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Title Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy, Section IV
Author/editor Nigel hall, Joanne Larson and Jackie Marsh
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Price if possible (This is often particularly hard for us to find if we don't have the book!)
Number of pages 437

Joanne Larson and Shira May Peterson highlight the paucity of research on how talk is used in pre-school settings compared to school settings. They locate the wealth of research studies on talk and discourse in formal learning settings in terms of the different ideological positions adopted. They use two continua; Streets (1995) distinction between ideological and autonomous conceptions of literacy and whether the function of literacy is seen as fixed or fluid to separate the studies into four quadrants, each with a distinctive ideological base. This means that their analysis does not highlight the groundbreaking impact of individual studies, but it does illustrate very effectively how ideological assumptions shape both research design and the resulting recommendations for practice. It also highlights some key research problems: that ideological rigidity means researchers can miss opportunities to build on each others' findings.

Kathy Hall, in her chapter on effective literacy teaching agrees that what constitutes both literacy and effective pedagogy is controversial. She focuses on the research about what characterises effective teacher expertise. Her clear and concise analysis makes this chapter more than just a summary of the research; it is a brilliant tool for self-evaluation and monitoring and should be required reading on every teacher training and staff development course.

Laurie Makin emphasises the importance of resource-rich and media-rich environments within a productive pedagogy in her chapter on positive literacy learning environments. She explores some consequences of discongruent home and preschool literacy practices; that if an early years 'print rich' environment is to be positive for all, every child needs to see his or her own cultural, personal and social literacy practices reflected in how the print is used.

Linda Labbo and David Reinking provide a clear and engaging account of the research into literacy, digital technology and educational computer use. They argue that 'context counts' and that the studies so far indicate important messages about the useful, necessary and appropriate ways forward for research, policy and practice in this area, Keeping abreast of technological developments and acknowledging the multiple realities and different ways that these new devices are being incorporated into social worlds is as central challenge for future developments in the field.

Barbara Comber describes how critical literacy in the early years developed from studies questioning the basic tenets of early theorizing about the nature of childhood through to

studies challenging the ideological assumptions of basal readers and the absence of the genres of power within process writing approaches. Comber embraces studies of power, literacy and identity that are not seen as traditional 'critical literacy' research: Dyson's work on the interfaces between personal and social knowledge, school and home practices and play and work that explores children's empowerment through literacy, for example. Because of this, the chapter is wide-ranging and provides useful illustrations of the variety of research in this field, from studies of young children exploring adult-identified issues to studies focused on empowering children by developing their repertoire of literacy practices and the ability to use them to impact on the issues, interests, questions and observations they think most important.

Sharon Murphy starts by exploring the ways in which both assessment and language are value laden. She examines the underpinning values of three archetypical methods; standardised assessment, observation and responsive listening. Using historical perspective and discourse analysis, she examines architecture of each assessment type and explains the longevity and popularity of standardised testing, the emergence of, and variety within, observational assessment as well as the power of responsive listening. The concerns she voices about each assessment archetype raise many issues about current early years policy and practices. Her final point, that most literacy assessment focuses on 'who do we want you to become as a literate person?' but that real progress will come from a more interesting question, 'Who *are* you as a literate person?', reflects the key theme underlying this section of the book.

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