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1995

**Transfer of embedded symbolic information between home and school: a grounded theory of how young children develop idiosyncratic responses during the construction of literacy in the classroom**

Adrienne Shane Huber

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**TRANSFER OF EMBEDDED SYMBOLIC  
INFORMATION BETWEEN HOME AND  
SCHOOL:**

**A GROUNDED THEORY  
OF  
HOW YOUNG CHILDREN  
DEVELOP IDIOSYNCRATIC RESPONSES  
DURING THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF LITERACY IN THE  
CLASSROOM**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the award of the degree**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**from**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**by**

**ADRIENNE SHANE HUBER  
BSc(Psych)(Hons) (Newcastle)**



**Faculty of Education  
1995**

**Dedicated to:**

Bert,  
my person for all seasons

Suzanne and Michelle,  
two of my best reasons for being

and

Brian,  
"a person without equal"  
in encouraging me in making connections

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No research is possible without participants and my participants have been particularly generous and enduring for which I am eternally grateful. I do hope my representation of you in this thesis does you the justice you deserve. Thankyou.

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My friends will now see a different me as I emerge from my thesis cocoon, my domicile for such a long time. I look forward to catching up before my next venture (well almost): I'm sure I can think of another project to keep me going into the Twenty First Century... A special thankyou to Maleeka Salih who unwittingly crossed my path at the eleventh hour providing much needed sane interludes at an insane time.

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# ABSTRACT

This study describes how three young children use their knowledge of the world derived from their primary experiences in their family of origin and their school to develop idiosyncratic responses during the construction of literacy in the classroom. The connections between young children's experiences at home and how they construct literacy in the classroom has received much attention in recent years. However, most research has focused on literacy-specific behaviours. This study provides a shift in this focus. Insights are offered into how deep level (i.e., embedded symbolic) information is transferred between home and school. A futurologist's conceptual framework and a cross disciplinary theoretical base have been used to provide access to a broader range of discourses for the purposes of understanding issues raised by the research question: How do young children use their knowledge of the world derived from their primary experiences in their family of origin and their school to develop idiosyncratic responses during the construction of literacy in the classroom?

The term literacy has not yet been clearly defined. The issue of understanding the nature of and defining literacy for a Super-symbolic Information Age is discussed. For the purposes of this study literacy was defined as a transient, idiosyncratic Gestalt, which is a by product of constructions of meaning from symbolic and embedded symbolic information in textual data.

The primary aim of the study was to develop a grounded theory of acculturated meaning making in the development of idiosyncratic literacy practices. This was achieved through three sub aims: Describing one school's culture; describing three individual families' intergenerational family acculturation; and ascribing acculturated patterns of responses to the making of meaning in the classroom by three young children, during their first three years of school, when they construct literacy. Acculturation may be defined as the means by which beliefs, attitudes, values, patterns and practices are willingly and unwillingly, overtly and covertly, verbally and non-verbally, communicated, negotiated and mutated (i.e., altered) from one generation to another and within generations of a family, community and culture (Ref.: Kingson, Hirshorn, Cornman & Cabin, 1986; Guerin, Fay, Burden & Kautto, 1987; Guerin & Pendagast, 1976; Minuchin, 1974).

Longitudinal Case Study data were collected over three years. During this time three children, their families and one of their teachers from the one school participated. Parents completed a questionnaire about their intergenerational family acculturation (i.e., their beliefs, attitudes, values, patterns and practices over three or more generations). Additional questions addressed parents' own experiences as learners and their beliefs, attitudes, values and practices with regard to their child's language, literacy and learning. The teacher and the three children were observed and video taped in the classroom over a three year period (1991-1993). One parent of each child and the teacher participated in individual focus interviews. These interviews acted as memberchecks whereby interpretations of observations were assessed, corroborated, errors corrected and new information added.

The school culture was derived from document analysis and classroom observations.

Naturalistic Inquiry methods were used to collect data for three main data pools: Intergenerational family acculturation data; document analysis; data and classroom observation data. Each data pool was subsequently collapsed to produce other data pools and provide additional information about embedded symbolic knowledge (Ref: Wurman, 1989).

A process for analyzing embedded symbolic information was developed and described. This process was developed in response to predictions of futurologists such as Reich (1993), Toffler (1990) and Wurman (1989) and specifically, Toffler's (1990) notion of a Super-symbolic Information Age and embedded symbolism in which symbols "represent nothing more than other symbols inside the memories and thoughtware of people and computers" (Toffler, 1990:62). Accordingly, data pools were analyzed for embedded information, then embedded knowledge and lastly, embedded beliefs.

A grounded theory is presented of how young children use their knowledge of the world derived from their primary experiences in their family of origin and their school to develop idiosyncratic responses during the construction of literacy in the classroom. Young children come to school already knowing how to use their knowledge of the world to make meaning. They learn how to make meaning through intergenerational acculturation processes which are fundamental to all family units. Intergenerational family acculturation provides a ready meaning making template system. It is through this

meaning making template system that young children pattern their experiences and specifically, textual data, when constructing in the classroom. Intergenerational family acculturation appears to construct meaning at a deep level of embedded symbolic information. Implications of the results of this study are discussed, including implications for how we understand individual children's responses during the construction of literacy in the classroom; the role of contexts in the meaning making process; the intimate acculturation processes inherent in school culture and teaching and learning processes.