

# Chapter 1

## Emergent Language and Literacy Skills in Early Childhood: A Path to Success

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Studies have emphasized the importance of the first years of life for successful long-term language and literacy development. It is thus crucial we focus on designing appropriate and effective early learning environments with a clear literacy interaction plan that engages learners in their success and helps them advocate for the language skills they need and do not yet have. This chapter will show early natural language and literacy acquisition in children ages 2 to 4 years in a context where youngsters are exposed to a rich verbal, emotional, and experiential environment where thinking is valuable, visible, and actively promoted as a vehicle to language and literacy, and global competency frameworks are leaving the best tools in their backpack for life.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The reader will journey through the analyses of educational frameworks, theories, and study findings, then crystallized in a story where a preschooler's class at BaBidiBu Preschool in Bogota, Colombia, collaboratively constructs a project-based learning experience for Pedagogical Impacts, a term created by the author. The projects mentioned were the result of children's interests and occurred in an educational setting when prompted to take chances and participate in age-appropriate decision-making. At BaBidiBu preschool, in Bogota, Colombia, children grow in an environment where they are prompted to think using what they know (Perkins, 2001), think skillfully for comprehension, and take ownership of their learning and use it. Learning is a consequence of thinking (Perkins, 2001), and we believe children

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will gain a sense of who they are becoming as thinkers, learners, and globally competent individuals, as a result of their time with us.

## **TRACING THE ROOTS OF EARLY AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EXPERIENCES: MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM AND LEARNING THAT MATTERS**

“What is worth learning, Life worthy?” (Perkins, 2016). This question inspires the desire to teach relevant content for the lives preschool children are living now, and the ones they will live in the future (Perkins, 2016). Teaching for Understanding is one of the inspirations from Harvard University’s Project Zero. It puts the focus on understanding instead of just knowing. Four central questions regarding Teaching for Understanding, give clear purpose, guidance, and sets an educational journey for preschoolers: What shall we teach? (Generative Topics), What is worth understanding? (Understanding Goals), What should we teach and do for our children to understand? (Understanding Performances), How can teachers know if their children are understanding and how can children develop deeper understanding? (Ongoing Assessment). This instructional map guides can be a valuable guidance in the everyday purpose of any educational setting. (Blythe & Associates, 1998).

It is important for children to understand rather than know. Knowing is just information available everywhere. It’s what you can get by repeating and memorizing to passing a test. When children understand, they can use those understandings, make them their own, and apply them to their lives now or the ones they will live in the future. To understand something is in a way recognizing that it makes sense, is meaningful, fully owned, and useful. According to Perkins, (Wiske, 1988), the primary skill worth learning is deep thinking. Understanding is the capacity to think and act flexibly with what one knows (p 40). The flexible and active use of knowledge helps students further scaffold their learning and their passion for doing so. Big understandings include insight, opportunity, ethics, and well-prepared action. (Perkins, 2016). I strongly believe learning should include engagement, and excellence, as Howard Gardner clearly expressed in a conference I attended on good work. Indeed, all learning needs a clear purpose. In our preschool, we teach with the 3 Ps at hand, which I created: (Purpose, Passion, and Persistence). We want our children to understand the value of having a clear plan, then follow that plan with passion and persistence to become good thinkers, self-makers, and autonomous, independent, and empathetic humans.

Teaching means walking by the child’s side while he/she is interpreting and learning about the world. Teaching implies focusing on our students and their need, and building opportunities for them to construct and foster their ideas.

Learning is not just about getting the answer right (Perkins, 2009). It is also about making the right connections along with the opportunities that caregivers give children to make them. By working with early ages, educators have invaluable windows of opportunity for teaching youngsters how to love learning and how to cultivate dispositions that will remain throughout their emerging lives. This is the time when they are building their character and understandings, unpacking what it means to be a good thinker, a good citizen, a good family member, a good friend, a good neighbor, and what it means to make good decisions and work collectively. This is a time when they learn how to adapt to new circumstances, solve problems and think critically and creatively. This is also the time to reinforce ethics and values, so they understand the importance of being empathetic, stay interested in the world they live in, and are ready to act for its benefit. Children are setting their foundations for life, and they must understand that they are already citizens of the world, a beautiful, but complex one that not only needs them to be

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