TALK to Think, Learn, and Teach

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Language Development

In chapter 1 of By Different Paths to Common Outcomes, Marie Clay points out that

Natural language learning occurs for millions of children around the world with seemingly no effort. Indeed, a small child’s life across cultures is especially well adapted for language learning. (Clay, 2014, p. 5)

Studies show, Clay continues, that when we provide preschool opportunities for our children, we have changed the “natural” characteristics of the environment, and that there are some gains and some losses. While increasing the child’s opportunities to play and socialize, time and again it has been found that children have fewer opportunities to talk with adults than they experience when they are at home. For instance, in school the adults are one person to many children, and the children are in same-age groups, very unlike more-naturalistic home settings.

For their language development to progress, children require closeness to a mature, more-knowledgeable speaker as a language resource. The mature speaker provides the child with the opportunity to converse, while also providing the appropriate model of the language. Children do not learn language by imitation. They learn to talk by talking to people who talk to them; people who make efforts to understand what they are trying to say.

The major characteristics of language and what children come to learn without effort include these:

- Language is a complex interrelation of subsystems.
- Language is multilayered and rule-governed.
- Language recognizes sensitivities.
- Language develops recursively—not in a single trajectory.

Children do not learn language by imitation. They learn to talk by talking to people who talk to them; people who make efforts to understand what they are trying to say.

If we consider the first characteristic, a complex interrelation of subsystems, the reluctance on the part of teachers to embrace this notion is understandable. Linguistic analysis is the most-frequent common denominator of language study and the least-understood by those of us who are not linguists. However, this variety of systems is the marker of language development, and lies behind every assessment of language. For this reason, the following discussion of language for teaching and learning will focus on the more easily describable aspects of a far-more complex phenomenon:

1. Pragmatics: Knowledge of conversations
   - listening, taking turns, following the gist of the argument, contributing appropriately, adopting rules of clarification

2. Semantics: The meanings
   - What is the talk about? What do I understand about what I am listening to? How do I check this?

3. Syntax: grammar, or the rules that govern the ways in which words are strung together

4. Morphology: The smallest units of language to carry meaning
   - This may be a single word like cat, or two morphemes like in the word cats which is cat + plural (two pieces of meaning or information).

5. Phonemic awareness: The sounds of language that matter
   - For standard English this is approximately 44–46 phonemes and learned very early in life.

Frank Smith (1975) used to say, “Why don’t children grow up to sound like the air-conditioning?” They don’t because that sound doesn’t carry meaning. Children are born ready to interpret a wide range
of sounds for carrying meaning and quickly lose this range of ability as they grow accustomed to the language(s) of their community. The developing brain is exceedingly efficient; it discards what it doesn’t need for survival. Its plasticity is notorious and extensive.

The following quotation from Clay’s work, as long ago as 1975, has informed all my later thinking about language learning, whether spoken or written:

Children do not learn about language on any one level of organization before they manipulate units at a higher level. As children learn language, spoken or written, there is a rich intermingling of language learning across levels … a simplification achieved by dealing first with sounds of letters, then words and finally groups of words may be easy for teachers to understand, but children learn on all levels at once. (p. 19)

So while some teachers may be focusing on phonics, or a letter of the week, or a word wall, or some other single feature of language, children are learning about language independently across all levels at once. With their attention focused elsewhere, they may fail to grasp the relevance or significance of their teacher’s emphasis on a particular aspect of linguistic complexity.

This is why it is so important to keep our focus on language levels within the context of a larger frame of meaning, thus providing a context and supporting the student’s potential for understanding not only of language, but also about what the language is signifying. In the end, it may be the most-important aspect of the student’s experience.

Importantly, children learn early in their lives that language is not arbitrary. It is a shared activity and it is primarily social (Raban, 2012). We talk to each other, we have someone who listens to us—an audience—and we learn gradually to take account of the needs and interests of our audience. Most of our language is surrounded by a familiar context. This helps the child to understand what the language is about, although as I will argue later, the child also needs to understand language apart from a physical context and focus more on the ideational context that a more sophisticated language user can provide. I will call this decontextualized language, or language that conveys meanings apart from the immediacy of the everyday.

We use language for a good reason—with a purpose—to explain, to share, to gain attention, to have our needs met. For example, “I want…. “I won’t…. “Can I…..?” “When….?” (Raban, 1999).

Rapid language development towards maturity, during the preschool years, depends directly upon the amount of conversation that occurs between the child and the adults who know them well. By talking with their children, families and caregivers provide these opportunities for rapid language development. These adults do not correct the child’s immature forms, rather they model correct forms through their replies to children’s enquiries. For example,

Child: When tea?
Mother: We’ll have tea when Daddy gets home.

However, playmates of the same age usually do not provide this kind of modeling through extended linguistic feedback.

Children try out their language skills in different ways and they know they are getting close when they are better understood. It is only when children are known well, and their language-use listened to closely, that we can get inside the child’s frame of reference and so support that child’s next moves forward with their development.

Language Interaction

Clay (2014) has pointed out the way in which we respond to children’s talk determines whether they will continue with their efforts to be understood or not. If children do not have opportunities for conversations in their preschool years, then more of the language learning is left to schools. However, teachers are not very good at spending time in conversation with children because they are working with large numbers of children at any one time.

The richness and complexity of language is that it works on many levels, frequently simultaneously. It develops recursively by

- fitting new ideas to old,
- taking turns and building meanings together,
- extending the discourse to gain new understandings,
- actively engaging with the social world of language in use, and
- consolidating implicit awareness with explicit understanding.
Language is used socially to enable us to get things done together, for instance, “Hello, how are you?” or “Can I help? Do you want a hand?”

We do things together, we live together, we rely on each other. We work and play together, and there is great sadness and lack of vibrancy when we are alone for long periods.

Importantly, we use language to think, to solve problems, to plan, to make enquiries, to meet the ebb and flow of daily demands. Through language we know we are loved, admired, respected, and appreciated.

As we grow up we learn to marshal the linguistic complexity of language at all its different levels. We gradually come to understand how these different levels interrelate and work together to help us successfully achieve what we set out to do each day, while living our lives across social, emotional, and cognitive levels of experience. In addition, while understanding the intricate relationship between language and thought, the extent of the dependence of one on the other is sometimes elusive — hard to identify and capture. Is it the case that without language there can be no thought? Tharp and Gallimore remind us that... (1988, p. 44)

However, if I want to share my thinking, then I clearly do this through language — spoken or written. What Tharp and Gallimore are saying in the preceding quotation is that the reverse is also true, that language is the start of the cognitive journey as young children learn to internalize language and create the means of extending and reaching for complexity in their ideas about the world and how it operates.

Students are using language all the time for a myriad of different purposes.

Students use language to share, sort, reorder and review ideas, justify points of view, question, speculate, argue, support ideas with evidence, summarize, hypothesize, problem solve, build on previous ideas, get information, seek clarification, explain cause and effect, and the like. (Raban, 1999, p. 105)

If they are not developing this process of refining then they should be, because by using language in many different ways for many different purposes they are not only learning language and about language, they are learning to think (Halliday, 1975). They are doing this by, for instance, using new words, putting things differently, clarifying ideas, making themselves understood, finding out about things, and working things out for themselves.

Clay reminds us of the special role of language in thinking:

… Any learning situation is like a conversation, for it requires the learner to bring what they already know to bear on the new problem being explored. (2014, p. 15)

In reaching new ideas, we need to also discover what we already know and how that prior knowledge helps us to get our head around new information. Indeed, we understand new knowledge because of what we already know. However, while this is fruitful, it can also lead to misunderstandings. This is why it is critical that we talk about what we understand, making it transparent so that this can be checked and verified further, both by ourselves and by others.

Extended discourse
From the field of preschool research in the UK, Iram Siraj-Blatchford (2009) identified the power of sustained shared thinking in educators’ interactions with young children. She found that students who did well when they entered school had experienced powerful conversations with their educators who asked them questions about what they were doing and...
spent time in building an intellectual understanding together, from what
was being experienced by the child.

This kind of talk, called extended discourse, clearly has features designed
to engage and support the child’s cognitive development. The exchange
will do this through elaboration, developing a depth of understanding, achieving a deferred purpose other
than in the here and now, establishing links between ideas and experience, and fostering precision and articulation of thinking. In addition, such conversations will be emotionally satisfying, because they will be getting closer towards understanding, and socially constructed because it is being done together.

Catherine Snow (1983) reports from her U.S. research that the foundation for children’s school abilities can be found in their home and their preschool language and literacy environments. Her research revealed the preschool years to be rich in critically important adult-child exchanges, giving many opportunities for contingent responding in which the child is provided with responses that are linked to what they are talking about. Such contingent responding, or semantic contingency as referred to by Snow, operates across a number of levels and

- keeps conversations flowing (social),
- helps listeners engage in active listening through responses that add to the meanings (cognitive & social),
- provides positive feedback that understandings are being shared (emotional and cognitive),
- gives listeners experience of positive emotional satisfaction because someone is paying attention (emotion),
- extends meanings beyond where you started from (cognitive), and
- achieves a clearly understood shared purpose — typically having something to show as a result of the exchange (social and cognitive).

**Speaking and listening at home**

If we think of talk in the context of home environments, what do children experience? They are talking with people they know, and they are usually talking to get things done, typically right away: “Can I…?” “Will you…?” “Are you…?”

Young children draw on their linguistic resources to make themselves understood, and exchanges are typically quite short. In the cut and thrust of getting on with our daily lives, everyone knows each other well, and communication is almost always successful.

For some young children there can be experiences of extended discourse, where long exchanges are expected, perhaps over the family meal, or at bedtime with questions like “What did you do today” or “What are you planning to do tomorrow?”

Children who experience these opportunities for extended discourse are generally those who are more successful at school (Burns, Griffin, & Snow 1999, p. 19).

**Speaking and listening at school**

When children start to attend school, we see that there is the opportunity for problems and difficulties that we need to (and do) ameliorate for the young students. For instance, oral language environments in busy classrooms can be emotionally, linguistically, cognitively, and socially challenging for students. This may well render some of them silent. Many students remain very quiet, hoping they will disappear under their teacher’s radar, not drawing attention to themselves and hoping to survive this new and confronting experience.

The language environment of the classroom may well be strangely different from children’s entire previous experience of language. For instance, they may know none of the other students. They experience being told to do things unquestioningly. They might not understand what is being talked about, and they are required to listen for long periods of time. Exchanges are brief, rarely is talk about things that are visible around the room, and the other children are all of the same age as they are, unlike the normal family experience they know.

So, given the complexity of spoken language and the extensive range of the language development of young children, it is somewhat surprising that some people think that the way in which young children learn to read written language is to start with the sounds of letters and individual words. Catherine Snow always likes to keep the balance, and reminds us, once again, of the role of language in literacy:
At a time when literacy researchers were quite single-mindedly focusing on phonological awareness and letter knowledge as predictors of literacy success and word reading as a major literacy outcome worthy of assessment, we felt it important to redress the balance by seeking evidence about the role of oral language skills and the predictors of reading comprehension. (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007, p. 10)

In earlier work, Snow (1991) provides a ‘map’ of the relationships between spoken and written language during the early years. Here she points out three distinct phases: 0–3 years of age at home, 3–5 years at preschool, and 6–10 years of age at school. Print-rich environments during the preschool years give children many opportunities to develop understandings and awareness about print. On arriving at school, these children are well-placed to respond positively to the item knowledge and skill development that will be required of them in the early stages of learning to read.

In parallel, these children will be experiencing spoken language in their homes and in preschool contexts, and those experiences also have implications for their reading and writing development. Conversations with familiar audiences will develop their skills for social talk. However, young children need to experience opportunities for extended discourse forms and decontextualized language, to help them to learn later from written texts. They need experience of talking at length, talking about things that are not present in the here and now. Talk with parents and caregivers about their day and a bedtime story every night can seed these young children with marked advantages when it comes to their own reading development during the later years of schooling.

**Decontextualized Language**

What, then, does decontextualized language mean? It means, being able to use language to talk about things that are not about the here and now — objects and events that are removed from the present context in both time and space. Children’s experience of book reading from earliest years gives them an excellent opportunity to grasp this concept because books are rarely about the here and now. They are about “Once upon a time…” and are about imaginary, nonpresent things and experiences, and it is this kind of language that is characteristic of the cognitive demands of later school experiences.

Using decontextualized language includes opportunities for extended discourse in the form of explanations, personal narratives, creating imaginary worlds, and conveying information to strangers. Young children need to experience these opportunities to help them to learn later from written texts.

Using decontextualized language includes opportunities for extended discourse in the form of explanations, personal narratives, creating imaginary worlds, and conveying information to strangers. When engaging with people who are not known, the listener will need the fullest possible information. The reader will be without a context, and the writer will need to create one that is credible for the reader. However, the ability to do so will emerge later in students’ literacy development:

Decontextualized oral language skills at ages 5, 6, & 7 will show moderate relationships to early literacy, but become increasingly strong as children grow older. (Snow, 1991, p. 9)
From their research, Nation and Snowling (2004) also point out that oral language proficiency as well as children’s phonological skills influence the course of reading development. Bearing these concerns in mind, our best teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in the kinds of learning activities that will promote talk, activities where everyone has to take part. Students’ own intentions for the activity are taken into consideration and these are also discovered through talk — allowing students’ intentions to be understood and catered for, the context of the activity to be clear and carefully resourced, and the talk outcomes to be clearly identified.

For example, a teacher might say, “When you have finished, I want you to explain to the other group what you did, why you did it, and how you went about it.” Engaging in this kind of discourse can be a useful tactic giving students opportunities to further develop their language.

**The Teacher’s Role**

Teachers need to be attending not only to what they are talking about, but how they are using language for particular emotional, social, linguistic, as well as cognitive purposes. Special attention needs to focus on the interactive nature of language and learning through taking turns, not just the teacher one-way monologue. The social and structural, or linguistic, conventions of speaking and listening need to be established, like who speaks when and the choice of vocabulary. Importance needs to be placed on the kinds of responses that extend and support student talk — open questions, which are not about the student guessing what is in the teachers’ head; and asking genuine questions, questions to which the teacher could not know the answers. There is a need to also provide students with a range of real contexts for talk — giving talk an audience, a context, and a purpose.

Helpful strategies for teachers to use would include these:

- asking for clarification or explanation — “How did that happen?”
- being cognitively ‘under’ — “I don’t understand how that happened. Can you explain it to me?”
- challenging students for clarity — “How often did you have to do that?”
- keeping silent at strategic moments, thus encouraging others to talk
- being contentious – prompting a rejoinder; asking “Does it always happen like that?”
- being a ‘skillful ignoramous’ and pretending not to understand — “I don’t see how that would work. Explain it to me again?”

Teachers need to remember that they are always acting as a model of how they want students to use language. English as a second language students especially need this kind of support, modeling correct form, rather than correcting student’s speech. See how this teacher manages this exchange:

Teacher: So today we are going to write about the three little pigs and their house or…

Child: Or the bricks house

Teacher: Mmm. The house of bricks, yeah. So what was, what was the bit you liked? … And you would want to write about? About the house of bricks? About the brick house? … What would you say?

Usually the teacher asks all the questions, but it is important to continually find ways that the student can take on this role. Sometimes by saying nothing, or and… and mmm… for instance, teachers can signal that they are NOT going to fill the gap in the conversation, the student must! Notice how this teacher manages this opportunity:

Child: At my old house I was sleeping …

Teacher: Mmm …

Child: a- a- like at the middle of the night or beginning …

Teacher: Yes …

Child: And my sister had her first tooth or her second and I went inside her room and I … and I … took … and I pulled it … and I opened the pillow and … and

Teacher: Oh, Jake!

Child: And I stole … I stole … my sister’s money.

Teacher: Did she find out?

Child: No. She was still sleeping before I stole it.

Teacher: Oh.
Child: And I put it under her pillow and then, then I was going to go, “Ahh, the tooth fairy came!”

Teacher: Now what could you say about that in your story today?

Child: At the middle of the night I stole my sister’s money from the tooth fairy, maybe her second tooth.

Teacher Development

In Victoria, Australia, we are at the beginning of a new pathway with Reading Recovery teachers. We have begun to collect transcripts of talk occurring during Reading Recovery lessons in the hope that we can better understand what works to support children processing written language in increasingly sophisticated ways. Wasik, Bond, & Hindman (2006) point out:

• The ways teachers talk to children, both during book reading and outside of book reading [italics added] can affect children’s language skills (p. 70).

• Teachers need to understand the impact of their language, before they change their practice — they need to know what works and why (p. 72).

Dickinson and McCabe (2001) are helping teachers to understand better what statements like this mean. They are finding that data from multiple studies now confirm the interrelationships among language and print-based skills as students begin formal literacy instruction, their interrelationships not only endure but strengthen with time, and that socioeconomic status, per se, is less important in predicting student’s attainment of literacy than are their specific home and classroom experiences.

Dickinson and Tabors (2001) elaborate further three significant aspects of teachers’ language curriculum.

1. Exposure to varied vocabulary

Knowing the ‘right word’ is vital if one is to communicate information clearly. Large vocabularies have long been known to be linked to reading success. They also signal that students are building content knowledge about the world, knowledge that is so critical for later reading comprehension. However, this is no reason to shift attention away from context, audience and purpose, or to focus specifically or arbitrarily on building vocabulary in isolation from continuous text.

2. Opportunities to be part of conversations that use extended discourse

Extended discourse is talk that requires participants to develop understandings beyond the here and now. It requires the use of several sentences to build a linguistic structure, such as explanations, narratives, or ‘pretend talk’ about what might be.

3. Home and classroom environments that are cognitively and linguistically stimulating

Students are most likely to experience conversations that include comprehensible and interesting extended discourse and are rich with vocabulary when their families and caregivers are able to obtain and read good books with them, and when their teachers provide classrooms with a curriculum that is varied and stimulating.

So what supports students achievement in school? Dickinson and Snow (1987) show how teachers are now sensitive to language use for different purposes across a wide spectrum of opportunities. At one end of their spectrum is *conversational talk*. It is about the every day, about the here and now, about what is happening in the present. While at the other end of their spectrum is *decontextualized talk*. This is the language of books, written in fuller, denser text that takes no account of current contexts, weaving its own context and events through language.

However, conversational language alone will not lead to success in school. Knowledge and experience of decontextualized language—the language of books—becomes the language of thought and cognitive activity, central to student progress through the school curriculum. Importantly, our experience of language moves between these two, and the more highly educated we are the more likely we are to talk like a book. Therefore, the kinds of language required to support literacy development are the kinds of language found in books:

• The language goes on at length (more than a single sentence).

• There is a development through the language that builds the meaning in a systematic and patterned way.
• The language does this by using word choices and sentences carefully, and with consideration given to precision.

• The meaning is conveyed solely by the language itself, not by gesture or by expecting the listener to know what the speaker is talking about.

The connectedness, between reading on the one hand and writing on the other, is complex. Both depend on sophisticated, decontextualized oral language. As Dickinson and McCabe point out, the language required to support literacy development needs to be extended, connected discourse that communicates meaning using varied, precise vocabulary and syntax rather than gesture, with no reliance on shared knowledge (2001, p. 197).

There are a variety of ways in which teachers can use oral language around book reading more appropriately:

• Take a moment to link the story to student’s own experiences.

• Pick out particular words for a focus which may be new words or known words used in new ways.

• Think about the story and what is happening, and ask why did it happen in just that way and could there have been other outcomes.

• Take time to consider the roll out of events and talk about why things happened in the order they did and how this impacts the final outcome — could this have been different?

Language as Object

An important transition from spoken to written language is marked by being able to think about language apart from its referent. This is a significant means of gaining control of language as children’s learning and development progress through the early years. Being able to play with language and treat it as an object apart from what it represents will be an important first step as children begin to learn to read and write for themselves.

How, therefore, do we create a view of ‘language as object’? Some activities that will help, include defining words and making words up, thinking of another word that means the same, playing rhyming word games, and ‘I Spy.’ These activities and many more help students tune in to the patterning of language, apart from what it refers to. Note that in order for jokes to succeed, students need to understand this principle of language first and foremost.

In conclusion, then, the relationship between oral and written language development is characterized by extended discourse and decontextualized language, leading to an understanding of language as object. However, as Clay (2005) reminds us, there are no quick ways to extend language, but the best-available opportunity for the teacher lies in the conversation with the student in and around the lesson. The authors of books chosen for the students to read provide other opportunities for extending language. And Clay adds that we know something has changed when we hear students construct part of a sentence in a new way. They begin to talk like a book.
As we look further at our own work with students, we find there are a number of reported activities with books that seem to be about the same idea of extending language through book reading. A particular example for babies is conversational reading (Wasik & Sparling, 2004) which engages families and caregivers to read a book, ask a question, and start a conversation.

There are also other book activities with which teachers are familiar.

Shared book reading
This procedure involves going through the book together for a particular purpose (Holdaway, 1979). In doing this, new words are checked and understood, giving students opportunities to use the words in their own sentences. Teachers ask questions which do not have a defined answer, and use language to explore the text and provide opportunities for mapping the text onto previous experience.

The kinds of questions that can help and support the student while moving through the book together with their teacher could include some of these strategies, and teachers will think of others that might include questions and prompting like the following:

- Tell me more about what is happening on this page.
- Tell me more about that.
- What do you think will happen next?
- What else?
- Why do you think they did that?
- What part did you like best?
- Tell me why you think ‘x’ happened and ‘y’ followed.
- Let’s think further about the story we just read.

Dialogic reading
During dialogic reading, Whitehurst and colleagues (1994, p. 683) outline procedures and techniques which also include questioning and giving feedback.

They show how this can be achieved by asking ‘wh’ questions — who, what, when, why, how, where; by following questions with another question — “Why do you think that?”; by repeating (modeling correct form) and extending what the student has said; and by helping and supporting the student where needed, and always praising and encouraging — “I like the way you did....”

Throughout this book reading, the salience of students’ interests is always paramount. In reporting further work (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001), the PEER acronym has been elaborated to support teachers further:

- Prompt — using questions to prompt a reply,
- Evaluating — by saying how you liked the way they completed the story or whatever,
- Expands — by rephrasing and adding information, again modeling correct form,
- Repeating — a prompt and expanding on it

Interactive book reading
Reading a book together has also been discussed by van Kleek (2006). Interactive book reading clearly involves taking turns and taking opportunities to ask questions, build and extend vocabulary, and making connections with what the student already knows and is interested in. The key throughout this interactive session is making meanings together. This activity is supported by Clay’s work (1993, p. 49) where she suggests the following prompts for Reading Recovery teachers to use:

- How did you know it was …?
- What could you try?
- Do you know a word like that?
- What would you think it could be?
- Do you know a word that starts with those letters?
- What do you know that might help?

Also, as Clay has suggested (2005, p. 108), in Reading Recovery teachers’ efforts to develop self-monitoring:

- Was that OK?
- Try that again.
- I like the way you worked that out.
- Why did you stop there?
- What else can you hear? (writing)
- You know a word that starts like that. (reading)
- Does it look right and sound right?

Indeed, it is through talking with students that all teachers can find out what students already know; discover students’ thinking processes through active listening; help students access past experiences relevant to new activities; develop and extend students’ thinking by building bridges
from known to new information; model successful strategies, and encourage, support, and scaffold through appropriate feedback.

Teachers’ planned intervention when students are reading and writing can operate at a number of different levels. Teachers can develop students’ understandings of texts and how they work by responding to the content (meaning) of what the student is saying and demonstrating correct form if necessary by modeling and taking the time for talk. Teachers can question for unknown information and elaborations of meanings and understandings of the text. Through actively listening, paying attention and working together, students can be supported to clarify meanings emerging from the text. Using these techniques, teachers will come to know better how to support the process of understanding text together as students gain more confidence through these supporting activities.

Finally, the TALK framework has emerged from this review of the literature on language and early literacy and can inform the work of all teachers who are developing their support of children’s language and literacy development in the future:

T (Time for talk)
Take the time for talk, giving students opportunities to extend their linguistic repertoire and their unique experiences of the world.

A (Asking questions)
Ask students to say things again, choosing different words.

L (Listening)
Listen actively to what students are saying and engage with their meanings.

K (Knowledge about language)
Knowing about language — respond to students by reflecting on and extending their meanings as understood, and providing an audience, context, and purpose.

Conclusion
This discussion addresses oral language in the early years of life and the role of language in literacy development by sharing key research findings and offering specific instructional recommendations. Teachers, parents, and caregivers who understand children, language development, and literacy make important contributions in support of a child’s journey to use, internalize, and extend linguistic resources. Appropriate support and careful listening are keys to developing each child’s talk, thinking, and learning.

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References


**About the Author**

Bridie Raban is currently working in Hong Kong as a visiting professor of education at the Hong Kong Baptist University. She is supporting the early childhood academic staff in developing their research and publications profile. She is a former senior research fellow at the Australian Council for Education Research and from 2007–2013, was a professorial research fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, having resigned from the position of professor of early childhood studies at the University of Melbourne 1995–2007. Prior to coming to Australia, Bridie was professor of primary education (early years) at Warwick University in England.

**About the Cover**

When Karma Hayes began her first-grade year at Kenwood Elementary School, her teacher was concerned that she was not making progress in reading and writing. She began her lessons with Reading Recovery teacher Jenny Grimes in February. After just 12 weeks her lessons were discontinued, and Karma caught up with her peers. Now an outgoing third grader, Karma is a very hard worker in the classroom and continues to read on grade level, said teacher Karen Smith. Karma’s family says she loves taking care of younger children and reading to her little brother. She also enjoys helping in the kitchen and cleaning up.