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מכון ון ליר בירושלים  
THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE  
معهد فان لير في القدس

Education at the Van Leer Institute



# International Seminar

Promoting Reading with Preschool Children from  
Disadvantaged Communities

**Tuesday-Thursday,  
September 9-11, 2014**

**The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute  
43 Jabotinsky St., Jerusalem**



# Seminar Program

**Tuesday-Thursday**

**September 9-11, 2014**



## Tuesday, September 9

9:15-9:45 **Gathering and Refreshments**

9:45-10:00 **Greetings and Opening**

Prof. Moshe Justman, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Prof. Margalit Ziv, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education

10:00-12:30 **First Session: Policies for Encouraging Reading with Preschool Children**

**Chair:** Prof. Moshe Justman, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

**Policy Initiative to Improve Basic Skills of the Israeli Education System**

Prof. Ami Volansky, Chief Scientist, Ministry of Education

**How We Can Change the Odds for Children At Risk: Policies for Encouraging Reading with Preschool Children**

Prof. Susan Neuman, New York University

**The Role of the Ministry of Education in Promoting Reading with Children**

Ms. Sima Hadad, Director of Pre-Primary Education Division, Ministry of Education

**Policy Making and Child Literacy: Lessons for Israel**

Prof. Boaz Porter, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Maccabi Health Services

12:30-13:30 **Lunch Break**

13:30-15:30 **Second Session: Book Reading, Early Literacy and Social Development**

**Chair:** Prof. Dorit Aram, Tel Aviv University

**Beneficial Effects of BookStart in Temperamentally Highly Reactive Infants**

Prof. Adriana Bus, Leiden University

**Parents and Teachers Reading with Preschoolers:**

**The “Whats” and “Hows” Indicated by Research and Practice**

Prof. William H. Teale, University of Illinois at Chicago

**Repeated Mother-Child Shared Book-Reading and Preschoolers’ Socio-Emotional Competence**

Ms. Rotem Schapira, Tel Aviv University and Levinsky College of Education

**How Do Mothers Read to Their Children? The Case of a Diglossic Language**

Dr. Safieh Hasouna Arafat, Beit Berl Academic College

15:30-16:00 **Coffee Break**



16:00-18:30 **Third Session: Children's Literature**

**Chair:** Prof. Susan Neuman, New York University

**From Grimm to Walt Disney: Considerations in Choosing Children's Literature**

Dr. Hana Livnat, Beit Berl Academic College

**Parents Read to Their Children: How Do Parents Choose Books?**

Prof. Dorit Aram, Tel Aviv University

**Why Do I Write for Children?**

Ms. Ronit Chacham, Children's Author

**Children's Literature in Arabic**

Mr. Fadel Ali, Poet and Author

## Wednesday, September 10

7:30-13:00 **Tour of the Old City of Jerusalem** (for invitees only)

Dr. Merav Mack, The Harry S. Truman Institute, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

14:30-16:00 **First Session: Promoting Reading with Children in Arab Communities**

**Chair:** Prof. Margalit Ziv, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education

**Insights from Three Years Working with a Preschool in Abu Dhabi**

Prof. David Dickinson, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University

**Promoting Reading with Children in Palestinian-Israeli Society: Maktabat Al-Fanoos (Lantern Library)**

Ms. Fatma Kassem, Supervisor of Arab Preschools, Ministry of Education

Ms. Mona Srouji, Editor of Educational Content, Lantern Library

**Contents and Gender Aspects of Children's Books in Arabic**

Dr. Manar Salame, Sakhnin Academic College for Teacher Education

16:00-16:30 **Coffee Break**



16:30-18:30 **Second Session: "Umm El-Fahem Reads": A Holistic Municipal Approach**

**Chair:** Ms. Haifa Sabbagh, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**TBA**

Dr. Mahamoud Zohdi, Head of the Education Dept., Umm El-Fahem Municipality

**Capacity Building among Early Childhood Professionals and Families: Principles and Challenges**

Ms. Areej Massarwe, Bidayat – Center for Early Childhood, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education

**Promoting Book Reading among Toddlers via Capacity Building of Caregivers**

Ms. Asmaa Mahajne, Umm El-Fahem Municipality

**"Umm El-Fahem Reads": Impact and Insights of the Program**

Dr. Suhad Daher-Nashef, Al-Qasemi Academic College and Oranim College of Education

Ms. Haneen Majadleh, Al-Qasemi Academic College and Jerusalem Foundation

## Thursday, September 11

9:30-11:30 **First Session: Shared Reading: Teachers' Characteristics and Capacity Building**

**Chair:** Prof. Dorit Aram, Tel Aviv University

**The Teacher Factor: Approaches to Supporting Teachers' Practices across Studies**

Prof. David Dickinson, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University

**Teachers' References to Socio-Cognitive Aspects during Shared Book Reading**

Dr. Lina Boulous, Sakhnin Academic College for Teacher Education

**Teachers' Reference to Theory-of-Mind in Three Storybook Contexts**

Dr. Marie-Lyne Smadja, Tel Aviv University and the College of Academic Studies, Or-Yehuda

**Teachers' Beliefs and Self-Reported Practices: Book Immersion and Other Literacy Goals**

Dr. Aviva Sverdlov, Tel Aviv University and Sha'anani Academic Religious Teachers College

11:30-12:00 **Coffee Break**



12:00-13:30 **Second Session: Book Reading and Technology**

**Chair:** Prof. Ofra Korat, Bar-Ilan University

**The Promise of *Living Books* in Narrowing Gaps in Early Literacy Skills**

Prof. Adriana Bus, Leiden University

**Book Reading and Technology: Evidence from the “World of Words” Intervention**

Prof. Susan Neuman, New York University

**The e-book as a Facilitator of Language and Literacy Among Hebrew Speaking Children**

Prof. Ofra Korat, Bar-Ilan University

13:30-14:30 **Lunch Break**

14:30-16:00 **Third Session: Book Reading in the Community: Multi-Cultural and Multi-Lingual Environments (Part I)**

**Chair:** Prof. Margalit Ziv, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education

**Mother-Child Interaction of a Picture Book and Folktale in the Ethiopian Community in Israel**

Ms. Ya'ara Sokolovsky, Tel Aviv University

**Promoting Social Understanding via Book Reading**

Ms. Mabsam Khalaily, Tel Aviv University

Ms. Mona Dwairy, Tel Aviv University

**Projects and Good Practices Promoting Reading in Multicultural and Multilingual Environments**

Prof. Nektarios Stellakis, University of Patras and OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood)

16:00-16:30 **Coffee Break**

16:30-18:00 **Fourth Session: Shared Book Reading in the Community: Multi-Cultural and Multi-Lingual Environments (Part II)**

**Chair:** Prof. Dorit Aram, Tel Aviv University

**“Moving Stories”: How Libraries Promote Reading and Respect Diversity of Cultures, Languages and Life**

Ms. Susanne Brandt, Büchereizentrale Schleswig-Holstein Libraries

**Reading to Children: A Pediatric Priority**

Prof. Basil (Boaz) Porter, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Maccabi Health Services

**Empowering Immigrant Families through an Early Childhood Literacy Program: The Experience of “Sifriyat Pijama”**

Ms. Sylvia Kamowitz Hareven, Education Director, Sifriyat Pijama



# ABSTRACTS AND SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

(In alphabetical order)

## **FADEL ALI**

### **Children's Literature in Arabic – Personal Experience**

Classical Arabic literature in the modern era has been accorded no place of honor or special importance in children's literature. Most of the writing for the very young involved legends and classical stories; there was almost no place for poetry. The content of children's literature primarily included religion, homeland, conformist social values and moral teaching.

Between 1948 and 1995 one can see a total disregard for children's literature on the part of Arab-Palestinian authors. During those years most of the literary writing was mobilized, focusing on the Nakba and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other sociocultural factors also contributed to the perpetuation of this situation, but I do not have room to list them.

In 1995 I self-published my first book, *Hadi kal ward* (Cheek like a flower), a volume of poetry for children. The poems were written following the birth of my first daughter, Awan. That year, the Arab Academic College for Education in Israel, Haifa, opened its Center for Arabic Children's Literature, which encouraged the publication of new books with modern content that had not been seen prior to that time.

For nearly twenty years I have been writing and holding literary meetings with young children in the Arab community, as well as meetings with Jewish schools, and particularly with bilingual (Hebrew-Arabic) schools. These have resulted from the initiative of schools or as part of the Ministry of Education's National Culture Basket, but I am sorry to say that many schools in the Arab society are not included in this project, mainly for budgetary reasons. In addition, I hold workshops for parents on encouraging reading.

I also conduct three kinds of activities with children: a one-time workshop; a multi-session workshop; and creative writing.

My workshops with the children are a profound personal experience for me. Usually I begin the workshop by introducing myself and am happy to answer personal questions. After that I present my writing and emphasize to the children that the main purpose of the meeting is to experience the pleasure that can be had from the world of literature, and especially from poetry. To break the ice, I begin with a series of riddles and rhymes suitable for the ages of the participants. At the next stage I choose just one text and conduct a discussion of it. I try to involve as many children as possible in the discussion by asking each participant's personal reaction to the content. It is important to note that even in a single brief meeting one can plumb emotional depths with the children through analysis of the text and expression of reactions.

In the multi-session workshop there is deeper work on various types of content that is relevant to the children's lives. This type of work makes possible a catharsis, an airing and internalization of new values and messages. In the multi-session workshop it is important to me to allow the participants an emotional and narrative space by using individual literary and artistic means of expression.

The work on creative writing emphasizes helping them acquire writing techniques, enhancing their connection to literature, enriching their language, broadening their world of emotional and cognitive content, and deepening their interaction with the environment. As a result of my experience in connecting to the children's world, some of the work is conducted on a computer.

In summary, I would like to stress that my unmediated meeting with the children as an author who writes poetry involves a mutual giving and enrichment. The direct meeting with the children deepens my understanding of the content of their developing world, and they are exposed to processes of creativity and the writer's joy of writing. In the lecture I will read poems and provide examples.

**FADEL ALI** worked in the past in education. Today he is an employee in the Welfare Department of Haifa Municipality, dealing with youth and young adults. He is the author of two volumes of poetry for adults and ten volumes of poetry for children. He translated into Arabic (from the Hebrew): *Ha'tetz hanadiv* (The Giving Tree) and *Koassim – ma ossim?* (What To Do When You're Angry).

Fadel has received several awards: the 1996 Hans Christian Andersen Award for making a lasting contribution to children's literature, awarded by the IBBY Holland, for the book *Hadi kal ward*; the 2007 al-Aswar Institute Award for Literature and Culture, Acre; the 2013 Seminar for Arab Teachers Award, Haifa; and the 2013 Award of the Institute for Arab Thought, Beirut, Lebanon.

Fadel Ali's first book (*Hadi kal ward*) was translated into Hebrew by Yehuda Atlas and Yona Tepper and published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad.

## **DORIT ARAM**

### **Parents Read to Their Children: How Do Parents Choose Books?**

In Western cultures, joint book reading is generally considered a natural and frequent parent-child activity, primarily during the preschool years. There is clear evidence supporting the relationship between frequency of book reading and children's language development (e.g., Cunningham, 2010), early literacy (e.g., Korat, Klein, and Segal-Drori, 2007), and the acquisition of reading in school (e.g., Mol, Bus, De Jong, and Smeets, 2008). Furthermore, there are studies showing a relationship between the frequency of parent-child shared reading and children's social-emotional adjustment (e.g., Aram, Fine, and Ziv, 2012). Reading a book to a child involves three factors – the parent, the child, and the book. While extensive research has explored the first two factors and the interactions between them, the third factor, that of the book itself, remains relatively underexplored (van Kleeck, 2003). Many children's books are published yearly around the world. For example, in 2013, 5,000 books were published in the United States (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2014) and 879 in Israel (The National Library of Israel, 2013). In light of the constant increase in children's book publications and the large availability, being able to select good books to read to children becomes more meaningful. The current study thus focuses on this factor – specifically, how parents select books to read to their children.

It investigated quantitatively and qualitatively parents' skillfulness when selecting books to read to their children and the considerations that guide parents in these selections. Further, it examined whether parents in education or caring professions are more skilled at book selection compared to parents in other professions. Last, it evaluated the relationship between parents' book selection skills and the frequency of book reading. Participants included 104 parents of children aged 4-7. Evaluation included a book choice task where parents selected between two books, one of which was recommended by experts. They were asked to account for their book selection and detail their opinions of good children's books. Parents also filled out a form measuring attitudes toward good children's literature, defined by: language complexity, socio-emotional complexity and complexity of structure. The quantitative results show that parents more strongly supported socio-emotional complexity in books compared to the other areas. Parents who supported greater complexity across areas also read more frequently to their children. Last, parents who work in education or a helping profession demonstrated greater expertise in book selection compared to other professions. Following transcriptions of the interviews, data were qualitatively analyzed following a thematic analysis method. We grouped the ideas repeatedly mentioned by different interviewees into four key themes which were divided into sub-themes. The themes were: (1) purpose of the book reading; (2) centrality of the text in children's book selections; (3) importance of the book's appearance; and (4) importance of the books' structure. Qualitative analyses of the interviews show that nearly all of the parents see joint book reading as an opportunity to impart morals to their child. As such, they expect the book to contain rich insights. The text that accompanies the book and the language in which it is written are significant considerations in most parents' selections of children's books. Parents noted that elements such as the language level of the book, the rhythm and flow of the book, as well as the length of the book, are important. Approximately half of the parents specifically expressed a preference for illustrations that are, in their words, "pleasant to the eye," "beautiful" or "clear." Further, parents preferred illustrations with many details, and also when the illustrations and the text match in such a way that the illustration demonstrates the text. Approximately one-quarter of interviewed parents stated that they like books to refer to the imaginary world. The study may open a window to a better understanding of the way parents choose books for their children. Guiding parents in selecting good children's books can lead to a more meaningful reading experience and promote frequent shared book reading.

**DORIT ARAM** is Professor and head of the Counseling Programs at the Department of School Counseling and Special Education at Tel Aviv University's School of Education, Israel. Her research focuses on adult-child literacy interactions (joint writing and shared reading) and their implications for early literacy and socio-emotional development, in Hebrew and Arab communities. Addressing needs in special populations,

her work examines these interactions in parent-child dyads of children with hearing loss, ADHD and low socioeconomic background, and among precocious readers. Prof. Aram has conducted early interventions aimed at improving kindergarten and preschool teachers' as well as parents' mediation and children's early literacy and socio-emotional development.

## **LINA BOULOUS**

### **Teachers' References to Socio-Cognitive Aspects during Shared Book Reading**

Theory of mind (ToM) is central in children's socio-cognitive development and refers to the understanding of mental states that underlie people's behavior and social interactions. The main mental-state categories are beliefs, knowledge, desires, intentions and emotions. A central component of ToM is the ability to understand that different people may have different and even conflicting perspectives. ToM enables people to understand, predict and explain their own – and others' – actions and is required for intact interpersonal relationships. For example, children with advanced ToM engage in richer and more reciprocal socio-dramatic play than children with less advanced ToM; they also have stronger friendships and are better in conflict resolution with peers. The foundations of ToM develop during the first six years of life. Children first understand basic mental states, such as desires and simple emotions – e.g, happiness and sadness. Between the ages of 3-6 years children come to understand more complex mental states such as false belief and hidden emotions.

Recently there has been growing recognition of the potential of shared reading with children for fostering their ToM. Previous research focused mainly on mother-child shared reading experiences and showed that rich conversations on book characters' mental states and related experiences in the children's lives strengthen the children's understanding of the story and their ToM.

Preschool teachers assume an important role in creating opportunities for conversations with children about socio-cognitive issues, and in Western countries they also regularly read books to children. Nevertheless, there is little research about teachers' reference to ToM themes during shared reading with children. This lecture will therefore present a study that examined how teachers lead a conversation with children after reading a story in which the central themes are the main characters' deception and false beliefs.

The main research questions were: 1. How do preschool teachers refer to the main mental states in a story during their conversations with children? and 2. Is there a difference in teachers' reference to the story's mental states when they discuss them with 3-year-old versus 5-year-old children?

The participants were 50 Israeli-Arab preschool teachers, 25 teachers of 3-4-year-old children and 25 teachers of 5-6-year-old children. Each preschool teacher read the same story three times to a small group of five children. The story was about a fox that deceived a hen and managed to catch her and keep her in a closed bag. But when the fox fell asleep the hen got out of the bag and put a rock in it, making the fox mistakenly believe that she was still in there. The teachers were instructed to make sure during the first two readings that the children understood the story plot and vocabulary and in the third reading they were asked to discuss the story events with the children. The third reading was videotaped and coded.

Each of the teachers' utterances was coded first as referring to action or to mental states. References to mental states were coded as referring to cognitive mental states, desire, intention or emotion. Additionally, teachers' mediation of the false belief and deception in the story was coded and analyzed. We coded the extent to which teachers referred to the distinction between reality and false belief, to the cause of the false belief and to the nature and intention of the deceptive act.

The main findings indicated that teachers referred to the story's mental states both with 3-4- and 5-6-year-old children, but they elaborated more on the characters' behavior with the younger children. Teachers also discussed the characters' false belief with children from both age groups, but they elaborated on it more with the older children. Additionally, teachers of 3-year-old children emphasized emotional states more than teachers of older children who elaborated on cognitive states. Finally, teachers of 3-year-olds tended to explain the story events to the children rather than to discuss the events with the children.

The findings highlight teachers' ability to identify mental states in storybooks that should be mediated to children and discussed with them. Importantly, teachers adapt their conversations to children's age and cognitive level. However, teachers should be encouraged to engage children from a young age in challenging conversations about complex mental states in order to provide them with opportunities to improve their mental reasoning and thus foster the development of their social cognition.

Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Margalit Ziv.

**LINA BOULOUS** is a Lecturer at Sachnin Teacher Education College and head of the Excellent Student Program.

She worked as an instructor and academic adviser in a project sponsored by Tel Aviv University and the Price-Brodie Fund, to encourage reading storybooks with Arabic-speaking preschool children in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Ph.D. from Tel Aviv University on the development of the Theory-of-Mind in children. The research examined the sequence of Theory-of-Mind development among Arab preschoolers, teachers' understanding of the developmental sequence, and the manner in which they refer to Theory-of-Mind topics during shared reading with children. She is currently, a post-doctoral student at the University of Haifa, studying the development of Theory-of-Mind among children with learning disabilities.

## **SUSANNE BRANDT**

### **“Moving Stories”: How Libraries Promote Reading and Respect of the Diversity of Cultures, Languages and Life**

The magic of stories, books and pictures helps the imagination to remain an essential part of an individual's life regardless of their level of education or social or cultural background. For preschool children from disadvantaged communities it is very important that the imagination allows the mind and soul to roam freely beyond the daily reality of life. With stories, pictures and movement they get an idea of their own life – and of other lifestyles, other people and other cultures.

For example: Early literacy experiences can be promoted by activities with body and movement. The project “Moving Stories” encourages an enjoyable and an active early literacy experiences by practice of reading-aloud and storytelling activities. The name **Moving Stories** can be understood in two ways: On the one hand, children can use their creative potential to actively introduce movement into stories. On the other, they can allow themselves to be moved by the stories – both emotionally and physically. The project's goal is to promote movement as a medium that can be used in reading aloud and storytelling situations with children in families, preschools and schools. Libraries, movement and music specialists as well as educators and parents think and work together in this project.

The **Moving Stories** project means, for example, that libraries inspire parents to tell their children “Outdoor-Stories” so that young children can understand the adventure of their own life in a combination of wildlife experience and language experience. Particularly, fathers and sons prefer books with facts and adventures rather than fiction and poetry. Sometimes it is the mysterious aspect of nature and landscapes that will evoke the interest and imagination. That is why the library project involves an invitation to go outside. Parents and children walk through the woods, smell, touch and taste their living environment, they move, they climb trees – and while doing all that, they learn things that can be wonderfully supplemented with information and stories they find in books. In this way they notice: Things we do with our hands, see with our eyes and hear with our ears connect with the imagination and the words we read. And also: Things we read in a book are present in nature around us. There is a deep connection between the words about nature, interactive movements and the real world of nature.

Another project is named “**Pictures on Tour** – a mobile and multilingual method of storytelling with kamishibai for preschool children.” The bookmobile is one of the most important meeting places to attract families and children to reading programs – and the kamishibai is one of the most interesting instruments on board for small groups of children and families. Storytelling with kamishibai in a bookmobile (or in other popular rooms of the community, or just outdoors!) means more than entertainment or learning something about the art of pictures or literature. What children (and their families) learn is:

- I can actively contribute to this process.
- I can envision my very own images.
- I can use them to describe a course of action and to discover the power of imagination.
- I can find and tell my own stories.

All these are essential competences for the learning process. Storytelling with kamishibai, which connects with the children, is a fine and mobile method to promote these aspects with fantasy, dialogues, movements and joy.

The third example describes a special method of “**Family Literacy**,” also in multicultural and multilingual environments, inspired by the ideas of the Polish pediatrician and pedagogue Janusz Korczak (1878-1942) as a model of using literacy to evoke the interest and needs of young children and to offer them a forum for individual thoughts and feelings by reading, playing and listening. Storytimes that pay special attention to dialogue-like reading to children as a social and preventive task in libraries are in demand here – for example, programs based on the idea of “**Family Literacy**” such as the “Reading to Children in Families” project offered

by the Phantastische Bibliothek in Wetzlar. Significance of projects such as this is their sensitive and respectful attitude toward children. It includes therapeutic aspects and is accompanied by intense schooling and consultation with the adult who does the reading. Here the term “therapeutic” describes a sensibility in the sense of Janusz Korczak. His ideas still today are important aspects of orientation for reading projects such as this. The most important question is: How can I reach children with books so that they feel addressed sincerely and tangibly and feel understood? And how can they themselves connect with other people and promote a fair exchange of opinions inspired by books, stories and pictures?

**SUSANNE BRANDT**, born in 1964, studied librarianship in Hamburg and Stuttgart, cultural science in Hagen and acquired special qualifications of rhythmic and literacy in the context of social and educational work for children. She has headed departments and public libraries in Cuxhaven and Westoverledingen, and served as a member of different commissions and project groups for children's libraries and literacy. Since 2011 she has been a lecturer at the Büchereizentrale Schleswig-Holstein in Flensburg. She is the author of numerous books and journal publications about reading and storytelling.

## **ADRIANA BUS**

### **Beneficial Effects of BookStart in Temperamentally Highly Reactive Infants**

**Purpose.** The Dutch Ministry of Education invited my research group at Leiden University to test the effects of the nationwide BookStart program. This program, first started in Great Britain, was later adopted in Australia, Canada, Colombia, Jamaica, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Thailand, and other European countries including The Netherlands. Parents of new-born babies living in areas where BookStart has been adopted receive a voucher from the local government for a baby book, a CD with children's songs, and a flyer explaining the importance of an early start with shared book reading. The package also includes free membership for the baby at a local library equipped with a rich collection of baby books. Librarians are trained to advise parents and organize workshops about how to involve infants in book sharing, singing songs, telling stories, or reciting rhymes.

Our main aim was to test whether there is a causal relationship between an early start with book sharing via BookStart, and language development in the children's second year. A complicating factor was that in many cases parents may share books with their infant regardless of whether they participate in BookStart. We tried to exclude the possibility that the project is effective only because it is embraced by parents who, due to personal choices and interests, agree with the importance of book sharing from an early age. Therefore, our main question was *not* whether participating in BookStart stimulates language development. Because there are various responses to being assigned to BookStart we tried to answer a different question: Does compliance with the BookStart suggestion to expose your young child to books from an early age increase the infants' early language development? In other words, we wanted to end up with an unbiased estimate of the critical relationship between children's language development and BookStart, and we tested whether early language skills improved when parents changed their book-sharing behavior due to BookStart.

Our second aim was to explore the differential effects of BookStart. Backed up by a wealth of studies, most parents in Western countries are aware of the need for verbal interaction from an early stage to stimulate their infants' language. A minority of parents may nevertheless be less motivated to interact verbally with their child in the first years, due to their infants' negative responses. Children with a highly reactive temperament may typically respond negatively to verbal interactions as a result of their proneness to sadness, anger and frustration. Because interactions are less rewarding and often frustrating, their parents may initiate verbal interactions less frequently than parents of temperamentally less reactive infants. We examined whether BookStart may be especially effective for temperamentally highly reactive children. By emphasizing the need for verbal interaction with infants despite the children's responses, BookStart may prevent parents from stopping interactions if the child reacts negatively.

**Method.** The 'BookStart parents' ( $n = 359$ ) came from eight provinces in the Netherlands, thus covering most of the country. Only those parents who collected the BookStart materials at the library were invited to participate. The control group ( $n = 225$ ) was recruited through 35 child health centers in comparable areas, where BookStart had not yet been introduced. In both samples, all education levels were represented except for the lowest educated parents (primary or special education): Their number did not exceed 1% of the total sample, whereas this percentage is 8.29% for the Dutch population as a whole (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* [Statistics Netherlands], 2010).

**Results.** Although BookStart only provides sample materials for babies, access to similar materials at the library

and advice on request, the program did enhance language development. Especially in a temperamentally highly reactive group, the program stimulates parents to initiate verbal interaction with their infants. In the complete sample, the effect size was rather low ( $d = .05$ ), but substantial – slightly less than half a standard deviation ( $d = .46$ ) – in the quartile that scored highest on temperamental reactivity. When infants exhibit difficult behavior during daily routines, they may be more sensitive or reactive to environmental input and easily irritated; if parents consistently fail to involve these children in verbal interactions, this may be particularly deregulating for language growth. We expect the effects of BookStart at 15 months to extend to later development, because they may set in motion a pattern of reciprocal influences that may cause language and cognitive development to “snowball,” thereby creating more opportunities to enrich later oral language, literacy and comprehension skills.

### **The Promise of Living Books for Narrowing Gaps in Early Literacy Skills**

**Purpose.** In our research program *What Works for Whom* we seek to shed light on the efficacy of kindergarten computer programs to enhance early literacy. In my presentation I will discuss the results of a randomized controlled trial testing the effects of a book reading program on the computer in addition to regular book reading at home and in school. *Living Books* is made up of age-appropriate multimedia storybooks with animated pictures, sounds and music to support story and text understanding. Each book is interrupted four times for questions about the story (e.g., “Eventually Little Mouse found a house. Whose house do you think it is?”) and word knowledge (e.g., “Little Mouse peeked inside. On which picture do you see her peeking?). The child responds to the question by choosing one of three pictures. If the child’s response is incorrect the question is repeated maximally three times and feedback provided by the computer is adapted to the child’s response.

**Hypotheses.** We hypothesized that when kindergarteners with poor literacy skills were randomly assigned either to an intervention using this program or to a control condition, the intervention group would show higher post-test literacy scores. We also explored the hypothesis that the program is especially beneficial for a subsample of susceptible children. From the domain of development and psychopathology there emerges growing evidence showing that some children are more susceptible to environmental influences and may benefit more from interventions such as *Living Books* (Belsky et al., 2007). Susceptible children may not only catch up and achieve at a level similar to normally developing peers, but actually outperform their peers (Kegel et al., 2011). We hypothesized that especially carriers of DRD4-7repeat (highly reactive and easily distracted children) would benefit the most from a program like *Living Books* with adaptive feedback.

**Method.** A randomized controlled trial was carried out in 90 schools. Teachers identified five-year-olds who scored in the lowest quartile of a national standard literacy test for kindergarten. After parents had given written consent to participate in the study, the researchers randomly assigned eligible children to the intervention (*Living Books*, two 15-minute sessions per week for three months) or control condition (during the same time playing a computer game not related to literacy). In all, we received informed written consent for 508 eligible children to participate in the research. After the intervention, children were tested group-wise with a standard literacy test as part of the normal routine in Dutch kindergarten classrooms. Saliva for genotyping was collected during the intervention.

**Results.** The study revealed evidence indicating that preemptive measures in kindergarten can offer an additional boost to early literacy skills – but not for all children to the same extent. Carriers of DRD4-7repeat (approximately 35% in the experimental and control group) appeared to be especially susceptible to the program: These five-year-olds lagged far behind without *Living Books* but outperformed their peers with similar scores at the pretest after the program. I will discuss why this susceptible group consisting of highly reactive and easily distracted children benefited from the program and which elements might make a computer program such as *Living Books* especially effective for this susceptible group of children (Kegel et al., 2011).

#### *References:*

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**ADRIANA BUS** is Professor of Education and Child Studies at Leiden University in the domain of learning problems

and impairments. A former reading specialist at a reading clinic, she teaches courses in reading, writing, and learning problems. She is a leading scholar on the impact of storybook reading on children's emergent literacy development, and on developmental changes in literacy, language, and cognition as a result of life-long reading. Currently she is working with publishers, computer experts, instructional designers, and content specialists on building an Internet environment to promote rich literacy experiences for children in the age-range from 4 to 12. New experiments with built-in computer tutors reveal promising results for pupils at risk because of attention problems. She has won the International Reading Association's "Computers in Reading Award." Since 2013 she is a member of the Reading Hall of Fame of the International Reading Association.

## **RONIT CHACHAM**

### **Why Do I Write for Children?**

Writing for children carries a wish to construct a humane vision based on principles of justice and empowerment. It is this very challenge that I find so appealing. I hope that the stories I write can encourage my young readers to find consolation, hope and a place for themselves in a world that is not always inclusive and sympathetic especially to those who experience the reality of belonging to disadvantaged communities. This does not mean that the stories I write are neutralized from anxieties, fears and obstructions. On the contrary, the stories are meant to give the children the opportunity to cope with all these in the framework of fiction – removed from their day-to-day experience in the real world.

Consequently, many of my stories are inhabited by creatures that generate fear and anxiety such as demons, witches and the like – characters that originate from folktales that have been told and retold in order to actualize and express those basic feelings and threats and at the same time demonstrate how one can overcome them.

Folk literature has been narrated for many generations through the filters of many different cultures, yet it crosses boundaries between cultures. Folk heroes encounter major existential questions, risks and difficulties and always find solutions to their distress at the end of the story, and are able to fulfill their aspirations.

These tales tell us about human experience known to everyone regardless of their origins thus creating a wide spectrum wherein all human beings share similar challenges and dreams. In this way folk literature seems to present a framework which is particularly important for children from disadvantaged communities. The stories can provide means of empowerment, offer self-esteem and a positive sense of belonging to a particular cultural background, together with an awareness of a much larger framework of all humankind to which we all belong. Folk tales are always singular as well as universal in that they show how everyone struggles with similar questions in different contexts.

This genre of stories makes room for many different voices – not only of kings, queens and rulers, but also of simple and poor people, the ruled and the weakened. They allow children not only to identify with the underprivileged but also to be reassured that one can overcome overpowering threats and resist them even if one is small, weak or different.

For all these reasons, some of my books are adaptations of folktales (whole stories or themes) presenting the wisdom and deep insights folded within them in contemporary and relevant language and images. Some of my recent Hebrew books are adaptations and revised folktales from Ethiopia or Hassidic Jewish sources. This in itself is an attempt to bring the voices of the underclass, the disadvantaged, into the hegemonic canon. I am sure that these tales, that preserve the standpoint of the minority, can be meaningful for young Arab readers as well.

Language is yet another major concern in writing for children as it is the mode of paving the way to the hearts of the readers and mediating the ideas and messages embedded in the story. Therefore I try to use language in a playful way and erase didactic traces. The playful and humorous language I use, that is sometimes rhythmic and nonsensical, is meant to create a sense of freedom. Breaking the rules of language serves the childish need to examine borders, conventions and game playing. By playing with the rules of language and the rules of reality children can gain a sense of control and liberation. In this sense, children's literature can be a source for hope so necessary in times of crisis and distress.

In my lecture I will demonstrate all these ideas through excerpts from my books accompanied by illustrations.

**RONIT CHACHAM** studied Hebrew and English Literature and Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She has published many books (in Hebrew) mostly for children (some of which have been translated), short stories and plays; she has created works for theater, performance

arts pieces, street theater and puppet theater in Jerusalem and in London; has instructed children and teachers' seminars in drama and puppetry; coordinated community arts events; developed educational programs; she has written and researched for television productions; edited books and magazines; taught creative writing and lectured about children's literature.

For many years she has been appearing in schools around the country as part of the "meet an author" program. Her theater pieces have been performed in various theater festivals and have won many awards. "Aunt Rim," a children's play for puppets and actors, was performed both in Hebrew and Arabic and won an award at the Haifa Children's Theater Festival 1996; "Chocolate," another play for actors and puppets (dealing with sexual abuse), won awards for its artistic daring at the Haifa Children's Theater Festival 2006.

Her *Five Wacky Witches* is a well-loved and award-winning book that has been reprinted for the last 20 years and was included in *The Best Children's Books in the World* (Anthology), Abrams, N.Y. 1996. *Five Wacky Witches* was followed by a popular series of 12 books, theater plays, and has been adapted to many other venues.

Since 1998, Ronit has been a Board member of HILA – The Israel Committee for Equality in Education – a project for empowering parents in disadvantaged communities, development towns and Arab villages.

## **SUHAD DAHER-NASHIF AND HANEEN MAJADLEH**

### **"Umm El-Fahem Reads": Impacts and Insights of the Program**

The main goal of this presentation is to discuss the principal findings of the evaluation process which accompanied the program "Umm El-Fahem Reads" throughout the last two years. We will focus on three themes of the evaluation: first is the structure of the cooperation between the three organizations – the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, the Bedayat Center and the Umm El-Fahem municipality. The second theme is the educational impacts of the program; this will include our main insights on the training process that the kindergarten teachers, the caregivers, the parents and the leading staff underwent. It will also discuss the process of planning their projects, and their execution. The third theme of the presentation will shed light on the achievements of the program and its educational impacts on the private space of the participants, the children, and on the public sphere of the city. By "private space" we mean the participants' personal experience, their homes and families, their kindergartens, pre-nursery and nursery frameworks. We will conclude our presentation with our main recommendations for improving and provoking such a productive, constructive and very important program.

**SUHAD DAHER-NASHIF** is a lecturer and researcher at Al-Qasimi College for Education and Oranim College for Education. She is also the coordinator of the Gender Studies Program at Mada Al-Carmel (the Arab center for applied social research) in Haifa. She completed her Ph.D. in social-medical anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her latest researches focus on practices of death within the Palestinian society including killing women; evaluating educational programs such as "Umm Al-Fahem Reads"; the life structure of young Palestinian females in Israel including civil service, higher education and access to justice.

One of her latest publications, co-authored with Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2013), is: "Femicide and Colonization: Between the Politics of Exclusion and the Culture of Control," *Violence Against Women* 19: 295-315. The article has been listed as one of the top 20 articles cited in *Women and Social Science*, ranked as #8.

**HANEEN MAJADLEH** is a social worker and a lecturer at Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education. She is a doctoral student in social work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She researches the subject of religion, gender and the welfare state in connection with day-care centers for children in the Arab population in Israel. She is a director and founder of the Ataa Center, a project to support the residents of East Jerusalem, and she is a project coordinator at the Jerusalem Foundation. Additionally, Haneen lectures and runs workshops for teachers, parents and social workers in her current research area. She volunteers in various institutions and public places, including promoting the status of women, women's health, and population-related areas among Palestinians in Israel. Haneen has taught qualitative research methods as a group facilitator for the past five years.

## DAVID DICKINSON

### Insights from Three Years Working with a Preschool in Abu Dhabi

#### *Brief Description:*

In this presentation I will discuss my efforts to work with school leaders, coaches and teachers to fashion a model kindergarten school that serves four- and five-year-old children. With the support of videotapes I will introduce methods we have found to be successful as well as challenges that we have faced. Data will be presented showing evidence of student learning and improvements in classroom practice.

#### *Extended Description:*

Beginning in the academic year 2011-2012, Vanderbilt University began a collaborative venture with the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) to develop a two-year kindergarten (KG) that is intended to exemplify what ADEC's New School Model looks like in practice. This model includes bilingual instruction from preschool through grade twelve, an approach to learning that values strong literacy in both languages, innovation and creativity, the mixing of genders through the primary grades and possibly beyond, and that preserves and celebrates the culture. This project was launched as part of a broader effort that was expected to result in the establishment of a school of education. The schools are standard public schools that serve children in their catchment area in the city of Abu Dhabi. I have been the Vanderbilt KG project director from its outset. This presentation will explore some of the strategies that we have employed successfully and will report some of the data we have collected on children and classrooms.

Strong leadership, a clearly articulated and shared vision of early childhood education, and mutual respect are the foundations on which Atfal Abu Dhabi KG is built. The strong principal established a school where it was possible to implement educational routines and approaches while assessing classroom quality and children's progress with the assistance of instructional coaches. Vanderbilt had direct control over hiring the principal and worked closely with the principal to hire coaches. We had some control over the hiring of the English Medium teachers (EMTs) who partner with the Arabic Medium teachers (AMTs), who are hired through different channels over which we have no control. There has been some turnover among coaches and considerable turnover among teachers because EMTs are only committed to being in the country for a certain time; there has also been quite a bit of change among AMTs, who have transferred for varied reasons.

In the face of challenges associated with the turnover and the multiple rapid changes in governmental oversight, we have instituted a vision of education that embodies and institutionalizes routines and materials so that we now deliver high-quality early education with reasonable consistency across 12 classrooms. Some of the keys to success that will be discussed include the following:

- 1) *Repeated reading* of the same book beginning in Arabic for two days, followed by English for two days. The language used on day five varies, and sometimes a successful book is read for a second week. We have created in-house translations of many of the books and use Arabic-language books when possible.
- 2) *Morning Message* is a shared writing and shared reading morning routine that includes pieces of predictable text. Individual children assist in constructing the message each day, and the full group is also involved. AMTs and EMTs take turns doing the Morning Message.
- 3) *Classroom Environment Checklist*. In collaboration with the coaches and the principal, I created a checklist that is modelled on Early Language and Literacy Observation (ELLO). This provides a focus for coaching and for the objective description of valued features of the environment and instruction.
- 4) *Instructional fidelity checklists*. Instructional routines that are introduced in PD workshops are reinforced by fidelity checklists that are used by coaches to guide discussions with teachers.
- 5) *Child assessment*. With some help from the coaches, the teachers assess the children three times a year using an objective tool that supplements their ongoing observations.

This presentation will provide videotapes of some of these routines and data, showing the children's progress and the status of the classroom quality as measured by our tool.

### **The Teacher Factor: Approaches to Supporting Teachers' Practices across Studies**

#### *Brief Description:*

Over the years I have supported teachers using a variety of methods ranging from a practice-based course that yields university credit to coach-supported interventions. In this presentation I will discuss the challenges and approaches I have found to be effective in improving the supports provided to the teachers in order to improve the children's language and literacy development.

#### *Extended Description:*

Multiple efforts have been made to create educational programs in which children at risk of educational failure

receive enriched support for language and literacy that results in significantly accelerated development among young children. Well-implemented interventions have often had success in improving print knowledge, and have sometimes fostered improved phonological awareness; however, changes in language have been seen less often. The limited impact of preschool classrooms on language is cause for concern: among the children most in need of additional academic support in the preschool years, the mastery of language is the most necessary competence to be achieved, in order to avoid placing them at risk of facing reading problems in the coming years.

Limitations in the effectiveness of programs to bolster children's language can be traced to the difficulty of changing patterns of language use. Some who have sought to improve children's language use have also examined the patterns of language use of the teachers involved in the project. Typically, shifts in teachers' language have been limited even in projects that employ methods that seemingly have a good chance of being successful. One reason for the resistance of language to change may be linked to functional, organizational constraints that shape language use. This presentation will briefly discuss the results of an analysis of over 146,000 utterances of 43 Head Start teachers across three settings, from a structural linguistics perspective. It reveals striking contextual effects on language and highlights the potential of book reading as a setting conducive to the use of academic language.

A second reason language use is resistant to change may be linked to the fact that how one uses language is deeply tied to one's sense of identity and to beliefs about how one should interact with young children. Personal language identities include a host of experiences that vary enormously, but one facet of one's linguistic identity that is shared by preschool teachers is their concept of what it means to be "a teacher." One way we might shift language use may be to change teachers' beliefs about their role in shaping language development; in helping them develop new ways of seeing themselves as "language teachers." Informing teachers about the importance of adults and teachers in particular is one way to achieve this, but it is not sufficient. We have become convinced that teachers need a combination of understanding their role, strategies to use in specific classroom settings that include both materials and methods that engage children, and a means of tracking and reflecting their success in adopting desired methods. This presentation will build on the earlier talk about my work in Abu Dhabi, linking back to methods used there. I will incorporate results from my current work in which we are helping teachers adopt ways of reading books that result in significant word learning. In addition, our effort to use pretend play as a means to extend book experiences and reinforce word learning will be discussed.

**DAVID K. DICKINSON** gained his doctorate from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, after teaching elementary school in Philadelphia while earning his Master's degree at Temple University. He studies the language and literacy development of children from backgrounds that place them at risk of educational failure. His work includes basic studies of language and literacy learning and development, the development and assessment of professional development interventions and curricula, and measurement tools. In Abu Dhabi he is currently directing the school-based efforts of Vanderbilt University to create and study a model kindergarten and primary grade school by collaborating with the government, school leaders and instructional coaches. He is co-author of three volumes of the *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* and has authored and co-authored many articles published in peer review journals.

## **MONA DWAIRY-JARROUS AND MABSAM KHALAILY**

### **Promoting Social Understanding Via Book Reading**

Adult-child shared reading interactions are part of the socio-cultural context of children's development. Despite the fact that this activity has earned extensive scholarly research, there are still open-ended questions regarding shared book reading and its myriad relationships to children's development. Much of the research has focused on the impact of book reading on children's language and emergent literacy skills. However, book reading also holds the potential to advance other aspects of development that have yet to be examined – for example, children's social-emotional adjustment. Children's books often present social and emotional experiences, and reading books to children invites conversation about the emotions, motivations and behaviors of the story's protagonists. Discussions between adults and their children that encourage the children to define emotions, consider the motivations for characters' behaviors and their implications, and to understand the array of relationships of the characters and their surroundings, can **promote children's social understanding and mental-emotional conceptualization.**

The study examined the effectiveness of a shared book reading intervention program in promoting mental-emotional conceptualization, social comprehension and the social problem-solving repertoire of preschool children in the Arab society. Participants were 116 kindergartners (51 boys and 65 girls) in the Arab society in the North of Israel. Their average age was 6.37 ( $SD = 0.28$  months) and they were randomly assigned into the intervention or the comparison group. The study compared the program in which the experimenters read a story to children (in small groups) throughout five sessions while referring to socio-emotional aspects (the intervention group,  $n = 58$ ) to a program in which the experimenters read the same book to children (in small groups) while referring only to the description of the characters and events (the comparison group,  $n = 58$ ).

The study took place in a quiet room within the preschools by MA students. The two groups shared the same picture book that told a story about social relations. Two texts were written for the current study: one was written for the intervention group and the second for the comparison group. For the intervention we wrote a text that was abundant with mental-emotional concepts. The text was read aloud and discussed based on Ellis's (1996) ABC model (**A**ctivating event, **B**eliefs, **C**onsequences) with the children relating to the social problems and finding solutions. For the comparison group, we wrote a text that focused only on events in the plot and character behavior. The text was read aloud and the events were clarified. All the children were assessed in their preschool before and after the intervention on social understanding and mental-emotional conceptualization measures.

Following the program, the intervention group performed better than the comparison group on their social comprehension: the ability to identify a social problem and define it, the ability to define a solution to the problem, suggesting alternate solutions, and the ability to link emotions with the situation and the characters' thoughts. Children in the intervention group also outperformed their peers in the comparison group in the level of mental-emotional conceptualization. They progressed more than the comparison group on number and variation of emotional concepts that they used in the different tasks and in identifying emotions.

The study shows that the mental-emotional discourse between adults and kindergarten children can be enriched through reading a picture book, based on the ABC model that encourages discussion of thoughts and feelings of the characters, their beliefs, and conclusions from the events. Via this discourse it is possible to promote social comprehension and expand the social problem-solving repertoire among children. Shared book reading is a tool that can be used by adults to develop conversations with children on social relationships. A model such as the ABC is productive because it is a structured problem-solving model of thinking that refers to the mental-emotional aspects of the characters.

The study showed that an intervention program that combines a structured social problem-solving model of thinking with emotional-mental mediation can promote children's comprehension of social situations and expand their problem-solving repertoire as well as the level of their mental-emotional conceptualization. Accordingly, it is important that educators assist preschool teachers and parents to endorse effective use of book reading, in order to realize the full potential of this daily activity among children.

Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Dorit Aram.

**MONADWAIRY-JARROUS** has a B.A in behavioral science, and an M.A in educational counseling for early-age children, from Tel Aviv University. In parallel, she studied Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and received accreditation in that subject at the same university. She works for the Ministry of Education as an educational counselor for kindergarten children and as an Applied Behavioral Analyst for autistic children and children with special needs in their kindergartens. As private work, she guides and supervises parents of autistic children, developing private home programs to promote their cognitive and communicative skills, and to help them cope with their behavioral difficulties and problems. She has recently submitted a thesis based on an intervention which was specifically built for the target research. The subject of the research is: Promoting Mental-Emotional Conceptualization among Kindergarten Children in Arab Society by Discussing a Picture Book.

**MABSAM KHALAILY** has a B.A. and an M.A. from Tel-Aviv University. She studied educational counseling, specializing in the preschool ages. She has recently submitted her thesis entitled: I Can Solve A Problem: Evaluation of an Intervention Program for Promotion of Social Comprehension and Social Problem-Solving among Preschool Children through Book Reading.

## **SIMA HADAD MA-YAFIT**

### **The Role of the Ministry of Education in Promoting Reading with Children**

There is a broad consensus that a command of reading and writing in its broadest sense is a condition for becoming a productive member of society. Concern over the reading level of school children is the motive for developing literacy-promoting programs in preschools and creating the foundations for reading and writing. The need to reduce the gaps in literacy between children from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds is a central goal of the Israeli education system and is a constant public issue.

To that end, a curriculum has been written based on the rich body of research conducted around the world that testifies to the importance of literacy-promoting programs. Research findings indicate that storybook reading should be encouraged in early childhood and that it affects development in preschool years as well as achievements in school and even later. Reading books has been found to contribute to linguistic and literacy development, including vocabulary, familiarity with texts, phonological awareness, identification of conventions of writing, reading comprehension, and oral comprehension. Reading also promotes emotional and social development and meets the emotional needs of the child.

One of the main dilemmas in the Preschool Education Division of the Ministry of Education is how to promote children in this area without transforming the preschool into a school. The approach we find congenial involves maintaining the preschool as a place that creates an educational environment for play, creativity and activity centers. The preschool environment should expose children to literacy-related activity and challenge them in a way that is meaningful for the child.

Implementation of the Ministry's curriculum and approach depends on well trained pedagogical teams that include supervisors, teacher instructors, coaches and preschool teachers. The cooperation among these interdisciplinary pedagogical professionals increases the effectiveness of the curriculum-guided educational practice. Thus, the ministry regards the ongoing professional development of early childhood professionals as a crucial element in promoting children's literacy in general and reading habits in particular. Professional development courses include familiarization of teachers with the new curriculum and educational approaches, as well as with studies regarding the acquisition of reading and writing in early childhood. These courses also elaborate on reading books with children and introduce methods for doing so while encouraging children's engagement and enjoyment.

The Ministry's guiding principles call for commitment of the preschool teachers to multiple activities that encourage reading:

- Reading books and stories in the preschool;
- Operating a library in the preschool so that children can take out books to read at home;
- Conducting parent-child activities in the preschool in relation to selected books (special emphasis is placed on cooperation with the parents and other family members among families of lower socioeconomic status);
- Encouraging activities at home in relation to books;
- Encouraging children and families to get a library card at the local library;
- Involving the community in encouraging reading.

To accomplish the goal of promoting book reading with young children, several programs have been developed by the Ministry of Education. These programs ensure accessibility to quality books, encourage reading for pleasure, and raise children's motivation to read through the cooperation of the preschool teacher, the parents and the community. The programs which will be described in the presentation include the following:

- The Parade of Books
- The PJ Library – for the Israeli Jewish community
- Maktabat Al-Fanoos – for the Israeli Arab community

**SIMA HADAD MA-YAFIT** Director, Department of Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education. Sima Hadad Ma-Yafit has three decades of experience working in Israel's early childhood education system. For the past six years, she has headed the Ministry of Education's efforts to establish a policy for all public – religious and nonreligious – early childhood frameworks, encompassing the Jewish, Arab and Druze sectors. Sima joined the Department of Early Childhood Education after spending 14 years as a kindergarten teacher and Ministry of Education supervisor. From her perspective, the Initiative to Promote Quality Early Childhood Education in Arab Society in Israel will serve a vital role by reducing the educational gaps between Israeli-Arab children and their Jewish peers. By investing in the professionalization of kindergarten teachers and promoting cultural

and social understanding between different segments of the community, this initiative will pave the way for higher academic achievements, more complete integration and the attainment of civic equality for Israeli-Arab children. Sima earned an M.A. in pedagogy, didactics and curriculum development from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## **SAFIEH HASOUNA ARAFAT**

### **How Do Mothers Read to Their Children? The Case of a Diglossic Language**

In recent years studies have demonstrated the family's role in promoting children's literacy. The interactions between adults and children, and particularly between parents and children, influence the child's general knowledge (Cunningham, 2010; McDonnell, Friel-Patti, & Rosenthal-Rollins, 2003) and the development of literacy (Korat, Klein, & Segal-Drori, 2007; Meisels, 1998; Teale & Sulzby, 2003). Parental mediation that promotes literacy means conscious and intentional behavior of the parent to improve the child's knowledge of the spoken language and the written language, as well as the connection between them.

One of the key literacy activities of parents with young children in the Western world is reading books to the children (Cunningham, 2010; NELP, 2008). Research shows that reading books to children contributes to developing the spoken language and literacy during the preschool years (Chow & McBride-Chang, 2003; Justice & Ezell, 2000; Cunningham, 2010) and to the acquisition of reading in elementary school (Baker, Sonnenschein, & Serpell, 2001). As a diglossic language (a significant difference between spoken and literary language), this is especially important in Arabic, because reading books not only enriches the children's vocabulary, it exposes them to the standard (literary) language.

Little is known about the child's development of literacy in Arab society. Consequently, the current study examined literacy-promoting processes within the Arab family and the meaning of these processes for the development of literacy in Arabic, in all its complexity and uniqueness. The study focused on three main areas: 1. The mediation of mothers in the activity of reading a book to the child. Examination of the mother's mediating activity included looking at the **general characteristics of the interaction** (the number of discourse units, statements, communication chains, mother's discursive initiatives, and mother's questions, as well as the style of the mediation), the **mediating behaviors** (focus, emotion, level of expansion, channeling of behavior, and encouragement) by the mother, and measures of the **level of expansion** by the mother (naming details and whole objects in illustrations, telling the story in the spoken language, reading and paraphrasing, discussing the story, discussing the written language); 2. examination of socioeconomic characteristics of the child's family (demographic data and background variables); 3. the literacy environment of the home in which the child is growing up (literacy-promoting tools and activities). We examined the contribution of all these variables to the child's literacy level at kindergarten age and at the start of elementary school. The study included 109 dyads, each consisting of a mother and her kindergarten-age child, from four locales in the north of the country and the center (a mixed Jewish-Arab city, an Arab village, an Arab city).

One of the important findings is that while reading to the child the mothers used many paraphrases (reading the written text and "translating" it to the spoken language), representing a low level of mediation, and tended less to relate to the written language, which would have represented a higher level of mediation. The results reveal that the mothers made few attempts to bridge the gap between the written language and the spoken language while reading the book. As we shall see, this behavior was a factor that did not contribute to the child's literacy in kindergarten and in first grade.

Another finding is that the literacy level in the home made the highest contribution to the variance in the child's literacy level in kindergarten and first grade. The socioeconomic level also made a statistically significant contribution to the literacy level of the child in kindergarten and in first grade. The mother's level of expansion while reading the book was a moderating factor between the literacy level of the home and the child's vocabulary level in the written language. That is, when the mother's level of expansion while reading the story was high, the literacy level of the home contributed to the child's vocabulary in the written language. The study also found that the mother's level of expansion and the socioeconomic level moderated the correlation between the literacy level of the home and the child's achievement level in recognizing the names of letters, the sound-letter connection, and phonological awareness in kindergarten; that is, when the mother's level of elaboration while reading the book and the socioeconomic level were high, the literacy level of the home contributed to recognition of the names of letters, sound-letter connection, and phonological awareness. With regard to first grade, the study found that the socioeconomic level moderated the correlation between the literacy level of the home and the child's level of phonological awareness, and also the correlation between

the mother's level of expansion while reading the book and the child's level of reading words. Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Ofra Kora.

**SAFIEH HASOUNA ARAFAT** received her Ph.D. from Bar-Ilan University in 2011. Safieh is an academic coordinator at the Arab Academic Institute of Education at the Beit Berl College. She also works as the major coordinator of the extended teaching unit in the Institute. She is a member of several committees: Instruction Committee, Administration Committee, Acceptance Committee, Script Management Association. Safieh has specialized in literacy and language acquisition in early childhood among Arabic-speaking children. Her thesis dealt with "Maternal Mediation during a Shared Book-Reading Activity and Its Contribution to Children' Literacy in Kindergarten and First Grade: Evidence from the Arab Family." Her work is a pioneering study among the Arabic-speaking population in Israel.

## **FATMA KASSEM AND MONA SROUJI**

### **Promoting Reading with Children in Palestinian-Israeli Society: Maktabat Al-Fanoos (Lantern Library)**

#### **Maktabat al-Fanoos: Educational and Social Impact**

Teachers read books to children long before they learned that exposure to books is one of three pillars of "literacy" in Early Childhood. They read because they knew that when listening to stories told, children relax, enjoy and enrich their language and development. The teachers learned the importance of this experience at home as well, and that was the start of borrowing books from the "classroom libraries" to take home. Today, the research literature indicates the great impact that reading books to children at a young age has on their performance at school.

Accordingly, the Israeli Ministry of Education has set a policy to read books to children in preschools, and that is how Maktabat Al-Fanoos began in Arab preschools in Israel. The program is run in partnership with two foundations: the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, founders of the Sifriyat Pijama book program for Hebrew-speaking children in Israel; and the Price Family Charitable Fund, founders of Bidayat (Beginnings) – Early Childhood Centers and programs in Arab communities. The program strives to stimulate a lifelong love of books in young children and discussion of universal values at home and in preschools. During the year, the children receive 16 high-quality picture books (8 for each age group: 3-4 years and 5-6 years). The teacher introduces each book through reading and other activities. Then each child receives his/her own copy to take home and keep, a gift to share with the family. Each book contains a parent guide suggesting activities and discussions for parents to enjoy with their children. The books are selected according to standards set by a professional committee, and approved by the Ministry of Education.

Today, we see the impact of the program on 4 levels:

**Children:** Children are more motivated to "read" books, alone and with family members. The accessibility of books has encouraged reading habits at home. Reading the same book at thousands of homes has created a "common denominator" that reinforces the feeling of "belongingness" of children to their own community.

**Teachers:** The program encourages mutual learning through joint activities, sharing experiences through the program's website and e-newsletters sent with every new book. The teachers have a pedagogical reference, and logistic support.

**Parents:** The books have spurred the sense of responsibility among parents for their child's development, especially academic. They motivate an enjoyable interaction between the child and family, and help parents make better choices of books for their children. Their involvement in preschool everyday life has increased.

**Community:** Teachers' and parents' activities around books have sparked an interest in the community. A number of heads of local councils have adopted reading books as a "community cause" and participated in different related activities. *Imams* read to parents in mosques to encourage the culture of reading. Public libraries have organized activities around books, including with authors.

#### **Challenges in Choosing Books for Arab Children in Maktabat Al-Fanoos**

This short presentation will discuss the challenges faced in choosing books for a nationwide program, such as Maktabat Al-Fanoos, through presenting samples of the program's books. The first and main challenge is the relatively small number of books published annually for children in Arabic, in Israel particularly, and in the Arab world in general, which consequently restricts the choices of books of good quality. Preschool children face the **diglossia** of Arabic language (children books are written in literary Arabic that differs syntactically,

lexically, grammatically and phonologically from colloquial Arabic). The primary linguistic skills in literary Arabic that a 3-4-year-old child has, often fail to accommodate the contents of the book relevant to the child's developmental stage.

Another challenge is to make **the voice of the child heard**. Often, Arab children are "invisible" in their books, by being only the object of didacticism, ideology or moral preaching. Adults are often presented in a stereotypical manner. There is a need for books that promote reading to and with children for **pleasure**, and that provide spaces for **dialogues** on feelings, values and attitudes that relate to children's living experiences. In a violence-stricken region like ours, and amid the rapid changes in Arab societies and the emergence of sectorial, fanatic discourse, what children's books are we looking for?

**FATMA KASSEM** is the Ministry of Education's national pre-primary education supervisor for the Arab, Bedouin, and Druze communities. Fatma has been heavily involved in JDC-Israel's ECHAD program, a unique partnership between the ministries of education, health, and social services; JDC; the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco; and several Arab communities in Israel. By improving early childhood services in these communities, ECHAD has had a significant impact in the areas of child development, teacher training methodologies and literacy curricula. Fatma also leads projects aimed at fostering educational leadership in Bedouin communities and nurturing family literacy. She is the head of the Maktabat Al-Fanoos library program, which distributes a set of free Arabic-language books to every Arab child between the ages of 3 and 6.

Fatma has extensive experience in upgrading professional educational standards among Arab preschool teachers, as well as designing customized learning programs for Arab children living in Israel's multicultural society.

As a Co-Chair for the National Advisory Committee of the joint initiative between JDC, the Israel Ministry of Education and the Bernard van Leer Foundation to promote quality early learning in the Arab society, Fatma looks forward to building a bridge between traditional Arab societies and educational approaches, and a rapidly changing technological world. The focus on excellence in learning materials, teachers and physical facilities will provide Arab children with the skills they need to succeed in modern Israeli society.

Fatma earned an early childhood teaching certificate from the Arab Academic College of Education in Israel, a B.A. in communications from the Academic College of Emek Yezreel, and an M.A. in educational system management from the University of Haifa. Married with three children, Fatma lives in Nazareth.

**MONA SROUJI** earned a B.A. in education and Arabic Literature and Language from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She also completed an advanced study program, focusing on planning and managing early childhood programs in the Arab community. Her career started as a high-school teacher for Arabic language and literature, and later as a trainer of early childhood caregivers. Today she is the co-developer, content editor and coordinator of the book selection committee for Maktabat Al-Fanoos (The Lantern Library), a joint project that encourages reading with children, funded by the Ministry of Education, the Grinspoon Foundation and the Price Family Charitable Fund.

Mona is also engaged in producing different training and educational materials for parents and caregivers in early childhood education with local and international organizations.

## **SYLVIA KAMOWITZ-HAREVEN**

### **Empowering Immigrant Parents Through an Early Childhood Literacy Program: The Experience of "Sifriyat Pijama"**

Sifriyat Pijama ("Pijama Library") is a comprehensive national literacy program aimed at fostering a love of books and encouraging adult-child conversations on values and heritage. The program distributes eight children's books each year to 215,000 Israeli preschoolers and their families. Sifriyat Pijama serves all young children attending public preschools: religious and secular, immigrants and Israeli-born, disadvantaged and wealthy. The program was established by a private foundation, Keren Grinspoon Israel, and operates in financial and operational conjunction with the preschool division of the Ministry of Education.

The books are distributed monthly throughout the school year to preschools around the country in parcels containing multiple copies of that month's selection. Each book is accompanied by activity and discussion guides for parents and teachers. Upon receiving the parcel, the teachers read the book in the classroom and carry out activities and discussions relating to the story. Most teachers read the books more than once and in different manners – in small groups, using puppets, incorporating drama, and at times – together with parents.

Then each child receives his or her personal copy of the book to take home as a gift for the family library. The name “Pijama Library” intimates a culture of reading bedtime stories. It encapsulates the image of calm and happy parents and children, following the family meal and a moment before heading off for bed, as they sit cuddled together on the child’s bed. But does this image represent all the families who take part in the program? Are all parents available and capable of reading the books to their children? Does every family have two parents? What about parents who work shifts, who are not home at the children’s bedtime, who may not be able to read books in Hebrew? Do the Sifriyat Pijama books supplement other books on the children’s bookcase or are they the only children’s books in the home? Is there even a bookcase in the home?

We realize that the manner in which the books are received and read varies greatly from home to home, from family to family. It is crucial to ensure that the program does more than reinforce prior family reading habits. It must help the neediest children and not increase pre-existing disparities within society. Thus one of the central challenges facing program staff and teachers is finding ways to make the books accessible to disadvantaged families and new immigrants.

In this lecture we will describe the experience gained through our work with immigrant children and their families – experience that demonstrates how an early childhood literacy program may not only promote the children’s capabilities on the eve of their entrance to primary school, but reinforce parenting skills and empower disadvantaged families as well.

We will present findings from an ongoing evaluation of the program, describe collaboration with non-profit organizations who work with immigrants, and provide examples of some of the successful strategies teachers have devised that aid them when working with immigrant children and their families.

We will also discuss some of the challenges and obstacles that impinge on the optimal implementation of the program.

The following principles guide us in our work with teachers and parents:

1. Children’s books are gifts for all, not just for children.
2. A good children’s book is good for all ages.
3. Emphasize joint pleasure and fun.

The field will always know more than we do, and we should listen to it.

Among the initiatives we will discuss in our lecture:

- Training Ethiopian immigrant “liaisons” to work with children and parents
- Activities for parents and children in community centers and public libraries
- Integrating the books into Big Brother/Sister and other volunteer programs
- Parent education for immigrants from the FSU and Ethiopia
- Collaborative ventures with other foundations and non-profits
- Successful initiatives of model teachers

**SYLVIA KAMOWITZ-HAREVEN** is Director of Education for Sifriyat Pijama, Israel’s largest preschool reading readiness and values program. Sylvia, an early childhood specialist, is a seasoned lecturer and educator. She is a member of Sifriyat Pijama’s book selection team and is responsible for book-based curricula and professional teacher training throughout Israel for Sifriyat Pijama. She holds a BA with honors from Brown University and a master’s degree (summa cum laude) in Early Childhood Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Originally from Boston, Massachusetts (USA), Sylvia now resides in Jerusalem, Israel.

## **OFRA KORAT**

### **The e-book as a Facilitator of Language and Literacy among Hebrew-Speaking Children**

E-book sales are becoming increasingly common, and their share in the book market is rising steadily. Many publishers in different countries, such as Scholastic in the US or Evrit in Israel, offer a growing selection of e-books. 2011 marked a turning point in this field. In March 2011, Amazon, the largest book distribution company in the world, reported that its e-book sales had surpassed the sale of printed books for the first time. The increase in the production and sale of e-books is taking place not only for adults, but also for children, including young children before school age in different languages, including Hebrew. In Israel, 42% of middle SES Hebrew-speaking parents reported that they have e-books at home, and 11% reported that they read e-books together with their children. Reading e-books which incorporate multimedia refers to a state of synergy where there is a joint and integrated operation of two or more factors (for example: text, pictures, animation, sounds, music). The combined operation of these actions is perceived as more effective than the

one obtained from a combination of the activities of each of the factors separately – i.e., the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. According to this theory, young children, especially those who have difficulty in language and literacy and who are at risk for language disability, may benefit more by studying in a way which incorporates the use of several types of media than by using only a single medium.

Reading books by young children using the computer raises the question of the effect of the software on their learning in general, and on their language and literacy development in particular. Fostering language and literacy in the preschool years is important, since it contributes to reading, reading comprehension and academic achievements in school. Reading books to young children is known to be one of the most important activities for developing language and early literacy skills.

The abundance of e-books available on the market today, including the possibility that the child will read them independently without adult support, presents new possibilities that bring with them great curiosity and motivation of both the children and the adults (teachers and parents). This situation leads to new questions. One of the questions we ask as researchers who specialize in early literacy is whether these books have the potential to enrich children's language and literacy.

We examined the quality of 43 Hebrew e-books that were available on the market (on CDs) in Israel from 1995 to 2002. The study showed that very few Hebrew e-books contained an adequate amount of hot spots for supporting the understanding of the text, word meaning support, and written text awareness. In light of the findings regarding commercial e-books on the market in Israel, we decided to develop e-books aimed at supporting language and literacy for research purposes. The rationale was to examine the possible support of these books for language and literacy development of the young child and to create a model for research-based software.

In this presentation, we will present a series of studies performed in the last decade that examined the contribution of e-book reading to the language and literacy of young Hebrew-speaking children. Children worked with two e-books designed by the researchers to achieve this aim. We will present the effect of reading these e-books on the language and literacy of young children: (a) in general; (b) in different age groups; and (c) in different SES groups. Language progress was measured by phonological awareness, word meaning, story production, and comprehension. Literacy progress was measured by letter naming, word reading and word writing. The results showed that e-book reading supported all language and literacy skills, except letter naming. The progress of most skills appeared after three reading sessions. Children aged 4 gained similar benefit to that of older children (aged 5-6). Furthermore, children from middle and low SES families benefited from reading the e-books; and in some cases, low SES children derived greater benefit than those from a middle SES. Further research and pedagogical implications for software developers and educators are discussed.

**OFRA KORAT** is Professor of Education at Bar-Ilan University and head of the Early Childhood Program. She has researched the early language and literacy development of Hebrew and Arabic-speaking children, with reference to socioeconomic background, home literacy environment, parent-child interaction and parental beliefs. Her recent research interests are children's language and literacy learning – from preschool through the school years, using technology. Her studies indicate the effectiveness of educational software as a support for children's language and literacy, when using it by themselves or with the augmentation of teachers and parents.

## **HANNA LIVNAT**

### **From Grimm to Walt Disney: Considerations in Choosing Children's Literature**

The lecture will deal with children's literature: fairy tales and other works for young children. It will focus on the quality of the literary text and its aesthetic value: the language, the characters, the plot, the point of view, the illustrations and other artistic aspects. These professional considerations in choosing children's literature will be discussed in connection with the child's meaningful literary experience and the promotion of reading.

**HANNA LIVNAT**, Ph.D., is head of the Yemimah Center for the Study and Teaching of Children's Literature at Beit Berl Academic College. She is a lecturer at Tel Aviv University, Beit Berl Academic College and Seminar Hakibbutzim College. She is the author of the book (in Hebrew): *Jewish and Proud – Shaping Identity for Jewish Children in Germany 1933-1938*, Institute for the Study of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem Press, Jerusalem. Hanna Livnat is the editor of *Small World [Olam Katan] – A Journal of Youth and Children's Literature Study*, Zmora-Bitan and the Yemimah Center, Beit Berl Academic College. She translates literature for adults, youth and children from German, English and French – into Hebrew

## ASMAA MAHAJNE

### Promoting Reading among Toddlers via Capacity-Building for Caregivers

Studies show that reading books with young children is an important emotional experience, in which the adult and the child focus on each other and enjoy the companionship and interaction. Children's literature is a key tool of development in early childhood; reading books to children has substantial influence on their success and achievements in school.

Professionals such as caregivers, preschool teachers, and assistants spend many hours with children every day and have a significant presence in their lives. This lecture presents the experiences of caregivers and the compelling changes they experienced after completing an in-service course offered as part of the Umm El-Fahem Reads project, which is designed to encourage reading to and by preschool children.

The courses were attended by caregivers who work in pre-nursery playgroups run in their homes and by others who work in daycare centers. The women in both groups care for children ranging in age from three months to three years. Caregivers in the pre-nursery playgroups are responsible for 4 to 6 children; those employed in daycare centers are responsible for 11 children. There are usually two or three caregivers in each daycare center, depending on the number of children enrolled. About half of the children come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and their families are clients of the welfare system; the other half are children of working mothers. The children stay in the playgroups and daycare centers from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Affiliation and Professional Supervision:** The caregivers in the pre-nursery playgroups are employed by the municipality. Administrative oversight and professional supervision are provided by the Social Services Department and the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Employment. A local coordinator oversees their work. The caregivers in daycare centers are employed by the private NGO that operates the center. The daycare centers are supervised by the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Employment and are required to employ professional mentors to work with the caregivers.

The caregivers complete an in-service program and/or basic professional training course, run by the professional agency that supervises their workplace. They almost never receive additional professional development and enrichment programs. The in-service and capacity-building course for some 70 caregivers, as part of the Umm El-Fahem Reads project, was a new opportunity for them.

The program was intended for women who work with young children—caregivers, preschool teachers, and assistants—women who show initiative and leadership abilities and hold influential positions in the communities where they work. The program offered these women the chance to take an in-service course on fostering a culture of reading among toddlers.

Effecting change and instilling a culture of reading, requires a steady effort and follow-up. The goal of the in-service course is to make the caregivers influential agents of change in the lives of children and parents, to encourage parents to get involved, and to make them partners in the effort to cultivate reading books to young children. The course was divided into two stages. In the first, which took place in 2012–2013, the groups received initial training and were exposed to the pivotal importance of reading. The second stage, in 2013–2014, focused on increasing their knowledge and included practical experience with and implementation of the topics studied among children, parents, and the educators.

#### The Changes Effectuated by the Project

**Professional:** The in-service course helped the caregivers mold their professional identities. Those who completed the course reported: "Before, we had no tools and didn't know how to read a story"; "Today, I can explain to parents how to read to children"; "I give parents assignments to work on that have to do with the story"; "The parents are very happy and are cooperating."

These testimonials show that there has been a change in the professional status of the caregivers vis-à-vis the parents. They have begun providing guidance to parents and including them in the campaign. The daycare center directors and playgroup coordinators also remarked on the change they observed in the caregivers' perception of their professional identities: "We felt the impact of the in-service courses in the daycare, ranging from how they designed the educational environment to the parents' involvement in various activities to encourage reading"; "Peer-learning emerged in the center"; "The way the caregivers see themselves has changed; they have more knowledge now and want to learn even more"; "The caregivers felt that the in-service course provided a space where they could express their professional identity." We see that the daycare directors are speaking about the change in the caregivers, both in their professionalism and their work relationships, a change that is manifested in the emergence of collaborative activities and joint projects in the centers or playgroups.

**Personal:** In their testimonials, the caregivers speak about the changes they have experienced on the personal level as a result of the in-service course—changes in how they read books with their own children. “First, I brought the change into my home and set up a library for my own children”; “I began giving books as presents”; “I began making time for reading books to my children”; “I told my family about the course”; “I came to feel that I had missed something in my own childhood, because they didn’t read stories to me, so today I’m making up for it to my children and giving them what I didn’t have.”

As the caregivers report, they understood that the change must take place first of all within themselves, at the personal level.

**Social:** The project included all current frameworks for early childhood development, and a shared dialogue emerged among workers in all of them. The caregivers, preschool teachers, and assistants began to serve as agents of change and to convey educational and social messages to the children and parents, which were expressed in various community events.

**Psychological and emotional:** The caregivers described themselves before and after the in-service course. Before the course, they felt disappointed and unsatisfied by their performance and this impacted their sense of self. They felt that they did not have anything to give and were alienated from themselves, until the project led them to a place of security and growth and gave them a sense of capability and success. Here are some examples of what the caregivers said at the end of the program: “I had felt that I was frustrated and disappointed in myself. I didn’t know how to tell a story. Today I am happy—I know how”; “Before the course, I felt emptiness; today I have a lot more to show”; “What drove me was the search for myself; I felt like a bare tree in autumn, but today I am a flowering tree in the spring”; “I grew and developed”; “A feeling of success.”

**ASMAA MAHAJNE** holds an MA in education, society, and culture and a BA in special education, sociology, and anthropology from the University of Haifa. Asmaa works in a number of early childhood frameworks. She is the director of the Multi-disciplinary Center for Early Childhood in Umm El-Fahem; a lecturer in the Department of Education at a-Najah College in Umm El-Fahem, where she teaches a course for caregivers in daycare centers and pre-nursery playgroups; program coordinator and preschool teacher supervisor in the Or Program; coordinator of the From Home to School program; and a group facilitator in the National Program for Children and Teens at Risk. In addition, Asmaa works with caregivers in a course that encourages reading as part of the **“Umm El-Fahem Reads”** project, run jointly by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Bidayat Center of the Al-Qasemi Academic College.

## **AREEJ MASSARWE AND MARGALIT ZIV**

### **Capacity Building among Early Childhood Professionals and Families: Principles and Challenges**

Capacity building of early childhood professionals is a central component of “Umm El-Fahem Reads” and a key factor for the sustainability of improved reading habits with children. The process is based on a multi-layered approach and several guiding principles: First, the recognition of the importance of providing professionals, mainly women, opportunities to express themselves and fulfill their wishes and goals. This strong anchor of self-value and motivation creates the foundation for serving as committed change agents and partners in fulfilling the program’s goal – i.e., deepening the culture of book reading with children in the community. Once commitment and a sense of partnership are established, enriching professionals’ educational knowledge and practices is more easily accomplished and implemented in their daily work.

Participants in capacity building courses include preschool teachers, teachers’ aides, toddlers’ caregivers, multidisciplinary leading professionals, community activists and parents. Courses are planned in collaboration with the Umm El-Fahem Municipality, the Ministry of Education, the Bidayat Early Childhood Center at Al-Qasemi Academic College and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The above-explained approach is applied in all courses, creating a mutual educational discourse, and an awareness of each professional and parent of her contribution to accomplishing the mutual goal. Importantly, the participation of teachers’ aides and toddlers’ caregivers in courses that are similar to those of the teachers has significantly improved their sense of value, raised their motivation and improved the continuity of their work and the team work of the teachers and teachers’ aides.

Each course begins with several meetings that focus on creating a positive empowerment experience for the participants. Emphasis is placed on sharing successful experiences, strengths and wishes, as well as on discussing difficulties and concerns. Additionally, during this stage, participants are given an adult book as a gift and are encouraged to read it, in order to create a positive personal reading experience, prior to instilling

a similar experience in children. This has indeed proven to be an enjoyable and powerful experience. The knowledge and pedagogical practice component is based on intervention studies that showed that professionals and parents benefit from learning and applying a structured model of repeated shared readings. The four-reading model that is presented and practiced during the courses includes discussing the story's plot and vocabulary, discussing the characters' mental states and points of view, relating the story to the children's personal lives and encouraging children to tell the story in their own words. The diglossic characteristics of the Arabic language are taken into account. Emphasis is placed on providing children with opportunities to express their ideas, thoughts and emotions verbally and through arts.

In applying what they learn, the professionals are encouraged to plan their own projects and to engage parents in book reading activities. They receive ongoing guidance from the course facilitators during the course and in their field visits to the preschools. Examples of projects that teachers have conducted are inviting grandparents to read with the children, and having an exchange library in the preschool for parents. Additionally, preschool teachers and toddlers' caregivers participate in community events. Their efforts and accomplishments receive exposure and appreciation of the program's partners and the community.

A unique course for leading professionals and community activists focuses on deepening the participants' understanding, knowledge and methods regarding community projects. During the course they plan and conduct projects in multidisciplinary teams. Examples of projects include reviving traditional storytelling, disseminating books in health clinics, accompanied by guidance of mothers, and tutoring reading sessions for preschool children by elementary school children.

To summarize, in all capacity building courses, the message conveyed to the participants is that they are partners in fulfilling the mutual goals of "Umm El-Fahem Reads" and that their crucial role and contribution are respected and appreciated. This approach has assisted in implementing changes in their reading habits with children which will be described in a separate session, devoted to the program's evaluation.

**AREEJ MASSARWE** is the director, on behalf of Bidayat – Early Childhood Centers and Programs, of "Umm El-Fahem Reads" (Promoting book reading with children in Umm El-Fahem) and of «Maktabat Al-Fanoos» (Lantern Library – a national book reading program in Arabic). She is a member of Maktabat Al-Fanoos' book selection committee.

She served for five years as director of the Bidayat Center at Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education in Baqa el-Garbia; she is a lecturer in the Early Childhood Department of al-Qasemi Academic College on the topics of language acquisition, children's literature, and promoting children's thinking skills.

She holds BA and MA degrees in speech and language development and disorders, and is currently a Ph.D student at Tel-Aviv University. The dissertation topic is: "How does reference to standard and spoken Arabic during shared reading affect children's understanding of the story?"

**MARGALIT ZIV** is an Associate Professor and head of the Teaching and Learning Graduate Program at Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education. She is the founder and director of Bidayat (Beginnings) – Early Childhood Centers and Programs in the Israeli-Palestinian Society. She strives to promote equal educational opportunities for all Israeli children, based on dialogue and joint action of Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens. Her research and professional interests include the development of children's social cognition, shared storybook reading with children, cultural aspects of development and education, and the empowerment of educational professionals and parents, especially women.

## **SUSAN B. NEUMAN**

### **How We Can Change the Odds for Children At Risk: Policies for Encouraging Reading with Preschool Children**

Each year policymakers are faced with a bewildering array of choices of which programs to fund that may benefit poor children. In this era of fiscal restraint, policymakers must make critical decisions on how many children will receive benefits and which ones they will receive. Some programs, such as Medicaid, are entitlements, which mean that every child whose family meets the criteria for the program is entitled to receive benefits. Other programs such as Early Head Start have never been funded at a level that would allow all eligible families to be served. The choices have not been easy, and frequently no clear-cut solutions have been offered by social scientists responsible for evaluating these programs. As a result, decisions are often made stochastically, as opined by then-Senator Walter Mondale in an address to the American Psychological

Association almost a half-century ago:

“What I have not learned from researchers [about improving the odds for poor children] is what we can do about these problems. . . . For every study, statistical or theoretical, that contains a proposed solution or recommendation, there is always another, equally well documented, challenging the assumptions or conclusions of the first. No one seems to agree with anyone else’s approach. . . . As a result, I must confess, I stand with my colleagues confused and often disheartened.”(Currie, 2005)

Many would argue that little has changed in the subsequent years. Today, the reauthorization and appropriation process – decisions that set budgets, benefit levels, and program rules – seem as perplexing as ever. Programs are funded, then defunded, and reintroduced all over again, producing discontinuities in services and diminishing any consolidated effort to provide a foundational safety net for children in the early years. Those that stand to be recipients of this disarray, unfortunately, are the most at-risk children and their families.

Ideally, of course, policymakers should make decisions based on evidence of what works – on the principles and practices of programs that are likely to achieve positive outcomes for poor children at a reasonable cost (Neuman, 2009). In this scenario, priorities would be established, evidence would be carefully weighed, budgets appropriately allocated, and programs monitored to ensure implementation fidelity. This would mean a very different process both in setting priorities and in funding programs. Essentially, those programs that fundamentally achieve results – changing the lives of children at risk – would set the course of action, providing a guide for further actions. Just consider the advances we might make in helping children to achieve at a price we can afford.

In this spirit, this presentation highlights an evidence-based approach. It first looks at broad policies for supporting book-reading in the early years and argues that programs and supports both in and out of school are most promising at improving the future of high-risk children. It then emphasizes specific factors that seem to cut across these programs. These factors include the active processing of text through questioning, predicting, and summarizing text, explicit explanation, the use of multimedia, categorical learning, and relating words to key concepts and big ideas. Together, it suggests that there are critical features of interventions that can remove some of the early risk factors associated with poor achievement. This new knowledge can become the foundation for leaders and policymakers to construct policies that radically reduce the occurrence of adverse outcomes and increase the odds that children will become more proficient readers and writers.

### **Book Reading and Technology: Evidence from the “World of Words” Intervention**

Recent studies have investigated more deliberate efforts to integrate early literacy skills and content knowledge in shared book-reading programs for preschoolers.

These studies provide substantial evidence that young children are highly capable of acquiring content-specific words, which may lead to building the critical background knowledge essential for comprehension development.

Given the importance of building children’s word and world knowledge during the early childhood years, this presentation describes a supplementary curriculum aimed at enhancing these critical skills. The World of Words (WOW) vocabulary program (Neuman, Dwyer, Koh, and Wright, 2007) is designed to maximize children’s opportunities to learn words and concepts that target science, math, and health content standards early on in preschool. Two key principles underlie its design. First, content-related vocabulary is taught through rich concepts structured as taxonomies. Taxonomies are hierarchical groupings based on shared essential properties; for example, katydid and grasshopper are both members of the taxonomic category “insects.” Second, WOW uses embedded multimedia strategies in which animations and other videos are woven into teachers’ lessons. Based on the theory of synergy (Neuman, 2007) and dual-coding theories (Paivio, 2008), separate mental representations are used to organize new knowledge, which can then be stored and retrieved for subsequent use.

At the same time, the intervention has a parent component, which involves take-home books on similar themes and topics. Analyzing our work with parents, we recorded the lexical quality of the parents’ talk, and their responsiveness to their children’s cues. Of the many factors we examined, we found that low-income parents were contingently responsive during shared book reading – that is, sensitive to children’s questions and queries in the course of their reading. Our research provides evidence that giving parents strategies to be more responsive to children’s cues and interests may affect receptive and expressive vocabulary development.

Four recent studies from our lab have demonstrated the potential of WOW to improve children’s word and world knowledge. Results replicated across a number of low-income populations have demonstrated that children can learn content-rich vocabulary and can develop more complex knowledge networks that are related to comprehension development. The lesson of our experience with WOW is that young children’s acquisition of

word and world knowledge is highly malleable and sensitive to instruction. Their knowledge development should not be limited by their socioeconomic circumstances. Instead, children's knowledge development should be a matter of planned, sequenced, and systematic instruction. It should also be a matter of selecting the vocabulary words, concepts, and information that matter most to children and will provide them with the knowledge necessary when they enter formal schooling. In addition, it should include a parent component that carefully mirrors the kind of instruction that children receive in school. It also suggests that children who enter school in these situations will need skillfully developed instruction that not only improves their word knowledge, but the world knowledge necessary for language comprehension and literacy development.

**SUSAN B. NEUMAN** is a Professor and Chair of Teaching and Learning at New York University specializing in early literacy development. Previously, she was a professor at the University of Michigan and has served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education. In her role as Assistant Secretary, she established the Early Reading First Program, the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program, and was responsible for all activities in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act. She served on the IRA Board of Directors (2001-2003) and other numerous boards of non-profit organizations. She is currently the Editor of *Reading Research Quarterly*, the most prestigious journal in reading research. Her research and teaching interests include early childhood policy, curriculum, and early reading instruction, preK-grade 3 for children who live in poverty. She has written over 100 articles, and authored and edited 11 books, including the *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* (Volumes I, II, III) with David Dickinson, *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk* (Teachers College Press, 2009), *Educating the Other America* (Brookes, 2008) and *Multimedia and Literacy Development* (Taylor & Francis, 2008). Her most recent books are *Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance: Poverty, Literacy, and the Development of Information Capital* (Teachers College Press, 2012), and *All About Words: Improving Vocabulary in the Age of Common Core Standards, preK-grade 2*.

## **BASIL (BOAZ) PORTER**

### **Reading to Children: A Pediatric Priority**

Reach Out and Read (ROR) is a pediatric, evidence-based strategy to prevent problems of early child development and learning. It was started in a single clinic in Boston City Hospital in 1989 and today functions in more than 4,000 clinics, with more than 5 million books distributed to more than 3.5 million children in the USA in 2008. It has developed as a model for parent education during pediatric encounters, based less on telling, and more on creating real-time learning experiences. Since the start of ROR, an increasing amount of research has confirmed the importance of reading aloud for the development of language and other emergent literary skills, and preparing children for successful reading in school.

There are three essential components of the program: 1) training pediatricians to give developmentally appropriate advice regarding reading; 2) giving books at pediatric visits from 6 months to five years; and 3) having volunteers model reading in the waiting room, or having a literary rich waiting room. Research on ROR has shown that parents who participated in ROR, compared with parents who did not, were more likely to report reading as a favorite activity, had increased literacy orientation, reported frequent reading aloud, and most important, increased language development was shown in children participating in the program.

In Israel, the program was introduced into pediatric clinics of Maccabi Health Services in 2003 under the name "Kria L'Kria" – literally, "A Call to Reading." The program was facilitated by financial support from a subsidiary fund of Maccabi aimed at improving patient welfare (Keren Maccabi), and the active support of a publishing house for children's books, Zmorah Bitan. A major landmark was the formal integration of Kria L'Kria into the Health Promotion program of Maccabi in 2007. Today the program functions in 75 pediatric clinics and in addition is taught by 110 preventive health nurses. 20,000 books are distributed each year – 13,000 in Hebrew, 2,000 in Arabic and 5,000 to the ultra-orthodox community. The Hebrew books are published under Maccabi auspices, with specific instructions to parents on the back cover of each book. The growth of ROR in the USA and Kria L'Kria in Israel is part of growing evidence that literary promotion can be incorporated into pediatric counselling to parents. In the developing world, consideration is being given to the idea of giving books at the same time as immunizations to improve adherence to immunization programs, and to reinforce the message of encouraging reading as an immunization against illiteracy.

**BASIL (BOAZ) PORTER** MD, MPH, Born in South Africa, he emigrated to Israel on completion of his medical training. He completed his pediatrics residency at the University of Chicago. From there he returned with his family to Beersheba where he was one of the founding faculty members of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Ben-Gurion University. He pioneered the medical school's involvement in the community through establishing community-based teaching clinics in pediatrics, and directed a program for graduates of the medical school to have post-internship experience in community settings in the Negev. He described many of the problems facing medical education in community settings in a book, *The Politics of Reform in Medical Education and Health Services*. After directing the Zusman Child Development Center for some years, he moved to Maccabi Health services where he served in various management positions, including medical director for the Negev region and National Director for Pediatric Care. While serving in these positions he pioneered the introduction of Reach Out and Read as "Kria L'Kria" in Maccabi clinics. He has consulted in South Africa regarding training of primary care workers, and served as a member of a World Bank committee to recommend reform of the health system in the Republic of Georgia.

He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and has helped develop and teach Maternal Child Care in the MPH course for many years; he teaches International Child Health at the Beersheba-Columbia School for International Health.

He maintains an interest in health services research and child development, and continues to learn new things from his seven grandchildren.

He is an avid amateur chamber music player.

## **HAIFA SABBAGH AND MARGALIT ZIV AND MAHMOUD ZOHDI**

### **"Umm El-Fahem Reads": A Holistic Municipal Approach for Promoting Book Reading with Children**

A joint project of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, with the Bidayat Early Childhood Center at al-Qasemi College of Education and Umm El-Fahem Municipality. Supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The program's founders and team: Prof. Margalit Ziv, Head of Teaching and Learning Graduate Studies, Academic Director of Bidayat Early Childhood Center, Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education; Haifa Sabbagh, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Dr. Mahmoud Zohdi, Head of Education Department, Umm El-Fahem Municipality

Reading books to children is a daily activity in families and kindergartens in Western societies (Mol, Bus and Jong, 2009). Reading books to children enriches their literacy and language, contributes to their social-emotional development and predicts achievements in school (Mol and Bus, 2011).

Whereas reading books with children is common among most Israeli-Jewish families, the culture of book reading is less developed in the Israeli-Palestinian society. In this society, there is less awareness of the importance of book reading, limited access to quality books and insufficient linguistically and culturally appropriate instructional material. Additionally, reading books in Arabic is considered less natural than in other languages because of the diglossia – the distance between the written language and the spoken one (Maamouri, 1998). The difference in the book reading experiences of Jewish and Arab children contributes to the large gap in scholastic achievements between children from these different backgrounds.

The Israeli Ministry of Education has recognized the need for promoting book reading in Arab society and has recently launched a national book reading program – Maktabat Al-Fanoos (Lantern Library). In this program, preschool children receive eight books per year as a gift for them and their families. In order to create a deep and broad change in the culture and habit of book reading with children in Arab society and reduce the gaps between Jewish and Arab preschool children, it is important to accompany the ministry's efforts with municipal-community programs. "Umm El-Fahem Reads" operates in order to accomplish these goals. The program began in 2010 and is planned to continue for two more years.

Umm El-Fahem, with 47,000 residents, is the second largest Arab town in Israel. The majority of the population belongs to a low socio-economic background. The local authority has set the education, welfare and health of young children as a high priority; it recognizes the need to foster reading with children and wishes to serve as a pioneer in investing efforts and budgets to accomplish this goal.

A unique collaboration between Umm El-Fahem Municipality, Bidayat – Early Childhood Centers and Programs, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and the Ministry of Education aims to establish an academic community model for advancing book reading culture, which can be adopted by additional Arab municipalities. The program's goals are: to create an organizational and professional leadership with a commitment and knowledge to

promote reading books with children; to deepen the awareness of the importance of reading books with children among professionals and parents and to enrich their knowledge regarding methods for shared book reading; to expand the accessibility of families to high-quality books; to encourage and increase book reading with children as a routine in preschools and families; and to develop culturally appropriate curricular materials regarding book reading with children.

To achieve these goals, capacity building courses and workshops have been conducted for leading interdisciplinary professionals, community activists, teachers, teachers' aides, toddler caregivers and parents. The courses focused on deepening the participants' understanding of the importance of book reading and introducing the principles and methods of shared reading. Quality books have been purchased for educational settings and libraries. Community events focusing on book reading activities have been organized. A unique course was conducted for professionals and community activists, during which they initiated book-reading projects. An important goal for the next two years is to establish a community book-reading center that will provide guidance for professionals and parents and will conduct multiple community book-reading activities.

Evaluation of the program's first two years indicate that it has begun to implement a holistic community approach to promote book reading in the community, and has had an impact on a number of levels: social, cognitive, professional, institutional and familial. A nucleus of professionals has been trained and changes have occurred in book-reading habits in families and in multiple educational and community settings; specifically, professionals and parents have learned how to select quality developmentally appropriate books, how to better understand the principles of shared repeated reading, and how to apply new ways of reading with children. Leading professional volunteers are committed to serve as change agents and are proud of their role in creating the change. The program has also had unanticipated by-products, such as the development of reading by siblings. Importantly, the municipality is strongly committed to the program's continuity and sustainability.

**HAIFA SABBAGH** is director of educational projects at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. She earned an M.A. degree in Education and a B.A. in Sociology and Political Science. Haifa joined the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute to play a role in developing and implementing educational programs in the fields of civics, pro-active citizenship building, education for democracy in schools from all streams in the Israeli educational system. She is involved in Van Leer's formal and informal educational programs— initiating and facilitating in-service courses for teachers and training community centers' moderators in active learning methods.

Recent projects include **"Values and Citizens"**, a newly introduced textbook and educational program for Junior-high schools in Israel, which focuses on developing concepts and professional knowledge related to social change, and approaches to civic and political participation by young people. In addition, she is a designer and founding member of the **"Umm el-Fahem Reads" program**: A Holistic Municipal Approach for Promoting Book Reading with Children.

## **MANAR SALAME**

### **Contents and Gender Aspects of Children's Books in Arabic**

In Arab society in Israel there is a growing awareness of Arabic children's literature and its important role in enriching preschoolers' emotional, social, and cognitive world. Children's literature has an important function in inculcating values in general and in transmitting messages regarding the expected behavior of boys and girls in particular. Children assimilate gender-related messages at an early age; hence the importance of examining gender-related messages in children's literature.

A series of studies that examined gender-related messages in Hebrew literature pointed out that women are often portrayed as being of lower status than men. These findings led to a recommendation that the portrayal in Hebrew textbooks be changed and that, instead of showing male characters as preferred over female characters, they include egalitarian messages with no preference for either sex. Thus far, no such study has been conducted on Arabic children's literature.

The current study examines for the first time the dominant messages in Arabic children's literature in Israel, and particularly the gender-related messages. The study examines the topics, content, and emotional, educational, social, scientific, psychological, and pedagogical messages, particularly the gender-related messages in stories written between 2000 and 2009 for children ages three to six.

The study was conducted in two stages:

1. A survey of some 200 children's books found in Arab preschools in Israel
2. Analysis of the stories in accordance with predetermined measures

The findings show that children's stories in Arabic include many types of messages. Among these are educational messages that provide the foundations for socializing the child in Arab society – for example, one must be a good, honest person; scientific messages – for example, values related to preserving the environment; religious values, including explanations of basic principles, ethical values, and important religious customs; and sensitive emotional issues, such as dealing with a death in the family.

A central finding pertains to gender-related messages transmitted overtly and covertly. Thus, male characters in the stories have names that mean, for example, "justice" or "strength," whereas female characters have names whose meaning is related to gentleness and external beauty. The male character in these stories is often shown outside the home—working and visiting various places. The female character, on the other hand, is portrayed as staying at home, and if she does go out, she does so to attend to an urgent matter, such as going to the doctor, or she goes out to the immediate vicinity of her home, for example, the courtyard or a field nearby. The boys in the stories have characteristics such as courage, pioneering spirit, diligence, and wisdom. In contrast, the girls are portrayed as dependent on a male character who helps them and finds a solution to their problems. This value set is out of touch with the reality of Arab society in Israel, in which 25% of the women ages 18 to 67 work outside the home. With regard to the representation of the status of women within the family, the children's literature presents two main models: the married woman within the confines of the home or the widow. Not one of these stories shows an unmarried or divorced woman, even though Arab society in Israel today has a high percentage of women who are single or divorced and are independent both financially and socially. The children's literature ignores this type of women and portrays only the classic female character—the traditional, conservative woman.

The study also examined the occupations ascribed to women in children's literature. Women in the stories are preschool teachers or school teachers, with the exception of one story in which a female character is the environment minister. There are no female characters with other professions—doctors, pharmacists, or lawyers—even though these professions are common among Arab women.

In summary, the study's findings show that children's literature in Arabic continues to portray a traditional and conservative society with a dichotomous division of gender roles between men and women; a society in which women cannot fulfill themselves in a manner that is equal to that of men. Authors who write for children and educators need to be aware of this situation and act to change it, so that children's literature will portray the changing reality and will foster egalitarian thinking among the children.

**MANAR SALAME** has a Ph.D in children's literature in Arab society from Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. She is the chair of the Department of Preschool Education at the Sakhnin Academic College for Teacher Education, where she is also the coordinator of students' practical guided experience in preschools .

She is a lecturer on children's literature and topics related to preschool education. She also lectures on topics including shaping the educational environment, preschool curricula, preschool teaching aids, and evaluation of learning achievement in preschools. Dr. Salame is a member of the Committee for Preschool Education at the Mofet Institute and a member of the Committee for Choosing Children's Books for "**Maktabat Al-Fanoos**" program. She is the author of children's Books in Arabic: *Clever Maram*. Beit al-Huda, 2007 and *Nazira, the Driver*. Beit al-Huda, 2008.

## **ROTEM SCHAPIRA**

### **Repeated Mother-Child Shared Book-Reading Interactions and Preschoolers' Socio-Emotional Competence**

The study explored the relationship between repeated mother-child shared reading interactions and preschoolers' socio-emotional competence. Studies traditionally focus on the contribution of shared book reading to children's language and early literacy skills. However, shared book reading interactions also have the potential to advance children's socio-emotional development. Early socio-emotional competence is related to children's well being and predicts future social relationships and quality of life. Children learn about social relationships through a variety of experiences within their family and society. There is evidence that parent-child conversations that focus on emotions (e.g. reminiscing an event) predict children's socio-emotional understanding. Within the Western socio-cultural context, parent-child shared book reading is a natural, everyday interaction. Children's books often focus on interactions between characters, and as such,

“invite” discourse on socio-emotional situations and events. Parents often read the same book to their children multiple times and these repeated readings facilitate rich, pleasurable, and teachable interactions between parents and children. The purpose of the current study was to predict children’s socio-emotional competence based on the characteristics of mothers’ mediation and the child’s contribution to the conversation during and following repeated readings of a book.

Participants were 50 children, aged 4-5 years and their mothers. Within a two-week period participants were videotaped at their homes during three shared book reading interactions of a previously unknown book (dealing with a socio-emotional issue). The conversations during and following the readings were transcribed and analyzed. The analysis focused on the characteristics of mother-child socio-emotional conversation (e.g., socio-emotional aspects of the characters, the plot, and the child’s life) and general talk (e.g., description, explanations of situation). Children’s socio-emotional understanding (i.e., knowledge of emotions, social understanding, coherence and empathy) was evaluated using direct measures within the preschool. For control purposes, the child’s level of language was also evaluated.

The primary findings regarding the nature of the interactions demonstrated that during repeated book readings mothers tend to provide more general mediation during the first reading and more socio-emotional mediation during the second and third readings. Similarly, children contribute more to the socio-emotional conversation during the second and third readings compared to the first. The nature of mothers’ mediation predicted children’s socio-emotional understanding while taking into account the mothers’ education and the children’s language level. Specifically, mothers’ socio-emotional mediation predicted children’s providing socio-emotional reasons, social understanding, coherence, and developmental empathy.

We conclude that parents play a meaningful role in mediating and advancing their children’s socio-emotional understanding. Children’s books (the plot, the characters, and the relations between them) encourage conversation surrounding socio-emotional issues. The present study demonstrates that the nature of the conversation during and following repeated readings predicts children’s socio-emotional development. The intimate daily interaction of parent and child during book reading serves as a repeated opportunity to teach children about the socio-emotional world in which we live. Similarly, children’s participation in the book reading process is valuable. The characteristics of the child’s conversation contribute significantly to his/her socio-emotional understanding. It is therefore important to inspire children to be involved in the conversation. Repeated readings, when children are already familiar with the plot, the characters, and the illustrations, allow parents to involve their children and encourage them to be full partners during the reading and the conversation afterwards. Children’s participation in the conversation serves as an opportunity for them to practice and learn about emotions and the day-to-day social situations with which they need to contend. Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Dorit Aram.

**ROTEM SCHAPIRA** is a lecturer and Pedagogical Counselor at the Department of Early Education at Levinsky College of Teacher Education in Tel Aviv, Israel. She has currently completed her Ph.D. at the School of Education at Tel Aviv University. She runs training and evaluation programs on book reading to low-SES children. Additionally, she lectures and runs workshops for preschool teachers and parents in her current research area: book reading and children’s social-emotional competence.

## **MARIE-LYNE SMADJA**

### **Teachers’ References to Theory-of-Mind in Three Storybook Contexts**

Theory of Mind (ToM) is defined as the ability to understand, explain and predict human behavior by attributing mental states (e.g., thoughts, knowledge, intentions, desires and emotions) to self and others (Meltzoff, 2011) and is an essential aspect of people’s social understanding. Shared reading is recognized as being valuable for ToM development (Adrián, Clemente and Villanueva, 2007). The majority of previous studies focused on mothers’ mediation during shared reading with children and showed that they refer to ToM aspects in their conversations about books with children. Preschool teachers in Western countries regularly read and tell storybooks to children. Yet there is very little research about their reference to ToM while doing so.

The current study investigated and compared how preschool teachers use storybooks as a tool for discussing ToM topics with 4- to 5-year-old children in three different storybook contexts: (1) storybook reading, where the teacher reads the story’s text to the children; (2) storybook reconstruction, in which the teacher is familiar with the book’s text but reconstructs the story to the children using a wordless version of the book; and (3) storybook telling, in which the teacher uses a wordless version of the book to tell the story. These three

contexts differ in their reliance on the book's text and illustrations and might therefore reveal differences in teachers' conversations with children on mental states.

The participants included 100 Hebrew-speaking preschool (female) teachers from 100 Ministry of Education preschools, randomly selected from lists of preschools from five districts in central Israel provided by the Ministry. The teachers introduced and discussed three picture books with small groups of five children. We selected books that were new to all the participants and included a cognitive mental-state theme – namely, the main character's false belief. Teachers' use of mental-state terms and reference to the book's mental-state themes were coded.

The findings indicate that the teachers used more mental-state terms, especially cognitive mental states (e.g., think and know) during telling, compared to the contexts of reconstruction and reading, and more during reconstruction than during reading. They also used more emotion terms (e.g., happy, sad, disappointed) during telling than during reading, and used more desire terms (e.g., wants, prefers) during reconstruction and telling than during reading. Additionally, they referred to the books' false belief themes more during reconstruction and telling than during reading. We also analyzed teachers' mental-state comments on the books' illustrations and found that they used more mental-state terms and referred more to false belief during telling than in the other two contexts, and more during reconstruction than during reading. While the benefits of shared reading have been widely acknowledged by researchers and educators, the current study highlights the unique nature of each of the three contexts (reading, reconstructing and telling) and especially indicates the contribution of storybook telling and reconstruction to preschool teachers' conversations with children about mental states. Shared reading allows teachers to rely both on the book's text and illustrations while discussing the book with children. Additionally, storybook reading exposes children to books' mental-state terms, thus enriching their mental-state vocabulary. Storybook reconstruction allows teachers to rely on the book's text which they read before presenting the story to the children, while referring to the illustrations and flexibly elaborating on the story's events and mental states. Storybook telling is challenging because the teachers have to create a coherent story based only on the book's illustrations. Yet, it allows them to balance flexibly between the book's illustrations and their own oral narrative as well as between the action and mental-state levels, and to adapt the telling and discussion to the children's interests and characteristics. Incorporating all three contexts into teachers' pedagogical practice can improve and enrich children's engagement in meaningful conversations about ToM and social interactions, and add to the learning and pleasure they derive from books.

Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Margalit Ziv and Prof. Dorit Aram.

**MARIE-LYNE SMADJA**, Ph.D, is a senior lecturer at the School of Education, the Center of Academic Studies in Or Yehuda, Israel. She is a researcher on Theory of Mind topics at the School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Israel.

## **YA'ARA SOKOLOVSKY**

### **Mother-Child Interaction of a Picture Book and Folktale in the Ethiopian Community in Israel**

Storytelling interactions in the Ethiopian-Israeli community were examined by focusing on two specific storytelling interactions: the storytelling of a wordless picture book and the telling of an Ethiopian folktale. Ethiopian Jews came to Israel from a primarily oral literacy culture and encountered difficulties in mediating written literacy to their children. A generational gap of literacy developed between parents who grew up in Ethiopia and their children raised in Israel. Ethiopian folktales are known to be told orally in Ethiopian culture. The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of mother-child interaction during the storytelling of a wordless picture book and an Ethiopian folktale, to learn the differences between them and see if the mothers have a telling style that goes beyond a genre. It was expected that the folktales would serve as a cultural bridge between mothers and children that would remove the barrier of written literacy, thereby enabling mothers to share with their children stories not requiring "written" books.

The cohort included 40 mother-child dyads from the Krayot region in Israel. Children ranged in age from 59-90 months ( $M=70.20$ ,  $SD=10.67$ ). All the families spoke Hebrew with the children at home, and as a result it is the only language the children knew. Most of the mothers were born in Ethiopia (37 out of 40) and came to Israel at a maximum age of 28. All the mothers had heard Ethiopian oral folktales as children. Some of the mothers had books as young girls while most did not. A home meeting was filmed where mothers were asked to tell their children stories from a wordless picture book (to neutralize reading difficulty) and a folktale they remember from youth. Half of the mothers told the picture book first and then told the folktale. The other

half of the group told the folktale first and then the picture book. Interactions were transcribed and analyzed in terms of general interaction measures (e.g., number of turns), mediation style (e.g., questions, elaborations, relating the story to the child's life, mental terms) and mother-child relation measures (e.g., eye contact). Mother and child language level was assessed, as well as the children's comprehension of the stories.

Results showed different mother-child patterns in the two contexts: picture book and folktale storytelling. In the picture book context, children participated more in the interaction and their mothers gave them more positive feedback than in the folktale context. In the folktale context, mothers told most of the story without including the children in the conversation. They elaborated and used high-order questions and mental state discourse more than in the folktale context. Without a book to draw their joint attention, mothers and children used more eye contact throughout the folktale context. When controlling for mothers' education and language levels, there were still differences between the two contexts showing that the mothers' mediation was higher during the folktale context. They used higher-order questions and elaborated more in this context. Additionally, we found that in terms of turns' pattern, eye contact and mental state discourse, mothers have a style that they use in both contexts. The child's comprehension of the story did not correlate with any of the interaction measures, but it correlated with the child's language level.

The results emphasize the advantages of both the picture book and the folktale context when told by Ethiopian-Israeli mothers. Although folktales were found to incorporate a less sharing style, the mothers' mediation level in that context exceeded the mothers' mediation level in the picture book context. The style in which folktales are told exhibits the traditional Ethiopian cultural values of respect for adults. Folktales do not require written literacy knowledge; they can therefore contribute to children's development as well as to preserving and imparting the Ethiopian heritage and to strengthening the parents as educators.

Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Dorit Aram.

**YAARA SOKOLOVSKY** is a speech therapist currently working with population with special needs: hearing deficits, learning disabilities and with children and families of low socio-economic status. Her M.A. thesis dealt with oral storytelling and shared book reading of mothers and children in the Ethiopian community in Israel, comparing these two narratives.

## **NEKTARIOS STELLAKIS**

### **Projects and Good Practices Promoting Reading in Multicultural and Multilingual Environments**

"Literacy is defined as the comprehensive aptitude to understand, use and reflect on written language forms in order to achieve personal and social fulfilment. It goes beyond the cognitive components of reading (i.e. decoding of words and text comprehension) to reach other aspects dealing with motivation for, and engagement in written materials" (Erydice, 2011: 7). While the teaching of the decoding skills is the main scope of the first grades of primary school, early childhood education plays a crucial role in strengthening children's motivation to read. Developing positive attitudes toward reading from a very early age seems to be of critical importance for children to become lifelong and avid readers. Shared book reading of both fiction and nonfiction books relates to children's vocabulary size, elaborated or extended discourse and print concept knowledge. But since not all family environments could be characterized as supportive ones, special policies and intervention programs should be addressed for those children who come from the more vulnerable, marginalized or less privileged backgrounds, as well as for those children who come from backgrounds different from the dominant linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

Current societies are multicultural and teachers are called to teach children who are more diverse than ever before in their backgrounds. Even though in most countries teaching in the official language is the norm, UNESCO strongly supports mother-tongue instruction in early childhood and primary education. Children who are nonnative speakers are considered much more likely to fail to learn to read. Establishing a safe classroom environment, which is characterized by positive relationships and play seems to be the key for the inclusion of learners from diverse backgrounds. We do know that school success is dependent on verbal abilities and reading. On the other hand, research has failed to provide a complete description of what could be a quality literacy program for children from diverse backgrounds. It is obvious that play and interaction with native language speaking children is important. Moreover, for those children who speak a language other than that of communication and instruction, exposure to book reading and, especially, one-to-one book readings seems to enhance vocabulary development and comprehension. But for those teachers who have no aides or volunteers in their classrooms, this practice, which is the most beneficial of all, is simply not possible.

For that reason we developed a program named “Reading Team,” members of which were students in their fourth year of study in the Early Childhood Department of the University of Patras. These students visited a kindergarten class one day per week and read fiction books to small groups and individual children. Students had been taught about the importance of conversation during reading. Children were encouraged to predict, to explain, to comment or to connect the story’s episodes with their own lives. According to the teachers’ evaluation this initiative was very successful, especially for those children who had language difficulties or were speakers of a language other than the official one. The students reported that they gained a lot of knowledge about language development and early literacy practices in early childhood education. Finally, the children’s parents accepted this initiative with enthusiasm and some of them participated in reading aloud or narrating stories from their countries.

**NEKTARIOS STELLAKIS** is assistant professor at the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, Greece. He has studied Primary as well as Early Childhood Education in Greece. He has an M.A. in Language Acquisition from Essex University, UK and a Ph.D. in Educational Sciences from the University of Patras. His research deals mainly with early literacy, written language development, learning spelling, family literacy, and in-service kindergarten teachers’ training. He is Regional Vice-President of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEPE) for Europe.

## **AVIVA SVERDLOV**

### **Teachers’ Beliefs and Self-Reported Practices: Book Immersion and Other Literacy Goals**

This study developed in light of the publication of a National Early Literacy Curriculum which defined the required content and expected literacy achievements for 3-6 year-old children. Kindergarten teachers (k-teachers) found themselves trapped between supporters of the changes and those who complained about the tendency to make kindergarten more academic by emphasizing alphabetic skills that were previously not considered to be an integral part of the preschool curriculum. Our study examined the beliefs of k-teachers with reference to the goals and instructional methods in the area of literacy, and their understandings of the expectations of parents and the educational system regarding these goals. We further examined whether differences exist between k-teachers based on the type of kindergarten (religious or secular) in which they work or the socioeconomic status (SES) of the children’s families. The participants included 120 k-teachers. The k-teachers’ beliefs and practices for advancing literacy were assessed using questionnaires. Twelve k-teachers also participated in an interview.

The results show that the k-teachers regard the advancement of children’s oral language, communication skills and the promotion of *book immersion* (i.e., fostering a desire to listen to books and increasing acquaintance with books), as more important than the advancement of alphabetic skills and emergent writing and reading. They believe that parents and education system representatives think that promoting oral skills, including book reading, is less important and that the most important goal is the child’s advancement in alphabetic skills. The k-teachers evaluated *book immersion* as the least important literacy goal in kindergarten to parents. However, they believe that parents from middle-high SES attribute greater importance to *book immersion* than parents from middle-low SES. K-teachers’ self-reports regarding literacy activities in their classes indicate that they currently promote all areas of literacy intensively. Their beliefs regarding parents’ attitudes toward *book immersion* do not affect their practices. The single most frequently reported activity that actually takes place in kindergartens on a daily basis is “reading books to children.” In their interviews, the k-teachers emphasized that children need to learn literacy in developmentally appropriate playful ways, by avoiding school teaching methods. K-teachers referred to reading books and to follow-up on reading activities as a proper “kindergarten pedagogy.” According to the k-teachers’ self-reports, a significant increase in literacy-related activities has occurred in kindergartens since the endorsement of the early literacy curriculum. The frequency of activities increased across all literacy areas, including those that were “traditionally” considered to be essential components of the kindergarten curriculum, such as book reading. About a third of the k-teachers reported that they are “more engaged now” in activities which promote *book immersion*. During the interviews the k-teachers explained that the training and guidance they had received in the process of implementing the new curriculum enriched their knowledge and raised their awareness of the importance of literacy as whole.

In conclusion, the present research findings indicate that k-teachers who needed to cope with substantial changes upon publication of the new literacy curriculum responded by adopting a pragmatic approach that enabled them to meet the new requirements coming from parents and the education system, while

continuing to maintain the spirit of kindergarten pedagogy. Although they increased the engagement with alphabetic skills, which were formerly associated with reading instruction in first grade, they continued to endorse book reading as the most frequent literacy activity taking place in the kindergarten. Dissertation was done under the guidance of Prof. Iris Levin and Prof. Dorit Aram.

**AVIVA SVERDLOV** is a lecturer at Sha'anun Academic Religious Teachers' College and Pedagogical Consultant for several early childhood programs. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from Tel Aviv University (2012). Her research deals with kindergarten teachers' educational beliefs and focuses on their beliefs and practices concerning literacy education in kindergarten. Dr. Sverdlov previously (1996-2009) held the position of Supervisor at the Preschool Educational Division and Curriculum Department of the Israeli Ministry of Education and was responsible for developing preschool curriculum and providing guidance for its implementation. She served as coordinator of preschool curriculum committees established by the Ministry of Education, such as the committee headed by Prof. Levin – *A Foundation toward Reading and Writing in Kindergarten*, and a committee headed by Dr. Shoval – *Physical Education in Preschool and Kindergarten*. Dr. Sverdlov is co-author and editor of numerous guidebooks for preschool educators on a variety of educational subjects.

## **WILLIAM H. TEALE**

### **Parents and Teachers Reading with Preschoolers: The “Whats” and “Hows” Indicated by Research and Practice**

The reasons for focusing a conference on reading, preschool children and disadvantaged communities are varied: to help foster children's social understanding, social-emotional competence, language/literacy skills or knowledge of the world; to promote healthy early development; to reduce the “achievement gap” between poor and more affluent economic strata in society; and more. This presentation presents conclusions from a research review about parent-child and teacher-child read-aloud interactions as well as young children's independent, emergent readings. It also considers research related to a variety of reading promotion programs for preschool children. Finally, it draws upon insights from work that I have done in preschool classrooms in Chicago and with various community and public agencies concerned with early childhood literacy development. The following points are discussed in the talk, accompanied by associated research data and/or examples from home and/or school settings:

- Adult readers have different read-aloud styles, and read-aloud style (1) directly impacts the nature of adult-child(ren) read-aloud interactions; and (2) is associated with the short-term effects on child comprehension.
- No particular read-aloud style can be thought of as the most effective, or best, style.
- Book genre, book format and book content significantly affect the language and social interactions between adults and children in read-alouds.
- There is little research information about the relationship between book quality and adult-child(ren) interactions in read-alouds.
- Adult book choice for read-alouds is an extremely important topic about which we have relatively little research information.
- Research has described the phenomenon of preschool children's emergent reading and has provided insight into developmental patterns of emergent reading, but the role of emergent reading in learning to read conventionally needs to be better understood.
- Preschool read-aloud and reading promotion campaigns have not significantly affected the achievement gap in the United States.
- We have precious little robust empirical data showing that reading promotion programs positively affect children's early literacy skills, later literacy skills or lifelong reading habits.

**WILLIAM H. TEALE** is Professor of Education, University Scholar, and Director of the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His work has focused on early literacy learning, the intersection of technology and literacy education, and children's and young adult literature. He has authored chapters in a wide variety of scholarly books and journals as well as publications for practitioners in schools and libraries. His research has been funded by the United States Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation, among other sources. From 2009-2013 he was principal investigator for three Early Reading First projects (<http://www.uic.edu/educ/erf/>) that implemented forward-looking preschool literacy

programs in some of Chicago's poorest neighborhood schools. As Director of the UIC Center for Literacy, he heads numerous projects that provide Head Start families with services that facilitate children's early development. He has served as consultant to school districts across the United States, public libraries and public television stations, and has presented papers and colloquia in over 25 countries around the world. He was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame in 2003 and served on the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association from 2011-2014. More information can be found at <http://education.uic.edu/faculty/128-william-teale> and <http://cfl.uic.edu>.

## **AMI VOLANSKY**

### **Policy Initiative to Improve Basic Skills of the Israeli Education System**

"Three Rs" is an old notion in the history of education. It refers to the foundations of a basic skills-orientated education program within schools: reading, writing and arithmetic.

During the last three decades, prominent initiatives were taken by the Israeli education system. Among them we can mention: a governmental proposal in 1989 for school reform, based on the idea that Grade 1 will start at the age of 4; the whole language reading method of the 1990s; departure from the whole language method and the return to the phonetic reading method; early preparation for school of the early childhood system from the age of 5; a more rigorous initiative of early preparation of basic skills from the age of 3 since 2008; and research findings on the impact of class size and basic skills during the last three decades.

Special attention will be given in the lecture to numerous research reports which have been submitted by several scholars on the acquisition of reading skills in order to improve policy implementation on this issue.

**AMI VOLANSKY** is the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education and a senior staff member at Tel Aviv University, School of Education and at the Center of Academic studies. His research focused on education policy including school reforms, school leadership, school-based management and higher-education policy

His recent books are *Academia in a Changing Environment: Higher Education Policy in Israel 1952-2004*; *The Pendulum Syndrome: Centralisation and Decentralisation of Education in England and Wales* (2003); and *School-Based Management: An International Perspective* (2003), co-edited with Isaac Friedman. He has published dozens of articles and monographs in his fields of expertise.

Prof. Volansky is former Deputy Director-General for Policy Planning at the Israeli Ministry of Education, and served as adviser on higher education policy for four previous Ministers of Education.





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