

Learning to be Literate

Insights from research for policy and practice

An essential read for those involved in literacy

This book analyses research into literacy from 1960s to 2014. With illustrations of children's developing awareness of written language, the author makes a persuasive argument for the value of research.



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Background. *Learning to be Literate: insights from research for policy and practice*, a new book, published in May 2014, provides an analysis of key research, mine and that of others who influenced my thinking over the past fifty years. All except the first and last chapters are adaptations of previously published articles, chapters in books or publications of conference proceedings between 1972 and 2014. In some ways it has been disturbing to discover just how relevant still are the comments I made in these publications; many of the insights have been ignored, and lessons not learnt. The book charts developments in our understanding of young children's developing awareness of print, backed by illustrations from children who succeeded at an early age and others who had continuing problems. Government literacy policies over these years are traced, the evidence cited to justify the policies is analysed and other evidence ignored is identified.

Below are extracts from two of the many endorsements of the book (from page 225): Others are on the back cover. These were made by professionals after reading an advance online draft.

She rightly draws attention to the complexity of the orthographic, syntactic and semantic processes a young reader must master in order to make sense of written text and the danger in any government policy that stresses one best method. The author sets out to dispel 'a few myths'. In so doing, she assures her position among the most influential figures in literacy research of her generation. Carol Aubrey, Professor Emeritus, Warwick University.

This book is a remarkable account of how we should approach teaching 'learning to be literate' in an age when we are increasingly told by Government both what we should teach and how we should teach it. It is a must read story of research and practice, drawing on a wonderful wealth of experience in the development of reading. Professor Stephen Rayner, Dean of Education, Newman University.

Articles from *Education Journal*

A number of articles of mine that appeared either in the *Education Journal* or in *Literacy Today* have been adapted for inclusion in this new book. Over the years 2003 to 2014 eight articles of mine were published in the *Education Journal* and two in *Literacy Today*. The latter two articles were on Reading Recovery's rediscovery and a tribute to Marie Clay on her death in 2007. In 2003 I sounded a warning about conclusions being drawn from international studies such as PIRLS. In 2006 I considered the possible impact on the teaching of reading in England of the Rose Report. The remaining series of six articles in 2013 and 2014 were an analysis of aspects of the government's policy requiring schools to adopt synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading and the introduction of the phonics check for all children in England.

Developing the book. I made a selection from my publications on literacy over the

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years 1967 to 2014, scanned the original publications, shortened some and adapted and edited them. However, where any new comments have been added that is clearly indicated. The book has been grouped in five sections with the scene set in each section so that readers can if they wish, concentrate on specific sections. Hopefully the book might put to rest some myths, including those perpetuated by successive governments, where they fly in the face of a wealth of research evidence.

In my determination to ensure that the book was in print as soon as possible I decided for the first time to self-publish, an exciting but somewhat stressful experience. In this venture I was supported by the ELearning Department at Newman University, who set up the templates within which I worked on the manuscript and prepared them for the printer. Advice from The Society of Authors ensured that I fulfilled all the legal requirements for a publisher in England. Witley Press Ltd, the printer I selected, gave advice throughout and will now act as distributor for the book and also link with Amazon. At one time I had visions of storing the books in my flat, packing them and taking them to the post office. Not only am I now an author with many publications to my name, but I am now a new publisher. Glendale Education, with ten ISBN numbers! I had to select either ten or a hundred numbers, ten being the minimum, so this may still be the first in a series of books under the imprint of this new publisher.

A review of *Learning to be Literate: insights from research for policy and practice*

**Wendy Scott, President of TACTYC
(Association for the Professional Development of Early Years Educators)**

Margaret Clark has unmatched experience as teacher as well as researcher of young children's literacy learning. She argues for the vital role of meaningful contexts for early reading and writing, matched to children's differing interests and prior experience. She provides compelling evidence, informed by extensive observation and rigorous analysis, of the purposeful ways that literacy can be taught effectively to children learning to express themselves and to decode the complexities of the English language. Her work, which importantly includes consideration of communication in the home, the influence of environmental print, and the reciprocal nature of reading and writing, is highly relevant to current concerns about the gap in attainment between children from disadvantaged families and others, and the related debate about school readiness.

As well as drawing on many years of research and reflection and on international evidence to provide thoughtful guidance for teachers and parents, Professor Clark encourages us all to consider the implications of research for practice, and to advocate for an informed approach to policy. She is a convincing critic of the phonics check recently introduced in Year 1 in England, and has succeeded in uncovering the financial as well as the opportunities cost of the imposition of the test. She deplores the way that tests are driving the curriculum and judgements of school effectiveness, benefiting commercial interests rather than pupils. Parents as well as teachers and students will encounter much to think about in this book, and will experience for themselves the increased motivation to find out more that good teaching can inspire.

The book is available via Amazon Marketplace www.witleypress.co.uk at £16.50 plus £2.80 postage and packing UK (£4.02 EU, £6.94 US and Canada, £7.00 rest of world).