They're all the same.....but different!

A study of intertextuality and its links with literacy in a kindergarten classroom.

An overview of research in progress

by

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Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the formation and progression of a qualitative research project being undertaken to study intertextuality and its links with literacy development in a kindergarten classroom.

The study began with the rather broad aim of examining factors that influenced literacy in the kindergarten classroom where the researcher was also classroom teacher in 1995. Recognition of the complexity of literacy and the sociocultural nature of learning provided a theoretical framework from which to begin observing and analysing literacy development in this classroom throughout the year.

Data were collected from a variety of classroom literacy practices and initial analysis examined the data to identify any factors which appeared to influence literacy development. More and more frequently the researcher became aware of intertextual incidents in the data. Intertextuality was first defined by Kristeva (1969) and describes the process of interpreting one text by means of a previously composed text (Cairney, 1992). Research across a number of academic fields has since led to more complex definitions of intertextuality and, in educational theory, its implications for learning.

The presence of intertextual events in this study and the implications they may have for literacy learning, precipitated the eventual focus for the study, namely, intertextuality. An exploration of the theory
of intertextuality, its significance to literacy, and analysis of intertextuality in this kindergarten classroom, have become the central foci of this research.

This paper provides a summary of the relevant literature and outlines the research design and methodology. It describes some of the intertextual incidents emerging from the data and recounts the study progress to date. Tables and figures have been removed from this paper for the publishing requirements of the AARE Conference proceedings. Copies are available by contacting Sharyn Jameson (see title page for address).

This study will culminate in a thesis for a Master of Education (Honours) degree.
Review of the Literature

Significant developments in the study of literacy learning during the past decade have had a strong influence on this researcher’s theoretical position. Classroom experiences, the observation of my own two children’s literacy development and my own literacy background have led me towards literature which acknowledges the complex, sociocultural nature of literacy and the implications for classroom practice.

In recent years the complex nature of literacy acquisition has been well documented (Cairney, 1995; Christie, 1990; Clay, 1979; Meek, 1991; Unsworth, 1993). The complexity of literacy attracts enormous interest and controversial debate. In 1995, as a practising classroom teacher with an avid interest in literacy and literature, I was interested in examining literacy to identify optimum conditions for promoting and developing literacy in the classroom.

There is an overwhelming amount of information available aimed at helping the classroom teacher foster literacy. Debates concerning various approaches to literacy can be bewildering to both teachers and parents. Having frequently witnessed and been intrigued by the idiosyncratic intricacies of literacy learning, I was drawn towards theorists and educators who recognise literacy as a complex, social practice (Cairney, 1995; Gee, 1990; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1983; Luke, 1993; Solsken, 1993; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) rather than a code emphasised, linear process of skill acquisition.
An important development in the study of literacy, has been the advent of research in real life settings (Bloome, 1987). Psycholinguists, such as Goodman and Goodman (1979) proclaimed the need to view reading and writing processes in the real world, not the laboratory. Educators expressed the need for research to be relevant to real classroom practices, rather than experimental settings. Stemming from anthropological and sociological traditions, ethnographic studies of literacy became more commonplace in education, and have led to literacy practices being examined as they occur in homes, families, communities and classrooms.

Several aspects of the literature have particularly influenced my beliefs concerning literacy learning, and hence, the literacy practices within the classroom. The following outlines the theoretical framework for classroom practices.
The sociocultural nature of literacy.

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy defines literacy as:

The ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts.

It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society.

Literacy also includes the recognition of number and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text.

Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.

Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime.

All Australians need to have effective literacy in English, not only for their personal benefit and welfare but also for Australia to reach its social and economic goals.


This definition begins to recognise the complex, dynamic nature of literacy and constitutes a movement away from simplistic definitions that traditionally defined literacy as 'being able to read and write'.

Luke (1993, p. 4) refers to literacy as "a dynamic, evolving social and historical construction whose standards and practices are contingent
upon the agendas and power relations of institutions and communities, governments and cultures".

Meek (1991, p. 36) points out "both language and literacy are in constant evolution - as language changes, as societies change, so what counts as literacy also changes". The knowledge, skills and behaviour of a 'literate' Australian in the 90's are vastly different to those of a person considered literate earlier this century. Christie (1990) concurs:

The contemporary world demands a level of sophistication in literacy greater than at any time in the past. It demands a people capable not only of handling the awesome range of print materials now a feature of a technologically advanced society, but also of creating and responding to new ones, for we do keep generating new kinds of writing, new kinds of genres, as a necessary part of generating new knowledge and new ways of thinking. (p.21)

Along with the knowledge that literacy cannot be simply defined because of its constantly evolving nature, has been a growing recognition of the social construction of literacy. Gee (1990) explains how we are socialised into certain literacy practices:

Every text is of a certain type (consider newspapers, political tracts, literature, lectures, political speeches, religious texts, comic books,
school books and lessons, and so on through hundreds of varieties).

Each type of text can be read in several different ways; meaning can be given to, or taken from, the text at a variety of levels.

Types of texts and the various ways of reading them are the social and historical inventions of various groups of people. One always and only learns to interpret texts of a certain type in certain ways through having access to, and ample experience in, social settings where texts of that type are read in those ways. One is socialised or enculturated into a certain social practice...... Thus the study of literacy ultimately requires us to study the social groups and institutions within which one is socialised to interpret certain types of words and certain sorts of worlds in certain ways. (pp. 45 - 46)

Heath’s ethnographic study (1983) of communities in the Piedmont Carolinas region of the United States exemplifies the implications of enculturation. She studied the language acquisition and literacy habits of children from the communities of Roadville, Trackton and mainstream townspeople. Roadville was a small community of white, working-class families who had been a part of mill-working life for four generations. Trackton was a black working class community whose older generations had been brought up on the land and now were employed by the mills. The 'townspeople' were blacks and whites, and were professionals who were seen as 'mainstreamers' (in common with the national mainstream middle-class presented in the public media),
influential and yielding power. Heath found that the patterns of language use of the children of Roadville and Trackton contrasted sharply with those of the townspeople. The children of Roadville and Trackton frequently experienced failure at school while most townspeople children succeeded. The literacy practices valued at school were those that the townspeople had enculturated in their children. Heath's research shows how the various literacy experiences of each culture prepared the children to differing degrees for school literacy success and failure and demonstrates the inextricable links between literacy and cultural practice.

The social construction of literacy has become a major focus of study in the past decade. Cairney (1995) explains that the shift from reading as a cognitive process, to reading as a complex cultural practice has been dependent on a number of differing influences from the research fields of psycholinguistics, psychology and sociolinguists. He points out that the need to study children in 'real world' contexts arose from psycholinguistic scholars such as Goodman (1965; 1967), Harste (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1983) and Snow (1983).

Haas Dyson (1992) called for educators to acknowledge sociocultural breadth and depth in order to weave together texts and lives to allow for a complex classroom world with widened discourse boundaries.

The work of psychologists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986) has emphasised the importance of relationships that exist in classrooms.
(Cairney, 1995). Sociolinguistic theories of language, built upon the premise that "language is made as people act and react to one another" also played a crucial role in the move towards a sociocultural understanding of literacy (Cairney, 1995, p.1). Approaches to reading that focus primarily on skills acquisition, have led to a narrow view of reading that concentrates upon the intrapersonal context of reading, ignoring the interpersonal influences of instruction and classroom communication. A sociolinguistic perspective of literacy allows the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of literacy in educational settings to be explored (Greene & Weade, 1987).

Luke (1993) maintains:
To become literate, children must master conventionalised linguistic and symbolic codes for constructing and deconstructing meanings with and around written texts. They must develop both implicit and explicit, tacit and active knowledge of how written language works and its possibilities for access to and the representation of culturally significant ideas, concepts and beliefs. But to use literacy to realise sociocultural power, they also need to deploy language to conceptualise and realise goals and alternatives in specific social relationships and situations...Literacy is therefore as much about ideologies, identities and values as it is about codes and skills. (pp. 8 - 11)
Cairney (1995) agrees that literacy is not a single unitary skill.

“There are many forms of literacy, each with specific purposes and contexts in which they are used...To understand literacy fully we need to understand the groups and institutions in which we are socialised into specific literacy practices (Bruner, 1986; Gee, 1990)” (p.11).

Simplistic skills-based definitions of literacy have given way to broader definitions of literacy in the 90's. The new definitions of literacy acknowledge the multiple forms of literacy and the dynamic nature of literacy as a social and cultural process. However, this broadened outlook towards literacy has not empowered all learners.

Recent research shows that literacy achievement is influenced by social class, ethnicity and geographical location (Cairney, 1995; Gee, 1990; Luke, 1993). Cairney (1995) and Luke (1993) highlight the inequity of classroom practices:

Even in the everyday functioning of the classroom it seems that critical decisions are made which limit some children's opportunities for learning. (Cairney, 1995, 14.) All literate practices are not of equivalent power in terms of the socioeconomic benefits and cultural knowledges they yield. Nor do schools successfully impart to all socially powerful or critical literacies. (Luke, 1993, p. 17.)

Teachers are faced with the dilemma of how to socialise students into
the literacy practices that will ultimately empower. (Cairney, 1995).

Luke (1993) calls for critical social literacy in the classroom which recognises cultural, class and gender differences and offers more inclusive literature and literacy curriculum. Cairney (1995, p. 16) advocates less concern with debates over methods, and more concern with the interactions and relationships that are permitted and encouraged in classrooms whilst reflecting on the extent to which individuals are empowered or disempowered by our literacy practices.

Solsken (1993) takes the underlying assumptions of the 'social construction of literacy' perspective further to examine the learning and teaching of literacy as part of status and dominance relations in the larger society. She calls this perspective 'literacy as social status and identity'. In her study of literacy, gender and work in families and in school, Solsken found that "children, like adults, strive to be counted as members of social groups and to be recognised as unique individuals". The day-to-day choices children make in classroom negotiations, are made within the constraints of, and have consequences for, broader social processes. (p.9)

Bruner (1974, cited in Clay, 1979, p. 271) draws our attention to the complex issues facing the classroom teacher:

How one manages to time the steps of pedagogy to match unfolding capacities, how one manages to instruct without making the learner
dependent and how one manages to do both of these while keeping alive zest for further learning - these are very complicated questions that do not yield answers.

Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) suggest a formula for literacy development whereby 'experience' transacts with 'print settings' leading to new levels of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic activity. (p.30) Harste et al found distinct patterns in literacy learning in their study of young children which lead them to stress the need for open-entry language activities in which constraints are allowed to evolve in a risk-free environment.

Unsworth (1993) warns that "there is no place in the classrooms of the 1990s and beyond for the sterile traditional teaching of the past with its mechanistic transmission of knowledge and passive, receptive learning" (p.x). Classroom teachers need to be mindful that children's access to knowledge and literacy practices is dependent upon their social position (Cairney, 1995; Gee, 1990; Luke, 1993; Unsworth, 1993).

Developing Communities of Readers and Writers.

The acknowledgment of literacy learning as a social and cultural process has implications for the classroom environment. Cairney (1989) suggests:
Classrooms are living evidence of the complex social nature of literacy. The teacher and the class are talking, listening, reading and writing as parts of a dynamic community. Literacy is being learned as children relate to each other, meaning is being created within a complex community of relationships (p. 561).

Teachers need to provide classroom environments where children value reading and writing as natural extensions of their lives and where they can grow and share as members of a literate community (Cairney, 1995, p. 17). There is a need to create communities of learners (Barth, 1986, 1990; Cairney, 1989; Johnson, 1993).

Senge (1990) defines a learning community as "an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together".

Three significant features are evident in 'communities of scholars': self-organisation, generative learners and self-sustenance, states Johnson (1993). Communities are developed through vision, planning, preparation and hard work under the leadership of a teacher. A community of scholars is not restricted to a certain grade or age. "The differences between a Grade 3, Grade 7, Grade 10 or university level
community of scholars would rest more with the nature of the texts with which the learners engage and the extent of the world knowledge that they bring to them rather than a stage of development or any particular set of skills." (p.4)

In learning communities:

uyện students are empowered, self-directed and committed learners

uyện teachers and administrators are themselves committed learners with well developed habits of continuous inquiry and reflection; they are life long learners who recognise the complexities of teaching and recognise that they need continually to deepen their knowledge of teaching and learning processes

yntax the principal is the leading learner, who models lifelong learning and facilitates the learning of all members of the community

yntax parents are learning partners

yntax there is a learning-focused work environment in which both formal learning activities and informal, workplace learning are valued.

(NSW Dept. of School Education, 1995)
Guided Participation

Vygotsky (1978) identified the 'zone of proximal development' in children. This zone refers to the development potential of a child when problem solving occurs with adult guidance or more capable peers, compared with the actual developmental level when involved in independent problem solving (p.86). Vygotsky believed that teaching towards actual developmental levels is ineffective and that the zone of proximal development is critical for learning to occur (p.89).

Vygotsky's concept of 'intersubjectivity' describes the process humans engage in when collaborating. It involves a sharing of focus and purpose between a child and another more skilled or knowledgeable person (Cairney, 1995, p. 37).

Bruner (1983, 1986) suggested the process of 'scaffolding' to guide children through the zone of proximal development. The process of scaffolding involves an enabling adult helping the child by guiding the learning task and segmenting the task into manageable components.

Cairney (1995) uses Bruner's term 'scaffolding' to describe the behaviour of an enabling person helping a student engage in an aspect of learning beyond their current level of development (p.46).

Rogoff (1990) built upon the theories of Vygotsky and Bruner to develop the concept of guided participation:
Guided participation involves children and their caregivers in the collaborative processes of (1) building bridges from children's present understanding and skills to reach new understanding and skills, and (2) arranging and structuring children's participation in activities, with dynamic shifts over development in children's responsibility. (p.8)

The Use of Literature.

Although Cairney (1995) reminds us that literature-based instruction is not the only means of acquiring literacy, and stresses the need to recognise multiple pathways to literacy, much has been written about using literature in the classroom.

"The way children are taught to read tells them what adults think literacy is. If we want our children to read more competently and sensitively in order to live more richly and to contribute to what is to be read, then we have to move beyond a utilitarian view of literacy..." (Meek, 1982, p. 18). The most important single lesson that children learn from texts is the nature and variety of written discourse - the different ways that language lets a writer tell and the many and different ways a reader reads (Meek, 1988, p.21).
Saxby (1993) states:

The most important factor in developing literary skills is early access to literature, in the first place to the oral literature of nursery rhymes and folk and fairy tales and then to books which will immediately capture interest, stir the imagination and absorb the listener into the world of story. True literature nourishes the mind, promotes sensory awareness, develops emotional sensitivity and provides a rich linguistic environment. A reader's experience is constantly being enriched by language, and at the same time language is sharpening experience because it is providing the tool by which to recognise and name it (pp. 57 - 61).

The emphasis on literature in classrooms today has arisen from development in theoretical understandings of the reading process since the 1970s. Whilst there is still debate concerning the reading process itself, there is universal consensus that reading is a complex meaning based process requiring the interaction of text and reader based factors (Cairney, 1995, p.4).

This two-way interactive process of reading reflects the transactional theory of reading developed by scholars such as Rosenblatt (1978) and Eco (1979). They proposed that "reading involves a transaction between a reader and a text which
leads to the creation of a new text that is unique to each reader”.

Transactional theory reflects the social constructivist notions of knowledge (Cairney, 1995, p.4). Rosenblatt (1978) stresses the need for literary experiences which involved 'aesthetic reading' as opposed to 'efferent reading'.

Cairney (1995, pp 77 - 78) suggests that literature can fulfil many complex functions:

- Literature is not just about story, it is about life and one's world.
- It can act as a mirror to enable readers to reflect on life's problems and circumstances; a source of knowledge; a means to peer into the past, and the future; a vehicle to other places; a means to reflect on inner struggles; an introduction to the realities of life and death; and a vehicle for the raising and discussion of social issues....Literature offers "endless possibilities“ for readers to explore their world and learn from it, to enter "other worlds“ and to engage in meaning making.

Bruner (1986) uses the term 'subjunctivize' to describe how literature "renders the world less fixed, less banal, more susceptible to recreation...literature, in this spirit, is an instrument of freedom, lightness, imagination, and yes, reason. It is our only hope against the long gray night".

Chambers (1991) describes what enabling adults (teachers) need to do
to create the reading environment that will allow children to discover literature:

They (teachers) provide books and time to read them and an attractive environment where people want to read. They stimulate a desire to become a thoughtful reader. They demonstrate by reading aloud and by their own behaviour what a 'good' reader does. And they respond, and help others respond, to the individuality of everyone in the reading community they belong to. (p. 92)

Cairney (1995, p.89) contends that it is the instructional model within which texts are embedded that is critical to the transformation of literacy in classrooms. Factual texts, technological and media approaches are other alternatives that should be present in classroom teaching and learning situations.

The foregoing provides an outline of the literacy theory underpinning the classroom teaching and learning practices in 1995. As the focus of the study has shifted towards intertextuality, an extensive review of the literature is seen as necessary to trace the evolution of intertextuality theory and its significance to literacy learning. For the purposes of this paper, a summary of this literature will be given.
Intertextuality

Saxby (1993, p.61) states that enrichment from reading is a spiralling process. "Each new book that is assimilated into the readers experience provides new insights that can be brought to bear on the next book read." This describes the basic notion of intertextuality.

Intertextuality can be defined as "the process of interpreting one text by means of a previously composed text" (Cairney, 1992, p. 502).

Intertextuality has woven a complex, labyrinthian path through various academic disciplines. This summary will attempt to explain some of the pathways - particularly those seen as relevant to this study.

Post-structuralist scholar, Julie Kristeva (1967, translated in 1980) was the first to attempt an explanation for the notion of intertextuality: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p.66).

Barthes (1979, p. 77) stated that "Every text is the intertext of another text." Following Kristeva's initial description, there has been extensive research into intertextuality throughout various scholarly fields.

Worton and Still (1990) allude to this in their definition:

Intertextuality - it should come as no surprise - is a promiscuous inter-discipline, or even a trans-discipline, certainly a transvestite discipline in that it constantly borrows its trappings now from
psychoanalysis, now from political philosophy, now from economics and so on. Its practitioners enjoy playing with their own words (newly coined) and even more so with other people's. (p. viii)

The pathway of intertextuality research through the academic disciplines of Literary Criticism, Semiotics, Cognitive Literacy Theory and the Social Construction of Literacy are of particular relevance to this study. In order to determine the patterns and importance of intertextuality in a kindergarten classroom, it is helpful to gain an understanding of the genesis of intertextuality in each of these various disciplines.

Literary Theory

Literary criticism is the home of intertextuality. The theory of intertextuality states that a text cannot exist as a hermetic whole for two important reasons. Firstly, because the writer is a reader of texts, the written text is always influenced by references of all kinds from the various texts experienced prior to writing. Secondly, the reader of the text brings with him or her a wealth of prior experiences which may lead the reader to an interpretation of the writing, different to that which the writer proposed. Conversely, a reference to a work by the writer, which is unknown to the reader, will have a passive effect
during that particular reading. Worton and Still (1990) refer to these two fundamental aspects, texts entering via authors and texts entering via readers, as the ‘Axes of intertextuality’ (p.2).

Whilst the term intertextuality was only used from the 1960s, the phenomenon itself occurred from the beginnings of human society whenever there has been discourse about texts. Worton and Still (1990), in their introductory chapter of an entire book devoted to intertextuality in literary criticism, trace the roots of intertextuality back to our earliest orators such as Plato and Aristotle. The twentieth century has seen the emergence of intertextuality theorists in literary criticism. One of the earliest influential theorists was Bakhtin who stated that ‘there is no utterance without relation to other utterances’ (Todorov, 1984, p.60). Post-structuralists such as Roland Barthes began to assert that readers can freely connect text with any system of meaning to make sense of our lived experience - ‘The aim of literature, Barthes asserts is to put meaning into the world, but not a meaning’ (Sontag, 1982, p. xi). In ‘The Pleasure of the Text’ (1975), Barthes states intertextuality is ‘the impossibility of living outside the infinite test - whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life’ (p.36). Reader response theorists such as Riffaterre (1990) define intertextuality as the ‘web of functions’ that synchronise the
relationships between text and intertext. Riffaterre states the
importance of intertextuality for readers to gain understanding when
trying to Ôfill gapsÕ in a text (pp. 56 - 57). The Reader Response
movement located meaning within the readerÕs interpretation rather than
in the text.

Semiotics

The semiotic discipline arose from the work of Pierce (1931) and
Saussure (1966). Semiotics, the study of signs, generated interest in
a number of educational researchers who developed a semiotic
perspective on reading comprehension (Eco, 1976; Harste Woodward &
Burke, 1984; Short, 1987). Hartman (1990) sums up their collective
wisdom thus: Ô...they examine how language, and thereby reality, is
constructed. Semiotics examines how our reality is already constructed
for us by the language and interpretations of our culture - an external
reality is always interpreted because it is mediated by a system of
cultural signsÕ (pp.8 - 12). Lemke (1992) sees semiotic intertextuality
as the cornerstone of our understanding of how meanings are made: ÔThe
meanings we make through texts, and the ways we make them, always
depend on the currency in our communities of other texts ... we can
make meanings through the relations between two texts; meanings that
cannot be made within any single textÕ (p.257).
Cognitive Literacy Theory

Literacy from a cognitive perspective is viewed as a body of cognitive knowledge about written language (prior knowledge) and a set of processes for using that knowledge (schema theory). This theory suggests that readers make use of visual information in the text to guide them in selecting and using their own knowledge to make sense of the text (Hartman, 1990, p5). By the use of prior knowledge and schema theory, meaning is constructed by connecting knowledge fragments into a particular configuration to fit a given context. Hartman used the cognitive tradition to examine the intertextual links made by able readers as they read multiple passages. Hartman reports that readers do transpose texts into other texts, absorb one text into another, and build a mosaic of intersecting texts. He found two general types of intertextual links occurring. Those between ideas, events and people; and those links made between the readers themselves to the passages in the form of a discourse stance (p.171). Hartman concludes that able readers use a variety of ways to read; reading is an intertextual enterprise where readers transpose, absorb and intersect texts as they zig-zag their way through passages (iii).

Social Construction of Literacy

The basic tenets of sociocultural research are drawn from cultural anthropology and sociolinguistics theory. Literacy viewed from a
sociocultural perspective is seen as “a community’s ways of using written language to serve social purposes” (Solsken, 1995, p.4). The social context is central to meaning making, as Cairney (1995) describes: “types of discourse and the way we read or write them are the social constructs of specific groups. Individuals are enculturated into these practices and these meanings” (p.2).

A number of intertextuality studies have been carried out from a sociocultural perspective. Cairney (1988, 1990, 1992) found that students link texts in diverse ways, and while intertextuality has idiosyncratic elements, it is also a rich, social phenomenon. Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993) ground their study of intertextuality in the social construction of literacy. “People act and react to each other, and they do so primarily through language. Intertextuality describes one of the social (and cultural) processes involved in how people act and react to each other” (p.220). Bloome (1991) proposes that merely juxtaposing texts is insufficient for intertextuality to be present. He maintains that the juxtaposition must be proposed, interactionally recognised, acknowledged and have social significance (p.259).

Kathy Short (1992a) draws on Peirce’s abduction theory (1966) to explain complex intertextual connections that occur in the social environment of elementary classrooms. Short examined the use of “literature circles” and “text sets” in classrooms to explore the processes and strategies that occur in intertextuality, rather than
just the types of connections. She calls for further
research in classroom learning environments which support collaborative
social relationships to gain insights into how intertextuality assists
meaning making.

Oyler & Barry (1996) examined what and how texts were juxtaposed, and
the teacher’s role in the construction of intertextuality, in their
study of a first-grade classroom. They found that student connections
were shared with the entire class and remembered texts became shared
texts thus building intertextuality among a community of readers (p.328).

In order to understand what shapes and mobilises reading instruction in
early school years, there is a need for more in depth examination of
the intertextual complexities that exist within it, conclude Harris and
Trezise from their study of intertextuality in a kindergarten classroom
(1997).

Wolf and Heath (1992) allude to intertextuality in their study of
children and literature: ‘Children, at particular ages, moods and
moments, will see and remember certain details that trigger the memory
of a particular piece of speech, fragment of scene, gesture or facial
expression and its connection to a recent event’ (p.109).

This outline provides a very brief introduction to the theoretical
history of intertextuality and some of the educational research into
this phenomenon. The literature will continue to be examined in and elaborated upon as the research project progresses.

The Research Setting

The study has been undertaken in a kindergarten classroom in a government primary school situated in the Blue Mountains of NSW. The school has a total enrolment of approximately 330 students. The kindergarten class comprised 22 children, 21 of whom were in their first year of schooling and one student who was repeating kindergarten.

The class were observed by the researcher (who was also the classroom teacher) throughout the school year, to initially provide a rich description of literacy development and to examine what factors influenced literacy. The study examines the whole class generally, and specifically focuses upon six children who were observed more intensively. The families of these children participated in interviews and completed questionnaires relating to home literacy practices.

The researcher collected a variety of data throughout 1995 which are currently being analysed. Initial data analysis adducted the study towards a focus on intertextuality. The data analysis and literature review will culminate in an
examination of intertextuality theory, a description of intertextual events in this classroom and the implications for literacy teaching and learning practices.

The Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research was considered appropriate for examining literacy development in a kindergarten classroom as it enables the researcher, who was also the classroom teacher, to directly observe and record the dynamic, sociocultural nature of classroom life as it naturally occurs. The following table (Table 1) depicts how the five characteristics of qualitative research identified by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) are reflected in this study.

Data Management

Data Collection

A variety of ethnographic techniques were used for data collection. Data were collected in five broad categories:

- Student home literacy background
- Analysis of classroom interaction
- Student literacy development
- Student school achievement
A summary of data collection procedures is provided in Table 2.

Data Analysis

The development of a conceptual framework is recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 18) to graphically explain the data to be analysed and to formulate research questions.

(See Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for a Study of Literacy Development in the Kindergarten Classroom.)

The study began with the very general research question: "What factors influence literacy development in this classroom?" to provide an initial path for exploring the collected data. As the focus of the study shifted to intertextuality, the following research questions were generated:

Research Questions:

What is the theoretical history of intertextuality?
In what ways do kindergarten students use intertextuality to construct meaning in classroom literacy practices?
What patterns of intertextuality are evident in literacy practices?
observed in this Kindergarten classroom?

What role does intertextuality play in young children’s literacy development?

It is recognised that the formulation of research questions is an iterative process and may need reformulating as the data analysis proceeds.

Data Analysis procedures

The first stage of analysis entailed watching the video recordings of classroom literacy practices to identify any factors that appear to influence literacy. During this stage it became apparent that intertextual incidents were frequently occurring. It was decided to focus upon these phenomena and examine them for links with literacy.

The video recordings were observed and all intertextual events transcribed. The second stage of data analysis involves investigation of these intertextual events to determine implications for literacy learning.

Much of the data will be stored and analysed using a computer program designed for qualitative research analysis. NUDIST, (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising), assists in managing complex data efficiently and allows for coding and theory construction to be explored and carried out.
Initially the data will be analysed speculatively to allow for tentative reflection by the researcher and any emergence of patterns (Woods, 1986). Data analysis will be undertaken using the principles of grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and incorporating the inductive coding techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). 'Grounded theory' involves the intense analysis of data using constant comparison and coding to produce a well constructed substantive theory, relevant to the specific site.

Spradley (1980) describes a 'developmental research sequence' using domain analysis and taxonomic analysis which also may be helpful for analysing intertextuality in this study.

Trustworthiness

A range of strategies will be used throughout this study to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.263) suggest 13 tactics aimed at ensuring the quality of the data, examining findings and taking a skeptical look at emerging explanations. The major strategy employed for trustworthiness will be triangulation:

Triangulation is a term that has been used to refer to multiple sources of data, gathering information from three points of view and also to the use of multiple strategies for trustworthiness. (Burgess,
Privacy and Consent

Permission to carry out this research was obtained from the NSW Department of School Education prior to commencing the study.

The purpose of the research was explained to all parents and consent was requested for each child's participation in the project. Parents were also asked to indicated their willingness to participate in interviews concerning home literacy background and practices.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research will be treated as confidential. No identifying information will be published without written permission from parents.

Timeframe

This study began in 1995. Data collection was completed in December, 1995. Data management and analysis has been ongoing and will continue for some time. The study will culminate in a thesis for a Master of Education (Honours) degree.
The Study So Far............

The study began in February, 1995. After obtaining permission from the NSW Department of School Education to conduct this qualitative research project, I informed parents of the nature of the study and requested their consent for each child to participate.

I began collecting data from the very first days of the school year. Initially I wrote field notes and recorded children using video and audio cassette on very much an ad hoc basis. I soon found the need to be more methodical in my data collection and devised a timetable which ensured a more systematic variety of classroom literacy practices were recorded each week. I also set aside a specific weekly time for writing rich field notes in addition to the copious anecdotal notes written on the run during the busy school day. Table 3 outlines this data recording timetable.

This timetable was adhered to for most of the year - although the inevitable interruptions to routines that occur so often in classrooms sometimes necessitated skipping some days! This was often made up for by the recording of special classroom events, such as the Bookweek Parade, Family Silent Reading, etc.

By the end of the school year I had amassed a mountain of data! Hours of work lay ahead in transcribing the 50 hours of video tape and 15 or
so hours of audio tape, not to mention a year's collection of work samples, field notes, anecdotal records and all the teaching and assessment records to be waded through! Delamont's (1992) words haunted me: "the most important thing is not to allow material to pile up unanalysed, or even worse, unread". Unfortunately, my circumstances as fulltime teacher, fulltime participant researcher, fulltime mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, etc., etc., precluded me from heeding Delamont's caution......so there I sat in December 1995 with material piled up - mostly unanalysed!

Firstly, I needed a starting point. My initial idea was to focus upon the whole class generally and then narrow the study to concentrate more fully on the 6 focal children. This would entail transcribing the video recordings (all 50 hours!) in chronological order - this seemed an insurmountable task to begin with.

I decided to change tack and begin with the focal children. I saw three main components to the study at this stage:

- analysing the focal children's data
- reviewing the literature about literacy
- reviewing the literature about qualitative research

Devising a study plan in January 1996 that enabled me to begin the compilation of focal children profiles and continue with readings on literacy and qualitative research, provided a starting point for tackling the data.
As I began this initial analysis of the video recordings, I became aware of the frequent intertextual events occurring. I began reading the literature on intertextuality and became fascinated with its implications for learning. I also became aware of the importance of intertextuality in my own life and learning. At last, I had found the focus for my study!

During 1996 I undertook training in the use of NUDIST, a computer software program for qualitative analysis. I am now using NUDIST for my data storage, coding, searching and analysis.

In 1997 I became Literacy Consultant for the Penrith District of NSW Department of School Education. Consequently time is still very much at a premium. I try to work to a weekly study plan which includes a designated time for data analysis, reviewing the literature and increasing my knowledge of qualitative research methods. This is quite a gruelling task, being squeezed in with my other commitments. As a result some weeks go by with me despairing because my study has been neglected.

At these times I am consoled by Pollard's (1985) paper 'Opportunities and difficulties of a teacher-ethnographer' and the knowledge that someone has
been here before me! Pollard concluded that "the research process as a full participant was often tiring, frustrating and difficult, and yet it was also fascinating and very rewarding to identify patterns in the data and to hesitatingly step-by-step, attempt to construct a deeper understanding of the events and social relationships in which I daily participated". (p.232)

The study is at an interesting stage as analysis of the intertextual incidents from the video recordings occurs. Fundamental to any study of intertextuality is an understanding of what constitutes a text. Just as intertextuality evolved into increasingly complex definitions as it was studied, so too has the notion of ÔtextÕ. The following definitions illustrate this increasing complexity:

Pierce (1931) :
A text is any sign that communicates meaning.

Witte (1992) : While a text can be something tangible, it need not be, it can also be those experiences and ideas that are remembered or constructed in the mind.

Hartman (1992) :
Although we usually think of the text as the object one reads - a textbook, a section of a passage, or the alphanumeric code printed on a page - it need not be confined to the boundaries of printed language. A text includes both linguistic and nonlinguistic signs. (p. 296)
Worton & Still (1990):
ÔTextÕ is used both in the restricted academic sense to mean a Ôwork of literatureÕ and in the wider sense to mean anything which can be perceived as Ôa signifying structureÕ from the spectacle of nature to social codes. (p. viii)

Texts…should be defined as meaningful configurations of signs intended to communicate.

Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993):
A text is the product of textualising. People textualise experience and the world in which they live, making those phenomena part of a language system. The result of textualising experience can be a set of words, signs, representations, etc. But it might be other forms and products not usually associated with texts: architecture, rock formations, the stars in the sky, the wind, the ocean, emotion - these can all be texts, but their being texts depends on what people do. The starts in the sky are only a text if they have been made so, if they have been textualised. In brief, text is something done by people to experience (broadly defined). (p. 311)

Short (1992):
A text is any chunk of meaning that has unity and can be shared with
others. A song, dance, poem, oral story, mathematical equation, or sculpture are all texts from which learners can draw connections as they construct their understandings about a current evolving text.

For the purposes of this study, I am currently defining text as “a textualised experience which may include a book, video, film, or a verbalised personal experience”. My working definition for intertextuality is “the explicit connection of texts, which enhances meaning to the initiator, within a situational context”, in this case, the classroom.

The video recordings of the literacy practices in this kindergarten classroom throughout the year have now been observed and all intertextual incidents have been transcribed and stored on Nudist. The intertextual incidents are currently being “open coded” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and pattern searching has commenced.

Intertextual Incidents Examples

The following intertextual incidents provide examples of some of the types of intertextual connections that are occurring:

Example 1

Intertextual Connection - Book to Book
*Video 1 - 4

*20/3/95

*Shared Reading - Imagine

*CONTEXT: Children are gathered on the mat with teacher in front with copy of 'Imagine'. They begin by discussing some common features of the cover pages of Alison Lester books they have been reading. They discuss the circles that often appear on the cover and the titles, then teacher begins reading and comes to the page about the Arctic.

*Giles: In the Journey Home they went to a snow place.

*Teacher: Yes they did go to a snowy place in The Journey Home.

Giles is linking the illustrations of the Arctic with another Alison Lester book ÔThe Journey HomeÔ.

Example 2

Intertextual Connection - Book to Media

*Video 8 - 3

*Alphabet

*31/7/95

*Context - T and chn are discussing the letter ÔNÕ and looking at the ÔNÕ picture card. Ben B. calls out ÔbirdÕ. T says ÔNow listen, bird, /b/, does it start with /n/? Ben points to the card where there is a picture of a bird and says ÔThereÕs oneÕ. T says, ÔWell, what do you
think it might be? Maybe, it's a special one that starts with /n/....

*T: I know a bird that starts with /n/ and is known for its singing...notice the musical notes (pointing to picture) ...does anyone know a bird that's known for its singing?...and starts with /n/?

*Several hands go up, and chn say things like ÒnotebirdÓ, ÒIÕve forgottenÓ.

*T: Nightingale.....has anybody heard of a nightingale?
*Elizabeth: (Singing) Sing sweet nightingale....

*T: What's that Elizabeth?
*Elizabeth: It's in Cinderella...(sings again)...Sing sweet
nightingaleÓ
*T: Well, there you go...it's in Cinderella...

Elizabeth is linking the word ÒnightingaleÓ to a song from the video ÒCinderellaÓ.

Example 3
Intertextual Connection - Book to Media

*Video 1 - 4
*20/3/95

*Shared Reading - Imagine

*Reading continues and they come to the page of dinosaurs:

*Alanna: Well, I have a video at home all about dinosaurs and there’s a longneck and Sean lent it to me.

*Teacher: Right, Elizabeth?

*Elizabeth: Well, I've got a video called the Land Before Time and there’s a little dinosaur called Little Foot.

*Adrian: Hey, I've seen that too.

*Emma: I've got a video about dinosaurs.

*Several others mention videos about dinosaurs too.

The students are linking the Alison Lester book *Imagine* to videos about dinosaurs.

Example 4

Intertextual connection - Phonemic Awareness to Student Knowledge

*Context - Teacher and students are discussing the letter ÔNÕ. T and chn are now jointly constructing the class big alphabet book for the ÔnÕ page. One child has suggested ÔneedleworkÕ and T is drawing and writing it on the easel.
*Adrian: My nanna does knitting and needlework

*Elizabeth: IÕm trying to do knitting...IÕm trying to knit a scarf for myself..

*T: WeÕre going to do some needlework ourselves, in class.

Adrian is linking the word ÔneedleworkÕ to a personal context and prompts Elizabeth to do so also.

Example 5
Intertextual Connection - Phonemic awareness to Known Rhyme

*Video 9 - 6

*Alphabet

*21/8/95

*Context - T and chn are studying the letter P. T reads ÔLucy and TomÕs Alphabet bookÕ first then they look at alphabet cards, make body shapes of the letters and begin making the P page for the KS alphabet book.

*OC - When chn are calling out words for the KS alphabet book, these are good examples of background knowledge, not ITX, because no links are made, eg Alanna calls out pencil, Giles calls out peg, Ben N says pig, etc. BUT then Alanna says:
*Alanna: Peter Piper!

*Giles: (in a singsong voice) Peter Piper....

*Alanna: Hey, Peter Piper picked a peck of Peter Piper Pepper

*Emma: Pied Piper

*Chn laugh

*Alanna continues saying the tongue twister to chn around her. T is
drawing on the big alphabet book and is ignoring all of this.

Alanna is linking the word to a rhyme but then Emma links the rhyme to
a story character - Pied Piper.

Example 6
Intertextual Connection - Book to Personal Possession

*Video 1 - 4

*20/3/95

*Shared Reading - Imagine

*T and chn are still reading the page about the Arctic

*Giles: Do you know what those white birds are called?

*Teacher: What?

*Giles: They're called albatrosses. Like my boat is called albatross.
Teacher: Oh, is it? So it's called after these white birds?

Giles: No, some different ones.

Giles is linking the illustration of albatrosses to his boat.

One of the dilemmas of this study is deciding what is an intertextual incident and what is an expression of background knowledge. The following example illustrates the type of statement that is being identified as simply background knowledge in comparison to the richness of intertextual examples:

Example 7
Background Knowledge

*Video 9 - 4
*Discussion about books with special features - lift the flap, etc.
*21/8/95

*OC - Example of background knowledge - T shows a ÔSpotÕ book and says ÔWhat do you know about these books?Õ Adrian says ÔTheyÕre lift the flap books.Ó No link is explicitly made.

Some incidents are being coded as ÔquestionableÕ intertextuality - the categorisation of these types of incidents will become more definitive.
as the study proceeds and the definitions of ÔtextÕ and ÔintertextualityÕ become more specific:

Example 8

Questionable Intertextuality

*Video 8 - 3
*Alphabet
*31/7/95
*Context - T and chn are discussing the letter ÔNÕ and looking at the ÔNÕ picture card.

Earlier during this session, one student said ÔknuckleÕ as an ÔnÕ word. T discussed how some ÔnÕ words are tricky because they have a silent letter....often a silent ÔkÕ. Now the T and chn are discussing a picture of a compass and T is leading the chn towards thinking about why ÔcompassÕ which starts with /c/ would be on an ÔnÕ card.

*T: But a compass starts with /c/, doesnÕt it? Why would it have a compass? Anyone got any ideas?
*Sophie: ItÕs tricky?
*T: It could be because its tricky....
*Alanna: James knows...
*James: ItÕs got a silent letter at the beginning.
*T: (laughs) It could have, what it actually is doing...when you have a compass, it points either north, south, east or west and this one is pointing north...

James is linking the word ÔtrickyÕ and the teacherÕs earlier explanation of silent letters to a new word - but does this type of ÔtextÕ count?

Example 9
Questionable Intertextuality

*Video 5.3
*25/5/95
*Guided Writing
*Focus: Stephanie, Samuel, Ben B..

*Context: All three children are seated at desks, T is using overhead to write ÔTessa snaps snakesÕ, a book they have been reading in class and chn copy into their books.
Alanna is off camera but her voice is heard in this incident. Teacher is discussing the word ÔsnakeÕ as it is being written and says:
*Teacher: Okay, thereÕs a silent ÔeÕ on the end of snake. So we need a silent ÔeÕ there. We donÕt hear that.
*Alanna: A silent ÔeÕ doesnÕt make a sound at the end, whatÕs in lamb is a ÔbÕ after the end but itÕs a silent ÔbÕ so it doesnÕt make the
/b/ sound.

*Teacher: That's right and the silent ÔeÕ doesn't make the /e/ sound - it just makes ÔsnakeÕ.

In this incident, Alanna is linking the teacher's talk about silent ÔeÕ to her own spelling knowledge of lamb with a silent ÔbÕ. Do they count as ÔtextsÕ?

The following examples reflect some of the themes that have been identified in the intertextual incidents.

Example 10

Meagre Offerings

ÔMeagre offeringÕ describes incidents where a student makes a connection between texts but does not elaborate sufficiently for the teacher to understand what connection is being made or what meaning is being constructed (Harris & Trezise, 1997):

*Video 10 - 6
*Alphabet
*28/8/95
*Context - T and chn are gathered on mat for the letter E. T reads Lucy and TomÕs Alphabet book page about E which says that Tom and Lucy
sometime trick their Dad by putting an empty eggshell upside down in the eggcup, when he taps it itÔs an empty shell.

*Jamie: Hey, you know what Mrs Jameson. When my Dad cracked a egg (xxxx)...there was a little tiny chicken in it.
*T: Was there?

Jamie frequently makes statements that link the classroom context to a personal experience. This example also demonstrates this Ômeagre offeringÔ which the teacher did not probe further to elicit more information.

Example 11
Meagre Offerings

Video 2 -3
*28/3/95
*Phonemic Awareness - blending

*CONTEXT: Teacher is holding small magnetic board and revising the letters that have been studied so far. Teacher shows how we can blend the letters to make words. They have made 'am, 'mat', 'fat', then Lara suggests changing the 'a' to 'i'. Teacher and children sound out the new word /fI/ /iI/ /It/ - and children call out 'fit'
*Ben B.: Fitness
*T ignores Ben
*Emma: Fitness
*Stephanie: Fitness
*Teacher: Fitness starts with that word....

*Ben B.: I said fitness
*T: Did you?
*OC - Children have connected the isolated word 'fit' with a context that is meaningful to them - fitness.
*T changes word again - making 'if' then 'is'
*Ben B.: Isadorius rhymes too!
*T ignores Ben's remark and continues talking about 'is'
*Ben stands up and moves toward T saying 'Hey, isadora rhymes', T says to him to sit down and tell us please, and he does so saying
*Ben B.: Isadorius rhymes!
*T: Say that again, Ben.
*Ben B.: Isadorius rhymes.
*T: Isadorius? What's that, Ben?
*Ben B.: Oh, it's like, the, you know, it's, well, sometimes I change my name and I call it Isidorius.
*T: Do you? That's interesting.
*OC - What is Ben B referring to I wonder?
Again, a student is making a connection and obviously constructing meaning. Although the teacher attempts to gain more information, it remains a “meagre offering”.

Example 12

Physical

This describes incidents where the students physically move during the intertextual incident:

*Video 9 - 4

*Discussion about books with special features - lift the flap, etc.

*21/8/95

*Context - T and chn are gathered on the mat, T is showing chn a variety of books with special features such as pop-ups, peepholes and lift the flaps. They talk about “The Jolly Postman”. T then shows them “The Magic Toyshop”.

*Alanna: Remember when I brought in...(begins singing) there were ten in the bed and the little one said, roll over, roll over?

*Teacher: And that had...what did that have in it?

*Alanna: Flaps.

*Teacher: It had flaps (affirming)

*Alanna: No, it didn’t have flaps. It had popups, it had arrows,
(stands up) they went woooo- wooooo, (uses arm swinging action to demonstrate). They had those arrows, popups. It had popups. (sits down).
*T is now ignoring Alanna and showing features of the book she is holding up.
*ITX LInk - Class book to home book.

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Example 13
Dwelling

It has been noticed that students will often ÔdwellÕ on an intertextual event until they are given the opportunity to articulate it:

*Video 1-6
*22/3/95
*Phonemic Awareness
*CONTEXT: Class are seated on the mat. T is out the front. T is showing class the magnetic board and letters that they have studied so far. They have revised the letter names, sounds and words that begin with these letters.
T has introduced the idea of blending. Firstly with vowel/consonant, as in 'at', 'it', 'am'.
T now demonstrates the word 'mat' on the magnetic board. Several children guess it and call out 'mat'. T says 'You can write that word because you know m-a-t!'
*Emma: We're sitting on a mat.

*Jenna puts her hand up to say something but T goes on to make 'is' on the magnetic board and talk about it with the children. Jenna keeps her hand up most of the time which is about one and a half minutes. Finally T says 'Jenna?'

*Jenna: I've got a cousin called, umm, Mat.

*T: Mat? Have you? My son's called Mat - it's short for Mathew.

*About 5 minutes later, following performing the rhyme 'I'm a little teapot' and discussing the worksheet the children are going to complete and then performing the finger rhyme 'Six Little Indians', James has his hand up. Teacher says 'Yes James?'

*James: Mats..we sit on at little lunch when the grass is wet.

*T: Yes, mats, and you know how to write that word now.

*OC: Interesting that both Jenna and James waited so doggedly to make a statement on 'mat' even though in both instances the class discussion had moved on. Also, 'mat' represented something meaningful to them possibly while the other v/c words did not?
Example 14

Multiple Links Simultaneously

This example illustrates how many intertextual links can be occurring by different participants in one classroom context:

*Video 10 - 8

*Shared Reading - Toys Factual Text - History of Toys

*28/8/95

*Context: T begins discussion about toys, stating that weÔre going to have a look at toys, but not just the toys that we play with. WeÔll have a look at different toys that children play with all over the world.

*T: There are lots of little countries too we mustnÔt forget, here is England and over here is New Zealand

*Jamie: My nanna lives in New Zealand

*Giles: Yeah, you were born in New Zealand

*Teacher turns the page and reads the title ÔGrowing up in Ancient EgyptÔ. Egypt!
*Teacher is interrupted mid way by Giles saying:

*Giles: Did you know Jamie...

*Teacher continues what she is saying but Giles has knelt up and is trying to finish what he was saying:

*Giles: Do you know what...

*Teacher: Egypt!

*Alanna: ÒEÓ!

*T: We just talked about that Egyptian lady on our picture card. Egypt starts with?

*Students chorus: ÓEÓ

*Giles: Jamie..

*T: Yes, I know that Giles, and Capital E starts Egypt because itÔs the name of a country.

*T continues showing the Egyptian page and saying how it was a long time ago - when the Pyramids were built. She is interrupted by Jamie

*Jamie: You know what?

*T: Is it to do with Egypt Jamie?

*Jamie nods

*Jamie: You know what, I used to live in New Zealand

During this episode, Jamie is connecting between New Zealand and his Nanna, Giles is dwelling on the fact that Jamie was born in New Zealand, the teacher elicits intertextuality by emphasising the ÒEÓ in
Egypt, alluding to the letter ÓEÓ they had been discussing in phonemic awareness earlier, and Alanna picks up on the reference to the letter ÓEÓ and responds.

Figure 2 graphically depicts the links occurring simultaneously in this segment:

These examples represent the types of intertextual incidents that are being analysed. It is too early to speculate about the significance of these incidents to literacy development. Indeed, it is felt that this study will actually provide more questions than answers as it proceeds. One of the major limitations of the study is that the analysis was unable to be done as the data was collected to enable follow up questioning of the students to some of these incidents. However, the data is still providing interesting examples of intertextuality in the kindergarten classroom.

And so the analysis process continues....slowly, often laboriously but hopefully with some interesting stories that will explain why and how 'they're all the same..... but different'.
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