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Introduction

The first Members' Briefing Paper was published by the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood in 2002. When the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood became the Equity and Childhood Program, within the Melbourne Graduate School of Education’s Youth Research Centre on 1 May 2011, the Equity and Childhood Program continued to publish the Papers, which were distributed quarterly to members, until 2013 when publication of the Papers concluded.

The aim of the Papers was to introduce readers to a particular topic or current issue and provide readers with viewpoints and resources about equity, social justice and children’s rights in early childhood. They often included a ‘Further Resources’ or a ‘Further Reading’ list so that readers were able follow up and learn more about the topic covered.

Topics have included presenting research findings, exploring theoretical perspectives new to the early childhood field, how to access resources for social justice and equity, children’s rights and participation and staff, family and community partnerships with Papers written by academics, researchers, practitioners, students and advocates. This is to name only a small sample of the diverse topics from authors that have been covered over the twelve years of publication of the Papers.

The Papers were provided as a member benefit to those that were members of the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood and later the Equity and Childhood Program. The Papers have been a resource for those in or interested in the field of early childhood and we are delighted to now make a selection of Papers available in this collection.
Matthew is busily at work stuffing small wooden figures into the open space created by the crosshatch design of his block building. The structure, like several others in this classroom bustling with five and six year-olds, towers above the children. Sandra carefully sends other people down a slide that extends out from the lower floors of the building and reaches to the floor. A patchwork of small carpet samples has been assembled to cushion their arrival. Near the shelves Kassim is methodically stacking smaller blocks in piles of six and pushing them across the floor, destination as yet unknown.

These scenes are from a video made several weeks after the attack on the world Trade Centre on September 11th (2001). I recently showed the video to my graduate education students. They reported that their own students’ immediate responses to the events of September 11th had included requests to visit the school nurse with all manner of bodily aches and pains, expressions of fear for loved ones, and an overwhelming desire to get back to the routines that make school a safe, predictable place. Ten weeks after the events, the majority of my students reported that their schools were involved in a plethora of charity drives including walkathons, bake sales, and toy collections. A few noted that their own schools were the recipients of charity. In one case this had resulted in a pen-pal project with children from the Mid-West. In another, the school simply distributed a huge quantity of cuddly animals it had received without explanation.

Charity helps to ameliorate the conditions of those in need and to assuage our anxiety. But educators have an additional, far more difficult task - to help children make sense of their experience. Children have abundant curiosity about their world, including the buildings where they live and where many of their parents work, as Mathew, Sandra, and Kassim demonstrated in the video. It is the teacher’s job to see the potential for learning in children’s curiosity. For example, the Trade Centre collapse raises questions such as: how is a 7-acre site containing hundreds of floors cleared and where does the rubble go? Why are fires burning weeks after the collapse? Why are subway stations still closed and how is the Hudson River held back anyway? Here are the makings of a rich curriculum filled with science and social studies, math and literacy too. Soon after the evacuation slide seen in the video first appeared, the teacher brought in a newspaper article about newly proposed emergency strategies, including rope slides, in order to support and extend their thinking.

My years of helping teachers to talk about difficult social issues such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and community violence have taught me that young children often respond to such issues long after the formal, adult-led discussions about them have ended. Their responses often appear in play and with concrete materials, undoubtedly mediated by individual personalities and life circumstances. However, in our rush to get kids reading, we forget all too easily that young children still learn in and through the body. They can re-present what they know, solve problems, and ask questions using not only words, but also blocks and sand, paint and clay, wood and other construction materials. One of my graduate students complained about the apathy with which some of her six year-olds approach their daily journal writing. She expressed frustration that they were not able to use detail, develop full storylines, or even...
identify stories that they want to tell. I worry, however, if it is the students who lack imagination.

I do not want to minimize the human tragedies suffered by so many on September 11th. I believe, however, that it is the educator’s responsibility to explore with students how society is responding to these difficult events - from managing the physical destruction at ground zero to pursuing the war in Afghanistan. And, yes, this may mean encountering difficult emotions and unanswerable questions in the class. We will be so much the wiser for acknowledging our ignorance, serving as models in our search for understanding and in our willingness to listen to the children.

© Jonathon Silin 2002 Visiting Scholar CEIEC, 2002 & Graduate Faculty Member, Bank St College, New York, New York.

FURTHER RESOURCES

On the web
Internet sites concerned with talking to children about controversial issues are predominantly from the USA. Many of them focus on the aftermath of the events of September 11 2001, although the sites may have existed before that date. Obviously, these sites have a strong American flavour, but much of their advice is more-or-less transferable to other cultures. (N.B. The addresses are accurate at April 2002, but may change at a later date.)

Talking With Kids About Tough Issues is a national (USA) campaign run by Children Now (see below) and the Kaiser Family Foundation (a health policy organization). This is a very comprehensive site, associated with a series of booklets (in English and Spanish) and a bi-monthly "e-mail tips" service, together with an organizer's toolkit for people who want to bring the campaign to their community. Current foci include talking about sex, violence, HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcohol. There is a special section called "Dads talk with kids" (a collaboration with the National Fatherhood Initiative and the ESPN cable network); and there is currently a special section on talking with children about the Pentagon/World Trade Center attacks, which includes links to other relevant on-line resources.

This website has been established by US-based children's TV channel Nickelodeon, in conjunction with Talking With Kids (see above). It aims to support parents who want to talk to their children about tough issues, including sex and puberty; violence; alcohol, tobacco and drugs; respect; and media. It is supported by a brochure and links to a separate but related site (www.nick.com/your_world) specifically for children.

Children Now is a US-based child advocacy organization. This is a comprehensive site, which is supported by a free e-newsletter service, a links directory, a publications directory and an action alert service. Talking With Kids (see above) is a Children Now program and this site links to an essay - "Talking with kids about terrorism" - by Children Now president Lois Salisbury. Another program concerns children and media and, since much of our information about 'difficult issues' comes from the media, this could be an added resource. Currently, the media program features a report highlighting the lack of racial and gender diversity in video/computer games.

The Future of Children is a broad-ranging US policy/advocacy organization. It currently displays an extensive list of on-line sites for people who want to talk with children about disasters. Several of the sites include disasters and terrorism as part of a broader focus, offering resources in the more general areas of children's grief, traumas and anxieties.

Print resources

CEIEC MEMBERS’ ISSUES PAPERS provide members with viewpoints and resources on issues relevant to working for equity, social justice and children’s rights. If you have ideas for a CEIEC Members’ Issues Paper please contact Gayle Pung  CEIEC, University of Melbourne  Tel. 0383440958 Fax 0383440995  g.pung@unimelb.edu.au
Children's relationships with the media are the topic of continuing debate. One side of that debate claims that media messages can influence children (for good or ill), while the other says that children make up their own minds (sometimes with adults’ help) about what they experience - including the media. Paradoxically, each side of the debate claims that research supports its position, but both sides are right, because for each piece of research showing that the media influence young audiences, another shows that children’s relationships with the media are rarely that simple. Two features of that research preclude consensus on its topic: it rests on competing models of childhood; & it expresses competing research approaches.

Competing models of childhood preclude consensus on children & media.

Researchers interested in children & the media base their research on particular models of childhood (i.e. ways to think about it), some more influential than others. Much research about children’s relationships with the media rests on one of three models of childhood, each implying some questions & precluding others:

- **Childhood as a lost ‘golden age’**. Researchers who model children in this ‘nostalgic’ way ask, “How can children stay innocent & untainted by modern life – including the media – as we all were once?”

- **Children as ‘sponges’, uncritically soaking up messages from their environment**. Researchers who model children in this ‘passive’ way ask, “What does the media do to children?”

- **Children as ‘canny consumers’, discriminating between competing products & ideas in a free market**. Researchers who model children in this ‘active’ way ask, “What do children do with the media?”

Competition between different models of childhood precludes consensus on, “How do children relate to the media?”, because the meanings of “children” & “relate” depend on the questioner’s model of childhood.

Competing research approaches preclude consensus on children & media.

Researchers into children’s relationships with the media tend, in broad terms, to adopt either an essentialist or a constructivist approach. Essentialist researchers regard “children” & “media” as homogeneous categories. They don’t differentiate between children according to (e.g.) gender, class & race, because they regard children as – essentially – children; nor between different media (e.g. print versus television versus computers); nor between people's different relationships with them (e.g. as sources of information or of entertainment, or as ways to make friends). Thus, people concerned about (e.g.) the possible influence of violence on television differentiate neither between different types of young viewer nor between different representations, functions & consequences of violence. Researchers & commentators urge parents (one homogeneous social group) to increase their control over their children (another such group), claiming that the media (a homogeneous social category) threaten childhood (another such category). Indeed, “children & the media” is an essentialist research topic: it assumes & examines relationships between a homogeneous collection of institutions – “the media” & a homogeneous social group – “children”.

In contrast, constructivist researchers regard children’s relationships with the media as socially constructed &; therefore, as culturally & historically specific, rather than being timeless, ‘essential’ features. Consequently, they examine specific children’s relationships with specific media in specific circumstances, paying particular attention to the age, gender & class of the children they study. However, the constructivists’ focus on the differences between young audiences can divert
attention from their shared experiences of the media – principally, the increasing proliferation of a few children’s media ‘brands’ (e.g. Transformers, Harry Potter, Batman) over a multitude of products. Such proliferation impedes children from interpreting a product in their own way. Instead, products seem to impart meanings to young ‘consumers’.

In summary: any research about children & media combines a particular model of childhood with a particular research approach; researchers’ questions determine the answers they ‘discover’; & their questions reflect their model of childhood & their research approach. Thus, a researcher should ask not, “What do I want to know about children & media?” but “What can I learn about children & media if I adopt this particular research approach?”. Similarly, a commentator on children & media should ask not, “What does this research tell us about children & the media?”, but, “What does this research tell us about its approach?”. There can be no definitive answer to, “Do media products affect children?”, so we should instead ask, “How can we study children’s relationships with media products – & which way/s will tell us what we want to know?”.

(For a more detailed briefing, see Hughes, P. (2001) “From nostalgia to metatheory: researching children’s relationships with the media.” Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood. 2 (3) 354 – 367.)

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FURTHER RESOURCES

Book-length studies

Edited collections

Online resources
Australian Broadcasting Authority. www.aba.gov.au Peak regulator of Australian broadcasting, the ABA also commissions & publishes research, issues news releases & runs conferences. In Jan 02, it published “Children’s Television Viewing”, (Click “Australian content”, then “Children’s television viewing”)
Australian Children’s Television Foundation. http://www.actf.com.au Essentially a production company its web site houses public comments about media & young people. (see the website’s “Learning Centre”.) Communications Law Centre. http://www.comslaw.org.au Covers more than the legal aspects of media & communications, CLC undertakes, commissions & publishes research to promote public discussion. Department of Communication & the Arts. The federal government department responsible for regulating & controlling the media & communications industries in Australia. Useful for media releases, speeches, policy papers, etc.
Young Media Australia. http://www.youngmedia.org.au Young Media Australia is the trading name of the Australian Council for Children’s Film & Television - essentially, an advocacy organization that undertakes & publishes research about young people & media.

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Early childhood educators and carers who work in predominantly white programs sometimes assume that multicultural education is for others. After all, white children don’t face the ethnic stereotyping, discrimination or abuse that ‘others’ face, so what is there for their educators and carers to challenge and change? However, discrimination affects everyone. Despite the denials of teachers and parents, young children notice racial distinctions, attend to race-inflected images and assumptions, learn racist ideologies and express them in ways that exclude and demean children of colour.

Children’s initial wariness of people who look different from themselves and their carers may be fuelled by racial isolation and by negative stereotyping. However, if children learn to take others’ perspectives, they can accept differences and see groups of ‘others’ as individuals, not stereotypes. Such shifts in children’s perspectives depends on the norms and values they encounter in their family, peers, community and media. Open communication with families can help educators to learn their views on discrimination and multiculturalism and, if needed, to carefully and patiently challenge them. White children can develop racial biases and aversions because their in-group preferences are generally supported by the attitudes and values in their community. Early childhood centres can unconsciously support racial bias by, for example, employing predominantly white people as teachers and administrators and predominantly people of colour as support and maintenance staff, even while their curriculum espouses notions of respect and equality.

Children can communicate many ideas and stereotypes of race between themselves, but hide these conversations from adults, as they do conversations about guns and about sex. Thus, educators need to observe children carefully (e.g. are ‘white’ dolls preferred to ‘black’ ones?) without ‘pouncing’ on every racist remark, which risks driving the issues underground further. Educators can use their observations to develop curricula that challenge misperceptions, illustrate racial differences positively and highlight inequities. (Educators can then listen ‘unobtrusively’ to children’s reactions.) What follows are some anti-bias strategies for educators and carers who work with white children.

1. Developing authentic identities. Members of dominant groups readily assume that their ascendancy proves their innate superiority and/or rewards their hard work. This ignores the systematic inequities that determine our life chances from birth and it ignores individual white people’s very real differences in life chances associated with, e.g., their class and gender. Educators can challenge false senses of superiority by valuing people’s acts and contributions, not their appearance and possessions.

2. Exploring differences and similarities. White children need to explore and respect differences and similarities among white people. Even in relatively homogeneous centres, children can explore their diverse physical attributes (e.g. height, fingerprints, hair) and preferences (e.g. games, food, music, etc.), learning that they can agree on some things, disagree on others and still be friends. Children’s stories of events at home can show families doing similar things (e.g. meals, outings) in different ways. Subsequently, they can be introduced to other cultures – preferably, ones that they are likely to encounter in their broader communities. Books, projects, videos and visits by people from different cultures encourage children to feel comfortable and enriched by difference, rather than frightened by it.

3. Taking other people’s perspectives. Educators can encourage children to ‘read’ and care for each other (e.g. sending cards to sick friends); and to learn that different people see the world differently (e.g. playing games that rely on players having different information, such as card games, hide and seek). Children with a sense of superiority can find it hard to take others’ perspectives, but need to do so to participate in society, especially as perspective-taking is linked with a sense of fairness.

4. Seeing the world as our shared environment. This challenges the assumption that white people have a right to more resources than others. It starts by encouraging respect for the earth (e.g. by working on local environmental
problems), being aware of people who live in different environments and different conditions of wealth and seeing satellite photos of the world ‘as a whole’.

5. Thinking critically. White children need to learn how to identify and challenge stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in themselves and in their communities. Educators can help them to do this by encouraging them to discuss their perceptions of various ethnic groups; and to challenge them when they are discriminatory. White children may find it hard to identify racial stereotypes, as they haven’t felt their harmful impacts, so they could be asked to identify and explore gender stereotypes as a start. Further, children can be encouraged to be critical of deceptive or biased information and images more generally by, e.g., comparing a toy’s real attributes with those promised in its advertisements and packaging. They can learn to question ‘official’ information and develop their own ideas about the world (e.g. writing their own endings to stories and their own rules for the centre).

6. Learning about anti-racists, including white anti-racists. There are few resources with which to do this. However, educators can create their own stories from the burgeoning material on the Internet; they can invite activists to visit; and they can encourage children to build on these stories and visits by creating doll and puppet dramas about social justice.

Ultimately, the question of what to do when “all the kids are white” is not only a query about what to do with children in the classroom. Rather it is a long-term commitment to reflect on one’s life and circumstances and to reach beyond self-interest to develop a broader view of the world that embodies more connection with other groups and an acceptance of diminished privilege. We must honestly explore our own racial attitudes and uncover and challenge previously unexamined fears, prejudices and misunderstandings. This requires a commitment to work - both with other whites and with people of color - to eliminate racism and to build more equitable communities and institutions. People asking “What do we do with white children?” must connect with each other – no-one can do this work alone. Together, we can help children to see themselves as participants and change agents in a larger and more inclusive world.

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Expanded version: www.RootsforChange.net

RESOURCES


CEIEC MEMBERS’ ISSUES PAPERS provide members with viewpoints and resources about equity, social justice and children’s rights. Please send suggestions for Issues Papers to Patrick Hughes at the CEIEC: patrickh@deakin.edu.au
Relationships with families are part of early childhood staff’s daily work but it seems that building those relationships into productive partnerships has its challenges. Throughout the international field of early childhood education, good communication between parents and staff is seen as an essential to high-quality care and education of young children. However, researchers have reported consistently that staff–parent regularly falter. The relationships are often strained and not always meaningful, with staff struggling to know how best to communicate with parents, often anxious about it and reluctant to do it.

What researchers say about why relationships falter
Researchers have offered various explanations for those problems, including inadequate staff training in communication, cultural differences between staff and parents and conflicting views over what is appropriate education for young children. Our own research has found that several of the problems in staff-parent relationships arise because many early childhood staff see their developmental knowledge of the child as more important than parents’ knowledge of the child and see ‘parent involvement’ as a way to rectify parents’ ignorance about what and how to teach their children (see Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000; 2001). We refer to these dynamics in relationships between staff and parents as the dynamics of knowledge/power relations.

Partnerships and the dynamics of knowledge/power relations
Partnerships between staff and families are most likely to thrive when knowledge/power relationships between staff and parents are equitable. Equitable knowledge/power relationships are founded respect for diverse ways of understanding children and recognition by staff that families have valid and valuable knowledge of children that can support them in their work with children. Staff can support the development of more equitable knowledge/power relationships with families by critically reflecting on whether and how they use their knowledge to support and/or silence other people. These questions can help such reflection: Who benefits from my use of my knowledge? Whose voice do I privilege in my relationships with families – parents, staff, children? Whose knowledge of the child is valued in my service? Whose knowledge of the child is silenced in my service? How are the voices of different families and their knowledge of the child welcomed into my service.

Staff can help form more equitable knowledge/power relationships between staff and parents by actively welcoming new parents to the service, sharing information equitably with all parents, creating appropriate spaces and with sufficient time allowed to show respect for the views and ideas of parents when you invite them. These simple principles provide a solid foundation from which to build partnerships with parents in which equitable knowledge/power relationships can grow and thrive over time. They are discussed in more detail in what follows.

Positively welcome parents who are new to your centre
Ensure that new parents know how to enter the centre before they arrive – tell them where they can park, how the child-safety lock works, where the ‘front’ door is and what security codes, if any, they need to enter the centre. Tell them what will happen when they first arrive and whom they should ask for when they arrive. Nominate a staff member who has time to can ‘meet and greet’ new families for the first days they attend. Ensure that parents from diverse backgrounds recognise their own culture and language when they enter the centre. E.g. ‘Welcome’ signs in different languages, images of different types of families (single-parent, two-parent, gay, lesbian, blended and extended families).

Explain how your centre operates, to lessen new parents’ anxieties
Plan time to share information with new parents in their first few days. Explain the routines and rituals; show them what happens at the beginning and end of the day what happens when they are not there. Tell them how to share information with you and how to ask questions if they are unsure or uncomfortable about their child’s care. Explain whether and how they can bringing family/cultural traditions and celebrations into the centre. Introduce them to the forms of communication you use on a regular basis, e.g. newsletters, meetings and notice boards.

Prepare to welcome parents from diverse social and cultural backgrounds
Children have different types of family. For example, some children will live with their mother and a father, others will live with only one parent and still others will spend part of the week with their mother and part of the week with their
father. Some children will have two mothers or two fathers. Some children will live with members of their extended family such as grandparents, uncles and aunts. Knowing who is in the child’s family is an important part of knowing a child and you can prepare yourself for this diversity by having images and stories of diverse families in your centre and by building your own awareness of family diversity. Families also differ in their beliefs - for example, what are appropriate activities for their child, what is important to their child’s well being, and what their child’s early education should accomplish. Your knowledge of how best to care for and support children can grow and deepen if you learn about families’ diverse preferences and expectations. When a disagreement or conflict is between families and staff from different cultural or ‘racial’ backgrounds it is particularly important to reflect on the knowledge-power relations that might have produced the conflict or disagreement and look for solutions that will produce more equitable knowledge-power relations.

**Invite parents’ contributions, knowledge and ideas on caring for their child**

Family members’ special knowledge about their child can help you in your work, so ask about, e.g., their child’s likes, dislikes, routines and rituals. (Some centres ask such questions on their enrolment forms, others ask informally.) Very little research features parents’ views on their relationships with staff, but it shows that parents enjoy discussing issues of concern and meeting other parents; they want to spend as much time as possible in the centre with their children; and they value informal, positive, open and friendly communication with staff – especially parents who are shy and lack confidence in formal meetings.

Parents appreciate it when staff raise any concerns with them at a special time, away from the daily bustle; and they feel more able to talk to staff at the end of the day if their child has been involved in a quiet activity and is relaxed. Parents have said that they have been most satisfied with their child’s early education when staff discuss their child’s progress and any concerns in regular contact with parents; when staff take parents’ views into consideration and deal with their complaints; and when staff make special arrangements to deal with their child’s needs.

Three principles of anti-bias education can help staff to communicate equitably with parents. First, try to offer all parents equal access to you and time with you, check your own reactions to parents for possible stereotypes, avoid discriminatory language at all times and use inclusive terms for family members such as ‘parent’ or ‘guardian’ rather than ‘father’ or ‘mother’. Second, provide all parents with the same basic information about the centre and encourage them to share information with you, but be aware that parents from different cultures may not be comfortable about disclosing personal family information. Provide information in languages other than English. Finally, tell all parents about current/planned ways they can become involved in the centre and ensure that all (including people with disabilities) can participate actively in meetings.

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**Further Resources**


National Parent Information Network - A (USA) website for parents and staff. http://npin.org

UK Parents. A (UK) website for parents: www.ukparents.co.uk

I’d like to rethink ‘observation’ in early childhood education to ensure that it:

- addresses the sources of social injustice, including gender, ‘race’, culture, class and sexuality
- includes parents’ and children’s understandings of social justice.

Observing children is fundamental to early childhood education in Australia. For example, it’s a basis for curriculum and it’s an indicator of quality in the Australian federal government’s Quality Assurance and Accreditation system (2001) and in state regulations such as the Victorian Children’s Service Regulations (1998). For the last fifty years, the professional early childhood literature has prescribed observation’s purposes (assessing children’s learning, development and behaviour as a prelude to developing it); and format (who should record what). However, that literature rarely examines observation’s theoretical, political and historical foundations in European rationalism. Further, there is little research showing that observation leads to quality and, more importantly, to equity.

Thus, my rethinking is based on some Rarely Asked Questions (RAQs) about observation.

- Who observes children and how and why do they do it?
- What are their observations’ theoretical foundations?
- What are their observations’ practical/political implications for children and families?

Traditionally, a good observer is objective, i.e. s/he has no personal involvement in her/his practice, but, instead, merely ‘receives’ data from the world. For example, when a traditional observer observes a child, s/he merely observes what is there to be observed – the facts about that child. The only voice s/he needs to listen to is her/his own. She needn’t listen to what (e.g.) parents or the child have to say, because she is a trained, professional observer, whereas they’re biased.

In contrast, a postmodern observer is a subjective and ‘active’ creator of data. For example, when a postmodern observer observes a child, her/his gaze is selective, partial, and (sometimes) contradictory; and rather than merely observing facts about the child, s/he ‘actively’ constructs what s/he sees in particular social, political and historical contexts. S/he does need to listen to other voices, as well as her/his own; and s/he needs to reflect critically on who they are and, therefore, what ‘baggage’ they bring to their observations.

Accepting that observers – and, therefore, observations – are always and inevitably subjective can be a start to exploring the fascinating issue of how an observer’s identity – a combination of factors such as their gender; culture, class, race, sexuality and lived experiences – influences how they see the world. For example, how does a particular early childhood educator’s identity ‘see’ a particular child. Further, accepting that the observers’ subjective qualities makes it hard to talk of ‘the truth’ about a child, because it implies that the observer, the child and their interactions can never be described and defined in a fixed and final fashion. Instead, each is uncertain and, sometimes, contradictory as it shifts and changes.

To reflect, question, challenge and create change around and through our observations, we need to understand how and why it exists as it does now. We need to identify observation’s (often unspoken) theoretical foundations, i.e. who, what, how and why we observe. Further, to create approaches to observation that explicitly include principles of social justice, we need to reflect on our own theories of the child; and on whether and how our observations of the child address the sources of social injustice, including culture, race, class, gender and sexuality. We also need to recognize and acknowledge how parents think about their child(ren) and our attitudes towards them, asking reflective questions such as

- Does ‘teaching’ parents what to observe about their child make them into apprentices of early childhood professionals? How does this happen? Who benefits from it? Who doesn’t?
- What might I learn about the child, the world and myself when I accept that parents’ knowledge is valid and important?

Further reading

The inquiry
The Australian Education Union is holding an inquiry into “the provision of universal access to high quality preschool education across Australia”. The inquiry was conducted by researcher Kathy Walker. It received submissions from organisations and individuals and conducted forums and meetings round the country. It will report later this year.

The AEU is to be congratulated for running this inquiry, but its terms of reference will limit its ability to produce a vision for the future of early childhood in Australia. Setting “preschool” education outside early childhood as a whole is a major limitation that will only lead to piecemeal results. The idea of “a preschool year” being somehow different from any other year of a child’s early childhood is educationally, ethically, and politically unsustainable.

The inquiry was launched in Melbourne in October 2003 with a national forum, where invited participants made oral and written submissions. Two members of the inquiry’s Reference Group – Margaret Reynolds and Rosslyn Noonan – spoke powerfully of the importance of seeing early childhood in a holistic way. Rosslyn Noonan, New Zealand’s Human Rights Commissioner, made the case for early childhood education and care as a human right. She also told how early childhood educators in New Zealand were responsible for bringing early childhood from the margins to centre stage of the national education agenda over the last few decades. One of the most significant results of this work is the unity of the early childhood sector in New Zealand, encompassing all provision, including kindergarten, day care, play groups and Te Kohanga Reo.

Why just “preschool”? 
The inspiration of our neighbour’s achievement was echoed by almost all participants at the forum, and points to a major shortcoming of the inquiry. By specifically limiting the inquiry to “preschool education”, other parts of the early childhood sector in Australia are ignored. As speaker after speaker noted, the artificial demarcation between ‘preschool’ and other forms of early childhood provision, does a disservice to both children and their families. There isn’t even a unified “preschool year”, as each state in Australia has a different school starting age. It’s hard to justify privileging the “preschool year”, as there is little research evidence that the preschool year is any more important than the years preceding it. Indeed some argue that the birth to three years are the most critical in terms of children’s future life chances.

The forum also highlighted the need to move away from a developmental framework if we are to embrace a rights perspective on early childhood - a vision of children not as passive dependents but as active learners and citizens. As one participant observed, the inherent white, middle class, European bias of developmental ‘norms’ poses indigenous children as ‘deficient’ from an early age, setting them up to fail from the start. A rights perspective sees children as active participants and agents within their social, cultural and political contexts.

“Preschool” education is a problematic term in itself. It defines children in terms of what will happen in the future rather than in the present – it sees children in terms of their future, not their present. Further, it is but one part of the intricate jigsaw of the early childhood sector. Early childhood services encompass different types of provision and can meet a range of needs – from providing early learning opportunities for children, through meeting families’ needs to engage in paid work to building civil society through community participation. Such multiple perspectives of early childhood are complementary, not contradictory.

The Australian Education Union inquiry focuses on the links between “preschool education” and school education and while this is an important issue, how can we prevent preschool being swallowed-up by the larger school system? A strong, united early childhood sector is far more likely to build true partnerships with other parts of our education system to build a united early childhood sector – where a range of properly funded services meet our communities’ diverse needs.

The AEU has the potential to contribute significantly to that process by enabling and assisting early childhood educators (whether we call them teachers or not) to become highly skilled and qualified and to enjoy good wages and conditions. The AEU inquiry is an opportunity to call for early childhood to become a national priority and for the ending of the present demarcations between state and federal governments, between care and education, and between TAFE and university teacher education.

Further information about the inquiry:
In 1998, I began six years of research into how early childhood educators teach about Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures. Slowly, I became slowly aware that ‘other’ cultures were subjects of extensive scrutiny, while white understandings and perspectives remained unexplored. I realized also that the lack of any systematic exploration of white cultural perspectives and understandings had left them invisible - while still highly influential, with the result that few people in early childhood feel a need to explore and shift white understandings of ourselves and our curricula to allow for the equitable inclusion of others. My research has shown that early childhood staff who ask themselves whether and how to address cultural and racial diversity face three major issues: the invisibility of white as a cultural group; individualism; and the lack of genuine inclusion.

The invisibility of white as a cultural group

White cultures have presented their particular understandings of themselves and their worlds as universal. For example, white cultures present their particular understandings of science, growth, development, creation and of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours as applicable to everyone; and many white people regard them as the most advanced and ‘true’ ways to understand the world. However, these ‘universal’ truths have been, and continue to be, developed within specific historical, social and political circumstances, in which non-white cultures are seen as a ‘culture’ or ‘race’, while whiteness is invisible - a silent yet powerful norm against which all others are compared, evaluated and expected to conform.

Some questions for early childhood communities

• What can we gain from exploring and questioning white understandings of identity, culture and education?
• What are the consequences of using white cultural understandings and world-views as the basis for expectations of learning, growth and behaviour?
• How can exploring white as a cultural group encourage more equitable practice and inclusion?
• What are the consequences for equitable practice of overlooking and/or ‘blanking-out’ whiteness?

Individualism

The transparency or invisibility of whiteness, and its norms allows and/or encourages whites to ‘see themselves as individuals, rather than as members of a culture’ (Mahoney, 1997a, p.331). Consequently, white people often claim they are not connected to a cultural or racial group, but label ‘non-white’ individuals in terms of their ethnicity and expect them to conform to whites’ ‘universal’ norms and expectations. Further, the lack of a cultural or ethnic identity allows many white people to see themselves and to act as individuals, which can hinder or prevent them from understanding collective social and cultural identities. Consequently, their view of racism is restricted to discrimination against individuals, rather than the institutional oppression of entire groups sharing a social, cultural, or ethnic identity.

Some questions for early childhood communities

• How may early childhood education’s focus on the individual child support and maintain the operations of whiteness and discrimination?
• In curricula focused on the individual, whose voices and experiences are heard and whose purposes and world-views are served and supported?
• In curricula focused on the individual child, how can we explore issues of equity, institutional disadvantage and discrimination, social responsibilities and community building?

Lack of genuine inclusion

White ideas and expectations allow inclusion only on and within white terms - individuals and groups outside of white cultures are expected to assimilate within white culture by adopting and expressing white values and knowledge. White understandings and world-views are not questioned or challenged and any resulting inequities are overlooked and/or ignored. Similarly, many early childhood curricula express particular understandings of child growth and development and education drawn from research, experiences and practices from predominantly white cultures; yet individuals and groups from ‘non-white’ cultures are expected to ‘fit’ these curricula, irrespective of their appropriateness.

Some questions for early childhood communities

• What are the effects - on children, families and educators - of subscribing to one culture’s understandings of growth, learning and education?
• How does the unquestioning acceptance of pervasive white understandings and world-views affect inclusion in early childhood?
• How can we practice inclusion while ensuring that individuals and groups from ‘non-white’ cultures retain their voice?

Responding respectfully to the issues
Early childhood staff can respond respectfully to the influence of whiteness on their understandings of themselves and of early childhood curricula by uncovering invisible white world-views and understandings and recognising their influences on beliefs, expectations and understandings of the child, the family, the curriculum and the early childhood professional.

Here are some first steps:
• Reconsider the dominant early childhood models of inclusion as these are based on white and colonial understandings of curricula practice and assimilation;
• Critically engage with and challenge the ideas and beliefs within curricula that construct/assume whiteness as the invisible yet powerful norm;
• Question the appropriateness of enforcing one (white) view of development and practice upon all;
• Accept that each culture has a multiplicity of ways to view children, adults, parents and families;
• Ensure that many different voices inform early childhood curricula beliefs and understandings;
• Reflect continually on how and when white voices appear and the inclusive and exclusive effects.

Further reading

The Lawful and the Prohibited

When I first encountered Persona Dolls, I regarded them as useful in puppet play, but as I learnt more about them, I realized that they can be excellent aids to teaching. Brown (2001: xi) defined Persona Dolls as “practitioners’ dolls”. Practitioners create an identity and personality for each Persona doll, giving them personalities, family and cultural backgrounds, likes and dislikes - - just like any child. Thus, when young children encounter a Persona Doll, they encounter something very like a real person. Children learn through materials that are concrete and relevant to their life, especially in a developmentally appropriate classroom. I believe that Persona Dolls can support such learning for all children, including Muslim girls and Muslim boys.

“Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim” (Badawi, 2005: 4. ‘Muslim’ here includes males and females.), but educators’ use of Persona Dolls as teaching aids - particularly in Malaysia – can cause religious controversy, especially among some Muslim teachers and children. I will examine this controversy by using the two primary sources of Islam: the Qur’an (which Muslims consider the divine word of God revealed) and the Hadeeth (the sayings, doings and approvals of the Messenger, peace be upon him).

Some Muslim practitioners misinterpret the rulings pertaining to figures and statues of living beings that are prohibited except those which are not treated in a manner indicative of respect (and which are neither worshipped nor revered). The most strictly prohibited figures are those which are made to be worshiped in the place of or in addition to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta’ala, the Creator (Qaradawi, 2004: 100). The eminent Muslim scholar Sheik Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (2004: 106) has argued that:

There are some kinds of three-dimensional figures which are not intended to be accorded respect or to be displayed as an expression of high living. Islam does not close its mind to them, nor does it see any harm in their use.

The following three ahadeeth (plural of ‘hadeeth’) support Al-Qaradawi’s view. Each shows that it is permissible for children to play with three-dimensional, statue-like figures such as Persona Dolls.

1. Al-Bukhari and Muslim (2004: 119) argued that children’s playthings - including dolls – that take the form of humans, animals, etc. come into the category of ‘three-dimensional figures which are not intended to be accorded respect or to be displayed as an expression of high living’. They also point out that the Prophet’s wife, Aishah, said:
   I used to play with dolls in the house of the Messenger of Allah and my friends would come over to play with me. They would hide when they saw the Messenger of Allah approaching, but he was in fact very happy to see them with me, and so we played together.

2. Abu Daoud (2004: 106) reported a conversation that indicates strongly that dolls can be used by children, in particular Muslim children:
   Aisha also reported: One day the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) asked us, ‘What are these?’ . ‘My dolls’, I replied. ‘What is this in the middle?’ , he asked. ‘A horse’, I replied. ‘And what are these things on it?’ , he asked. ‘Wings’, I said. ‘A horse with wings?’ , he asked. ‘Have not you heard that Solomon, the son of David, had horses with wings?’ , I said. Thereupon the Messenger of Allah (peace be on him) laughed so heartily that I could see his molars.

3. Khalid b. Dhakwan (2003:6) reported a conversation that indicates strongly that dolls can be used as a strategy for dealing with problems:
   I asked Rubayyi‘, daughter of Mu’awwidh, about fasting. Thereupon she said, ‘The Messenger of Allah (May peace be upon him) sent his messenger to the villages of the Ansar and the rest of the hadeeth said: “We used to make toys out of wool and took (them to the mosque) along with us. When they (the children) asked us for food, we gave them these toys to play with, and these made them forgetful till they completed their fast.”

Using Persona Dolls to promote equity and social justice

Persona Dolls could certainly be part and parcel of the education system in an Islamic society such as Malaysia. They can support children’s development in any children’s centre, regardless of the children’s
gender. Persona Dolls can help children to understand diversity in family structure and in how people live (van Keulen, 2004: 127). MacNaughton in her research project also do believes that Persona Dolls can also illuminate young children’s diverse and complex understandings of their social world (Brown, 2001:54). She has used Persona Dolls to uncover young children’s prejudices and discriminatory attitudes and to promote a sense of fairness and justice. Persona Dolls can broaden children’s intellectual horizons, introducing them to forms of social diversity with which they have little or no experience or knowledge. Finally, Persona Dolls can enable children to build their self-esteem (by developing strong, positive identities) and to value each other equally.

REFERENCES
Khalid b. Dhakwan (2003) “Introduction to Translation of Sahih Muslim.” Translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui. (http://www.ummah.net/Al_adaab/hadith/muslim/had6.html). (Sahih Muslim is a collection of sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), also known as the Sunnah.)

FURTHER RESOURCES
www.campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/Islam/Islam.html
www.wings.buffalo.edu/student-life/sa/muslim/islisl.html
http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/MSA/reference/searchhadith.html

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The policy context

State and federal governments are encouraging community strengthening and capacity building, especially for ‘disadvantaged’ families. For example:

- **Best Start** initiatives (Victoria) aim to support the growth and learning of young children and their families by fostering partnerships across agencies.
- **Stronger Citizens, Stronger Families, Stronger Communities: Partnerships in Community Care** (Victoria, Department of Human Services) aims to foster strong and well functioning families, confident and skilled parents and citizens capable of dealing with various social circumstances.
- **The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy** (Canberra, Department of Family and Community Services) aims to help families and communities to identify and resolve local issues, manage the impact of social and economic change and explore opportunities for development. It focuses on the needs of families with young children, on strengthening family relationships and on balancing work and family; and it highlights prevention, early intervention and capacity building.

The roles of agencies and of learning in community-building

The international early childhood research literature argues strongly that family and community partnerships in early childhood services improve learning outcomes and program effectiveness. However, that literature lacks a shared definition of ‘community’ and a shared understanding of how to build one through family and community partnerships in specific circumstances. Nonetheless, the roles in community building of agencies and of learning dominate that literature.

Relationships between agencies and learning form a Continuum of Involvement (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2003). At one end of the Continuum, small agencies, such as voluntary organizations and the local offices of government departments, are often described as ‘community-based’ and from that perspective, ‘community-building’ means. A centre that adopts this perspective sees itself as one agency among the several that make up a community; and it builds community by increasing and improving its contact, collaboration and co-ordination with other agencies, thereby improving its service. This is happening in several of the community early years hub centres in Queensland. Such a focus on agencies can unwittingly exclude people - such as parents - who act outside of them, and who are accommodated within Casswell’s (2001: pp. 3-4) definition of community as ‘a social space, a sector made up of informal and relatively unmanaged associations’.

At the other end of the Continuum of Involvement, early childhood centres have involved themselves in community-building in two ways.

1. **The centre is the focus of a ‘community of learners’** (the parents and children who attend it).

   Such a centre provides a specialist service to that community. It cares and educates children; and it educates their parents about how best to do so. From this perspective, the centre can build its community by improving the quality of its education and/or by increasing the number of people it educates.

2. **The centre is an element of a ‘learning community’**.

   Such a centre may find it hard to ‘merely’ provide a service to its community, because that implies a distinction between the centre and its learning community. From this perspective, the centre can build its community by becoming an active participant in a broad-based movement for changes through learning. For example, a family learning centre in the Elizabeth region of South Australia provides early learning experiences for children whilst parents and other community members undertake accredited training courses.

Early childhood centres wishing to build ‘learning communities’ define and assess high-quality service in terms of their local communities’ needs (Cummings, 2003; 2004). For example, Nordic countries set goals for children and services at a national level, but implement programs and assess these goals locally (Mooney et al, 2003).

The benefits of family and community partnerships

Family and community partnerships underpin best practice in early childhood services in many ways.

1. Family and community partnerships are a hallmark of excellence within the internationally acclaimed centres in the Reggio Emilia area of Northern Italy (New, 1993) and in Te Whariki, New Zealand’s national early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996).
2. Staff-parent collaboration can improve young children’s learning outcomes, especially in literacy (Roskos & Nueman, 1993; Veglio, 1993; Kelly, 1995).

3. The involvement of parents, communities and other stakeholders in democratic governance structures improves the effectiveness of early childhood programs (Atmore, 1998).

However, despite the evidence that family and community partnerships are beneficial, they can be hard to establish and maintain and they often require significant staff development and training. Many staff find it hard to build strong partnerships with parents and some need strong professional development support (McBride, 1999; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2001). Further, building local partnerships takes significant funds and staff time - the very things that are often lacking in services working with minimum staff-child ratios (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau & Sparling, 1999). Finally, a family and community partnership can work only if all participants can clarify what the partnership means, who’s in it, what its objectives are and how it should work (NCB, 2002).

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Introduction
There is a growing belief that children have a right to be involved in developing policies that affect them and in recent years, practitioners in a wide range of professions have decided that it can be valuable to involve young children in such decisions. Young children can tell adults much about their daily lives and about what makes them feel that their needs and opinions are valued. Further, CEIEC researchers have found that young children have definite views on why some environments are more attractive or ‘child-friendly’ than others and can talk cogently about subjects as diverse as playground design and curriculum, as well as migration, literacy, social networks, equity and peace. The increased interest in involving young children in public decision-making is inter-related with two other developments in early childhood education: a new model of the young child and new concern with young children’s rights as citizens.

A new model of the child
Three models of the child dominate current thinking in the ‘North’.
1. The child is a possession of adults (e.g. parents, teachers, policy-makers). Since children depend on adults biologically and are too immature to participate in decisions about their lives, adults must take decisions for them.
2. The child is subject to adults. Since children are innocent, they need adult protection, so adults must develop policies and practices that will enable children to develop (in universally-applicable stages) into mature adults.
3. The child is a participant in decisions about their lives, but only when adults regard them as competent. Adult adherents to this model certainly consult with children, but reserve decision-making power to themselves.

Recent developments in developmental psychology and in sociology have generated a new model:
4. The child as a social actor. Children shape their identities, create and communicate valid views about the social world and have the right to participate in it. Adult adherents to this model certainly consult with children, but reserve decision-making power to themselves.

This new model of the child as a social actor expresses three research-based beliefs about children:
- young children can make valid meanings about the world and their place in it
- children’s knowledge of the world is different (not inferior) to adults’ knowledge
- children’s insights and perspectives on the world can improve adults’ understandings of children’s experiences.

New concern with children’s rights as citizens
The growing belief that young children have a right to participate in public decision-making owes much to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which proclaimed that children have, among other rights:
- the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)
- the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13)
- the right to education that promotes children’s emotional, intellectual and physical development; that fosters awareness and understanding of parents’ roles and of the importance of cultural identity, language and values; and that prepares children for a responsible life in society (Article 29)
- the right to pursue leisure, recreational and cultural activities and to practice their own language, culture and religion without fear of persecution or discrimination (Article 31).

A commitment to enacting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was at the heart of UNICEF’s 1996 ‘Child Friendly Cities Initiative’, in which children appear as active citizens who can participate in local government decision-making as partners with adult facilitators. UNICEF defines a Child Friendly City as one where, the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, budgets, programs and decisions. UNICEF believes that any plan to create a Child Friendly City should include these elements:
- Children’s active involvement. Promote children’s active involvement in issues that affect them and consider their views when taking decisions.
- A child friendly legal framework. Ensure that laws, regulations and the procedures promote and protect the rights of all children consistently.
- Child impact statements. Systematically assess (before, during and after implementation) the impact on children of laws, policies and practices.
Implications for policy and practice

Listening to children is the first step to regarding children’s rights as rights of citizenship, rather than rights defined - and restricted - by age. Listening to children encourages and assists them to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to be active citizens who participate in public decision-making. Adults decide to include children in decision-making generally fall into one or more of three broad categories:

- **Ethics.** A decision to include children in decision-making expresses the ethical belief that children have the right to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect them.
- **Excellence.** A decision to include children in decision-making is a mark of excellence because involving children - as experts in their own lives - increases the likelihood that programs will meet their wants and needs.
- **Pragmatism.** A pragmatic decision to include children in decision-making recognises that if children participate in making decisions, they are more likely to support them.

CEIEC researchers have distilled some broad policies and practices that can support successful consultation with young children. Such consultations are most likely to succeed if they have clear aims and methods and if consultation is valued in itself, as well as for its results.

- **AIM.** Consultations with young children should aim to enable and encourage children and adults to collaborate as equal stakeholders in an ongoing process - from planning to evaluation.
- **METHODS.** Consultations with young children should enable all children ( irrespective of their gender, race, culture, disability, etc.) to understand what is being proposed and to make a reasonable decision that reflects that they believe are their particular interests.
- **PROCESS.** Organisers of consultations with young children should value the process of consultation as much as its outcomes and should provide children with ways and places to participate that are appropriate, safe and comfortable.

Further, consultations with young children are most likely to succeed if they are supported by resources additional to those allocated to the everyday work of the organization undertaking the consultations. Thus:

- Realistic costs to prevent participation becoming restricted to participants who can afford it. These include expenses for children and young people to attend meetings and other related conferences; and paying for relief staff, to give participating staff time for training and participation.
- Extra time for staff. This is needed for training (to facilitate children’s meaningful participation), for ongoing communication with participants, to prepare for meetings (most of which are likely to be evenings or weekends) and to provide administrative support to the consultation process.
- Communication resources to enable and encourage participation by all. Some examples: phones, cameras, audio and video recorders, word-processors and, more simply, paints, pencils and paper.

**Further reading**


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Contemporary Australia is an increasingly diverse society, where early childhood teachers see young children behaving in increasingly diverse ways. Children can sometimes behave in ways that challenge the adults who care for them; and some children challenge adults more frequently and intensely than others. Such challenging behaviour - often referred to as ‘behavioural problems’ - includes physical violence, such as hitting, spitting, biting and kicking; verbal abuse, such as swearing, yelling, name calling or screaming; and excluding children from play based on their gender, culture, ‘race’, sexuality and class.

Defining terms, examining models
The notion of challenging behaviour - seemingly self-evident - is a social and cultural construction that means different things at different times in different cultures and societies. It evokes different responses by teachers, depending on their view of the child and of childhood. Three broad types of behaviour are described currently as ‘challenging’:

- aggression, often regarded as the result of genetic, biological, environmental or social factors
- expressions of biological disorders (e.g. developmental delays, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder), often regarded as ‘treatable’ by pharmaceutical or behavioural means
- behaviours of children with disabilities, which are sometimes regarded as ‘abnormal’ or ‘problematic’.

Few early childhood teachers in Australia have had significant training in how to work with children with challenging behaviours. Support services (e.g. CSRDOs, and PSFOs) in the field can provide support, guidance and some resources, but not day-to-day and not in the classroom. Similarly, in-service professional development in this area is rarely linked directly to teachers’ day-to-day work in the classroom. One consequence is that staff can find the classroom a stressful environment in which to work.

Parents’, teachers’ and policy-makers’ attitudes and responses to challenging behaviours reflect their particular model of the child and of childhood; and four models dominate much current western thinking about the child:

- a child is a possession of adults. Adults must decide what’s best for the child, who is too immature to take decisions about their lives. Adults with this model respond to a child with challenging behaviour by prescribing medication (e.g. Ritalin) or behaviour modeling by adults and peers.

MEMBERS’ ISSUES PAPER 4.4 2005
“Working with children who challenge”
MacNaughton, G., Smith, K. & Hughes, P.

- a child is subject to adults. Adults must develop policies and practices that will enable children to develop (in universally-applicable stages) into mature adults. Adults with this model respond to a child with challenging behaviour by teaching orderly (passive) behaviour within a structure of developmental ‘norms’.

- a child is a participant in decisions about their lives, but only when adults regard them as competent. Adults with this model respond to a child with challenging behaviour by involving her/him in decisions about what are acceptable behaviours and the consequences of deviating from them, but reserve decision-making power to themselves. This model assumes that children can change their behaviour or challenge others’ only with adults’ support and guidance.

- a child is a social actor (a citizen) who shapes her/his identities, creates and communicates valid views about the social world and has a right to participate in it. Adults with this model respond to a child with challenging behaviour not by trying to ‘fix’ it, but by reflecting critically on how adults’ and children’s attitudes and beliefs affect how the child is regarded, addressed, included and excluded. Children can explain actions that adults may have misinterpreted as violent or aggressive; and such explanations can change how adults assess and intervene in their behaviour.

Children Who Challenge - a CEIEC project
The CEIEC recently completed a project that supported a group of preschool teachers and early childhood intervention support workers who work with children who challenge. The project - Children Who Challenge - aimed to encourage and enable participating staff to improve their capacity to work with children who challenge and their families; and to initiate an archive of information about a practical, strengths-based approach to such work.

Children Who Challenge was a small-scale project (13 participants), but its findings are significant. Participants reported consistently that their involvement had had these effects:

1. They changed their model of the child who challenges, their classroom practices and their view of themselves as teachers. In particular, participants gained new insights into children’s capacity to understand the world and express views about their place in it. As participants began to see children who challenge as citizens,
they became more confident in working with such children and changed their classroom practices.

2. They strengthened their desire and ability to respond to children who challenge because it extended their knowledge about the possible origins and significances of such behaviours, and gave them new ways to respond. In particular, participants encountered best-practice strategies and practices for working with children who challenge; increased their confidence to work with such children by meeting fellow professionals willing to reflect critically on their current approaches; and were given time to plan how to work with children who challenge - time that wouldn’t necessarily be available in their normal work day.

3. They increased their ability to reduce the stress in their work - this was, of course, linked with the first two outcomes. Each participant reported that they had increased their confidence and ability to respond to children who challenge and that they had initiated strategies in their classroom that had reduced disruptive behaviour, increased children’s participation and reduced the levels of adults’ and children’s stress.

*Children Who Challenge* rejected mainstream thinking’s focus on the individual child defined in biological terms as exhibiting a pathology or deficit; and it rejected the mainstream’s reliance on intervention by an outside ‘expert’ such as a pharmacist or a behaviourist, who displaces other adults - parents and teachers - associated with the child. The focus of *Children Who Challenge* was the child-in-context, defined in social terms through one or more of those four competing models of the child; and the project’s founding assumption was that teachers can reflect critically on their current practices around children who challenge as a prelude to changing them.

The *Children Who Challenge* approach poses a strong challenge not just to the ‘medicalisation’ of behaviour defined as problematic or challenging, but also to the drift to a technocratic, top-down micro-management of education - and, by implication, of children. *Children Who Challenge* poses an alternative - the autonomous, reflective teacher-researcher who is a member of a reflexive community committed to improving the classroom and pedagogic effectiveness by emancipating it (Parker, 1997: pp. 3-6).

**RESOURCES**


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Defining ‘marginality’

My current research asks, ‘What creates and sustains someone’s commitment to cultural diversity?’ Each participant in the research tells their own story, but a recurring theme is marginality - an issue that has been thought about in different ways. From one perspective, people in the margins live ‘in-between’, without belonging to the other, poised uncertainly between two or more different and sometimes antagonistic cultures (Park, 1921; Stonequist, 1937. Both cited in Davis, 2006). From another perspective, life on the margins offers a possibility to live ‘in-both’, i.e. to be part of the whole but outside of the whole (hooks, 1984; Young-Lee, 1995). From a third perspective, marginality is ‘living beyond’, i.e. transcending the boundaries of one’s race, social class and culture (Willie, 1984, cited in Alfred, 2001).

Clearly, marginalization is a complex, shifting issue. In what follows, I present two stories from the margins, then suggest some very practical implications of my research for the early childhood field.

Marginal realities

Marginalization is often defined in ‘deficit’ terms, with people on the margins often seen as subordinate, powerless and needing help. In contrast, the view from the margins can be very positive. For example, to be marginal is to be ‘different but equal’. Indeed, to be marginal is to be ‘privileged’, because it is on the margins that growth, critical analysis and creativity can flourish (Giroux, 1992).

Anna, a native Hawaiian educator.

In the following excerpts from my interview with ‘Anna’ (a pseudonym), deficit notions of marginality have been disrupted and marginality appears as a creative, powerful position and status:

My parents said that my Hawaiian ancestors were skillful navigators, productive farmers and talented craftspeople. But my schoolbooks said that the Hawaiians ‘discovered’ by Caucasian sailors and missionaries were primitive, lazy and illiterate. My parents taught me that the qualities of strength, honesty and determination passed on to me by my Hawaiian ancestors would enable me to understand what my wise parents had somehow known intuitively. Postcolonial theorists helped me to see that these schoolbooks and lessons - which for more than half my life had caused me to question the value of my own culture - are not objective, disinterested representations of my people. Instead, they are biased reflections of the western colonial views of European sailors, traders and missionaries who arrived in our islands over two hundred years ago.

As I continued my education and ventured out further into the world, I set out to prove these statistics wrong and learned to succeed in the western academic arena.

Anna’s experience of marginality has affected her teaching and influenced her commitment to a just and equitable society. Her story expresses her commitment to re-connect to her roots, in order to retain the essence of her native identity:

My larger research agenda focuses on helping native Hawaiians and other formerly colonized groups resist and deconstruct colonial representations of their people that circulate in our schools and the larger society so that we each may work towards fashioning our own autonomous identities.

Merlyne, a Filipino-Australian practitioner and researcher.

I wish to share some faces of marginality in my life. Colonization

My cultural roots are bound to my birth country, the Philippines, a nation that has suffered from dual colonizations (over three hundred years by Spain and almost fifty years by the USA). Our colonizers have stripped us of our own writing, placed our own language at the margin (with English at the centre), Westernized our ways and made our identity inferior to their own.

What did we make out of these experiences? These colonizing transgressions have not weakened us. Instead, they have strengthened our belief that “things can be done on the margins of the impossible” (Maggay, 2002, p.3). Our resilience, our will to survive and our relentless faith in God - each a product of our marginality - have defined us
as a people and given us courage to fight our oppressors.

Immigrant Life

In 1986, I came to live in Australia with my family. As a member of a minority group, my family and I have experienced discrimination and rejection many times. We’ve endured cold treatment, prejudiced silences and racist remarks, such as:

- ‘Go back to Marcos country where you belong!’
- ‘Hey! No brownies here!’ (from prep children!)
- ‘We can’t give any credit for your previous degree. Our system of education is different from (meaning better than) yours. Sorry, you just have to start from the beginning.’

These experiences led me to create complex and shifting understandings of marginality and of its benefits. As a Filipino-Australian practitioner and researcher on the margins:

- I have learned to maintain a ‘both/and’ sense of belonging to my native land and to my adopted ‘home’ land. This attitude is born out of a reclaimed sense of ethnic self that has enabled me to survive and to see the power in living on the margins.
- I have developed a competence in crossing borders that has helped me to resist oppression and to maintain my cultural identity.
- My immigrant experiences of living ‘in-between’, ‘in-both’ and ‘in-beyond’ two worlds have taught me to honor diversity and helped me to maintain a holistic view of life.
- Being on the margins has made me feel comfortable in being different.

Responding respectfully to the issues

How do we relate these issues to early childhood practice? I suggest the following:

- In partnership, allow safe spaces for those on the margins to express how they view their marginality.
- Reflect critically on the following questions when faced with marginality in our teaching practice:
  - Through what lens do we choose to view marginal groups?
  - How do we open up spaces for different kinds of knowledge to flourish?
  - Who’s given permission to speak? What is considered legitimate to say?
  - How is knowledge created?
  - What knowledge is created?
  - Whose methods of creating, constructing, understanding and disseminating knowledge are considered legitimate in early childhood practice and research?

References:


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Books, children and gender

Books embody and express particular ideologies, i.e. views, ideas and assumptions about, for example, gender differences. An ideology either supports or resists a culture’s dominant values, attitudes, expectations and politics. Books for children are no exception - they often embody and express ideologies that reflect and re-formulate adults’ views about what children should know and value.

A reader in a particular culture may well accept these ideologies as just ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’, but ideologies are always ‘manufactured’ and reproduced through education and through cultural products such as movies, games … and children’s books. Children encounter books frequently and often repetitively; and as they do, they often build on what they learnt previously. Picture books in particular are often read repeatedly during the early years, when young children develop their understandings of gender.

Increasingly, children’s books feature characters who are either androgynous or appear to have no gender (Allen et al, 1993; Dellmann-Jenkins et al, 1993). Such characters - sometimes called ‘gender-neutral’ or ‘gender-ambiguous’ - are usually animals. They possess neither specifically male or female characteristics, nor the stereotypical cues (e.g. hair, height, build, facial features and clothing) that usually assign gender. Consequently, these characters can be labeled ‘man’, ‘woman’ or ‘it’, depending on a reader’s interpretation.

Do children actively assign gender to ‘gender-neutral’ characters?

Researchers have examined these ‘gender-neutral’ characters since the late 1980s, but there is little consensus about their effects on young readers. Some researchers suggest that ‘gender-neutral’ characters could encourage children to resist labeling - especially sexist labeling - and to be flexible in their responses; others suggest that these characters’ increasing appearance in books for children may be a substitute for truly egalitarian perspectives.

There is also little consensus among researchers about how young readers respond to ‘gender-neutral’ characters. Some research has shown that readers rarely regard a ‘gender-neutral’ character in a neutral way and, when asked to assign ‘it’ a gender, readers often use gender stereotypes. (A stereotype is an oversimplified and, generally, derogatory generalization about a particular group; a gender stereotype is a fixed idea about each gender’s ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ behaviours and abilities.)

Further, while children’s gender orientation does not influence how they interpret characters who were clearly male or female, it affects how they interpret ‘gender-neutral’ characters. Children whose gender orientation was masculine, androgynous or undifferentiated regarded these characters as more male, while children whose gender orientation was feminine regarded them as more female (Karniol et al, 2000).

Very little of this research has been conducted with young children. One notable exception is Arthur’s and White’s (1996) study of children 4-5 years old. Arthur and White were concerned that if children used existing stereotypes to assign gender to ‘gender-neutral’ characters, then such characters may contribute unwittingly to gender stereotyping in children. In fact, they found that young children usually assigned their own gender to ‘gender-neutral’ characters - a result the researchers ascribed to an egocentric view of the world characteristic of the children’s age.

Can ‘gender-neutral’ characters challenge gender-based power relations and roles?

Ideologies of gender often rest on and reproduce stark, mutually-exclusive oppositions - male versus female, boy versus girl. However, while these two gender categories are thought to be mutually exclusive, each depends for its existence on the other - we define and recognise ‘male-ness’ in terms of its opposite, ‘female-ness’ and vice versa. Further, while male and female are theoretically equal (each needs the other to exist), in practice male is the more privileged and powerful term/category. Hence the call for language that is actively gender-neutral.

Books for children re-produce the mutually-exclusive gender roles appropriate to their societies. They show children what it means to be a boy or a girl and what they can and should be like when they grow into men and women. ‘Gender-neutral’ characters do little to challenge or resist the imbalance of gender-based power and privilege. They are outside of the male-female opposition, preventing them from challenging the relations and roles associated with it.
‘Gender-neutral’ characters can help to disrupt the assumptions around gender that children encounter through picture books and provide children with an ‘open space’ in which to assign or not assign gender. However, in a highly gendered society, gender categories are so powerful and pervasive that it can seems impossible not to assign something a gender.

The following questions may help adults and children to respond respectfully to the issues raised by the use of ‘gender-neutral’ characters in books for children:

- How do children encounter gender at home and in early childhood centres? How do they interpret the representations of gender that they encounter?
- Are children encountering gender stereotypes at home and in early childhood centres? Are they also encountering challenges to those gender stereotypes in these places?
- How can adults and children broaden their understandings of gender so that we avoid reproducing stereotypes? Do ‘gender-neutral’ characters broaden our understanding of gender in ways that challenge stereotypes?
- Do ‘gender-neutral’ characters undermine the mutually-exclusive categories of male and female, or do they encourage children to reproduce those categories - perhaps as stereotypes?

References


Further Reading


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Introducing the issues: evaluating children’s learning

What does learning look like? How do you know when children are learning? What signs or ‘indicators’ do you use to make judgements about children’s learning? Traditionally, early childhood professionals in Australia have developed context-specific signs or indicators of children’s learning derived from their knowledge of how young children learn. They have used these indicators to inform their curriculum planning decisions and to report to parents and regulatory agencies on the specific progress of individual children and/or on the effectiveness of their program.

However, researchers in other countries are seeking specific tools that can enable early childhood professionals (and their funding agencies) to evaluate young children’s learning more objectively and strategically (Hyson, 2006; Hutchin, 2006; Samuelsson, 2006; Bennett, 2006; van Kuyk, 2006). For instance, in 2003 the UK the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced the Foundation Stage Profiles as a statutory assessment of young children’s learning (Hutchin, 2006); and in the USA, child assessment is being linked directly to funding, with some programs penalized for producing inadequate outcomes (Hyson, 2006).

The current enthusiasm for evaluating young children’s learning is linked to three other contemporary phenomena. First, the increasing belief that engaging citizens in life-long learning benefits a nation’s economy (B-HERT, 2001; Watson, 2003). Second, the growing recognition that the early years can be critical to producing such lifelong learners (OECD, 2006). Third, the increasing influence of outcome-based assessment in measures of the effectiveness of educational systems and other services for young children.

There is considerable - often heated - debate about how to assess young children’s learning in the most meaningful, appropriate and effective way (Hyson, 2006). These debates reflect competing understandings about what learning looks like and if/how it can be measured. This Members’ Briefing maps the key ideas and concepts in that literature, so that readers can reflect critically on whether and how the concepts in this literature can assist us to assess young children’s learning.

Introducing student engagement as a measure of children’s learning

Broadly, ‘student engagement’ describes the extent to which a student engages with the possibilities for learning that s/he encounters in a classroom. It offers a way to measure how effective a learning environment is for specific children; and to measure children as learners. Traditionally, the literature concerning ‘student engagement’ has focused on mapping and evaluating learning and learners in the compulsory years of schooling - hence the use of the word ‘student’. However, the ideas in that literature are now influencing discussions about how best to map and evaluate learning in the pre-school years.

The student engagement literature abounds with (often contradictory) definitions of student engagement and, therefore, different ideas of just what student engagement measures. This Members’ Briefing maps the key ideas and concepts in that literature, so that readers can reflect critically on whether and how the concepts in this literature can assist us to assess young children’s learning.

Mapping the concepts

Typically, research into student engagement focuses on one or more of three broad indicators: Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural. However, different researchers use different terms to describe their specific approach to these indicators and/or different indicators to measure it.

COGNITIVE approaches to and indicators of student engagement

Mapping and evaluating cognitive indicators of student engagement involves measuring a student’s level of investment in intellectual/thinking tasks, i.e.: The extent to which students are attending to and expending mental effort in the learning tasks encountered (e.g., efforts to integrate new material with previous knowledge and to monitor and guide task comprehension through the use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies).

Specific terminology and indicators associated with this approach:

- **Student content engagement.**
  - Indicators: Cognitive interaction with subject matter of an appropriately challenging nature. (McLaughlin et al, 2005)

- **On-task engagement.**
  - Indicators: Behaviours directed to a goal (e.g. collecting equipment). These
behaviours include attending, recalling, collecting, comprehending, quantifying, planning and generalizing. (Tobin & Capie, 1980; Gettinger, 1984)

- **Self-regulated learning.**
  - Indicators: The metacognitive activities of planning, managing, monitoring and controlling one’s task-oriented behaviour, together with monitoring and modifying one’s cognition of them. (Crono & Mandinach, 1983)

- **Intrinsically motivated engagement.**
  - Indicators: Engagement based on curiosity, interest, enjoyment or a desire to achieve one’s own intellectual or personal goals. (Dev, 1997)

- **Substantive engagement.**
  - Indicators: Sustained mental concentration or focus; habits of thoughtfulness. (Newmann, Onosko & Stevenson, 1988)

- **Critical engagement.**
  - Indicators: Questioning and rethinking, thus challenging the accepted boundaries of knowledge and ways of thinking. (Bangert-Drowns & Pike, 1999)

**AFFECTIVE approaches to and indicators of student engagement**

Adherents to this approach seek to measure a student’s reactions (positive and negative) to peers, to teachers and to learning in general, i.e.:

*The level of students’ investment in, and their emotional reactions to, the learning tasks (e.g., high levels of interest or positive attitudes towards the learning tasks.* (Chapman, 2003: online)

Specific terminology and indicators associated with this approach:

- **Positive emotions during ongoing action.**
  - Indicators: Emotions such as enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, confidence and interest. (Skinner & Belmont, 1993)

**BEHAVIOURAL approaches to and indicators of student engagement**

Adherents to this approach seek to measure a student’s level of participation in schooling and learning, i.e.:

*The extent to which students are making active responses to the learning tasks presented (e.g., responding to an instructional antecedent, such as asking relevant questions, solving task-related problems, and participating in relevant discussions with teachers/peers).* (Chapman, 2003: online)

There are two broad categories of Behavioural types or indicators: ‘Compliance’ and ‘Active Citizenship’.

**COMPLIANCE** describes types of engagement where the motivation to engage lies on a spectrum between intrinsic and extrinsic, as seen in the following specific terminology and indicators:

- **On-task engagement.**
  - Indicators: Bringing appropriate materials to class; completing homework (Lee & Smith, 1993)

- **Persistence.**
  - Indicators: Willingness to regulate one’s own learning behaviour in order to persist with difficult tasks. (e.g., Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992) Contrast with ‘Frustrated engagement’ and ‘Unsystematic engagement’.

- **Procedural engagement.**

- **Strategic compliance.**
  - Indicators: Engaging purely to achieve a reward or to avoid a punishment. (Dev, 1997, Brooks et al, 1998; Schlechty, 2002)

- **ritual compliance.**
  - Indicators: ‘Keeping the peace’ by expending the minimum effort and achieving minimal learning. (Schlechty, 2002)

**ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP** (Adapted from Stewart, 2004) describes types of engagement where children take more or less control of their learning, as seen in the following specific terminology and indicators associated with it:

- **Sharing information.**
  - Indicators: Children share information with teachers and peers.

- **Seeking information.**
  - Indicators: Children ask for information as part of learning.

- **Collaborating.**
  - Indicators: Children collaborate to make things happen.

- **Decision-making.**
  - Indicators: Children contribute to decisions concerning specific activities in the classroom.

- **Program-development.**
  - Indicators: Children contribute to decisions concerning the program of activities in the classroom.

**Reflections**

When student engagement in learning is used as a measure of school effectiveness, program effectiveness, classroom effectiveness or learner effectiveness, we must ask what ‘student
engagement’ means. Not all measures/indicators of student engagement measure the same thing. Each specific way to think about student engagement drives the indicators that are used to ‘see’ it and therefore to measure it.

The following questions can be used to reflect on the extent to which each approach to student engagement improves our understanding of young children’s learning and, therefore, our ability to assess it.

- How does this approach take account of the effects of teacher decisions and behaviours on student engagement?
- How does this approach take account of the influence of social relationships on student engagement?
- How does this approach acknowledge the influence of power relations on different students in different contexts at different times?
- Who benefits (and who loses) from this approach to student engagement?
- How might this approach enhance social justice and equity outcomes for students in my context?

References

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Storytelling as a way of knowing

Bruner (1986) defined storytelling as a way of knowing that reveals the storyteller's inner mind and offers listeners a way to interpret the world. A story will trigger different personal connections, different messages and different levels of meaning for each person; so a story shared with a child recurrently will change its meaning as the child's understanding of the world changes.

Greene (1995) advocated sharing our stories and opening ourselves to others' stories, thus creating a “connection between narrative and the growth of identity” (p. 186); and other authors have argued that we develop a deeper sense of identity through narrative (Aveling, 2001; Bruner, 2003; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001). (Sufferers from the neurological disorder dysnarrativia [the inability to tell or understand stories] have no sense of self and cannot sense what other people might think, feel or even see.)

Storytelling shapes meanings not by relaying the truth but by offering a shared understanding of what we know (Emihovich 1995, p. 38). A well told story invites the listener to enter its world, identify with its characters, share their experiences, then emerge with new insight and understandings. Jaffe (2000, p. 175) argues that storytelling, ‘can serve as an important medium for effective communication of curriculum content, with long-lasting repercussions for children as learners and participants in a complex and demanding world’. Egan (1986) argued that carefully crafted stories can enable children to understand abstract concepts like death, love, honor and courage; and advised teachers to regard a unit of learning as a story to be told. Saxby (1992) argued that storytelling can be a way to discuss social justice with young children, who have a natural disposition to explain and explore their inner and outer worlds through story.

Children as knowing critical thinkers

Silin (2000, p. 259) suggested that the lens of developmentally appropriate practice has led many early childhood educators, ‘to underestimate what children know about the real world and to overestimate their own ability to protect them from it’; while Canella & Viruru (2004: 88) argue that children are defined consistently as in need of surveillance, limitation and regulation - for their own good. Other research has shown that children can understand and discuss real local and global issues (MacNaughton, 2001; MacNaughton & Davis, 2001; Silin, 1995, 2000; Soto, 2005), so shielding children from certain topics to ‘protect’ them may make them feel vulnerable & powerless.

Stories about real, contemporary (possibly contentious) issues can encourage young children to empathize with another, making them more able to respond, engage in discourse and take action. For example, in 2000 I was invited to support a teacher who had read “The Rabbits” (John Marsden and Shaun Tan) to a group of preschoolers, some of whom were disturbed by the phrase, ‘and they stole our children’. I told them a story from the book *Murawina* (Sykes, 1993) which draws from the childhood experiences of Aboriginal Australian women. The children responded passionately to the grave injustice that the young girls had experienced. They wrote to the Australian Government demanding that it say sorry to Aboriginal Australians (Phillips, 2005).

Children as active citizens

Giroux (2003) argues that children appear in public discourse ‘as objects, defined through the debasing language of advertising and consumerism” (p. xiv). Such objectification belittles their status in society, perpetuating a belief that they cannot understand, let alone discuss and act upon, complex issues. In contrast, Jans (2004, p. 31) observed that, ‘children … are strikingly sensitive about global social themes, like the environment and peace’, yet many educators regard this ability as a foundation for children’s citizenship in the future, rather than seeing it as evidence that young children can and should be citizens now, engaging in meaningful public debate in their communities about issues that affect them.
When children encounter stories about injustice, then engage in critical discourse via words, dramatic form, dance and visual art, they can gain new insights to those stories. Greene (1995, p. 132) suggests that this can lead to, ‘… the education of persons to become different, to find their voices, and to play participatory and articulate parts in a community in the making’. As Rose (2004, p.104) argues, ‘to ignore the potential of the arts to challenge thinking in brilliant, innovative, and subtle ways is to neglect an essential way of knowing’.

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**Professional development and the code of ethics**

The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Code of Ethics notes that an early childhood educator should regard themselves as “a learner who undertakes reflection, critical self-study, continuing professional development and (who) engages with contemporary theory and practice” (ECA, 2006). One way to “engage with contemporary theory and practice” is to use on-line or electronic databases.

These databases are “an effective and efficient means to identify useful sources” (Laspagis, 2006) and are available through the World Wide Web. Online databases can search a variety of education journals, so they can enable someone to find the most up-to-date literature on a particular topic quickly and easily. Many electronic databases also provide full text copies of articles, which users can download, either free or for a small fee.

In addition to databases that focus solely on education, multidisciplinary databases offer early childhood professionals information that may cross disciplines. For example educational resources may overlap with areas such as sociology, psychology or health.

**Benefits of online searching**

Online databases offer three major benefits:

- Online searches don’t depend on access to libraries during their opening hours.
- Online searches minimise printing or photocopying costs, as many articles are available to download.
- Online databases cover a wide range of national and international publications such as conference papers, journal articles, book reviews or book chapters; and the user doesn’t have to search each category individually.

**Search strategies**

Unless your searching is focussed, you can take forever… and still not discover what you want! To search effectively, you need a set of keywords related to the topic you wish to research. Some databases have a dictionary or thesaurus function that you can use to find further keywords related to your topic (Raszewski, 2006). This is especially useful when searching international databases, where reference terms and keywords may differ slightly from your own. For example, when you type ‘gender’ into the ERIC database thesaurus, it suggests that you use ‘sex’ instead. Similarly, typing ‘gender bias’ generates ‘sex bias’, ‘sex prejudice’ and ‘sexism’ as alternatives.

Once you have defined your set of keywords, you can use search operators such as ‘and’, ‘or’ and ‘not’ to broaden or narrow your search (Raszewski, 2006). You can also use search fields such as author, title, publication date or type to limit your searches (Raszewski, 2006).

The advanced search screen from the ERIC website is illustrated to give you an idea of the features of a search page of an online database.

**Education databases and how to access them**

Early childhood professionals can search a wide range of education databases, both local and international, of which the following is only an indicative list:

- **The Australian Education Index (AEI)** provides over 150,000 entries from 1978 onwards on educational topics from early childhood to adult education around research, policy, practice, and curriculum. Many articles are available in full text versions and can be downloaded for a fee from EdResearch Online available at [http://cunningham.acer.edu.au/dbtw-wpd/sample/edresearch.htm](http://cunningham.acer.edu.au/dbtw-wpd/sample/edresearch.htm). For more information on AEI go to: [www.acer.edu.au/library/catalogues/aei.html](http://www.acer.edu.au/library/catalogues/aei.html).

- **The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)** is a US-based international database that provides access to journal and non-journal educational research and information. It has entries from 1966 onwards with over 1.2 million items and many full text items available. ERIC can be accessed at: [www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal).

- **Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADT)** allows postgraduate students at Australian universities the ability to upload digital theses to enable worldwide availability of their work. This site provides another type of resource for early childhood professionals, in addition to traditional journals or conference papers, seeking literature on a particular topic. ADT can provide full text access to a wide range of theses completed at a range of Australian Universities giving early childhood professionals the latest in postgraduate research across the country. The web address for ADT is: [http://adt.caul.edu.au/](http://adt.caul.edu.au/).

- **The State Library of Victoria** also has a range of databases that can allow access to full-text articles. There are two ways to access the resources of the State Library either from home or from within the library. If you are a registered Victorian library user you can access a limited amount of the library’s databases for use from home. Going into the library allows you to access the full range of databases. However, this option can mean that you are restricted to accessing the online databases during library opening hours but if internet access is not available within the workplace or the home environment this can be a good way to do some online searching. The State Library website can be found at: [http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/) with a link to the catalogues and databases on this homepage.

- **The University of Melbourne Library** also allows access to a wide range of national and international educational resources with more than 20,000 electronic journals available (Vickers, 2005). Electronic resources are available to all users within any of the University of Melbourne libraries however, this option does restrict non-University of Melbourne staff and students users to the opening hours of the particular library. Students and staff of the University are able to gain access to the library’s resources off site through an authentication processes. If you are not a current staff member or student at the university you may be eligible for one of three membership types that can allow borrowing of library resources with the library also supporting the CAVAL system for Victorian universities and the National Borrowing Scheme for interstate universities. From the
library web page you can also download a range of guides to help assist in searching the online databases available as well as guides for more effective searching. The University of Melbourne also offers an e-print repository (UMER) that allows free access to the research of the staff of the university as well as PhD and Masters theses. UMER is available at: http://eprints.unimelb.edu.au/ and also through the University of Melbourne Library website at: http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/

More ways to ensure you’re up-to-date

Once you have focussed your keywords and developed a successful search approach that has resulted in finding the information you want, it is a good idea to put in place some strategies to ensure that you are staying up to date with the literature that becomes available after your original search has been completed. There are several ways to do this such as saving searches, email alerts, table of contents alerts or new journal issue alerts.

Saving searches allows you to go back and re-search using the search strategies you have used in the past. This can be useful if you want to use these strategies in the future to conduct another search. Email alerts can also provide you with another way of staying up to date as search strategies can be saved as alerts and an email can be sent to you as new material that matches the keywords is found. Table of contents alerts allow you to see the contents of current and future journals allowing you to scan through and identify any items of interest you may want to follow up. You can also create an alert to be notified when the next issues of a journal you are interested in is available. For more information on how to set up these alerts see the University of Melbourne’s ‘Staying Current’ guide by Jennifer Warburton available at: http://dydo.infodiv.unimelb.edu.au/index.php?view=pdf;docid=2652

Managing the literature

Once you have found the information that you are after it is a good idea to put in place some information management strategies that will enable you to make sure you have the bibliographic and reference details of the resources you have sourced. This will ensure you can accurately cite any information you find and enable you to direct other people who may be interested in the same information to the correct source.

Bibliographic software can enable you to do this by allowing you to create your own ‘libraries’ to store your information. Some bibliographic software programs, such as Endnote, can allow you to enter items into the program directly or import them from the electronic database you may be searching and even make your own notes within the individual entry. Some programs also integrate with word processing programs such as MS Word, allowing you insert in-text citations and references directly into the text as you write as well as developing reference lists and bibliographies in a variety of reference styles such as APA, Harvard or Chicago.

Conclusion

Keeping up to date with current theory and practices in the field of early childhood education and education more broadly need not be difficult and time consuming with the use of electronic and online databases. This article has aimed to introduce early childhood professionals to electronic databases and the benefits they can offer while providing links to relevant sites to enable early childhood professionals to apply some of the ideas suggested in this article. As many electronic databases exist and not all can be covered here I strongly suggest spending some time at your local library and talking with the librarians about the electronic services they offer. Attending some practical classes that may be offered by libraries can also be beneficial to assist in developing skills in searching online databases.
References


In the early June postgraduate seminar we tossed around ideas about the value of thinking about research as a conversation. In particular, we wanted to explore the ways that such a framing might enable those relatively new to research to establish their own distinctive researcher’s voice.

We began by considering some of the reasons why thinking about research as conversation can be helpful. As conversation is a facet of everyday life, we discussed how thinking about research in this way lightens the gravitas of academic work. Such a reframing can make the work less daunting and more engaging, less competitive and more collegial. In fact, thinking about research as conversation relocates intellectual work as just another domain for sharing ideas and recasts it as just another set of communication practices. There is mutuality to conversations, an expectation of exchange, sharing and engagement that takes the sharp edge off the more cut throat alternative of defending an intellectual position. While the field of early childhood research tends to be a much friendlier one than some others, for postgraduate researchers it can still be somewhat intimidating. As we embark upon the daunting task of deciphering volumes of stretching ideas and the challenge of articulating our own ideas within all of this, it is hard not to be aware that we although we are ‘big readers’ at first we only ‘small writers’.

Thinking about research as a reading and writing conversation can be a somewhat comforting way to ease ourselves into the process of ‘finding our own voice’ and working out a ‘place to speak from’.

We then moved on to discuss the different levels at which research conversations operate. At the macro level we thought about the public nature of conversations which take place in journals, academic publications, conferences etc. On this large public stage, research conversations constitute a collective knowledge building project. The more voices that take part, the more different viewpoints that are considered in this public conversation, and the more vibrant it is. This means that all contributions are valuable and there is not one ‘correct’ way of thinking about something. Viewing the public sphere of research as an international conversation also allows us to hold onto the sense that there is no end point to this practice. It is a continuous project in which contributors drop in and out again. This allows us to maintain a reassuring perspective on the task. This conversation is bigger than any of its contributors, not just bigger than us as novice researchers. Moreover, no-one has the ‘final word’.

Conversations at the collegial level provide us with sustenance. They take the form of affinity group conversation, a kind of intellectual ‘family and friends’ which includes supervisors, fellow postgraduate students and takes place in postgraduate forums and over coffee. This is the safe home base to try out ideas, to take risks, to admit uncertainties and to seek help. Conversations at this collegial level are definitely reciprocal, they should be mutually supportive.

Although we are all in conversations with others at our own university and beyond, a lot of the time we spend on a large research project is very solitary. Nevertheless, we are still engaged in our own private conversations as we work at computers, as our desks, in the field, in libraries and in the
abstracted world of academic literature. This is micro level of the research conversation, and often the most intense one. Thinking about the private labour of research as a conversation is also helpful. The conversation, in this micro context, is one taking place between what we are reading and what we are learning from the field. If we conceived of this labour as a conversation, it cannot be a linear one way street. Like all conversations, it is more of a ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ between the literature and the field. We are the translator of our own conversations between other people’s thinking and writing and our own data.

In order to make the most of this private research conversation, we discussed how important it is, while reading, to keep thinking ‘how does/doesn’t this help me make sense of my data?’ Similarly, while assembling data, it is important to keep thinking ‘how might x’s ideas help me determine what is important?’ When we are reviewing our data, back at our computers, it is necessary to keep thinking ‘how do x’s ideas help me get an angle on this data’ or ‘how does my data show up the limits to x’s ideas?’. In other words, we have to keep our private conversations going across the various sources of information that we encounter. If we use conversation as a metaphor for doing research, we have to keep directing questions between all the bits.

The last part of our discussions was a review of the strategies for finding our voices as new researchers. We considered the merits to identify our own personal strengths and then developing them into a voice. For every person this will be different, but some of the personal strengths we considered related to our age (eg. mature aged student with lots of life experience or young adult student with lots of fresh energy and ideas), our ethnicity (eg. knowledgeable and well connected cultural insiders of the communities we are studying); our professional experiences (eg. practitioner as well as academic knowledge of working with children); even our hobbies (eg. a love of art or film that we might draw into our ‘research conversation’). The next strategy we talked about was the need to locate our voices within the conversation. Sometimes our personal strengths help us to do this, but also we need to be clear about our political and disciplinary perspectives. In other words, we need to know where we are coming from (and it may be more than one place) before we can speak clearly. Sometimes we are working at disciplinary intersections, or intersections of particular standpoint perspectives. A clear articulation of these positions will always facilitate a distinctive voice. Again, in conversational mode, if we are articulating between more than one standpoint, we can foreground ourselves as the voice that translates the differences between these perspectives. One the most important things to achieve as postgraduate students is to mark our work as somehow original and distinctive. Finding a voice and knowing where we are coming from establishes the uniqueness of our contribution to the broader conversation.

The final thing we discussed related to the benefits of thinking about our writing as a conversation. Thinking about writing as a conversation with others assists us to remain aware of whom we are talking with. In the literature review chapter, it might be the authors we have been reading as well our audience – perhaps our markers or conference delegates, or if we are writing for journal publication, we need keep in mind that we are talking to the wider academic community.

In lots of ways and for lots of reasons, the metaphor of research as conversation can be very useful.
Suggested further reading:

On the relevance of conversation to action research -
Allan Feldman, 1999, 'The role of conversation in collaborative action research'
Educational Action Research 7 (1) 125-147

For a postmodern perspective on research as dialogue, relationship and an intersubjective process -

For consideration of autobiographical and reflexive conversation as a form of engaged and dialogic practice in teacher education -

For broader philosophical musings on the ethics of dialogue -
Edward Sampson 1993, Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature, Harvester Wheatsheaf

For an indigenous (Maori) perspective on research that counters the positivist, ethnocentric and exploitative western approach –
Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999, Decolonizing Methodologies, Zed Books
The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFC) was launched in 1996 by UNICEF to challenge cities around the world to consider themselves in new ways so that the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of their public policies, programs and decision making processes. The initiative was an action arising from the second UN Conference on Human Settlements that declared that the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society and of good governance (Child Friendly Cities Initiative, 2007).

In 1999 the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) sought to become accredited as a UNICEF Child-Friendly City. This initiative aimed to ensure that children’s rights were considered in all relevant policy, programs and partnerships within a local governance setting to improve outcomes for children. Johannesburg represents the central urban area in the Gauteng. Despite its relatively short lifespan (less than a century and a quarter), the City of Johannesburg markets itself as “sub-Saharan Africa’s most developed urban metropole, with sophisticated economic and social infrastructure”, (Integrated Development Plan, 2005: 8) however this is not equally accessible by all 3.2 million residents over half of whom live in poverty. Johannesburg is also home to around 1 million children between the ages of 0-19 years making up nearly one-third of the city’s population (Goldstone, 2004).

During the apartheid years Johannesburg was divided into 11 provinces run independently. In 1995 following the end of apartheid the African National Conference installed a single local government mechanism to manage the city as a whole. In 1997 a group of researchers from the UNESCO Growing Up in Cities project undertook a participatory research project in Canaansland, a squatter township in the centre of Johannesburg. The project identified some key issues for the marginalized population of children who lived in the township and gained some currency with the Mayor of Johannesburg (Swart-Kruger & Chawla, 2002). An agreement was signed with UNICEF to make Johannesburg a Child Friendly City in 1999 and a cross departmental team of senior managers was established to support the project.

By late 1999, however, it became clear that the new CoJ structure had run into difficulties due to inexperienced management and a city manager was appointed to run the city (Communications 2007). In 2000 the CoJ commissioned the UNESCO Growing Up in Cities project to investigate children’s views at four sites. This study made a number of general recommendations regarding the adequacy and safety of places for children (Swart-Kruger & Chawla, 2002). A CFC Manager was also appointed to oversee and manage the project. This should have served to formalize the responsibility of the project, however the role was hamstrung by movement from one department to another and diminished by inadequate recruitment and training (Clements 2005).

Documentation from 2001 indicates that the project was to have two main sources of funding the child co-ordination policy unit and a proposed Mayoral Children’s Fund.

In 2004, a further report into the safety and health of children in Johannesburg observed that despite the cities CFC status there was no evidence of a city-level integrated programme of action for children. Nor was there a mechanism for the co-ordination of, or dissemination of information regarding,
projects and initiatives for children within Johannesburg (Goldstone, 2004). A 2005 review of the project concluded that there had been no response by the CoJ to the study recommendations. The funding identified in the 2001 planning documents appears to have never materialized. In 2007, an executive mayor head up a metropolitan municipality council consisting of 210 councilors and 109 ward councilors. The CFC initiative is forgotten, unknown by councilors and administration alike.

**Five Dimensions of Partnership**

Considine and Hart (2006) suggest that for a partnership to be successful and add value it needs to provide more than what could be delivered by conventional means and create an opportunity for meaningful participation. They suggest that partnerships should be reviewed against five dimensions: mandate, structure, resources, activities and dynamics. The CoJ CFC project clearly failed, as it did not deliver anything additional to the business as usual experience. Whilst early pre-partnership projects showed some potential in facilitating consultation with young people, this was not translated into the later project work, nor was it institutionalized at the CoJ. A review of the project against Considine and Hart’s (2006) partnership dimensions draws out some lessons.

**Partnership Mandate**

The instability of the political mandate at the CoJ clearly inhibited the success of this project. Support across the political spectrum, beyond the election cycle, and inside the administration is important to ensure successful implementation, long term viability and currency of the project. As Clements (2005) argues:

> “While bodies like UNICEF might consider a CFC agreement to have been made with a particular city, the city itself may consider this agreement to have been made with a particular mayoral individual and may have mixed feelings about sustaining the agreement once that individual is no longer in office” (p. 112).

UNICEF’s support of the project and participation in the partnership appears to have been at a distance. A stronger more proactive external partner may have had better luck in shepherding the project through the political instability that surrounded it. While the project had some support in the community, this was fractured by the political instability of the time. Strong grassroots support has been shown to be a significant factor in the survival of initiatives (Bartlett, 2005).

**Partnership Structure**

In theory the partnership structure looked strong, however in practice it was inadequate. The cross departmental committee which was established in the early days of the project appears to have lacked authority to make decisions and lapsed. The participation of UNICEF appears to have been significantly limited with much of the related research being undertaken by third parties. While the establishment of a CFC manager to be responsible for the project was a positive step, the post needed to have greater permanence. Inadequate recruitment and training further hampered its effectiveness. Children were not included in the formal structure of the project and were only engaged in a very limited manner after the commencement of the project. The project relied heavily on previous participation processes rather than proactively designing new protocols and processes for clearly defined participation by children and young people.

**Partnership Resources**

The proposed budget for the project never materialized. Research by Barlett (2005) has noted that a greater level of transparency and accountability may be more effective in providing outcomes to children than a specific fund. However specific funds may have the advantage of mobilizing private sector resources. Neither was available for this project, and either would have improved the outcomes to some degree. Specifically allocated resources may also underpin the partnership structure
by funding appropriate governance structures.

**Partnership Activities**

Early planning documents for the project indicate that a range of activities were scheduled including participatory research and development of a children’s information system. However recommendations from the early planning document were not implemented. Children quoted in the Clements (2005) review of the project indicated their frustration regarding promises that were not kept. Noting that governments “should not start these projects if you don’t intend to finish them”. The participation of children in activities should have clear objectives and scope to ensure that appropriate resources (political and financial) are available to ensure decisions are implemented. In addition, appropriate strategies need to be adopted to enable meaningful participation by children. As Chawla (2002) notes “much that passes for participation in government and non government planning and practice is tokenism, decoration and manipulation”. However, against Hart’s (1992) ladder of children’s participation this would be classed as non participation. Hart argues that participation, the sharing of decision making, is a fundamental right of citizenship. He describes a hierarchy of child participation from manipulation, decoration and tokenism at the bottom through to child-initiated and directed and ultimately child initiated, shared decisions with adults at the top. Hart contends that at all times children should be allowed “to choose to participate at the highest level of their ability “(p. 11).

**Partnership Dynamics**

It is difficult to discuss whether partnership dynamics played any part in the failure of this project as limited information is available. It is clear however that when the political instability within the CoJ caused the project to stall. UNICEF was unable to garner sufficient political will to restart it.

**Conclusion**

Councils should beware the pitfalls identified by the CoJ case study. The partnership failed to adequately deliver any value and provided very limited, low rung (by Hart’s (1992) Ladder) opportunities for the participation of children. To be successful the mandate for similar projects needs to cross the political spectrum and exist at senior levels inside the administration. Structures set up to support the project need to be appropriately governed and resources must be specifically allocated to the project. Partnerships should be created to access specialist expertise, but to be successful they must be empowered to enable real change. The participation of children should be included in the design of the project at an early stage and needs to be clear in its objectives and limitations. Care should also be taken to ensure that children and young people are not being tokenized, manipulated or used as decoration. The top rung of Hart’s ladder (where children, young people and adults share decision making) remains an important goal, however a successful partnership with a specialist organization may facilitate significant change and build skills for the future.

**List of Acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CFC</td>
<td>Child Friendly City</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoJ</td>
<td>City of Johannesburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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**References**


“Child Friendly Cities Initiative (2007)”, [http://www.childfriendlycities.org/about/index_the_initiative.html](http://www.childfriendlycities.org/about/index_the_initiative.html)

Child Friendly City Initiative. (2001). "Child Friendly City Initiative City
of Johannesburg and UNICEF Partnership 2001 ACTION PLAN."
http://www.childfriendlycities.org/pdf/southafricaacfci.pdf Child Friendly City Initiative
Swart-Kruger, J. & Chawla, L. (2002). "We know something someone doesn't know": children speak out on local conditions in Johannesburg."
Environment and Urbanisation 14, (85-96)

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English is at the centre of any Australian language policy, as evidenced by The National Policy for Languages (1989) and Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (1990) and by the Citizenship Test (2006). Each document relegated all languages in Australia - including Indigenous languages - apart from English to the status of languages other than English; and they divided the population neatly into those who speak English ('Us') and those who don't ('Them'). 'They' are inferior to 'Us' in that they are linguistically deficient, disadvantaged and dysfunctional. No surprise, then, that 'they' stop using their own language in an attempt to be accepted by 'us'. So complete is this victory by English over other languages in Australia that there is even a jaunty acronym to celebrate it - LOTE (Languages Other Than English).

'Linguicism'
The supremacy of English in Australia is a specific instance of the general phenomenon of 'linguicism', i.e. discriminating against a group of people because of its first language/s. When - as in Australia - English dominates a society's major institutions (e.g., education, law and media), most schools teach English, because familiarity with it is a precondition for participation in that society (Makin, Campbell & Diaz, 1995). Nonetheless, when schools teach only English, this 'institutionalised linguicism' marginalizes or even trivializes other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988). Linguicism confers feelings of power and superiority upon native speakers of a society's dominant language, while making those who have to learn that dominant language as well as their own feel inferiority and inadequate (Grin, 2005; Arthur, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988).

The supremacy of English in Australia is a remnant of Australia's colonial past. English is the former coloniser's language and its continuing dominance marks the continuation of colonial power in a postcolonial period. 'Postcolonial' describes the period in the history of a country or a region when a former coloniser has relinquished power. The country or region has attained self-government, yet is still dependent economically on one or more major economic powers. People living in postcolonial times retain marks of colonization in their 'colonial discourse', i.e. in their ideas, their culture and their speech and postcolonial thinking aims to challenge those marks (Young, 2001). Thus, from a postcolonial perspective, linguicism is an element of colonial discourse that categorises people into 'Us' and 'Them'.

'Orientalism'
A specific, practical instance of colonial discourse is what Edward Said (1978) called 'orientalism'. Said has argued that the West has observed and understood The Rest, their civilisations and their languages through Orientalism - a colonial discourse that distinguishes 'The West' clearly from 'The Rest'. The Rest are 'other' than us, especially in what they can do and understand; and while our view of the world is so common-sense and ordinary that we don't even need to name it, their world-view is the other of our own, so it needs naming.

Such a 'naming and categorising' form of colonial discourse implies racial supremacy, but this doesn't mean that failing to name and categorise is avoids racial supremacy. Instead, denying that there are significant differences between racial and ethnic groups can also maintain racism, but in a different way. Phrases like, ‘We’re all the same’, ‘You’re just like me’ and ‘I don’t see colours - only people’ hide the fact that power and resources are often distributed unequally between different racial and ethnic groups in a society.

A postcolonial Australia?
The start of Australia's postcolonial period is often traced to 1972, when the Labour government (1972 - 1975) formally ended the 'White Australia' policy and initiated a policy of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism continued under the ensuing Coalition government (1976 - 1983) and has received more or less support ever since. At face value, the terms 'multicultural', 'cultural diversity' and 'cultural difference' merely describe the presence of many cultures in a society. However, this can hide the dominance of one culture, from which all others 'differ' or 'diverge' and, as such, are 'exotic', i.e. 'other' than we who are members of that dominant culture.

Such 'othering' is especially insidious as it doesn't even name the dominant culture or locate it explicitly at the centre of a society. Instead, it relegates all cultures except the dominant one to the margins of a society; and the margins are defined as everywhere except the centre ... even though the centre is never named. In Australia, Anglo-Celtic cultures form the invisible cultural centre and the so-called 'Australian identity'; and each other culture suffers more-or-less marginalisation and hardship accordingly (Gandhi, 1998; Ashcroft et al., 1998).
What can be done?

Human communication is marked by its diverse forms, yet many early childhood practitioners seem to equate ‘communication’ with ‘English’; and so they describe children who speak English as a second language as lacking in communication skills. It is as if these practitioners believe that dogs bark, cows moo … but people English! However, such children can ‘communicate’ perfectly well in their first language.

The place of languages in early childhood settings has always interested me, but two years ago I began to explore early childhood practitioners’ views about languages seriously. As I did so, I began to feel a need for new terms with which to discuss language policy and practice in Australian early childhood settings. So far, I have created two.

Languages Othered By English (LOBE)
This is an alternative to Languages Other Than English (LOTE). LOBE acknowledges that LOTE ‘others’ every language except English. Such linguistic ‘othering’ doesn’t just happen of its own accord or through a natural process: it is a deliberate strategy through which the dominant linguistic/cultural group maintains its dominance (Mills, 2004).

Culturally and Linguistically Identified (CALI)
This is an alternative to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD). CALI acknowledges that CALD implies Anglo-Celtic cultures as the invisible cultural centre; and that as it does so, it marginalizes every other culture as diverse or different. Such cultural ‘othering’ doesn’t just happen of its own accord or through a natural process: it is a deliberate strategy through which the dominant linguistic/cultural group maintains its dominance (Mills, 2004). In contrast, CALI points to the invisible and anonymous dominant group as the perpetrator of this cultural ‘othering’.

Can you think of other, equivalent terms that need reinventing? I’d like to hear them!

References

Arthur, L. (2001). ‘Diverse languages and dialects.’ In E. Dau (Ed.) The anti-bias approach in early childhood. NSW: Pearson Education Australia Pty Ltd. (pp. 95-113)

Further resources


Footnotes

1 See both documents at: www.anu.edu.au/linguistics/nash/aust/policy.html#national
2 See the Citizenship test at: www.citizenship.gov.au/test/index.htm

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The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child observed that Indigenous children continue to experience serious discrimination contrary to Article 2 of the Convention in a range of areas including education. Aboriginal Victorians have for decades worked with Governments and education and training authorities to address such discrimination, but continue to face the marginalization of Aboriginal voices, identity and culture in the education system including the early childhood sector. A change of government gave Aboriginal Victorians cause for renewed hope in 2008 that saw an Apology made to Indigenous people by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd who talked of closing the gap that lies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in terms of educational achievement. Prime Minister Rudd also made a commitment to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people (2007) that outlines Indigenous community’s specific rights around education. Early Childhood Australia (2009) asks that the national significance of The Apology be highly visible in the Early Years Learning Framework, an initiative of the Commonwealth that is currently being trialed across Australia. Although this framework discusses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as one of its underlying principles, the rights of the Indigenous child are not discussed. The rights of Indigenous children in Victoria and across Australia need to be taken much more seriously if nation states such as Australia are to fulfill their obligations to an equitable society as discussed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and advocated by early childhood practitioners across Australia.

As 2009 is the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child it is timely to reflect on how children’s rights are being implemented within early childhood programs in Australia. This paper calls on early childhood practitioners to reflect on how Indigenous children’s rights in particular are being addressed in Victoria, where it is often assumed that Indigenous families are either assimilated or nonexistent.

Although it is a requirement for early childhood practitioners in Victoria to accept and respect cultural diversity and to reflect this in their curriculum (see The Code of Ethics Early Childhood Australia, the National Child Care Accreditation Council and The Pre-school Quality Check List) the specific requirement to recognize and address the needs of Indigenous children, families and communities is minimal. For example:

- The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) lists 33 principles of quality practices for child care centers with only 2 principles connecting to broad statements around multiculturalism in which Indigenous inclusion is collapsed (National Child Care Accreditation Council, 2005). Although Indigenous Inclusion may be seen to sit within the broad requirements of engaging with inclusivity and social and cultural responsiveness, the Indigenous community has long argued that Indigenous perspectives must not be positioned within the broad sweep of multiculturalism. This argument is based on the right of Indigenous people as the original owners of Australia to self-determination including the right to determine the cultural education of their children. This is education in a cultural heritage that is unique to Australia, that deserves special status and that should be a frame of reference for all Australians.

- Early Childhood Australia’s (ECA) Code of Ethics provides a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of professionals (Early Childhood Australia, 2007). It highlights the rights of children as enshrined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and while the Convention provides some basis for recognizing the specific rights of Indigenous children to an education, it is limited and can be read as marginalizing Indigenous education to Indigenous specific spaces. Article 30 states: *Indigenous children shall not be denied the right, in
community with other members of his or her group, to profess and practice his or her religion, or to use his or her own language’. The ECA Code of Ethics is at risk of marginalizing Indigenous education to Indigenous specific spaces through the embracing of this Article in this way.

In January 2009 the United Nation Committee on the Rights of the Child, after consultations with Indigenous communities, released General Comment No. 11 on Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention. The primary purpose of this document is to give direction to Nation States on their obligations to Indigenous children under the Convention. In relation to Article 30 for example it is acknowledged that this Article is ‘expressed in negative terms’ and concurs with the Human Rights Committee that positive measures to protect Indigenous children’s rights are required instead. General Comment 11 provides points for those in early childhood education to consider and reconsider their work in relation to Indigenous children and Indigenous communities with the intent of broader recognition and acknowledgement of their rights. More specifically:

- Point 13 states that States must explore and investigate the ‘specific challenges which impede indigenous children from being able to fully enjoy their rights’. This point asks that State funded structures, including educational institutions of which early childhood is a part, seek to determine how they affect the realization of Indigenous children’s rights and work to ensure Indigenous children’s rights are upheld. Further, Point 80 asks States to develop culturally sensitive policies in consultation with Indigenous communities and directly with Indigenous children. Point 82 urges States to adopt ‘a rights based approach to Indigenous children’.

- Point 16 recalls Article 27 in which all children have rights to enjoy their own culture and use their own language. Point 16 however further discusses the rights of Indigenous children for ‘recognition of the collective traditions and values of indigenous cultures’. In early childhood education, in honoring Indigenous children’s rights, it is important to be respectful and embracing of culture and language of both the individual and the collective identities.

- Points 30-33 discuss the principle of the best interests of the child. These points outline that for Indigenous children, the determination of the best interests of the child must include both the right of the individual child as well as the rights as connected with the collective. They also state that the best interests of an Indigenous child must be determined in consultation with the Indigenous child and that child’s Indigenous community. Point 33 specifically asks that the State, in order to effectively ensure Indigenous children’s rights are upheld, provides training and awareness raising for all relevant professionals in the importance of ‘considering collective cultural rights in conjunction with the determination of the best interests of the child’. These points of the General Comment require early childhood education to pause to think how Indigenous children’s rights are supported in early childhood services across the nation in ways that are consultative and underpinned by the concerns and needs of Indigenous children and their communities.

- A number of points in the General Comment are directly related to education and Indigenous Children’s rights. Point 25 reminds us that Indigenous children have a right to access culturally appropriate education services. Point 57 states that all education of Indigenous children must serve as ‘an essential means of achieving individual empowerment and self-determination’. Point 58 expresses the need for representation of Indigenous peoples and cultures in all education settings be fair and accurate while Point 59 states that educational institutions must ensure Indigenous children are not faced with discrimination and racism in their educational setting. These collections of points pose many challenges for the early childhood field as the right of education for Indigenous children is underpinned by the aim of acknowledging early childhood settings are places where bias can exist and calls for educators to actively challenge all forms of bias and discrimination.
General Comment No. 11 poses many challenges for the Australian early childhood field if we are to take seriously the need for education of Indigenous children to be developed in partnership with Indigenous individuals and communities to ensure collective cultural needs are honored and acknowledged in our services and the aim of education for self-determination is achieved. This General Comment however is well placed to guide us in this work as it provides prompts for us to consider and reconsider how we move forward in this work.

Further resources
For further details of the General Comment go to: http://www.crin.org/ngogroup/infodetail.asp?ID=19552


For further details on the NCAC Accreditation principles go to: http://www.ncac.gov.au/resources/qias_pub.asp


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Introduction

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to protect children from “all forms of physical or mental violence” while in the care of parents or others. Article 28(2) requires that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity. Article 37 imposes an obligation to ensure that children are not subjected to torture or to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Since the beginning of its work monitoring implementation of the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasised that compliance with the Convention requires the prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment of children, including by parents within the family home.

Other international human rights treaty monitoring bodies also recommend prohibition of corporal punishment, including the Committee Against Torture, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Human Rights Committee. Regional human rights bodies have also prioritised the issue, with high level commitment to ending corporal punishment of children in Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Middle East. Corporal punishment of children – and the urgent need to eliminate it through law reform and other measures – was a key focus in the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children.

General Comment No.8

In 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No.8 (2006) on “The right to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para.2; and 37, inter alia)”, which aims “to highlight the obligation of all States parties to move quickly to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment and all other cruel or degrading forms of punishment of children and to outline the legislative and other awareness-raising and educational measures that States must take” (para. 2).

Corporal punishment is defined as:

“... any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (‘smacking’, ‘slapping’, ‘spanking’) children, with the hand or with an implement – whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children’s mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment which are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.” (para. 11)

The Committee distinguishes between violence and humiliation as forms of punishment, which it rejects, and discipline in the form of “necessary guidance and direction”, which is essential for healthy growth of children. The Committee also differentiates between punitive physical actions against children and physical interventions aimed at protecting children from harm.

Human rights standards

The human rights obligation to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment and all other degrading forms of punishment is founded on the rights of every person to respect for human dignity and physical integrity and to equal protection under the law. The Committee traces this back to the International Bill of Human Rights – “The dignity of each and every individual is the fundamental guiding principle of international human rights law” (para. 16) – and shows how the Convention on the Rights of the Child builds on these principles. Quoting article 19 of the Convention, the Committee states (para. 18):

“... There is no ambiguity: ‘all forms of physical or mental violence’ does not leave room for any level of legalized violence against children. Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of
punishment are forms of violence and the State must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate them.”

The fact that the Convention does not specifically refer to “corporal punishment” does not undermine the obligation to prohibit and eliminate it (paras. 20 and 21):

“... the Convention, like all human rights instruments, must be regarded as a living instrument, whose interpretation develops over time. In the 17 years since the Convention was adopted, the prevalence of corporal punishment of children in their homes, schools and other institutions has become more visible, through the reporting process under the Convention and through research and advocacy by, among others, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“Once visible, it is clear that the practice directly conflicts with the equal and inalienable rights of children to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity. The distinct nature of children, their initial dependent and developmental state, their unique human potential as well as their vulnerability, all demand the need for more, rather than less, legal and other protection from all forms of violence.”

In response to the view that a certain degree of “reasonable” or “moderate” corporal punishment is in the “best interests” of the child, the Committee states that “interpretation of a child’s best interests must be consistent with the whole Convention, including the obligation to protect children from all forms of violence and the requirement to give due weight to the child’s views; it cannot be used to justify practices, including corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment, which conflict with the child’s human dignity and right to physical integrity” (para. 26). And there is no conflict between realising children’s rights and the importance of the family unit, which the Convention fully upholds.

The Committee recognises that some justify the use of corporal punishment through religious teachings but again notes that “practice of a religion or belief must be consistent with respect for others’ human dignity and physical integrity” and that “freedom to practice one’s religion or belief may be legitimately limited in order to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of others” (para. 29).

How to eliminate corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment

Legal reform is essential. All provisions which allow a “reasonable” degree of corporal punishment – whether in statute or in case/common law – should be repealed, as should all legislation which specifically regulates the administration of corporal punishment. But the law must also explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all settings (para. 35):

“Once the criminal law applies fully to assaults on children, the child is protected from corporal punishment wherever they are and whoever is the perpetrator. But in the view of the Committee, given the traditional acceptance of corporal punishment, it is essential that the applicable sectoral legislation – e.g. family law, education law, law relating to all forms of alternative care and justice systems, employment law – clearly prohibits its use in the relevant settings. In addition, it is valuable if professional codes of ethics and guidance for teachers, carers and others, and also the rules or charters of institutions, emphasize the illegality of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.”

The Committee emphasizes that law reform should be accompanied by awareness-raising, guidance and training, because the primary purpose of such reform is prevention. Prohibition in law does not mean that all cases of corporal punishment of children by parents should lead to prosecution.

Effective prohibition also requires the consistent promotion of positive, non-violent relationships and education to all those involved with children. While the Convention does not prescribe in detail how parenting should be carried out, it does “provide a framework of principles to guide relationships both within the family and between teachers, carers and others and children” (para. 46). For example, children’s developmental needs must be respected, their best interests are fundamental, and their views should be given due weight.

Finally, States parties should monitor their progress towards eliminating corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, including through the use of interview research involving children and the establishing of independent monitoring bodies, and should report on all measures taken in their periodic State party reports to the Committee.

Global progress


...
(1987), Portugal (2007), Republic of Moldova (2008), Romania (2004), Southern Sudan (2008), Spain (2007), Sweden (1979), Ukraine (2003), Uruguay (2007) and Venezuela (2007). Law reform to achieve full prohibition is under way in many others. Over 100 states have prohibited all school corporal punishment, and 150 have abolished it as a sentence of the courts.

Further resources
For the full text of the General Comment see www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm

For details of all aspects of prohibiting corporal punishment, including resources to support law reform and information on progress worldwide see www.endcorporalpunishment.org

For information on the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children see www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/study.htm

Further reading


Introduction
Physical or corporal punishment has been defined as “any punishment in which the use of physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light” (Paragraph 11, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). This briefing paper addresses the issue of children’s right to physical integrity, and not to be physically punished. It explains the basis for this right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and General Comment Number 8 (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006), and looks briefly at links with research and law reform, particularly recent events in New Zealand.

The protection of children from abuse, discrimination, exploitation and so on, are reasonably well accepted and uncontroversial rights. There is one field of child protection, however, which still remains extraordinarily controversial, and this is the child’s right to protection against violence, specifically when that violence takes the form of physical punishment for disciplinary purposes. This is a fundamental right which, when not recognised, threatens children’s dignity, fails to give them equal respect and protection under the law, and puts many of their other rights at risk. Until 30 years ago, the near-universal practice of hitting children was considered appropriate, necessary and a parental right. But a paradigm shift in conceptions of childhood has led to a global movement to redefine it as violence and as a violation of children’s rights.

Young children, six years of age and under, are particularly at risk from having their right to physical integrity violated, because it is during the early childhood years that they are most often subjected to physical punishment (Ministry of Health, 2008; Nobes & Smith, 1997; Wissow, 2002). Younger children’s high activity, exploration, drive for independence and impulsivity, challenge parents, and they often resort to physical punishment as a means of maintaining control (Durrant, Ensom & Wingert, 2003). Research over three decades in New Zealand suggests that parents there, are inclined to use negative methods of child training, such as scolding, shouting and smacking. In a study in the late 1990s more than half of both mothers and fathers continued to hit their children once a week or more, a finding which was unchanged since the previous decade (Ritchie, 2002).

The UNCRC has been a powerful force in addressing children’s right not to be physically punished. In its preamble, the convention says that children “should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (UNCRC, 1989). Article 37 requires states to ensure that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”, while Article 19 asks for “measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”. The Committee on the Rights of the Child remedied the omission of explicit mention of corporal punishment in the UNCRC in 2006, by publishing General Comment Number 8, which includes the following statements:-

Once visible, it is clear that the practice directly conflicts with the equal and inalienable rights of children to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity (Paragraph 21, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).

...interpretation of a child’s best interests must be consistent with the whole Convention, including the obligation to protect children from all forms of violence and the requirement to give due weight to the child’s views; it cannot be used to justify practices, including corporal punishment and other forms of cruel and degrading punishment, which conflict with the child’s human dignity and right to physical integrity (Paragraph 26, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).

The General Comment refers to the provisions in the laws of many states (including Australia and before 2007, New Zealand) to allow “reasonable” or “moderate” chastisement of children, arising out of English Common Law. They point out that the same sort of defence was available in the past to justify physical punishment of wives, slaves, and apprentices, and that “the Convention requires the removal of any provisions (in statute or common – case law) which allow some degree of violence
against children” (Paragraph 31, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006).

The Committee has urged ratifying countries to revise legislation, as well as develop public education campaigns, to prevent the use of physical punishment. The Concluding Observations, provided by the Committee in response to country reports, have also been consistent in criticising countries which have not banned all forms of physical or mental violence to children (Taylor, 2005). For example the Committee forthrightly expressed their deep concern over New Zealand’s continuing failure to repeal section 59 of the Crimes Act in their 2003 Concluding Observations.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child’s views on physical punishment, positioning children as partners in improving their lives rather than passive victims of violence, align well with the interdisciplinary theoretical paradigm of Childhood Studies, which suggests a new approach to both research and advocacy for children. Childhood, according to childhood studies theorists (James & Prout, 1997; Woodhead, 2005), is not a natural or universal feature of human societies, but a social construction. Constructions of childhood have important implications for what we do, as researchers and advocates for children. If children are viewed as the property of their parents and the passive recipients of socialization, then it is easier to rationalise the use of violence to control them. Childhood Studies views children as social actors who are competent agents, which makes it difficult to think of exposing them to physical punishment.

What most undermine children’s protection are a cultural system that constructs children as human becomings rather than human beings, and a power system that upholds ‘parents rights’ over children’s human rights. (Phillips & Alderson, 2003)

Research Rational for Eliminating Physical Punishment

In 2004 the Children’s Issues Centre carried out a review of research on the effects of physical punishment under contract to the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (Smith, Gollop, Taylor & Marshall, 2005). The review covered over 400 studies, but there is insufficient space to give detail of the findings here. While much of the research was quantitative (e.g. Gershoff, 2002), there were a small number of qualitative studies (Davis, 1999; Russell, 1996), including studies of children’s perspectives (Dobbs, Smith & Taylor, 2006; Willow & Hyder, 1998). The report showed that physical punishment, particularly when severe, was associated with increased aggression and antisocial behaviour; poorer academic achievement; poorer quality parent-child relationships (attachment); adverse mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, low self esteem); and diminished moral internalization (children’s internalization of parental values and ability to control their own behaviour). Other methods of parental discipline were shown to be more effective in bringing about favourable outcomes for children. The only positive outcome achieved by physical punishment was immediate compliance.

Law Reform

The preceding discussion provides the backdrop to the unprecedented progress towards prohibition of physical punishment around the world. Twenty-five states have now made corporal punishment of children illegal: Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela. High Courts in two further states, Italy and Nepal, have ruled that corporal punishment in childrearing is unlawful. Many other countries, such as Lithuania and Serbia, are committed to full prohibition and are in the process of developing new policies and laws to bring this about.

New Zealand became the first English speaking country in the world to prohibit the use of physical punishment by parents when the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007 took effect on 21 June 2007. This reform removed the defence provided by the previous law (section 59, Crimes Act 1961) and means that parents who are prosecuted for assaulting their child can no longer invoke the excuse that the force they used was reasonable in the circumstances and for the purpose of correcting their child. This amendment to our law was, and continues to be, the focus of intense and polarised public, political, media and academic debate in New Zealand (Taylor, Wood & Smith, forthcoming). There is a long way to go before we can say that the reform has been successful in its aim, as can be seen by the results of a recent referendum showing that many people want hitting children to remain legal. Nevertheless there is some encouraging evidence that attitudes are beginning to change (Children’s Commissioner, 2008; Lawrence & Smith, 2009a; Wood, 2008). In the Office of the Commissioner for Children Survey 89% of participants agreed that children were entitled to the same protection from assault as adults, and more than half (58%) thought that physical punishment was okay to use in some circumstances (whereas 91% of men and 86% of women had agreed with this statement in 1981). A Ministry of Health survey (2008) found that only one out of 22 parents had used physical punishment in the
last week, and fewer than one in three thought that it was effective.

Conclusion

It is important now for more efforts to be put into supporting parents to raise their children using positive non-violent disciplinary methods. Early childhood practitioners can help disseminate this change to the social norm, and support parents in using alternative methods. Our recent research (Lawrence & Smith, 2009a; 2009b) shows that early childhood professionals were often asked about disciplinary issues by parents, but did not always feel adequately prepared to answer parents’ questions. We also found a high proportion (almost two thirds) of parents drew on written sources of information, and more than a third were influenced by television and radio. Law Reform is only likely to be effective in changing attitudes if it is accompanied by public education and parenting support. Nevertheless it is an essential step towards the recognition of children’s right to physical integrity. It is likely that attitudes will be changed more quickly when researchers and advocates highlight children’s own experiences of being disciplined physically. Some of the most successful international stories of change have come from countries where children and young people have been partners with adults in lobbying for law change (as in Venezuela and Uruguay) and where politicians have proved open to listening to the voices of children about their experiences.

Further Resources

1. Eleven pamphlets for the project entitled SKIP (Strategies for Kids, Information for Parents) have been developed for parents of under fives in New Zealand. They can be read online, downloaded as a PDF format or you can contact Family Services through the web site below to order free hard copies of these pamphlets. You can also get information about the SKIP Local Initiative Fund or SKIP newsletters.


Further Reading

I have asterisked references on the list, that would be particularly valuable for further reading on this topic. In addition there is:
- An issue of Children’s Issues (Volume 12, number 2, 2008) the journal of the Centre for Research on Children and Families devoted to physical punishment issues.

References


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MEMBERS' BRIEFING PAPER 9.4 2010

Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children
Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive Officer

Background

Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (previously known as NIPPA) has been operating in Northern Ireland since 1965. Founded by local parents in response to the lack of pre-school places for young children, the development of the organisation was influenced by the play movement in New Zealand and similar parent-led playgroup initiatives in the rest of the United Kingdom (UK).

Formed just a few years before the recent conflict, the history of the organisation has been strongly influenced by the backdrop of a 40 year sectarian war.

The main objective of the organisation over the period has been to develop and support high quality community managed early childhood services but as a result of the conflict, Early Years was also challenged to provide environments for young parents and children from across the religious, political and class divides to come together to create safe and equal spaces for children to play, learn and grow together.

Since its inception, the work of the organisation has been underpinned by a strong community development ethos, focused on helping communities to assess the need for, develop and manage their own pre-school services.

During the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s early childhood groups, whether pre-school playgroups, parent and toddler groups or full day care groups, flourished across Northern Ireland. Currently there are 1,000 member groups affiliated to Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, servicing 30,000 pre-school children and their families on a daily basis. Each early childhood service in the community, voluntary and independent sectors is locally managed, in the main by local parents who are elected each year to oversee the management and development of the service. Each centre employs a staff team which is mainly qualified through a vocational system of professional development and training. Currently, however, there is a strategic policy focus to develop a graduate led workforce within the sector over the next 10 years.

Early education and care policy in Northern Ireland has been fragmented and up until recently (November 2007) early childhood services in the voluntary, community and private sectors were the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety while Nursery Schools and Units were the responsibility of the Department of Education.
Attempts were made as far back as 1978 to create greater synergy between the various sectors delivering early education and care, when under a short-lived Direct Rule Labour Administration, Lord Melchett the Minister responsible introduced a policy statement on early childhood developments proposing a seamless delivery of early care and education. In 1994 a further policy statement on integrating care and education was published by the Department of Health and Social Services but in reality up until the late 1990s the issue of early care and education was a low level priority for both the Department of Health and the Department of Education. During this period however, the work of Early Years was increasingly recognised by Government as an important contributor to early care and education, community development and the participation of parents in decision making and democratic processes.

Early childhood services in Northern Ireland operate within a deeply divided society where most educational services are segregated across religious divisions. Figures from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education suggest that as few as 5% of children attend integrated formal education. However, in the main, groups in the informal early education system, affiliated to Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, have managed to maintain a cross community, anti-sectarian focus and often provide the only opportunity for young parents and children from different backgrounds to get to know each other before entering a divided school system.

Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children is the lead support organisation for the early childhood sector in Northern Ireland. The organisation employs a range of training and support staff who provide specialist support to the early childhood sector. This support ranges from curriculum support for centres, to business and community development planning for management committees, to developing innovative solutions to specific issues within the sector.

The main focus of the organisation has been on developing the quality of experiences for young children with staff supporting the sector towards internationally recognised quality assurance levels. In the mid 1990s influenced by the High/Scope longitudinal research, the organisation has supported a number of member groups implement the High/Scope approach. In a recently published government led research ‘Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland’ (1997-2007), the quality of service for children in Early Years groups compares more favourably than similar pre-school groups in England and Wales. The rationale given for this is the quality of training and support provided by specialist staff who provide five hours of mentoring, modelling and training to each member group each month.
Conclusion

In the past 10 years the organisation has increasingly focused on improving outcomes for young children. Influenced by the commitments to improve long-term outcomes for children articulated by the Northern Ireland 10 Year Strategy for Children and Young People, Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children has set strategic objectives to improve outcomes in three key domains: eagerness and ability to learn; emotional and physical well being; and inclusion.
Table 1: A Logical Framework Approach to improving long term outcomes
I intended to explore through my doctoral thesis, how cultural boundaries were constructed and co-constructed in early childhood settings and how such boundaries could be transformed to reflect equitable cultural enactments. Therefore, I engaged in participatory action research, which I perceived would enable me to interact and act along with my participants, the children, families and staff, and myself in early childhood settings. I set out to implement this procedure last year with ideas of blurring boundaries between the researcher and the researched, thus making this a mutually exchanged, explored and acted out procedure. However, this procedure at times was much more challenging than I anticipated and the following are my reflections that stemmed from those interruptions.

Cited re-actions
Most research projects start with a research proposal that provides an overview of the project outline, intentions and goals of any research. I began mine by reading a substantial volume of literature that spoke about my topic, my intended methodology, action research and methods. In the following, I would like to focus primarily on this methodological process, action research. Literature on action research to varying degrees regarded this form of research as being critical, liberating, self-emancipatory and a change inducing process (Burns, 2000: Freebody, 2003). Moreover, the authors represented this procedure with cyclic or spiralling diagrams, thus denoting the procedure was self-generating with no definite beginning or an end (Martin, Lisahunter & McLaren, 2006; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009). All of the above literature suggested ways of closely working with and amongst participants, by presenting what was observed, engaging in collaborative discussions about the meanings of such observations and then collectively acting to induce change. Thus, using this available literature, I designed my research to closely engage in participatory observations with children and take these documented evidences to families and staff to begin collective action, after which we would again collectively observe, exchange, review and act again. Hatch (2007) comments that early childhood practitioners engage in daily practices that are based on cyclic procedures, in which they observe, interpret and plan. Having worked in early childhood settings for more than 10 years, it seemed plausible and possible as the procedure in itself seemed to me closely akin to what most early childhood practitioners considered as their daily practice.

Imagined re-actions
I imagined that it was possible to enact such cyclic procedures that I had meticulously studied and designed from all the literature that I had read. Nelson (2008), describes an action researcher as a critical friend, who engages in a relationship that is least threatening in order to bring about changes collaboratively. I imagined myself to be this critical friend, whose key aim was to take children’s voices to the forefront in order to enact cultures collaboratively and equitably. I circulated my intentions and the goals of my action research to long daycare early childhood centres seeking their consent to participate, with a hope to encounter in this seamless relationship as researchers. The centres too imagined of what this procedure would be and they signed to participate in my project using their own cited and imagined re-actions on action research and my research topic. We believed that our cited and imagined re-actions matched and we began our commitment to cultures of children, families and staff.

Ethical re-actions
This was collaborative action research, as a tool it should enable the voices of children, families and staff to be heard. As an action researcher, I was seen as the vehicle, who would carry those exchanges that were raised with hopes of inducing change. It was very difficult to predict what would be exchanged through interactions, and during many occasions children, families and staff confided and shared their deepest emotions and feelings, which they believed would resolve their predicament. However, I was bound ethically to protect my participant’s anonymity and confidentiality, and I realised my re-actions had to be carefully considered before being shared. As a critical researcher (Joyce & Tutela, 2005), I had to choose with whom and how much and what should be shared, not shared or partially shared as sharing such exchanges had the propensity to reveal the identity of the exchange. I had the power to exert perceivably ethical discernment to completely or partially discard interactions and actions, which were exchanged with intentions of being taken further. I repeatedly wondered with guilt, whether my partial discretion was ethically sound in relation to my participants.
Sighted re-actions
I began to share my re-actions to children’s sighted actions and interactions with children, staff and families. This was when I realised, as researchers our re-actions to the same sighted action or interaction were incongruent, despite our consent to interact, act and re-act together. It became evident that each one of us based our re-actions on our own cited and imagined re-actions, as we held on different bodies of literature and imaginations as our ‘truths’. I sought the literature that I held as ‘truth’, and I imagined and sighted by drawing upon these citations. I sighted children as being as innocent and/or as knowledgeable as adults, who had the capacity to choose what was perceived and constructed as contextually powerful. However, some of the staff seemed to sight children as innocent and innately inclined to take the natural course of development, thereby viewed what was chosen by children as a matter of individual, developmental choice. Grieshaber (2001) comments on how developmental psychology has been embraced by many staff in their daily practices and their understandings of children’s interactions and behaviour are based on this individual developmental model. It seemed like I had to work against this powerful paradigm that saw children as passively set in the race and gender dispositions set for them (Connolly, 2008). The families of those children, and some other staff sighted the same as I did, but were as innocent and/or as knowledgeable as the children who expressed only what was perceived as contextually powerful. Therefore, what was shared by them with me could be perceived as my subjective sighting or their subjective revealing. I chose not to exchange and review collectively as I had envisioned with all staff, and chose timely (in)action and silence. Action research, as a procedure was supposedly built around this desire for change, yet, I kept wondering what right I had to impose my realms of ‘truth’ on those around me, especially when theirs were also based on their citations and imaginations of ‘truth’.

Desired re-actions
I was consumed by my desire, my project. I had to protect this due to my fear of being rejected was real to me. I realised my sighted re-actions differed from the re-actions of some staff, and there were very little chances of my re-actions being accepted as even one of the perceivable ‘truths’. I therefore decided to retract my intended re-actions and to project only my desired re-actions. These desired re-actions were carefully framed in order to protect my project. The staff and the centre had the power to withdraw from my project. How do I stand up against this power, as an action researcher who had invested much time, space and emotions to fulfil my desire? Therefore, despite my intentions of seeking alternate re-actions, I stood silenced, not by those around me but by my own inner desire, my project. I still question my selfish re-actions against how I proposed and intended to act earlier. Furthermore, recognising my own desire made me become aware of the desires of those around me and how it could affect their re-actions and this awareness further justified my silence and their resistance to my intended re-actions. It was only during the final few weeks I felt the slightest shift in the attitudes of some of the staff and I desired to start my action research afresh. Although action research is depicted as a cyclic procedure, realistically as an outsider researching in someone else’s setting, my time there was limited and set and I had to leave it just when it seemed to begin. Is action research that is completely collaborative even possible when we as individuals and collectively are consciously and unconsciously guided by our own cited, imagined, ethical, sighted and desired re-actions? Thus, my action research, laden with guilt remained (in)action research at times, due to my self-imposed partial or silenced re-actions.

My questions still remain, as I contemplate:
• What is the purpose of this (in)action research?
• Does this mean I have failed to accomplish what I had set to accomplish as an action researcher?
• How do I re-act differently or is it even possible to re-act differently, if it means I need to relinquish my citations, imaginations, ethics, sights and desires?

References


Suggested readings


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“... the unresolved tensions of children’s participation detail a record woven with ambiguity, of progress and emancipatory potential on one front and unresolved tensions, questions and power practices on another. Such ambiguity suggests we have not yet resolved how to best theorise, interpret and practice children’s participation in everyday social and political life” (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 343).

In this members briefing I will explore how such tensions and ambiguity are played out in early childhood settings based upon five discourses that can be employed to understand children and childhood, and how these intersect with children’s participation in curriculum to create both openings and limitations. In my Masters research I conducted a series of interviews with early childhood educators to explore how participatory practices for children may be enacted and sustained in early childhood settings. One level of analysis I conducted on the interview data was to identify the discourses of childhood that educators used to make sense of and to talk about their work, in particular their efforts to increase children’s participation in curriculum. The discourses I used were children as: innocent, threats, developing, apprentices, and social actors/citizens (Kotsanas, 2009).

**Innocent**
In the discourse of children as innocent, children are considered naturally vulnerable. In addition to a duty to care for and protect children, an adult’s role is one of guidance and education. The construction of children’s dependency encompasses “a myriad of power relationships resulting in inequalities between adults and children” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p.7) which have the negative consequence of making children extremely vulnerable, isolated, silenced and disenfranchised (Gittens, 1998, cited in Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p.7), and perpetuates their need for protection. It is also a discourse of children’s need, which gives authority to educators who identify and address their needs (Cannella, 1997). If children cannot be expected to restrain themselves and are assumed to only make self-gratifying choices, educators must limit the options to those that are deemed to be in the child’s best interest. This discourse can be used to either justify why children are not asked to participate – for example, that they will only choose inappropriate toys or junk food – or participatory practices can be used as discipline – for example, by giving choices during routine times to create calm, or allowing children to choose resources as an incentive or reward for good behaviour.

**Threats**
A discourse that has historically shared dominance with the discourse of children’s innocence is the conception of children as threats (James & James, 2004). This discourse attempts to deny children the opportunity to negotiate power or autonomy, inhibits the development of trusting relationships with adults and attempts to prevent or limit opportunities for children to exercise their agency (Woodrow, 1999). Ironically the tighter regimes of surveillance and ordering that children are now subject to proves that they are agents, for if children were thought to be passive there would be no need for the systems of control (James & James, 2004). If young children cannot be expected to restrain themselves and are assumed to only make self-gratifying choices, educators must limit the options to those that are deemed to be in the child’s best interest. This discourse can be used to either justify why children are not asked to participate – for example, that they will only choose inappropriate toys or junk food – or participatory practices can be used as discipline – for example, by giving choices during routine times to create calm, or allowing children to choose resources as an incentive or reward for good behaviour.

**Developing**
The developing child is the most recognisable image in the dominant discourses of early childhood education. Within this discourse children are believed to be immature and unreasonable but will inevitably make self-propelled progress through linear, biologically fixed stages to an adulthood that is characterised by cognitive maturity and reason (Archard, 2004). Children are presumed incapable and are therefore denied the opportunity to show their capability. The developing discourse is explicitly future-oriented, focusing on the competent adult that the child will become and dismissing the realities of being a child in the present (Uprichard, 2008). Positioning children as ignorant leaves them unable to make decisions about what and how they learn in early childhood settings (Kotsanas, 2009; Millei, 2005) Educators who categorise children as developing normally or abnormally, or as not sufficiently developed to make decisions, may also compromise the equity of child participation.
Individualising children in terms of their development may cause them to be silenced and marginalised within the group. Where specific skills are considered prerequisite to participate certain children will be less likely to be included in participation practices (Kotsanas, 2009; Sinclair, 2004). For example, this discourse may be employed by educators working with younger children to limit choices or offer very simple means of participating on the premise that as they gain experience and age they would be able to participate more fully.

**Apprentices**
In the apprentice discourse children are allowed to participate when situations are adult-engineered and decision-making choices remain limited (MacNaughton, Smith, Hughes, Lawrence, & Olcay, 2006). The ability of children to participate is decided upon by the educator who can invite or allow the child to take part, and who can make the appropriate modifications before complying with children’s requests. This discourse presumes that there are limits to what children are capable of making choices about, and that these are best set by adults, thereby maintaining existing power relations. The apprentice child’s participation is adult initiated, driven and led which restricts children’s opportunities to exercise their agency. Although they have a greater chance of having their requests heeded in this discourse than in other traditional discourses, children are not encouraged to take initiative and must wait for an invitation to share their opinion. Their experience of participation will remain conditional, always subjected to the scrutiny of the educator (Kotsanas, 2009). Children may therefore choose to participate in ways they know will be accepted, even if this does not accurately reflect their experiences or interests. Children in the discourse of the apprentice are often required to produce particular responses to be heard, as educators may privilege certain ideas as more appropriate than others (Clark, 2005). This is easily recognisable in the group-time consultations that are often conducted in kindergarten and primary classrooms.

**Social actors/citizens**
A more recent discourse of children as social actors and citizens has emerged in which children are believed to be social agents who shape their own identity. It recognises that children construct their own social worlds, that they have agency and that they are participants in social processes (Smith, 2007). Realising participatory rights for young children relies on incorporating the concept of children as social actors and agents. Three ideas are embodied by this new model: that young children make valid meanings about their world, that children’s knowledge is different but not inferior to adults’ knowledge, and that children’s perspectives can improve adults understandings of children’s experiences (MacNaughton, et al., 2006). A related discourse of children and childhood elaborates on the social actor and agent discourse, coupling it with the belief that children’s rights are citizen’s rights. This discourse offers subject positions for educators to identify as learners, partners and collaborators who are responsive, flexible and reflective. It increases the opportunities for participation to be everyday and ongoing as well as one-off consultations (Clark, 2005). It also increases the opportunities for all children to participate – not just those who have the ‘skills’ to communicate about events or set up activities. Participation within the discourse of children as social actors and citizens is not merely additive, but grows out of everyday routines and interactions. It is based on respectful relationships, can be led by children as well as adults, and it is fluid and responsive to time, place and individuals. Children are viewed as highly capable and important members of the community whose opinions are consistently sought across many areas.

**Conclusion**
Educators shift between multiple discourses of childhood in different combinations and with different effects. The discourses have obvious affects on participation: on how capable children are believed to be, the chances they have to exercise their agency, and the participatory opportunities they are provided with. Whilst the discourse of children as social actors and citizens is predictably conducive to increasing participation, the other discourses can also play a productive role at times. The ability of any discourse to singularly represent the best interests of children in early childhood is unfeasible – even children’s participation as social actors and citizens can be contested in regard to its failure to adequately address the need for balance between protection and participation (Milne, 2008; Stasilus, 2002). The use of multiple discourses of childhood to inform early childhood practice may therefore be instrumental for upholding children’s rights holistically and contributing to the growth and good of all children (Kotsanas, 2009). Just as any singular discourse of childhood has restrictive effects for children, using a singular understanding to inform participatory practices will inhibit diversity and limit what participation practices can become.

**References**


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National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day (NAICD) was celebrated on August the 4th across Australia. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) which is the national non-government peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, has organised this event since 1988. This year’s theme ‘From Small to Big: Growing Stronger Every Day’ according to Frank Hytten SNAICCs Chief Executive Officer speaks to the understanding that:

Children who grow up strong in culture will, research shows, be more likely to be better functioning as adults, thus enhancing communities and becoming parents and adults who then raise children in safe and culturally positive ways, as well as become role models and provide leadership in their own and the ‘mainstream’ community. In this way, SNAICC wants to encourage the idea that given the solid supports, especially in relation to their own cultural identity, children will grow stronger every day, as they grow from small to big (Hytten, F., personal communication, September 23, 2011).

For non Indigenous early childhood practitioners NAICD is a good time to reflect on how Indigenous cultural identity is represented within their programs. Narratives of Aboriginality that are presented in early childhood programs are often underpinned by colonial understandings of Aboriginality which position Indigenous people around dualisms such as assimilated/traditional and black/white. As Annette Sax an Indigenous Early Childhood consultant relates:

I went to a non Indigenous centre that had booked me for storytelling and face painting over two days, which fell on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children’s day. I told the story of ‘The Possum Hunt’ but the teacher was unhappy because it wasn’t traditional. They wanted traditional dancers and a didgeridoo player (Sax, A., personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Aunty Iris’ story of the ‘Possum Hunt’ (Lovett cited in Atkinson, Lovett, & Elkner, 1991, pp.11-14) is ‘traditional’ in that it is a story of hunting and gathering, and is set in the Victorian bush of the 1940s but it could just as easily be set in 2011. In its understated way the ‘Possum Hunt’ highlights the tenacity of Victorian Aboriginal culture in that it represents as alive a set of ancient skills and knowledges such as tracking as practiced by Aunty Iris and her brother Charlie. But Aunty Iris’ story meets with resistance when colonial understandings of Aboriginality persist when early childhood practitioners reject an Indigenous standpoint which does not conform with an ‘authentic’ Aboriginality as they know it.

Reconceptualising Aboriginality within a contemporary multiplicity and a cultural continuity within the lived reality of urban spaces is central in respecting and supporting Indigenous children’s identity. Within such a reconception non Indigenous children are challenged to reconceive their own concepts of Aboriginality which are emerging in the early years of education and care. As Kylie Smith Co-director of Swanston Street Children’s Centre describes:

I had been talking with children in Spider Room about their understandings of Aboriginal people and their culture. For many children their discussions involved Aboriginal people as living in the past and their culture in traditional, historic and in some cases ‘exotic’ ways. There were sentences that started with “A long time and go…” or “In the old days…”. For some of the children they talked about Aboriginal people as eating kangaroo as a ‘primitive’ activity and again in the past. I reflected on the resources that the centre has and the discussions that I engage with children to challenge these ‘colonial’ understandings of Aboriginal people. I wanted to consider how I could provide contemporary understandings of Aboriginal people. In my search I found a children’s picture book called ‘Shake a leg’ written by Boori Monty Pryor & Jan Ormerod. This book tells a story about some young children who go to a pizza shop in Darwin where they meet an Aboriginal man who works at the shop making pizza. In the story the reader is introduced to the person’s family within a contemporary context. The man tells stories about his life and his multiple identities as an Aboriginal person. He works in a pizza shop, he is part of a family with brothers and
sisters, and he is a part of a dance group. When I first read the story with the children they all were surprised that the person worked in a pizza shop and that he had a sister who was a nurse. The book opened up spaces for me to talk about contemporary understandings of Aboriginal people and challenge ‘colonial’ ideas that ‘other’ Aboriginal people (Smith, K., personal communication, September 9, 2011).

The children at Yappera Children’s Service, a multifunctional Aboriginal children’s service celebrated NAICD in a way that reflects how staff and children construct their subjectivities as Indigenous people. A subjectivity that is informed by multiplicity as well as the uniformity that informs the dynamic of Indigenous culture.

Stacey Brown the Chief Executive Officer at Yappera described it this way:

We had a very busy day and the children had lots of fun. Yappera hosted a theme pyjama day for all the children at Yappera. The staff also dressed in PJs. Hey de Ho music visited to perform a concert for the children in the morning. We also had an animal farm visit in the afternoon. Uncle Robert Bamblett did some traditional dance activities with the children. The staff, children and families enjoyed pizza, pasta and salad for lunch and throughout the day enjoyed other activities including boomerang painting. As you can imagine, all the children were very tired in the afternoon when their parents/caregivers arrived to collect them after such a busy day (Brown, S., personal communication, September 12, 2011).

Amongst the PJs, pizza and pasta of multicultural Anglo Australia lay the continuities with Indigenous tradition such as the visit from the Elder bringing ancient narratives to life through dance. In this lived experience of postcolonial Aboriginality the Indigenous child’s culture and identity is nurtured.

Decolonizing ‘mainstream’ early childhood programs is a process of reflecting on and critiquing colonial concepts of Aboriginality. Through such critiques the inclusion of more authentic Indigenous perspectives in the program should evolve, addressing the right of Aboriginal children to an early childhood experience that strengthens their culture and identity.

References


Further Information
http://www.snaicc.asn.au/

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Musings on Critical Pedagogy

Merlyne Cruz, Equity & Childhood Program, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne

Centuries of colonization made my country of origin, the Philippines, the most Westernised country in Asia. Almost five centuries after our first colonizers came to our shores, epistemic colonization still continues to manifest in different ways in the lives of colonized Filipinos: valuing white culture while devaluing one’s own indigenous culture; tolerance of (neo) colonial mentality; adopting a Western-dependent identity. The everydayness and systemic effect of colonization remains in people’s episteme. Whitening, therefore, had been for me a daily preoccupation; to be white/whiter has always been a perennial aspiration. Migrating to Australia did not cure my White love (Rafael, 2000) syndrome. I continued to anchor my daily life - and future - to White ideals. Even as a mature age undergraduate student, my mental absorption with earning my White father’s approval never left me. In my scholarly pursuits, I had a ‘natural’ inclination to consult, learn from, and read works written mainly by White theorists.

Until one day, in an Inclusive Curriculum undergraduate class, I met Critical Pedagogy.

In this class, I was exposed to existing debates in early childhood on equity and social justice. We talked about anti-bias curriculum and wrote our reflections about topics on inclusion that relate to our own experiences. My lecturer spoke about how Australia’s history of colonization relates to current, persistent racism towards Indigenous Australians in the country. I felt angry about the oppression brought about by colonization but, back then, in these beginning years of my encounters with Critical Pedagogy, I peered though this history dimly, from afar, distant from my own life.

The early years of my PhD study were marked by intense interest and intense struggle over episteme (systems of meaning) and epistemology (examining the making, the implications and the effects of meaning systems themselves). In fact, the idea of researching a group of early childhood educators’ commitment to diversity stemmed partly from this interest and from a conviction that what we believe – our worldview – influences what we do. I began with exploring the topic of worldview in my PhD study, as I was interested in understanding its impact on our everyday practices. I didn’t know then that deeper reasons for my preoccupation with worldviews and mindsets were embedded in the larger contexts of my personal and socio-cultural history.

Halfway through my PhD study, I took time to reflect on my academic pursuits. With my evolving critical consciousness, I was ready to redefine myself as deeper engagement with Critical Pedagogy exposed me to who I was in the contexts I was in: immersed and steeped in whiteness, obsessed with mimicry, lacking awareness of the forces of white domination that has shaped and continue to shape my perceptions and practices. Critical Pedagogy nourished the strong needs to resist and subvert the ‘natural’ urge to please my white masters. Critical Pedagogy became particularly useful in my study from here on not just for the critical lens through which to theorize contemporary society and constructions of individual subjects but also for the ways individual subjects challenge normalizing discourses.

Freire’s (1970) version of Critical Pedagogy connected with my passionate interest in human consciousness and concrete action to transform my (neo) colonial world. Freire named the world I had lived/live in. Slowly, I opened up to the challenge of breaking free from what Freire identified as the ‘culture of silence’ I grew up in. Through my readings, I learned that an end to oppression would require the ability to critically perceive one’s existence in the world; my action is largely determined by the way I see myself within it. Freire (1970) taught me to perceive the reality of perception not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation, which I can transform (p.34).

I continued to meet Critical Pedagogy in my dual role as educator - researcher. I met it in my close encounters with diverse professionals who are passionate about diversity and are fervent in bringing about transformations in and through early childhood education. Notions of subversion, resistance, radical and transgressive appealed to me as knowledge of these constructs deepened at this stage of my postgraduate years.

As my PhD study progressed, I realized all the more that many of the questions that have arisen in my thesis have connections to my own life. My multiple identities as a novice critical researcher; a Filipina in diaspora; a woman of colour beginning to learn a discourse of resistance; a first generation migrant
parent learning to grapple with a hyphenated identity; a minority academic working in an institution operating within and through a Eurocentric framework that has always been inextricably linked to discourses of exclusion – all these underpinned the strong urge to discern the oppressive social and political structures that produce erasures, invisibility, alienation, and trauma in my life.

Critical Pedagogy directed me to scholarly works written by Filipino academics. These newfound mentors introduced me to counter-narratives I never knew existed. Their thoughts, words, and the subjects they presented, gave meaning to many unanswered questions. I re-learned Filipino history from the lens of critical scholars who taught me that the leaders of our first revolutionary movements (1896-1898) were men – and women – who possessed courage and brilliance to fight our colonizers. The works of our national hero Jose Rizal, whose core writings on individual rights and freedom found in his works Noli Me Tangere (published in Berlin in 1887) and El Filibusterismo (published in Ghent in 1891) expanded my understandings of the dynamics of submission and resistance under colonialism. Vicente Rafael’s (1993) innovative interpretation of the early Spanish period, his focus on translation and conversion makes his book Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule of great value to someone like me interested in the role of language in history.

Renato Constantino’s writings (see for example Identity and Consciousness, Miseducation of the Filipino, Neocolonial Identity and Counterconsciousness, Westernizing Factors in the Philippines) revealed how resignation and passivity, respect for the master and depreciation of indigenous ways - imposed by the colonizers to make us good colonials - had been accepted and passed on by our ancestors as virtues. Constantino (1975) instructed me to value the need for a real people’s history. Such a history, according to him, must rediscover the past in order to make it reusable and serve as a guide in the continuing struggle for change. Virgilio Enriquez (1992) soaked my consciousness with constructs of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, a framework that questions the imposition of Western theoretical models in explaining why the Filipino is the way s/he is.

Alejo (1990) and Ileto (1979) mentored me as I re- visioned and re-membered indigenous core values embedded/buried within me, such as loob (inner being as it is connected with ideas of power, leadership, revolution, dissent), kapwa (the other in one’s self), pakikipagkapwa (sharing one’s being), paninindigan (courage for critical conviction) and pakikibaka (fusion in common struggle). Pe-Pua (1982), author of Sikolohiyang Pilipino Teorya, Metodo at Gamit, opened my eyes to Filipino ways of researching and presented me with innovative methods I have not come across in handbooks of qualitative research that I have read - methods like pagtatanung-tanong (spontaneous and informal questioning), pakikisala (being one with ‘other’), and pakikiramdam (to feel with, and feel for, the ‘other’).

Melinda de Jesus (2005) and her co-authors in the book Pinay Power, Feminist Critical Theory exposed me to various languages of Pinay feminism (critical feminism, Filipina version). Their story-talks articulated different accounts of Pinay resistance to imperialism’s lingering effects. Leny Strobel (2000) took my hand and walked with me as I embarked on my decolonization journey after I read her book, Coming Full Circle, a documentation of aspects of a visible decolonization movement in the United States amongst a new generation of Filipino American scholars.

Now, in this latter phase of my encounter with Critical Pedagogy, Filipino scholar Eloise Tan (2008) prods me to ask, where are all the diverse scholars in our syllabi, lecture halls, and conferences? What hope is there for students and aspiring academics of colour if they can see no trail blazed before them? Eloise Tan reminds me that there were critical discourses that existed before critical pedagogy and that there are critical discourses that exist alongside critical pedagogy. She warns that critical discourse is in danger of losing authenticity when it is not critical of itself; it is in danger of seeing and confronting the political everywhere but within. Her words move me:

We go on about the Frankfurt School yet we do not recognize Du Bois and his writing about schools, students and education until a white man asserts his importance in our critical discourse. The structural systems that govern power and discourse in our society have not come as far as we like to think in regards to diversity in representations. We may all learn the importance of multicultural education and critical analysis of power in education, but we still live in a system of academia where most high-level positions are occupied by white males. This drives me crazy. It makes me want to scream with frustration when I see faculties of education where most are white like their mostly white pre-service students who go out to teach classes where they are the minority in number and I am the majority (Tan, 2008, pp.155-156).

Yet, amidst academic systems where, as Eloise Tan describes them, only one voice and one positionality are valued and where the nature of institutions seems to reproduce the macro power dynamics of the society in which it is embedded, we see, in Critical Pedagogy, many possibilities.
Where am I now in Critical Pedagogy? Critical Pedagogy stirs me to be a part of critically knowing communities (MacNaughton, 2005) made up of peers who provide hope and inspiration, as we, individually and collectively, work to bring about change in – and beyond- early childhood education. My critically knowing communities extend to Indigenous and anti-colonial people of colour, scholars and theorists whose works honour Indigenous epistemologies, and in so doing, heal the wounds of colonization. Critical Pedagogy continues to encourage me to “drink from my own wells” (Gutierrez, 1984) and challenges me, incessantly, to embrace non-dominant, indigenist pedagogy in my work toward social justice, equity and diversity. I continue to refer to Critical Pedagogy - the humble, evolving kind of Critical Pedagogy that learns from diverse peoples in differing historical and socio-cultural locations (Kincheloe, 2008) and asks questions of itself, and induces us to ask questions of ourselves.

References


Rafael, V. (2000). White Love and Other Events in Filipino History, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City.


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In her book, *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway (2008) poses the following question: “How is “becoming with” a practice of becoming worldly?” (p.3). This question continues to frame much of my current grappling about the ethics and politics of equity in early childhood education and research. In this paper I want to share some of these grappling in order to highlight the usefulness of Haraway’s question, along with her broader body of work. As a feminist, ecological and post-humanist scholar, Haraway brings together a wide set of political interests that I have found useful in my work as an early childhood teacher and as a researcher.

**Finding my way to Haraway**

As a beneficiary of the Australian early childhood scholars who brought feminisms, poststructuralisms, postcolonialisms, Indigenous cosmologies, and queer perspectives (among others) into early childhood education (see for example MacNaughton, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Atkinson, 2008) I have come to particular political sets of understandings about how early childhood education can be conceptualised and practiced. These perspectives align with the idea that truths are generated not discovered; nature and culture are not essentially ‘natural’; power is productive not fixed; and, subjectivities are negotiated not predetermined. These poststructuralist principles continue to shape my teaching and research. I have found these principles to be central to many of Haraway’s arguments.

**Who and what else contributes to world making?**

During my doctoral research I explored these principles in early childhood practice in collaboration with co-teacher researchers and children. While my dissertation focused on equity and routines, the lines of enquiry we also followed included Indigenous knowledges about the place the centre was situated in (Gadigal Country), ecological concerns that stemmed from these Indigenous knowledges coupled with environmental issues that we included into our repertoire of ‘social justice’, and the materials that we used to construct the physical space in which we worked.

At the time I began reading the work of Bruno Latour (2005) whose extensive philosophy offered an interesting dimension to our teacher-researcher. He argued that objects (such as cups, spoons, tables chairs and so on) can - ‘express’ power relations, ‘symbolise’ social hierarchies, ‘reinforce’ social inequalities, ‘transport’ social power, ‘objectify’ inequality, ‘reify’ gender [and ‘race’] relations, they can be at the origin of social activity’” (Latour, 2005, p.72). This way of thinking about ‘objects having agency’ enabled us to consider that the truth making that we were contesting about equity in early childhood practices, included more than just the human players. This also meant that processes of negotiating subjectivities also included non-human players (e.g. cups, water, food, furniture and so on) (please see – Giugni, 2011b for an example).

Subsequent to our grappling with this idea of objects having agency and the equity issues that arise from recognising this, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi published a book that explicitly engaged with this idea of the material world playing a significant part in human becomings (Lenz Taguchi, 2009a, 2009b). She offered provocations such as an image of a girl playing in a sandpit with the question: “Is the girl playing with the sand or is the sand playing with the girl?” (2009b, n.p.). Lenz Taguchi’s work helped generate a movement of new questions into ‘relational’ ways of becoming; relationality between humans as well as non-humans such as the sand. This kind of relationality suggests that the sand (or object, or place, or technology) plays a significant part in our processes of becoming. This way of thinking about becoming is a significant step away from solely developmental ones. Lenz Taguchi primarily engaged with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) to make her arguments. Conceptualising becoming in this way, in conversation with these philosophers, brings challenging questions about humans and their centrality to the creating world.

Haraway’s question of ‘becoming worldly ‘with’’ adds another dimension to the possibilities for thinking about the centrality of humans in world making. While Haraway’s work is not specifically about education or children, she generates many useful and highly political concepts, like ‘becoming worldly with’, that can help expand an early childhood educational repertoire (Taylor, Blaise & Giugni, 2011; Giugni 2011a). When Haraway asks the question of ‘how we become ‘with’ to become worldly’, she is attending to ideas that shift humanist understandings of the world. For example, ‘becoming worldly with’ helps open up questions about who and what we share the world with. This means that we begin to recognise that humans are not the only worthy contributors to, and makers of, the world. Haraway (1991, 2008) argues that animals, places, plants, digital and mechanical technologies and all kinds of ‘non-human others’ collectively generate
who we can become and who/what the world can become. This thought provoking question suggests that concepts of human development that have been relied upon to shape early childhood education are not only limited in terms of cultural diversities and differences, but limited in recognising that all of the human and non-human others that create the world are inter and intra dependent (Barad, 2007). In other words, the idea that we are separate autonomous individuals who ‘develop’ along a predictable trajectory falls short of recognising all of the other dimensions of the world that contribute to who we can become. So when we consider all of the human and non-human others with whom we share the world, we can begin to rethink who and what else has agency to shape us.

In early childhood pedagogy we might think of how the physical environment shapes us by calling it ‘the third pedagogue or teacher’ (Gandini, 1998). While this is one step toward recognising the agency of the physical environment in how we can become ‘in relation’ to others, it falls short of recognising the political dimensions, histories, geographies and so on of the ‘resources’ that we use to construct our early childhood environments (Giugni, 2011a). When we reconsider the pedagogical agency of early childhood places and spaces in conversation with Haraway, another politics attuned to the question of who acts in whose interest and on whose terms, arises.

Haraway argues that all of the non-human others, in particular what we might regard as the ‘natural world’, does not simply exist to resource human interests. For example, her arguments ask us to consider the part that companion species such as cats and dogs play in shaping us, not in terms of a human-pet relationship but in terms of the shared mutual becomings that both animal and human generate relationally (Haraway, 2003). In addition she asserts that animals are not human babies, but companion species with whom we share ‘questioning relationships’ (Haraway, 2008, p.72). These questioning relationships engage with the complexities of interspecies differences and how these shape our becomings. While this may seem distant from what we consider to be important in early childhood education, consider these two points. Firstly that our bodies are already interspecies (we have tiny worms that live on our eyelashes and all kinds of critters that live in and on our skin) and our bodies are 70% (or so) water so we are constantly made of other worldly elements that keep us alive and shape our becomings. In turn, we shape them. This clearly illustrates our mutual inter and intra dependence. Another way to consider our worldly mutualities is, as Haraway suggests, to consider ‘the world as an active subject’, and that ‘...acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities...’ (Haraway 1991, p.199). These ‘unsettling possibilities’ about who and what else contributes to world making, and the politics of taking seriously the contributions of ‘non-human others’ enable us to stretch our thinking about what else we can do in early childhood education that contributes to grappling with the ethics and politics of working for a different kind of world. Finding another way through Haraway enables a rethink about early childhood practices as those that beckon us to ‘becoming worldly with’ all of the ‘non-human others’ with whom we share the world.

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Lenz Taguchi, H. (2009a, 20th November). *What is an ethics of immanence and potentialities for early childhood education?*. Keynote address presented at
the 9th Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity: Children’s rights in research, policy and practice conference, The University of Melbourne, Australia.


**Further reading and resources**


**Online Resources**

Sometimes learning about new and complex ideas through videos can then help further reading. There are a few reading references in the list above as well as links to a couple that you can access online below. These readings and references are not early childhood because Haraway’s work is newly entering early childhood research and practice.

Donna Haraway has some excellent lectures on Youtube – here are two links below that illustrate many of her concepts but particularly the development of her ideas of ‘becoming worldly with’ and ‘world making or worlding’:

The Fifth Annual Feminist Theory Workshop
Implementing violence prevention programs without violence: can it be done?

Lisa McKay-Brown PhD

The perception of increasing levels of school violence has seen a proliferation of violence prevention program being developed for implementation in schools (Elinoff, Chafoules, & Sassu, 2004; Griffin, Chen, Eubanks, Brantley, & Wilis, 2007). The focus of these programs has been to change the violence prevention culture in a school by decreasing violent or aggressive behaviour (Park-Higgerson, Perumean-Chaney, Bartolucci, Grimley, & Singh, 2008). However there are concerns with the evaluation of violence prevention programs. There is little examination of longitudinal studies, a difficulty in demonstrating causality, and little theoretical coherence concerning program aims, methods and evaluation (Farrell, Meyer, Kung, & Sullivan, 2001; Howard & Flora, 1999; Park-Higgerson et al., 2008; Scheckner, Rollin, Kaiser-Ulrey, & Wagner, 2002). Literature also suggests that violence prevention programs do not address issues of power nor do they acknowledge how power is used in their implementation (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003; Fields & McNamara, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2008; Scheckner et al., 2002).

Eyes shut

My work in violence prevention started in a myopic utopia. I had been implementing a violence prevention program called PeaceBuilders in a school and was getting excited by the changes that were reflected in the student surveys collected over a three-year period. The students reported experiencing more pro-social and less anti-social interactions. There was a decrease in bullying behaviours and an increased positive attitude to school. I felt confident, that I could evaluate the efficacy of PeaceBuilders as a violence prevention program that ‘worked’. However when I began to try to explain what did work, I had more questions than answers. This is where my myopic utopia began to unravel.

A slow awakening

The unraveling and subsequent awakening began when I started examining the stories of students and staff that I had collected incidentally during the evaluation. I unmasked unexpected dynamics of power in student and teacher relationships in reaction to PeaceBuilders. I was unsure about how to include this data but knew that it was intrinsically important to have their voices in my study. My initial confidence began to dwindle and my struggle to find a way through this thinking began.

My eyes were opened to ways of exploring and conceptualising relations of power when I discovered a book titled *Life in Schools: an introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* by Peter McLaren (2007). I read about his teaching journey and his attempt to tell a story in the hope of drawing attention to the oppressive circumstances being experienced by both teachers and students. McLaren’s own story resonated with me. He had powerful examples of how schooling disempowered teachers and students. However, until his exposure to critical pedagogy, he was left with no conceptual tools to make sense of these. As I read about his interpretation of critical pedagogy, I was drawn to the discussions about knowledge and power in particular. I began to question my role in the attempt to embed a new dominant discourse of violence prevention called PeaceBuilders.
Becoming awake: how do I talk about my new thinking?
One of the key struggles I had during my awakening was finding a conceptual framework in which to discuss violence prevention. Violence prevention programs are based on various theories underpinning youth violence. These theories include social learning theory, attribution theory, resilience theory, developmental theory and eclectic theory (Fields & McNamara, 2003). While these theories have been used to devise violence prevention programs, they do not promote discussion about the ways that dynamics of power and the positioning of individuals or groups can impact on their implementation or efficacy.

So where to next? Well after much reading and discussion, I embraced critical pedagogy for my conceptual framework because of the view that schools are sites of inequality and oppression where knowledge that maintains dominant discourses is controlled through curriculum and culture (Apple, 2004; McLaren, 2009; Monchinski, 2008). However, as I began to realise that power was exercised in multiple locations, and through the different positions that participants held during the course of implementation, I also drew on Foucault’s (1979, 1980) view that the exercise of power acts through the individual on multiple and co-existing levels and is linked to the production of knowledge. It was this thinking, incorporated into the discourses of critical pedagogy that I decided to draw upon in my analysis (Goldstein, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2007; Monchinski, 2008; Popkewitz, 1999).

Reflecting on the implications of my research. What did I find?
What I found was that the implementation of PeaceBuilders impacted on teachers and students in multiple ways and their reactions created different positions during the process. For most teachers and students PeaceBuilders ‘worked’. They seemed to embrace the ideology of PeaceBuilders and felt that they were seeing a positive difference in interactions. These students and teachers were privileged with recognition for their ‘good’ work; they actively supported the continued use of PeaceBuilders and were critical of those who were not ‘PeaceBuilders’.

However, there were groups of teachers and students who were critical of the PeaceBuilders program and resisted its implementation. Some teachers resisted the imposed nature of the PeaceBuilders and believed that it wasn’t appropriate for our setting. Some students were critical of PeaceBuilders as they found the its language inaccessible and did not want to be told how they should think, act and feel within the discourse. Some older students felt that their teachers were not implementing PeaceBuilders in a way that was fair and they talked about PeaceBuilders ‘being used against them’.

My responses to these different positions only reinforced them. Those who I believed had mastered the knowledge of PeaceBuilders were labelled as ‘successful’, however for those who resisted the implementation I had a different response. I ignored their messages about PeaceBuilders and saw these individuals as dissidents who needed to get their act together so that I would be able to maintain my position of power as a ‘successful’ coordinator. I saw their resistance as their issue, not mine. I did not recognise that these multiple perspectives were presenting the complexities of knowledge production that was occurring. I also became skilled at silencing the voices of dissent so on the surface the school violence prevention culture looked like a PeaceBuilders one.
The broader context: my questions about violence prevention programs

My learning from this journey now has me questioning under whose terms are violence prevention programs in schools being implemented? Are violence prevention programs truly a reaction to increasing school violence? Is the implementation of a ready-made violence prevention program of benefit to a school that wants to make a difference to the levels of violence that are being experienced? Or is imposing a dominant discourse of violence prevention on a school community another form of violence, albeit one disguised by what is thought to be ‘good for the school’?

While I am not suggesting that violence in schools should be ignored, what I am suggesting is that we go beyond the packaged programs with their prescribed knowledge and ways of being. I suggest that future research into violence prevention could be undertaken using critical pedagogy as a guiding theoretical perspective. To create individualised programs I suggest that the process of praxis be considered. This process identifies a problem, analyses it, creates and implements an action plan, and analyses and evaluates it (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). This allows participants of a school to go into the process with “eyes wide open” (Hinchey, 2004: 21) with an understanding that there will be shifts in relations of power as the privileged are challenged and their dominance disrupted. We need to begin to acknowledge the multiplicity of positions that exist in the schemas of violence and violence prevention. This will allow us to consider the broader context of violence and how we can engender the capacity to act against violence in different situations.

Eyes wide open

What started out as a school-based evaluation became so much more. When I started this journey I thought I knew all the answers; how wrong I was. I have learnt to become self-reflexive and I have challenged myself to become critical in the way that I read my discursive positioning and that of the participants. I also believe that I have honoured the voices I dismissed during the implementation of PeaceBuilders by taking an opportunity to produce my reading of their experiences and views.

This is of course not the end of my work. This paper reports a very brief reading of my attempts to embed PeaceBuilders as a dominant discourse of violence prevention in one school. This story was situated in a “particular crossroads in time” (McLaren, 2007: xvii), where I was awakened to reviewing the implementation of PeaceBuilders through the discourses of critical pedagogy. It is my lived experience and I don’t presume to think that others involved in the process would necessarily draw the same conclusions. However, I do believe this work has provided directions for further research and added to the understandings of violence prevention in schools.

So with eyes wide open I go forward. Watch this space.

References


Further reading:

Today many early childhood practitioners are on a journey towards a more socially just society in constructing an Indigenous inclusive program. This journey is not a simple one. It involves reflecting on and interrogating understandings of a contemporary Victorian Aboriginality as practitioners interrupt the silences around Indigenous inclusion in the philosophy and practice of their services.

Indigenous families and communities are ideally positioned as both leaders and partners in this journey. While recognising the benefits of 'mainstream' early childhood education and care for their children, Indigenous communities continue to challenge the early childhood sector to examine the conception and delivery of such programs. Such challenges focus on the needs and rights of their children to an empowering early childhood experience which engages more authentically with local Indigenous identity and culture.

Belonging, Being and Becoming

In the context of the Australian National Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009), which aims to build a sense of Belonging, Being and Becoming for each child, an Indigenous family may pose the following questions when enrolling their child at a service. In partnership with my family and community how will you:

- Ensure that my child feels a sense of belonging here as an Indigenous person?
- Support my child in being a proud Indigenous person?
- Support my child in becoming a future Indigenous Elder?

A genuine engagement with Indigenous inclusion means answering these questions in the light of the rights of Indigenous people as the original owners of Australia to self determination, including the right to determine the direction of the early childhood education and care of their children. It is through this rights based approach that Indigenous families and communities may frame their goals and understandings of an empowering early childhood experience for their children which ideally:

- Is constructed in partnership with the local Indigenous community
- Strengthens their children's identity and is built on an informed understanding of and respect for their culture
- Challenges bias and discrimination against Indigenous families and communities
- Challenges the concept of authenticity constructed around stereotypes which render Indigenous Victorians as largely invisible
- Addresses Indigenous disadvantage here in Victoria which is reflected in poorer educational outcomes for Indigenous students (DEECD, nd)
- Addresses barriers around early childhood services which compound such disadvantage.

Belonging, Being and Becoming at a local level

Here in Victoria’s City of Moreland and in the neighbouring City of Hume a recent report "Early Years Service Delivery System for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Children living in Hume and Moreland Municipalities" was delivered by ASR Research in June 2012 for Hume City Council. The report identified the strengths of and barriers to participation in early years services by interviewing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families living in the municipalities who use these services. Data was also gathered from the 'mainstream' service providers including kindergartens and long day care services within the municipalities.

When looking at the strengths of 'mainstream' early childhood services Indigenous participants spoke of a spirit of goodwill or openness to Indigenous inclusion that saw an evolution of such inclusion in programs. Participants were also pleased that service providers were undertaking training around such inclusion, as well as consulting with families around the construction of Indigenous inclusive programs.

When looking at barriers to participation, Indigenous participants voiced concerns around a continuing absence of inclusion and or the lack of genuine inclusion in programs that focused only on special events such as National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC). The persistence of stereotypical views of Aboriginality in some services which took the form of questioning fair skinned Aboriginal parents identity or a general cultural insensitivity were also cited as barriers to participation by some participants.

Addressing Barriers

In addressing these barriers the Indigenous participants felt that staff needed more rigorous cross cultural training and that services should be more active in forming partnerships with Indigenous families and the local Indigenous community in
planning and presenting Indigenous inclusion in their programs. Echoing the voices of the Indigenous participants, 'mainstream' early childhood service providers also saw the need for a stronger engagement with and the building of links with Indigenous families and services and accessing a greater understanding of Indigenous culture via ongoing cross cultural training. Significantly the vast majority of 'mainstream' participants providing Indigenous inclusive programming saw this inclusion as important regardless of whether Indigenous families were enrolled in the service or not. Their position being that a knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture was important for all children (Hume City Council, 2012).

This finding is consistent with the concept that Indigenous Inclusion gives all Australians an education in a cultural heritage that is unique to Australia (Lopez Atkinson, 2008). As such, Indigenous inclusion deserves a special status and should be a frame of reference for all Australians.

A genuine engagement with the rights of Indigenous people around Indigenous inclusion in the early years is also an engagement with the rights of all Australian children to access such knowledge as part of a learning community in which Indigenous people are teachers. All children also have the right to acquire the skills and knowledge which will prepare them to recognise and challenge bias and discrimination against Indigenous Australians.

Constructing a philosophy

Until Indigenous culture is positioned as central to early childhood services and is clearly part of each services' philosophy, policy and practice, early childhood spaces will be comprised as sites of rights based practice for all Australian children.

This is a substantial and complex commitment, which requires self reflection, patience and risk taking, a journey often dogged by a lack of knowledge, self doubt and the desire to proceed with sensitivity. Constructing a personal/professional philosophy is a vital first step and cornerstone in such a commitment as it:

- Provides an opportunity to build partnerships with the local Indigenous community
- Provides a foundation for services to reflect on, clarify and build their own position and understandings
- Provides an opportunity to build new knowledge beyond dualisms such as traditional/assimilated and black/white
- Makes explicit the commitment to practices that recognise and respect Indigenous identity and culture
- Provides a philosophical base that staff can communicate with confidence at points of resistance.

When reflecting on your own values, knowledge and theoretical perspectives in terms of social justice more broadly it is useful to revisit or visit authors such as Glenda Mac Naughton, Susan Grieshaber, Gaile Sloan Cannella, Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia Ramsey who explore issues such as diversity, inclusion/exclusion, equity and multiple perspectives which are central to Indigenous inclusion in philosophy and practice.

More specifically explore the writings/research of Indigenous early childhood professionals and academics such as Karen Lillian Martin, Deb Mann and Samantha Knight and papers produced by the Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). “Dardee Boorai: Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People” (DEECD, 2008) provides another insight into delivery of the human rights of young Indigenous Victorians. While “Balert Booron: The Victorian plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020)” (DEECD, nd) explores the Victorian Government’s commitment to these principles.

Both of these documents have been constructed in partnership with Indigenous people based on the principle of self determination and this principle applies equally to the construction of your own philosophy and policies. Acting on the principle of self determination means consulting and building partnerships with:

- Indigenous families at your service
- Local Indigenous Elders
- Indigenous staff employed by your local council such as the Aboriginal Parent Engagement worker at Moreland/Hume
- Other Indigenous early childhood professionals such as your local Koorie Engagement Support Officer
- Other non Indigenous early childhood professionals with experience around Indigenous inclusion.

Philosophy and practice

Boroondara Kindergarten in Richmond and the Audrey Brooks Memorial Preschool in Heidelberg West in Victoria are two examples of early childhood services which have formed successful partnerships with their local Indigenous community, strongly informing their philosophy and practice around Indigenous inclusion.

The following extracts from the 'Boroondara Kindergarten Philosophy' (2011) demonstrates respect for Indigenous people as the original owners of the
land on which the centre is built and positions staff and families as part of a learning community that values Indigenous culture and knowledge.

'Our Place
Boroondara Kindergarten acknowledges that we work together on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation
We want to ...
Have greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being
We will...
Provide learning experiences that reflect and respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.'

When Indigenous parents enter the foyer of Boroondara Kindergarten there are signs and symbols of welcome and respect such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land and visual representations of local Indigenous culture. Similarly, when Indigenous parents step into the foyer of Audrey Brooks Memorial Preschool they see the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, a copy of the Apology to the stolen generations delivered by Kevin Rudd in 2008 and the following statement:

'How we are promoting and celebrating Reconciliation at Audrey Brooks Memorial Preschool'

Audrey Brooks Memorial Pre School acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional custodians of the land on which our kindergarten stands. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australians. Reconciliation among Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians is about finding new and better ways of solving problems and of connecting with each other. Reconciliation involves justice, recognition and healing. We value and promote respect, tolerance and understanding for all of our community.

At our Kindergarten we are working on a daily basis to make reconciliation a part of our kindergarten program. Traditional and contemporary Indigenous culture is a part of all Australia. This history belongs to all of us and we respect how Indigenous Australians wish for this history to be told. Our aim is to ensure that Indigenous children and families feel proud of their culture and heritage and that non Indigenous children, families and staff have an increasing understanding and respect for the richness of this culture.

Traditional and contemporary Indigenous culture is a part of our kindergarten program, this is displayed through photos, art, stories, natural materials, activities, songs, games, cooking and dance. Non Indigenous cultures are promoted in the same way. Everyone is encouraged to be proud of who they are. We respect the outdoor environment we nurture and look after all the creatures, birds, bugs and plants who share this earth with us.

(we acknowledge information from the Dare to lead program in writing and preparing this document).

In these two centres the foyer acts as a border land where Aboriginal families can travel from the exclusion and invisibility of urban Aboriginality often experienced in the mainstream to an inclusive, respectful and welcoming environment.

A final reflection on Belonging, Being and Becoming
In conclusion and as a final reflection ask yourself, 'when Indigenous families step into my service or read the service philosophy do they feel respected, welcome, comfortable and confident in my ability to offer their children genuinely inclusive experiences of Belonging, Being and Becoming?'

Bartja and Mayila by Annette Sax (reproduced with permission).

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Further Reading

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1. This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the Moreland Early Years Conference "Partnerships, Rise to the Challenge" in 2012.
In order for young children to learn a democratic way of life, they need to have the opportunities to practice this way of thinking and acting with peers and adults. Childcare centres, schools and other community settings can provide these important learning opportunities. This was the starting point for the project ‘The childcare centre and school as space for democratic practice’ (2009-2011), which was lead by Bureau MUTANT and Eduniek in the Netherlands, with research support from Dr Kylie Smith from the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood at the University Melbourne in Australia. The Bernard van Leer Foundation funded the project.

The key aim of this action-training research project was to create spaces where every child, practitioner and manager has a voice and are listened to and young children are taken seriously as citizens in the here and now. Four large childcare providers and two integrated schools in multi-ethnic areas in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Veghel participated in this project over two years. In the pilot project 25 educators and 6 team coordinators working with 0-4 year olds in day care and with 4- 12 year olds in afterschool care participated. In the current implementation phase (2012) 16 childcare providers are working in about 1400 centres.

Action research was chosen as the methodology as it is a way to change social practices, by systematically reflecting - doing and reflecting again. Practitioners participating in the project were encouraged to reflect critically on their practice and to trust in children’s competencies. Practitioners and managers were introduced to the action research cycle in the first year, by taking them step by step through the four phases of the cycle: choosing a topic; planning the change; creating the change together with children and documenting; sharing and reflecting. This was undertaken in action research training sessions held at the sites of the services.

Initial action research questions raised by the practitioners/teachers were: How to stimulate community spirit in a group with young children? How to listen to young children who have limited verbal expression? How to stimulate social responsibility with young children? How to stimulate empathy for diversity among children?

Dr Kylie Smith from the University of Melbourne supervised and evaluated the research section of the project through two surveys at the beginning and the end of the action research cycle and through significant change stories. Specifically, information was collected on

- What participants learnt about children's active citizenship and tracked the extent to which their attitudes, perceptions and knowledge had changed during the life of the project.
- Changes in participant competence in practicing democratic citizenship with young children and what changes participants made in practice as a result of what they had learnt.
- Project effectiveness in supporting children's democratic citizenship.

The surveys and significant change stories were then analyzed against the competences developed by Bureau MUTANT. The competences are: Democratic attitude; Democratic knowledge and understanding; Participative leadership; Research attitude. These competences were reconstructed based on the experiences of the practitioners and based on what skills and knowledge practitioners would need to implement democratic practice.

‘Democrats are made not born’

A democratic way of life is not automatically reproducing itself, but needs attention and education. ‘Democrats are made, not born’, as John Dewey said (Berding, 2011). Although the primary schools in the Netherlands are obliged by law to integrate democratic citizenship in their curriculum and programmes, attention to the youngest citizens from 0-6 years is hardly seen. Childcare centres are spaces with opportunities to create democratic practice. Early childhood services that pay attention to democratic skills and moral education, fulfill their social function, next to their economic function (opportunity for parents on the labour market) and their educational function (opportunity for children to develop their talents).

Pedagogical themes

Five pedagogical themes are used as operationalization of democratic citizenship into the childcare centre’s practice: ‘learning together on democracy’, ‘participation and decision-making’, ‘responsibility for the group and community’, ‘conflict solving’ and ‘respect for diversity’. These themes fit into the Early Childhood pedagogical framework and curriculum and can be used parallel to the primary school programmes on democratic citizenship.
Results and impact on children
The results in the project and the evaluation research show that children’s sense of responsibility and their autonomy has increased. Creativity and problem solving has also been enhanced. They have also improved their listening skills and their willingness to help each other. Social solidarity is valued. Children feel welcome and respected—they matter. Children also discover that there are positive expectations of them, in relation to themselves and to others.

Practitioners spoke about the changes in children’s attitudes:
‘more calm and more attention to each other’
‘more fun and togetherness’
‘more joint decision-making and rules together’
‘Children who helped select the playing materials explained these themselves to the other children’.

Results and impact on practitioners
During the action-research project practitioners went through an on-going learning process which allowed them to experience and develop their professional role as democratic role models and guides, participative leaders and researchers.
‘Quality needs to be considered as an on-going “process” rather than as something that is achieved or not’ (CoRe, 2011, p. 23).

The data in the evaluation research showed that practitioners became increasingly aware of the importance of creating a calm environment and more space and time for children in order to give them the possibility to discover themselves their own ways to act autonomous, responsible and with solidarity. Practitioners have learnt to understand the importance of using and living democratic values such as equality, the right to participation and respect for diversity on a daily basis. Talking with children instead of talking to children was the leading norm in their new learning process. Providing relevant information and structure to children, showing and giving trust to them and believing in their competence were key elements in this process.

‘when I really show that their voice counts, children gain more confidence on me but also in themselves. From this trust and confidence they grow!’
‘The really important turnaround is that staff have really experienced (for) themselves that providing frameworks for children is necessary to be able to focus on democracy. Quiet and clarity also create space to fit democracy and child participation into the daily routine.’

Practitioners have also developed a new understanding of their professional role: sharing ‘power’ with children and that giving them the possibility to participate doesn’t mean losing control.

Practitioners showed a shift in their leadership: from directive to coaching. The participation of children was not experienced as a threat to their role and expertise. They redefined their role as guiding and monitoring the democratic process among children. They increasingly worked as participative leaders.

‘Children’s participation it’s also about the effect of slowing down myself; not giving solutions, but putting questions back to the children. ... exciting! The strength is there! The children are enthusiastic and come up with many ideas. We realize children can handle more than we expected, they can handle conflicts.’

The data revealed that learning by doing action-research, together with reflection and documentation of the process, is a powerful tool for professional, personal and team development.

Results and impact on organisations
At the end of the project the evaluation research undertaken by the University of Melbourne showed that 100% of the practitioners indicated that their school or childcare service provided resources for promoting democracy compared to 58.6% at the begin of the project. This was a 41.4% shift. This indicated that the project had also impacted on how the participant’s organisations had supported the practitioners to undertake this work.

Structural conditions that support a democratic praxis, were clear outcomes of the project. The project clearly showed that when practitioners are given time, space and knowledge, they have a great capacity to critically reflect on their own understandings of themselves, children and families and create change in practice to increase democracy in the everyday classroom. Through the action research meetings and mentoring as part of the project practitioners reflected on how the project re-energised their passion and social engagement as a result of changes to team communication, increased professional knowledge and skills:
‘There is more cooperation, more enthusiasm, more sharing of experiences, more taking personal responsibility.’

These findings connect to the policy recommendations in the Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care report (CoRe) (University of East London & University of Gent, 2011). Specifically, this project supported the building of leadership capacity for practitioners by bringing theory and practice (CoRe, 2011, recommendation 8.2.2, p. 50) together in relation to democracy and children’s participation.
The project also clearly shows that the role of the coordinator or coach is crucial in order to realize these results. This role includes:

- Indicating a democratic framework / theme
- Coaching, evaluation and monitoring progress
- Planning regular work meetings and encouraging critical questions
- Making time for documentation and reflection; what, why and & when - not quantity
- Transfer to the pedagogic policy: how does the documentation link to what already happens in practice in the organisation?

The strength of the action research project is explained by the practitioners and coordinators as follows: "There is more cooperation, more enthusiasm, more sharing of experiences, more taking personal responsibility. Practitioners enjoy their work more again."

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Resources


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For more information please visit:
www.mutant.nl
TAC (the Team Around the Child model) has been designed to meet the particular support needs of babies and young children who have an on-going multifaceted condition. Because these children have a range of needs in various developmental areas, e.g. motor, perception, communication, cognition and behaviour, the child and family can find themselves at the centre of confusing networks of service providers.

In this article I want to describe TAC as a successful response to the problematic complexity that can arise and as an example of horizontal teamwork. I will also show how TAC both depends on and supports keyworkers and outline the opportunities TAC brings to give more decision-making power to parents.

Putting it another way, the article and the TAC model answer solutions to some basic questions that parents often ask; ‘Why don’t the people helping my child talk to each other?’, ‘Why can’t I have just one special person who helps me join it all together?’ and ‘Whose child is it anyway?’. These are important questions because they are often asked of service providers with a high degree of parental frustration and even anger.

**Why don’t the people helping my child talk to each other?**
This is a fair question and it would seem both logical and common sense for teachers, therapists, psychologists, nurses, nursery staff, play workers and anyone else working directly with the same baby or young child with a disability to share observations and approaches with one another. In my experience in the UK and other countries, many parents experience the opposite; practitioners do whatever it is they are supposed to do separately from each other. The consequence can be failure to treat the child as a whole, contradictory advice, treatment programmes that do not fit together, gaps of unmet need and sometimes too many people doing too many things.

TAC philosophy suggests that a few key practitioners around each child – those with the most practical and regular involvement – agree to meet together every so often for face-to-face discussions. Two major features help define TAC; the child’s parent(s) has a full place in the team and the team membership is restricted to three, four or five people so that it is child- and family-friendly. TAC is not an old-type case conference for all comers.

TAC is a horizontal team because it is freed from vertical or hierarchical management. When a social worker, therapist and teacher, for example, agree to join their efforts together around a particular child none of them can assume the role of team manager. Nor can the culture and working practices of any of these three agencies (social work, therapy/health and education) predominate. This helps define the role of the child’s keyworker (used synonymously here with the term ‘lead professional’) and makes space for the key people around the child to speak up and influence how support is provided.

**Why can’t I have just one special person who helps me join it all together?**
Perhaps you have heard this question as frequently as I have. It often comes from exasperated parents who are bewildered and overwhelmed by the number of appointments, assessments, planning meetings, reviews, etc. they have to keep abreast of. Often the dense scribbling on the calendar on the fridge tells the story. The plea is for one person who is known, liked and trusted by the family to sit with the parent at the centre of the web and help to make sense of it all – help fit it all together so there is maximum benefit to the child and minimum cost to the child and family’s functioning, wellbeing and mental health.

At its worst, under traditional discipline-specific approaches, parents can find themselves lost and disempowered in chaos. This suggests no negative reflection on any practitioner’s expertise, commitment, care or concern for the child and family. While each one of them is working with skill and compassion, the lack of any local co-ordinating system can reduce them, in the eyes of parents, to just one more piece of a jigsaw that is never put together.

In the TAC model, local senior managers work in their own cross-agency horizontal teams to create integrated pathways that will carry each child through the journey of referral, assessment, action planning and support. This strategic effort builds the horizontal landscape between the local ‘vertical’ agencies engendering effective communication and networking, co-ordination of all interventional efforts, and the child and minimum cost to the child and family’s functioning, wellbeing and mental health.

The beneficiaries of this effort are child, family and keyworker. The keyworker, instead of being swamped by the same local chaos that disempowers parents, now has a well organised environment with interagency systems and protocols. Work can now be more effective in supporting the child and family and
helping them get the best from the services around them.

The keyworker is typically the facilitator of the child’s TAC, being the one who knows the child and family best and supporting TAC meetings through their agendas. TAC is always a collective effort and each member will take on tasks to avoid the keyworker being overloaded.

Whose child it is anyway?
This is the plea of the parent who wants to be more involved in deciding what is going to happen to their child. They see plans are being made but do not feel they have been allowed to play a part – and do not necessarily agree with what has been decided. Frustration is made worse when they feel none of the practitioners have got to know the child or family very well or listened properly to their aspirations for the child.

The TAC model affords parents a full place in their child’s TAC and, once there, acknowledges the role of the child’s parent with very special knowledge and expertise. Opinions will be actively sought and their voices will be listened to with genuine rather than feigned interest. Parents are an equal member of the TAC and have a full part to play in its horizontal teamwork.

The spirit of TAC is the collective effort; the belief that, when facing very complex issues, two or three heads are better than one. While each person in the TAC brings their own particular skills and expertise, the TAC as a whole represents shared experience, shared concern, shared resourcefulness and shared wisdom. Decisions about a child’s health, wellbeing and, sometimes, survival are likely to be better founded when they come from the child’s TAC rather than from a single person. This authoritative voice of each child’s TAC is built into the workings of the local integrated pathway in recognition that no other group or person has the same degree of knowledge or concern.

Empowerment of parents extends beyond the service to each individual child. Collectively, local parents hold a valuable store of experience, expertise and energy. In TAC thinking, parent empowerment means inviting representative parents into the planning of the local integrated pathway, in recognition that no other group or person has the same degree of knowledge or concern.

I have a repeated experience, in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and Australia of speaking about TAC to groups of practitioners and managers without any parent in sight. These major stakeholders, for whatever reason, are absent from discussions which will surely impact on their lives and on the lives of families coming along. The result is that parents are denied a voice and service managers lose the grounding and dynamism that parents would have brought to the table. When we are planning new service models we should always ask ourselves, ‘Whose children are they anyway?’.

Further Reading


1. Contact:
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Introduction
Australian Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services provide care, leisure and education for children attending primary school in the hours before and after school and during vacations. OSHC is mostly unfamiliar territory for researchers. When I first commenced work in OSHC over 20 years ago, I was briefed on the challenges unique to OSHC, including the difficulties posed by ‘older children’ (nine to twelve years of age). For as long as I have worked with OSHC the problematic older child has been a recurring discursive thread. My recent masters thesis set out to trouble the notion of the older child in OSHC. The literature review showed this complexity is exemplified by this account from Emily.

The difficult older child
In OSHC, older children are a minority with children aged six to eight years twice as likely to attend (ABS, 2009). The limited literature available on OSHC is quite consistent in how it speaks of older children. They can be regarded as more like teenagers than other children, rebellious, risk takers, resentful of having to attend OSHC and unsuited to OSHC (Gifford, 1991; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Longobardi, 2001; Shellharbour City Council, Shoalhaven City Council, & Wollongong City Council, 2010). Older children seem to be regarded as different to other children and are deemed as requiring specialist pedagogies (Kennedy & Stonehouse, 1997; Musson, 1994; Tarrant & Jones, 2000). Barker et al (2003) found a similar situation in British school aged care services, with children over eight years in the minority and lacking peers in the setting which impacted on their capacity to enjoy OSHC. When viewed together, these texts ascribe to older children developmental characteristics commonly associated with adolescents. They appear to be accepted as a form of truth about older children that positions them as problematic and difficult (Hurst, 2013).

Seeking the voice of the older child
This research sought a different perspective on the older child in OSHC. The literature review showed that adult perspectives and developmental theory inform much of how older children are understood. Consequently, the research sought to investigate the question of older children using postmodern theories and from a non-adult perspective, that of the older child. Nine older children attending OSHC in 2012 were given digital cameras to record images of things that they did or didn’t like in their OSHC service. The photographs they identified as ‘most important’ served as a framework for a semi-structured interview that followed (Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011; Stephenson, 2009). This study positioned children as ‘co-researchers’ and sought to conduct research ‘with’ children, rather than ‘on’ children (Kellett, 2010). This method afforded the children the power to determine the key discussion points in the interview so that it better reflected how they felt about life in OSHC. The accounts of the nine children revealed new knowledge that unsettled traditional understandings of the older child as problematic.

Risk takers and rebellious?
The interview data revealed much about how the participants experience life in OSHC. Whilst there were commonalities across participants, each one experienced OSHC differently. Rather than a singular truth that applies to all older children, the research highlighted great complexity and multiple understandings of the older child.

The participants disrupted the discourses of older children as difficult and risk-takers. All participants identified challenging play experiences as critical to their enjoyment of OSHC, but spoke about challenging play in a way that did not necessarily imply risk-taking. The participants’ attitudes to risk varied, with some not enjoying risk at all. Some participants identified behaviours that could be interpreted by practitioners as challenging, but which are also informed by a range of complexities, suggesting that it would be simplistic to merely label the behaviours as ‘challenging’. The participants described a range of behaviours that both support and disrupt the dominant construction of the older child as bored, challenging and risky.

This complexity is exemplified by this account from Emily.
A simplistic reading of Emily’s account would corroborate notions of the difficult older child. The behaviour Emily describes is a direct challenge to the authority of the practitioners. However, to merely characterise this as rebellious ignores the complexity informing the behaviour. Emily saw withdrawing from Zumba as the lesser of two evils. Emily chose to disobey the wishes of the practitioners rather than risk being teased by peers. So, whilst adults may see the behaviour as rebellious, it is understandable given the circumstances described. Emily’s account provides an example of competing discourses. Davies (1994) argues that individuals are able to occupy and use different discourses. Emily chose to occupy the discourse of the ‘popular child’ seeking the approval of peers rather than risk the discourse of the ‘good child’ seeking the approval of the practitioner. It evidences Emily’s agency and ability to make political and strategic decisions.

Difficult or disadvantaged?
The data also demonstrated that older children could be disadvantaged in OSHC by virtue of their minority status and practitioners enacting discourses of the developing and vulnerable child. Accounts from some research sites revealed how normalisation operated in OSHC. The participants provided evidence of how they moderate their play and behaviour in response to the normalising judgement of practitioners. They identified how practitioners privileged the majority younger child through equipment provision and activity design. Compulsory activities provided via a government sponsored sports program were also biased towards younger children. The participants also described how practitioners employed democratic processes that claimed to act in the name of fairness but disadvantaged the older child.

Jim provides one example of how younger children are privileged in OSHC.

Jim: So, baseball the other week…. the activities were set for younger kids. The older kids could do them quite easily.
Interviewer: What’s annoying about it?
Jim: That you can’t like really show your best or improve that much.

Jim describes how the sports activity is tailored to the needs of the majority younger child. Jim’s unsuitability for the activity individualises and marginalises Jim. Jim complains that the activity doesn’t allow Jim to show their best. Instead, Jim must modify her/his behaviour to bring Jim closer to the norm represented by the younger child.

Some participants suggested that privileging occurs not just within activities but also in the provision of materials and resources. They identified how this manifested through the provision of play equipment, dress ups, books, movies and art materials that were all regarded as better suited to younger children.

Truths about older children are contextual
The study also demonstrated that how adults understand older children and how older children understand themselves is different, and contextual. The literature review and data analysis suggested that adults see children who attend OSHC as a younger-older child binary in which the younger child is dominant and privileged. The older children in the study also saw themselves and younger children as a binary, but they saw themselves as the dominant half of the binary. Both binaries appear informed by the discourse of the developing child. It demonstrates that what we consider to be true about older children can vary depending on context and positioning.

Conclusion
Children aged nine to twelve years in OSHC are spoken of negatively, and in a way that positions them as outsiders in a setting that is meant to include them. This article has summarised some of the main findings from my research. There were a number of other findings that could not be covered within the scope of this briefing paper. Like the findings that were discussed, they too indicate that older children in OSHC are more diverse and complex than developmental ‘truths’ about older children suggest. This research has revealed new knowledge of the older child that can be used by practitioners to understand better how power and knowledge disadvantage not just older children, but also other minorities. This study presents an opportunity for practitioners and policy makers to consider new pedagogies that recognise the diversity of older children, and create more inclusive OSHC services that better support all children, including those aged nine to twelve years.

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I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today, the Wurundjeri people. I would also like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Elders past, present and future.

Today I am honoured to share with you some of the results of my research "Indigenous self determination and early childhood education and care in Victoria" (2008) with specific emphasis on the role of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, within the journey to reclaim Indigenous self determination and Indigenous pedagogies.

**Looking Back**

Until the 1970s education for Indigenous students in Victoria, Australia including pre-schoolers, focused on assimilation (Mc Connochie & Russel, 1982) with Victorian Indigenous identities, cultures and knowledges dismissed as absent or functioning as part of a culture of poverty (Langton, 1981).

The 1970s saw a renewed movement of self determination within Indigenous communities across Victoria which highlighted the right of the Indigenous child to a positive and empowering Indigenous identity, an identity which could not or would not be supported in non Indigenous early childhood spaces. This movement saw the establishment of Aboriginal specific early childhood services across Victoria in the 1980s in the form of child care services or playgroups. It was these services which would eventually become the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS). In 1987 under a Commonwealth funding initiative designed to support Aboriginal communities in fulfilling their diverse child care needs, the MACS being community owned, operated and governed were established. An example of such a service is Yappera which was established in Melbourne in 1980.

The 1979 application for a capital grant to establish Yappera (which means Belonging Place) states:

> The Aboriginal child from an early age must understand his culture so that he can be proud to be an Aborigine, understand what Aboriginality means and be able to see himself as an Aboriginal person living in a multicultural society. Non-Aboriginal family/children’s centres cannot provide a service based on Aboriginality for children and/or their parents. This service has to be provided by Aboriginal people utilizing community resources. Aboriginal and associated factors must form the foundation not only for a children’s service, but for all community development programs aimed at the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people (Yappera Children's Service Co operative LTD, 1979, pp.3-4).

Self determination as reflected in this statement means that Indigenous people have the right to establish culturally appropriate and empowering early childhood education and care for our children and in spite of dispossession, we have a vision for our children built on our cultural strengths.

Yappera's current vision statement written over 30 years after the original application for its establishment remains true to its philosophy:

> That all Aboriginal children have the opportunity to reach their potential through access to highest quality of care and enrichment in a rich cultural setting which strengthens their identity (Yappera Children's Service Co operative LTD, nd).

This rich cultural setting can be viewed through an Indigenous pedagogy broadly based on three interconnected principles: cultural experiences, community relationships and a holistic approach.

**Approaches to Indigenous programming in the MACS**

Approaches to a range of experiences within the MACS reflect the priorities of the Indigenous community in placing Indigenous culture at the centre of the programme. Often these experiences and activities are based on knowledges that have been eroded and discredited under colonisation and are now being honoured. Significantly, the local Indigenous Elders who were consulted during the research project highlighted the importance of young Indigenous children learning about clan, country, language and respect for the Elders as teachers.

The Elders and Indigenous early childhood practitioners and families consulted during the research process felt that such knowledge should be passed on using Indigenous pedagogies. Story based pedagogies, particularly in the form of Elders narratives, were emphasised as a central pedagogical practice. As Celine an early childhood professional andparent states:
Our Elders need to pass on their stories to encourage children to know who they are, their identity and to make their culture a lot stronger and to believe in themselves (Interview with Celine, 2003, p.1).

Nature based pedagogy also employed within the MACS can be seen as reinstating Indigenous knowledge through using natural materials in play, exploration and art, even for children living in highly urban areas.

As Anne an early childhood professional and parent notes:

There has been a lot of gum replanting around the centre to promote an environment for native birds and insects. This is a great opportunity to talk to the children about the traditional uses of these trees. For example the she oak tree was used by our people to make spears. My Aunty uses the needles from this tree to make mats in a contemporary basket coiling (Interview with Anne, 2006, p.135).

Although materials provided in the MACS are similar to those in all centres, they are selected with the aim of reinforcing a pride and knowledge of a contemporary urban identity and therefore reflect the lives and aspirations of Indigenous families in Victoria. Experiences within the MACS also represent and reinforce a contemporary urban Indigenous identity that has been challenged as inauthentic or unacknowledged by many mainstream early childhood services.

The diverse and positive images of Indigeneity in the MACS meet with parents expectations of seeing contemporary images of Aboriginality in early childhood services. Indigenous pedagogy within this framework of lived authenticity reflects the experiences of the Indigenous child and connects him/her strongly with his/her local community.

**Relationships within the program**

Central to Indigenous pedagogical practice is the framework of interconnectivity. Although the activities offered in the MACS are important, it is the relationships in which these activities are constructed that is the subtle strength of the MACS. The making or re-affirming of connections to people and place is highlighted by Heather, a parent of a child at the MACS centre:

The fact that our kids have gone through the centre with their relations and their families is absolutely the most important priority in terms of maintaining connectiveness of family, extended family as well as that opportunity for our kids to grow up with other Koorie kids and maintaining that connectiveness with community is fundamental. And the fact that many of the workers know the families, too (Interview with Heather, 2004, p.109).

**An Integrated Approach addresses children’s rights**

Such connectivity with community is a central principle of the MACS, reflected in the multifunctional or integrated approach at its foundation. Such an approach draws on the holistic basis of Indigenous pedagogy in addressing the rights of Indigenous children. Not only the right to culture, but to a range of culturally appropriate services that address the disadvantages that Aboriginal families often face.

The principle of Indigenous self determination within the MACS is demonstrated in Indigenous communities taking responsibility for addressing the effects of disadvantage (such as poorer health and poorer educational outcomes for Indigenous children) on a holistic, community level. Drawing on Indigenous networks such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to provide dentistry, immunisations and hearing tests and providing parenting programs which are developed in consultation with parents according to their needs and interests are just two examples of this approach.

The local Indigenous community as Elders, artists, musicians and older Indigenous children from local schools who visit the MACS are also a source of a community of 'teachers'. Again this holistic approach is vital for young children as learners of culture and to enhance and build a strong and positive Indigenous identity. Within the MACS children lay within a community of support and within a network of learning.

Such a community approach to education is consistent with ‘traditional’ Indigenous pedagogies around the education of children which is often extended to the wider community, with children being a community responsibility.

Indigenous specific early childhood spaces such as the MACS are built around pedagogies that continue to be central to Indigenous identity and culture in Victoria today. Within the MACS learning and teaching experiences, around culture, kin, country and the local community are interwoven in a holistic way that support, stimulate and strengthen children and their families in both incidental and considered ways.

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1. This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the CFC Leaders Forum May 2012.
This member’s briefing is based upon our experiences as qualified early childhood educators working voluntarily to provide a weekly play-based program for children and families detained in a secure immigration facility in suburban Melbourne, Australia.

**Context**

Despite ongoing assertions by successive Australian governments that we do not keep children in detention centres, this is only true in a linguistic sense. Throughout 2013 there has consistently been more than 1,000 children in some kind of secure, locked immigration facility in Australia and in offshore camps on Manus Island and Nauru - these facilities are variously called transit accommodation, residential accommodation, processing centres, or alternative places of detention. After a peak of close to 1,800 in mid-2013, the most recent available information puts the number of children held onshore at 1,045, and a further 106 on Nauru and two on Manus Island (DIBP, October 31 2013).

With the increase of boat arrivals in 2013 capacity was created to house asylum-seeking families with children in a closed facility in Melbourne, and approximately 65-100 children have been held there at any given time. Families undergo health and preliminary checks on Christmas Island prior to their transfer to Melbourne, a process that can take up to three months. Some families may also spend time in other facilities before being transferred at short notice to Melbourne. Prior to the 2013 Australian federal election, families with children were expected to reside at the facility in Melbourne for only a short period of time before being placed in the community on Bridging Visa E (a temporary visa that is issued before the refugee application is processed, which provides limited financial support, no material support and no work rights) or community detention conditions. However, post-election there has been little movement. As we write this there are still a small number of families who arrived in Melbourne among the first transfers in March.

In the latter part of this year arrangements began to be made for school-age children to attend schools in the community, and finally in late-November 2013 there was full enrollment for primary school children. Unfortunately at present there are no opportunities for children below school age to attend early childhood services in the community whilst they are being detained. In the past few months the service provider who runs the Melbourne centre began to provide a daily program for preschoolers conducted by an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, this is currently 3 hours per weekday for children aged 3 and up. A handful of children regularly attend, and others come and go. There is also a 1 hour program for children under 3 offered each afternoon, but parents seldom choose to attend this program with their infants and toddlers. Other activities are provided, but staffing and resources tend to make the scope of these limited. Our playgroup aims to fill and respond to the gaps as they appear, which means it has been changing frequently throughout the year.

**‘Playgroup’**

Our playgroup program is in the schedule as part of the provision of children’s activities. Whilst it can be a fraught space to navigate, we are generally now well regarded by the service provider and the Department of Immigration staff at the facility for the expertise, resources and novelty that we provide. Our original proposal was to run a supported playgroup that would particularly target parents and children under 5 years, drawing on Department of Education and Early Childhood Development guidelines (DEECD, 2011) and research evidence that suggests playgroups can be beneficial for refugee children and parents as a bridge to accessing other services (Jackson, 2006). We imagined a play-based program that would to mirror what families might access when they become part of the Australian community. However, in beginning the playgroup in May, 2013 we quickly realised it was more important to be flexible to the needs of the people accessing the program, rather than being rigid about plans and definitions. The practice of our ‘playgroup’ has therefore become something quite different to what the name invokes.

We try to provide experiences that you would commonly find in any early childhood setting. We now have a wonderful variety of resources courtesy of the generosity of the early childhood community in Melbourne. Having plenty of everything is important because, due to having few possessions of their own, it is tempting for children and their parents to appropriate toys. Every week there are beautiful moments of the engaged exploration, creation and play that as educators we hope to see. Children can have trouble making the transition from hoarding to playing in the initial weeks of attendance, because they are used to a competitive environment with limited resources, but this too is slowly overcome. We have catered for children from infancy to teenage...
hood, though there are fewer older children now that they are all at school. Some parents chose to stay and play, do craft activities, study English by perusing the children’s books, or drink tea and talk with one another. Others use the brief respite to attend a class, to use the gym or to just have a break.

In combination with the shifting group of children of different ages, there is also an array of language groups and abilities. The children and parents who attend may speak Tamil, Farsi, Arabic, Dari, Rohingya and/or other languages. Many have limited English and there is often no common language between ourselves and a child or a group of children we are trying to negotiate with. Further, there are some children who have no language at all, having additional needs or hearing difficulties that have never been addressed in young lives characterised by persecution, lack of access to services, fear and flight. We feel especially strongly about the role we can play communicating with and trying to support these children and their parents. Some cultural stigma surrounding disability remains a challenge, especially when it prevents respectful relationships being built between children and between parents as well. Additionally, the environment in the facility is not ideal for addressing these needs and in some cases seems to exacerbate difficult behaviours. There is a security-mindedness about the service provider that often means that exclusion is deemed the most risk-adverse option for children who have challenging behaviours and diverse needs. Overall the ability of people to parent most effectively in a stressful environment impacts what is possible to do in terms of support, yet we have made some ground in communicating to families that their children with diverse needs are welcome and that we want to celebrate and assist them not judge or turn them away.

Whilst the program is somewhat unlike any playgroup you would encounter in the community, we see real benefits of providing a play-based program and professional support to children and families and we hope that these benefits will contribute to their eventual transition to mainstream services. At a basic level we are trying to assist children to engage in behaviours and relationships that will prepare them for early educational environments. We see the enormous potential of these incredible, resilient children who are surviving and in some ways even thriving in an environment that can burden and break many adults. They find ways to be self-reliant, creative and agentic in a constraining and restrictive place. Their openness and trust, despite everything, makes it possible to quickly build warm and joyful relationships that overcome any barriers of language or ability. More complicatedly, however, we also see the effects of immigration detention compounding the trauma, stress and insecurity that these children and their families have faced and know there is only so much we can provide in two hours per week. We know the real and devastating effects of prolonged detention on the mental health of children and adults and we are powerless to prevent that. Listening, responding to needs where possible, and sharing everyday moments and milestones with love, laughter and kindness feels like a small offering in the face of what these families have to overcome. That said, we have had some incredible breakthrough moments with children with high needs; built emotionally supportive relationships in which children choose to speak about their experiences, feelings and fears; and can see that children and their families truly appreciate what we do.

We simultaneously celebrate and experience a strange sense of loss when families move out into the community. We hope that the educators who encounter refugee and asylum-seeking children in their settings are able to take up where we left off. In sharing information about immigration policy and detention conditions, as well as our first-hand experiences, we are trying to ensure that more people have an understanding of the capacity of, but also the barriers faced by, asylum-seeking families. We are sure that with the right support they will get to see each of these children realise all of their amazing potential.

References


Further Resources

ChilOut: Children out of immigration detention http://www.chilout.org/

Out of sight, in our minds http://outofsight.org.au/


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