



Editorial

Literacy in early childhood education: the importance of undertaking a critical reading of practice and research.

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This is the second special edition He Kupu. The first considered arts education and in this edition literacy has been identified as a focus in early childhood education. The scope of this collection of papers is broad and reflects a wide variety of research perspectives within this field of inquiry. All six papers reveal a community of interest in literacy issues for early childhood educators and either implicitly or explicitly makes suggestions for the nature and character of practice and pedagogy in both teacher education and professional development for teachers. All papers have an interest in transforming praxis in some way; exhibit criticality, question approaches to pedagogy, and all have a democratic impulse for education at heart. Interestingly, none of the papers have emerged clearly from the philosophy of education, a way of knowing and thinking sadly marginalized in OECD countries worldwide, including New Zealand. Four of the essays have emerged from an 'evidence-based' paradigm, while three of the papers suggest implicitly a philosophical interest and a possible future research trajectory.

Each of the researchers engages strategically with the overall theme of literacy in early childhood education through different forms of language, different voices and approaches to research. In each they advocate for an acknowledgement of the politics of difference, averting the endorsement of one way of producing knowledge.

Claire McLachlan's paper entitled, 'What do teachers need to know about literacy in the early childhood context?' examines, in her own words, 'the early childhood teacher's role in supporting children's literacy'. She discusses the knowledge teachers need in order to successfully support children's literacy development as well as evidence on the most effective pedagogical strategies for supporting children's acquisition of literacy knowledge skills. After pointing to teachers' needs for a profound understanding of literacy structures and how literacy is acquired, McLachlan claims that 'evidence-based knowledge' is imperative for 'teacher education and professional development providers'.

Judy Hamer's paper is entitled 'Should Critical Literacy be a part of Early Childhood Education in New Zealand?' This paper examines the question of whether critical literacy should be part of early childhood education, and how it is evident in the early childhood curriculum. The question is also asked if early childhood education is indeed 'ready' for it. Critical literacy as an educational goal is contextualised within the current discourse of reading standards, reading



acquisition processes and beginning reading. Attention is drawn to tensions between children achieving 'basic' literacy skills – the current focus (functional literacy) and critical literacy (a critical and more empowering transformative literacy). Questions for debate are posed by the author, and possibilities entertained for future curriculum writers and educational decision-makers.

Marjolein Whyte's paper, 'Early Learning Skills and Dispositions for Reading Comprehension' places reading comprehension as centrally important in literacy achievement at school, arguing for the imperative of early childhood teachers' knowledge and understanding of the preparatory processes for reading comprehension at this level. She points to some of the difficulties that might be experienced in this preparation and examines issues around literacy for early childhood teachers. Congruence between early childhood centres and schools in terms of experiences and practices provided, she argues, is vital, as is collaboration between home and school in the project of literacy development.

Ian Hay, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley and Therese Taylor's paper, 'Dialogue and early childhood learning, considers the nature of the 'teacher and child dialogue interaction and enhancements'. They delineate the procedures facilitating interactions between early childhood teachers and children in their educational environment with a view to democratizing opportunities for children of differing experiential and social backgrounds. Using Marion Blank's (1980) research propositions, they describe how teachers shape dialogue to enable children to respond at 'advancing levels of linguistic complexity'. This mode of interaction, the authors suggest, can be applied to a range of literacy learning tasks and across the early childhood setting.

Navpreet Kaur's paper entitled 'Apni boli, apna virsa: Our language, our culture', articulates graphically the importance of language for the maintenance of culture and identity pointing towards the struggle of diasporic peoples to preserve their minority languages in English-speaking contexts. 'Boli jioni rahi tan Punjabi jionde rahenge' comes from a Punjabi song which translates as, 'If our language is alive our culture is alive'. Offering practical examples, she promotes passionately the opportunity in early childhood education for teachers to draw on the rich and diverse language backgrounds of immigrant families and their children.

Alison Arrow's paper entitled, 'Emergent literacy skills in New Zealand Kindergarten children: Implications for teaching and learning in early childhood settings', focuses upon the development of emergent literacy skills that are the 'precursors of conventional literacy'. A number of children attending Auckland kindergartens were the subjects of scrutiny where the aim was to promote the extension of critical cognitive emergent literacy skills with a view to assisting in reducing the achievement gap between good and poor achievers in literacy.

Janet Mansfield who is co-writer of the editorial, has co-written a paper on narrative methodology in early childhood educational research. The implications of evidence based research, a fundamental in much research work on literacy development, being accepted as the only way to undertake research are outlined in this paper. The paper constructs an argument on the potential for limiting early childhood practice, by losing sight of the interaction between the teacher and child, something pivotal to understanding the complex nature of learning and teaching in the early childhood community.



We would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Juliette Smeed as co-editor of He Kupu. Juliette brings a wealth of writing experience and expertise particularly in the field of language and literature. She has been instrumental in much of the research teaching and program writing at the college and will be heavily involved in the next issue of He Kupu which has the title of 'multiple perspectives.' More information on the next issue is available on the He Kupu website alongside a call for papers.

References

Blank, M., & Franklin, E. (1980). Dialogue with preschoolers: A cognitive-based system of assessment. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 1, 150-227.