Editorial for Special Issue
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When we crafted the call for papers in response to Professor Keri Facer's article *Storytelling in Troubled Times* (Facer, 2019), our priority was to explore the role of literacy educators in helping children make sense of the turbulent, anxious and changing times in which we live. Our focus was on the ecological crises we face, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, the rise in hate crime (Devine, 2021) and global movements such as Black Lives Matter. We had not imagined or anticipated the particular ways in which teaching and parenting in a pandemic would surface the sustained growth in inequalities (Dorling, 2019) which impact disproportionately on the poorest in society.

Children's lives are rich in stories which are available in ever more complex media forms and the stories they encounter become sources for their own storytelling (Parry and Taylor, 2018; Taylor et al., 2021). These multimodal and multilingual narratives shape their orientation to literacy (Parry, 2013; Little, 2021) and through stories, children make sense of their own experiences and the world. New digital platforms have potential to open new spaces for children to create and share their multimodal, multilingual stories and develop new digital literacy practices. We are wary, however, of the rhetoric surrounding storytelling as emancipatory and of terms such as 'giving voice' (McKay & Bradley, 2016) which place the researcher or teacher in a problematically colonialist position.

The response to this call has resulted in a productive dialogue about these issues which you will find reflected in different ways in each of the papers. We are delighted to present papers here which share new pedagogical approaches for our times which combine the forms of poetry, picture books, and drama with digital media such as augmented and alternate reality, working in both online and offline spaces . Each paper generously shares moments of storytelling, foregrounding pedagogy, methodology or new theoretical lenses to better understand the teachers or children's experiences. In each paper you will also find critical reflections which consider the troubled times we inhabit, providing much needed moments of both critique and optimism for our field. We end the special edition with an interview with Keri Facer which enables us to confront issues raised by the call and our varied responses more directly, outside the context of the traditional academic paper and, for this, we thank the editors of Literacy.

The first paper by Jenny Byman, Kirstiina Kumplainen, Chin-Chin Wong and Jenny Renlund presents a study of children's emotional interactions with and stories about nature, through digital storying, using an augmented reality storytelling app. They offer insights into new ways of theorising interactions between human and non-human actors, as well as the ways that primary children in a Finnish are using digital tools to tell stories about their world, their environment and their imagined futures.

The development of an intercultural, multimodal digital storytelling tool which includes physical, manipulative resources is described and analysed by Cristina Sylla, Maite Gil and Iris Pereira, in a collaboration between researchers in Portugal, Denmark and Brazil and Cape Verde. They explore the opportunities provided by such tools to enable children to learn about their world and to create and share their own stories, and detail the complexities involved in using collaborative, participatory methods in the design of resources.

Angela Colvert presents the findings from a two-year research project in Lambeth, London which set out to investigate how engaging teachers in the co-design of an Alternate Reality Game might develop their understanding of digital literacies (their own and those of the children in their classes). Colvert foregrounds the value of noticing literacy processes as they emerge 'in the moment', suggesting these have significant implications for educators, policy makers and industry.

Exploring the power of storying as a shared, collaborative practice that connects children and artist educators in Leeds, UK, is the focus of Lisa Stephenson's and Alastair Daniel's paper. Their contribution to this special issue articulates the process of weaving fragmentary narratives, online and offline, into open-ended, collective stories, and explores the power of the 'meanwhile' as an affective space during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, spoken word poetry as a way to explore and perform counternarratives is the focus for Jen Scott Curwood and Katelyn Jones, as they reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities of 'shifting online' during the COVID19 pandemic. They consider the affordances of poetry for young people to engage in and with storytelling, in addition to activism. Their paper foregrounds the experiences of two young women, whose collaborative poem - performed at the annual poetry slam in Sydney, Australia in 2018 - explored racial stereotypes.

Helen Hanna invites us to share in experiences of silence(s) and absence in a research project with primary school learners in South Africa, which used Shaun Tan's picturebook 'The Arrival' as a tool for exploring experiences of migration and dislocation. Her reflections on this experience and the book itself foreground what is often considered unsayable in research, and she suggests that silence and absence need to be foregrounded in critical engagement with voice in research with children and young people.

Working in Canada, Jonathan Ferreira and Sam Panangamu highlight the important links between language and identity, and how the foregrounding of constructive play can help children from migration and refugee backgrounds on their language learning journeys, enabling them to link their experiences to the real and imagined communities that are part of their world.

In focusing on what is troubling in society, we are not offering a critique of the status quo or even a political rallying cry. In the work of the recent Digital Literacies Task Group, now published as an 'Ideas in Practice' book for UKLA Dowdall and Burnett, et al., (2021) highlight the ways in which current assessment frameworks and high stakes accountability continue to

'impact literacy and teaching practices in reductive ways.' They suggest a relatively small and simple act of planning for children to read and create texts in both paper-based and digital forms. Each of the papers presented here illustrate the richness and the challenges of doing so. In the most extraordinary times, literacy educators and researchers did find ways to respond to the worst challenges of the 21st Century, everyday, in their work with children and young people. These acts of 'carrying on', even in the face of a pandemic culture of grief and loss, are acts of epistemic hope; a concept which captured our tired imaginations when we interviewed Keri at the end of the Spring semester in 2021. We close therefore, with this interview which we hope will enable you to share our perspective that acts of optimism are key to bringing about radical change, however incremental and small those acts initially are.

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