

# Editorial

 I am pleased to report that this is our thirteenth issue of LEARNing Landscapes (LL) since its inception in 2007. Eleven of these are themed issues and have attracted submissions from a variety of different countries that include academics, graduate students, school leaders, elementary and high school teachers as well as students. One is a special issue to which eminent Canadians from across the country were invited to share their views on education. Our original aim in creating LL was to incorporate voices from all niches of education, and happily, this vision has been realized in each of the issues. A special feature in each LL issue is the section we call commentary. We have been extremely touched by the warm responses and generous contributions we have received from the many eminent commentators who have added important perspectives to each of the themed discussions. The commentaries in this issue are no exception. They highlight important fundamentals of early childhood education and provide a helpful context for the articles that follow. As usual, contributions are published in alphabetical order, however, this editorial clusters them thematically to permit a coherent overview of the issue.

## Commentary

**Vivian Paley** is an award-winning author from Chicago, a longtime pre-school and kindergarten educator, as well as a renowned early childhood researcher. She explains compellingly in my interview with her how play and performance are a natural way for preschoolers to perform their stories, and connect socially. These activities provide teachers with excellent opportunities to observe and scaffold the learning that is taking place. She suggests that the storytelling of preschoolers enacted in their play helps to unify classroom activity and remove barriers that may be caused by difference. She argues for much more space for play and storytelling/performance in the early years instead of imposing the literacy curriculum of later grades on these youngsters.

**Sarah Michaels** is a Professor of Education and Senior Research Scholar at the Hiatt Centre for Urban Education at Clark University. She is a major and longtime contributor to early literacy education. Using Hart and Risley's (1995) work entitled "Meaningful Differences" as an example, Michaels argues strongly against the deficit notions these authors, and others, attribute to difference in children's ability to learn. She suggests, as she has for many years, that educators need to use alternative approaches that honour differences and build on the varying and rich capacities for language that children bring with them to school.

**Beverly Kutsunai**, a primary science specialist at Kamehameha Schools in Hawaii, and **Kathryn Au**, CEO at SchoolRise and first Endowed Chair at University of Hawaii, show with examples how they implement what Michaels suggests. They honour difference and diversity by responding sensitively and meaningfully to the cultural background and traditions of their students in science learning in kindergarten. They ensure that classroom learning is culturally responsive by connecting home and community knowledge with what transpires at school. They posit some tips for teaching in culturally responsive ways: by introducing a topic in a way that makes a powerful impression on students, by providing students with multiple ways of expressing and representing their work, and by allowing children to explore first using their own cultural lenses as a way into a topic in order to grasp more meaningfully the connection to more conventional scientific concepts.

**Tim Peters** is an early childhood educator and Principal of The Priory School in Montreal. Peters describes in a videotaped interview how he first became enchanted working with young children when he was a ski-school instructor. This prompted him to study education and to choose to work in early childhood. In his work with teachers and young children, he emphasizes equally academic and social development and, much like Kutsunai and Au suggest, encourages inquiry learning that helps students connect to topics through novelty. He concludes his interview with two touching experiences he had with students that made a significant impact on him as an educator.

All of these commentaries suggest just how important early experiences in school are for the futures of children. Unless there are physiological reasons, they all come to school as very capable communicators having mastered the complexities of language outside of school in four short years, irrespective of their cultural contexts (Ochs & Schiefflin, 1984). The important task for educators is to honour diversity and avoid deficit thinking, and to use cultural contexts as bridges and motivation for meaningful and successful learning (Ochs, 1997; Park & King, 2003).

## Exploring Perspectives on Kindergarten and Daycare

**McCann**, a kindergarten teacher and a PhD graduate from Concordia University in Montreal, provides a useful history of early childhood education and then focuses more specifically on kindergarten in Quebec and how it is rooted in the philosophies of Dewey, Vygotsky, and that of the Reggio Emilia schools. She remains skeptical about the extent to which these important perspectives actually get translated into practice and provides some examples about how they might be. **Evans**, a PhD candidate at University of Exeter, draws on the context of early childhood education in England

and suggests that the dominant discourses around the idea of “readiness” are based on mechanistic, exclusive, and reductionist thought that marginalizes difference and diversity. She advocates for a concept of readiness that is not predetermined, but rather one that emerges from each child’s individual context and needs. **Scheffel**, an Assistant Professor at Nipissing University, describes four portraits of home-based daycares and the unique issues these daycare educators faced because their work and home spaces were one and the same. In order for these daycare providers to be treated as professionals, she suggests they need spaces for ongoing dialogue, sharing experiences, and mentoring, so that they can be recognized for and validated in their important work.

### **Bilingual Education in the Early Years**

**Byers-Heinlein** and **Lew-Williams**, both Assistant Professors at Concordia University and Northwestern University, respectively, offer a thorough and important overview of the literature on the myths and facts about bilingual education in early childhood. Their review supports the idea that bilingualism is best achieved by exposing children to the second language as early as possible, and by using strategies that are differentiated according to the needs and contexts of each individual child. **Bode** and **Gallagher**, both graduate students at the University of Minnesota and Notre Dame University, respectively, **Vang**, an undergraduate student and **Durgunoğlu**, a Professor, both at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, describe their qualitative study in which they interviewed a small sample of parents of children from both low- and middle-income families of language minorities who were doing well in grade one according to several standardized tests. Common factors supporting success across all demographics were responsive parenting, valuing school, appreciating the potential in each child, having high expectations, and providing an enriching environment. **Crump** and **Phipps**, both PhD candidates in education at McGill University, argue that when doing research in early childhood education, particularly in multilingual contexts that exist in cities like Montreal, research ethics should be at the forefront. They illustrate with vignettes of a study with Japanese-Canadian children how their participants’ voices were validated by fostering respectful relationships, listening attentively to their contributions, and by using informal conversations, rather than interviews, and other creative ways for the children to communicate their ideas. In sum, they advocate minimizing the researcher power differential by doing research with, and not about, children.

### **Pedagogical Stories in Early Childhood Curricula**

In an informative and engaging article, **Cordeiro**, a Professor of Education at Rhode Island College and **Sevey**, an Assistant Professor there, refer to fostering the “brilliance of children” by using the Reggio Emilia approach of pedagogical documentation.

This form of documentation has pedagogy as its focus. Documentation may be thought of as content and the pedagogy as process. In this way pedagogical documentation can be used as a tool for mediating the understandings of both adults and children. By making children's thinking visible, documentation facilitates teaching and learning. (Alcock, 2000, p. 1)

They show the benefits of pedagogical documentation for helping children to use metacognitive approaches to reflect on what they are learning, and for helping teachers to support the uniqueness of each child's learning processes. **Forman** is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts and co-founder with **Hall** of Videatives Inc. In addition, Hall is executive director of the Boulder Journey School in Colorado. We asked them for permission to include their interesting article as a reprint in this issue. They, too, argue for the importance of observing children, particularly in their play. By eliciting explanations from children about what they are doing or thinking, teachers get a better understanding of what learning needs to be scaffolded and developed further. **Walshaw**, a Professor at Massey University in New Zealand, presents a study in which she compared the discourses of mathematics in early childhood education (ECE) centres and that of new entrants (NE) classrooms. She used Foucault's notion that discourse is about the rules governing speech—when to speak, act, or even think—to explore discourse in these settings (Hook, 2001). She discovered that the educators at the ECEs valued multiple ways of thinking and knowing, while in the NE classrooms, mathematics discourse was scripted and very regulated. She recommends the need for communication and sharing in order to make transitions much smoother from one context to another. **MacEachren** is the Outdoor and Experiential Education Coordinator at Queen's University in Kingston. She describes, with interesting insights from a variety of stakeholders, the rationale and philosophy for the founding of Canadian "Forest Schools," which are a means of introducing early childhood students to environmental education. It is far from a prescribed curriculum, but rather depends on the creativity and the passion of the teacher to facilitate play-centred learning that is grounded in nature and the outdoors. She stresses that early childhood is a critical time for children to connect with the environment because it develops a caring and healthy perspective for adult life. **Munroe** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at St. Xavier University in Nova Scotia. She, too, is committed to nature-based play for young children because it enhances emotional well-being, develops environmental ethics, and helps children self-monitor to prevent unnecessary risks. She describes how one Aboriginal educator took the steps to transform her playground and suggests that it was because this educator's belief system was congruent with the importance of nature-based play that she decided to make this change. Munroe questions why other educators with similar belief systems do not see the benefits and take the same steps.

**Roessingh**, a Professor of Education at the University of Calgary, explores the successes and challenges of literacy development at the grade two level. She shares with interesting visual examples how she analyzed 20 students' writing samples. She posits that students who have strengths in vocabulary, spelling, and printing have a "lighter cognitive load" which allows them to generate ideas and retrieve vocabulary that improves the writing. She does not suggest that educators should use skill-and-drill approaches to do this, however, but rather they should use authentic and engaging ways to enhance these skills.

### Connecting School With Young Children's Lives

**Swanson**, a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, shares a poignant story of how she held on to the memory of her very caring grade two teacher that she intended to emulate in her own classroom. She found herself unable to do this as a novice teacher because the prescribed curriculum and standardized tests produced a context of authority rather than care. She had an awakening during graduate school that helped her to revision herself as an educator, as one who honours children and the differences they bring with them to school. **Jelfs**, a Professor of Education at the University of Bristol in England, describes how in a "language for learning project" animal metaphors and imagery helped pre-school children make connections with their learning. The project was so successful that they created a mural to show parents what they were learning and eventually the project grew further and had a transformative effect that involved the wider community. **Elliott-Johns** and **Cantalini-Williams** are Associate Professors, **Black** and **Wideman** are Assistant Professors, and **Guibert** is an Instructor of Education, all at Nipissing University. They conducted a qualitative study to evaluate the "Family and Community Engagement Strategy" (FACES) that was a community-based, multi-agency initiative to support young children's transition into school. They describe in great detail the "seven keys" that emerged for successful partnerships and highlight the importance of trusting relationships as a basic requisite in the process. Last but not least, **Beren** is an Adjunct Professor at the University of the Rockies in Colorado. She describes how, through an online course for teachers on gay and lesbian families, she was able to help early childhood educators become better informed and prepared to ensure that all children and their families were fully welcomed into inclusive classrooms, and not silenced, marginalized, or demeaned in any way. She suggests strongly that pre-service education programs should better prepare teachers on how to reach out to the community through inclusive practices.

On behalf of the LEARNing Landscapes team, I would like to wish all our readers a healthy and productive 2014. Also, I would like to extend a special thanks to **Lerona Lewis**, PhD candidate at McGill University, for her help in organizing and summarizing the manuscripts.

LBK

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