

International Perspectives on
Early Childhood Education and Development 17

Claire J. McLachlan
Alison W. Arrow *Editors*

Literacy in the Early Years

Reflections on International Research
and Practice

 Springer

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 17

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Early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment. Yet what has become visible within the profession, is, essentially a Western view of childhood, preschool education and school education. It is timely that a series of books be published which present a broader view of early childhood education. This series seeks to provide an international perspective on early childhood education. In particular, the books published in this series will:

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Editors

Literacy in the Early Years

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and Practice

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Editors

Claire J. McLachlan
University of Waikato
Hamilton, Waikato, New Zealand

Alison W. Arrow
Massey University
Palmerston North, New Zealand

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Preface

Research suggests that children begin to develop understandings of literacy from birth, and emerging curriculum policy in many countries states that children's language and literacy learning during early childhood lays the foundation to later success in compulsory schooling. In some cases, these emergent literacy policies have been followed by local or national investment in particular approaches to supporting children to become literate, with mixed success. However, many approaches to teaching literacy in the early childhood curriculum have been based on rhetoric, ideology, theorizing, or limited research findings, rather than on recent robust evidential research.

Early research on literacy acquisition in children prior to school entry was termed "emergent literacy," building on the research with children learning to read on starting school and the term coined by Dame Marie Clay. Although most of the researchers in this volume identify with the notion of being researchers of emergent or early literacy, the term "early multi-literacies" has been used by the editors to encapsulate the breadth and scope of the studies of early literacy reported in this volume. It also captures the new foci of research in this field since its inception in the late 1970s. The international team of researchers represented in this book all share a common interest in how young children develop a range of literacy knowledge and skills, and many of the research studies also examine the role of teachers, parents, and other children in children's literacy acquisition. Many of the researchers have drawn on sociocultural theories to explain the multifaceted nature of children's literacy learning through oral, visual, aural, digital, and multimodal means, situated within a range of social, cultural, and educational contexts.

This edited collection provides an up-to-date and in-depth exploration of different aspects of contemporary early childhood literacy research, the types of research methodologies being used, and the implications for educational practice. The scope of the book ranges from a focus on children, their perceptions of literacy learning, and the interrelationships with those around them to the challenges that cultural and linguistic diversity pose in literacy learning in early childhood classrooms. It also explores specific aspects of literacy learning, such as writing and morphological

awareness, new issues related to the use of digital technologies in literacy learning, and issues related to the professional learning of teachers.

Each chapter details how the research was done and any issues that researchers encountered in collecting data with very young children, as well as detailing what the research findings mean for educational practice. The ways in which each study contributes to the growing body of research on early multi-literacies are clearly outlined by the authors. The book contains tables, figures, and images, as well as detailed explanations of research methods and their limitations, so the studies can be replicated or expanded upon. Key features for promoting effective literacy practice in early childhood settings are proposed by the authors. This book is an essential read for postgraduate students, researchers, and teachers who are interested in exploring the complexities and challenges of researching, supporting, or planning curriculum for literacy acquisition in the youngest children.

We hope that you enjoy this collection, which provides insights into the literacy worlds of children in diverse countries, as much as we have enjoyed working with all the authors to bring this collection to fruition. We hope that the ideas presented in this collection will inspire another generation of researchers of early multi-literacies.

Hamilton, New Zealand
Palmerston North, New Zealand

Claire J. McLachlan
Alison W. Arrow

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Second, we would like to thank the contributors, who responded so enthusiastically to our message asking for contributions to this volume. It has been a pleasure to work with a group of people who share our interest in early literacy, although their research stems from many different perspectives. All authors have been a delight to work with as we have gone through the reviewing and editing processes that such a volume requires. We have greatly appreciated their timeliness and the thoughtfulness with which each has written and revised their respective chapters.

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Finally, we want to thank our families for their love, support, and understanding. Claire would especially like to thank her husband, Simon, for his tolerance as yet another book project got completed in weekends when there was gardening to be done. Claire would also like to dedicate this book to her grandchildren, whose language and literacy development is a constant source of delight and interest. Alison would like to thank her husband, Nick, for his patience as weekends were whittled away. Alison would like to dedicate the book to her children, Paige and Emma, who inspire her work every day.

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Contributors

Shimrit Abiri School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Gunhild Tomter Alstad Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Elverum, Norway

Ann Anderson Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Jim Anderson Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Dorit Aram School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Alison W. Arrow Institute of Education, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Anna Bolt Glyncollen Primary School, Heol Dolfain, Morriston, Swansea, UK

Barbara D. DeBaryshe Center on the Family, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, HI, USA

Lili Elad-Orbach School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Kailey Pearl Ennis Department of Psychology, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada

Mary Ann Evans Department of Psychology, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada

Brian Finch Institute of Education, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Nicola Friedrich Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Kathleen Tran Gauci Department of Educational Psychology, Honolulu, HI, USA

Pauline Harris School of Education, University of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia

Kauanoë Kamanā Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, Hilo, HI, USA

Lise Iversen Kulbrandstad Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Elverum, Norway

Sue Lyle Swansea School of Education, University of Trinity St. David’s, Swansea, UK

George Manolitsis Department of Preschool Education, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece

Claire J. McLachlan Te Hononga, School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Karen McLean Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia

Laura Teichert Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

William H. Wilson Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, Hilo, HI, USA

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Chapter 1

Conceptualising Literacy in the Early Childhood Setting

Claire J. McLachlan and Alison W. Arrow

Abstract This chapter will provide a brief introduction to literacy research with children in the early years (birth to 8 years) and will identify some of the pressing issues and concerns in research on early literacy. The theoretical framework which underpins many of the studies is explored, identifying that much research into early literacy has employed socio-pyscho-linguistic, social practice and cultural historical explanations of how children learn. The unifying theme of early multi literacies is explored. An overview of the chapters in the book is provided, along with comment on how each chapter contributes to the growing body of early childhood literacy research.

The Emergence of the Study of Literacy in Early Childhood

It is with enormous pleasure that we present this collection of research on the topic of literacy in the early years. That a call for expressions of interest resulted in such an interesting and important collection of research is testimony to how much this field of literacy research has developed in the last 20 odd years and the enthusiasm that researchers have for the topic.

In New Zealand, where we, the editors of this volume, are based and conduct our research, the interest in early literacy was led by Dame Marie Clay (1991), who pointed out that the timing of beginning formal instruction in reading and writing is culturally defined. She argued that the beginning of formal schooling implies a social belief – that the child is now “ready” for formal instruction in general and literacy in particular. Clay argued that children move from individual learning to

C.J. McLachlan (✉)

Te Hononga, School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
e-mail: c.mclachlan@waikato.ac.nz

A.W. Arrow

Institute of Education, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North 4410, New Zealand
e-mail: a.w.arrow@massey.ac.nz

collective learning on school entry and that some children make this transition readily, while others show the first signs of a trajectory of reading failure within their first year of school. Prior to Clay's research, the focus of literacy research over the previous 100 or more years had been on the notion that literacy is acquired in the school environment and much research had focussed, and continues to focus, on identifying, testing and finding strategies to help children toward the goal of full literacy at primary/elementary school.

The body of research reported in this volume arguably has its origins in the study of "emergent literacy", a coin termed by Clay (1966) to describe the beginnings of reading and writing, which develops in homes and early childhood environments and often in the absence of deliberate tuition. The study of how this early literacy develops and is acquired emerged in part to explain why some children arrive at school better prepared to learn to read and write than others. Clay's own research was with school age children in New Zealand, but her research with new entrants led her to the conclusion that many children entered primary school with a functional understanding of literacy, which she termed 'concepts about print'. Clay's early research showed that children who couldn't read in the full sense of the word showed sensitivity to letter and word forms, appropriate directional movements, self-correction and synchronised matching of spoken word units with written word units. As Clay (1982, p. 22) concluded, "There is nothing in this research that suggests that contact with printed language forms should be withheld from any 5 year old on the grounds that he is immature".

Research suggests that children begin to develop understandings of literacy from birth and emerging curriculum policy in many countries states that children's language and literacy learning in early childhood is foundational to later success in compulsory schooling (McLachlan & Arrow, 2011). However, many approaches to teaching literacy in the early childhood curriculum have been based on rhetoric, ideology, selective theorising or limited research findings, rather than on recent robust evidential research. This edited collection provides an up to date and in-depth exploration of different aspects of contemporary early childhood literacy research and the implications for educational practice. It also illustrates an increasing trend in literacy research with young children, which is to examine the sometimes complex interplay between children's homes and early childhood settings and their increasing engagement with a wide range of literacy tools, including digital technologies. This volume presents a wide range of research, using different writing styles and research methodologies, all of which examines what could be considered to be early multiliteracies, rather than simply emergent literacy. A brief synopsis of the history of this field of research is discussed in the next section.

Literacy as a Complex Socio-Psycho-Linguistic Activity

Pioneers in this new field of research, Teale and Sulzby (1989), described emergent literacy as the beginning of literacy development, and not simply as a cognitive skill to be learned. They defined it as a complex socio-psycho-linguistic activity,

meaning that the social and contextual aspects of literacy are integral to children's development. Similarly, other pioneers, Strickland and Cullinan (1990) argued that children come to formal literacy learning armed with a number of literacy skills:

The term emergent underscores the fact that young children are in a developmental process: there is no single point where literacy begins. Children's uses, motives and functions associated with reading and writing, and their psycholinguistic processes are to a surprising degree similar to those of adults and older children (1990, p. 427).

Using such a definition of literacy acquisition means that teachers in junior classrooms are faced with children at varying points in their developing literacy. In order to meet children's learning needs, teachers need to be skilled in observing and identifying children's literacy behaviours and planning how to best support children's learning. This view of literacy acquisition is potentially confronting to teachers who want all children to have the same level of development and to teach to a lock step reading programme, or conversely to teachers who think children learn little about language and literacy in the home environment and will learn all they need to know in the classroom. The actual challenge of accepting a definition of emergent literacy is recognising that not all children have equal opportunities for literacy experiences prior to school entry and that some may immediately "fail" within the school system, unless teachers are able to differentiate instruction to meet children's learning needs in both early childhood and school settings. Within most of the chapters in this volume, the issues associated with social justice and rights for equity of literacy opportunity are evident.

The work of Stanovich (1986) on the "Matthew effects" of reading achievement was equally influential in the early phase of literacy research with young children. Merton (1968) originally used "Matthew effects" in terms of the consequences of early educational achievement, from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (XXV:29, cited in Stanovich, 1986, p. 381). Stanovich argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between good vocabulary knowledge, which facilitates reading comprehension, and the act of reading itself, which facilitates vocabulary acquisition. Stanovich proposed a cumulative advantage or "rich get richer" phenomenon embedded in reading progress in vocabulary growth and skill knowledge which results from reading volume. Stanovich's research showed that children who have good vocabularies and read well will read more, learn more words and read better. Research showed that the converse was also true: children who have smaller vocabularies, read slowly and without enjoyment, have a slower development of vocabulary, which further inhibits reading ability (Walberg & Tsai, 1983). Stanovich further argues that the "Matthew effects" spill over into all other areas of learning, creating a "poor get poorer" phenomenon, so that failure in reading leads to failure in other areas which were previously progressing normally. Stanovich argued that the gap widened immeasurably for the child who succeeds or fails in beginning reading instruction.

The body of literacy research concerning young children that began to emerge was concerned with examining what was happening in children's early childhood

contexts that created such differences in their ability to learn to read and write on school entry. Teale and Sulzby (1986) in their influential text *“Emergent literacy: Writing and reading”*, argued that few parents set about actively teaching their preschoolers, but something in their daily interactions had shown beneficial effects for later literacy acquisition. As they commented, “children use legitimate reading and writing behaviours in the informal settings of home and community” (1986, p. xviii). Yetta Goodman’s (1986) work on the “five roots of literacy” confirmed this. She found that children developed print knowledge and awareness in situational contexts, such as reading environmental print, and through connected discourse such as learning how to hold and orient books and demonstrate knowledge of terms, such as ‘turn the page’. She also found children know the difference between reading and writing and that by the age of 3, 50% of children are making letter like forms. The fourth root of literacy was the ability to use oral language to talk about written language and finally they display metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language, showing ability to talk about reading and writing when written language is not in view. Goodman argued that all children receive an introduction to literacy in their home environments, but the degree of experiences makes a difference to children’s preparedness for formal literacy learning.

Much of the research in this field to date has had the socio-psycho-linguistic focus identified by Teale and Sulzby – it has examined how children develop the cognitive and linguistic capabilities required for reading and writing within their homes and communities. Early literacy or emergent literacy can be defined as the period between early childhood and formal schooling when children gain their foundational understandings of what literacy is and what it means for them as learners. The term is used to:

...denote the idea that the acquisition of literacy is conceptualised as a developmental continuum, with its origins early in the life of a child, rather than an all or none phenomenon that begins when children start school. This conceptualisation departs from other perspectives in reading acquisition in suggesting there is no clear demarcation between reading and pre-reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 848).

Emergent literacy means that children develop reading, writing and oral language concurrently and interdependently as a result of children’s exposure to social contexts in which literacy is a component and in the absence of formal instruction (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Whitehurst and Lonigan, in their seminal paper on emergent literacy, further argued that children develop literacy as a result of what they call “inside” and “outside” processes, explaining the complex interplay between a child’s maturing brain and the social context in which they learn about the purposes and functions of literacy.

More recently, Teale et al. (2009) have argued that the field of early literacy in particular has burgeoned since the early eighties, as a result of reconceptualisation about how much children understand about language and literacy through experiences without formal instruction. They argue that studies have showed how much children’s understandings are shaped by the social processes of the home (e.g. Heath, 1983), and how they become aware of print (Burke, Harste, & Woodward, 1984), learn through interaction with adults in read aloud sessions (Teale, 1984),

begin to use invented spelling strategies as a logical and developmental solution to the language puzzle of learning about written words (Read, 1975) and show meta-linguistic awareness of language, words and print in English and other languages (e.g. Ferreiro, 1986; Yaden & Templeton, 1986). Teale et al. consider that this raft of research through the eighties legitimised *emergent literacy*, the term coined by Marie Clay's (1966), as a significant and important field of research and one that underpinned understandings of how to help children gain the fundamental understandings of language required for literacy acquisition.

Since this early research, there has been considerable research effort examining the various socio-psycho-linguistic factors influencing children's early literacy development (Neuman & Dickinson, 2011). This body of research makes clear that children will not develop literacy without involvement in rich literacy environments and without support and active mediation from knowledgeable adults and sometimes peers, who understand how to sensitively support children's emerging understandings. Many of the chapters in this volume have socio-psycho-linguistic factors at the heart of the research carried out; a focus on how the cognitive skills required for literacy develop with formal and informal mediation.

A Social Practice View of Literacy

The views of literacy expressed in this volume also encapsulate the "social practice" focus of early literacy research, which focuses on how children participate in literacy as part of their social lives. In this view early literacy is seen as a key dimension of community regeneration and a part of the wider lifelong learning agenda, associated with learning social languages and identities. This view of literacy sees children learning a set of complex literacy capabilities rather than a simple set of basic skills. Social practice perspectives focus on local literacies and how literacy practices are affected by settings and groups interacting around print. In this world view, literacy cannot be separated from the social, cultural and historical context in which it is acquired and many of the chapters in this book refer to the contextual factors shaping children's literacy acquisition. Jalongo, Fennimore, and Stamp (2004, p. 62) cite the writings of Bakhtin (1981) about literacy, and argue that literacy is influenced by context, is part of the construction of self, and affects participation in communities. They cite the following aspects of literacy as a social practice:

- *Literacy is deeply influenced by context.* Each person and each use of literacy is situated in a world that is interactional, has certain ideologies and that change occurs as the context changes.
- *Literacy is part of the construction of self.* Bakhtin argued that our beliefs about self are constructed through interaction with people and texts. As he states, "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropri-

ates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (1981, pp. 293–294).

- *Literacy affects participation in communities.* As children engage with a multitude of texts (broadly defined to include images, symbols and signs) and build dialogic relationships with others either face to face or ‘virtually’ via social media they learn how to participate in different literacy communities. In this way, learners identify who has power, who speaks and who listens, who writes and reads, who leads and follows and whose story gets told.

Gee (2004) states that people adopt different ‘ways with printed words’ within different purposes, functions and contexts. In these practices, humans are always meaning producers, not just meaning consumers. As Gee proposes, literacy is always a social and cultural practice, which is integrally linked into ways of talking, thinking, believing, knowing, acting, interacting, valuing and feeling. He considers that it is impossible to just look at the “print bits” and ignore the rest; in this way all a child’s interactions with literacy tools are meaningful literacy acts, which are rooted in literacy identities adopted in relation to cultural and social context. Kalantsiz and Cope (2012) similarly argue that the term multiliteracies should be used to express the shifts occurring the ways that people make meaning. Their definition of multiliteracies has two foci: one on *social diversity* or the variability in conventions of meaning in cultural, social or domain-specific situations; the second on *multimodality* or the ways in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural and other patterns of meaning. The chapters in this book clearly show that these understandings of multiliteracies develop in very young children, as well as in school aged children.

Knobel and Lankshear (2003, p. 55), in their discussion of “out of school” literacies, argue that there are four main research positions examined as part of literacy as a social practice research:

A concern with literacy *practice* always takes into account knowing *and* doing, and calls into play the notion of *literacies* as a way of describing how people negotiate and construct patterned and socially recognizable ways of knowing, doing and using languages to achieve different social and cultural contexts.

In this view, there is more than one form of literacy, hence the term “literacies” or “multiliteracies” that is used in much recent writing and the understanding that different people use literacy in different ways in different social settings. Knobel and Lankshear propose that the research into literacy as a social practice has had the following foci:

1. Any literacy practice engaged in by a preschool age individual outside a school;
2. Any literacy practice engaged in by persons of any age within non-school (i.e. non formal education) settings;
3. Any literacy practice engaged in by preschool age individuals in settings outside the school that is not a formally recognised literacy within school pedagogy and curriculum; and

4. Any literacy practice engaged in by persons of any age within non-school (formal education) settings that is not a literacy belonging to a formal education curriculum or pedagogy.

Knobel and Lankshear propose that the first category concerns literacy research which draws on developmental psychology, psycholinguistics and cultural psychology, informed by Vygotsky's theories, which aims to look at the influence of children's lives outside school in terms of emerging literacy. The second type of studies involves family intervention studies which aim to increase family literacy. Typically this type of research looks at how parents/caregivers can provide more effective story book reading and other literacy opportunities in the home, which is reported in this volume. The third type, which is of particular interest for early childhood, is research which concerns comparing the in and out of school literacy competencies and experiences of diverse school children. Knobel and Lankshear state that research shows that children who fail in one context (e.g. school) may be effective in other out of school contexts. The aim of this research has been to alert teachers to children's literacy proficiencies outside school and examine what literacies children want to use outside school. The fourth type mainly concerns adult learners and is only marginally related to family literacy research reported in this volume. The first three foci are of relevance to the research in this volume.

The Cultural Historical Theoretical Foundation for Literacy Research in This Volume

Much of the research presented in this volume is framed around cultural historical theorising, drawing primarily on the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and more recent research stemming from Bruner (1986), Bodrova and Leong (2005), Fler (2010), Rogoff (1990, 2003, 2014) and others. Vygotsky's interests in developmental psychology, child development, and education were diverse. His scientific thinking underwent several major transformations throughout his career, but generally his legacy can be divided into two fairly distinct periods and a transitional phase between the two during which Vygotsky experienced a crisis in his theory and personal life. These are the mechanistic "instrumental" period of the 1920s, integrative "holistic" period of the 1930s, and the transitional years of, roughly, 1929–1931. Each of these periods is characterized by its distinct themes and theoretical innovations. His philosophical framework included insightful interpretations of the cognitive role of mediation tools, as well as the re-interpretation of well-known concepts in psychology such as internalization of knowledge. Vygotsky introduced the notion of zone of proximal development, an innovative metaphor capable of describing the potential of human cognitive development, often understood to refer to the way in which the acquisition of new knowledge is dependent on previous learning, as well as the availability of instruction. Vygotsky proposed a theory of the development of higher cognitive functions in children that saw reasoning as emerging through

practical activity in a social environment. During the earlier period of his career he argued that the development of reasoning was mediated by signs and symbols, and therefore contingent on cultural practices and language as well as on universal cognitive processes.

During the instrumental period (1920s), Vygotsky studied child development and the significant roles of cultural mediation and interpersonal communication. He observed how the higher mental functions developed through these interactions also represented the shared knowledge of a culture; a process known as internalization. Internalization can be understood in one respect as “knowing how”. For example, riding a bicycle or pouring a cup of milk are tools of the society and are initially outside and beyond the child. The mastery of these skills occurs through the activity of the child within society. A further aspect of internalization is appropriation, in which the child takes a tool and makes it his own, perhaps using it in a way unique to himself. Internalizing the use of a pencil, pen or crayon allows children to use it very much for their own purposes rather than drawing exactly what others have drawn previously. These notions are of particular importance for children learning literacy and underpin much research on the importance of a literacy rich environment (Casbergue, McGee, & Bedford, 2008; Mashburn, 2008; Neuman, 2007) and are exemplified in the studies on children’s writing in this volume.

Vygotsky (1997) described the development of higher mental functions as a gradual process involving the transition from inter-individual (“inter-mental”) or shared to individual (“intra-mental”). Higher mental functions are shared, meaning that they are co-constructed – constructed by the child in interaction with another person. For young children, most higher mental functions still exist only in their inter-individual form as they share them with adults or with older children through the process of co-construction. The nature of the cultural tools that are acquired and the outcome of their acquisition are determined by the specific interactions that occur between children and their social environment. Vygotsky (1998) called these interactions the “social situation of development,” which he considered to be the “basic source” of development. The social situation of development determined Vygotsky’s approach to the transition from preschool to school age, including the issue of school readiness. Much of the research in this volume deals with the issue of how literacy in the early years relates to literacy in primary school and issues of transition for the new social situation of development are foregrounded by authors.

Vygotsky (1997) argued that the transition from preschool to school means major changes in the social situations that the child participates in – a change in the nature of the interactions involved in schooling and in the expectations associated with the role of “student.” In other words, the way adults interact with children as well as what adults expect children to be able to do changes between preschool and primary school. Changes in the social situation of development include more than participation in the interactions. There must also be a change in the child’s awareness of these expectations concomitant with changes in the child’s ability to meet them. To adjust to the social situation of school, the child must be aware of the new expectations as well as possess the capacities to meet these expectations. To gain this awareness, the child has to actually participate in school activities and to enter

specific social interactions with teachers and other students. Vygotsky argued that children cannot learn to adjust out of that context. However, certain underlying competencies or accomplishments that develop during early childhood make it easier for children to be ready for the new challenges of schooling. Among these accomplishments are mastery of some cultural tools, development of self-regulation, and the integration of emotions and cognition. Having developed these prerequisites, a preschool child can make the necessary transition from learning that “follows the child’s own agenda” to the learning that “follows the school agenda” – one of the basic ways that the social situation of development in school differs from that of preschool (Vygotsky, 1956). Several of the chapters in this volume focus on the development of literacy competencies that will help children to bridge the differing agendas of home, the early childhood setting and the primary school.

Some of the particular concerns of chapters in this volume are associated with what Vygotsky (1978) identified as the twin notions of *access* and *mediation* to explain the important relationship between the child, the environment and more knowledgeable others. Vygotsky argued that children need both *access* to the resources, tools and artefacts of a culture, as well as *mediation* (support or guidance) by more competent adults or peers to help them to understand how to use those tools. He proposed that teachers help children to co-construct knowledge within their zone of proximal development, using teaching techniques that assist performance, such as scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). He argued that providing access to resources was insufficient and that if children were not given the gift of instruction, they were limited to biological maturation. Vygotsky (1978) theorised that the developing mind of the child is both individual and social at the same time and is the result of a long process of developmental events. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) consider that the primary focus of cultural historical research has been on how the social co-construction of knowledge is internalized, appropriated, transmitted, or transformed in formal and informal learning settings. Vygotsky’s (1978) definition of how children internalise and transform learning suggests that teachers use a range of strategies to promote learning, which is of particular relevance to literacy learning. As John-Steiner and Mahn (1996, p. 197) suggest:

There are different modes of internalization, reflecting different teaching/interaction strategies. A continuum with direct instruction on one end to creative and collaborative learning on the other could describe the wide range of teaching/learning situations in which internalization occurs. Whether in the learning of a young child or in the activities of experienced thinkers, internalization is a fundamental part of the life-long process of the co-construction of knowledge and the creation of the new.

Vygotsky argued that the mediation provided by a more competent other person using demonstrating, modelling, questioning, feedback and task management helped the child to internalise and transform their understanding. Several chapters in this volume have explicitly examined how literacy is internalised through social interaction with more experienced peers, family or teachers.

Perhaps Vygotsky’s most important contribution concerns the inter-relationship of language development and thought and it is this work that has been particularly influential to early literacy researchers. In particular, some of the research in this

volume examines how children acquire metalinguistic knowledge and awareness and make use of private speech as literacy develops. This concept, explored in Vygotsky's book *Thought and Language* (1962/1986) (Russian: *Myshlenie i rech*, alternative translation: *Thinking and Speaking*), establishes the explicit and profound connection between speech (both silent inner speech and oral language), and the development of mental concepts and cognitive awareness. According to Vygotsky, language starts as a tool external to the child used for social interaction. The child guides personal behaviour by using this tool in a kind of self-talk or "thinking out loud". Initially, self-talk is very much a tool of social interaction and this tapers to negligible levels when the child is alone or with deaf children. Gradually, self-talk is used more as a tool for self-directed and self-regulating behaviour. Because speaking has been appropriated and internalized, self-talk is typically no longer present around the time the child starts school. Self-talk "develops along a rising not a declining, curve; it goes through an evolution, not an involution. In the end, it becomes inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 57).

Vygotsky's (1978) theories have been further developed by a number of researchers, such as Rogoff (1990, 2003, 2014), whose cross cultural studies identified that children also learn through being participants in the work of their families and communities. Rogoff termed this *guided participation*, which takes place when creative thinkers interact with a knowledgeable person and suggests it is practiced around the world. Rogoff (2014) has more recently theorized that children also '*learn by observing and pitching in*' (LOPI), which describes the process of learning alongside other members of a culture and internalizing and appropriating cultural knowledge and practices. The range of types of mediation used for supporting literacy learning in young children is a feature of the research in this volume.

Literacy in the Modern Early Childhood Curriculum

Vygotsky's ideas have been further developed by two of his colleagues, Daniel Elkonin and Alexander Zaporozhets, whose constructs encompass the cultural historical theory of development, play as a leading activity during preschool, and the concept of amplification. According to these neo-Vygotskian researchers, during early childhood cognitive restructuring goes through initial stages as children's use of cultural tools transforms perception and other cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and thinking. In addition social-emotional capacities are transformed. As these cognitive and social-emotional capacities develop, children make the transition from being 'slaves to the environment' to becoming 'masters of their own behaviour' (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, 2010); an issue of key importance for becoming literate.

Elkonin (1977, 1978) viewed childhood as determined by the social-cultural context and through the child's engagement in 'leading activity'. Leading activities are interactions that are unique to a specific period of child development and are necessary to bring about the major developmental accomplishments of that period,

such as literacy play. Consistent with Vygotsky's principle of effective teaching being aimed at the child's ZPD, Elkonin defined the goal of education as promoting developmental accomplishments at each age by supporting the leading activity specific to that age. Within this volume, the provision of literacy experiences that promote the development of literacy is consistent with this notion of literacy play as a leading activity.

Elkonin emphasized the importance of play for children's mastery of social interactions, cognitive development and self-regulation. He identified the essential characteristics that make dramatic play the leading activity of pre-schoolers as the roles children play, symbolic play actions, interactions with play partners, and the rules that govern the play. Thus, only play with a specific set of features is the kind of dramatic play granted the status of leading activity. Other play-like behaviours (such as building with blocks, materials and objects) are assigned secondary albeit important roles (Elkonin, 1978). Elkonin concludes that in make-believe play, children learn to model reality in two different ways: when they use objects symbolically; and when they act out the distilled symbolic representation of the role in the pretend scenario. In both instances, the use of symbols is first supported by toys and props and is later communicated to play partners by the means of words and gestures. Dramatic play reflects the universal path of cognitive development from concrete, object-oriented thinking and action to abstract mental action (Elkonin, 1978), a view which has been substantiated in several literacy studies (Morrow, 2009; Morrow & Schickendanz, 2006). Thus, Elkonin enriched Vygotsky's idea that play scaffolds a child within their ZPD enabling the preschool child to behave at the level where he is "a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1966/1967, p. 16). Although Elkonin's ideas are not explicitly explored by authors in this volume, they are an area of further research to consider.

According to Zaporozhets (1978), early childhood should not be considered as simply a preparation for school. Instead, early childhood should be treated as having a value of its own, as making a unique contribution to the overall process of human development (Zaporozhets, 1978). Processes and outcomes of development – cognitive, social, and emotional – specific to the preschool years are part of the systemic process of human development and cannot be replaced later. Zaporozhets (1986) proposed that development can be *amplified* (or enriched) when education promotes developmental accomplishments specific to a particular age and does not attempt to force the emergence of accomplishments that are the outgrowth of later ages. For preschoolers, amplification of development involves expanding and enriching the uniquely "preschool" activities, ensuring that in these activities, children are truly functioning at the highest levels of their ZPD. Zaporozhets emphasizes that properly designed education does not stifle development of preschool children but instead promotes it, thus, presenting a logical extension of Vygotsky's principle of instruction leading child development and is of particular significance for the inclusion of literacy in the early childhood curriculum.

Drawing on Vygotsky's theory and the Russian Ministry of Education guidelines for early childhood (Yudina, Galiguzova, Knyazeva, Mesheryakova-Zamogil'naya, & Sterkina, 2000), the following principles are proposed to underlie a quality cur-

riculum for early childhood (in Bodrova & Leong, 2005), which are of direct relevance for literacy. The curriculum should:

- Amplify the child's learning and development within age and developmentally appropriate activities.
- Have dramatic play as the leading activity of preschool.
- Promote co-construction and individualised teacher-child interactions that scaffold development.
- Uses standards as general instructional guidelines.
- Prepare children for later grades by emphasizing underlying competencies.

Bodrova and Leong (2005, p. 445) usefully highlight that adopting a cultural historical approach to education means reconceptualising how children are taught in early childhood and the goals of education:

Returning to the original question about quality preschool education, the Vygotskian approach provides another way to examine this issue. On the one hand, Vygotskians emphasize the importance of scaffolding each child's individual, unique, developmentally based needs on one hand. On the other, they acknowledge that the underlying skills that are at the center of development are taught through content. This content is a means for instruction and learning, not its end goal. The approach considers a specific kind of dramatic play as a major activity but argues that it, too, must be scaffolded to develop into an activity that truly fosters development. The approach expands the idea of school readiness from one based on the facts that children must know to the underlying capacities that will make the learning of future skills and knowledge possible.

This notion of considering children's literacy capacities is echoed by Pearson and Hiebert (2010), who state that literacy has been the subject of considerable review over the last half century in many countries to establish consensus and synthesis within the field. This is often at governments' behest, as argued elsewhere (McLachlan & Arrow, 2011). Pearson and Hiebert argue that the most recent American review, the National Early Literacy Panel report (NELP, 2009), strengthens the recommendations from previous reviews, but still doesn't go far enough in extrapolating the implications for teaching in early childhood and primary classrooms; an issue that is addressed by many authors in this text, echoing the previous quote by Bodrova and Leong. In this volume, the authors collectively propose that teachers and parents play a crucial role in both providing *access* to enriched literacy environments, but also by *mediating* between the child's home background and cultural experiences and what Vygotsky (1998) called 'schooled concepts'. Teachers and parents have the opportunity to open up access to new worlds for the child and through skilful and sensitive teaching *amplify* the capacity of children to not only learn to read and write, but to understand the demands of a multi modal and sometimes multi lingual literacy environment. Next, an introduction to the research in this volume is presented.

Overview of the Chapters in This Book

In Chap. 2 Pauline Harris addresses the issues of children's voices in literacy research, a previously neglected field of study. Harris argues that in early childhood, a paradox has emerged between a human rights-based focus on children's voices in matters affecting their lives and the relative silence of children's voices in literacy education policy and practice. In light of this paradox, Chap. 2 presents a case study of young children's voices about their classroom reading experiences. Framed by a sociocultural perspective of reading (Luke & Freebody, 1990) and a participatory research perspective constructing children as competent participants and key informants (Mayall, 2002), the chapter explores the experiences of two case study reading ability groups in their second school year. The study found these children experienced two disparate classroom reading worlds that constructed reading and the reader in substantially different ways. Enabling reading and the reader to greater or lesser extent, these differences provoke reflection on consequences of what is advocated and provided in early years reading programmes – and the importance of understanding these consequences through children's voices. Harris argues that further dialogue is needed about authentic engagement with children's voices in early childhood literacy research, policy and practice.

Chapter 3, written by Gunhild Tomter Alstad and Lise Iversen Kulbrandstad, focuses on how linguistic diversity is reflected in language and literacy practices in early childhood education in Norway, an educational context which traditionally is characterized by informal learning. They argue that early childhood is changing as a result of changes in immigration and as a result of changes in educational policy, which has stressed the importance of kindergarten attendance as an important preparation for learning Norwegian as the main school language. The chapter starts out with a description of the socio-political level including laws, regulations and curriculum concerning bilingualism and literacy. It then draws on analysis of a case study of preschool teachers' second language teaching practices and beliefs, documented through observations and interviews. The analysis demonstrates how informal teaching practices in activities like picture book reading and play create opportunities for more complex and challenging second language and multilingual literacy experiences.

In Chap. 4 Jim Anderson, Ann Anderson, Nicola Friedrich and Laura Teichert report on a bilingual family literacy program with 500 immigrant and refugee families of 4 and 5-year old preschool children from four different linguistic groups in the Greater Vancouver Area of British Columbia, Canada. Like many other authors in this volume, they situate the work in cultural historical theory and draw on notions of intersubjectivity and additive bilingualism – the concept that there are benefits in maintaining one's first home language while acquiring second or additional languages. Drawing on analysis of focus group sessions, the Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (Anderson, 1995), and field notes, the authors report on families' perceptions of the benefits of the program, concerns and issues raised, and changes in perspectives of literacy learning over the course of the project.

Chapter 5 reports a study in Israel by Dorit Aram, Lili Elad-Orbach and Shimrit Abiri which examined young children's acquisition of writing capabilities in their homes, based on a cultural historical framework (Vygotsky, 1978). Fifty kindergarteners were recorded in their homes in three situations: (1) writing five words with parental mediation; (2) writing the same words independently; (3) instructing the writing of the words to a hand puppet. Results demonstrate that there are positive correlations between parents' writing mediation, children's private speech while writing, children's understanding of the writing process as expressed while teaching the puppet, and children's independent writing level. Beyond this, the authors found that each of these variables has an independent contribution to children's writing, with the three variables together predicting 80% of the variance in children's writing level.

In Chap. 6 Sue Lyle and Anna Bolt report on a qualitative study from Wales in the United Kingdom that examined the impact on children's literacy of the Storytelling Curriculum (Paley, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Egan, 1992) that privileged children's voices and encouraged them to become authors by dictating their stories to adults. Two schools in Wales took part in this study; the first school is the main focus for the chapter, with supplementary evidence from the second school that joined the project. The chapter discusses findings from interviews with teachers and children about the effectiveness of the Storytelling Curriculum. Dictated stories by the children in both schools were analyzed and results of standardized reading tests are presented from the case study school. Findings show that where meaning making, enjoyment and imagination are put at the heart of the writing process children are energised to compose story and learn to write by creating and dictating stories.

Chapter 7 reports a study by Mary Ann Evans and Kailey Pearl Ennis in Canada that investigated the association of child shyness and decoding ability with parent and child behaviours when children encounter difficult words during shared book reading. Grade one children and their parents were observed reading storybooks together that the child could read with assistance. Children's shyness and their ability to decode pseudowords were also assessed. Shyer children and poorer readers less often attempted to read words that they found difficult in the text. Parents of shyer children and of less skilled readers responded to this and other reading errors by providing more context cues and fewer encouragements to try the word again. The findings demonstrate a new facet of the way in which behavioural inhibition in shy children and protective parenting of them are manifested, and suggests a mechanism for the negative association between shyness and academic achievement found in previous studies. The findings also highlight the need for teachers and parents to be more reflective in their shared-book interactions with shy children.

In Chap. 8 William Wilson and Kauanoë Kamanā explore the development of a Hawaiian literacy program. They point out that Hawaiian is the only language other than English that is official in a state of the United States; it is also a highly endangered language and the object of a school-based revitalization movement, which is discussed in this chapter. At the base of the movement are the Pūnana Leo pre-schools. Hawaiian literacy is taught in them through the Hakalama, a syllabary using the Roman alphabet. Contemporary research has established that the childhood

cognitive development necessary to break words into syllables precedes the ability to break words into phonemes by approximately 2 years. The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo seeks to take advantage of that research to produce a high level of literacy upon graduation from preschool. Assessments of students using the Hakalama shows that they are reaching a relatively high level of literacy by the end of preschool and that literacy in Hawaiian is transferring to literacy in English even before instruction in English.

In Chap. 9 George Manolitsis reports on two studies conducted in Greek kindergartens. The chapter examines whether morphological awareness instruction in Kindergarten classrooms contributes to the improvement of young children’s early literacy skills (e.g., morphological and phonological awareness, print knowledge, vocabulary). George and his research team implemented two quasi-experimental studies with a pre-test/post-test design and a control group. In both studies, the treatment groups received a 5 weeks intervention with several morphological awareness activities, while the control groups attended the mainstream classroom literacy activities. Both studies’ findings showed that the treatment groups who received morphological awareness instruction or a blended instruction on morphological and phonological awareness improved their morphological awareness abilities more than the control group. According to Manolitsis, the teaching of morphemes in Kindergarten is beneficial for morphological awareness improvement, but it has to be combined with other early literacy activities in order to have broader effects on young children’s literacy development.

Barbara De Baryshe and Kathleen Gauci report on the The Early Reading First program (ERF) in Chap. 10, which was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to develop model “preschool centers of excellence” that enhance the early language and literacy skills of low-income preschool children. In this chapter they discuss the outcomes of two ERF projects conducted with Head Start classrooms in Hawai‘i. The intervention included 3–4 consecutive years of intensive professional development on research-based curriculum and instruction, teacher-child interaction, family engagement and child progress monitoring. Outcomes included large gains in intentional literacy instruction, classroom quality, and family engagement, and moderate gains on child language and emergent literacy skills. Despite the academic focus, most teachers were highly satisfied with the experience, reporting increased child motivation and considerable professional growth.

In Chap. 11 Claire McLachlan and Alison Arrow report on two studies conducted in early childhood centres in low socioeconomic communities. The mixed methods studies (Punch, 2009) discussed in this chapter explored if different approaches to professional learning would lead to improved literacy outcomes in children. Study one examined if a workshop on literacy acquisition would increase teachers’ understandings of literacy and enhance children’s literacy outcomes over an 8 week intervention period, with a fifth centre used as a control (McLachlan & Arrow, 2013). Pre- and post-test measures of children’s literacy were collected, along with teachers’ accounts of how they promoted literacy during the intervention period. The second study examined if collaborative planned reviews with kindergarten teachers would enhance literacy outcomes for children. Children’s literacy was