

Beyond Readiness: Rethinking Early Literacy Through Children's Meaning-Making and Agency

This lightning talk explores how recognising children's everyday meaning-making can strengthen early literacy development beyond traditional readiness models. While early literacy is often framed through alphabet knowledge and early writing skills, practice reflections from an early learning setting in Western Australia suggest that children demonstrate rich literacy understanding long before conventional print emerges.

A simple moment reshaped this thinking: after observing an adult create a grocery list, a five-year-old independently constructed her own list using drawings to represent items. Although she was not yet writing words, she clearly understood the purpose and communicative function of text. Experiences like this prompted a pedagogical shift toward intentionally extending children's storytelling, symbolic drawing, dramatic play and functional writing opportunities.

Aligned with the conference theme Empowering Voices, this session argues that when educators recognise and extend children's intellectual agency, they strengthen the foundations for later reading and writing. Participants will gain practical strategies to notice, document and intentionally build from children's oral language, narrative thinking and multimodal expression in ways that foster confident, capable literacy learners.