

Special Issue: Early Literacy

Guest Editor's INTRODUCTION

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This is the first special issue that the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education* has undertaken since it was first published in 2007. The issue includes five papers, which, together, address a number of different aspects of early literacy in children ranging in age from infancy through six years.

The first paper, by Tsuji, reports research on the behavior of 4-month-old Japanese infants toward a picture book read by a trained adult demonstrator to individual infant-parent dyads, as part of the Bookstart programme implemented in a health center context. Of particular interest were differences in infants' attention-related behaviors and temperament ratings. Thus, Tsuji's research suggests some possibilities for thinking about the origins of differences found in prior research on infant-parent dyad, picture book sharing that were related to attachment status (Bus, Belsky, van IJzendoorn, & Crnic, 1997; Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1997).

The second paper, by Ko and Lee, also focuses on parent-child picture book sharing, but from the perspective of enabling marriage immigrant Korean mothers to learn the Korean language through the use of picture books written in Korean. Significantly, folk tales from the mothers' country of origin (Philippines) were among the books used in the supportive training course provided by the researchers. Readers might note the mothers' higher level of extra-textual comments in the context of reading familiar folk tales. Although Ko and Lee focus more on how sharing of folk tales affects mothers' feelings of pride about their cultural heritage and their ability to pass this along to their children, there is likely a larger lesson for language and literacy learning. It is that parental knowledge of the content of a story and its setting probably enables more talk about the book with the child. This increased talk, which

includes explanation of events and content knowledge, would likely aid not only the parents' acquisition of the new country's language, but also help children learn the language and content-related facts and concepts, with benefits to their listening and reading comprehension.

The next two papers are concerned with writing. The first, by Lee, Lee, and Oh, reports an exploratory study focusing on differences in written versus spoken narratives produced by young Korean kindergarten children. An interesting finding was that written narratives had higher story structure levels in the majority of dyads with written and spoken narrative levels that differed. The authors suggest that reviewing what has been written, so far, might lead to better story structure than spoken narratives, which cannot so easily be reviewed during creation. On the other hand, children's spoken narratives included more cohesion devices than did their written narratives, which the authors suggested might be related to the different social contexts (i.e., a physically present listener might cause a child to include more detailed language than an imagined, but not present, reader). The study's findings suggest different instructional outcomes for spoken versus written narratives, for this age group; a need to look at younger children, who have less technical writing skill (i.e., less skill in writing words and sentences); and the value of teachers taking dictation via different methods (e.g., taking down what the child speaks, without stopping to review, so far, compared with stopping to review the child's dictation, so far).

The second paper focusing on writing, by Schickedanz, concerns the question of goals for preschool classroom writing centers, and issues relating to the conduct of classroom-based studies of teacher-child talk. Examples illustrate the language and content knowledge development potential of preschool emergent writing when viewed broadly as a writing/drawing/talking context rather than primarily as a context for developing literacy skills. The author also suggests a need for research focusing on the writing center during free play as a language and content development context, and for research on teacher-child verbal interactions about a topic that includes multiple contexts, over a period of time, with teacher interview data used to explain variations in conversation length on different occasions and in different contexts.

The final paper, by Paciga, Lisy, and Teale, provides a comprehensive discussion of a variety of issues pertaining to technology and interactive media use with preschoolers in the United States. The authors discuss major policy documents that guide technology and interactive media use, cite research on current technology use at the preschool level, and discuss the widening "digital divide" between lower income and higher income children. The

authors discuss the potential for technology and interactive media to reduce the knowledge gap between lower income and higher income U.S. school children, which often underlies wide differences found in the two groups' reading comprehension. They also suggest that dictation technologies could increase preschoolers' oral communication with adults beyond what is possible given current student-to-teacher ratios. The authors note a critical need to increase technology access at the preschool classroom level and to provide high quality professional development that acquaints preschool teachers with new tools, and especially with how to use these to enrich young children's content learning.

Unifying themes across all of the papers are language and content knowledge development, and issues of equity in educational opportunity. Some inequities might have roots in early individual differences (Tsuiji), which, if identified early and understood, might be modified to the benefit of a child's later literacy development. Other inequities are related to cultural dislocation, which diminishes children's learning in a new language and an immigrant parent's confidence and skill in supporting a child's learning in a new language and culture (Ko & Lee). Still other inequities result from low income, which affects the number and range of experiences in which young children are engaged at home and in their communities, including their experience with new technologies. If utilized well in preschool settings, new technology might help to reduce experience and related knowledge gaps found in lower income children (Paciga, Lisy, & Teale). And, of course, knowledge and understanding about differences in learning that come from different experiences and their interaction with different adult strategies (Lee, Lee & Oh), and from different sets of goals for an experience context (Schickedanz), can help early childhood teachers maximize learning for all young children.

References

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