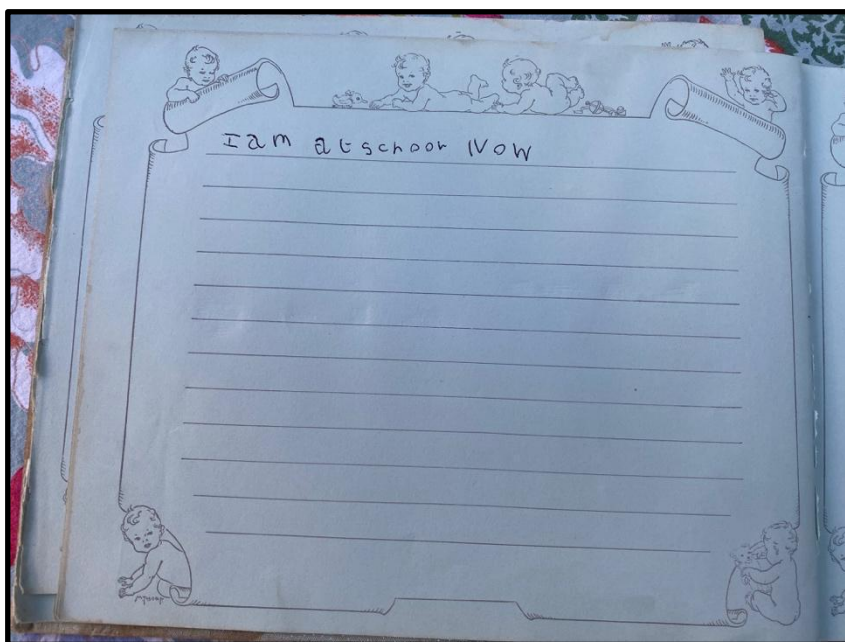


Fig. 12: Diary of a special moment in time: I am at school now

I had a desire to write moments in time, reflective diaries in many forms, from baby book (fig.5) to a locked, 5 year diary, that constrained writing liberties and frustrated me to add pages between the pages. I had an urge to write to save special moments and for future reflection.

The image in the baby book represents my diary following my first day at school. This was a primary school in Wincobank, Sheffield, the spring of 1972. I was concerned that I wasn't able to take teddy or my reading book with me and in their absence the day began as a tearful one with lots of teacher reassurance from a very tall woman who was kind and smelled of toast. The next memory moment is one of joy as this same teacher realised I could write in sentences. The amazement, glee and praise poured from this person onto me and was shortly followed by a 'special' visit from the Headteacher to personally see my writing. The next flash of memory is also a happy one as I sat, in a campfire-like huddle, around the teacher for 'story time'. It was a story about a dog, I loved dogs and I hadn't heard this story. The carpet was itchy and hard but I parked this discomfort so that I could give my full attention to absorbing this



wonderful story. However, there was one more hurdle! The teacher didn't finish the story. Nan arrived with a huge smile and I was happily reunited with teddy and my current book for the bus ride. Happy to return the next day to hear the remainder of the story.

#### 4.4.3 Lists and happenings

By the age of six my reason to write in the book was a desire to list the presents I had received from Santa (Fig. 6). There's a mention of every item that had popped out of the chimney. I'd taken the time away from playing with these precious presents in order to list them in the book so the motivation must have been quite compelling. My age was also very important to me at the age of six as it was the first statement I made on the page. A mention of my brother also appears on the page but either a desire to get back to my toys or a lack of significant interest left his list unwritten.

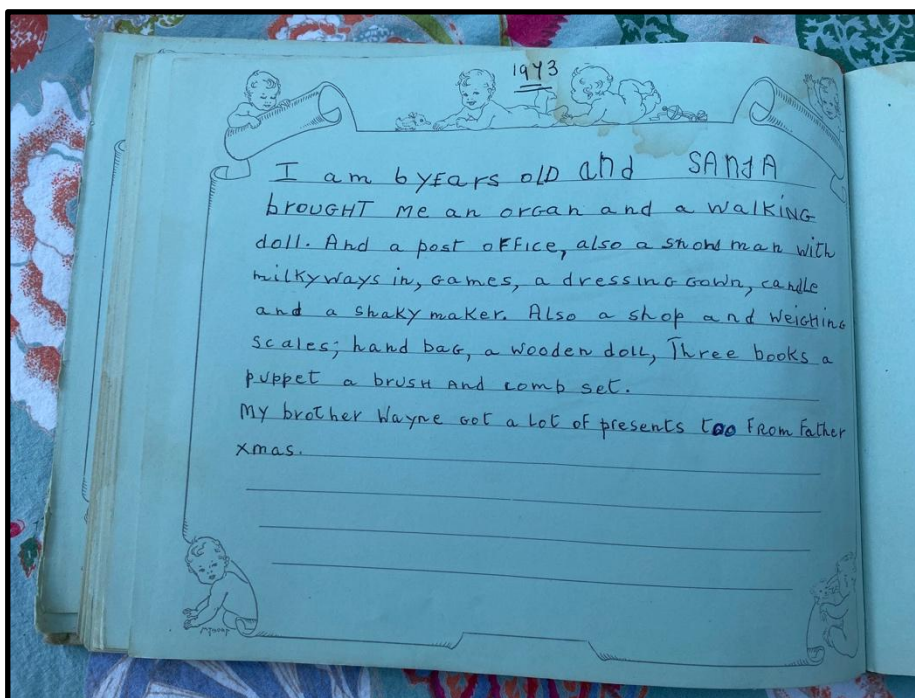


Fig 13: Santa brought me...

#### 4.4.5 I can spell a lot of long words but my writing is atrocious

My next reflection is at eight years old. Here, the elements of life, worthy of noting again begin with my age. The status of my school year and the names of the teachers dominate the page, potentially alluding to a comment from such teachers when referring to my writing being 'atrosness'! The irony of this word being used within the same sentence as my claim that 'I can spell a lot of long words' has often caused me to laugh at this when I've re-read the book as an adult.

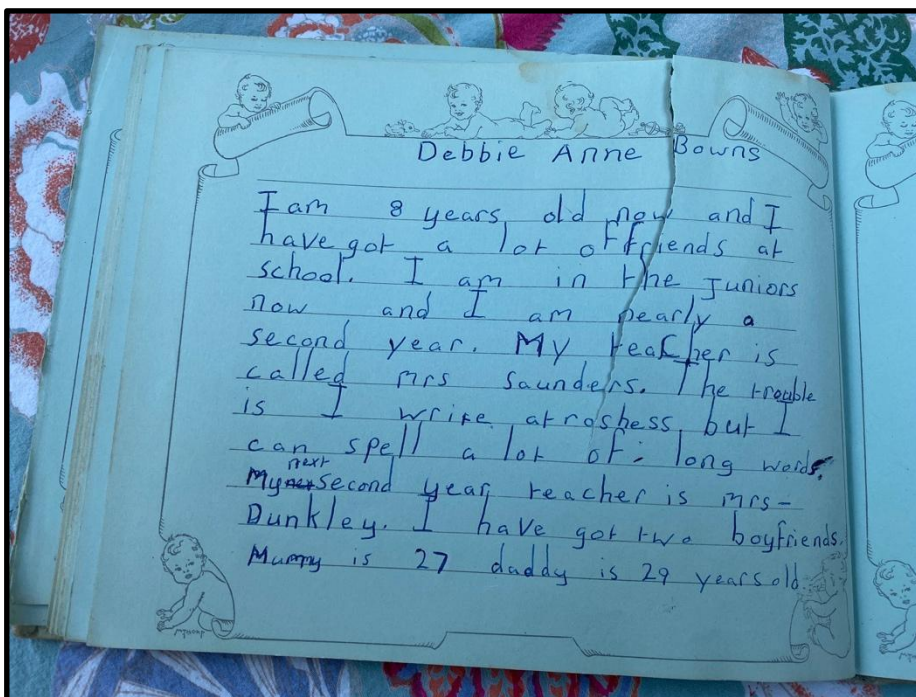


Fig. 14: My writing is atrocious

My memory of this is that my teachers did repeatedly scold me for the presentation and style of my writing. This did matter to me. I recall that the girl who sat next to me in class wrote beautifully and this was remarked upon by the teacher. I tried to improve by practicing and drill writing at home and at school, but this 'drill' writing didn't fill me with enthusiasm and didn't come easy. So, I resigned myself to being an untidy writer, comforted by the fact that this didn't stop me from writing and when I wrote for myself or at home, I didn't let the concentrated effort of presentation interfere with the importance of content.

Interestingly, having two boyfriends was also a high point (fig.7)! If I had the chance to return to talk to the little girl writing on this page, I would be compelled to ask who the little girl was writing to and for. I do remember in later years, when writing pages in this book, my reason was to capture moments and memories that would be for the older me or, the children I may have one day and this was indeed a key motivation to write. I was very aware of its purpose as a book of memories that I might use to reflect back on one day, but I also remember considering the reader might be family members who did have access to this book and where it was kept. I recall not wanting to hurt their feelings so I would paint the picture of an idyllic life, whilst attempting to tell a little about myself.

#### **4.5 Destination, teacher: An imagined narrative**

Setting: 1971 to 1980. Various homes around Sheffield, England.

Until the age of six I remember repeatedly asked questions from grown-ups, 'so Deborah, what do you want to be when you grow up'? My immediate answer was 'farmer's wife'! This desire came from a misplaced opinion that farmers, and their wives, looked after animals and possibly, from the nursery rhyme, as I remember always wanting to be chosen by the farmer as his 'wife'! This was the early 1970s. Nan was horrified by this and repeatedly told me that I should be the farmer but I thought that would involve tractors so was adamant that was not the job for me. However, on a day branded in my memory, on asking Nan 'why do we call this meat the same name as a fluffy lamb in the fields' she gave me a very honest answer that led to lamb never (knowingly) touching my lips again and my absolute disgust that Nan fed such a thing to me. From that day onwards, the thought of working on a farm horrified me.

At the age of six, I remember setting up my teddies, Thumbelina doll, Tiny Tears and any other remotely human look-a-likes that would participate in my classes. I took them out into the outdoors in a makeshift wheelbarrow (Nan's shopping trolley) on a field trip to describe the things we could find in nature, gathering along the way to make scrapbooks with flour, water and hand-made paper pages, stapled together. I

would imagine each pupil, creating their own work of art and writing the story that enveloped it. This shifted to 'real' people, friends and neighbours, other children, as my teaching took on 'domestic science' at the make-shift mud kitchen of empty flora margarine tubs and good old fashioned mud. Apparently (according to Nan's stories in later years) my style was to support other children to do this for themselves rather than tell them what to do, which didn't always go smoothly.

#### **4.6 Take a u-turn when possible.**

Setting: 1980 to 1986. Various homes around Sheffield, England.

My path to creating Grimm & Co did not follow the traditional course of my era, i.e. school, sixth form, university, job. It most definitely didn't fulfil my 6 year old imagined narrative!

From the age of six to thirteen my career Sat Nav was firmly set to destination, English teacher, any phase (primary or secondary). I knew exactly what I needed in order to do this and I had complete clarity, purpose and a focused direction. My chosen subjects were relevant and my grades were high and they mattered to me because each was a step closer to the adult me. I had chosen this path because I enjoyed and understood every element of English language and literature. Studying this meant I could read, use my imagination, be creative, explore new worlds and I could write – both, equally pleasurable to me. Teaching was an occupation that I could also imagine. It was in my world. There were teachers all around me, many inspirational, some funny, most seemed to enjoy their work, and all helped pupils to learn. This was meaningful, important and enjoyable and I felt those were the main reasons to work... oh and to earn money of course. My ambition didn't go beyond this point and I had no desire to build an empire... just to enjoy making a difference to others, teaching a subject that I loved. I wasn't naturally gifted. I had to work hard for every grade. But I was motivated. I had a goal behind my eyes and within my grasp.

This imagined narrative was disrupted for me at age thirteen when, as a result of a short but impacting illness, my grandmother moved into a residential home. Further

developments meant that I left school at fifteen with no qualifications to find a job and bring an income into the family. The footsteps of my previously imagined narrative veered off in an unknown and very unfamiliar direction, rejecting the inner voice Sat Nav that incessantly nagged to take a U-turn. There was no longer time, nor luxury of embracing my life-choice path. At fifteen, without informing school, I told a white lie about my age, dressed as old as I could look, and set about finding a job, any job, that would provide an income that could attempt to mend some very broken fragments of my new circumstances. Initially, I found work two bus rides away in a shoe-shop in Rotherham. This didn't provide sufficient yield so I put a new setting in my Sat Nav, to attempt to find an alternative career. By the age of sixteen I started an apprenticeship with an estate agency but interruptions from a rocky, turbulent home life disrupted the natural course of this career move. Self-esteem and self-worth levels plummeted and I began to lose direction, purpose or hope. The lack of self-care, resigned to exist rather than thrive and hormonal plus domestic turmoil created the conditions of a dysfunctional life. At the age of nineteen I discovered I was pregnant and homeless.

Finding myself singularly responsible for another human being gave me the shoulder shake I needed to recognise I'd inadvertently found myself in 'Noman's Land' without a compass. Just to make it harder on myself I also needed to earn money to feed, clothe and house another being. A new destination would need to be found, within reach and with prospects, I'd train at college to be a secretary whilst working three part time jobs, 1) the twilight shift, packing at the local sweet factory, 2) early morning cleaning for the local working men's club, 3) weekend shifts behind the local pub bar. My son's childcare was organised – from creches to paternal grandmother, he would benefit from this deal too.

The expected achievement on this course was a Royal Society of Arts Grade 1, but I needed to achieve a Grade 3 to fast track through the ranks of secretaries and provide sufficient single parent salary to support my son and provide childcare. So, every moment counted. It is often said that for most of us there has been an individual in our lives who has helped us to see something about ourselves that we cannot and this can create a pivotal moment that can change the course of travel. My moment arrived

half an hour after my return from Grade 3 audio transcription typing exam, to join the rest of the mature and eclectic class group. One of the group verbalised frustration at the computer screen as they struggled to find the appropriate command to print. I sat beside them, talking through the training we'd had and prompting their memories of successful attempts through to success on this task. A call from another person followed, then another, as the tutor was busy with reviews at the other end of the room. The tutor called an end to the class and called me over. "Deborah, I've noticed how you help the others in your class. You've got a particular style... you really help others to find the right way to do it for themselves rather than just telling them what to do. The way you explain is quite unusual but really effective. Have you ever thought about teaching? You're a natural you know!" The tears flowed and although I didn't realise it at the time, this was the next pivotal point in my journey that set me back on track. Although there were many more wobbles that shook me off course, that moment created a possibility and potential that lit a flame of hope that had long been extinguished before this tutor spoke. I'd carried my literacies with me, hanging out of my baggage on this journey, a little frayed at the edges and with no qualification to speak of. The journey would be more difficult but it was possible! Within three years I was teaching English, communications, literacy and 'computers for the terrified'. Within five years I was qualified and teaching in schools, colleges and across the voluntary sector. Within eight years I was Head of Literacy for a regional college, also working in two schools. The flame had become a bonfire!

## Chapter 5: Spinning Yarns: An analysis of the stories that weaved an arts-based signature pedagogy

### 5.1 Introduction:

In this chapter I draw on data presented in the preceding chapter as five significant memories – collections of artefact triggers, moments or an amalgamation of memories told in reflections through the story of a day. The selection of these memories was a spontaneous act (Goodson, 2006) that began with the drawing of a patchwork of my literacy journey, from birth to founding a literacy charity, each hexagon contained a memory trigger worth digging further into and identified particular artefacts that would support these memories. My next step was to reach into these memories, the rich stories that provided data for learning from the life fragments exposed. In this analysis I attempt to examine the ‘stories of action’ within the ‘theories of context’ to ‘fortify patterns of domination’ (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.86) in the form of repertoire and a direct example of pedagogy in action.

Although the learning from these stories has resulted spontaneously from emergent themes, the stories themselves were not randomly curated. They are stories that represent moments in time that had an impact on, and shaped my own literacy narrative. I will unpick the tapestry of this narrative and examine the stitches of experiences that occurred ‘in’ and ‘through’ (Goodson, 2010, p.3) the stories from memories unleashed. This ‘narrative learning’ (Goodson, 2006) comprises of epiphanies from experiences remembered as an autoethnographic journey, including the collections of artefacts that presented reflections on my literacy repertoire and artefacts that remain in my possession and provided additional context that enabled a degree of textual analysis to accompany this autoethnographic account. The artefacts provide a scaffold for memories, these ‘scriptive things’ (Bernstein, 2011, p.8), such as writing in my baby book, and act as an object for reflection and meaning-making from my literacy childhood (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). These artefacts have also ensured greater ‘disciplining of the memories’ (Mackey, 2016, p.19), acting as the ‘narrative rhythms’ (Mackey, 2016, p.12) of my childhood through to adulthood. The



development of my own literacy repertoire, the influences and influencers on what could be considered a rich literacy narrative.

I examine these memories within the framework of the key elements of a signature pedagogy for the teaching of writing or literacy/ies. Within this framework I also draw on Burnett and Merchant's 'Charter for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies' (2018), and its components but instead of looking at this within a digital literacies context I frame this charter within the wider context of pedagogies that are relevant to the making of Grimm & Co, using my own memories as a narrative learning tool.

I explore the possibilities afforded by creating a bridge between home and school spaces. A place for this 'third space' in which literacy and identity practices emanate from distinct contexts and involve distinct sets of knowledge, can meet and be valued is explored by Moje, et al., 2004' (Parry, 2013, p.41) but for this third space to be an embedded literacy pedagogy that is valued by teachers and embraced by families/carers. This third space, as embedded, embraces the socio-cultural literacy practices, and could even, potentially co-exist with technical, functionalist pedagogies prescribed by the policy makers through the National Curriculum (England and Ireland) or other appropriate models as imposed in other lands.

As previously highlighted, two key texts that influenced my initial thinking throughout this account include Mackey's 'One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography' (2016), Nutbrown's 'A box of childhood: small stories at the roots of a career' (2011). I found these narratives engaging as stories that brought experiences to life within contextual frames that provided rich data with which I could resonate. This method of storytelling also enabled me to embed my practice within my thesis. Fragments of each have been drawn out and considered and have provided contextual frameworks which popped out at me as providing additional clarity on which to hang this analysis.

In introducing this analysis of data, I would like to recognise at this point the way that I approached this 'telling'. As Ellis (2016) describes, I 'assign significance and meaning to rather vague experiences and events in an attempt to bring order and make sense [...] by telling stories about what (I've) experienced' (p.196). The



selection of these stories was not random, but structured as recollections, prompted by the question, *what were the foundations of my literacy repertoire?*. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest 'memory is selective shaped, and retold in the continuum of one's experiences' (2000, p.142) so I was careful to pluck the memories that had remained true to their original experience in order to convey these memories and make sense of them within this framework. I hope the 'narrative web' (Parry, 2013, p.3) my grandmother initiated around me provides a visual navigation of an assembled repertoire over time that built the narrative of a literacy champion that founded an arts-based literacy charity with a clear, rationalised, signature pedagogy (explained within the introduction of this thesis).

### 5.1.1 Audience/reader

As I sat at my laptop to write the analysis of data I became very aware of the reader of this thesis. I attempted to hear my words and the theories within them as read by the audience. Mackey describes this experience:

The writer summons up and then addresses a schematic reader who possesses sufficient repertoire to process the story being told. The writer needs readers to know how to align their own life understandings with the implied reader that is shaped by the way the story is written (Mackey, 2016, p.115).

Mackey is referring to the repertoire of references that the reader can draw on, for example the time and place of the memories could hold references that are of a different age of experience and unfamiliar to the reader. It occurs to me that many references from the memories might be of a time or circumstance (e.g. some of my own recollections are from over fifty years ago) that might not resonate with a younger reader with little experience to draw on within their repertoire. Therefore, I have considered this by re-editing the analysis to attempt to explain any occurrence that might disenfranchise a reader of this work and I hope the timing of these references has no bearing on their usefulness.

As a child born in the late 1960s I acknowledge that my own memories are from a time which was limited in the resources we have access to today. Therefore, it is important to note that whilst I do not dwell on digital medium for this study I do embrace it as a critical mode of resource of contemporary literacies, and will revisit this further. As expressed by Razfar and Gutierrez (2013), the new literacy environment is broader, more dynamic, more fluid, multi-layered and multimodal (Razfar and Gutierrez, 2013, p.65).

### **5.1.2 Narrative**

My childhood narrative was rich in literacy practices that helped me make meaning of the world around me and I engaged and excelled in my childhood education. However, I did grow up in challenging circumstances as we had limited financial resources, an indicator of this is that I qualified for free school meals. The Education Policy Institute defines children who are disadvantaged as those eligible for free school meals, and report there is a 17% educational gap between those experiencing disadvantage and all other children (2016/17, Department of Education, UK Government, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results-2016-to-2017>). That is not to assert that my own account could be applied as a generalised narrative to many or to demonstrate any kind of trend but that this account does provide an insightful look at data from one childhood and these were the particular circumstances that surrounded my narrative so are worthy of mention. My personal account presents a deep exploration into the memories of literacy practices that took place around the child, the pedagogies that enabled a rich literacy repertoire and disruptions along the journey.

### **5.1.3 Signature pedagogy for a rich literacy repertoire**

The following section returns to the title of this thesis, 'Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies'. The data analysis is framed within the areas of signature pedagogy that have determined Grimm & Co's core principles of delivery methodology. Each principle co-exists with the others rather than

as standalone pedagogies, and each has equal value. These pedagogies provide the framework for the analysis of data, extracted from my five key memories, at points where the memory encounters meaning making that links directly back to this pedagogy and the contextual practice around this.

## **5.2 Change lives, one story at a time**

Stories appear across all of my memories as they appear across the signature pedagogy as the underpinning fabric on which each pedagogy sits. Each memory brings its own unique reference to how stories were used and developed and this has informed my thinking within each pedagogy and this narrative learning, 'in' and 'through' (Goodson, 2006) the data presented as my memories, and has determined the headings that follow:

### **5.2.1 As shared literacy experiences**

From 'a pocketful of stories', the memory of observing the train station, viewed through a high rise window provides a narrative twist to what Neuman and Celano (2001) discuss as they describe 'poor' neighbourhoods as offering less visible literacies due to economic constraints. Reimagining of a moving train and the platform communities of people afforded an over-layering of an ecological resource, nested within a neighbourhood considered a poor community. The train station was reclaimed and reframed within a literacy-rich community through the shared imaginations of my grandmother and myself. Sharing of stories enabled emergent literacies (Sulzby, 1986) through dialogue that would describe the newly imagined communities, giving shape, characteristics, emotions and happenings to these passengers with responsive improvisation that reacted to their behaviours. The knowledge construction used storying and imagined improvisation through our human interaction (Turnbull, 2003, p.5) that took the story forward, helped shape a wider vocabulary and provided playful reimagining that triggered emotional connections through a shared, social and collaborative process (Dyson, 1997). Not only did we make the best of what we had, we reimagined the neighbourhood around us that we could see through playful practices, and the use of shared, imagined stories. Leander and Sheehy (2004) see

these playful discursive practices as producing new kinds of spaces. This layering of alternative worlds onto the physical world enabled a reimagining of the contextual landscape around our home. In this world of the early 1970s, my grandmother and myself were co-constructing new spaces, new realities, new cultures and making meaning within them using, what to us was a familiar resource of stories, to push boundaries beyond what we could see to what we could reimagine.

### **5.2.2 Repetition**

An appetite to repeat this activity as a daily ritual is an act that is common with children's play and enactment of stories. The act of repetition, 'a pattern of repeatable behaviour into which experiences are assimilated and that are gradually co-ordinated' (Athey, 1990, p.37) created a practice zone for revisiting, developing and advancing the stories. Marsh (2005, p.31) asserts, 'through the repetition of various physical and mental acts, children accommodate and assimilate new learning'. Introduction of new elements of the story would be modelled by my grandmother then tried out by myself within safe, repeated domains that included familiar characters, already introduced, mixed with new characters and their imagined experiences. This 'ritual practice' acted as a schema (Athey, 1990; Nutbrown, 1999) that in itself played an important role in facilitating the cognitive development in relation to language and literacy (Marsh, 2005, p.31). In repeating this activity I was also growing in personal confidence and courage to attempt new stories, built on the foundations of others, constructing a repertoire of meaning making and developing language that would form features of my 'cultural toolkit' (Carrithers, 1992). This repeated re-enactment began with characterisation of scenes imagined and untouched to a sensory extension of these stories through the use of dolly pegs (a wooden clothes peg with rounded top and slit for hanging on a washing line) to bring the characters to life and enabled interaction to explore these narratives further.

### **5.2.3 Dolls as meaning making artefacts**

The dolly pegs, infused with 'anticipated identities' (Wohlwend, 2009) with which I could make meaning. These dolly pegs were material objects that formed part of my wider 'narrative web' (Marsh, 2005; Parry, 2013) and were used and re-used, each time dressed differently with off-cuts of old aprons, artefacts produced with the cultural and material products I had to hand (Kress, 2000) and to which I would 'attribute meaning' (Parry, 2016, p.194) that would imitate a real person, observed through the window. The creation of objects and people that enabled this act I remember as an important element of my story making rather than as an extension. The tactile artefacts did not need to look perfect as in my own imagination I could perfect their look. This switch from one narrative mode to another, each supporting the other (Millard, 2005, p.162) provided multi-modal learning, but the vehicle of stories remained and the dolly pegs provided an additional sensory interaction with the story, bringing it closer and directly within my world. Pahl, (2010) discusses this as 'world making, using these objects as a tool for a special kind of talk' in that it calls up 'home stories and creates imaginary worlds' (p.42). The opportunities for my emergent literacies were plentiful in my early and continued childhood.

#### **5.2.4 Emergent story literacies**

Emergent literacies, defined by (Cameron, Hunt and Linton, 1996; Hall, 1987; Teale and Sulzby, 1986) as the acknowledgement of young children's early experience and development in literacy. From the earliest of memories my own emergent literacies were situated in a literacy rich environment which I define as such due to the wealth of activities, resources, and interactions I had at hand. I experienced a multimodal pre-school environment (Lancaster, 2003; Kress, 2010, Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) and this was common practice between my grandmother and myself from my earliest memories in that we would interplay with text and language through our use of stories, both inside and outside our home and advanced through a constant focus of semiotic literacies (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) around us and our interaction with these. Books and writing were all around me and the boundaries of prereading and reading didn't exist, my literacies emerged prior to formal instruction (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). My own reading, writing and oral language developed in an interconnected

manner, rarely linear, with informal and social contexts (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998) and exposure to many texts, and uses of such, led to a familiarity and easiness.

I was able to use various art forms from a very young age, not only to make meaning but to convey meaning to others. The story of the swan is an example of this. I had never seen a production of Swan Lake or heard of this in a book. However, my grandmother had told me a version of the story that merged in my own mind with the story of the ugly duckling. Here, I had drawn from two references to create a new version that I would claim by reshaping and retelling with a remodelled and positive outcome. My repurposing of a negligee as a cloak and furniture as evil beings, brought my home narratives and culture into play (Kress, 2000; Heath, 1983) through improvised use of objects and through the shapes I could make with my own body (Parry, 2013, p.42), applied to music through dance, I was portraying a story that communicated messages of meaning from my own interpretation of this story to an audience.

### **5.2.5 Stories for inclusive pedagogy**

One constant thread was that of my engagement with story. It seems that when I have shared my experiences with others, there is a common understanding and shared experience, to some extent, with story as an element of their lives too, often manifesting in a nostalgic response to a particular book or an experience of sharing a story with another. Stories are shaped in all forms of communication, from fact to fiction, the uses of stories are diverse and their accessibility is boundless and timeless. From cave drawings, making meaning of life patterns to folk tales, warning children not to dwell in the woods. Stories within families, from comedic to shocking, seem fundamental to 'extended zones of proximal development' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990, p.344) that create meaningful context within the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Moll, et al., 1992; Moll and Gonzalez, 1994) filling my 'virtual backpack', providing a repertoire to draw on throughout interactions with others and to support my meaning making of the world around me.

Museum of Me: Stories appeared in many forms within the contents of my curated suitcase museum. Books, comics, annuals and Christmas bumper activity annuals filled my primary years of childhood with fiction, and especially fairy tales being the principal presence in my literary repertoire of that time. For the most part these fairy tale stories of the brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson evoked a biological prey response that manifested in fear and excitement of these adventures and magic. However, they also tested my meaning of the world through their moral messages, which on reflection could be partly blamed for a very traditional sense of my own place in the world and childhood aspiration of marriage and babies equates to living happily ever after. The story of 'Clever Elsie' (Grimm and Grimm, 1812) was told in many ways, depending on the version but always with an ironic take on the title. Each version portrayed a girl who's parents claimed was clever but her actions did not seem at all clever. This story provided a frustration with the nonsense of the story but on later reading this, laughing at the nonsensical silliness within the story and more recently, in my mid-forties reading this same story and seeing a very different meaning of anxiety and notes of mental health. Meaning making messages were interwoven through the plots of these stories and became seated in my narrative and drawn from throughout experiences.

Starting with 'Learn to Read with Janet and John' books (Nisbet, 1949), and joint reading with my grandmother I moved on as swiftly as possible to books that I imagined would excite me and take me to new places and people. The excitement I experienced from the 'Learn to Read' books was purely functional as they provided gratification, but most importantly, unlocked the potential to read the more interesting texts with ease. These texts were 'necessary schema' (Mackey, 2016, p.22), enabling the foundations for free reading. My reading repertoire was stretched through my reading of stories, from cartoons which provided easy illustrations that contextualised any limited understanding of the words. Once I had developed sufficient ability to decode the letters into words and worlds from a page, I chose books which I would enjoy rather than those that were age related, these again expanded my vocabulary and my regular reading provided a practised recognition of word patterns, use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, that gave meaning to the use of such rules. I understood the uses of each type of text and my thirst to engage with those which

were of greater interest to me motivated me to use the age related, technically developing texts solely as a vehicle.

### 5.3 Use of imagination

Kudryavtsev (2017) describes imagination as ‘a free, unbridled flight of fantasy beyond the control of logic; it is the invention of what does not occur in reality, a disregard of reality’ (p.395). However, I argue, imagination is not so simply juxtaposed with reality as it can provide a playful, experimental place for logic and it can include imaginations of possible realities (Stephenson and Dobson, 2020; Greene, 1995). Imagination is not necessarily fantasy but can also provide a space for exploration and experience where limitations exist. A design cannot be created unless it has been imagined but then it can become a reality. A narrative of a community is not necessarily inevitable if an individual can reimagine an alternative aspiration for themselves. In this section I shall demonstrate how imagination, and its uses, can provide a powerful literacy pedagogy that can be used in many ways to engage in meaning making.

#### 5.3.1 Social imagination

Within the memory entitled *a Pocketful of Stories* a large picture window in an inner city block of flats provided more than a view of the highly populated city centre roof tops. As a child with my grandmother my focus was on the train station and the real-life people who were over-layered as characters with alternative lives that were imagined from their presentation and placed in stories that were shared, built, imagined and reimaged as something ‘other than what it was’ (Greene, 1995, p.5). This was a train set that was different in that it was not in my control and I couldn’t touch any part of it physically so the stories and interaction with this relied completely on my own imagination and that of my grandmother. However, the stories behind the happenings could be reshaped, reconstructed, reimaged and for a child, guided and in partnership with my grandmother, I connected to the characters and created new realities for them. I was learning to empathise with people outside of my own home narrative, bringing in people from the wider world to connect with my own. The



construction of these stories shows the process of knowledge construction at work as the connection between the real characters and imagined extension of these characters demonstrates. This form of constructing inferred identities and narratives allows us to imagine something beyond that which is explicitly stated and this is a skill acknowledged to be 'a critical component of reading, comprehension and necessary for deep engagement in text' (Duke, et al., 2004; Sweet and Snow, 2002; Lysaker and Miller, 2013).

In creating the Museum of Me I re-connected with the stories around the artefacts and unexpected outcomes arose from re-encountering these artefacts as tangible objects (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) that jolted further memories, conveying meaning (Winnicott, 1971) and nudged my senses and feelings around them (Bissell, 2009). The richness and value I place on these textual resources resonated with Mackey's account of collecting artefacts of her reading self as I found myself recalling past sensations of reading and re-reading the texts of my childhood, bringing their stories to life in my mind. Again, as for Margaret Mackey, I hope these, and following reflections 'offer potential to develop a deeper understanding of the complex internal world of reading' (Mackey, 2016, p.7).

In filling this suitcase, it soon became apparent that some items held greater value than others. It was important to me that I found the book by the brothers Grimm, Grimm's Fairy Tales (1812) and Black Beauty (Sewell, 1877), and I searched the internet and second hand book shops to attempt to reacquaint myself with a version of this book that was an exact replica of the original I had held, walked my fingers through, re-reading sections through tears of emotion in experiencing this story through the words and from imagined experiences of this horse. Throughout my life, and very present today, is a strong sense of care and concern for animals that is core within my cultural narrative, influencing life choices such as not eating lamb since the age of five and choosing a vegetarian diet from reaching adulthood to the present day . Looking at the artefacts within the *Museum of Me* I was interested to see if there were many that were from the perspective of the animal. There were indeed many books with animals as the main characters, dominated with books authored by A. A. Milne, Beatrix Potter and Enid Blyton and in revisiting these texts 'reverberate for me

in telling ways' (Mackey, 2016). I recall the strength of emotion experienced as I read of Black Beauty and how horrified, dismayed and disappointed I had been at the injustice of his life at the hands of many dispassionate humans who did not understand he was a being with feelings, worthy of consideration. My memories of Black Beauty are particularly associated with an overwhelming feeling of sadness for the way humans could treat this horse. Nussbaum (1995), Liddle and Nettle (2006) and Szarkowicz (2000) hypothesize the child's processing of stories affords the imagination to empathise with the thoughts and feelings of others. Rosenblatt (1970) agrees that when we participate in these type of imaginary situations, we 'look on characters living through crises', and as a result we examine 'ourselves and the world about us through literature' (p.37). Fiction reading creates opportunities to imagine the reality of others' thoughts, feelings and intentions!

These uses of social imagination that occur during reading may then be internalized and experienced as parts of ourselves, creating a consciousness that is inherently perspectival and a valuable resource for understanding others (Lysaker et al., 2011).

My repertoire and ability to use my social imagination was developing as a component of my emergent literacies, providing me with the ability to imagine, consider and construct thoughts, feelings, and even the intentions of others, which Lysaker, et al., (2011) assert is to 'think about thinking, and in particular to be able to think about someone else's thinking and to put language to it' (p.168).

### **5.3.2 Narrative imagination**

In this following section I explore the imagination as experience to encounter narrative improvisation and experimentation as repertoire.

A colleague at Grimm & Co, Sarah Christie, crystallised my thinking on this when, after a consultation session (2018) with teachers we were discussing one of the key reasons that teachers cited as their pupils' limited vocabulary was 'their limited experiences to draw on'. Teachers working in schools serving some of the most

socio-economically marginalised children across South Yorkshire, discussed how when they tried to engage pupils in creative writing through imagined stories, their mode of reference consistently referred to online gaming, take-away food, shopping precincts and characters from television programmes (often targeted at grown-ups). Teachers stated that their language vocabulary (verbal and written) was limited and the majority agreed that this was due to limited experiences. In furthering this discussion they referred to museums, parks, theatre and galleries as places they felt would provide greater experience and a solution to this problem. My colleague reminded me that experiences, and the interactions within these experiences might certainly enhance one's literacy repertoire but it was not necessarily the most important way of doing so. Sarah further argued, the Brontes' childhood was very limited in terms of experience and was plagued with illness, challenges and they lived in a remote landscape in Yorkshire. However, all three sisters, and brother, were creative, had a limitless imagination and possessed a strong and extensive vocabulary. What they had to draw on was an immersive and rich culture of literacy and imagination which celebrated and embraced books, communication, game playing and each other. I could see direct comparisons between this and my own experience of childhood. Financially poor but literacy rich, many of my experiences existed in pockets of imagined worlds and small scale, lived experiences of a child's everyday life, which I continue to carry with me as part of my 'cultural toolkit' (Carrithers, 1992).

My pre-school experiences brimmed with imaginative playful literacy pedagogies, from inspecting the pond fairies in my Aunt and Uncle's garden in Sheffield to puppetry with upturned, emptied boiled eggs. I was able to suspend my disbelief at will, utilise the everyday environment around me and immerse myself in the action (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003, p.111).

My experiences were indeed limited, in some aspects, due to a lack of financial resources. I did visit the theatre but only once per year. We did visit the cinema once per month to the double bill matinee as it was the least expensive time to visit. We could rarely go to museums but we curated our own museum in the environment around us by exploring nature in the walks around our home.

Books provided rich experience, especially as I visited the library regularly and the assistant paid attention to my interests, suggesting books that I might enjoy, whilst always accompanied with a dictionary as these texts were often beyond my official reading age. Library assistants were usually friendly, frequently engaging, acting mostly as a source of expansion for me to seek out new lives and experiences that would appeal to me.

When I read a book I was sometimes aware of the writer's voice, 'My books allowed someone else's mind into the room' (Mackey, 2016, p.53). I remember at times choosing not to accept their description or version of events but instead, creating alternative routes that had greater appeal to me, acted out through the use of materials, encountered outside of the book. I oscillated between the material 'scriptive things' (Bernstein, 2011, p.77) and stretching beyond the limits of my own imagination by piggybacking onto that of another, the author.

Memories around this experience were nudged as I located 'Swallows and Amazons' (Ransome, 1930) in my Museum of Me and remembered the rich and illuminating descriptions. Mackey (2016, p.183) also used this book to explore how, even without the repertoire of relevant life experience to draw on, this book is:

inclusive rather than exclusive of non-sailing readers. I might not know what the specialist terms all meant, but I could savour the children's relish in their own expertise and share their qualms when they overstepped the limits of their competence (as John does, for example, in the night raid on the Amazon that does not go according to plan) (p.183).

Mackey explains that a key 'function of the detailed vocabulary is to move the children through time and space' (Mackey, 2016, p.183).

This use of stories, through reading, as imagined experience on which to build our repertoire was a powerful realisation for me when I examined the contents of the suitcase that contained the Museum of Me. Stories appeared throughout,

especially through the primary years. A further genre, in addition to that of animals, was fairy stories and fantasy novels.

A dominant plot, central to fairy tales, is that of 'overcoming the monster' (Booker, 2004). This 'terrifying, life threatening, seemingly all-powerful monster whom the hero must confront' (Booker, 2004, p.22) was a familiar aspect of my reading adventures. Booker (2004) further asserts there are six further plots, rags to riches; the quest; voyage and return; comedy; tragedy; rebirth/dark to light (p.22). From the comics to the books of my childhood I recognise each of these plots across the many adventures they provided, giving experiences that engaged in problem solving, challenging adversity, striving and aspiring. Bettelheim agrees, 'fairy-tale, fictions allow the reader to explore and play around with cultural meanings, including that of good and evil, the role of authority, freedom, love' (Bettelheim, 1976) and so on. This freedom allows the child to 'experiment with boundaries and cultural meanings' (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003, p.111). Stories, as vehicles for cultural development seem fundamental to a child's fundamental understanding of the world (Bruner, 1986), enabling an imagined placement of scenarios that provide possibilities for greater understanding of the world, and their place in it. Astington's (1991) experimental studies showed that children's understanding can be significantly increased when forming in a narrative frame. An imagined world can provide scope for further possibilities and exploration, as Machin asserts, children can learn about cultural values through things that take place in magical worlds (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003, p.113).

### 5.3.3 Summary

For me, the stories provided a reason and motivation to read. They took me to worlds I couldn't imagine without the author's introduction and they afforded experiences beyond my physically limited reach. The repertoire I built from these stories led to creative making – from my imagined knowledge to engagement with my 'hand knowledge' (Mackey, 2016, p.192). Just as Mackey read 'The Borrowers' and turned to creating chests of drawers made of match boxes, I also brought to life remembered characters, scenes and plots improvising with whatever materials I had to hand

(Parry, 2013, p.42), to spend many hours foraging to repurpose objects as items that I could use to take these stories, both re-enacting from scenes remembered and extending the stories further through additionally improvised play.

Children seem more imaginative as they lack the experiential framework, the cultural tool kit, which adults have acquired, although it is important to note that the imaginings of children are nevertheless limited to the cultural resources that are available to them. They are by no means boundless. And yet the connection of the conventions of fairy-tale with children contains just this myth of boundlessness – that young minds should be unshackled to wander. (Machin and Messenger Davies, 2003, p.115).

My imagination equipped me with the tools for life experience and provided frames of reference from which I could draw and imagine within my own narrative.

Interestingly, I must have been aware of my financial limitations as although I discussed the map of the world and examined the globe, twirling and exploring the countries with my uncle, I imagined it solely as a reference tool and I did not see the connection between this map and my own life or possibilities. It was an imagined view of the world that I would never see in reality, the limits of my personal repertoire saw this as a further extension of my imagination, not as something I could aspire to for myself.

## **5.4 Narrative influencer roles**

### **5.4.1 Literacy Patrons**

I consider my grandmother my first, and most effective teacher. Several academics agree family members, particularly main carers, but also other close adults and older siblings, do undertake teaching (Johnson, Walker, and Rodriguez 1996; Roskos and Neuman 1993; Wagner, Spiker, and Linn 2002). The style my grandmother used did not follow a typical 'instruction' (Hannon, 2000) model but was a less planned,

'facilitation, opportunistic, context-dependent and embedded in real-life tasks' (Hannon, et al., 2020) that enabled the emergent literacies to weave across our everyday practices, as highlighted across the memories of my childhood, essentially in memory one, a pocketful of stories, which illustrates this practice across Hannon, et al's (2020) four strands of emergent literacy (environmental print, book sharing, writing and oral language) (p.311) as elements of my childhood literacy development. My maternal grandmother had many roles beyond the care role that was given, as my first and continued teacher, storyteller, teacher, facilitator of my learning, champion and literacy sponsor (Brandt, 2002), investing in me and in my literacy repertoire.

The idea of 'literacy sponsors' from Deborah Brandt (2002) explored how the life chances of young people can be changed if a specific, significant person or event intervenes and provides a role model for literacy. I have often attributed the positive aspects of my own narrative to my illustrious Grandmother, a characterful, creative performer who was my hero and guide, but what instruments did she use to elevate my experience and repertoire beyond my given circumstances? The narrative of my maternal Grandmother, her love for the arts, positioning on the importance of literacy as a gateway, coupled with her determination to build resilience and open opportunities for her granddaughter played a huge part in raising my aspirations, as asserted by Erben.

It is a very rare autobiography that does not contain within its pages many, shorter or longer, biographies of other people who figure, in different times and places, in the subject's life. (Erben, 1993, 47)

Brandt defines sponsors of literacy as 'any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way' (Brandt, 1998, p.166). Therefore, this term, in its whole sense, is not a natural fit as the role for my grandmother, the aunts, uncles and others who supported the construction of my literacy narrative as the people who invested in my childhood literacies but with little return for themselves beyond the satisfaction of experiencing my growth and development. There was no 'advantage' gain that Brandt describes for the family

members who took on this role to build my narrative repertoire. Brandt states that this part of her theory has 'often been deleted or downplayed when this concept has been taken up' (Brandt, 2015, p.331) and I have indeed noticed this in my own reading where the term 'literacy sponsor' is used to refer to people making investment.

Brandt states 'sponsors need our literacy as much or more than we do' (p.331) and I have considered this in the analysis of the role of my grandmother, which is strikingly dominant throughout the memories of my early childhood. Inevitably, her investment in me would pay dividends in enabling me to communicate with her, to become more independent and to share common interests. However, this was not an exploitative sponsorship as her motivations were mostly selfless. Her literacy sponsorship could include 'a belief in and love for the goodness of literacy' (Brandt, 2015, p.331) as her own engagement with literacy demonstrated. A poet, orator, choir-master, script writer and comedian, her love of words and the uses of literacy were apparent in my every day. The encouragement of my grandmother championed the social nature of me as a reader, as a writer, a rich literacy narrative in which reading and writing were critical elements of my identity. My grandmother (and other family members, in a supporting role) were in fact my 'literacy patrons'! She used her own repertoire to further my opportunities. The literacy confidence and skills afforded by this rich, capacity building model, helped me to find my place within the school community, as recognised in the memory of my first day at school, as the teacher acknowledged and appreciated the skills within my repertoire.

#### **5.4.2 Teachers as Literacy Sponsors**

The role of the teacher, although situated across the threshold of the school, plays an important role in creating the sense of value of what their pupils have to offer (Hart, et al., 2004, p.218). Their role has a greater fit with Brandt's full definition of literacy sponsor as the investment of the teacher into the pupil leads to attainment capability, the test results by which teachers are judged. Therefore, their investment in their pupil's literacies has the capacity for gaining advantage in some way (Brandt, 2015).



On my first day of school the teacher took time to examine my starting point, the skills I brought with me. However, there is a marked difference between genuinely listening/paying attention to young people's ideas and 'pseudo listening' (Hart, et al., 2004, p.218) and whilst the former can reinforce commitment to the learning of the whole group (Hart, et al., 2004, p.218) the latter can equally disengage a group. Hart, et al., (2004) discuss how children notice and that this sense of care can make the difference between children maintaining distance in learning or active engagement which can lead to their thinking being challenged and extended (p.218). Dyson (2016) agrees, 'a teacher can create agentive space by acknowledging a child's resources' (p.177) and further recognises the importance of the role of the teacher. In the memory of my first day at school I noticed this sense of care which helped me to feel I belonged. This acknowledgement of my technical skills ability was valued, demonstrated further by the additional presence of the headteacher to witness my ability which seemed extraordinary to them, but in a positive way, demonstrated by a warm welcome into this school community.

On further memories of my school experience I discuss how some teachers took an interest in my skills but also in my outside world across the school threshold and this interest sparked a sense of returned obligation to this teacher, together with seeing their opinion as important, giving me a sense of belonging.

The memory, scripted in the baby book, demonstrates the importance of naming the teachers in my personal account of myself at that time. References to the technicalities of my literacies, "I can spell a lot of long words", states this as a proud statement of something valued by my teacher, shortly followed by a comment that had clearly poured from the mouth of the teacher to the page of this book, 'but my writing is atrocious'! This memory refers to being scolded for my writing presentation by the teacher and this mattered to me enough to quote the teacher. However, I was writing in this book for my own purpose and as such able to own that the presentation of my writing for the teacher was valued, seen as important but for the purpose of my own writing this was not such a critical point. This is played out throughout this text as, ironically, in discussing my technical writing ability I mis-spell atrocious. This book contained a journal of a place in time and my account of my skills at that time, but I

was conscious I was writing it for myself so free to be able to concentrate on the content and not be too concerned with the technicalities. This freedom to write was a treasured thing. Writing in class was for the teachers so their values took priority and at that time, spelling and presentation of writing gained the greatest acclaim. As discussed by Dyson's research (2020) where children saw their "real" writing as grounded in the 'intention to please the teacher' (Dyson, 2020, p.120) or as Lambirth's (2016) research found, that success was measured in 'meeting the requirements of the teacher' (p.230). I understood the difference between writing for myself at home, being free, unconstrained, and writing for the teachers at school, beautifully presented with good spelling. These were two very different spaces that enabled different sides to my writing, emerging from what was valued in each space. At home the creativity and writing freedom was embraced, whilst at school, the technical aspects (spelling and presentation) were valued.

Brandt's notion of the literacy sponsor that I dismissed earlier in this chapter when referring to my grandmother is actively demonstrated in the role of the teacher as described within my memories. Their power to impact on the school narrative of the child is apparent, as demonstrated in my own memories and in the research results from Lambirth (2016) and Dyson (2020). Their agency to 'enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy' (Brandt, 1988, p.166) is critical to the child as a learner in school and their level of engagement and participation. These memories corroborate the theory that policy driven approaches can reduce teachers to technicians (Ball, 2018), as discussed in the literature review of this thesis, and as such, by emphasising the value of these technical aspects of curriculum above meaning-making literacies, teachers are indeed literacy sponsors who express their agency to 'gain advantage by in some way' (Brandt, 1988, p.166) as the child's school literacies will comply with policy and as such will support the achievement of targets. This is not meant as a disapproving view of teachers but rather as an observation of the power of their role on the literacy narrative of the children they teach. If teachers, as literacy sponsors of children, are driven and regulated by the performative technical literacies their children can demonstrate, inevitably these will hold greatest value and the vibrations of policy and what is valued, will pass through the teacher to the child.

### 5.4.3 Literacy champions

This champion baton was picked up by many others along my learning journey, from my aunt and uncle who discussed maps, engaged in pond fairy stories, played endless word games and were participatory audiences in my Swan Lake story-telling, reinforcing my literacy narrative, building confidence, courage and belief in this child. Smith (2011, p.14) in considering the influencers on learning states, 'the prevailing point of view had for centuries been that you learn from the company you keep (p.14). The people around me encouraged and maximised potential for engaging in literacy practices that positively enhanced my literacies (Brooks, et.al, 2012; Nutbrown, et al., 2005, 2017; Swain et al., 2014).

Each influencer modelled behaviours of reading and writing around me, building my repertoire and practice in the uses of literacy. These more knowledgeable others helped me to navigate my journey and supported my meaningful interactions with texts (Harste, et al., 1984; Rowe, 1994) found in Gregory , p14. From my earliest 'emergent literacy' (Suizby, 1986) experiences in and around the home (Baghban, 1984), in oracy and in written use of text, my encounters were purposeful and enabled growth in the company of more experienced readers and writers (Goodman, 1985).

According to Gregory, et al., (2004) there is a recognition of the influence of grandparents in 'transmitting literacy practices and values by providing materials' (Gregory, et al., 1996), offering support and encouragement (Padmore, 1994) and modelling ways of sharing texts and taking meaning from them (Whitehead, 2002). For me, my grandmother was my main carer, principally filling my pockets with literacies but with some help from others around me, as Rogoff (1990) proposes through the wider 'flexible webs of relationships' (p.97) that children are involved in with companions and caregivers as they focus on shared cultural activities.

### 5.4.4 The role of child influencers

Gregory asserts, 'It is sometimes assumed that low income or minority families provide inappropriate environments for fostering or modelling literacy or valuing literacy development' (Gregory, et al., 1996, p.68) and more recently claims, 'literacy problems are linked to family inadequacies' (Gregory, et al., 2004, p.68). Although, as a child, my financial resources were limited, my literacy experience does not align with these statements on children from low income backgrounds. This is a thread that is stitched through this thesis to examine the features and factors of this child whose experiences contradict this generalised theory. Gregory, et al., (1996) specifically discussed the role of grandparents in building literacy practices and values by providing materials. However, for me, my grandmother was my main carer so her singular role provided much more than materials as she was my first literacy teacher, facilitator and my primary literacy influencer.

The role of family members in intergenerational transfer of literacy, Wasik and Van Horn (2012) assign as determining a child's early language, a family's culture, beliefs, and traditions also determine the way children use words (Heath, 1983). Hannon, et al., (2020) suggest within emergent literacy practices families provide learning facilitation:

Several family characteristics could influence families' teaching of early literacy. These include parents' levels of education and levels of literacy, their attitudes to written language, their past experience of schooling, their understanding of children's literacy and how it is acquired, their knowledge of how children learn, and their confidence as teachers.  
(p.312)

It is agreed by Nutbrown (2017) and Hannon, et al., (2020) that the relative importance of such family characteristics, as highlighted above, is under researched. Bearing in mind the analysis within this thesis I suggest the role, capacity, confidence and values of family members as a child's first, and continued teacher demands greater investigation.

As the greatest influencer on my narrative, my grandmother believed in the power of literacy as a key determiner of opportunities and affordances it gives. She was an educated woman, born in 1904, and had undertaken many roles (paid and unpaid) throughout her life. Stories of her own childhood were brimming with encounters of story-telling, poetry, song, talk, radio, reading, writing and playful drama. She embraced the uses of literacy as a fundamental tool for opportunity, as a tool for resilience and to bring joy to life.

Wasik and Van Horn (2012) discuss the family having many print materials available, the modelling and use of reading and writing in daily life as influencing whether children develop strong language skills and literacy (p.3). There is clear evidence that family literacy can positively enhance children's engagement in literacy (Brooks, et al., 2012; Nutbrown, et al., 2005; Swain, et al., 2014) also suggesting that what primary carers do with their children is more influential on later literacy success than social class or parental education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) and that modelling literacy as enjoyable activity means children are more likely to become intrinsically motivated to read (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). The role of those with influence on the child is multi-faceted, often under-played, certainly under-researched and most definitely, and I believe importantly, under-valued and under-communicated to those within these roles. Caretaking, understandably takes precedence but if the role of the primary caregiver is not also understood as patron, influencer and modeller of literacies the role could be underplayed, leaving core elements of this development to the later phases of the classroom.

#### **5.4.5 Narrative Swerve**

Literacy influencers, in various supporting roles, provided the modelling and reinforcement of literacy behaviours. However, even with this built repertoire and literacy confidence a narrative can take the wrong turn. In the memory of my first day at school, I was nervous and lacking in confidence until the teacher fussed around the skills I demonstrated, supported by a head teacher who praised me for my abilities, rebooting my confidence and valuing me as a member of this new school community. This recognition from someone with authority was a critical buy-in point for me.

My grandmother's direct opposition to my own imagined prolepsis (Stone, 1993, p.171) of becoming a 'farmers' wife', challenged external influences of playground rhymes, fairy tale stereotypes and the societal, media fuelled opinion on female roles at that time. Mackey (2016) discusses the overlapping of reading encounters, her own sensory, social, cultural and intellectual understanding of life, and stereotypical assumptions that influenced the way she began to imagine herself in the world (p.147). Although the content of the literacy material I was reading and practices I was engaging with, sometimes built potentially negative frames of reference that would influence my repertoire, my grandmother's critical engagement around these with me, encouraged me to critique these texts. She particularly took exception to me seeing my future aspirations solely dependent on me being *somebody's wife*. Many challenging conversations took place on this matter, providing rich and critical discourse between us that tested my own perceived narrative as a series of firmly seated questions and alternative viewpoints that I could draw on as I imagined my future self. This, whilst not providing an immediate turning point, did enable a learning curve, a discourse that influenced my moral compass and principles that underpin my narrative.

At times of narrative swerve there are examples of other narrative champions providing critical turning points, some over time but others immediate, as demonstrated in the memory of the college tutor who recognised a facilitative style in me that I had not recognised for myself. This acknowledgement and suggestion of an alternative narrative aspiration that directly contested my own resigned imagined future, provided a belief in me, and my possibilities that I had relinquished. This tutor might not have realised at the time that this disclosure of her observation would lead to the nudge epiphany that it did, but that conversation ignited dormant beliefs that provided the turning point that would lead to my current narrative as an educationalist and literacy champion.

This college tutor also tuned into a particular style, a capacity building style that, rather than teaches how to do tasks, supports others to know how and why they are doing the activities they do as a pedagogy that builds recognises the agency in the other

(Jolly and Jolly, 2011; Danaher, et al., 2012). This, the tutor said, was 'unusual' but for me, it was usual. The style was also inherited from my grandmother who would not do things for me but would support me to do things for myself, enabling me to make meaning which would build a stronger core to my repertoire, affording greater independence. This style is now cascaded through the pedagogy I deliver and have adopted for the charity I founded.

#### **5.4.6 Summary**

Bearne and Marsh (2007) report that parents' skills are essential, especially their ability to 'recognise and encourage the development of their children's language and literacy skills from early infancy' (p.16). The 'emergent literacies' (Sulzby, 1986) that engage the child and weave in and out of the technical coding and decoding of text help the child to make meaning that informs their literacy narrative. The literacy sponsors around me actively encouraged many encounters with text and discussion of text throughout my early childhood and beyond. My grandmother, as primary carer, championed a joyful approach to literacy through 'communication and negotiation of meaning' (Freire, 1993, p.60) and this positive attitude to literacy infected me, inspiring me to engage, to consider, to reflect and to critique.

The way I experienced literacy built a positive and rich home-literacy environment, a home full of books, words, reading and talking practices that informed, influenced and developed what Bourdieu (1986) and later, Bourdieu, et al., (1994) would describe as my 'cultural capital'. Bourdieu asserts that cultural knowledge and experiences accumulated are an asset and as with economic capital can be accumulated and inherited (Bourdieu, 1986). My grandmother seemed to understand this as she recognised the ability to engage with text as an affordance of power. The attitudes and beliefs were passed on to her granddaughter along with an emergent literacy repertoire that would continue to grow in the development of a 'cultural toolkit' (Carrithers, 1992) that would equip me for much of what was needed to navigate and negotiate life. These experiences informed the development of a signature pedagogy adopted for the literacy charity, Grimm & Co, as a model that empowers and enables

meaning making, supported by patrons, influencers, champions and sponsors, all playing a critical but very different role on the literary journey of a child.

## 5.5 Starting from the child – a cultural toolkit

### 5.5.1 Literacy repertoire as lifelong funds of knowledge

When considering pedagogy there is a resounding consensus amongst champions of New Literacies that it is important to recognise and build on children's linguistic, social and cultural repertoires (Burnett and Merchant, 2018, p.9). These 'New Literacies' (Cope and Kalantzis, 1999) acknowledge as the role of 'home culture, experiences in, and out of school'. Every child brings a unique grid of experiences, engagement with text and language, modes of meaning making, knowledge, information and frames of reference, gathered from their particular context and experiences in homes, communities, school, referred to as their 'funds of knowledge' by Moll (Moll, et al., 1990; 1992; 1994). Some are rich in cultural references and vocabulary beyond the expected range of their age, whilst others demonstrate the opposite with limited experiences around text and language. Parry, (2013), Marsh, et.al., (2000); Hilton, (1996); Dyson (1997) in their literature, all discuss the importance of these diverse experiences from children's lives outside of school, their interactions with stories and media creating knowledge that has a value and needs to be recognised by schools to better differentiate and provide contextual development for children.

One key, recurring issue is highlighted by teachers on visiting Grimm & Co, as demonstrated in the attached wordle from a discussion with teachers highlighting their opinion of the most significant barriers facing children and young people in their learning<sup>4</sup>. This issue is emphasised as a lack of experience, leading to limited vocabulary or references to draw on and inability to use their imaginations, especially affecting their writing. This continues to amplify my interest in exploring children's funds of knowledge but particularly in relation to literacy. I noticed whilst reading

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<sup>4</sup> Wordle demonstrating 15 teachers' opinions on the most significant barriers to literacy, size emphasising number of people highlighting that barrier within their response



Margaret Mackey's book (2016) she referred to these funds as her 'reading repertoire' at each stage throughout the book where she considered her registers and reference points upon which she had drawn throughout the making of her reading narrative. This term is also used by Burnett and Merchant (2018) in referring to the 'communication repertoire' of children, again linked to their gathered experiences and interactions, resulting in information and knowledge on which to draw and use.

This notion of a literacy repertoire then led to considering my own repertoire, which I have referred to as a 'rich' repertoire due to the type, level, volume, attitude to, and engagement with experiences of literacy.

Thinking about repertoire allows us to consider the differences and similarities in children's experience across different channels of communication, how they might make choices or move seamlessly between them (Burnett and Merchant, 2018).

In unpicking my literacy memories I came to realise how this repertoire had served me well, affording opportunity and choice at times when challenges arose. Each stitch of literacies experienced is portable, rootless, flexible, each binding to the next to give strength and richness to the registers and references of my fabric being, from childhood through to present day.

Illustrated below in fig. 15 is a representation of Margaret Mackey's reading repertoire. Here, I have located and extracted Mackey's references to her repertoire directly from the book where this was considered as what Mackey was able to draw on through her reading childhood. In Mackey's book she discusses how, when exploring her references for the 'interpretive toolkit' she was pulling together as a home grown, locally assembled understanding she had brought to bear on understanding texts. Mackey discusses how this grew and became layered more complexly with her literacies, offering expansion beyond the local, informing and influencing her repertoire (2016, p.22). Mackey discusses her reading repertoire throughout her book, using a variety of types of repertoire on which she draws in order to make meaning throughout her reading life and interactions with text.

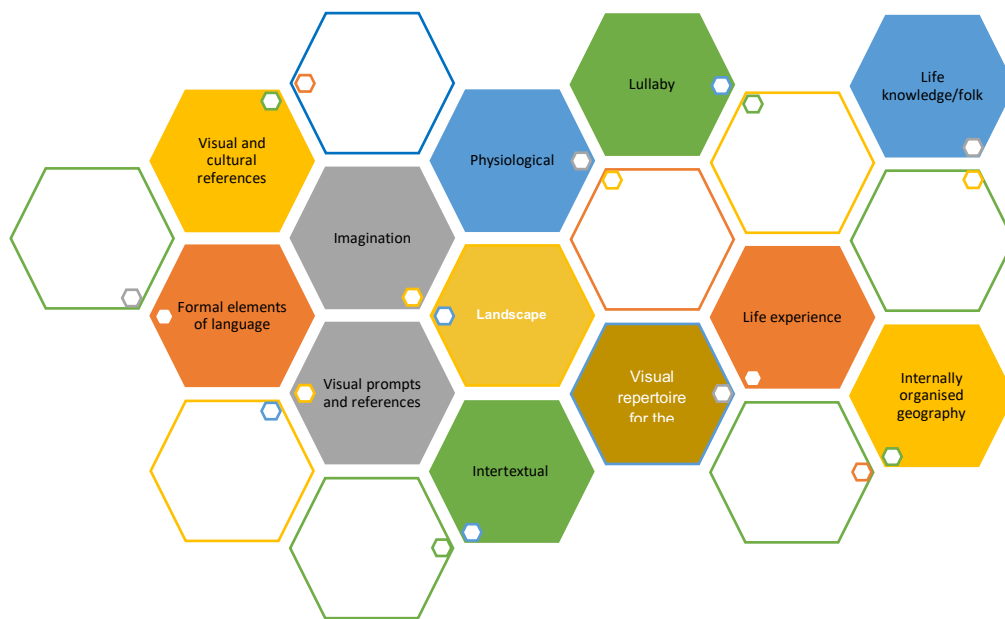


Fig: 15: Mackey's identified reading repertoire (I have extracted from One Child Reading, 2016)

This, in itself, is worthy of further study as the repertoire elements Mackey was able to draw on but also areas where repertoires were lacking and not able to provide registers of familiarity on which she could draw. These instances were where she did not feel she had sufficient experience, either through previous texts read or actual experience, indicating that each aspect of this repertoire has measures of depth and breadth and that each is potentially linked to others (Mackey, 2016).

I do not intend to analyse this repertoire grid any further for the purpose of this study, but instead to offer as a model of a reading repertoire, often drawn upon, to be used for reflection whilst reading this analysis or for the reader to consider their own literacy repertoire and the instruments developed and of use to them within their narrative.

### 5.5.2 Habitus

It is widely understood that 'literacy practices, the way we use text to interact with others, are interwoven with individual and group practices' (Nutbrown, et al., 2017, p.553). Therefore, in considering my literacy repertoire or cultural toolkit (Carrithers, 1992), I also recognise the inherited and socially negotiated practices within my

personal toolkit in addition to individually developed tools and practices that are present in this toolkit. I also reflect on Bourdieu's notion of 'Habitus', as ways of being or as habits and practices in everyday life, described as sensory and embodied (Bourdieu, 1990) as I delve into the memories that reflect this continuously evolving repertoire, beginning in the embryonic early childhood and maturing as understanding and meaning making continues to upgrade, built on new ways of seeing the world around me and emerging technologies that enable new possibilities.

### **5.5.3 Literacy as power – an inherited belief**

My grandmother believed that if she could help me to develop a rich repertoire of language and of meaning making, she would provide me with all she could for the best start in life. This assertion was underpinned by a belief in the value and power of literacy in society and in life. My grandmother, as a literate person championed the importance of literacy and as a result I was endowed with a wealth of experiences, materials, modelling and practices that would build a richness of literacies around me. I consider my grandmother my most critical cornerstone within my repertoire as her influence and role as my literacy patron enabled, created and afforded the fundamental access to, and engagement with literacies.

In considering this notion of the literacy patron in the home as a resource I reflect on the opposite possibility, where literacy is not valued with such embrace and is not seen as having such importance. Olsen (1975) argues literacy 'is over- valued' and especially so by literate people, such as educators (Olsen, 1975, p.149). Olsen (1975) further suggests that 'these literate people assume that the 'values and pleasure' of literacy are so great that all individuals will want to seek at least a high level of literacy through the medium of education' (p.149). This is a dangerous concept if, as educators, we believe everyone will place this high value on literacy we would be mistaken. For some families, their particular circumstances may mean that their priorities of need weigh heavily against the value placement of literacies and furthermore, their experiences, education and resulting repertoire will lead their placement of literacies, as defined by the education system, much further down the scale on their list of priorities for their children. Therefore, it is important to listen to

those communities and consider their position, needs and experiences, rather than impose the values of us, as educators, onto families for whom this is not their key priority.

In *Take a U-Turn When Possible* I describe a deviation from my imagined narrative path as a devastating illness led to a life-changing disruption for my grandmother and for myself. This change threw me off course and into unfamiliar territory, littered with worsened social and economic hardships and circumstances. However, although this territory was unfamiliar, the literacy repertoire I had developed was sufficient to provide the essential tools and skills to see me through many of the challenges I encountered.

Elasser and John-Steiner (1977, p. 361) question the widely held belief that 'education in and of itself can transform both people's sense of power and the existing social and economic hierarchies', and they go on to claim that this view is naive because 'educational intervention without social change is, in fact, ineffective' (Nutbrown, et al., 2017, p.554). At times where the conditions I found myself in were challenging (homelessness and pregnancy) my literacies did not provide a sense of power but they did provide tools for resilience and a sense of hope. The ability to communicate at all levels and with many different people for various reasons, my problem solving abilities, the escapism in the cover of a book are just a few of the tools within my cultural toolkit that I could draw on, even when poverty and hardship struck, my literacy repertoire provided affordances that would support me through. So, in response to Elasser and John-Steiner I would agree that it is naïve to think that education in and of itself can transform both people's sense of power across the existing social and economic hierarchies. However, it equips the bearer with the skills and ability to make meaning that affords life chances and opportunities. Social change is critical as it will overpower the benefits of education when the balance tips in the deficit direction. Education and the factors that create a strong literacy repertoire, provide essential skills to navigate and, in many cases, survive the turbulence of socio-economic challenges. For me, my literacy repertoire has provided a constant undercurrent of power. I have inherited my grandmother's belief in the power of literacy, whilst also building from my own experience that compounds this belief and it is on this basis that the founding of Grimm & Co is based.

#### 5.5.4 Loaning and owning

Library visits featured at least once per week throughout my childhood. They provided an experimental space for my literacies to expand, explore, discover and to quell my thirst for stories. Libraries were full of books and I saw each book as a possible adventure that would push the boundaries of my experience, stretch my imagination and help me taste and try through the lives of others. Libraries made me feel rich, as a junior member I could choose up to eight books to try or reloan on each trip. However, some books were extra special, some books had greater meaning, invoked deeper emotions or provided pure fantasy that lit up the corridors of my mind with awe and wonder. Some books had characters that had become friends or that I felt I needed to save. I found these more difficult to part with so they often had repeated renewal stamps.

Those books that held greater meaning for me were the ones that were eventually purchased and I saved for my shelf, to own. These were my books to enjoy as and when I wanted to. Most books purchased were second, or multiple time reads for me. I treasured the books I owned and I looked after them as though they were alive. *Black Beauty* (Sewell, 1877) and *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (Grimm, 1877) were poured over regularly, providing a familiarity and emotional engagement in equal measure. Books were my most prized possessions. They were my chosen reward following a success so they also provided a sense of achievement that registered from the moment of their purchase.

### 5.6 A literacy ecology, a creative environment

#### 5.6.1 Immersed in literacy

In *Deborah Was Writing Before She Knew the Alphabet* I recall that writing was all around me, 'writing was everywhere' and as 'nan pointed out the words, patterns from

letters' I was gathering an ecology of literacies around me that I recognised and engaged with, not only 'banking' (Freire, 1993, p.60) these learned literacies, but additionally extending and being playful with these references and their creative possibilities into my repertoire. Through the artist's eye of my grandmother I saw the landscape of a high rise block of flats, bus and train stations and the graffitied parks around us as places to explore and to engage creatively rather than as negative references within my narrative. Pahl (2016) discusses how when she walked and reflected on the landscape of Rotherham through the lens of Hoggart (1957) she reframed her position and as a result of this was able to observe affordances within working class landscapes or as an artist or poet views place the language and literacy practices came alive, 'stories, sayings, poetry, songs, material cultural and creative practices' Pahl (2016, p.136) reflects as being all around. This authentic reframing is how I lived and observed my neighbourhood and my surroundings, as a creative environment around me, in and around my home, that provided authentic, playful opportunities to experiment and explore. Pahl (2016) discusses how,

by shifting the framing of representations it is possible to understand different ways of recognising, knowing and understanding that can be built up and understood. These then can provide young people with hope and a sense of possibility (p.136)

I engaged with this writing alongside my grandmother in a multi-modal way, through a rich ecology of literacies (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.91), 'stretching beyond literary texts to include a variety of genres in a variety of media' (Parry, 2018, p.104). However, my neighbourhood was poor and would be described as such by Newman and Celano, (2001) as carrying 'negative literacies' and whilst I do have vague memories of bad smells at the foot of staircases and arty, colourful writing (graffiti) on bus stops and shop fronts, they didn't dominate my personal view of the world around me. The 'layered nature of experience' that informed my 'web of practices' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.91) was abundant with positive, rich literacies.

### **5.6.2 Valued purpose**

One particular thread that runs through these ecological literacies is that each engagement had a valued purpose. Each experience was a social practice and we used words and text to make meaning, from satisfying our basic needs of nourishment to communicating with our neighbours and others we had never met (pen pal letters), playing games (Happy Families and Scrabble) and choosing our entertainment (Radio Times) for the evening. Each practice was playful but not childish, it was authentic and meaningful, it allowed time for reflection and for generating new ideas.

I interacted with text positively in so many ways, using modes that were available to me in our everyday texts. From food labels, shopping lists, comics and street signs to poetry, song and bedtime stories, I was introduced to text in every corner of my daily life. Words were the essence of happiness as they unlocked experiences that brought joy. Text was hugely important to me as the more proficient I became with it, the more power it gave me to connect with the world around me (Janks, 2009), to participate, engage and be included. This power, or rather my need to be included, was a significant motivation that fuelled my learning journey. I could see its relevance to my life, I could see its purpose and I could enjoy the meaning it gifted.

### 5.6.3 Summary

I was fortunate in having an artistic grandmother as my patron who framed the world differently from how others might see it. Her lens, shared with me, saw texts as being used in everyday life, but also influenced how these texts were used and experienced (Pahl, 2016, p.89), through the use of stories. This lifted me out of the everyday, potentially negative elements of my surroundings and clothed them with alternative, playful and immersive new narratives. The memories of my early childhood do not reflect a child living in a poor neighbourhood but instead demonstrate a life lived in a creative, literacy filled environment where writing and stories were all around me.

The textually immersive environment was significant across all my memories as shaping a safe and rich space to grow. Much of what I learned in this safe space would feed the developing awareness that made reading (and writing) the world possible (Mackey, 2016, p.58).

## 5.7 Writing for purpose

### 5.7.1 Motivation and power

This power, I could also see reflected in the use of language and text around me. From the signs and multimodal texts within my home and neighbourhood (Kress, 1997), the artefactual literacies (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) and in the modelling of meaning-making, applied and observed with others. Within the memories around my baby book is the recollection of my grandmother telling people “Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet”. My determination to write started early, as demonstrated in (Fig.4) of *The Baby Book*, which shows my writing at the age of 20 months with a self-will to practice letter shapes, drilled preparation that, towards the foot of the text begins to join the lines, mimicking the observed modelling of my grandmother and others around me. The physical act of reading and writing was a ‘constant’ in and around my home, a behaviour and a practise that excluded me whilst I was unable to participate. This motivation prompted an early start and a determination beyond expectations of that age. The act of writing was free, accessible and had many uses. The act of reading gave me access to places I had no capacity to imagine without the author’s transfer of imagined stories. It could also be freely accessed for the cost of a walk to the nearest library, a story palace with all the riches the stories could bring to a child with limited means.

### 5.7.2 The smell of books as reward

In memory 3.2 I discuss the intoxicating delight at the smell of books on a reward trip to Andrew’s, the stationers and book store in Sheffield city centre, that followed my achievement of a relevant number of gold stars. The memory of a trip to Andrews’ is a vivid recollection that remains a strong memory, even though the place no longer exists. The multi-sensory engagement with fresh books and stationery evoked excitement. This thrill was there, even with the purchase of the Janet and John book



series (O'Donnell & Munro, 1950) at the beginning of my learning journey, which provided a sense of semiotic (Kress, 1997) movement towards my goals and the achievement of such goals rather than engagement with the actual stories, which I didn't see as so exciting. At this age I understood the difference between my bedtime stories which enabled enjoyment of a story, a release of reality, into alternative worlds. Janet and John, on the other hand, provided a route to mastery of the language, a 'scaffold for technical skill development' (Mackey, 2016, p.495) and at this young age I recognised the difference between the two, valued both but each for very different reasons as to what they gifted to me.

### 5.7.3 Identifying and appreciating the funds of knowledge

At four and a half, my first day of school was documented in my baby book, indicating its importance with the simple statement, 'I am at school now' (fig 12). This sense of a milestone passed is reinforced by the memory of my first day of school. The day began with my fear of the unknown. A significant happening that was the catalyst for this experience was the recognition and appreciation of my technical skills which were recognised very quickly and this positive reinforcement provided an alignment between myself, my 'directives' (Cooper, 1990, p.116) and that of the teachers. My functional skills were allowed to dominate above the importance of the person (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.87) but I was blissfully unaware as each hour of the day that passed was filled with the delights of stories, craft, play and future friends. In revisiting this as an adult I have mixed feelings. The first is that I am heartened by the attention to my 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Moll, 1992; Moll and Gonzalez, 1994) but this is sharply followed by disappointment that the focus, and celebration, rested solely on my technical abilities rather than on my wider experiences. I am also immediately concerned with the other children in my class, who might not have arrived with such a pocketful of literacies and of the power the teacher holds in determining the type of experience a child receives on their first, and continued days of school. Doddington and Hilton (2007) assert 'teachers' knowledge of children is significant, but it is how they then use and show that knowledge that counts from the child's perspective' (p.112). Every child arrives with a completely different set of skills, knowledge and experiences that will afford varying degrees of

fluency and repertoire within their cultural toolkit (Carrithers, 1992, Marsh, 2005). The role of the teacher is to engage and motivate each child and help to unlock potential, using and appreciating their familiar tools to do so.

I was fortunate in that from the age of six to the age of eight I remained with the same form teacher. I say fortunate, as this teacher was able to build a strong understanding of every child in her class. Her style of teaching was mostly based around children's experimentation and exploration rather than teaching steps to a discovery (Simon, 1960). Our learning styles were individual just as we were individuals, and this was also celebrated through multimodal literacy pedagogies that engaged, intrigued and celebrated what we had.

#### **5.7.4 Literacy confidence and courage**

As a child I was aware of my strengths, particular fortes included reading aloud, creative writing and spelling. However, this had clearly escaped me on the ironic entry into my baby book, memory 3.4 (Fig: 14) 'I can spell a lot of long words but my writing is atrosness'. There are three significant points to explore in this piece of writing. The first is that my declaration showed I was proud of my ability to 'spell a lot of long words' and this prompts memories of my enthusiasm for spelling tests in class. As a reader of texts, aimed at children beyond my age, I felt confident and rarely got a word wrong. Therefore, I relished the opportunity to show the teacher this repertoire, and clearly to also pass this on to my reader of the book, my future self.

Secondly, the fact that I have written the word inaccurately, without pausing to check for accuracy, demonstrates the courage I possessed to be playful, creative and write freely. This courage, though ironically misplaced on this occasion, I do remember experiencing. I remember the feeling of liberty and the thrill of writing just for the pleasure of it. Experimenting with words that would conjure images of imagined and recalled memories felt indulgent and the moment of sharing with an adult provided jubilation when the praise and additional curiosity flowed.

### 5.7.5 Real writing = neat and tidy

Thirdly, I refer to my writing being 'atrosness'! Notice, in fig.6 I start the page in this book with large, unconnected, untidy writing, 'I am 6 years old and SANTA...' but then begin to pay attention to the presentation of the writing for the reader. Then compare this page with fig.7 where I am now 8 years old. The style of my writing hasn't changed a great deal. In fact, if anything, it has become more untidy. My memory of this is that my teachers did repeatedly scold me for the presentation and style of my writing. This did matter to me. The girl who sat next to me in class wrote beautifully and this was remarked upon by the teacher. I tried to improve by practicing and drill writing at home and at school to please my teacher (Cremin, 2015; Lambirth, 2016; Goodson, 2015; Taylor and Clarke, 2020) but this 'drill' writing didn't fill me with enthusiasm and didn't come easy. So, I resigned myself to being an untidy writer in my home writing, that was my authentic creativity, comforted by the fact that this didn't stop me from writing and when I wrote for myself or at home, I didn't let the concentrated effort of presentation interfere with the importance of content matter. Each piece of writing mattered equally to me. The school writing, that I considered formal, important, my real writing (Dyson, 2020) for the recognition I would receive from the teacher (rule following and neat and tidy). The other for the freedom it enabled for myself in its content and style and the array of uses from the freedom of the everyday (Dyson, 2020, p.120) to the critical imagining of a more equitable world (Greene, 2018). I could compose for my imagined future self with the freedom to sway slightly from the lines, experiment with words and to document the things that were important to me, for myself, my future self, or for an audience.

### 5.7.6 Audience consciousness

Reflective diaries provided space for writing liberty but with a consciousness of writing for my future self and a concern for the potential other readers I felt it important to talk about my teacher, my boyfriends (Fig. 14) and the age of my parents. Within these texts I 'engaged directly with the reader' (Taylor, 2020, p.18) as an imagined audience and I was very conscious of the reader and the key messages I intended to convey. As I discuss in the memories, I knew there was a strong chance of the book being

read by family members so would consider the picture I painted consciously, including them in some way that would provide facts without causing harm. However, the main purpose, and major motivation for writing in the book was to write to my future self. I found this concept fascinating and a real reason to write about the character I was at that moment and the happenings that were important to me within my life. This recognition of myself as the future audience gave the writing purpose but the conscious 'other' audience member meant further consideration of my disclosures. More detailed disclosures were saved for my daily diary, unfortunately lost, but with endless added pages and bursting at the lock.

This consciousness of my imagined future self (Greene, 1995, p.5) was present as I listed the Christmas presents at the age of six, (Fig. 6). The excitement of Christmas and of desperately trying to list the presents was immediate, taking the time to do this on Christmas day gave an urgency to the writing so that this moment could be captured to remember again and again. This notion of journal writing and documenting an event was so imperative it took precedence over playing with the actual presents.

Consideration of the audience, of the 'other' (Bakhtin, 1981) was present whilst composing my biographical journaling and informed what I was attempting to portray as an identity I was constructing about myself to share with my future self but also with potential unknown others. Giddens (1991) discusses integrating with events which occur in the external world, then sorting into an ongoing story about the self (p.54).

This sense of audience was not only present in the writing of my baby book journal, it was also present in the memory within the pocketful of stories as I performed my rendition of Swan Lake to an audience of three – in my head I was a swan but I was also very much aware of the audience, so I was not solely living the story for myself, I needed the audience to see it too. The creation of the ballet through to performance detail of my toes touching the back of my head acting as the punctuation, an exclamation mark, provoking a response. In my own mind I could visualise the story, the shapes, the power conjured at moments in the music, I was making meaning but also very conscious of the recipients of this story, hoping they would see what I could see.

### 5.7.7 Audience providing purpose

Dyson (2020) states, 'children themselves benefit from the anticipation of an audience for their work, whom they hope will laugh, or feel sympathy, or simply be informed' (p.125). As a child, my 'museum of me' was full of journals but also note paper, letter writing kits, comic templates, large pieces of paper, chalks and many other tools that enabled writing in a variety of places but almost always for a purpose and on every occasion for an audience. Whether that audience was myself or others, the anticipation of their reaction on reading what I wrote was a consciously present thought as I wrote and informed the style and presentation of my writing as well as the content.

Writing for a teacher would involve a complex thought process of presentation (hand and pen placement on the page and within the lines), punctuation (shaping the sentence before writing), spelling (not attempting a word unless sure of spelling correctly – stop/start with dictionary in hand), margins, grammar and eventually... content. The objective, to please the teacher and to receive a page with zero red pen marks and a gold star. Writing in my journal meant thinking about what I wanted the reader to learn from the page then writing it down. Mistakes could be crossed out. I could experiment with language and words. The audience was me, and personally, the technical skills didn't thrill me, the content did!

### 5.7.8 Summary

Thinking about the reader can inhibit the child writer or give voice. In the example above there are points at which the potential audiences have played both roles, sometimes within the same text, an understanding and appreciation of different audience members and an empathy for how they would read influenced the composition and meaning within the text. I wanted to engage the audience and bring them with me and was happy to negotiate my story to fit their needs. The writing I would undertake for myself or an 'other' at home was creative, free and focused on content. The writing I would undertake at school was laden with rules, the core on

which I could scaffold my writing. The writing style of home never crossed the playground to within the school walls.

## **5.8 Alternative literacy identities of a child**

### **5.8.1 School as an island**

My learning journey took place at home and in school. Sometimes these paths crossed when school life entered home life through homework and projects, but it was rarely a two-way process in terms of home practices being recognised, acknowledged or discussed in school above the age of eight.

I recognise that my childhood had very little experience with technology beyond a radio or television. This was the early 1970s. However, there were some practices then that are true of today when considering how schools used the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, et al., 1995) I accumulated and practiced. My teacher through the infant school (age five to seven) knew her students well and engaged in talk and writing about their home references, championing their repertoires in whatever ways they had been fashioned. However, from that point forward I do not remember any interest in my home practices or knowledge being valued or discussed in school. Schools seemed an island, disconnected from the mainland practices of the everyday experiences of the home. I had a school literacy narrative and a home literacy narrative. The repertoires within this narrative were often useful in both contexts but were very different. Marsh (2005) asserts the 'distinction between the literate identities children develop in the early years at home and how these might be different from the literate identities they develop in school' (p.31). There was a clear distinction in the writing, the tools and the practices of my childhood as they were kept very separate from each other and remained so throughout the memories represented from my childhood. Marsh (2005) further argues, 'literacy practices shape identities and identities shape literacy practices' (p.31) which supports the notion of my literacy narrative, created and shaped differently as a result of how they are valued, which in turn can impact on the representation of identity (McCarthy and Moje, 2002). These two spaces were

clearly shaped and understood as separate entities, identified by the writing of a child in their childhood baby journal.

### 5.8.2 A Third space – the bridge between

Pahl and Rowsell (2010) attest there is 'more latitude for subjectivities and identities in a home space compared to a school space (p.70). Theorising on the proposal of a 'third space' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) for teachers to draw on and use they state,

Every home brings with it identities, dispositions, stories, objects, artefacts, memories, languages and resources. This implies a wealth model of literacy by which families' cultural capital can be drawn upon when planning schooled literacy activities' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p.70)

Burnett and Merchant (2018) reflect on this theory in relation to many schools' lack of engagement with new media technologies that are now so prevalent in children's everyday lives, describing schools as 'sanctuaries from a complex world and places in which the pervasive forces of new media should not be allowed to enter' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018). However, not embracing home literacy practices and the riches they contain, is an opportunity missed on many levels from home language, narratives and cultural enrichment (Heath, 1983) to the new literacy environment which is broader, more dynamic, fluid, multi-layered and multimodal (Razfar and Gutierrez, 2013, p.65).

In this third space there is greater recognition of how curricular materials and activities educators offer, are renegotiated in children's worlds, 'influenced by social goals which educators might not anticipate are infused with cultural material – thematic content and literacy values' (Dyson, 1993, p.3). This third space provides a permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993) that is open to the worlds and the narratives of the child's own lives, enabling relevance of their meaning making that is accessible and appropriate to their worlds, a bridge between.

### 5.8.3 Summary

This third space/bridge between enables greater interaction with children's experiences, lives, skills and understandings, providing important continuity between school and out-of-school lives, embracing their creativity and their ability as 'discerning users of all communication media' (Burnett and Merchant, 2018). There is a strong rationale for home communication and literacy practices, including new media technologies, being embraced in schools. Rather than the child needing to have two sets of identities and negotiate meaning from prescribed, technical literacy based learning to free, imaginative literacies that provide greater personal meaning to the child, embracing both elements will provide greater and quicker wins for both the teacher, as sponsor of the child's literacy narrative, and for the child, engaging in a curriculum that is relevant to their lived experience with greater fluency of accessibility.

## 5.9 A playful pedagogy

### 5.9.1 Freedom to explore

Prevalent across my home childhood memories is the reflection, through a variety of activities, resources, popular culture and interaction in and outside of stories, that enabled freedom to explore. From the characters at the station to what we would find in the park, we reimagined and I turned stories into tactile objects or dance that would allow advancement of this playfulness beyond the boundaries of the given context. This freedom to explore and play with meanings woven throughout my experiences of childhood. For centuries philosophers on education and how we learn have debated the importance of play, from Edgeworth and Edgeworth (1798) who championed the 'centrality of the child's active play to the learning mind [...] allowed to think freely without interference (p.30). More recently, Doddington and Hilton (2007), discussed childhood, not solely as preparation for adulthood but as a time in itself. They assert that a grown adult can only be secure and act authentically if 'during that period of early childhood, the child is allowed space, opportunity and time to develop his or her own pattern of consciousness' (Doddington and Hilton, 2007, p.55).



This importance of creative freedom to be playful, imagine, to explore but not necessarily discover, is supported by many academics in the most recent literature on literacy pedagogy. Burnett and Merchant, 2021, state 'playful pedagogies' as a key principle within their charter for 21<sup>st</sup> Literacies, stating, 'playful pedagogies have a role to play in cultivating risk-free environments in which children may follow interests, experiment and explore in ways that may take new or unexpected directions' (p.5), demonstrating its ranking of importance. There are many references across the memories of my childhood where this playful pedagogy is demonstrated in my home life but not within school life. This provides risk within an environment that is measured by outcomes and a culture of high stakes testing to which many teachers are subjected and bound. However, the benefits of this kind of meaning making to children's language and literacy affords greater opportunity for ownership and freedom without the concern for getting it wrong, but only if creative licence is true, consistently enabled and trust is given to the child to do this. Otherwise, the child is likely to resort to what they know will please the teacher (Dyson, 2016; Lambirth, 2016) rather than what will please themselves.

### **5.9.2 Creative pedagogies that allow for improvisation**

Exploring the 'Museum of Me' as a collection of artefacts that represent my popular cultural literacies throughout my childhood led me to revisit placeholders in time that circled these objects through remembered interactions with them. The relationship between play, popular culture and text production is obvious and significant to my childhood emerging identities and literacy practices (Pahl, 2006). Marsh (2005) and Parry (2013) recognise the close relationship between popular culture texts for young children and how they talk, dress up, dance characters from favourite films and television programmes. For me, this continued through to teenage years as my reimagined dance of a swan was replaced with bedroom mirror re-enactments of a scene from a Madonna (popular music icon of the 1980s) music video. A fertile imagination existed within my repertoire that enabled exploration with my identity as rather than passively engaging with the objects of this museum of me, I immersed

myself enthusiastically with the range of arts disciplines they afforded, each providing a textual connection.

### **5.9.3 Accommodating improvisation**

Marsh (2005) discusses how the influencers on the child further children's enthusiasms, accommodating their interests. The memories of my childhood are littered with this type of accommodation, from the dressing gown made available as a cloak to the upturning of eggshells and reimagine new characters and stories, my freedom to improvise was encouraged, supported and accommodated to the best of her ability within the means then available to her, by my grandmother. I was provided with an audience for the result of such imaginings, giving a further sense of acclaim and recognition, supporting the significant value placed on these activities.

### **5.9.4 We take fun very seriously**

The idea of children's learning being fun is not always central to the pedagogies adopted. However, on revisiting the memories of my childhood my senses were reignited as nostalgic excitement was sparked as I remembered the fun entwined in these activities, the enjoyment and the pre-engaged anticipation of the fresh smell of a book or the empty pages of a journal to running to the window to see the characters walk onto my train set stage. Then as a teenager, the popular culture that ignited my enthusiasm through music, film, literature, theatre and sharing these experiences with my peers. These are the memories of my building literacy repertoire, dominating forces that fitted comfortably with my own narrative. This type of learning was exciting but it was undertaken by me in my home. Bulman, et al., (2021), discuss, within the Charter for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies, how this type of learning can cross the bridge into schools through initiatives motivated by a drive to plan contexts for learning that are exciting, responsive and involving. Bulman, et al., advocate a school environment that provides opportunities for children to steer their own learning to gain meaningful engagement that acknowledges and enables their contribution 'with ideas, with experience, with text' (2021, p.11). Bulman, et al., base their ideas on a belief that,

learning happens through doing, through encountering complex, contradictory situations that prompt children to reflect, engage critically and act meaningfully drawing on the resources to hand (Bulman, et al., 2021, p.11).

The idea of bringing popular culture that exists within a child's home, together with the opportunity to and freedom to explore, to be playful and pull it across the school drawbridge seems never further from a possible reality as the weight of a very full curriculum sits heavy on the shoulders of teachers, measured by their pupils' ability to demonstrate competency with the technicalities of the reading and writing as literacy.

### 5.9.5 Summary

Peering into the memories of my childhood I have been able to see the foundations and the building repertoire of a literate adult. Built, not only from the schooling of technical aspects of literacy but more dominantly placed and everyday useful are the literacy practices that had greater meaning and relevance to my life. I had the opportunity to experiment and be creative, to use multiple modes and media and I was surrounded with adults that accommodated and delighted in my enjoyment and growth. It seems such an opportunity missed that these encounters of my home literacies were not embraced within the school and it seems an even greater disappointment that more playful or improvisational approaches that took unexpected directions (Hobbs, 2013) were not adopted within the school, but instead left in the playground or brought in as a reward or a fluffy activity at the end of a school term. Phillips and Willis (2014) discuss this as living authorship 'that is action-oriented, generative, authentic, open, relational, affective, responsive, ever-changing and engaging' (p. 76).

Hobbs (2013) champions teachers being open to unexpected directions and playful or improvisational approaches (Bulman, et al., 2021). This requires courage but in adopting pedagogies that 'respect and rescue the curiosity of students' (Shor, 1992, p.18) the motivation, the learning energy and the meaningful literacies will provide

additional reward that complements the curriculum. Unfortunately, I fear as Moss suggests, where 'teaching contexts that privilege a skills-based curriculum, where what children have to say is increasingly being drowned out by the long lists of what they need to learn ( Moss, 2021, p.46). The challenge of a one size fits all curriculum is that it is a curriculum for a global economy, based on the subjective opinions of policy makers with a need to benchmark England with the rest of the world. It is a standard curriculum, prescribed for a benchmarked standard for a child. The challenge here is that there is no such thing as a 'universal standard child' (Comber, 2017, p.58).

### **5.10 Scope for further thought**

This exploration of my memories has resulted in further questions that would have been interesting to explore. An example of this is the reference to boyfriends in my baby book from such a young age and the questions that emerge from recordings such as this in relation to how adults shape us. The uses of popular culture and the changes through the years is also under discussed within this thesis as there is a wealth of data within the *'Museum of Me* that would be interesting to explore alongside theories of the influence of popular culture on literacies (Marsh, 2009; Parry, 2013; Pahl, 2010) and the habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) of this child and the adult they've become. However, for the purpose of this study, I have rested on the artefactual literacy representations of life fragments that informed the adult who founded a literacy arts charity, inspired by Nutbrown's (2011) article and Mackey's (2016) and Parry's (2013) books.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

The aim of this study was to collect and analyse data to explore the literacy repertoire and resulting narrative of one person, examining the influences and influencers on that child through an autoethnographic study of memories, mirroring with pedagogies and wider research. This exploration of personal experiences would then be examined in order to better understand how the personal intersects with other factors/consultations to inform the development of a signature pedagogy.

This study is set within the current policy environment in England that has determined a prescribed technically based curriculum, schools judged by test results that assess curriculum competencies, literacy defined as a textual system rather than a socio-cultural form of meaning making.

The analysis of the data from this project further indicates the potential for further study of key components of pedagogy that could enhance a child's literacy repertoire and resulting narrative in the home, in the school, and within the bridge between the two. There are also key indicators of the importance of the influencer(s) on a child's life determining their narrative.

In the next section of this chapter I discuss the findings of the project in relation to the research question and the original aims of the project. I also examine how the project developed as a result of the data collection. I continue to discuss the potential contribution that the findings of this thesis could make to the wider body of knowledge. Further reflections on the limitations of the project will outline key barriers. I will finish with implications of my findings and by offering potential opportunities for further research.

### 6.1 Findings

This research is concerned with understanding the development of a signature pedagogy for the teaching of writing/literacies. As such this thesis has explored the emerging practices within literacy based memories of a childhood to discover the key attributes that feature. Shulman (2005) discusses signature pedagogies as 'habits of the heart, the mind and the hand that are learned and brought into action in the facilitation of learning. These habits are built on foundations but rarely are these footings explored to help bring greater understanding of their origins and influences that influenced or determined these habits' (Shulman, 2005, p.57).

Throughout this study the impact of a neoliberalist, policy driven, education landscape that is measured by league tables and performance has dominated discourse analysis around school education. Highlighted within the literature review chapter and trickling through the whole study is a clear, stark juxtaposition between academic research around socio-cultural literacy pedagogy and current curriculum pressures with resulting classroom practices. The culture of accountability and defined curriculum outcomes determine a prescribed curriculum with limited wiggle room to allow for a permeable, creative pedagogy that academics such as Dyson (1993), Doddington and Hilton (2007) and Moss (2017) support as a more inclusive approach. Whilst this policy driven landscape persists in driving up the value placed on performance against prescribed measurable outcomes, determined by test results, the opportunities for pedagogies to embrace creativity and allow time and space to enable depth for the socio-cultural, meaning making pedagogies are squeezed out. The result of such a regime over a significant period of time has implications for all stakeholders in the education landscape but a key implication is that children, and in fact teachers, who do not thrive in this environment could become demotivated, or even disenfranchised. Critiques of a neo-liberalist prescribed curriculum that focuses on accountability and testing claim that this approach 'affects children's engagement, purpose for learning and anxiety levels' (Dobson and Stephenson, 2020). Lambirth's study (2016, p230) concluded that school children 'saw little or no purpose in the act of writing', seeing it as a 'technical exercise' and resulted in them being 'alienated from the act of writing'. However, this policy maker championed 'back to basics' (DfE, 2014) curriculum makes little room for the more creative curriculum leading to the signature creative

pedagogy, explored through the memories of my childhood and placed as the foundations of an arts based charity.

The memories presented in this thesis have animated pockets of one childhood of socio-cultural literacy experiences that enabled and built an arts-based literacy practitioner. Wider research, coupled with the stories that the analysis tells, provides a framework of habits entwined within pedagogies, determining a suite of pedagogy principles to feature for the influences and influencer(s) on a child if one is to optimise their socio-cultural literacies in an environment where it is their technical abilities that hold greater value.

The following lists the elements of a creative signature pedagogy and the threads from within the autoethnography that influenced the signature pedagogy of Grimm & Co:

### **6.1.1 Stories**

The use of stories as vehicles for learning, enabling a rich and tangible experience with stories, valuing a child's own cultural experiences of stories and enabling the extension of the use of stories that can take on new meanings. Within 4.2, *A pocketful of Stories* the importance of stories, fictional and factual, woven prominently through significant elements of communications and meaning making, represented through remembering a vignette of a typical day. From sharing food to walking through the park, whether lived or imagined, stories dominated cultural experiences that shaped my narrative. This continues through the memories providing a vehicle for my learning journey and is at the heart of the work of Grimm & Co from its mission (to change lives one story at a time) to its pedagogy. This thread from the autoethnography has particularly influenced the signature pedagogy of Grimm & Co.

### **6.1.2 Imagination**

The use of imagination as narrative and social imagination enables free thinking, greater ownership and possibilities for reimagining given contexts, freeing children beyond limited means to explore potential other narratives.

Teachers often cite *limited experiences to draw on* as a key barrier to children's creative writing. Within the data, specifically, in section 4.2 *A pocketful of stories* there are many references to the use of imagination in my childhood and the extension of this that built practices within my own development and repertoire. A strong example of this is the reimagining of Sheffield's railway station as a theatrical set for our invented characteristics that were embedded in the stories we created. The development of empathy for the characters that continued into the physical transfer of their stories to artefacts (dolly pegs) enabled opportunities to expand and explore beyond my own lived experience. The sharing of this with another also enhanced and extended imaginings and language to make meaning of these communities and the world around us.

### 6.1.3 The role of influencers

The importance of the role of influencers as sponsors, patrons, champions of a child's literacy and their ability to hinder or advance both the repertoire and narrative of a child's literacies. This may or may not be a parent/carer/teacher/wider family member/peer but the greater the constructive influence, the greater the confidence and skills made possible to the child.

Mentoring and coaching can empower the child/young person. However, where there is a literacy sponsor (Brandt, 1998) with an investment in the outcome of the child there is a danger that their goals could supersede the needs of the child. This is a potential factor explored in relation to high stakes testing for teachers and is worthy of further exploration.

One person believing in a child/young person can engender or rekindle a lost self-belief that has the potential to support them to reimagine a resigned future narrative.



A single moment of recognition can support a child to feel welcome, part of a community or reimagine their abilities and their possible future. Examples of this being present within my own experiences appear throughout the data section of this thesis with the recognition of my Nan's role as my supporter and champion but also appears in section 4.6 *Take a u-turn when possible*, where a college tutor observed my practice and gave feedback to me that provided the pivotal point in my career to reset my destination that I had long since abandoned. This tutor probably never realised the enormity of her comments but this had provided a flame of hope and belief that determined renewed imaginings of my possibilities.

The data provides examples of these significant roles within this autoethnography, further examined in section 5.4 *Narrative influencer roles* as patrons or champions. Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy strongly champions the role influencers play, training volunteers to act as mentors, referring to them as providing the *life blood* of Grimm & Co. This has more recently been taken further as the charity develops programmes for families, carers and teachers, recognising the importance of the role they play in determining the extend of children's socio-cultural literacies.

#### 6.1.4 Child Agency

Child agency and the need to start from the child's own imagination, encourage ownership of writing, from creation to edit. The analysis of data and additional wider research presents a compelling argument for the motivation, engagement and ownership of the learning journey for the child. Additionally, the opportunity to give every child/young person the opportunity to use their voice and be heard rang through the research and the data in determining a key factor in the optimum signature pedagogy of a literacy charity. An example of this through the memories of my childhood appears in 4.2 where a story would be jointly read at bedtime and 4.4.1, Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet as my childhood self's marks on the paper were valued by my Nan in whatever form they took. This modelling from my Nan, and possibly others, is a practice that I played out from early years as discussed in section 4.5 *Destination teacher: An imagined narrative* as I recall Nan's stories that

reflected on my style in supporting others to do this for themselves rather than telling them what to do. Then later in section 4.6 Take a u-turn when possible where I discuss the teacher comments, again reflecting on this teaching style of helping others find ways of doing things for themselves. This facilitation model features at regular intervals through the data and has influenced the signature pedagogy of Grimm & Co.

### 6.1.5 Repertoire

The literacy repertoire that we bring to our understanding and meaning making of the world has significant bearing on the way we learn. This repertoire develops as a result of lifelong funds of knowledge and practices that we develop throughout our lives and does not stop when we reach adulthood but could continue and could be nurtured through and beyond childhood.

The data is crowded with rich literacy practices within all aspects presented from my childhood and this is demonstrated throughout, from the ballet performance in section 4.2 *A pocketful of stories* to the reading of road signs and writing of shopping lists in 4.4.1 *Deborah was writing before she knew the alphabet* my everyday practice was filled with socio-cultural literacy practices and habits that informed and influenced the repertoire I could draw on. This rich repertoire afforded opportunities which might otherwise have been limited and stands as a key strand in Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy to support children to develop positive literacy repertoire.

### 6.1.6 Home literacies

Whilst a child might grow up in poverty their surroundings could be rich in literacies. A literacy rich ecology is not necessarily determined by the economic position of a child but there are many ways to interpret this. From the negative/positive literacies in and around a child's home to the volume of print, the level and type of communications that takes place in the home and the activities that are valued or engaged with by families and across the third space into schools.

Presented throughout the data of my childhood is a significant and rich literacy ecology that was not limited by economic circumstances but in fact rich with the personal experiences from which I could draw and strong use of the literacies around me as a child. The *amazement* of the teacher in section 4.4.2 *Collecting memories* as she learned I could write in sentences indicates an assumption that I would not have this skill. By listening, observing and engaging in this space that occupied the majority of a child's life, the teacher/facilitator of the child's learning can draw familiar habits and practices that enable a more positive experience for the child rather than a deficit assumption.

The continued interests and practices through my childhood are represented in section 4.3 *Museum of me*, from nursery rhymes to song albums with written lyrics, the popular culture of that time was important to me as it provided emotional response, connection with others and freedom as just some of my reasons to engage with literacies. Had this been exploited further, maybe even extended, this could have afforded even greater ownership and confidence in my school learning.

Although there is a growing body of knowledge on digital literacies and popular culture, there is an emerging need for further studies on literacy ecologies and how these operate for children and young people, together with the call for teachers and families to occupy a third space between the two or venture across the bridge between.

### **6.1.7 Purpose – a reason to write**

For many children the purpose of writing in the classroom is to please the teacher or satisfy attainment targets. A great deal of research, some of which is presented within this study, demonstrates the lack of motivation in some children and the divide this creates for those children who struggle with reference or repertoire that they can draw on for these activities. Children respond well, are more creative and are more motivated to read and to write if they understand the purpose and it is meaningful to them.

The memories of section 4.4 *The baby book* presents multiple purposes that provided motivation for me to write. From the ecological presence of writing all around me and helped with our everyday activities from eating to communication and very importantly as a motivating factor for this child was the need to read and to write for the pleasures it would bring. Decision making around television programmes required the use and understanding of texts. Games and the stories within the pages of books provided multi-sensory pleasure from the smell of the books to the exciting anticipation of the story.

### 6.1.8 Playful but not childish

A greater potential for response will occur within a playful pedagogy that affords time and value to imaginative, improvised playfulness with a topic that enables the child to make meaning, develop dialogue with their peers and where there are no right or wrong answers. The fear of getting something wrong can create constraint rather than the freedom to read and to write with interest.

Throughout the data there are references to playful literacies, prominently demonstrated in section 4.2 *A pocketful of stories* where time spent with Nan was teeming with playful experiences that fed my imagination, enabling repurposing of furniture as monsters and upturned egg characters as I told and retold stories. Play featured strongly in my childhood narrative, providing space for creativity from which I drew great pleasure. Play was taken seriously rather than mocked, my grandmother playing alongside me, encouraging, giving licence to further this and to take pleasure from this. I had no idea I was learning but indeed I was. This authentic playfulness is at the heart of Grimm & Co's pedagogy as we deliver a creative curriculum and suspend disbelief to enable and give agency for play.

## 6.2 Contribution

A thesis for a doctoral qualification is required to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge. The following engages with the findings of this study in relation to this.

This study set out to explore and identify the components which should exist within the design of a signature pedagogy for teaching literacies. In the data and analysis for this research I have been able to make an original contribution in two areas, 1) the use of autoethnography as a research methodology that provides childhood insight; 2) exploration of components within an arts-based signature pedagogy; 3) further discourse analysis of a neoliberal, policy driven prescribed curriculum and its effects on children's socio-cultural literacies.

### **6.2.1 Autoethnography of childhood memories as method**

This autoethnography paper explores the inner world of a child with a rich socio-cultural repertoire and the traces of my childhood that I brought to (my version of) being an arts-based literacy practitioner. This non-traditional research provides deep insight to better understand the ordinary life of a child, not through 'spying on our children' (Enright, 1948) but through 'an honest and reflexive telling of ordinary tales of our younger selves' (Nutbrown, 2011, p.246). Nutbrown (2011) in her own autoethnographic research, ended her paper with a plea that academics include autoethnography so that the 'ordinary lives of young children are better understood [... ] through an honest and reflexive telling of ordinary tales of our younger selves' (p.246). Nutbrown continues to advocate this methodology as insightful of journeys and influences of the small stuff of childhood on one's career as an educator of children.

Children need well educated educators who engage in professional and sensitive reflection, who think about their work and who respond to new ideas and new experiences drawn from reflection on their practice and relevant research (Nutbrown, 2011a, p.177).

The data presented within this study does not focus on the traumatic or difficult stories. These are stories of the everyday with a key focus on the socio-cultural literacies that

took place and the elements of pedagogy are drawn from these ordinary stories to explore the aspects of my childhood that brought me to my work as champion and facilitator of arts-based socio-cultural literacy education. This has proved an act of discovery as I was able to directly learn from these tales of what seemed ordinary in my memories and extract the direct influences on the signature pedagogy of this arts based charity. Whilst this research methodology remains relatively new I feel there is a missed opportunity that might benefit further and potentially influence the body of knowledge around literacy pedagogy, in particular the arts-based socio-cultural literacy pedagogy and the signature pedagogies and their origins.

### **6.2.2 Components of an arts-based signature pedagogy**

In reflecting on the particular habits of heart, mind and hand (Shulman, 2005, p.57) that are distinctive practices that intend to do more than merely inculcate knowledge, I have undertaken to consider the philosophy within this particular practice, the influences derived from one's own childhood experiences but also the ways in which this particular approach facilitates orientation and meaning making.

### **6.2.3 Neoliberal, policy driven curriculum**

The discourse analysis draws on current policy in the UK and the wider academic research that demonstrate its deficit impact on teaching practice and children's outcomes with particular emphasis on literacy education. As a result of this research I suggest the neoliberal approach that continues to raise the stakes of performance to tests, the emphasis on labelling of language rather than making meaning is squeezing creative pedagogies out of the learning experience. This issue is current and having significant impact on teachers, leadership, pedagogy and ultimately on this generation of schooled children learning in the mainstream education system. I also draw on research from other countries, demonstrating this is not only an issue for the UK. By starting to pull together the discourse around current policy determined curriculum and its impact on pedagogies this thesis offers the potential for further development in socio-cultural literacy research, ideally furthering the notions of effects on pedagogy, teaching, leadership and ultimately the effects on children and young people.

#### 6.2.4 Further aspects drawn upon

Although relevant, sound recent research exists regarding digital literacies, (Mars, 2021; Burnett and Merchant 2018) the role of popular culture (Parry 2013), the importance of valuing teacher and home third space (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005) the role of families/carers (Nutbrown, et al., 2017) the problems continue to exist for children and young people of this generation, experiencing a high stakes testing (Moss, 2014, 2017 ) performative school culture that widens the gap between those who have the repertoire on which to draw for this model and those who do not. Therefore, by providing a deep dive into one child's literacies and the factors that brought a literacy rich repertoire to that child, I hope to contribute some depth of knowledge that provides an insightful exploration to inform the body of knowledge and invite others to do the same to build greater understanding of the pedagogies that build a literacy rich narrative.

#### 6.3 Limitations of the study

It would have been beneficial to bring in additional action research from the field to this study that explored the experiences, literacy pedagogies and ecologies of others alongside me to provide greater interest of comparisons. However, I felt this would provide ethical challenges, as discussed from one aspect within the methodology chapter. Therefore, I have presented this study as the research of one child's experiences which should not be compared or generalised. However, there is scope to expand with additional studies from others that further the insights into the building of an arts-based practitioner pedagogy. As this study adds to the body of knowledge accumulated from other autoethnography accounts from Nutbrown (2011) and Mackey (2016) we could begin to understand the development of a child's literacy practices better by listening to the lived experiences of an individual and their journey. The literature review was initially limited by my knowledge of a wide research field. Rather than drill down into one aspect of this study I attempted to explore the wider, resulting narratives that emerged from the data and this resulted in a wider field of

research. The study would benefit from greater emphasis on each aspect of the pedagogy that explores in depth the wider research around this field.

#### 6.4 Implications and opportunities

Grimm & Co's signature pedagogy is at the core of all provision and delivery across the charity. Originally founded on the basis of the *Inspire Rotherham* action research project discussed earlier in this thesis, it was further developed through consultation. However, the epiphanies resulting from this research have furthered and widened the consideration behind the characteristics within an arts-based signature pedagogy to embrace the successful factors, and wider research outcomes to inform and influence this signature pedagogy further as we embrace families/carers/influencers on the child and determine how we advance our work. It is rare that the research within the development of a doctorate thesis has the opportunity to immediately (whilst writing) influence action, but in this case the resulting analysis and additional research gathered for this thesis has informed my own, and Grimm & Co's whole body of knowledge on pedagogy and will be actioned immediately as it is embedded into delivery planning, evaluation strategies and ways we report.

Grimm & Co will also continue to engage with the research around this pedagogy and engage with research communities with an interest in this type of work, building the body of knowledge and influencing practice through continued action research around socio-cultural literacy pedagogies.

#### Acknowledgement of collaborative work within the thesis

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own, except where work that has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included.

The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below.

The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.





Appendices and their authorship acknowledgements:

Wordle of teacher opinion on barriers to literacy for children and young people. Author: Deborah Bullivant. Co-author: Sarah Christie

Author conceived and designed the experiments. Co-author performed the experiments. Author and co-author analysed the data. Author and co-author co-wrote the paper.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: It's Grimm Up North, the fictional story behind Grimm & Co's creation. Author: Jeremy Dyson. Co-author: Deborah Bullivant

Co-author designed initial concepts. Author wrote the paper. Co-author reviewed and provided comments on the manuscript.

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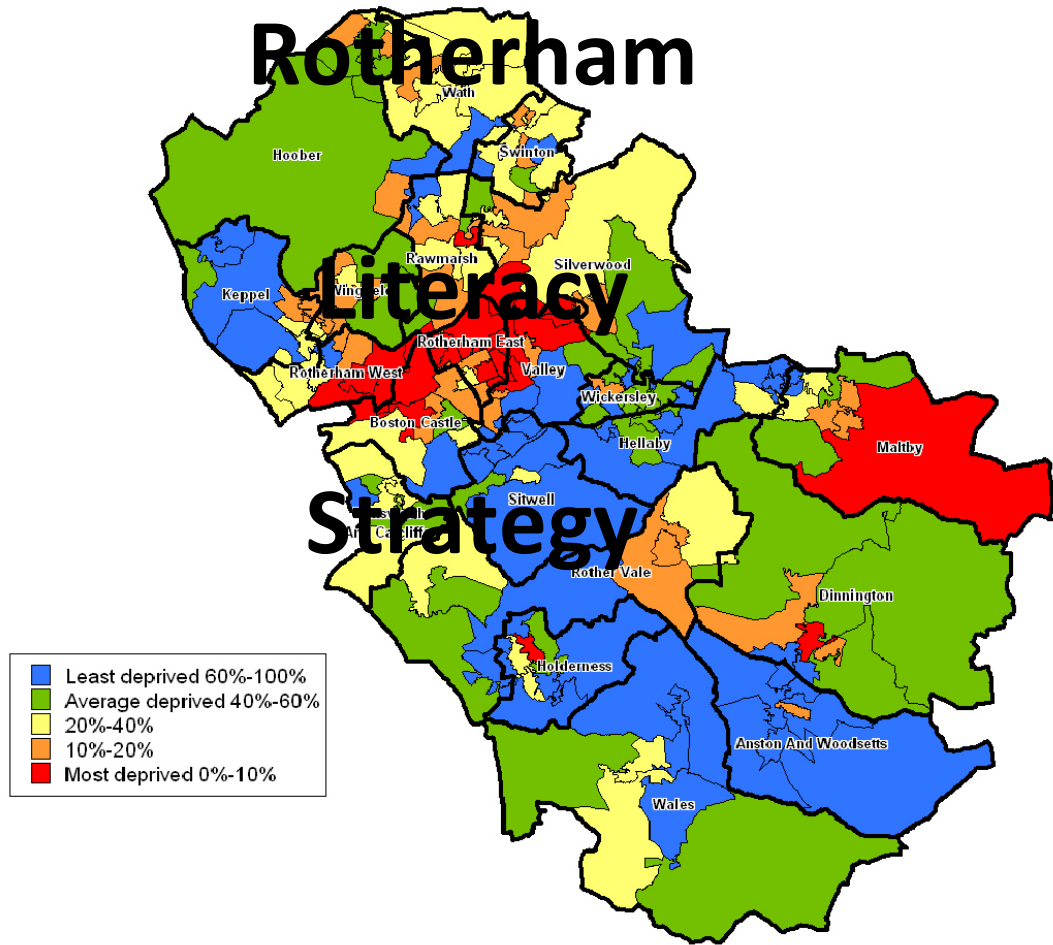


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Appendix 1: Inspire Rotherham Strategy/Plan



Below are the representation buttons representing groups affected by each action recommended action coming out of the Inspire Rotherham evaluation. These actions are drawn from recommendations highlighted throughout the evaluation report, completed by the University of Sheffield. It is crucial to continue to target those children from the 10% most deprived communities as an integrated approach (mixing reluctant readers with enthusiastic readers). To optimise impact in Rotherham, it is important to maintain the following elements:

Diverse literacies      Raising aspirations and reading for pleasure      Family engagement      Collaboration and literacy

Whole school literacy approaches                      Professional development      Creating a literacy rich community



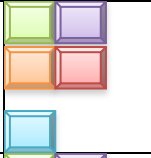


Consider planning, **environment**, people, **research**, *school*, *family learning*, and adult providers:



Action	Mode of action	Groups
Put literacy at the heart of voluntary sector/community sector/health sector/public sector and private sector strategic plans – where they have involvement with families	(Planning)	
Include literacy, and shared outcomes for literacy in the 'Fit for Purpose Plan'.	(Planning)	
Include literacy in the commissioning arrangements for services delivering to families/children.	(Planning)	
Inspire Rotherham should target resources into organisations that have a clearly defined set of objectives and working practices around families/children and then articulate how literacy support can feed into existing good practice.	(Planning)	
Develop innovative, relevant, skills led literacy/communication learning programmes, celebrating diverse literacies, developed with clearly communicated access routes and pathways for young adults and adults (equally in/out of workforce across the communities of Rotherham).	(Planning)	
Develop a range of initiatives to be developed to ensure Rotherham 's children are able to reach their potential. These should include greater and stronger relationships with colleges and universities, improved communication, information, and advice and guidance for children and families on careers. It is important to promote learning outside of mainstream school, through extended services. These initiatives help raise aspirations – the Children's Festival, Rotherham Children's University and links to the RSC (including Shakespeare Festival).	(Planning)	
Sustain the Quality Mark for schools – a framework offer to support new awards and to ensure renewals are supported and assessed – to include all schools, children's centres, and further children's settings, to ensure continuous improvement and a standardized level of quality across provision.	(Planning)	
Provide opportunities for critical reflection and experimentation -- development of research opportunities to continue to inform practices and to be supported and developed to widen the reach of influence and collaborative working practices.	(Research)	

Measure change in social practice through qualitative research, over time, as well as through quantitative measures. This will enable a non-intrusive approach to the measurement of social change and should inform future practice and approaches, helping us to share information consistently.	(Research)	
Undertake an audit of literacy resources available in literacy poor and literacy rich communities across Rotherham, also focusing on negative and positive literacy – informing an improvement plan, owned by Rotherham citizens to improve the quality of literacy on the street, in the home and in the community.	(Research)	
Adopt a listening methodology adopted by practitioners is important to support and value home literacy practices	(Research)	
Develop a range of best practice models and toolkits – utilising the literacy practitioner champions across the borough.	(Research)	
Recruit parent champions who can act as role models and can help people who work with children to understand home book sharing practices.	(People)	
Build a literacy volunteer framework that creates opportunities for sharing practices in the home, raises the aspirations of children and develops the enjoyment of sharing reading. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build in time for speaking and listening – develop a trusting relationship</li> <li>- Use resources which promote home/volunteer sharing</li> <li>- Create a framework which recognizes the volunteer’s contribution to Rotherham’s next generation</li> </ul>	(People)	
Use Reading/writing for pleasure Ambassadors – create a structure to promote the ‘Pay It Forward’ campaign – those who know and recognize the love of reading and writing for pleasure pledge to pass on this love of reading to at least 5 people/families/children.	(People)	
Raise the awareness of the importance and relevance of communication skills with people who work, or spend time with families, equipping these people to be agents of change.	(People)	
Create shared and evolving understandings around literacy, targeting each group appropriately to ensure communications which are fit for purpose and which are shared and communicated through one mechanism (website/portal) – monitored and evaluated regularly.	(People)	
Recognise that the role of library assistants in mediating the experience of using libraries is crucial. Key objectives for school and family engagement should be set, to create ownership and clarify responsibility with training and awareness programmes from Champions to raise awareness of methodology and share tools/resources. <i>The work of outreach and partnership work across libraries was an area that we identified as needing more support. (Pahl, 2010). The role of library assistants as literacy sponsors for children needs to be stressed across all the libraries we visited. (Pahl, 2010)</i>	(People)	
Collaborative approach to be developed to raise awareness amongst families, practitioners, professionals and young people of the indicators of language delays in children - how to detect these earlier and resources/support to prevent delays or address early. <i>Hello Campaign, 2011, National Year of Communication.</i>	(People)	

Promote a greater awareness of delays in recognition of meaning/understanding communication indicators at an early stage and of intervention strategies. ( <i>Speech and language team</i> )	(People)	
Recognise that space and spatial layout is important for libraries to support reading pleasure and engaging parents. Thinking about space for literacy is important in schools, homes, across services to families and in community organisations.	(Environ-ment)	
Invest in – the quality of interactions children have inside and outside the home in relation to print and books the quality of literacy resources on the street, in the home and in the community resources related to children’s development	(Environ..)	
Extend the reach of literacy – in terms of space, developing new imaginative spaces where children and young people’s skills can be extended.	(Environ..)	
Ensure some specific provision, in the Central Library, which focuses on oral storytelling; this is particularly important for children from Roma families.	(Environ...)	
Ensure that children and young people can experience something radically different, something inspirational which injects some energy into the learning.	(School)	
Enable shared experiences across year groups – e.g. literacy mentoring of older children with younger children/research agents.	(School)	
Ensure planning around leadership support for implementation (of initiatives/cross school approaches) in learning communities/organisations, with buy in and communication of buy in from those leaders to their staff and communities.	(School)	
Give teachers the opportunity to enjoy reading for pleasure and focus on their reading choices in school settings. Engage teachers in reading children’s books and further literature, modern and classics, to become more knowledgeable on literature available to children.	(School)	
Break the cycle of low aspirations within families which are passed onto children through the support of interventions (Children’s University/Shakespeare Festival/Children’s Festival) and celebration of children’s achievements, along with an attitudinal shift, where needed, promoting ‘Rotherham children can’!	(Family Learning and School)	
Make family literacy a higher priority Family literacy should become a higher priority for schools and local authority and has the potential to support the achievement of the aspirations of policies such as Reaching Out: Think Family, Every Parent Matters and Skills for Life. <i>Literacy Learning Together Evaluation Report (NRDC 2009)</i>	(FL and School)	
Communicate to schools the impact of improving adult literacy skills on children’s progress. There needs to be better communication to schools of the impact that improving adult literacy skills can have on their children’s progress, and of the contribution that adult literacy work can make to closing pupil attainment gaps. <i>Literacy Learning Together Evaluation Report (NRDC 2009)</i>	(FL and School)	

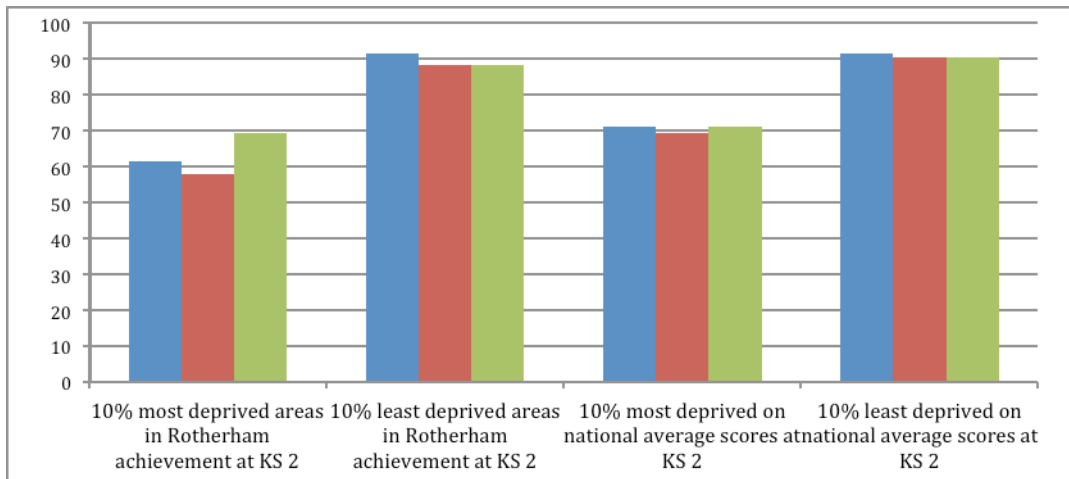
<p>Work with adult learning providers...          Adult learning providers need to further develop their recruitment strategies in partnership with schools in order to more effectively reach the target learners – parents with low skills. <i>Literacy Learning Together Evaluation Report (NRDC 2009)</i></p>	<p>(FL and School and Adult Provide)</p>	
<p>Schools develop a greater understanding of communication and literacy practices in the home and how these could be linked to what is going on at school. Book sharing and literacy practices at home are not the same as school literacy. A focus on the sharing of a reading experience rather than solely on independent reading is important.</p>	<p>(FL and School)</p>	
<p>A development of outreach learning programmes across Rotherham which reach families who are often marginalized and complement the work of the schools, the children's centres and the Imagination Library.</p>	<p>(Family Learn)</p>	
<p>Parent involvement – schools to create opportunities and undertake a range of strategies to involve ALL parents, from the enthusiastic through to those who may not recognize their role in their child's learning support and the school. (Partnerships with other agencies – e.g. voluntary sector – can support this).</p>	<p>(Family Learn)</p>	
<p>Family learning strategy (incorporating innovation and literacy) to be developed collaboratively with schools, parenting, prevention and early intervention – to widen participation in learning and link to progression outcomes for families. <i>Family Learning's 'Sherlock Bones' activity was particularly popular with men, literacy activities included investigative theory prompting discussion proved a successful technique in engaging families in a fun and creative method. (Beavers, 2011).</i></p>	<p>(Family Learn)</p>	



## Why do we need a literacy strategy?

Rotherham has a long history of low literacy levels which can be seen in adult qualification outcomes and in our children's attainment levels. If we are to truly make a difference, ensure efficiencies and success, we need to focus our energies on a strategy for Rotherham, which will provide the foundation for an action plan, and this should be built on what we have learned from the 'Learning from families and communities' evaluation report'.

Inspire Rotherham targeted the families in the 10% most disadvantaged areas under the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). These activities began delivery in the school year 2009/2010. The following chart shows increased levels of attainment in English for the year 6, age 10/11 children

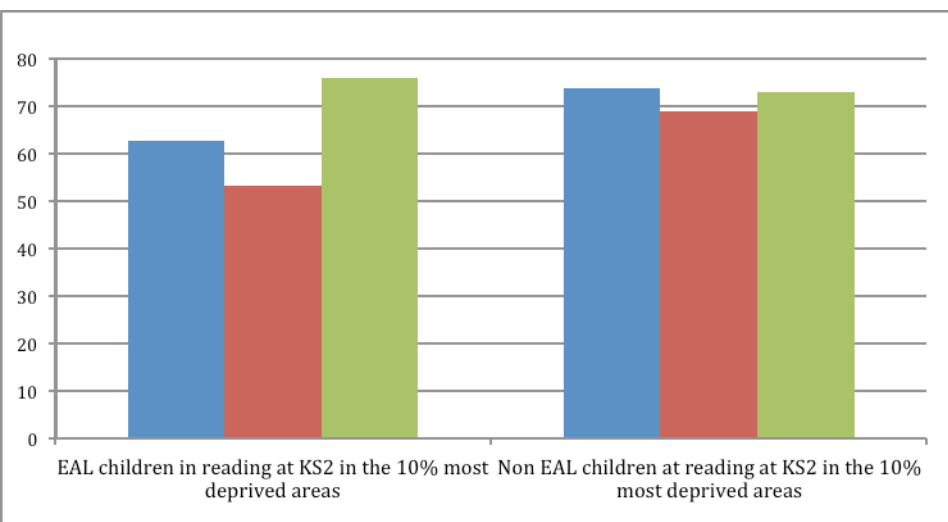


(key stage 2) from the 10% most deprived areas during this time.

Key  
 ■ 2008  
 ■ 2009  
 ■ 2010

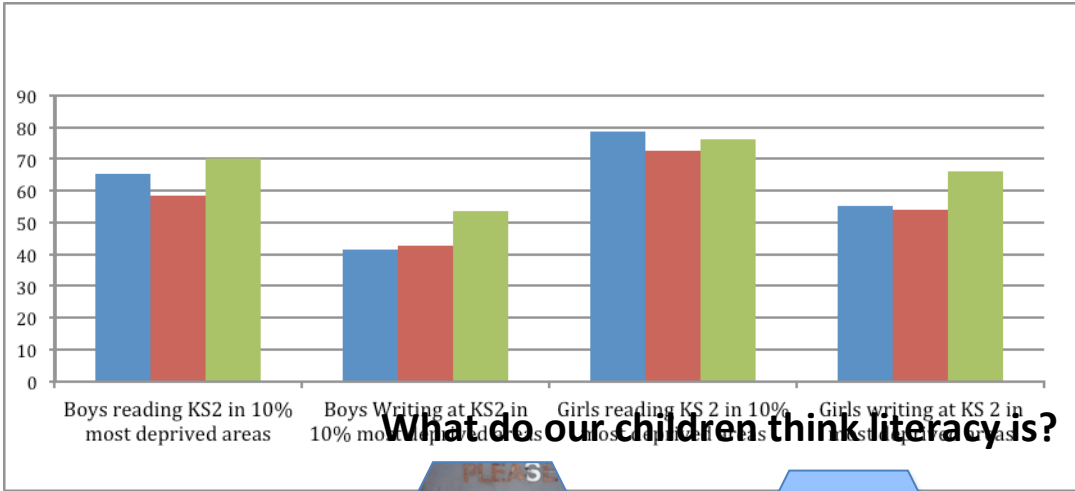
The first graph demonstrates

a sharper increase in 2010 in key stage 2 attainment on SATs result outcomes.



This second graph demonstrates achievements of those children for whom English is not their first language. Rotherham has a growing and significant number of Eastern European migrants and these were a particular focused group, amongst those from the 10% most deprived areas, for Inspire Rotherham. In 2010, reading levels demonstrated a significant increase amongst these groups.

Evidence shows that in reading and writing girls out perform boys and this is an issue common beyond Rotherham. Inspire Rotherham projects targeted boys in the 10% most deprived areas and the graph demonstrates an



improvement in 2010 across boys and girls, and in reading beginning to narrow the gap between boys and girls.

**What do our children think literacy is?**



*(Above: From a study with High Greave Junior School children with Kate Pahl and Robin Bone, 2011)*

**What do we know?**

Over 80% of the child's learning takes place in the home – skills development, behaviours, attitudes to learning, etc. The child's environment is really important – speaking and listening in the home, text (books/comics/newspapers/etc) around the home environment, the positive/negative influences of communications used in the community, the people around the child/parent/carer.

The family attitude/confidence levels/views on learning/aspirations/own skills/level of reading for pleasure - affect their child's communication skills.

Communication skills are developed quicker and with more enthusiasm when using a variety of methods. Where families build a positive and close relationship with the school around the learning, greater improvements are achieved. To make a real difference you need the commitment from adults, you need time, space, relationships, positive role models, and places which make it easy to communicate positively.

We have listened to our children and young people and to the adults in our communities and they know what they need when it comes to communication and literacy:

Our children and young people :

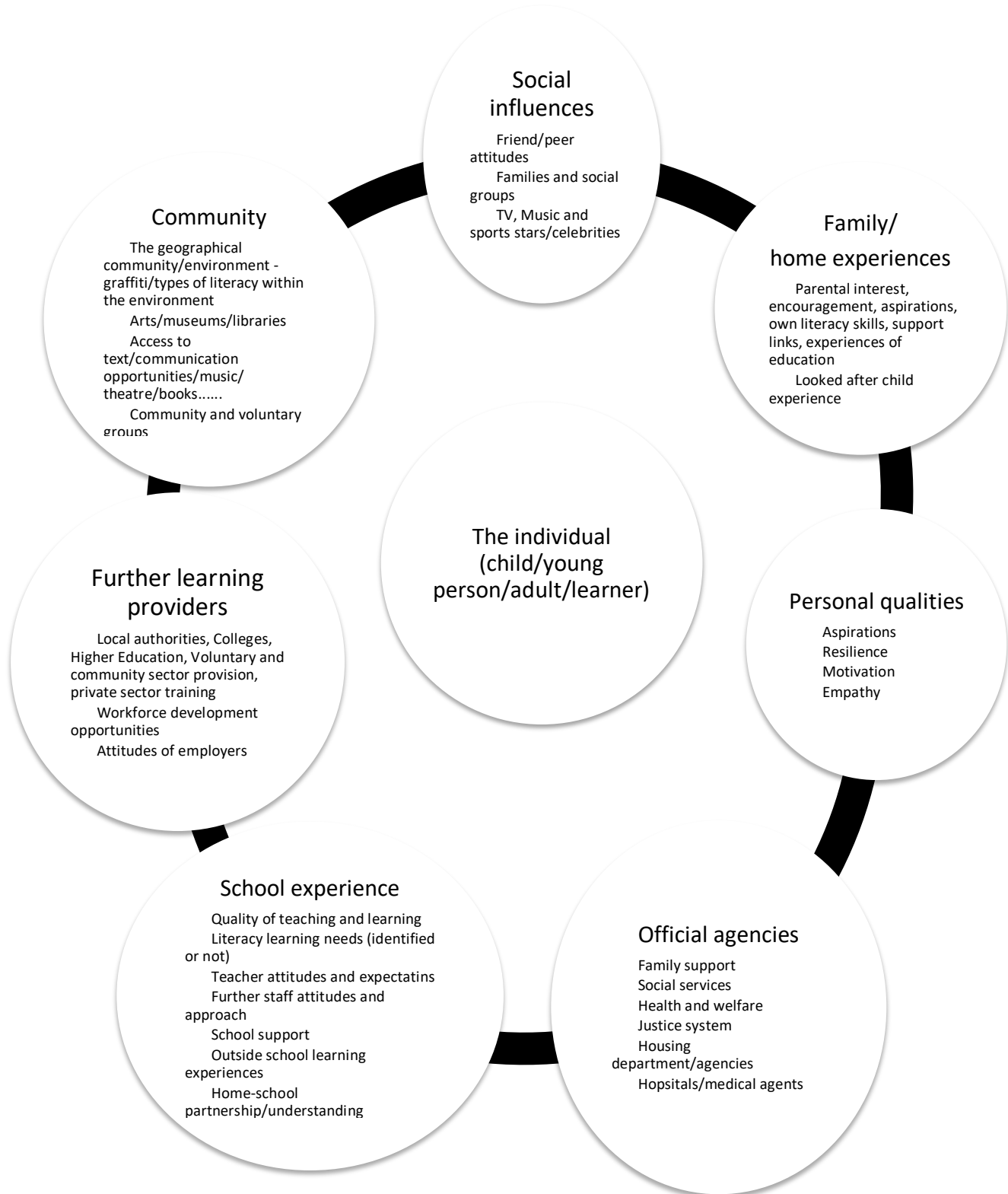
- Need to own literacy and have their home communications/environment for learning recognized.
- Do not like living in areas where there is racist abuse and bad language on the walls.
- Would like to use film and digital literacies to make meanings that relate to contemporary society.
- Love activities that promote speaking and listening and drama.
- Recognise that time and space for literacy is important.



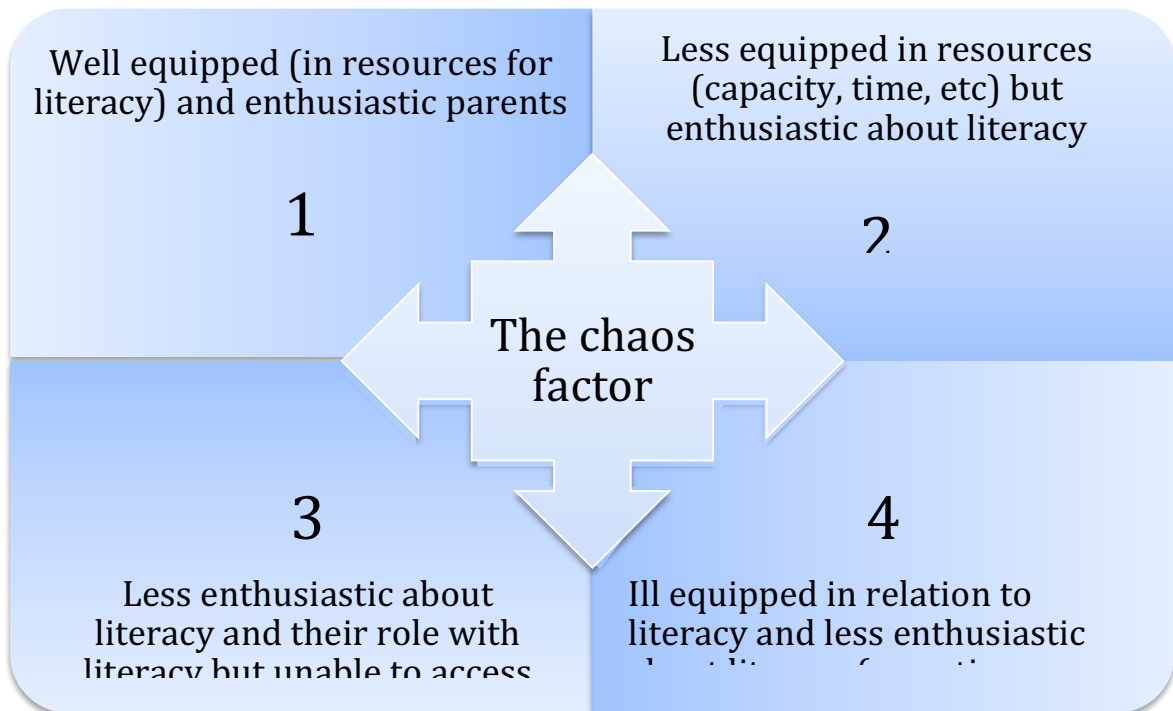
To

consider.....

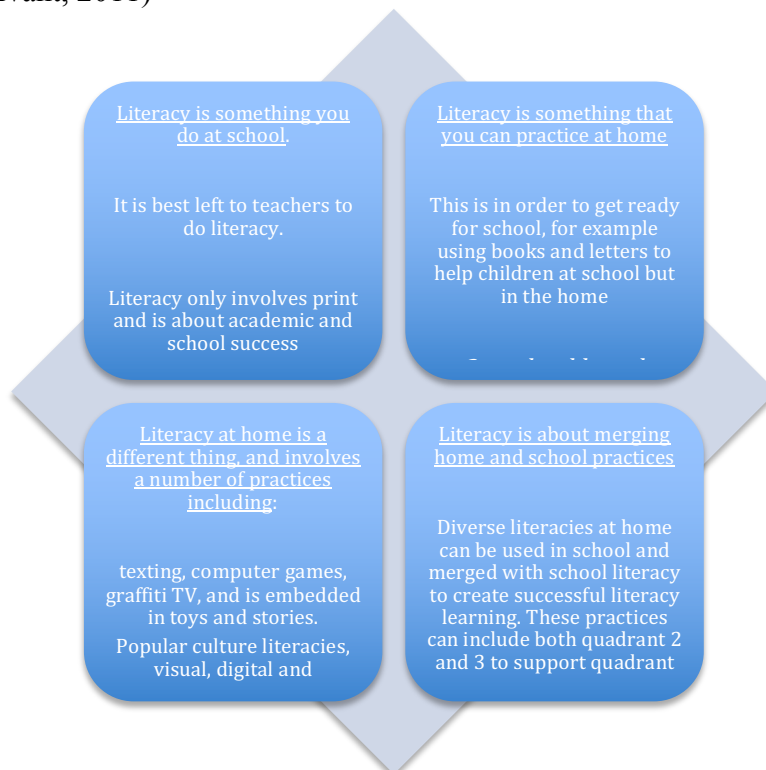
The influences and influencers on the child  
 (Deborah Bullivant, 2011, inspired by Rochdale, et al., 2009)



Parent groups.....



(Deborah Bullivant, 2011)



(Kate Pahl, 2011, University of Sheffield)

## IT'S GRIMM UP NORTH

Yorkshire. 1148. The darkest hour of the Dark Ages.

The family Grimm – the richest merchants this side of the Don Valley - and the other side for that matter. Cloth. Barrels. Grain. Sand. Iron. Cheese. Old cheese to feed pigs with. You name it the Grimms knew how to buy it cheap and sell it expensive. They had the market cornered in everything that could be wrapped up and put in a box. They even wrapped up boxes, put them in bigger boxes and sold these. Old Enoch Grimm – the family patriarch - ruled over his young 'uns with a rod of iron. Literally. It was a yard and a half long with spikes all over it and he used it to rap his sons on their knees with it if they displeased him.

And none displeased him more than his youngest, little Graham Grimm. Or Twirly Curly Graham Grimm as he was known by the locals ('twirly' on account of his poor lame twisted leg and 'curly' because of his flowing brown locks and big brown eyelashes longer than a cow's). These unkind locals laughed at him from their doorways because all the other Grimm children, all Graham's brothers and sisters had inherited their father's vigour and his canny business brain. But Graham. Graham was – well – he was the opposite of the apple of

his father's eye. Whatever that might be. The dog dirt in his father's eye perhaps. Nothing he did could please old Enoch. Whereas his brothers and sisters liked fighting and thumping each other and wrestling shire horses and all kinds of other rough activity – Graham preferred wandering the moors and the woods and the drover's paths and the valleys on the edge of the town. His father tried setting him up with a job in the business, counting all the day's takings from his siblings' market stalls and writing the numbers down in a big ledger. But for Graham, nothing could have been more boring than counting things. And on his third day in charge of all the counting his father came down to see how he was doing only to find the boy's ledger open on the bare wooden desk – with the ink drying in the well, and Graham nowhere to be seen.

There was a reason why little Graham with the twisted leg and curly locks was so drawn to the moors and the valleys and the glens and the dark wooded places that others shunned come twilight. You see, he wasn't just the youngest son, he was the youngest of seven children, just as his father had been before him. And that made him the seventh child of a seventh child. A rare and powerful thing which gave him even rarer powers. For Graham's eyes were open to all kinds of things that others couldn't see. The creatures and



spirits that, shall we say, vibrate at a different speed to you and me. The fairies and the elves and the goblins and the brownies (oh yes they exist – particularly in Yorkshire – just ask the residents of Cottingley about their famous fairies). These fairies and goblins and brownies and boggarts and bogles, well Graham's eyes were open to all of them. And on the day that his father came looking for him at the ledger Graham had been yarning it with one of the bogles at Hatherton Tops.

Well as Graham limped back after sundown – he realised he was for it as soon as he saw his father outside the shop bashing that spiky iron rod into the stony mud. That was it – Graham was out on his ear. His last chance and he'd blown it. His father was furious. According to Enoch, Graham was no Grimm. What kind of Grimm abandoned his work on a whim? What kind of Grimm couldn't bring in a brass farthing – or any other kind of farthing for that matter? Graham was from that moment banished – banished until he could contribute properly to the family business. Because if he couldn't bring in brass, he wasn't worthy of the family name.

As he sloped off, Graham remembered a phrase that his father used to sing to him in a song when he was tiny. It wasn't a very tuneful song but it was the

only song he'd ever been sung by his father. The song went 'where there's muck there's brass – where's there's brass there's muck' - over and over again – those were the only words. Well it just so happened Graham knew where the muckiest place was round his way – the old tarn at Crimton Mire up by Hatherton Tops. Without really knowing why – and frankly in a bit of a mope – Graham limped his way up there. If nothing else there was a hollowed out tree stump he could take shelter in. And he could live off the bilberries which grew all around, for a week or two at least.

It was raining when he arrived – and as the water poured down on him and then the hail (it was a very cold afternoon – but then June can get cold round these parts) who should sidle over to him to see what was up but the very bogle he'd been chatting to earlier.

“Brass? Is that what's this is all about. Nay lad – thee doesn't want to be chivin' thissen' over brass. Brass is nowt. Why we magical folk have got more brass than a thousand chapel altars.”

“Really?”

“Of courseth, of courseth – for magical folk make their own coin – out of lost

teeth and old bones and daisies and every beautiful or unbeautiful thing we see about ourselves – just because it pleaseth us – come on – I’ll show thee.’

And he took Little Graham’s limp hand in his claw (Bogle’s have claws – though not very frightening ones) and led him to the nearby Hatherton Scar. The Bogle pursed his purple lips (yes- they have purple lips too) and blew. There followed a sound like a hundred robins taking flight and the tumbling waterfall parted like a curtain of molten glass, revealing a dark doorway beyond.

“Go on lad – step through – I’m with thee so there’s nowt to be afeared of.”

Graham looked nervous as they passed into the dark cave and perhaps with reason because the Bogle whispered to him, “Of course if I wasn’t with you there would be something to be afeared of. Thee’d be sliced into a thousand pieces very slowly by that there magical sword,” and he pointed with his Bogle’s claw to a fearsome looking blade that hung suspended from the cave ceiling.

Piled up against the black rocks was a treasury the like of which Graham could not have conjured in his imagination. The Bogle took in his disbelief. “Oh aye – we’re a profligate lot.” Graham could only imagine his father’s face if his

eyes were ever to set on those riches.

“What do they do with all this?” asked Graham still trying to take in the mounds of gold and silver pennies and farthings and sovereigns.

“Do with it? What do you do with the wax that comes out of your ears or the snot that come out of your nose?” Being of Yorkshire stock this particular Bogle called a spade a spade. And snot, snot.

I mean,” said Graham, trying to contain his excitement – “What do they spend it on - what would they spend it on – if they were to go to market?”

“Well they wouldn’t go to market – as you say – they can conjure anything they need’

“Anything?”

“Well almost anything. There’s one thing they can’t conjure, of course – but it’s not something they’re able to buy – at least not something you humans are in the business of selling, to us.”

“And what’s that?” said Graham with a twinkle in his eye, for despite what his father said, he was not without the Grimm family canniness.

“Why what do I get from you – what do I love to hear from you when we chat over a fairy ring – as we did earlier today. We love your stories. You don’t know it, you don’t realise it – but that talent – that skill – that’s peculiar to your kind. Only humans make up stories.”

“You don’t make up stories?”

“No we don’t, not like you. But how we wish we could – because to hear your stories – that gives us a lift like nothing else. When we hear one of your stories, to us – it’s like walking in sunshine – it’s like a thousand days of sunshine in one go. It restores and replenishes our magical energy. It’s quite wonderful. You humans - you swim in story like a fish swims in water – and you don’t realise how enchanting it is. You make up people just as if they’ve been alive – and then think of amazing things that have happened to them – quicker than a falling pebble. Why that’s a fantastic thing. And just as you need to walk in sunshine or you’ll sicken, we need to walk in your story. We’re always hovering about you in search of stories to give us the lift we need – just

to pick us up. And I'll wager we'd give up some of our precious fairy gold to do so – without lurking and sneaking. If someone was offering – that is.”

A gap in the market – wasn't that what Old Enoch was always talking about. A shop that sold the energy to magical creatures – the energy that stories gave off when they're made up and told.

“What if I was to see you got some of that energy – if I got people to come and make up stories - and you were nearby when it happened? What do you think to that?”

“I think that's a grand idea!” said the Bogle.

“And what if I was to entice the magical creatures in with all kinds of goodies – fare that might just appeal to the likes of your kin – items that would make them feel right at home?”

“Even better,” said the Bogle, tapping his curly claws together in delight.

Now little Graham was no slouch himself when it came to telling tall tales –

they came easy to him. But he realised it would be in his interest to get others to join him – to get the most out of the whole enterprise. ‘They need our stories like we need sunshine,’ he said to himself. ‘So let’s start shining.’

Without telling his father he found a room next to an old Inn, in a town thirty miles south of his own. Turned out – despite what Enoch thought – Graham had the Grimm gift of striking a bargain, too. And the kind of premises he was looking for was the kind nobody else wanted – down a dark alley – hidden away - where the magical creatures would be happy to shuffle and flit and fly – away from prying eyes (just in case there were any other seventh sons of seventh sons out there – not of as friendly a demeanour as little Graham.)

And what do you know – within the year that little shop was the most profitable establishment run by a Grimm. Graham had an ear for who could spin a yarn – particularly which child and he staffed his shop with them and set them spinning yarns like a tailor might spin thread. And it turned out that he had a feel for a distinctive product line too – things that the magical folk didn’t even know they needed – until they saw them.

Well, the Bogarts and Boggles and Brownies and Elves and Hobs and Pixies were

soon queuing round the door – any who arrived down-hearted left refreshed and replete with replenished magical energy and a special Grimm’s commodity or two.

And word soon spread. Fairy gold flowed from Graham’s pockets. And when he felt he had enough – he went and bought himself a new pair of the finest woollen breeches together with a pair of shiny black boots – with the left one specially fitted to his poorly leg - and thusly suited he went to tell his father all – since until that point Old Enoch had little idea as to the fate of his youngest son.

The old man couldn’t believe it. “Nay son, you’ve done me proud. And here’s me thinking you were runt of t’litter! You know what? I think you might just be the greatest Grimm of all.”

And Graham Grimm’s duly line prospered – not just in Yorkshire – but all over the country – then all over Europe too.

In fact you have may have heard of some his off-spring – his Great-great-great-great-great-great-great Grandchildren to be exact – born in Germany of



all places. They definitely had Graham's ear for a yarn – particularly those that appeal to magical folk - and they made it their business to collect as many of them as they could.

And the Grimm's shops – well they're still with us. The magical folks' need for stories to refresh and lift their spirits and their powers remains as great as ever – greater even in a time when most human's don't even believe in such beings. To that end – quite a few hundred years ago actually – the shop took on an extra role – to encourage and inspire the imaginations of young story-tellers everywhere. You see when a great story's told the burst of energy those magical creatures get is quite phenomenal – like a bomb going off. Or a thousand bombs. Or a hundred thousand if it's really good.

There was a branch of Grimms on the back streets of Haworth when the Bronte Sisters were girls – where they got their little notebooks from to make stories in. Bram Stoker visited Whitby as a child and never forgot the branch of Grimms there, overlooking the harbour; no wonder so much of Whitby features in his book Dracula. And it's not just book-writers. Alan Bennett – a writer of plays - was known to visit the branch next to Armley Library in Leeds, Ted Hughes, a poet (who wrote The Iron Man) loved the one next door to his

parents' tobacconists in Mexborough and songwriter Jarvis Cocker was very fond of the one on The Moor in Sheffield.

And here's the latest branch – opening up in Rotherham – there must be some special story magic about to happen here. Well you know what old Enoch Grimm would have said – 'some of the very best things start in Yorkshire. My son Graham did, after all'.

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## GRAHAM GRIMM AND THE MAGICAL SPRING

by Jeremy Dyson

Yorkshire. 1149. The It's-Still-Quite-Dark Ages. Graham Grimm was sitting down with his second-in-command, Palfreyman to do their shop's quarterly review. This should have been a pleasure. The business - Grimm and Co - couldn't have been more successful. It was there to serve magical creatures, replenishing their spell-making energy. The means for doing that, the best possible fuel for bringing that about, was stories, made up by humans. And

magical creatures were coming to visit from all over the county in order to hear the stories the humans created and get the extra special lift, the wonderful energy hit the stories released. In fact, they were coming not just from across the county - but from all over the magical world. They had visitors from Cloud Cuckoo Land, large parties from the Land Beyond Beyond, and even a sizeable trickle of somewhat dodgy-looking characters sneaking up from Pandemonium, via the rabbit holes on Hatherton Tops. All this should have been reason for celebration. But Etheldred Palfreyman the shop's manager - who wasn't so much a glass-half-empty person as a glass-drained-all-the-way-to-the-bottom-and-oh-look-there's-a-great-big-crack-in-too person - was not given to joyful expressions of celebration. She was not blessed with a happy countenance either - she looked very much a catfish chewing a pickled lemon wrapped in sandpaper - if you can imagine such a thing. And in her opinion - the shop's popularity was a not a good thing. Her realism and sensibleness were valuable qualities when it came to running a business it was true. But they didn't seem to be helping now.

On this particular morning Graham had suggested that maybe they could look at buying the disused bakery next door to expand their space and Palfreyman had immediately questioned the wisdom of this strategy.

"If you're going to expand, sire, you're going to need to multiply hugely the

amount of stories our human visitors can produce. Those creatures (even though I can't see them) are hungry. They guzzle down everything our mortal patrons come up with. The humans will never be able to keep up. They'll run out of ideas. They'll run out of stories. I think you're just going have to accept it. Look it hard in the face. Grimm and Co might have to cease trading. It's a victim of its own success. It wouldn't be the first time such a thing had happened. It's better to be realistic about these things - rather than get into trouble.' And Palfreyman smiled a sad smile - confident she had all the forces of prudence and rectitude on her side.

It's true - the shop was completely at capacity. Of course, the other humans couldn't see it, but Graham, being the Seventh Child of a Seventh Child, was only too aware of the severity of their problem. There were all kinds of appendages poking out of the doors and through the open windows. Tails and wings and trunks and tusks and spikes and tentacles and spiralling horns. There wasn't even room for a gnome. The fairies had to fold their wings into quarters just to squeeze inside.

The creatures were coming, in part to buy some of the amazing products Graham Grimm had put on sale. Items such as Chinese Dragon Wing Descalers were impossible to find anywhere else (and the hard water of Yorkshire does tend to clog around their spines and claws). But the main reason they were

queuing out of the door was for the incredible bursts of energy they received from hearing the stories the human visitors were encouraged to make up. That was the real draw. To hear the products of human imaginations - the tales and yarns and songs and poems and plays - was like basking in the most glorious sunshine to a magical creature. It revived them, gave them life, energy, restoration. It was the purest most wonderful, most delightful way they could spend their time and they couldn't get enough of it. But now - unless Graham could come up with a solution - the customers might not be able to get any of it at all - because there was no room for any more of them in the shop - and the floor was threatening to give way - dropping them all into the cellar. Those floorboards could only take so many ogres. And more importantly - they could only fit so many story-creating humans in. And by 'eck those magical ones were hungry for stories.

Having not got very far discussing it with Palfreyman, Graham thought a visit to his siblings might provide the answer. They were commonsensical, down-to-earth souls - who could be relied upon to give him honest (if perhaps occasionally uninspiring) advice. After unburdening himself of his concerns, Graham waited to hear what they might have to say. They were all sat, as they often were, occupying the whole of a large wooden dining table at their

favourite inn - The Seven Stars - at the centre of the town. Of course, they liked to believe the inn was named in honour of them (it wasn't). And their favourite pastime was sitting there, talking up their own qualities and achievements as they drank. Which was ironic because Graham was the one with the reputation of being a dreamer - and yet he was the one - in actuality - who had done the most extraordinary things.

The brothers listened to Graham's concerns and offered up their judgment.

'Don't get above yourself, young un' is what we reckon,' said Gwendolin Grimm - the oldest, blowing the foam off a tankard of ale. 'You've given it a good run - you've shown what you can do. But it's not a sustainable enterprise. There's no shame in that. Demand has outstripped supply. Sometimes that's how things are in business. So, cut your losses, love. And come back to the family firm.'

But that wasn't how Graham was feeling. The thought of the shop just giving up was too miserable to contemplate. They needed more space - but they also needed more stories, hundreds more stories - and how could their human visitors possibly generate that increased amount. There must be another solution to this conundrum. Weary and heavy of heart he decided to go for a long walk, if only to clear his head.

Graham hiked up to his favourite tramping ground on Hatherton Tops. And as he was walking and fretting, an old friend jumped on his shoulder. It was the chummy bogle who had first shown Graham the secret cave where the magical creatures stored all their riches - the unexpected event that had led to the start of Graham's business.

'Now then - what's up wi' thee - thou mopey-faced misery guts?' asked the bogle. Graham Grimm explained his predicament. 'Oh,' said the bogle, smiling in disbelief, 'you do fret a lot you humans - always a worrying and feeling frit. Come on. You need to straighten out your thinking.'

So the bogle hopped off Graham's shoulder and led him towards the waterfall that covered the secret cave - which looked particularly beautiful in the long shadows of the autumn afternoon.

'You've shown me this already,' said Graham, unable to snap out of his mopey mood. 'It's not going to change anything.'

'Nay,' said the bogle, 'we're not going in there. I'm taking thee up top to the top - to the top of the tops. We're going to visit that waterfall's source.'

'What do you mean 'it's source'?'

"Ignorant as well as mopey! Every waterfall starts as a stream, And every

stream has its source. Come on..."

After a good bit of climbing over craggy rocks with spiky gorse bushes scratching at him and damp bracken slapping him in the face, Graham made his way to the boggy ground at the top. There - about twenty metres away were the remains of an old building made of rocks and wattle - clearly once of very grand proportions. He could see it used to be beautiful and majestic. Somehow - because of where it was positioned, on the other side of a modest slope the structure hadn't been visible from the bottom of the moorland around the base of the waterfall.

"What's that?" Graham asked the bogle who was still sitting, somewhat impertinently on his shoulder - given that Graham had done all the legwork, clambering over boulders and squelching through the soggy ground to get here.

"Ah. That building's been there a long time," said the creature, mysteriously. "There's always been a special building on that spot. Before that one were put up - which was probably about three hundred year ago - there were another one before it. And doubtless there'll be more to come after it. You humans always put special buildings on special spots. And that's a special place. Come on - I'll show you."



They trudged across the mushy earth, over muddy clumps of grass until they were right in front of the old stone doorway. The door itself was long gone and there were bilberry bushes growing where the doorstep would have been.

“What’s so special about this spot - apart from it being soggier than wet cake and custard?” asked Graham, still irritated that the bogle was squatting on his shoulder and that his tiny boots were still dry - whereas Graham’s were damp as ducks’ feet.

“Don’t be so impatient - I’m showing you, aren’t I?” And the bogle jumped off Graham’s shoulder and pushed his way through the gorse bushes into what would have been the hall of the old building.

Inside (except it was outside because the building had lost its roof) within the boundaries of the old wall - there was something like a little wooden cupboard, which the bogle tripped his way towards. He used his little curly claws to prise open the door and reveal what lay within. “In here,” he said, “is the source.”

“The sauce? Like brown sauce?” asked Graham.

“Not the sauce, you fool. That’s what you put on your sausages. The

source. Where the stream begins. This here is a magic spring.”

“What’s magic about it?”

“It gives you ideas. And it never runs out. So you can rely it. Whenever you need an idea - all you need to do is stand in front of it and listen to it trickling. You do that - and the ideas will start to flow. I promise.” And even as the bogle was explaining this, a memory began to bubble up in Graham - of his old Grandma - Gwenore Grimm - and how she used to talk about a place, up on the hillside - when he sat her on a lap as a little one, resting his head on her soft and squishy bosom. She would say to him - “Lad, if you’re ever fretting about summat - just go up yonder - and have a wander. And have a wonder at the same time. And you might just get an idea or two.” He’d never quite understood what she was talking about - but now he did. And the bogle was saying the same thing.

“I’ll tell you what,” said the bogle, “I think I’ll leave you to yourself. Let it do its stuff.”

So Graham looked at the trickling stream of water, bubbling up from who-knows-where, encased in its strange little cupboard. He leaned forward, ran his fingers under the trickling water, which frothed up from the ground. And he waited. And waited. And waited. And eventually... nothing happened. Nothing

at all. No ideas. No solution as to what to do about the future of Grimm and Co. Zilch. Well that was a bit useless. More than useless. It had been a stupid waste of time. Irritated, Graham turned to complain to the bogle. But the bogle was gone.

Shaking his head in frustration, Graham turned away from the supposedly magical spring, kicking the wooden door of its enclosure shut. He left the remains of the old building surrounding it, and marched up the small incline, towards the rocks that led back down to Hatherton Tops.

The town was spread out below, including the street with the shop. Even from here Graham could make out the queue of magical creatures stretching out of the door. They were all so squashed up that he could see an eagle having to sit on top of a lion who was resting on a snake - until Graham realised it was actually just one creature - an Egyptian Sphinx. Though to be fair, it still looked a bit squashed up, stuffed into the alleyway (Egyptian Sphinxes are quite large, in the flesh).

'I'd better go back down,' Graham thought. And so, he trotted off, clambering down the hillside, back into town.

It was only when Graham was back at the shop that he remembered the

most important bit of old Grandma Gwenore's advice. "Sometimes, lad - the ideas don't come straight away. Sometimes they do - but sometimes they don't. And then the best thing is to go to sleep - but keep a bit of parchment and a quill next to the bed - because you might just wake up with an idea in your idea in your head. And if you do - bloody well make sure you write it down." She was a plain-speaking woman - but wise and fair - so nobody minded.

After his little excursion - and the cumulative advice of bogles and ancestors - Graham thought maybe he should do just as he remembered Gwenore saying. He would leave all his fretting and worrying and troubling and go to bed - with an item borrowed from the shop to help him sleep - a hot-water bottle shaped like a snowball, especially made for chilly Yetis from Nepal.

Graham woke up sharp at five in the morning, just before dawn, with a vision in his head. A vision of the spring, in its little wooden enclosure. But where the remains of the old building had been, there was now a newer one. It was huge and grand and magnificent and wondrous - a magical place like a huge castle. A very special building built on a place where there had been other special buildings before (and doubtless there would be more in the

future). The little spring, was bubbling away inside it. Somehow Graham knew that people would come from all around and stand in front of the spring. And the spring would never run out. Nor would the ideas. Ideas for stories. Ideas for songs. Ideas for jokes. Ideas for poems. And the magical creatures could get all the energy they wanted. There would be enough room for all of them and enough stories. They could spread out and listen and laugh and wonder as they soaked up the thing they loved, that only the humans could create. Stories.

Despite the early hour Graham sprang up, out of his bed, ran out of his cottage, all the way down the street to go and bang on Etheldred Palfreyman's door. "Come on you lazy mardy bum," Graham shouted as he knocked.

"What is it?" said his sceptical manager, befuddled by the earliness of the hour and the force of the entreaty, "what's going on?"

'We've got work to do,' said Graham, grinning broadly and handing Palfreyman a shovel.

Later that morning - as the two of them started digging what would be the foundations of the new building - making them as deep and as strong as they possibly could - Graham had another thought, about what his sister Gwendolin had said, about Graham not getting above himself. It was funny, because

actually, getting above himself was exactly what Graham had needed to do. 'You keep flying, Graham Grimm,' he said to himself as they dug. 'You keep flying...'

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### Append 3: Rotherham Demographics

Demographics: (Source – [Rotherham Data Hub](#)) from 2018/19:

Grimm & Co serves Yorkshire and Humberside but it's purpose for residing in the town of Rotherham is to prioritise the communities of this town, ensuring the charity is on the doorstep of those residing in the central areas of Rotherham as an accessible resource for schools and communities. As such the demographics of Rotherham are important if the charity is to strive to reflect these communities, champion and actively tackle socio-economic disadvantage in the communities.

Demographics of Rotherham:

Rotherham is one of four metropolitan boroughs in South Yorkshire and lies at the centre of the Sheffield City Region. The Borough is divided into 21 wards, covering a wide diversity of urban, suburban and rural areas.

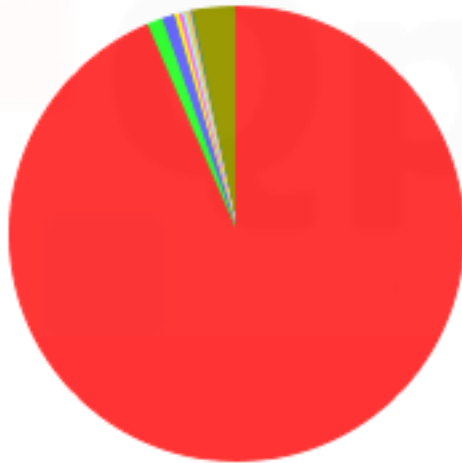
As of 2019, there are 265,400 residents of which 161,500 aged between 16 and 64 (working age). To gain further information on the demographics available the 2011 census shows the following:

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In the 2011 census the population of Rotherham was 257,280 and is made up of approximately 51% females and 49% males.

The average age of people in Rotherham is 40, while the median age is higher at 41.

93.5% of people living in Rotherham were born in England. Other top answers for country of birth were 1.1% Pakistan, 0.9% Scotland, 0.3% Wales, 0.3% Zimbabwe, 0.2% India, 0.2% Ireland, 0.1% Northern Ireland, 0.1% Iran, 0.1% South Africa.



1.	England	93.50%
2.	Pakistan	1.10%
3.	Scotland	0.90%
4.	Wales	0.30%
5.	Zimbabwe	0.30%
6.	India	0.20%
7.	Ireland	0.20%
8.	Northern Ireland	0.10%
9.	Iran	0.10%
10.	South Africa	0.10%
11.	Other	3.20%

96.6% of people living in Rotherham speak English. The other top languages spoken are 0.5% Urdu, 0.4% Panjabi, 0.4% Polish, 0.3% Slovak, 0.2% Arabic, 0.1% Pakistani Pahari, 0.1% Czech, 0.1% Lithuanian, 0.1% Persian/Farsi.



1.	English	96.60%
2.	Urdu	0.50%
3.	Panjabi	0.40%
4.	Polish	0.40%
5.	Slovak	0.30%
6.	Arabic	0.20%
7.	Pakistani Pahari	0.10%
8.	Czech	0.10%
9.	Lithuanian	0.10%
10.	Persian/Farsi	0.10%
11.	Other	1.20%

48.6% of people are married, 12.6% cohabit with a member of the opposite sex, 0.6% live with a partner of the same sex, 21.8% are single and have never married or been in a registered same sex partnership, 8.4% are separated or divorced. There are 13,458 widowed people living in Rotherham.

The top occupations listed by people in Rotherham are Skilled trades 13.1%, Professional 12.5%, Elementary 12.4%, Sales and customer service 11.0%, Administrative and secretarial 11.0%, Process, plant and machine operatives 10.6%, Caring, leisure and other service 10.4%, Associate professional and technical 9.9%, Elementary administration and service 9.7%, Managers, directors and senior officials 9.0%.

The Boston Castle ward is the central ward in which Grimm & Co's new centre is placed. The more localised stats for this central ward:

Boston Castle is a ward in Rotherham of Yorkshire and The Humber, England and includes areas of Upper Whiston, Parkgate, Ickles, Park Gate, Bradgate, Templeborough, Masbrough, Masbrough Common, Eastwood Vale, Broom, Thorn Hill, Holmes, Canklow, Henley Grove, Eastwood, East Dene, Eastwood Trading Estate and Moorgate.

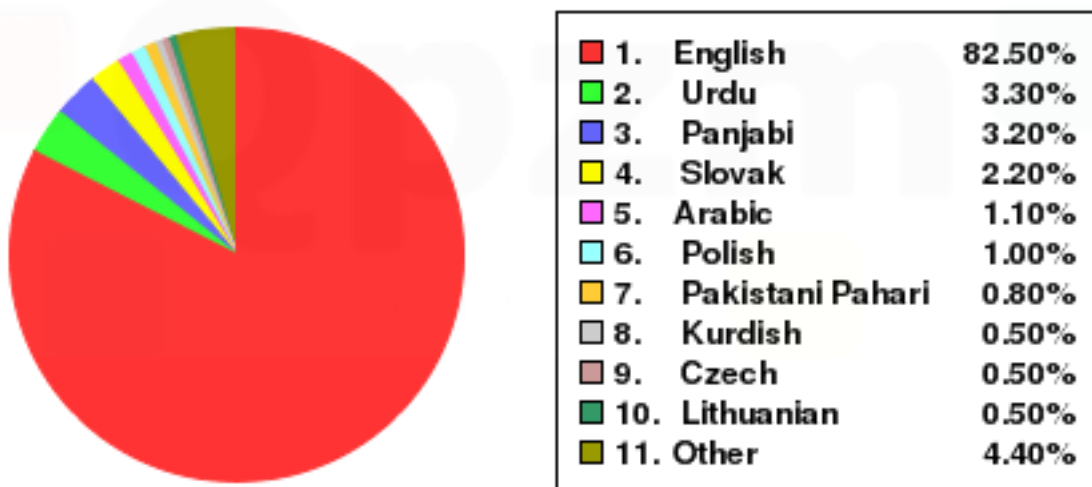
In the 2011 census the population of Boston Castle was 13,440 and is made up of approximately 50% females and 50% males.

The average age of people in Boston Castle is 38, while the median age is lower at 37.

77.2% of people living in Boston Castle were born in England. Other top answers for country of birth were 7.5% Pakistan, 1.4% India, 0.8% Scotland, 0.8% Zimbabwe, 0.5% Ireland, 0.4% Iran, 0.3% North Africa, 0.3% Wales, 0.3% China.



82.5% of people living in Boston Castle speak English. The other top languages spoken are 3.3% Urdu, 3.2% Panjabi, 2.2% Slovak, 1.1% Arabic, 1.0% Polish, 0.8% Pakistani Pahari, 0.5% Kurdish, 0.5% Czech, 0.5% Lithuanian.





43.5% of people are married, 10.8% cohabit with a member of the opposite sex, 0.8% live with a partner of the same sex, 25.9% are single and have never married or been in a registered same sex partnership, 9.6% are separated or divorced. There are 729 widowed people living in Boston Castle.

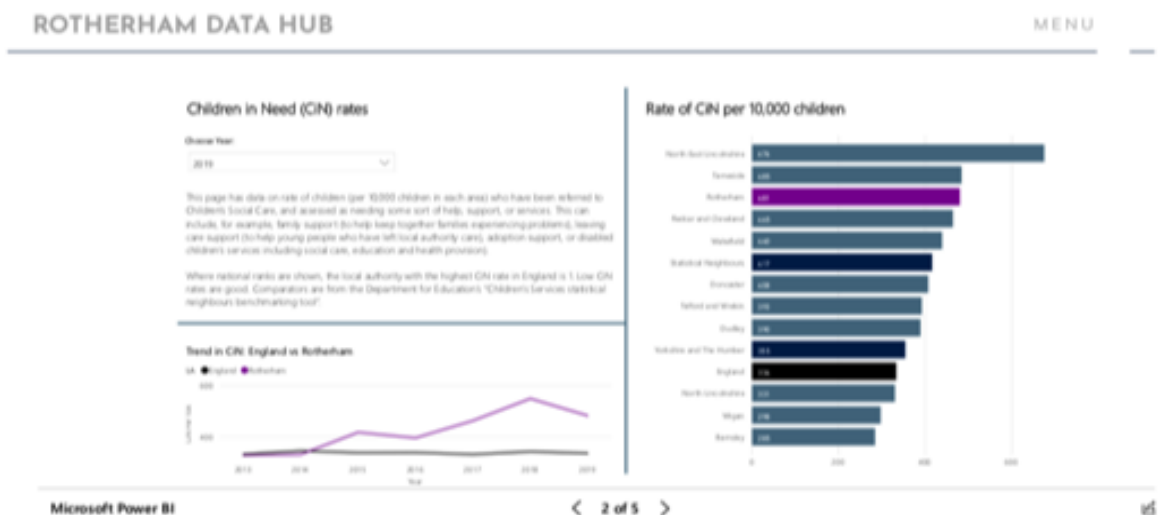
The top occupations listed by people in Boston Castle are Professional 17.3%, Elementary 12.9%, Process, plant and machine operatives 12.5%, Skilled trades 10.3%, Sales and customer service 9.8%, Elementary administration and service 9.6%, Managers, directors and senior officials 9.6%, Associate professional and technical 9.3%, Administrative and secretarial 9.1%, Caring, leisure and other service 9.0%.

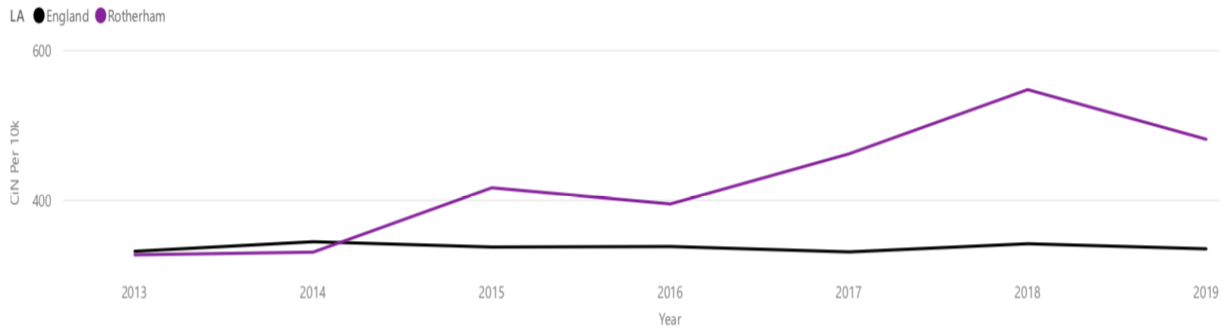
(Source – [Rotherham Data Hub](#)) from 2018/19:

There are 50,900 children, aged 0-15 in Rotherham and 26,100 young people aged 16-24. Whilst the majority get a good start in life, child poverty is highly polarised across the Borough and life chances can vary greatly. In the most deprived areas, 25% of the population are aged 0-15 but in the least deprived, the proportion is only 16%. Rotherham has a lower proportion of young people aged 18-24 than the national average due to people moving elsewhere to study or work.

Children in Need (CIN) Rate: 481  
 Child Protection (CP) Rate: 71  
 Looked after Children (LAC) Rate: 112  
 Early Help – Families: 1811  
 Early Help – Children: 4055

Benchmark graphs regarding children in need:





Year	England	Rotherham
2013	330.90	326.20
2014	343.70	329.80
2015	336.60	415.80
2016	337.30	394.20
2017	330.10	461.20
2018	341.00	547.00
2019	334.20	480.60

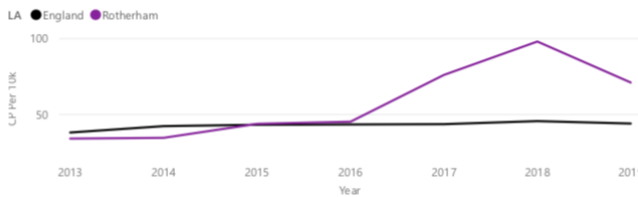
### Child Protection (CP) rates

Choose Year:

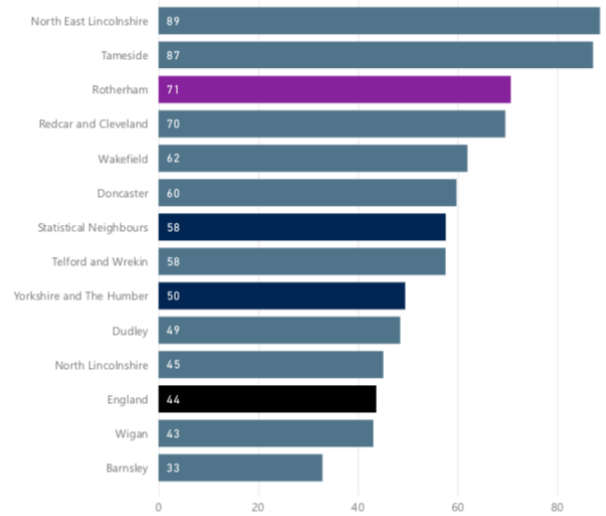
This page has data on rate of children (per 10,000 children in each area) who have been referred to Social Care, and are on a Child Protection (CP) Plan. Child protection is the process of protecting children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. A child protection plan is a plan drawn up by the local authority, setting out how the child can be kept safe, how things can be made better for the family, and what support they will need.

Where national ranks are shown, the local authority with the highest CP rate in England is 1. Low CP rates are good. Comparators are from the Department for Education's "Children's Services statistical neighbour benchmarking tool"

#### Trend in CP: England vs Rotherham



### Rate of CP per 10,000 children



## Looked After Children (LAC) rates

Choose Year:

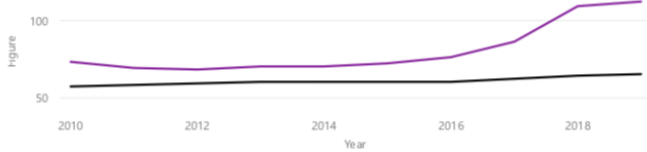
2019

This page has data on rate of children (per 10,000 children in each area) who are a Looked After Child (LAC). LAC is the highest level of concern for a child, and is sometimes known as a child being "in care". A LAC child might be living with foster parents, at home with their parents, in a residential setting like school or secure units. Parents might have voluntarily placed the children in care, or the local authority's children's services department may have intervened because a child was at significant risk or harm.

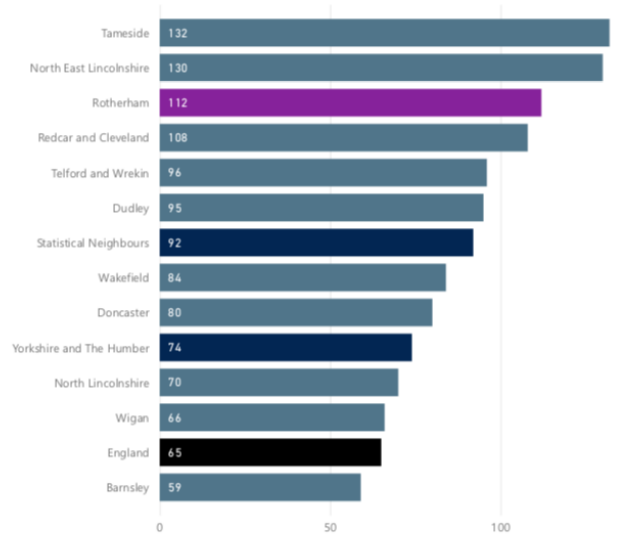
Where national ranks are shown, the local authority with the highest LAC rate in England is 1. Low LAC rates are good. Comparators are from the Department for Education's "Children's Services statistical neighbours benchmarking tool".

### Trend in LAC: England vs Rotherham

LA ● England ● Rotherham



## Rate of LAC per 10,000 children

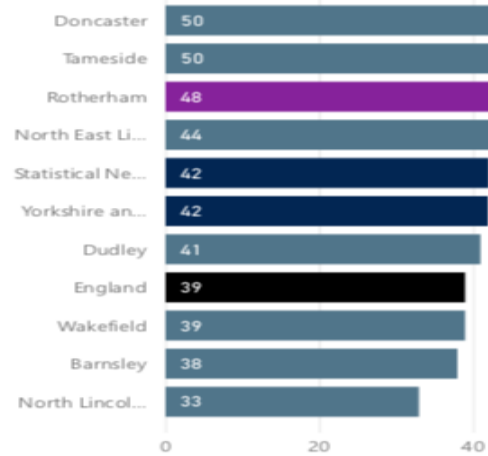


## Care Leavers - NEET

The NEET category is young people "not in education, employment or training". It covers care leavers in a variety of situations - such as being out of work or looking for a job, looking after children, on holiday or traveling, sick or disabled, or doing voluntary work.

The care leavers group is all 19-21-years olds who were looked after for a total of 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including at least some time after their 16th birthday. Where national ranks are shown, the local authority with the lowest NEET percentage in England is 1. A low percentage of NEET is good. Comparators are from the Department for Education's "Children's Services statistical neighbours benchmarking tool".

2019



### Trend in Care Leavers NEET: England vs Rotherham (%)

LA ● England ● Rotherham



## Population Profile (Source Rotherham NHS):

Rotherham Population Profile Rotherham is one of four metropolitan districts which together make up South Yorkshire. The population of the area covered by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough was recorded at 257,280 in the 2011 Census. The comments below reflect statistical

trends detailed in the 2015 Equality and Diversity report, next available Census data from the Office for National Statistics will be published in 2021.

#### Population trends

The population of Rotherham has increased by 3.7% (9,100) since the 2001 census and has steadily risen year on year. This represents a reversal on the trend from 1991-2001, when the population fell by 2.7%.

#### Age profile

Rotherham's young population (under 15) has fallen in number by 2800 (5.8%) since the 2001 census, although there has been a higher birth rate which has reflected in an increase in the population under school age. The population aged 60 and over was recorded at 61,500 in the 2011 Census, an increase of 19% from the previous census in 2001. Nationally the increase in this age group in the same period is 16% - Rotherham's population profile is becoming more elderly at a faster rate than the national average.

#### Gender profile

According to the 2011 Census, the population of Rotherham comprises 131,033 females (50.9%) and 126,247 males (49.1%) which mirrors the national average and has been fairly stable in recent years.

#### Gender and age profile

In most age brackets the mix between males and females is relatively even, although males do slightly outnumber females in the younger age brackets, and females more in the older ones. The only significant difference is in the age ranges exceeding 75, which is reflective of the greater life expectancy of women.

#### Ethnicity profile

The population of Rotherham is 91.9% White British, significantly higher in comparison to the figure across England which is 79.8%. The largest ethnic minority group is of Pakistani origin, 7609 or 3% of the population.

Compared with the England average, Rotherham has lower life expectancy and higher mortality from circulatory disease and cancer.

Within Rotherham, there is a slope of inequality between the most and least deprived parts of the borough. The age and gender distribution of Rotherham's population is broadly similar to the national profile, although Rotherham has a slightly lower proportion of young adults (20-34), particularly young men of this age, a pattern which suggests outward migration to study and find work.

In 2016, 15.5% of births were to mothers aged 35+ which has increased from 10.7% in 2010, reflecting a trend for women to have children later in life.

In 2016, 14.1% of births in Rotherham were to mothers born abroad, half the English average of 29%. Of Rotherham mothers born outside the UK, 62% were born elsewhere in Europe and 28% were born in Asia.

Rotherham's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is relatively small but has been growing and becoming increasingly diverse.

The ethnically diverse population more than doubled between 2001 and 2011, increasing from 10,080 to 20,842. 8.1% of the population belonged to ethnic groups other than White British in 2011 (6.4% were from non-white groups), very much below the English average of 20.2%. It follows that 91.9% of Rotherham residents were White British.

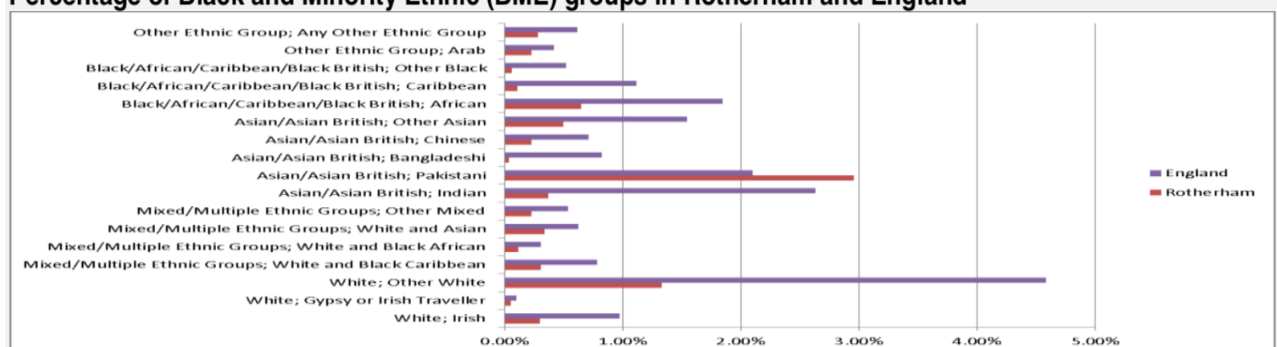
The majority of Rotherham’s BME residents in 2011 were born abroad (55%) and were more likely to speak singular language skills of their origin from birth with no English language skills which differs from those born in the UK. 19% of those born outside the UK cannot communicate in English.

Of those born outside the UK, 30% arrived as children aged 0-15 and 57% arrived as young adults aged 16-34.

Ethnic groups where more than two thirds were born outside the UK in 2011 were “Other White” (63% born in Eastern Europe), Black African (73% born in Africa), Arab (54% born in the Middle East) and “Other” ethnic groups. 81% of people with Mixed or Multiple Heritage were born in the UK. 61% of Rotherham’s Pakistani community were born in the UK whilst 36% were born in South Asia (i.e. Pakistan or Kashmir).

The fact that Rotherham’s BME population more than doubled between 2001 and 2011 shows a clear increasing trend which could reasonably predict to have continued since 2011. Immigration and natural increase means that Rotherham’s Black and Minority Ethnic population has grown steadily in recent years. The white minority population (almost all European) was 2,368 in 2001, rising by 82% to 4,320 in 2011, mainly as a result of immigration from Eastern Europe. Most minority ethnic groups have young populations, including Pakistani/Kashmiri (33% under 16), Black African (31% under 16) and Eastern European (24% under 16). The mixed or multiple heritage population is growing rapidly as a result of mixed marriages or relationships, 50% are aged under 16. The Irish community is by far the oldest ethnic group with 42% aged 65+.

**Percentage of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in Rotherham and England**



According to data from the 2011 Census, almost 95% of Rotherham’s population were born in the UK, significantly higher than the national average of just over 86%, and just below 2% of Rotherham households have no residents that speak English as their main language.

### Religion profile

The overwhelming majority of the population of Rotherham follow the religion of Christianity (66.5%), no religion (22.5%) or chose not to state their religion (6.6%) in the 2011 Census. The largest minority religious group in Rotherham stated they followed the religion of Islam (3.7%), with other religions comprising just under 0.7% of the population.

### Sexual orientation profile

There are no definitive statistics on the number of people in Rotherham who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) and this information is not currently collected via the Census. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) conducted a national experimental survey in 2011 and estimate that 94% of adults in the UK define themselves as Heterosexual/Straight, 1% as Lesbian/Gay and 0.5% as Bisexual. 0.4% defined themselves as other and 4.3% declined to provide a response.

#### Disability profile

The 2001 Census revealed that 55,610 people in Rotherham (22.4 per cent of the population compared to 18.2% nationally) considered themselves to have a long term limiting illness or impairment that limits their daily activities or the work they can do, so the figure has slightly reduced to 22.0%.

The Age & Gender Standardised Morbidity Ratio demonstrates that the rate of disability is much higher in Rotherham than nationally where the National rate is expressed as 100, the Rotherham rate as 126, showing a rate approximately 26 per cent above the national average.

Append 4: Wordle demonstrating teacher's perceptions of barriers

