

## PERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of school children regarding the meaning of reading and writing in the world, using the conversation analysis approach (Hutchby & Wooffit, 1998). Analysis focused on three main questions: (1) How do children perceive the role of reading and writing in the world? (2) What literate discursive skills do children reveal in their reflective discourse? (3) What differences emerge between the perceptions and components exhibited by 7-year-old children, who have just entered the formal education system, versus 12-year-old children, who have just undergone the transition from elementary school to middle school? Qualitative methodology was used to identify the two age groups' various perceptions, and quantitative methodology was used to compare the two age groups' frequency of different perceptions.

Findings pinpointed seven categories of literacy perceptions, four identified previously by Peled-Elhanan (2007) among school children in Grades 1-7 (functional, practical-social, purposeful, and cultural-academic) and three identified in the present study (self-enrichment, virtual traveler, and literacy as an instrument for processing feelings). Clear-cut differences emerged between the two age groups in the following dimension: distancing levels increased with age, the diversity of perception increased with age. The degree of perception represents the distancing levels, as well as the meta-literacy awareness. The current outcomes may help deepen pedagogical understanding about the importance of targeted exposure to the roles of reading and writing, in order to strengthen literacy in school-age children.

The children's literacy components during their discourse are classified along the contextualization axis. Speech with includes distancing levels reflect the child's ability to further herself from the immediate context of the conversation, and thus produce literacy abilities. In addition, other components facilitate the production of literate extended discourse: extended turns – which broaden and expand ideas in the conversation, the use of thinking verbs which indicate meta-pragmatic thinking. These issues were not analyzed in a systematic and quantitative way in this paper, but were observed in the qualitative analysis.

The paper focuses on two main aspects viewed in the childrens' speech: *perceptions* and *contextualization*. Thus, the framework of this paper is based on two main components:

(1) Perception is viewed along the perception axis, showing the children's perceptions about literacy in the world, as measured along an axis ranging from instrumental and personal to broad or global. (2) The contextualization aspect is viewed by means of literate discursive skills. These skills serve as indicators of academic potential, containing the presence of literacy components in the children's discourse. They include the ability to create "extended discourse", in genres such as: definitions, narration of stories, explanations, etc.. In addition, the use of metapragmatic components, such as thinking verbs (e.g., think, feel, believe), is prevalent in the speech of literate discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** Meta, Language, Literacy, Literate Discourse, Literate Perceptions