Collaborative Methods in Early Language and Literacy Research

Jean Harkins, Laurie Makin, Susan Spedding and Peter Whiteman

Introduction

Contemporary literacy research has established beyond any doubt that that the cognitive, behavioural, and social foundations of literacy are laid in the early years, prior to school entry (ALLC, 1995; Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999; Cairney, 2000; Makin & Whitehead, 2003). To understand the process of early literacy learning and its relationship with language development in early childhood, research approaches need to include recognition of the crucial role of the family as a child's first literacy educators, and to use investigative methods that can reveal as much as possible of what is happening as the young child is acquiring the concepts, dispositions, and behaviours that lead to successful literacy in school and other contexts. Clearly, simple measures of literacy attainment or readiness are inadequate for the purpose of understanding the underlying conceptual and social processes.

In comparison with the large body of research on early literacy learning in school settings, there has been relatively little research on children's literacy prior to school, and even less study of interventions for young children who may be at risk of difficulties in learning to read once they enter school (NICHD, 2004). The projects discussed here focus on gaining new knowledge about the foundations of literacy learning, and about how to promote children's literacy growth by supporting families in their role as children's first literacy educators. The gaps in knowledge and research on most aspects of what happens as young children take the first steps toward successful literacy in home and community contexts need to be addressed in studies that yield rich descriptions of their literacy learning, and examine in detail how families and others contribute to young children's journeys into literacy.

This kind of research requires methods that are capable of gathering detailed and adequately contextualised information about everyday literacy activities and learning by individual children, in their families and communities, and in early childhood services. The search for effective ways of collecting such research data has highlighted the value of approaches that are diverse and sensitive enough to capture the necessary kinds of information (Spedding et al., 2004). Recent research in Australia and other countries utilises such methods (e.g. Abbott et al., 1999; Ho, 2002; Makin & Spedding, 2002; Whitehead, 1999). A multidisciplinary approach is essential to address the cognitive, linguistic, social and educational dimensions of literacy learning. Further, it is crucial to incorporate perspectives from all parties involved in literacy learning, by accessing the voices of children, families, educators and service providers. Collaborative, participatory and naturalistic research methods are the optimal way of achieving this, and have the added benefit of being able to generate understandings to inform the practice of professionals and of families as literacy educators.

The research discussed here is based at the Children and Education Research Centre (CERC) of The University of Newcastle, Australia. It is involved with two early childhood initiatives: SHELLS (Support at Home for Early Language and LiteracieS), which has operated in New South Wales since 1999, and Learning Together (LT), operating in South Australia since 2003. The CERC researchers are an interdisciplinary team with a strong commitment to research of high quality that is of benefit to all participants. Both SHELLS and LT are language and literacy support programs for families and young children.

SHELLS is a three-year program for families with children from birth to age three, funded from both government and private sources, that has involved over 300 families to date. LT is a program for families with children from birth to school entry, initiated and funded by the South Australian state Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), that currently operates at five sites with nearly 200 families enrolled. Both programs have a strong emphasis on participatory research that empowers families to support their children's early learning.

Principles and methods in collaborative research

In the process of identifying appropriate and effective research methods for investigating literacy learning in these contexts, several key principles emerge. These principles are briefly outlined here, as a prelude to the description of three different types of research instruments currently in use in these projects.

Socio-contextual approach

In keeping with new understandings of the social foundations of early cognitive development (Rogoff, 1990; Shore, 1997), literacies are seen as far more complex and multifaceted than just cognitive skills for decoding print (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Makin & Jones Díaz, 2002; Street, 1995). Literacy is now understood as "a set of social practices situated in sociocultural contexts defined by members of a group through their actions with, through and about language" (Cairney, 2002a, p.159). Learning, including literacy learning, is social, collaborative, and cultural; it is inextricably linked with language and the joint construction of meaning (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 1999; Rogoff et al., 1993). Especially in the early years, the family in its sociocultural context is central to these interactions (Auerbach, 1989; Sulzby, 1994; Taylor, 1997). Understanding early learning thus requires research that traces the process in its full social and cultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1990).

Research partnerships

Partnerships between researchers, practitioners and families are essential to accessing the kinds of information required. Traditional research models have proved less than adequate in accessing the knowledges and practices developed by young children in family and community settings (Hill et al., 1998; Street, 1995), and in producing results that lead to effective change (McNaught et al., 2000; Woods, 1994). Collaboration and participation by all participants in literacy research gives a fuller picture of literacy learning, and better access to research outcomes (Epstein, 1996; Makin & Spedding, 2003). Ethical concerns for respect, equity and accountability also favour the collaborative involvement of all participants in research (Aubrey et al., 2000). These issues of equity, access, and ecological validity in research become even more urgent when dealing with those who may be at risk, as literacy and life chances are closely linked (Freebody & Ludwig, 1997; Hanlen, 2002, Makin, 2003).

Multiple voices and perspectives

Including the voices of all participants is a top priority, for both practical and ethical reasons. The situated expertise of parents and other carers of young children has too often been overlooked in research and in policy and practice, particularly in circumstances of social disadvantage (McNaught et al., 2000). Identifying and valuing diverse families' and communities' knowledge about their children's learning is essential to building genuinely strengths-based practice in education and family services (Munford & Sanders, 2003). Service providers, policymakers, and families need input from research that represents the voices and perspectives of all those involved in children's literacy learning, including the children themselves (Bowes, 2000; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Saracho, 2000). Program evaluations have also suffered from a limited range of perspectives and measures. High quality evaluation research requires active input by stakeholders, along with multiple methods and measures (Dymond, 2001; Karoly et al., 1998).

Research-based practice

Research that informs practice is a key principle for all partners in the projects discussed here. The effectiveness of participatory action research is well recognised, producing valid and credible results that can be used to improve educational programs and services (Atweh, Kemmis & Weeks, 1998; Patton, 2002). Research is integral to both SHELLS and LT, providing input to continuous program evaluation and development, and increasing knowledge about the earliest, foundational stages of literacy. A process of externally validated self-evaluation enables practitioners, parents and families to reflect on their practices as literacy educators, learning through participation in the research (Pascal & Bertram, 1997), rather than waiting for results that may or may not eventuate in a form that can readily lead to program improvement (Makin & Jones Díaz, 2002). While research of this kind must necessarily be specifically tailored to the needs of each program and location, it generates results that contribute to new knowledge and applications in other programs, in policy development, and in the field of early language and literacy as a whole (Makin & Spedding, 2002; Patton, 1997; Ramphele, 1990). Research collaboration is thus a multi-channeled process in which all participants contribute to one another's knowledge base, and provide input and feedback to improve each other's practice.

The general principles sketched here form the basis for selecting research methods and instruments suitable for use in SHELLS and LT research. Although SHELLS and LT have some similarities, they are separate programs. The research methods and instruments developed for SHELLS over the past several years were available for consideration by the LT research partners, but differences in research approaches and requirements were expected (Harkins et al., 2004).

The following sections present two types of research instruments that are used in both programs, and one instrument that is specific to LT. The development and key features of each instrument are described, along with how it is used. Each of these examples illustrates the principles outlined above. This is followed by a discussion of insights gained and issues arising from the use of these methods, and their implications for the continuing development of the research model.

Accessing families' literacy experiences and perceptions

For the purposes of this research, it is important to collect and analyse data about program and site demographics, and information which identifies changes in the beliefs, attitudes, practices, and circumstances of the families of participating children prior to and following implementation of the programs. Two sets of measures which have been used over the past several years in the SHELLS program to identify changes are the SHELLS Baseline and Follow-up Interviews, and the Confidence Survey. The LT program has its own extensive demographic database, which is supplemented by the more specifically literacy-focussed elements of the SHELLS interviews.

Surveying families' literacy experiences

The first means of tracking changes occurs through comparison of information gained through initial (Baseline) and subsequent (Follow-up) interviews with families. The initial interview, administered on entry to the program, is used to collect baseline information on attitudes towards early literacy, provision of early language and literacy experiences, access to and use of resources, and family demographics. Changes in these are identified at the end of each year through a follow-up interview. The follow-up interview includes an additional reflective section relating to program content and implementation, and perceived impact of participation in the program. This information is utilised in ongoing program planning and development, ensuring that the program continues to meet the specific needs of participants in diverse sites.

The general approach of the interviews is consistent with current conceptions of early literacy learning, including recognition that it is a "a multi-dimensional and mutually engaging process between adults and children" (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p. 38). Specific items in the interview address the linguistic and cultural practices of literacies in their sociocultural

contexts, and recognise the importance of children's agency, i.e. their choice and exercise of personal power.

Some opportunities to engage in key early language and literacy experiences have been identified in the research literature (e.g. Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998); for a review of emergent literacy knowledge and skills predictive of later literacy competence, see Scarborough (1998; 2001). The kinds of experiences included in the interviews are indicated below.

Informal interactions

Frequent, informal and meaningful interactions with written and oral language, and with literacy-related artefacts such as books and writing instruments, are strong mediators of early literacy development (McCormick & Mason, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Such interactions promote an awareness of print contextualised within the community or household environment (see Neuman & Celano, 2001) and an understanding of the functions of literacy in everyday life. The specific form of interactions and the relevance of different types of artefacts will vary with the cultural practices of families (Cairney, 2002b). These potentially rich forms of language, literacy and textual traditions provide the foundations for literacy learning.

Mediated interactions

Children engage with such artefacts under the guidance of more capable and knowledgeable individuals such as parents, siblings, or grandparents (Justice & Ezell, 1999; Kaderavek & Justice, 2002; Watkins & Bunce, 1996). Adult-child shared storybook reading, for example, is considered to be a powerful means of promoting early literacy development (e.g. Bus, Van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehead, 2004)

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness refers to sensitivity to the phonological structure underlying oral and written language (e.g. Torgesen & Davis, 1996; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Wise, Ring & Olson, 1999). Children develop phonological awareness through shared activities such as singing, chanting and rhyming. A strong, reciprocal association has been demonstrated between young children's oral language proficiency and early literacy development (Lonigan, Burgess & Anthony, 2000).

Multiple literacies

Opportunities to engage with the literacies of technology (such as computer, internet, fax), popular culture (such as movies, theatre, art), functional literacy (such as road maps, timetables), ecological literacy (especially for Indigenous groups) and literacies other than English, are important if children are to participate effectively in a world of "multiliteracies" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Makin, Campbell & Jones Díaz 1995). A key factor for participation is access to multimedia resources, through availability in the home or borrowing from the library, as well as opportunities to engage in associated productive activities.

Surveying confidence levels

The SHELLS Confidence Survey was designed to determine adults' perceptions of confidence in their role as their children's first language and literacy educators. The survey is administered on entry to the program and at the end of each subsequent year. Items included in the survey are designed to establish levels of confidence in undertaking activities to promote language and literacy learning, such as selecting toys, books and games, using television and computers, and using a shared metalanguage. Adults (usually parents) rate their level of confidence using a five point Likert scale, ranging from *Not very confident* through to *Very confident.* Two final, open-ended questions provide an opportunity for participants to identify any additional aspects of language or literacy they feel confident or not confident about. This information is utilised to identify individual and site-specific needs, allowing these to be addressed throughout the following year.

Comparison of data obtained on each occasion allows for changes in participants' levels of confidence in relation to each of the items to be established, and for determination of whether previously identified needs have been met. The LT Family Literacy Perceptions Survey utilises the SHELLS Confidence Survey with minor adaptations. The main change was to substitute the term 'confident' with 'comfortable'. This change reflected a concern that some families in LT sites might be reluctant to identify levels of confidence, particularly low levels of confidence, since they might feel that this could be perceived to reflect negatively on their parenting.

Accessing information about early literacy behaviours

Another instrument used in the SHELLS research that was adapted for use in LT was what is called the Literacy Wall in SHELLS, and the Literacy Mosaic in LT. These instruments are completed by family members on a regular basis, giving a visual form to parent perceptions of their children's literacy understandings. As the Wall or Mosaic is completed several times when children are at different ages, it also offers evidence of changes over time in literacy learning.

The Literacy Wall originated when SHELLS researchers were investigating ways of gathering information about children's early literacy understandings. The many general scales available (e.g. Brigance, 1983; Linder, 1993) were used to measure skills across a range of areas, but did not have a strong focus on the development of literacy understandings. Other instruments suitable for older children focussed specifically on literacy (e.g. Clay, 1985), but were not appropriate for use with infants and toddlers. The search was made more difficult by the fact that the researchers wished the instruments to be naturalistic and participatory, drawing on the situated expertise of parents.

The notion of situated expertise (Schön, 1983) is at the heart of both SHELLS and LT. Both are partnerships between researchers, who know the research literature and what it says about building strong literacy foundations; program leaders, who have a background in early childhood education; and parents, who know their families and communities. Recognising and validating the situated expertise of all stakeholders, including the children themselves, supports children's early literacy learning within a range of home and community settings.

When it was decided to use a version of the Literacy Wall in the LT research, the SHELLS items were reviewed. All but two were retained, and the design was changed to a mosaic, to better reflect the open-ended nature of the instrument. The Literacy Wall or Mosaic is presented to participants as an A4 sheet of paper on which there are a number of items. The majority of these identify Early Literacy Behaviours (ELBs) based on current understandings of what might be expected in children from birth to four years (Burges,s 1997; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Sylva, 1999). Some of the 'bricks'/'tiles' are left blank for parents to add additional early literacy behaviours that they observed. Thus, there are two categories of observations: one in which ELBs are selected by the researchers, and one in which parents select additional ELBs to record. The Literacy Wall/Mosaic is completed at regular intervals by participants. In the first instance, program personnel introduce the items to all participants. It is then completed individually, with assistance always available.

The information that is collected reflects the adult participants' observations of their children and their knowledge of their children's everyday behaviours (Makin, 2004). Parents can thus assist in building up a picture of very young children's early literacy behaviours, as they have many opportunities to observe their children in everyday contexts.

In SHELLS, the Literacy Wall continues to evolve. This process reflects the complex nature of literacy, and offers a way of incorporating participant input, through the information recorded in the blank bricks on the Wall. These items are grouped and scrutinised. Sometimes they are judged to be re-wordings of items already on the Wall. Sometimes they are new and, where it seems an area that would be useful to follow through, the Wall is adapted to include that item. It was through parent input that items relating to information communication technology were added to the Wall, as parents reported that their children

attended differently to electronic media content and advertisements, and could select their own CDs or DVDs, from a very early age.

As well as offering an appropriate way of collecting information about young children's ELBs, the Literacy Wall/Mosaic serves other functions. It assists parents to develop their observation and reflection skills, and provides them with a visual record of their children's literacy learning over time. Most parents appear to enjoy using the Literacy Wall. One SHELLS group decided that they wanted a Literacy Wall for themselves so that they would have a record of their own learning as they participated in SHELLS. The participants and the SHELLS facilitator developed a draft Participant Literacy Wall for this purpose, which they sent to the researchers for comment and then began to use.

Accessing children's voices

Gathering data about children's development and learning has long been the domain of adults. It was important in designing the LT research project to embrace contemporary reconstructions of childhoods, and to find a way for children's voices to be heard. Data about children's cultures garnered from parents and teachers are important, but insight from the privileged position of the children themselves is indispensable. Instant Video Revisiting (IVR) was chosen as a suitable tool for gathering information from children, about children.

The process of IVR was conceived by Forman (1999) as a valuable means of observing and documenting children's work in early childhood settings. Evolving from the practices of teachers in Reggio Emilia, Italy, documentation involves collaboration between children and teachers in "revisiting" the children's endeavours through discussion and contemplation (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993). This practice not only entails an artefact that records learning (e.g. a photograph, a written record or a work sample), but provides a springboard for reflection and broadening thinking. Forman extended this process by introducing to the playroom a small handheld video camera with a foldout LCD screen, to record the children and serve as a means of revisiting.

Forman's (1999) procedure involves recording a child (or children) at play, and shortly (perhaps minutes) thereafter, playing back the video recording on the camera's inbuilt screen and discussing it with the child; the discussion taking place in the context of the learning experience recorded on the tape. Previous studies (Forman, 1999; Hong & Broderick, 2003) have shown that IVR can be an especially useful metacognitive tool because children are able to move beyond a recount of their actions. The children's generally limited working memory resources are thus freed to focus on the revisiting task, rather than on the effort of recalling. This results in a deeper insight into the purpose and intent of their actions, because the video recordings take care of the narrative recount of events. This is consistent with Sweller's (1988; 1994) cognitive load theory; reducing the load on working memory leads to positive outcomes in a range of teaching and learning endeavours. Being privy to information about literacies from the children's perspectives provides more ecologically valid data, which in turn, can be used to plan further learning experiences cooperatively with children.

Shared book reading has been identified by researchers (e.g. Wells, 1985; Neuman, 1996) as one of the most important foundational literacy events in children's early lives. It can build positive dispositions towards engaging in literacy events, develop receptive and productive vocabulary, and increase children's knowledge about the world in which they live and their empathy towards others, as well as helping children learn concepts and functions of print. One way in which SHELLS collects information about children's experiences with shared book reading is to video them with their parent/carer when they are within the age windows of 8-12 months, 18-22 months, and 32-36 months. The videos give useful information about adults' strategies and children's reactions, and offer insight into the messages about literacy that young children are receiving as they engage in this experience. Close observation of this kind, particularly for children in the first two age windows, is an appropriate way to study young children. However, it does not offer children the opportunity to comment directly upon the experience. At the age of three years, such comment is becoming possible.

For the LT project, it was decided to use the child-centred IVR instrument to gather data about children's literacy practices from their perspective. Other tools, such as verbal protocol analysis, can be used to gather similar information, but were rejected because of their researcher-centred focus. The IVR data are collected while children aged approximately three years engage in book play with a close adult. The book play session is recorded using a small handheld video camera and then, adhering to Forman's (1999) protocol, the recording is shown to the child during a semi-structured interview about what is seen and heard on the videotape. It was at this point that the IVR procedure was extended beyond the normal playroom process, as it is important for the researchers to have ongoing access to these data. For this reason, the video revisiting is recorded with a second video camera, and the ensuing discussion is transcribed verbatim for coding and analysis from a phenomenological perspective using qsr NVivo software. Video footage of both book play and the revisiting is available to be imported into the NVivo project as necessary, allowing links to be made to apposite sections of the transcripts.

When investigating development and practices in early childhood language and literacies, it is relatively easy to collect data as an adult outsider. Careful observation, interviews with teachers, and the like, yield useful and interesting data. However, the best sources of information from the children's perspectives are the children themselves. IVR has very constructive applications in early childhood teaching and learning environments. Extending this participatory research tool beyond the immediate confines of the playroom provides an ideal platform on which to situate children's perspectives of their own development and practices, ensuring opportunity for all participants' voices to be heard.

Discussion

The research instruments described above range from fairly conventional survey and interview techniques, through more open-ended and flexible data gathering methods, to a highly innovative technology-based approach. Each method has been selected and customised with a view to empowering participants and facilitating their input to the research process. The focus of these three types of instruments is on accessing the voices of adults about themselves and their families (in the interviews), the voices of adults about their children (in the Literacy Wall and Mosaic), and the voices of children themselves (in the IVR process).

It will also be observed that these diverse research instruments provide output in different modes: the familiar facts and figures of survey and interview data, the visual mode of the Literacy Wall and Mosaic, and multimedia data from book play and IVR. These diverse types of data add depth to the picture gained, and render the research data far more immediately accessible, vivid, and useful for purposes of reflection and real-time learning. However, these advantages are accompanied by questions and issues, ranging from theoretical questions of reliability and validity, to practical issues of implementation.

With the advantages of accessing parents' and families' perspectives via interviews and the Literacy Wall or Mosaic, for example, comes the question whether adults who are not trained observers can offer valid and useful information to researchers. The SHELLS experience (Makin, 2004) suggests that the answer is yes. This is consistent with findings from Dickinson and DeTemple (1998), whose hypothesis was that parents of young children could predict their children's school literacy development. The researchers compared the reports of low income parents, gathered when their children were three and four years old, with teacher assessments of children's performance a couple of years later in kindergarten and first grade. They found significant correlations between parental reports and teacher reports and assessments.

The reliability of families' self-reporting has been questioned, in relation to literacy practices, use of information technology, book reading, library usage, children's literacy behaviours, and the like. It is natural that families seek to present themselves and their children in a positive light, to gain approval from program staff or to compare favourably with other program participants. This factor highlights the importance of multiple methods and measures, to allow triangulation of the research data. For example, parent observations may

or may not be consistent with video data, or with practitioners' reflective journals, which comprise another source of data for this research. It is important for families to experience that their self-reports are treated with respect and confidentiality, and as an opportunity for them to compare only with their own progress over time. For this reason, interviews and observations are conducted individually, not in groups.

The customisation and evolutionary nature of these research processes enhances their effectiveness. Modifying the terminology of the LT Family Literacy Perceptions Survey from 'confident' to 'comfortable' may encourage more accurate self-reporting. Interview questions that are found to be unclear can be modified and improved with each edition of the surveys, following review by the research partners. Respondents and participants are aware that their input and views are taken seriously, when they see their input incorporated into later versions of the Literacy Wall, Mosaic or other research instruments.

In the initial months of the LT research, the majority of the research tools used were adapted from those used in SHELLS research, although other instruments specific to the LT research are also being used or developed. Research instruments that can be customised for each program and context are essential to enable research to meet program-specific needs for self-evaluation and informing practice. Customising the instruments allows modification to suit the interests and focus areas of different groups, but raises questions of cross-program validity and generalisability. It has been interesting, from this point of view, to observe the relatively small amount of modification between SHELLS and LT research instruments. The maintenance of many shared items offers opportunities for cross-program joint research into the foundations of literacy.

As participants experience the empowerment of engaging actively with the research instruments, group dynamics become an important influence on the process. For example, the group of parents who initiated their own, adult version of the Literacy Wall gained considerable insight from the exercise, but their initiative was not continued by others after the participants most interested in it left the program when their children turned three, and the SHELLS facilitator changed.

Another important issue is when and how findings are reported to participants. One of the findings from analysis of the SHELLS Literacy Wall is that there is a trend for gender differences in reported ELBs to be evident by the age of three years. In a controlled experiment, this information would not be shared with participants. However, the philosophy underlying SHELLS, and its aim to contribute to ensuring that children establish strong literacy foundations prior to school entry, means that this information needs to be shared with participants, who may then choose to change their own interaction patterns with their children.

Dealing with issues arising in collaborative relationships can be time-consuming and requires tact and forbearance on all sides. It is very difficult for busy practitioners and parents to find time to make their contributions to the research process. Academic researchers face the challenge of making clear to other research participants the requirements of rigour and validity in data collection and analysis. Appropriateness of research procedures and timelines must be continually reviewed and renegotiated in the light of contextual realities in each research location. Many of these issues have been ironed out over the several years of SHELLS research, and are currently being addressed in the newer LT research collaboration, which faces the additional challenge of greater geographical separation between research partners. What has become clear is that maintaining effective collaboration requires a strong commitment to the shared principles discussed here, along with clear communication, frequent opportunities to reaffirm the joint focus and the benefits experienced by all partners, and realistic approaches to institutional constraints. Internal and external pressures in early childhood and academic work settings often present obstacles to fully collaborative research, despite increasing calls for such research partnerships and for research of the quality that they can deliver.

Concluding remarks

Findings from the research thus far confirm the commencement of early literacy behaviours at much younger ages than previously recognised by parents or by many early childhood practitioners. They also confirm the value of the situated expertise of families, their ability to observe and reflect on their role as literacy educators, and their ability to make constructive changes based on increased awareness. There are strong indications that these structured ways of accessing the voices of families and children are helpful to practitioners, assisting them to reflect on their own practice and to better understand families' and young children's experiences with and perceptions of literacies.

This discussion has covered fewer than half of the research instruments used in the two projects. Other instruments focus on different stakeholders and other types of data, and all stakeholders are welcome to propose ways of expanding or improving the research processes, wherever practicable. What has become clear is that this flexible and evolving research model offers advantages that outweigh the problems and issues encountered thus far. It appears to be a genuine step forward, particularly in the light of calls for multidisciplinary, collaborative studies incorporating a range of methods sufficient to create a body of knowledge on which to base high quality programs (NICHD, 2004).

References

Abbott, C., Walton, C., Tapia, Y., & Greenwood, C. (1999). Research to practice: A blueprint for closing the gap in local schools. *Exceptional Children, 83*(3), 339-362

ALLC (Australian Language and Literacy Council), National Board of Employment, Education and Training. (1995). *Teacher Education in English Language and Literacy.* Canberra: AGPS

Atweh, B., Kemmis, S., & Weeks, P. (1998). *Action research in practice: Partnership for social justice in education.* London: Routledge.

Aubrey, C., David, T., Godfrey, R., & Thompson, L. (2000). *Early childhood educational research: Issues in methodology and ethics.* London: Routledge

Auerbach, E.R. (1989). Toward a socio-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*, 165-187

Bowes, J. (2000). *Parents' responses to parent education: A review of selected parent education and support programs in the USA.* Sydney: Macquarie University

Brigance, A. (1983). *Brigance inventory of early development.* MA: Curriculum Associates

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Bruner, J.S. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Burgess, S.R. (1997). The role of shared reading in the development of phonological awareness: A longitudinal study of middle to upper class children. *Early Child Development and Care, 127-128*, 191-199

Burns, S., Griffin, P., & Snow, C.E. (Eds.). (1999). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press

Bus, A.G., Van IJzendoorn, M.H., & Pellegrini, A.D. (1995). Joint book reading makes for success in learning to read: A meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy. *Review of Educational Research, 65*, 1-21.

Cairney, T.H. (2000). The home-school connection in literacy and language development. In R. Campbell & D. Green (Eds.), *Literacies and learners* (pp. 91-104). Melbourne: Prentice-Hall.

Cairney, T.H. (2002a). Bridging home and school literacy: In search of transformative approaches to curriculum. *Early Child Development and Care, 172*(2), 153-172.

Cairney, T.H. (2002b). New directions in family literacy: Building effective partnerships between home and school. In O.N. Saracho & B. Spodek, *Contemporary perspectives in literacy in early childhood education* (Vol. 2). Connecticut: Information Publishing.

Clay, M. (1985). *The early detection of reading difficulties: A diagnostic survey with reading recovery procedures.* (3rd ed.). Auckland, NZ: Heinemann.

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures.* Melbourne: Macmillan.

Dickinson, D.K. & DeTemple, J. (1998). Putting parents in the picture: Maternal reports of preschooler's literacy as a predictor of early reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(2): 241-263.

Dymond, S.K. (2001). A participatory action research approach to evaluating inclusive school programs. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities, 16*(1), 54-64.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.). (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Epstein, J. (1996). Perspectives and previews on research and policy for school, family and community partnerships. In A. Booth & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Forman, G.E. (1999). Instant video revisiting: The video camera as a 'tool of the mind' for young children. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 1*(2). Retrieved 1 September 2004, from http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v1n2/forman.html.

Freebody, P. & Ludwig, C. (1997). *Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socioeconomic urban communities: A descriptive and interpretive research program.* Melbourne: Curriculum Corporation.

Geekie, P., Cambourne, B., & Fitzimmons, P. (1999). *Understanding literacy development.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Graue, E.M. & Walsh, D.J. (1998). *Studying children in context: Theories, methods and ethics.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hanlen, W. (2002). Indigenous literacies: Moving from social construction towards social justice. In L. Makin and C. Jones-Diaz (Eds.), *Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice.* Sydney: MacLennan & Petty.

Harkins, J., Makin, L., Spedding, S., & Whiteman, P. (2004). Collaborative early literacy research methods and instruments. Workshop presented at Learning Together Research Forum, Adelaide, SA, 10 March 2004.

Hill, S, Comber, B, Louden, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J. (1998). *100 children go to school: Connections and disconnections in literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school*, Vol. 1.Canberra: DEETYA.

Ho, B.S. (2002). Application of participatory action research to family school intervention. *School Psychology Review, 31*(1), 106-121.

Hong, S.B., & Broderick, J.T. (2003). Instant video revisiting for reflection: Extending the learning of children and teachers. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 5*(1). Retrieved 1 September 2004, from http://ecrp:uiuc.edu/v5n1/hong.html

Justice, L. M. & Ezell, H. K. (1999). Vygotskian theory and its application to language assessment: An overview for speech-language pathologists. *Contemporary Issues in Communication Science and Disorders, 26*, 111-118.

Kaderavek, J., & Justice, L.M. (2002). Shared storybook reading as an intervention context: Promises and potential pitfalls. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 11*, 395-406.

Karoly, L.A., Greenwood, P.W., Everingham, S.S., Hoube, J., Kilburn, M.R., Rydell, C.P., Sanders, M., & Chiesa, J. (1998). *Investing in our future: What we know and don't know about the costs and benefits of early childhood interventions.* Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Linder, T. (1993). *Transdisciplinary play-based assessment (TPBA): A functional approach to working with young children.* (Rev. ed.). MA: Paul Brookes.

Lonigan, C.J., Burgess, S.R., & Anthony, J.L. (2000). Development of emergent literacy and early reading skills in preschool children: Evidence from a latent variable longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology, 36*(5), 596-613.

Makin, L. (2003). Literacy prior to school entry: Narratives of access and exclusion. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 11*(1), 93-104.

Makin, L. (2004). Snips and snails and puppy dog tails: Literacy, 32-36 months, paper presented at the annual conference of research in early childhood education (ARECE), Monash University, January 2004.

Makin, L., Campbell, J., & Jones Díaz, C. (1995). *One childhood many languages: Guidelines for early childhood education.* Pymble, NSW: Harper Educational.

Makin, L. & Jones Díaz, C (Eds.). (2002). *Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice.* Sydney: MacLennan & Petty.

Makin, L. & Spedding, S. (2001). Support at Home for Early Language and LiteracieS (SHELLS): Collaboration and challenge. *Early Child Development and Care, 170,* 45-57. (Special issue, Power of choice in early childhood: Research or rhetoric?).

Makin, L.& Spedding, S. (2002). Supporting parents of infants and toddlers as first literacy educators: An Australian initiative. *Early Childhood Practice, 4*(1), 17-25.

Makin, L. & Spedding, S. (2003). 'Cause they trust their parents, don't they? Supporting literacy in the first three years of life. *Journal for Australian Research in Early Childhood Education, 10*(2), 39-49.

Makin, L. & Whitehead, M. (2003). *How to develop young children's literacy.* London: Sage.

McCormick, C. & Mason, J. (1986). Intervention procedures for increasing preschool children's interest in and knowledge about reading. In W. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading* (pp. 90-115). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

McNaught, M., Clugston, L., Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Jones Díaz, C, Ashton, J., Hayden, J., & Makin, L. (2000). *The early literacy and social justice project.* Canberra: DET & DOCS.

Munford, R. & Sanders, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Making a difference in families: Research that creates change.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Neuman, S.B. (1996). Children engaging in storybook reading: The influence of access to print resources, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 11*(4), 324-9.

Neuman, S.B. & Celano, D. (2001). Access to print in low-income and middle-income communities: An ecological study of four neighborhoods. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36,* 8-26.

NICHD (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, USA). (2004). Adult and family literacy: Current research and future directions. Retrieved 19 November 2004, from http://www.nichd.gov/crmc/cdb/AFL_workshhop.htm. Page last modified 5 May 2004.

Pascal, C. and Bertram, A.D. (Eds.). (1997). *Effective early learning: Case studies of improvement.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Patton, M.Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation.* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Purcell-Gates, V., (1996). Stories, coupons and the TV guide: relationships between home literacy and emergent literacy knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly, 32*(4), 406-428.

Ramphele, M. (1990). Participatory research: The myths and realities. *Social Dynamics, 16*(2), 1-15.

Razfar, A. and Gutierrez, K. (2003). Reconceptualizing early childhood literacy: The sociocultural influence. In N. Hall, J. Larson and J. Marsh (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy* (pp. 34-47). London: Sage.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Rogoff, B., Mosier, C., Mistry, J., & Goncu, A. (1993). Toddlers' guided participation with their caregivers in cultural activity. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & A. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (pp. 230-253). New York: Oxford University Press.

Saracho, O.N. (2000). Literacy development in the family context, *Early Child Development and Care, 165,* 107-114.

Scarborough, H. S. (1998). Predicting the future achievement of second graders with reading disabilities: Contributions of phonemic awareness, verbal memory, rapid serial naming, and IQ. *Annals of Dyslexia, 48,* 115-136.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97-110). New York: Guilford Press.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the brain: New insights into early childhood development.* New York: Families and Work Institute.

Snow, C., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Spedding, S., Harkins, J., Whiteman, P., & Makin, L. (2004). Investigating children's early literacy learning in family and community contexts. Paper presented at Learning Together Conference, Adelaide, SA, 1 July 2004.

Street, B.V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education.* London: Longman.

Sulzby, E. (1994). Roles of oral and written language as children approach conventional literacy. In C. Pontecorvo, M. Orsolini, B. Burge, & L. Resnick (Eds.), *Children's early text construction* (pp. 25-46). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science, 12,* 257-285.

Sweller, J. (1994). Cognitive load theory, learning difficulty and instructional design. *Learning and Instruction, 4,* 295-312.

Sylva, K. (1999). The role of research in explaining the past and shaping the future. In L. Abbot and H. Moylett (Eds.), *Early education transformed.* London: Falmer Press

Taylor, D. (1997). *Many families, many literacies: Developing family literacy programs based on an international declaration of principles.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Torgesen, J.K. & Davis, C. (1996). Individual difference variables that predict response to training in phonological awareness. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 63,* 1-21.

Watkins, R.V. & Bunce, B.H. (1996). Natural literacy: Theory and practice for preschool intervention programs. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 16*(2), 191-212.

Wells, G. (1985). *The meaning makers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Whitehead, M. (1999). *Supporting language and literacy development in the early years.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Whitehead, M. (2004). *Language and literacy in the early years.* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Whitehurst, G.J., Falco, E.L., Lonigan, C.J., Fischel, J E., DeBaryshe, B.D., Valdez-Menchaca, M.C., & Caulfield, M. (1988). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology, 24,* 552-559.

Whitehurst, G.J. & Lonigan, C. (1998). Child development and emergent literacy. *Child Development, 69,* 848-872.

Wise, B.W., Ring, J., & Olson, R.K. (1999). Training phonological awareness with and without attention to articulation. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 72,* 271-304.

Woods, P. (1994). The conditions for teacher development. In P. Grimmett & J. Neufeld (Eds.), *Teacher development and the struggle for authenticity.* New York: Teachers' College Press.