Student thesis projects in literacy

Learning to be literate with smart screens – Alison Arrow & Brian Finch

New domestic digital technologies (smartphones, iPads, tablet computers, laptops) have altered children’s access to narratives and information. There is little research that identifies good practice with digital technologies in school settings, only suggestions on how to use it. Our aim with this project is to identify good practices through an analysis of the use of digital technologies in early childhood education and junior primary school settings. This research project will investigate the ways that children interact with screens within two early childhood institutions and during the first year of school in two primary school classrooms, focusing on the emerging literacy behaviours and the pedagogies in each setting. Data will include children’s interactions with representations on screen using screen recording software and interviews with each educator exploring their beliefs and the institution’s policies in the area.

Reading the first word: Do letters matter? – Alison Arrow

Reading research has not yet been able to identify how children make the qualitative shift from non-readers to readers. This research project proposes that knowing names of letters enables beginning readers to learn and store orthographic representations of words. This research project will investigate how children learn words as a function of letter names and sounds known, as well as the influence of their own name, and encompasses a series of smaller studies. The ability to understand print as a second order symbol of a concept is also part of the research project. Data will include how children perform on the moving word task of Bialystok when the symbol is a picture and when the symbol is a printed word of a matched concept, letter knowledge, own name abilities, and a teaching task for simple printed words.

Set for variability training – Bill Tunmer, James Chapman, & Alison Arrow

A recent Tunmer and Chapman article is one of the most popular articles in the Scientific Studies of Reading in 2011-2012. This article examined how vocabulary influences word recognition skills through set for variability which is the ability to determine the correct pronunciation of words, from incorrectly pronounced words. Vocabulary also influenced reading comprehension both indirectly, through set for variability and word recognition, and directly, from year 1 to year 3. This series of research projects will investigate several of the follow-up questions derived from this work. Data will include carrying out assessments and intervention tasks with children.

Teaching practices in literacy – Claire McLachlan, Alison Arrow, & Jane Prochnow

There is a body of research that examines teacher quality and teacher knowledge of literacy practices and literacy development, but much of this research is based on teacher surveys. There is a gap in the research literature for small scale studies that examine what teachers actually do in ECE and in primary school classrooms. An aspect of this would also be examining assessment and how it
is used in both settings. Data will include interviews and observations of practice. This large research project has a series of smaller research projects are several aspects to this project that can be focused more specifically on, for example:

- New entrant classrooms;
- The practice of 4-year-old extension classes in ECE;
- Specific practices in early childhood such as large mat sessions;
- Behaviour management practices utilised in new entrant classrooms;
- Level of attention focused on literacy tasks by new entrant learners;
- Teacher understanding of assessing new entrant learners’ literate cultural capital and ability to scaffold from that level of knowledge.

**Literacy practices of children at home – Brian Finch and Alison Arrow**

Rhetoric abounds with regards to what children do at home, and how they engage with literacy (or not), but there is very little research on what children actually do and how they do the things they do. This includes how they use their home practices in school contexts. This large research project involves a series of research projects across a range of methodologies, primarily case study, to look at literacy practices:

- Children’s interactions with favourite rich texts (novels or films) at home and their literary responses within classrooms;
- Children’s home engagement practices with YouTube and the various kinds of learning involved;
- Beginning blogging – the kinds of writing and reading and interactions involved from children in the age range 7-17 years old;
- Public library internet use by children compared with home use practices of their age group;
- Case studies of children, looking at their literacy practices at home (reading, viewing, writing, designing), within community groups and at school. A research project would include children of the same age, but different projects could have children from 4 years to 18 years. This could possibly also include a comparison between children in a ‘digital classroom’ and those in a ‘regular classroom’.

**Using text across formats – Brian Finch**

In the 21st century we have to be cognisant that children are doing very different things with texts, across formats than researchers ever did. This series of research projects looks to further examine what this use looks like, and what it means, for children at school.

- An analysis of writing content where children have some choice and how this influences the development revealed in their writing.
- ‘Design’ is a concept which includes how print and visuals are combined to create multimodal texts. Examining how children, in a setting where visuals are encouraged within text production, incorporate them in non-fiction texts and in narrative.
• Children’s repeated engagement with narrative. An exploration of how children access narratives across text formats (digital and print) and how their interpretation of the narrative develops. This could involve a small number of case studies.

• Exploring children’s interpretation of whole texts using a picturebook, novel or short film within small groups across two ages to examine any developments of comprehension and interpretation.

• Comparing small group discussion of an extract from a novel and film text of the same narrative to examine language structures and whole of text understandings revealed.