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Linda Laidlaw, Suzanna Wong and Joanne O'Mara

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Reimagining Literacy: Being Literate in the Pandemic Era

LINDA LAIDLAW
University of Alberta

SUZANNA WONG
University of Alberta

JOANNE O'MARA
Deakin University

Children today must navigate an ever-expanding array of mobile electronic devices and digital technologies that require literacy skills of a different order than in past eras. School systems and educators everywhere have been racing to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change and to respond to these changing learning needs which disrupt existing pedagogical practices. In early 2020, education systems across the globe experienced further disruptions, with the sudden arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many systems shifting to online remote teaching and technologies taking a more predominant classroom focus.

Literacy now, for children and society, involves a complex intersection of online and offline practices, and a requirement to adapt quickly to fluid and constantly emerging practices and technologies, as well as changing relationships with literacy and texts. Children's digital lives, in many instances, have also been amplified due to various COVID-19 lockdown or restriction measures. Given such sweeping literacy changes, children, and indeed all global citizens, have urgently needed to acquire knowledge and proficiencies to navigate this complex digital world (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2013). A general consensus that classrooms need to shift the models upon which they are predominantly structured and respond to current conditions has emerged across the globe.

However, educators often continue to rely on 20th century pedagogical models to guide classroom practices for literacy instruction, and they may also be impacted by bureaucratic push-down on narrow conceptions of literacy, based on limited standards driving literacy curricula across nations. Technology provision continues to be an ongoing issue, particularly for students living in the margins. Ultimately, a key question is how best to support children to develop the literacy skills they will need to fully participate in society and the world, in and out of pandemic circumstances. As such, this gap must be addressed within a context where the disruptions of the digital realm will be ongoing and children will need to continue to develop 21st century skills, including those that invite response to changing literacies and changing global circumstances that will most certainly be present in the future.

This Special Issue aims to respond to this need for updating pedagogical frames, by presenting new research, innovative models, and exploring some alternatives for reimagining literacy education. We bring together a collection of articles shared by international scholars in literacy education internationally, including research from

Canada, the US, Australia, and the UK. This issue brings together insights across diverse contexts for literacy learning, including makerspace applications, game production, dramatic arts, as well as critical analyses of current literacy contexts, with the aim of reimagining literacy education during and beyond the pandemic era.

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Author Biographies

Linda Laidlaw is a Professor working in the area of early literacy in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Alberta. Formerly a classroom teacher, her research focuses on digital and mobile technologies in primary education, diversity, and the relationships between children's digital practices at home and their experiences at school. Her latest projects, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, working with teachers, parents and children, investigates new pedagogical frames and strategies for literacy education in a changing world. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2017-4302

Suzanna So Har Wong is a former early childhood educator now working as an Adjunct Professor and Assistant Lecturer in Language and Literacy Education, at the University of Alberta. Her research focuses on young children's literacy practices at home and in school. Her current research project, *A longitudinal study of children's multiliteracy practices in 'out-of-school' settings* focuses on children's literacy engagements in- and out-of-school environments and examines children's perspectives on these literacy practices. ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6473-9603

Joanne O'Mara is an Associate Professor of Language and Literature Education and Chair of English teaching method at Deakin University. An experienced secondary English and Drama teacher, she has continued to work with young people and schools through her university research. She particularly values the opportunity to work with students to develop their confidence and self-belief. She considers herself extremely lucky to have the opportunity to work with wonderful colleagues on a series of projects that are valuable. This research includes reading for pleasure, literacies and new textual practices; digital play and games; literacy pedagogies and gratitude and secondary English and drama pedagogy.