

Preface

Children's play and early literacy development have been the subjects of intensive research during the past several decades. Psychological researchers have used quantitative methodology to study the nature of children's play behavior, how it changes with age and varies between individuals, and its impact on social and intellectual development. At the same time, sociolinguistically oriented investigators were using ethnographic and case-study procedures to study the development of written language in young children.

Although these two strands of research were initially conducted in isolation from one another, links between play and early literacy soon began to emerge. Play studies reported connections between play and literacy-related variables (e.g., use of literate language), and case studies of early literacy development contained vivid examples of how children often used play to explore the functions and structure of print. The result has been a rapid growth of research directly examining the connections between play and early literacy development.

This volume contains chapters from scholars who are on the cutting edge of play/literacy research. The role of children's play in early literacy is examined from a number of theoretical and research perspectives, including investigations of play's contributions to early reading and writing development and applied research on how teachers can promote literacy growth through play.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, *Research Foundations*, is meant to serve as an overview of the major approaches to studying play and literacy. Hall's chapter presents a historical overview of play/literacy research, as well as a review of several landmark sociolinguistic studies of children's emergent literacy. Hall also describes his own pioneering research on direct connections between play and early reading and writing. The chapter by Christie reviews four major areas of psychological research on play, highlighting indirect and direct connections with early literacy. Two of these research areas—play settings and play training—form the foundation for much of the applied research reported in the third part of this book.

Part II, *Play's Role in Early Literacy Development*, contains basic research on the connections between play and literacy. The chapter

by Pellegrini and Galda reports two longitudinal studies of the relationship between play, use of metalinguistic verbs, and emergent reading and writing. The pattern of relationships which emerge is complex and intriguing. Williamson and Silvern describe a series of studies on thematic-fantasy play's (guided story re-enactments) contributions to children's story comprehension. Again, a rather complex set of findings is reported, with the effectiveness of the play experiences being mediated by factors such as children's age and ability, level of adult involvement, and familiarity with the story being enacted. Finally, Branscombe's chapter details an ethnographic case study of two brothers' literacy experiences in and out of school. Her findings indicate that, when literacy activities are meaningful and child-centered, they are perceived by children as play and make important contributions to literacy growth. However, when reading and writing activities are adult-directed and isolated from real life, they are meaningless and ineffective. In the words of one of the brothers, such activities "ain't real."

Part III, Educational Applications, presents applied research on how literature activities, manipulation of play environments, and teacher involvement in play can encourage literacy to be incorporated into children's play. Martinez, Cheney, and Teale examined types of literature activities that encourage children to dramatically re-enact stories. Morrow and Rand also investigated connections between play and children's literature but with a focus on features of the classroom environment that encourage children to use library corners during free-play periods. In another study reported in the same chapter, Morrow and Rand examined the effects of adding literacy materials to dramatic play centers. Results indicated that, when coupled with subtle adult guidance, such materials resulted in a large increase in literacy-related play. Theme-related literacy materials and adult involvement in play are also the focus of research reported in several other chapters. The Neuman and Roskos chapter and the Schrader chapter describe how the addition of literacy props to play centers encouraged children to experiment with the functions of written language. Schrader also examined qualitative differences in how teachers interact with children during play, contrasting an effective, child-centered "extending" style with an ineffective, teacher-centered "redirecting" style. Finally, research reported by Vukelich paints a more complex picture of the effectiveness of theme-related literacy materials and adult involvement in play. Vukelich's study revealed that adding literacy materials to play centers had differential effects, depending on the amount of spontaneous literacy activity the children were engaging in before the

addition of the materials. She also found adult modeling was not very effective in promoting literacy-related play. The possibility exists, however, that Vukelich's adult modeling strategy was more "redirective" than the adult guidance used in the Morrow and Rand study, thereby reinforcing Schrader's finding that the type of adult involvement in play is a crucial variable.

By bringing together these diverse strands of research, this volume attempts to consolidate what has been learned about play's contributions to early reading and writing. It is hoped that, in so doing, this book will stimulate further research on play and literacy development. In addition, the applied research in Part III has direct implications for educational practice and should enable teachers to take better advantage of play's potential as a medium for literacy learning. Therefore, this book is intended for scholars, graduate students, and in-service teachers. The book can serve as a scholarly reference, an instructional resource, or a text for master's and doctoral level courses in early childhood language arts.