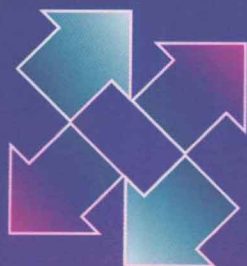


ISSUES --- *AND* TRENDS *IN* LITERACY EDUCATION



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Issues and Trends in Literacy Education

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Issues and Trends in Literacy Education

*The love of books is a love which requires neither
justification, apology, nor defense.*

—JOHN LANGFORD

*This book is dedicated to those teachers
who have inspired in their students
an undying love for reading and writing.*

*Reading is the sole means by which we slip,
involuntarily, helplessly, into another's skin,
another's voice, another's soul.*
—JOYCE CAROL OATES

Preface

The primary purpose of this book is to help you better study and understand the field of literacy education. What was once a rather limited discipline is today a vast and complicated body of knowledge and field of inquiry, frequently drawing on information from many diverse areas such as psychology, sociology, and linguistics. The individual wishing to investigate a question or topic in literacy today may find the experience a daunting one.

For example, a recent computer search on the subject “reading comprehension” identified over 4,000 references to this one topic. Ranging across a broad spectrum of subtopics, the results of this search clearly showed the diversity that is typical of the literacy field. These results included data-based research studies, classroom observational inquiries, theoretical research papers, as well as personal opinion articles. These references represented the work of university faculty, classroom teachers, commercial publishers, and private individuals. Complicating the situation is the fact that there is not only a great deal of information currently available, but many different opinions and perspectives as well. These viewpoints often range between a single individual's position on a topic and a national movement reflecting the philosophies and attitudes of many thousands of people.

It is with these circumstances in mind that the present textbook was written. We have attempted to identify the most significant issues and trends facing literacy educators today and to locate sources that explain principal viewpoints on these issues. Beyond selecting sources and providing textual aids to promote comprehension and engagement, our contribution has been minimal. We prefer to let the authors speak for themselves.

We have assumed that most readers of this book have had at least some introduction to the study of literacy education. The book has been developed with practicing teachers in mind—practitioners interested in extending their own thinking about the important issues they face in classrooms. We have not attempted to produce an introductory text, but assume that the foundations of literacy instruc-

tion—its purposes, concepts, and methods—have already been laid by means of prior coursework and teaching experience.

Organization of the Text

Each chapter is made up of four parts: (1) a brief introduction to the topic, (2) the articles themselves, (3) an annotated bibliography, and (4) suggestions for further involvement.

Chapter Introductions

Each topic is first summarized in a brief section designed both to provide necessary background and to help stimulate thinking related to the topic. Many readers of this book will have, either through previous education classes or classroom teaching experiences, developed ideas and feelings about the topics discussed in this book. We challenge you to keep an open mind about what you currently believe concerning literacy instruction. In many literacy areas, either because of recent research or relevant classroom experiences, instructional strategies that were once considered appropriate are now being challenged by new ideas and pedagogy.

Each chapter introduction concludes with a list of important questions designed to guide your reading and organize your thinking. Actively considering them should give you a better understanding of your current knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about a particular literacy issue.

Articles

Following the introduction are the selections. Our intent is that this section will help familiarize you with important, though sometimes incompatible, views on the chapter topic. Of particular note is the presentation of differing points of view. For some topics, where there is little disagreement or controversy, you will find a general discussion of the literacy trend. You should understand that the selections are never intended to be all-inclusive but rather to introduce the topic and encourage you to pursue further study on your own.

Accompanying the selections are **Content Literacy Guides**, designed to aid you in focusing on the important issues discussed in the accompanying articles and to provide a useful review guide once completed. Some parts of the guides are designed to be completed as you read, whereas some portions are to be finished afterward. They combine literal, inferential, and critical responses to the article content. They can be used both prior to reading the articles as a purpose-setting device and following the reading as an opportunity for content review. The final portions of the guides are called **Integrating Sources** and **Classroom Implications**. These two sections follow the articles. As the headings indicate, the intent is to help you resolve differences between the articles and to consider possible implications for classroom literacy instruction. These sections are purposely designed to be open ended.

Annotated Bibliographies

Although every article has its own reference section, we have attempted to supplement these with a careful selection of sources useful for further reading. In some cases, the material is divided into a historical and a current listing of literacy sources. In these cases, the reader can see the development and changes in thinking on a literacy topic, noting how historical issues and trends have influenced current opinions and practices.

You Become Involved

The final section of each chapter is designed to help you formulate your own views by engaging in activities that encourage independent thought. For each chapter, a range of possibilities is presented. The ideas can be approached individually or in groups and are meant to be undertaken selectively.

For the University Teacher

Today, colleges of education are increasingly faced with issues of accountability related to their preparation of teachers. Whereas some standards, such as those of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), apply across the general field of education, subject matter organizations have developed guidelines for more specialized teacher preparation. In this respect, the International Reading Association (IRA) has long been involved in the development of standards for the preparation of literacy educators at all levels. The IRA publication, *Standards for Reading Professionals* (Lunsford & Pauls, 1992), was written to guide the preparation and professional development of literacy educators. Emphasized as a fundamental principle throughout this publication is the fact that all educators, whether at the preservice or inservice level, need an extensive conceptual framework related to the field of literacy instruction.

The following specific guidelines are only part of those listed by which university and college programs of teacher education in the field of literacy will be evaluated. They include the following student outcomes:

- Has knowledge of current and historical perspectives about the nature and purposes of reading and about widely used approaches to reading instruction
- Pursues knowledge of reading and learning processes by reading professional journals and publications and participating in conferences and other professional activities
- Employs inquiry and makes thoughtful decisions during teaching and assessment
- Interprets and communicates research findings related to the improvement of instruction to colleagues and the wider community
- Initiates, participates in, or applies research on reading

- Reads or conducts research with a range of methodologies (e.g., ethnographic, descriptive, experimental, or historical)
- Promotes and facilitates teacher-based and classroom-based research

The primary purpose of this book is to assist you in helping your students meet these wide and diverse guidelines for literacy education. Chapter content is designed to encourage further exploration of certain selected topics in literacy education through the effective use of a wide variety of resources and materials. We would hope that the end product of this book and your instruction is an educator who has been made more aware of the prominent issues and trends in the field of literacy education today and who appreciates their implications for practice.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments: Larry Andrews, University of Nebraska–Lincoln; Nancy Bacharach, St. Cloud State University; Patricia DeMay, Livingston University; Jean McWilliams, Rosemont College; and David Reinking, University of Georgia.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Field of Literacy Education

*Books are yours,
Within whose silent chambers treasure lies
Preserved from age to age; more precious far
Than that accumulated store of gold
And orient gems which, for a day of need,
The sultan hides deep in ancestral tombs.
These hoards of truth you can unlock at will
—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH*

The study of literacy today is a vast and often complicated enterprise. In many fields, information is concentrated in a limited number of journals or produced by relatively few individuals; this is certainly not the case in literacy education, however. For example, important literacy research and writing are currently being done by individuals in fields as diverse as linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociology, computer science, anthropology, and education. Even within the general field of education, literacy materials are often indexed under a broad range of descriptors, such as emergent literacy, assessment, materials, teacher training, and so on. This information is frequently reported in a wide variety of outlets—including journals, books, and research reports—and has recently been lodged in huge computer databases. For the literacy educator, this wide spectrum of knowledge and available resources often presents a daunting challenge.

The purpose of this chapter is to facilitate your further study of literacy education. The intent here is to provide specific information that will help you learn more about the most prominent resources and current thinking in the field. You may already be familiar with some of the sources mentioned.

As You Read

Your study of this chapter should prepare you to examine the issues that follow. As you read, keep the following objectives in mind:

1. Describe some effective strategies for literacy research and study.
2. Identify some of the current trends in literacy education.
3. Identify the major national organizations in the field of literacy study.
4. Describe some of the important journals and references in the field of literacy.

Introduction

Edmund Huey, writing early in the twentieth century about the study of the reading process, noted that “to completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist’s achievements, for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind, as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance that civilization has learned in all its history” (Huey, 1908, p. 6). This single statement, in many respects, epitomizes even today the ongoing search for a better understanding of the reading process. Although it is true that much has been done in the study of fundamental processes related to literacy as well as in the development of new instructional programs in literacy since Huey wrote, many important questions remain unanswered at the present time.

Current Trends in Literacy Education

Today, as in the past, the literacy community often finds itself split according to philosophies, theories, and/or practical applications. Although terms may have changed, much of what is debated today is often strikingly similar to the substance of past disputes. Issues such as the most appropriate methods and materials to use in the teaching of literacy as well as how to effectively assess what is learned are, after extended controversy, still the center of much of the literacy debate today.

As you continue your study of literacy issues, it is important to be aware that you must inevitably confront divergent viewpoints and opinions. For almost any of these issues, there is a wide range of opinions and feelings. These differences are clearly evident in the available literature on most topics. Expecting them should make you better at identifying and appraising the various viewpoints on each literacy topic.

A preview of some of the most prominent issues facing literacy educators today may well convince you of the range of problems involved. A major issue is that of **whole language** versus more **conventional philosophies** to instruction. Related to it is the role of **phonics instruction, spelling, and basal readers**. The nature of **emerging literacy** in early childhood has challenged older notions of “**readiness**,”

just as research into vocabulary instruction may surprise you with its implications for day-to-day practice. In content area classrooms, new conceptualizations have arisen as to how literacy activities can help students learn. In the larger arena of education, debate over the proper approaches to assessment and the desirability of national standards has spilled over into literacy. Finally, new advances in technology challenge educators to make the best uses of it in developing literate behavior in students. Each of these topics will be covered later in this book, though their interrelatedness will frequently compel you to cross-reference your thinking!

Organizations in Literacy Education

Many professional organizations address literacy issues as part of their programs, but the following are the most prominent.

- *International Reading Association.* The IRA is the largest organization in the literacy field, with a widespread membership that includes teachers at all levels from college and university faculty through elementary teachers. This organization is noted for its many quality literacy publications as well as a structure that invites participation at local, state, regional, national, and global levels. Its periodicals include *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* (formerly *Journal of Reading*), *Reading Research Quarterly*, and *Lectura y Vida* (Spanish language).
- *National Council of Teachers of English.* The NCTE is a large organization representing teachers interested in language arts instruction. Like the IRA, the NCTE is noted for a variety of publications, including its two principal journals, *Language Arts* and *English Journal*.
- *National Reading Conference.* This organization is primarily comprised of college and university faculty interested in all types of literacy research. Its periodical is the *Journal of Reading Behavior* (soon to be known as the *Journal of Literacy Research*), and its yearbook also presents research on a wide variety of literacy-related topics.
- *College Reading Association.* Members of this organization are primarily college and university faculty. CRA publishes a journal, *Reading Research and Instruction*, as well as a yearbook.

Leading Journals in the Field of Literacy

- *The Reading Teacher.* This journal, published by the International Reading Association, includes articles primarily related to the teaching of literacy in the elementary school.
- *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.* This journal, formerly titled *Journal of Reading*, is published by the International Reading Association with emphasis on literacy education in the content areas as well as on middle, high school, and adult education.

- *Reading Research and Instruction*. Formerly *Reading World*, this journal combines research reports with articles that suggest ideas. It is published by the College Reading Association.
- *Reading Research Quarterly*. This is the leading journal of literacy research. The articles published in this journal consistently represent important contributions to the field of literacy research. Often, the articles published in the *Reading Research Quarterly* include extensive bibliographies of related materials and thus are excellent sources for further study. This journal is a publication of the International Reading Association.
- *Reading Horizons*. This journal is intended primarily for classroom teachers and typically publishes articles related to classroom applications of new literacy research.
- *Journal of Literary Research*. Primarily a literacy research journal published by the National Reading Conference, this publication also presents position papers and issues-oriented commentary.
- *Reading Psychology*. This journal contains a wide variety of literacy articles, including research, opinion pieces, and suggestions for practice.
- *Language Arts*. This journal is published by the National Council of Teachers of English. Although areas of the language arts curriculum are included, there is a substantial number directly related to literacy concerns. The primary orientation of the journal is toward elementary instruction.
- *English Journal*. Published by the National Council of Teachers of English, this journal addresses the concerns of teachers serving adolescent and older populations.

ERIC

References in the Study of Literacy Education

Although a seemingly endless flow of new titles enters the field of literacy education, the following books have been selected as important sources for further study. They have been selected on the basis of their importance to the field and should be excellent starting points for further study.

Reference Materials

Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

This important and scholarly reference reflects the continuing interest in the study of the sound/symbol relationships related to word analysis. Comprehensive synthesis of research in the areas of cognitive and developmental psychology, instructional methodology, and related areas is included.

Flood, J., et al. (Eds.). (1991). *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts*. New York: Macmillan.

This collection of research reviews focuses on topics broadly ranging across the language arts.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

A thorough discussion of the philosophical foundations of the whole language movement is provided.

Kamil, M., & Langer, J. A. (1985). *Understanding research in reading and writing.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

This book is a discussion of the uses of various research methodologies and their specific application to the study of literacy. For those interested in the development of a research design related to literacy, this is an excellent reference.

Pearson, P. D., et al. (1984). *Handbook of reading research.* White Plains, New York: Longman.

Barr, R., et al. (1991). *Handbook of reading research, Part II.* White Plains, New York: Longman.

Both of these volumes are important resources in the study of literacy education. They contain inclusive reviews of important issues in the field as well as extensive bibliographies of related materials. They should be excellent starting points for most studies in the field of literacy education.

Samuels, J., & Farstrup, A. (1992). *What reading research has to say about reading instruction.* Newark, Delaware: International reading Association.

This is a series of articles written by noted literacy authorities on how current research informs several important issues in the field.

Historical Materials

The following references have been selected to provide a historical perspective on the research and teaching of literacy. They should provide you with information on important past work done by noted authorities in the field.

Altick, R. D. (1963). *The art of literacy research.* New York: W. W. Norton.

This cornerstone work on the research methods in literacy anticipates many of the present-day concerns of qualitative researchers.

Anderson, I. H., & Dearborn, W. F. (1952). *The psychology of reading.* New York: Roland Press.

This is an important reference in the early study of the psychology of literacy processes.

Betts, E. A. (1946). *Foundations of reading instruction.* New York: American Book Company.

Written for preservice teachers on the teaching of literacy in the elementary grades, this important reference is excellent for comparison with current methods texts.