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**Emergent literacy in New Zealand kindergartens : An examination of
policy and practices**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Massey University

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1996

Abstract

Current research into emergent literacy suggests that children learn about literacy prior to formal education. Children develop the knowledge and skills of literacy within the context of their home and preschool relationships. A view of literacy as a developmental process which is socially constructed within children's relationships is proposed in this thesis. A kindergarten curriculum which focusses on providing a literacy rich, mediated learning environment is argued to be the most appropriate way to promote children's emergent literacy.

This thesis documents a research project undertaken in New Zealand kindergartens, which examines teachers' and parents' view of children's literacy development. Results of in depth interviews with Head Teachers and structured interviews with parents and Assistant Teachers will be presented, as well as the results of observational studies, which examine the domains of literacy activity in six kindergartens. Teachers in these kindergartens are constructivist teachers, who seek to promote independent learning through a range of "free play" curriculum. They argue a commitment to providing a literacy environment for children. Parents, who come from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, all describe a high level of literacy involvement with their children and firm beliefs about how children learn and what children need from early childhood education. Observational studies demonstrated that not all children receive the same exposure to literacy activities or to literacy- rich environments. Factors influencing the availability of literacy activities include teachers' views of cognitive and literacy development, curriculum design, kindergarten layout and the resources available to the kindergarten.

The strengths and weaknesses of a constructivist curriculum for promoting literacy development are examined and alternative views of teacher role, literacy environment and parental involvement are proposed. The implications for developing a curriculum for kindergarten which would promote emergent literacy development in children are explored.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr. Alison St. George and Professor William Tunmer for their advice, assistance and encouragement throughout the course of this work. I am extremely grateful to Alison for her ongoing support and careful consideration of all parts of the research. I am also very grateful to Bill for his positive and encouraging comments on various parts of the research.

Thanks are also due to the following:

The New Zealand Federation of University Women, for the award of a doctoral fellowship, to allow completion of the research while living the United States. The Massey University Research Fund and Education Department Research fund, for funding to support this research. The Faculty of Education, Massey University, for the award of an Assistant Lectureship from 1991-3.

The teachers and parents in all of the kindergartens studied in this research, who gave so willingly of their time and their experience. I am very grateful to everyone for making me feel so welcome and for giving me such interesting data to study.

Professor Beth Graue, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin - Madison. I wish to thank Beth for her support and many helpful discussions regarding early childhood theory and research. I am also grateful to Professors Michael Apple, Gary Price and Joseph Lawton at UW, for very helpful discussions regarding early childhood education.

Dr. Joy Cullen, for her valued suggestions, ready supply of useful resources and many helpful discussions regarding this research. I am also grateful to Associate Professor Dick Harker and Diana Bloor, for helping to clarify aspects of the data analysis, and Professor Tom Prebble, for his kindness and support over the last few months.

Last, but by no means least, I want to thank my family, for all their patience, support and encouragement over the last four years. I want to thank my parents, Dolly and Stuart McLachlan, for inspiring my interest in literacy and encouraging me to study, and my children, Daniel, Jeremy and Jessica, for inspiring my interest in how children learn. Finally, I want to thank my husband, Clyde Smith, for encouraging me to keep studying, helping me to fulfil the multiple roles that being a mother, a wife, a student and a teacher involve, and for all of his help and support at every stage of this research.

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