

**THE ROLES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
IN THE ENGLISH PROGRAM
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Reading the texts of our lives?

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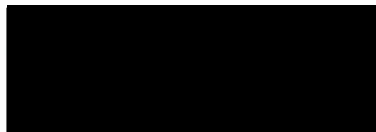
September, 2001

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature:

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Date:

30 September, 2001

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the possible roles children's literature plays in the contemporary primary English classroom. How teachers perceive literature is directly linked to the relationship they see between the reader, the 'read' and the practice of reading. Such perceptions are derived from many influences, both ideological and pedagogical. All, in some way, are driven by a Foucauldian perspective of power where many competing discourses of English education organise meaning differently and establish their own positions of power.

The research for this study adopts a multimethodological approach that draws on ethnographic and quasi-experimental research, together with conceptual, discursive research. It is organised in a metaphorical framework of research in three broad categories of 'lab', 'field' and 'library' research. The context for the study involves two New South Wales sites: primary schools and a regional university. Through surveys of two hundred and eighty-nine teacher education students and interviews with eight classroom teachers, the study examines how preservice and practising teachers recognise and develop their own expertise in the areas of reading and literature. It explores their attitudes to literature and their knowledge of literary theory and of children's literature, and the roles they see literature playing in English education in the primary school. In keeping with the postcritical thinking of this research, the study has followed Romm's suggestion (1997) that claiming multiple realities offers sound arguments that will stimulate discussion in society and enhance the Discourse of the primary English classroom.

This study utilizes not only observations of the contemporary educational site, but draws on historical perspectives to weave a richer tapestry of the primary English classroom. In order to identify the possible origins of current thinking, it retells the history of the field of children's literature and its role in English education. This thesis does so by identifying the 'monuments' of traditional history and, consistent with Foucault's notion of genealogy, subverts some of these monuments through an analysis of both past and present educational sites. An examination of the historical development of the primary school English curriculum in New South Wales highlights the changing roles literature has played in these sites. A study of the history of children's literature reveals shifts in the perceptions of the nature of the child reader. It also considers how the definition of what constitutes a children's book is being challenged as the genre embraces new sub genres such as adolescent fiction and experiments with texts to contribute to the body of contemporary literature.

The study considers how some of the older discourses persist and merge with the new and how these competing realities impact on the teacher. In particular, the research examines the effect of recent politicisation of education and ideological shifts and the subsequent impact on the implementation of the current New South Wales *English K-6 Syllabus* and related policy documents. It also provides information about how curriculum change challenges the teachers' pre-existing perspectives on the roles of literature in the primary English program.

The analysis of the gathered data identifies some of the powerful forces that formulate teacher education students' and classroom teachers' perceptions of children's literature and raises questions about the nature of educational programs for preservice and practising teachers. This study considers how teachers have arrived at their present knowledge base, how they utilise it and what they perceive as being the limitations of this knowledge. This information is seen to be significant in enhancing the tertiary instruction available in the education of primary teachers. Ultimately, the study is concerned with how teachers and teacher education students might best be active, informed participants in assessing the roles of children's literature in the classroom.

The findings of the study show that primary English teachers must respond to discourses of theory, policy and practice in formulating their views of the roles of children's literature in the primary classroom, a task that many consider challenging given the conflicting perspectives with which they are faced. The present research has found that while teachers generally value the use of children's literature in their English programs, they lack confidence in understanding its qualities and how it might develop readers' 'literary literacy'. The study suggests that solutions may be found through research, strengthening the links between academic institutions and the classroom, and through tertiary programs that confront competing discourses and explore the interaction of theory, policy and practice.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
BOS	Board of Studies
BST	Basic Skills Tests
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DET	Department of Education and Training, NSW
DSE	Department of School Education
ELIC	Early Literacy Inservice Course
ELLA	English Language and Literacy Assessment
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
KLA	Key Learning Area
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
LRQ	Literary Response Questionnaire
MACQT	Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching
NCTE	National Council of the Teachers of English
NUDIST	Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theory-building
PETA	Primary English Teaching Association
RPM	Response Preference Measure
TDM	Total Design Method
TODA	Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation

*[L]earning to read books—or pictures or
films—is not just a matter of acquiring
information from texts, it is a matter of learning
to read and write the texts of our lives
(Scholes 1989: 19).*
