

Book Reviews

Patterns of Literacy: Processes of Development and transition.

Stuart McNaughton, (1995)

Oxford University Press.

217pp. ISBN 0195583248.

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In *Patterns of Emergent Literacy: Processes of Development and Transition*, Stuart McNaughton draws upon an impressive database of information about the way children in different cultures in Aotearoa/New Zealand learn to make sense of print in the world around them. The book's multicultural perspective is one of its greatest strengths: McNaughton manages, without privileging one culture's practices over another, to trace the multitude of ways in which children come to understand the written word.

The first section of the book is entitled *The Wide Lens*. In keeping with a multicultural theme, the metaphor of unobstructed vision is an appropriate one. Indeed, only relatively recently have psychologists broadened their view of children's cognitive development to include literacy as an appropriate domain of study. McNaughton points out that the previous view of literacy as something to be "taught" in school, not learned informally in a variety of settings, implies that literacy acquisition is not a developmental process. As a result of Clay's (1979) research and that of others (e.g., Heath, 1983), it soon became clear that children know a great deal about the written word before ever starting school, an "expertise that emerges from processes at work in

children's everyday experience" (p. 7).

Patterns of Emergent Literacy is an ambitious book, primarily because its target audience is broad: families, educators, and developmental psychologists. The book succeeds on all levels. McNaughton's use of detailed footnotes expanding upon contemporary research and theory is largely responsible for this success, and also leaves the main text uncluttered for those less interested in this level of analysis.

If possible, the scope of the book is even more ambitious than the breadth of the target audience. McNaughton provides the first book-length discussion of his major multicultural study (called SOL for *Socialization of Literacy*) of 17 New Zealand families, four of whom are Maori, six Pakeha, and seven Samoan. And although most emergent literacy research to date has focused primarily on children's reading behaviours, such as letter recognition and book concepts, McNaughton additionally studies the emergence of children's writing behaviours. Children's early writing is in some ways much harder to capture than early reading because it often does not occur at a set time, in contrast to bedtime book-reading sessions. McNaughton's book will go a long way toward spurring other researchers, and teachers, to acknowledge the importance of emergent writing for children's literacy.

Researchers may find the lack of statistical analysis of the SOL data unsettling, but they can find answers to some of their questions in published papers and proceedings (e.g., McNaughton, Ka'ai, & Wolfgramm, 1993). The strong point of the book is McNaughton's theoretical presentation and his detailed analyses of children's literacy activities. For instance, Chapters 1 and 2 (*Building a Model of Early Development; Resourceful Families*) discuss theories of the role that cultures, communities, and families play in children's emergent literacy development. McNaughton situates his own theory of the socialization of literacy amongst current theories of the co-construction of knowledge (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Valsiner, 1994). He integrates these

theories with Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ideas of the different levels of contextual influence on the child: from within the family, to the school, to the wider community, and finally to the government policies that affect all of these levels and, eventually, also affect the child's learning experiences.

Then, in Chapter 3 (What's In A Name?), McNaughton moves to an incisive analysis of his son Harry's developing ability to write his own name over a 21-month period. Before his second birthday, Harry knew the difference between writing and drawing but could not copy the letters of his name. Harry's questions during the ensuing year and a half revealed his emerging understanding of the representation of his own name and, in the process, many of the principles of writing. The initial breakdown of writing into its components was revealed when Harry yelled "Harry! Harry!" upon seeing the word Hydra in a sign on a drive to the university. By age 33 months, Harry could write his name unaided. The example is a lyrical illustration of the chapter's main theoretical point: how the child elicits literacy interaction from others. This tacking back and forth between theory and qualitative analysis of children's literacy activities recurs throughout the book, and continually grounds ideas about literacy development in practical examples in specific cultures.

In Chapters 4-6 (Early Activity Systems: Reading, The Special Case of Storybooks, and Writing), McNaughton analyzes examples from the SOL study. He argues that examining a multitude of literacy settings is especially crucial when conducting a multicultural study. Literacy activities may occur in different settings in different cultures. For most of the Samoan families in the SOL study, and in a separate study of 8 Tongan families, church was a primary setting for a number of literacy practices. For instance, Samoan preschoolers learn the Samoan alphabet at church through the use of large wall charts. A focus only on the "prototypical" home literacy activities such as shared book-reading would result in missing these vital literacy experiences that occur outside the home for many children.

Growing conventional wisdom among researchers de-emphasizes the role of shared book reading in literacy development: it is nice but certainly not necessary for children's later success in school. This view (see Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994) runs counter to the popular opinion of parents and early childhood educators that book reading is vital for children's cognitive and emotional development. McNaughton sensibly takes the middle ground on this debate. He acknowledges that book reading is important but also reminds us that children develop literacy in many other ways. Moreover, he stresses that the way in which adults and children read storybooks together is crucial, and that we can't

simply think of shared book reading between adult and child as a similar activity across, or even within, all cultures. In this middle section of the book, McNaughton provides the best published description to date of different ways in which adults and children in the cultures studied interact during shared book reading sessions.

One omission in the book, somewhat surprising given McNaughton's broad definition of literacy, is a discussion of oral language components of children's literacy. McNaughton hints at the importance of children's oral language skill for their facility with print at many points in the book, but does not fully explore the predictive value of children's early narrative skill for later literacy. Many emergent literacy researchers (e.g., Snow, 1983) consider children's oral language skills to be vital in their literacy development, and advocate assessments of children's narrative development as well as their print skills in school testing profiles. Including narrative skill as part of early literacy assessments is particularly important when adopting a multicultural perspective. Children from cultures that cherish oral language skill may be especially strong in this area; teachers can then build upon their narrative strengths as one route to literacy.

As a developmental psychologist with an admittedly research-oriented "lens", I initially expected to find the last, applied section of the book (Relationships and Transitions) the least relevant for my own enterprise. I am happy to say that my expectations were unfounded. The main point of this book is that our theories about children's early literacy, whether implicit or explicit, and whether we are parents, teachers, or researchers, can constrain the way in which we interpret and promote children's literacy behaviours. McNaughton makes this point abundantly clear in the ninth chapter (Settings: Home, Early Childhood, and School) by connecting teachers' and parents' views of what and how the child should be learning with the way that we all encourage or discourage children's earliest efforts at reading and writing.

In the last and most applied chapter in the book (Resourcing Families and Educators), McNaughton is unafraid to take a stance on what needs to be done to teach children's literacy. He criticizes the child-directed orientation of Early Childhood Education curricula in New Zealand for an unwillingness to nurture children's early literacy efforts in the name of self-paced learning. But is this approach best for children, or is it simply another example of "lazy"-faire politics? McNaughton maintains that "being more deliberate in promoting literacy activities does not mean necessarily being more direct. It does mean arranging, selecting, and deploying resources for both the early childhood and home settings" (p. 182). In other words, kindergartens and preschools

can supplement the child's home experiences with a range of literacy practices that may ease children's transition into formal schooling. McNaughton is no easier on broader government policies that result in preventing families from having the time or psychological leisure to participate in shared literacy activities with their children. These government policies include recent library closures and limited library hours, but also less visibly related policies, such as cuts in state housing assistance, which affect family life at its very core.

Given the established link between children's emergent literacy and their later success in school (see Chapter 8, *What Develops?*, for an excellent review of this research), McNaughton's admonitions for home and school interventions are to be taken seriously by developmental psychologists, teachers, and families. A first step is to truly see what it is that children are doing with print in their early years, and McNaughton has accomplished this task admirably.

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An Introduction To Social Constructionism

Vivien Burr (1995)

New York:Routledge

198pp, ISBN 0-415-10404-1

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This book has been written to introduce students to the social constructionist movement within social psychology. The inherent difficulty of the subject matter, and the lack of accessible texts make this a challenging task. Burr aims to introduce students to the ideas of social constructionism and provide a bridge to more advanced reading (briefly listed at the end of each chapter). This text follows Sarup's (1988) introduction to post-structuralism and postmodernism, which continues to be a very popular entry level text for those wishing to find an accessible book which will aid understanding.

The book is organised around a series of questions which correspond to chapters of the text. The questions themselves (for example, *Does language affect the way we think?*, *Is there a world outside discourse?*, and *What do discourse analysts do?*) will arouse interest as they seem like the questions students might ask when first exposed to constructionist ideas. The Introduction defines social constructionism; compares it with "traditional" psychology; and provides a brief historical overview. Burr suggests four defining characteristics: epistemological scepticism, historical and cultural specificity, knowledge construction via language, and the proscriptive nature of constructed knowledge. Further constructionist tenets emerge from the comparisons with traditional psychology. These include anti-essentialism, anti-realism, language as a form of social action, and the claim that knowledge is not something which we can have, but rather something that we can do together. What becomes clear is that alternative epistemologies are being proposed with a strong focus on language as a social process. However, an omission is a concise statement about what constructionism has to offer. It would have been useful

to have included something like Turner's (1994) suggestion that the strength of constructionism is its ability to provide an account of the creation of conceptual practices.

Chapter 1 provides a case study for the epistemological sceptic, where the constructionist challenge to the "taken for granted" is carefully played out in the realm of 'personality'. Essentialist views are described with the nature/nurture debate as a backdrop. Problems associated with 'personality' are discussed and readers are challenged to provide evidence which might demonstrate the existence of personality. The text highlights the circularity in reasoning which supports the notion of personality, and argues that personality is a culturally and historically embedded theory. Burr suggests that personality is not something found **within** people, but rather is constructed **between** people. The *relational* aspect of personality 'talk' is highlighted thereby supporting this general point. Chapter 2 provides an account of the challenge to the assumption of linguistic neutrality. The social and contestable nature of language is explained as being fundamental to poststructuralism, and having profound implications for our understanding of the person. Burr argues that language and thought are inseparable, but language is the place where identities are "*built, maintained and challenged*" (pp.43).

Chapter 3 introduces differing approaches to the study of discourse. The provocative notion of "life as text" is described as the underlying metaphor of discursive psychology. Three problems (personhood, agency and reality), are mentioned, which is consistent with Burr's position of critical advocacy with respect to constructionist writing. These problems are touched on, then left with the promise of a later reappearance. Such deferments were annoyingly common. While I understand the difficulty of trying to provide an accessible discussion of some conceptually difficult material, the effect was a dislocation of key issues which would not enhance the understanding of student readers. Foucault is introduced in Chapter 4 by way of an examination of issues of power, knowledge, discourse and resistance. The archaeology of knowledge is detailed as a means for contesting the power which discourses hold. Students might find the historical and political implications of this either unnerving or exciting, depending on the extent of their exposure to other than positivist influences in psychology.

Chapter 5 covers meanings of ideology and the relationship between discourse and reality. Epistemological relativism is talked about as leading to the view that nothing exists, except as it exists in discourse. This (mis)representation of relativism is further confounded by the suggestion that "*this seems*

to deny that there is any material base to our lives and things which have a tremendous effect upon us such as the economy, living conditions or health are reduced to being simply the effects of language" (pp. 86). This unfortunate conclusion would seem to have completely missed the point that our knowledge (of the economy, living conditions or health) is inextricably tied to the language which is used to talk about these things. Rather than suggesting that there is no reality, social constructionists would argue that there are **many** discursively constituted realities. Burr has taken precisely the discursive move advised against by Edwards, Ashmore & Potter (1995) of equating relativism with the view that relativists throw out everything that realists think is real.

In Chapter 6, Burr asks whether individuals can change society. The question gives rise to an attack on psychology's obsession with individualism and the decontextualised nature of much of what currently stands for social psychological knowledge. Research in the areas of conformity and altruism is cited as contributing to the ideology of individualism within western capitalist society. In this regard reference to the work of Buys (1978) would have been useful. He reviews a range of social psychological phenomenon which are seen to support the proposition implied in his title ("Humans would do better without groups"). Burr criticises psychology's individualism on the grounds that social problems are depoliticised as a result of the popular view that they reside in the individual psyche.

While Chapter 7 provides a review of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) approach to discursive work, Chapter 8 argues the case that the self (and subjectivity) is linguistically based. Two approaches are drawn on to support this claim. Harre's grammatical self is contrasted with Sarbin's narratology of self. Drawing a line through both approaches Burr suggests that the cultural linguistic conventions have a profound effect on notions of the self. Chapter 9 deals with subjectivity and subject positioning.

The final chapter firmly establishes the link between constructionism and discourse analysis. Burr claims that discursive work should not be judged by how well it has revealed the "truth" or uncovered the "facts", but by the criterion of pragmatic and political usefulness in bringing about change. This seems an ambitious criterion, especially given the newness of discursive work to the psychological landscape. The final section concludes with an appeal for more "rigour", with discursive researchers being criticised for leaving readers in the position of not being able to '*judge the status of the analysts own reading*' (pp. 183). I would take issue with this point, on the grounds that the limited range of discursive reports which have been published

are characteristically open in presenting data, with the authors interpretive work leading the reader through to the analytic conclusions. I have found such analyses contestable yet psychologically involving and methodologically rigorous.

In conclusion, Burr should be congratulated as she has achieved a great deal. The book provides clear explanation and useful critique. I already know of many students (myself included) who have found it to be an accessible guide to the complexities of the constructionist challenge.

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Australia's Adolescents: A Health Psychology Perspective

Dianna T. Kenny & R. F. Soames Job (eds.)
(1995)

Armidale, NSW: University of New England Press

272 pp., ISBN 1 875821 24 4.

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This book uses a public health perspective to present a wide range of Australian and international research on adolescent health and lifestyle. While the introduction assures us that adolescents are less prone to illness than either children or adults, it is clear that there are still a number of serious health risks faced by this age group. These include: poor body image, eating disorders, unemployment, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, traffic injury, AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy. As most of these have a primarily social cause (and cure), by the end of the book it is hard to avoid the conclusion that adolescent ill health serves to mirror the social problems of a community.

Section one, the introduction (Oldenberg, French, & O'Connor), provides a quantitative overview of the extent of adolescent ill health. It covers a wide range of Australian statistics and a smattering of international statistics on the major causes of adolescent morbidity and mortality. Information is included on minority groups such as Aboriginal adolescents and young people with disabilities. A number of strategies are discussed for promoting adolescent health through primary care, schools and appropriate legislation and enforcement.

Section two contains a range of chapters on body image and eating disorders. One of the chapters I found most interesting was Chapter 4 by Kenny and Adams. It looks at gender differences in body attitudes and includes a discussion on whether anorexia is (or isn't) an extreme form of expressing the social pressure on young women to be thin. Chapter 5 (Newman, Russell, & Beumont) on ethical issues concerning the treatment of anorexia is also absorbing. Other chapters are on adolescents' perception of themselves, attitudes towards specific foods, and the treatment of obesity. It is disappointing that there are no qualitative studies on

body image, as these may have been more enlightening than the surveys presented. The section also lacks a theoretical synthesis of the various issues discussed. For example if both obesity and "wanting to be thinner" are problems in adolescence, what approach should be taken in health promotion messages? There are fine lines and potential contradictions when dealing with the conundrum of body image, eating, and nutrition, and they are not addressed.

The next section is entitled "Stress, coping and mental health". A very comprehensive introduction (Kenny & Waters) presents the major issues in this area, well backed up with Australian statistics. Some of the precursors to mental health problems, such as certain kinds of family structure, are also discussed. The following chapter on unemployment (Winefield) clearly describes the theories and research on unemployment and the methods for studying its psychological effects. Other chapters look at suicide, illness behaviour and stress.

The topic for section four is risk taking and road safety. Having just finished research in this area, I probably read it with a particularly critical eye. The introduction (Job) concludes that the most appropriate countermeasures for tackling adolescent road injuries are engineering improvements, improvements in alternative transportation so as to reduce driving exposure, legislation, and mass media campaigns. While I agree that all these interventions are needed, I do not agree with Job's complete rejection of driver training and education. Some of the studies he cites to support his position on this are not as conclusive as he implies (e.g. Wynne-Jones & Hurst, 1984), and he appears to ignore research that suggests driver training can have positive medium term effects (e.g. Gregersen, 1994). The chapter by Morgan and Job on drivers' behaviour around red light cameras was the one I found most satisfying in this section, as it describes a number of psychological factors that appear to influence how people drive. The remaining chapters on casual attributions and optimism bias failed to convince me of the usefulness of the constructs they discussed. For example Martin's chapter on casual attributions states: "The pattern of responses is of a young person who believes that effort is a less important cause of accidents, and luck is a more important cause of accidents than older drivers do. The implication of this is that the younger drivers will be less likely to adjust their driving behaviour after any form of driving failure. . ." (p 142). Being sceptical about the usefulness of locus of control in driving, I could not accept this implication as stated.

Section five deals with health care issues. The introduction (Winefield) presents qualitative material on interactions between doctors and patients that are

fascinating to read. The following chapter (Forero, Young, & Bauman) focuses on the management of adolescent asthma. Other chapters include material on what adolescents want out of health care and how health professionals can be most effective with young people.

The final section, on sexuality, is the longest. Its length is largely due to an attempt to deal with the enormous amount of research on HIV/AIDS. Following a sociological overview of sexuality patterns, the four chapters specifically on HIV/AIDS look at health promotion issues, surveys of sexual behaviour, and include a qualitative study of young people with the HIV virus. Pregnancy is allocated only two chapters. One of these (Clarke, Kenny, Waterlow, & O'Sullivan) provides a useful critique of the kinds of care pregnant adolescents receive, and describes an attempt to design and evaluate a new programme to cater for the needs of this vulnerable group. Chapter 21 (Howard) presents the results of a survey of Sydney street youth. The myriad of health problems this group both suffers from, and is at risk for, is quite horrific. The section ends with a study of primary dysmenorrhoea (Brown & Fernandez), one of the few adolescent conditions that may be largely physiological in cause and cure.

Overall, I feel this book has a lot to offer the teacher or student of adolescent psychology. Some of the chapters would serve as good introductory reading for students trying to get a feel for adolescent issues. However, as it is not comprehensive, but rather a cluster of articles on different topics, it could not function as a stand alone manual, particularly in New Zealand. It is very much an Australian book, so anyone in this country who used it as a teaching resource, would need to complement it with local research. It probably has less to offer those who are already very familiar with the topics addressed. The original research presented is patchy in quality, and there is little new theoretical ground. Anyone looking for research ideas in this area, however, would probably find it a stimulating starting point.

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Perception and Representation: Current Issues (2nd ed.)

Liona Roth and Vicki Bruce (1995)

Buckingham: Open University Press

222 pp. ISBN 0 335 19474 5

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Roth and Bruce have produced a stimulating and highly accessible introduction to categorization and recognition. Major themes include how knowledge is organized and mentally represented, and how perceptual information is processed and compared with stored representations so we can recognize what we see. Different candidates for mentally representing categories (defining features, typical features and exemplar models) are compared in Part I on conceptual categories. Marr and Biederman's theories receive a detailed (but non-mathematical) treatment in Part II on object recognition, and a lucid account of how we perceive and recognize faces is derived from the empirical evidence in Part III on face recognition. Perceptual demonstrations, experiments, neuropsychological studies and artificial intelligence approaches all contribute to this rich and up-to-date account.

The most striking feature of *Perception and Representation* is its pedagogical excellence. The writing is clear, the organization is transparent, and the presentation is engaging. Material is presented in digestible chunks, succinct summaries reinforce key ideas and conclusions, techniques boxes illustrate important empirical methods and results without interrupting the flow of the argument, and student activities and self-assessment questions encourage active participation from the reader.

One can quibble over details. For example, some might think that the acquisition of categories should be covered, or that view-specific accounts of object recognition warrant mention, or that neuropsychological evidence could be brought to bear more incisively on the question of whether faces are special. But these really are quibbles in the face of the clear success of this work.

Perception and Representation is ideal reading for undergraduate courses in cognition, perception and cognitive science. It doesn't fully cover any of these areas and would have to be used in conjunction with a more comprehensive text. Don't settle for the first edition though. The section on face recognition is completely new, and the material on categories and object recognition has been radically revised in this second edition.

There are 25 items and 2 trials can be given per item. Clearly, performance on such a task could be facilitated or circumvented by using mnemonic strategies or by verbal codes so as to utilise auditory memory; the use of abstract figures is intended to counteract this tendency (Kirk & Kirk, 1971).

A few studies have examined the appropriateness of using US norms in other countries. Mittler and Ward (1970) found that the scores of four-year-old British children were similar to those of the US standardisation sample of the same age. Teasdale and Wray (1975) used similar selection criteria to those used for the ITPA-R norms and found no differences in raw scores between Australian children aged 5:7 years to 6:1 years and those in the US sample. However, the US children aged 6:7 years to 7:1 years were significantly better than Australian children of the same age. St George (1972) reported that mean raw scores for NZ children aged five and six years corresponded to US norms for less than five years. Gronwall (1980) sampled small groups of children within the ITPA-R age range to check whether the US norms for the VSM subtest were appropriate for use in NZ. She also examined performance in older children and young adults to see if an extension of its use beyond the normed age groups would be justified. No ceiling effects were found in her study and she concluded that the US norms for the VSM subtest may be adequate for Auckland children whose ages fall within the ITPA-R reference group. However, because the variance among the NZ sample was greater than in the US sample, she suggested that a more conservative comparison between scores be used than that advocated in the ITPA-R manual.

A child's score on a norm-referenced test reflects his or her performance relative to the performance of children on whom the test was standardised. It is an essential practice for users of normative tests to interpret an obtained score with reference to sets of norms appropriate for the individual tested and for the intended use (A.P.A., 1974). At present, there is little standardisation data available for educational and psychological tests used in NZ. Essentially, the reliability and validity of these tests for use with NZ children is unknown (Ballard, 1988). Despite the widespread use of the ITPA-R (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991) and on-going use of the VSM test in clinical settings (Wilson, 1992), no data on the validity of the VSM test for NZ use have been gathered since the early 1980s. One aim of this study, therefore, was to extend the earlier work of Gronwall (1980) by testing larger samples of children and thereby providing more information on the applicability of the US norms to the NZ population.

This paper reports part of a larger study which also examined the validity of the VSM subtest as a measure of visual sequential memory. The VSM subtest was compared with two modified versions of this test - one version used stimulus items that were readily verbally coded (common objects) and the other version used stimulus items of low verbal codability (random shapes). Procedures and results from the larger study are reported in this paper where relevant.

METHOD

Participants

There were 238 school students (136 female, 102 male) who participated in this study. The age range was from 6 - 16 years. Participants were divided into 11 age groups based on their birthdates. Participant information is summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1. *Participant characteristics (number, mean age, standard deviation, sex distribution) for each age group.*

Age Group (years)	Number	Mean age (months)	Standard Deviation	Female (n)	Male (n)
6	28	78.71	2.94	17	11
7	26	89.73	2.86	11	15
8	23	101.22	3.19	12	11
9	22	114.82	3.16	14	8
10	25	126.28	3.41	15	10
11	22	138.23	3.52	12	10
12	25	151.72	2.91	13	12
13	14	162.21	3.14	9	5
14	23	175.13	3.32	13	10
15	13	183.69	2.96	8	5
16	17	197.77	3.15	12	5

Five schools were chosen for this study: one coeducational primary school; one coeducational intermediate school; one boys' and one girls' secondary school; and, one coeducational secondary school.

Schools were located in areas that represent average socioeconomic distribution for the Auckland region (Crothers, 1992). No exclusionary criteria were set for this study. Each school was asked to provide students from classes that represented mixed levels of educational ability. Participant selection was then based on the teacher's consent and the student's willingness to participate in the study. Prior to the study, an information sheet was given to each participant and written consent to participation was obtained from their parent or guardian.