Early Childhood Education: Successes and Challenges

Autumn 2013 Vol. 7 No. 1

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Statement of Purpose

LEARNing Landscapes™ is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the autumn and spring of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec, and beyond, by welcoming articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

Review Board (Vol. 7 No. 1)

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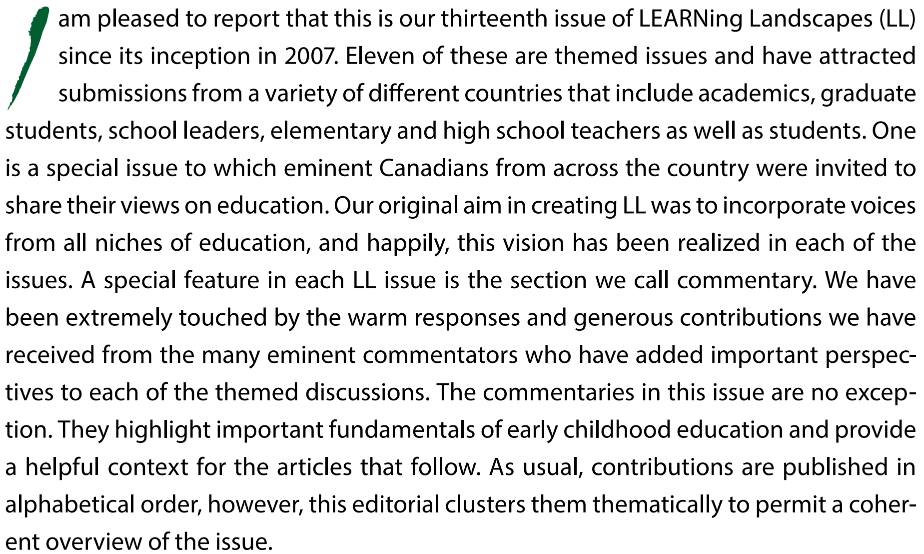
Editorial



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 Massacchusetts 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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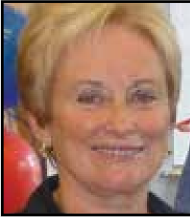

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Commentary

Culturally Responsive Instruction: Listening to Children

Beverly Kutsunai and Kathryn Au

ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive instruction aims to promote the academic success of young children of diverse backgrounds, closing the achievement gap that typically exists between these children and their mainstream peers. Culturally responsive instruction is illustrated here through science lessons taught to young Hawaiian children around themes based on plants and the water cycle. Such place-based education provides a framework for building on the knowledge young children bring from the home and connecting them to the ways of their ancestors. Teachers seek to introduce themes in an engaging manner, including hands-on activities with artifacts and the reading aloud of literature.

The joyful voices of kindergarten children float through the early morning sunlight. They are outside in the garden, painting pictures of plants.

"This tree has funny flowers!" says an observant child.
"What do you notice?" asks the teacher.
"The flowers look pokey," the child replies.
"Touch it gently," the teacher responds.
"Wow, it's soft!"
"How can you show that in your work?"

Another student chimes in, "It's really 'ula'ula." And another adds, "That's Pele's flower. My uncle says if you pick it, she'll be unhappy and it will rain 'cause she is sad."

This is a science class focusing on parts of plants. The teacher's strategy for successful plant study is to take the children to explore plants in the school's small garden. The lesson incorporates elements of successful early childhood education, such as direct, hands-on experience with nature. The children are observing their world and sharing their observations through art—visual art and the art of conversation. Painting and open discussion help them make the most of the experience. They express themselves in their own styles and learn from each other. After working in small groups, painting and talking, they will return to the classroom to record their observations in their science journals, through both writing and drawing. Some plants in the garden are endemic and indigenous, having taken root in the Hawaiian Islands without human intervention. Others are popularly referred to as "canoe plants," having been brought to the islands by early Polynesian settlers in their voyaging canoes (Abbott, 1992). These children examining the plants are descendants of these settlers, and they are enrolled at a school for students of Hawaiian ancestry.

'Ohi'a lehua (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) is a hardwood plant of the Hawaiian Islands considered sacred to the volcano goddess Pele. After just a few moments, the teacher has learned that some children already know about this plant, while others have never seen it before. She makes note of the knowledge the children already possess. One of the children knows of the plant's connection to Pele and of the belief passed down through many families that picking a lehua blossom will cause it to rain. Flowers of the 'ohi'a lehua may range in color from a fiery red to yellow. In the school's garden, the plant's flowers are red, prompting one of the children to describe them with the Hawaiian word for red—'ula'ula.

As they progress through the grades, the children will learn more about how the plants in the garden were and still are used by the Hawaiian people. At the same time, they will explore and begin to build the foundations for basic botany from the perspective of western science. The children will learn about such biological processes as reproduction, adaptation, capillary action, and photosynthesis as they investigate how plants grow and change, how water travels through plant parts, and how leaves use this water with light to make food for the plant to survive.

In our example, culturally responsive instruction has been applied in the teaching of science as way for young children to make sense of the world around them, in a manner that builds on their prior knowledge while expanding their horizons. Notice in this example that there are no longer walls separating school subjects such as science, English language arts, and visual arts. Other subjects, such as Hawaiian language and culture, math, and health and wellness, can easily be brought into this unit on plants.

In fact, one of the children has already introduced Hawaiian vocabulary. As this example shows, culturally responsive instruction offers the potential for improving the opportunities for young children of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to excel in academic learning through building on the knowledge they bring from the home. Teachers face the challenge of recognizing and celebrating this knowledge, while enhancing it in ways contributing to children's academic success.

Definition

Because culturally responsive instruction is a term that lends itself to different interpretations (Au, 2009; Osborne, 1996), let's explain how it may be defined in the context of early childhood education. In our view, the goal of culturally responsive instruction is to promote the academic success of young children of diverse backgrounds, to close the gap that typically exists between the achievement levels of these children and their mainstream peers. Studies indicate that an achievement gap exists even at the earliest levels of schooling and that this gap only widens over the years (Au, 2007).

Culturally responsive instruction is central to a pluralist vision of society in recognizing that heritage cultures have a central place in a school's curriculum. In this way, culturally responsive instruction can help children simultaneously achieve academic success while taking pride in their heritage cultures. Culturally responsive instruction is based on the idea that young children of diverse backgrounds bring assets a skillful teacher can build on. Culturally responsive instruction is proposed as a way of narrowing the gap, by building on the values, knowledge, and behaviors that young children of diverse backgrounds bring from the home.

Culturally responsive instruction is not intended to limit young children to content and learning activities they find comfortable and familiar. Rather, it involves giving children opportunities to find success in school by learning through means that are responsive to their cultural backgrounds, while at the same time introducing them to the new curriculum content and patterns of interaction needed for success in mainstream academic contexts.

In this commentary, we present science examples from lessons taught to Hawaiian children. We know, however, that many teachers work in urban settings where children come from a dozen or more different cultural backgrounds. What can these teachers do to bring culturally responsive instruction to their classrooms? Part of the answer is to plan lessons that foster a classroom environment where children are provided with common experiences and knowledge, while simultaneously inviting children to make

contributions from their various heritage cultures. In this way, a shared classroom culture can evolve to include and engage all children, as everyone in the class weaves a tapestry that represents expanding views of the world. Young children are eager learners of all that surrounds them. Active and enthusiastic, they are willing explorers. Teachers can take advantage of this energy and curiosity to develop culturally responsive lessons that engage children in exploring the world together.

Place-based education.

Placed-based education (Gruenewald, 2003) is a key to culturally responsive curriculum and entails strategies that can be used by teachers in diverse, multi-ethnic classroom settings. Developing a sense of place is a way to awaken children's reflections of personal identity and connections to the environment, both natural and man-made. It gives children the opportunity to investigate their potential and who they can be in the inclusive global world that surrounds them. They can begin to discover more about the importance of their culture and cultures through history with a respect for their own education and the future of their people. In the Hawaiian Islands, people have been linked to the land and the sea through generations. As Hawaiian people today look towards sustaining a vibrant culture for future generations, they look to their language, their traditions, their arts, and their children. Revitalizing the culture creates new learning opportunities for families as well as their young children. They can share common experiences and access new knowledge linked to their ancestors and their history. They can redefine and reconnect with their sense of place on their land in their culture today.

A basic cultural link is easily enhanced in content areas utilizing real artifacts or materials. In Hawaii, as in other cultural areas around the world, natural materials still link people with the land across time. For example, first graders examine and test three types of volcanic rock in basic lessons from an exemplary U.S. science education program. The teacher enriches the module lessons by adding a place-based focus to include the location of these types of rocks in Hawaii. Basalt, cinder, and tuff are all common in the islands. In Hawaii, tuff results from volcanic eruptions near the sea, and it often holds fossils from the ocean. These fossils show children evidence of the origins and history of living things in the islands.

Children investigate further by testing the rocks as geologists do: a color test, a streak test, and a hardness test with a scratch plate of glass and their own fingernails. They learn that tuff crumbles easily. Connection: No wonder hikers in areas with tuff get into trouble when they leave marked trails.

The children learn that basalt is hard and dense. Connection: The early Hawaiians used basalt to make tools, including knives and adzes. Sample artifacts show children what their ancestors were able to accomplish using these natural materials. The children gain insight about the pivotal role of the natural environment, realizing that their ancestors had to use the type of rock available to them. Children then compare rocks from Hawaii with rocks from continental North America. They examine arrowheads made by North American cultural groups in the past, using available rocks for tools that met their needs in various environments. Involving children with artifacts from multiple cultures allows them to note similarities and differences and to see how what they have learned in one context may or may not apply to another.

Starting with literature.

Literature from a heritage culture can also be a way of introducing an inquiry in a culturally responsive manner. Oral chants are the literature of the heritage culture of Native Hawaiian children. With guidance from a cultural archivist and educator, a teacher experimented with using a historic chant to highlight examples of natural sources of water in the children's environment. The chant provided a culturally responsive introduction to a science unit on the water cycle from a native perspective. It was entitled "Aia i hea ka wai a Kāne" (Emerson, 1909), which may be translated as "Where is the water of Kāne?" Kāne, the highest of the four major Hawaiian gods, is associated with procreation and with the sun, dawn, and sky.

The children were excited to discover that they drank water from the same sources as their ancestors. They learned the key patterns in the chant, as each verse began by repeating the question, "Aia i hea ka wai a Kāne?" They identified sources where water could be found in the world of their ancestors, soon realizing that their ancestors were keen observers of their environment and practiced natural scientists. Children then considered sources of water in the present environment. They experimented with the water cycle and used modern resources, such as videos and brochures from the local water supply board, to find out more about what they could do to maintain an ample supply of water, as well as good water quality, in their island home.

Teaching tips.

We hope these examples will inspire early childhood educators and other teachers to bring culturally responsive instruction into their classrooms, not just through science but all subjects. We close by offering some tips for getting started, applicable to the teaching of all subjects.

1) Introduce the topic in a manner that makes a strong impression on children. For example, have children's first involvement with the topic occur through nature or the handling of artifacts, or use a powerful story or chant from a heritage culture. Do what you can to make learning concrete and meaningful, and allow children to make connections to their knowledge brought from the home and community.

2) Give children multiple ways of expressing themselves, such as through conversation, writing, drawing, drama, and music. Relying just on one mode of expression, such as talk, may not be a sound strategy. For example, children from some families may have been encouraged to state their opinions, whereas children from other families may have learned to wait to find out the answer the adult expects. The latter group of children may be more comfortable drawing their observations and sharing these with the class, rather than speaking at length.

3) Give the children a chance to explore on their own first, so you as a teacher can understand how they see the topic through their own cultural lenses. Have children elaborate on their thoughts and encourage further exploration. Children will be able to grasp conventional scientific or western explanations more easily, if they can make connections to these explanations, comparing and contrasting them with what they already know.

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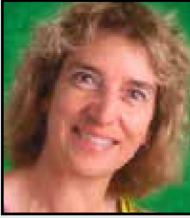

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Commentary

Déjà Vu All Over Again: What's Wrong With Hart & Risley and a "Linguistic Deficit" Framework in Early Childhood Education?

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ABSTRACT

In this invited article,[1] the author critiques some of the most often-cited scholarship on children's early language development and its relationship to children's learning. She suggests that Hart and Risley's work, *Meaningful Differences*, adopts an implicit deficit perspective, and makes unwarranted claims about the impact of children's early language on their later thinking and learning abilities. In contrast, she proposes an alternative framework that validates the rich and generative language capacities that children bring with them to school (including poor children, dual-language learners, ethnolinguistic minority children, and children who struggle in school). She argues that using "vocabulary size" or "language deficits" as an explanation for school failure locates school failure in children (with no credible basis) rather than in schools as places where children are failing to, but can, under the right circumstances, learn extraordinarily well.

Introduction

The title of this "commentary" is "Déjà Vu All Over Again," riffing off Curt Dudley-Marling's recent critiques of Ruby Payne's and Hart and Risley's work emphasizing the impact of a "culture of poverty" home environment—on school achievement—which he titles "The Return of the Deficit" as well as on Peggy Miller's critique of the Hart and Risley work entitled, "Déjà Vu: Contesting Language

Deficiency Again." Both Dudley-Marling and Miller critique the credibility of research that attempts to demonstrate the workings of a linguistic deficits framework in explaining "the achievement gap" or what I think of as school failure. And in a sense, this commentary revolves around the meaning of the term "school failure." Are we talking about the failure of kids in school, or the failure of schools as places where students can learn?

Here I focus on the core inadequacies of the academic scholarship that looks at cultural and linguistic difference and calls it deficiency—using the Hart and Risley work as perhaps the clearest and best example. It's important to examine claims about home environments and the "culture of poverty," especially in light of recent work by sociologists and social justice-oriented scholars who argue that we are wrong to blame schools and teachers alone for the achievement gap; poverty is a huge problem in this society and a huge factor in school failure. So, the critical question is when is a *difference* just a difference, and when is it a deficit?

Hart and Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*—Google it and in .15 seconds you get over 100,000 hits. Hart and Risley's book *Meaningful Differences* (1995) is the most-cited piece of academic work that attempts to explain what goes wrong with poor kids, with grand extrapolations and claims (which you'll see that I argue are totally unsubstantiated) about how poor children will fare in school and later life—based on their early home experiences with language. The book purports to demonstrate (with what I will call pseudo-scientific elegance) that poor children (in their study six families, all black, all on welfare) are doomed before they enter school because 1) their parents don't talk to them as much as upper middle class parents (13 upper SES, "professional" families—where the parents were predominantly professors, all white except one); and 2) poor children don't experience as many "quality" features in the talk with their parents.

Coding and Counting Amount of Talk and "Quality" Features

Their study yielded over 1,000 hours of tape, and in the book, Hart and Risley take great pains to show how meticulously they transcribed and coded the talk, with multiple checks on inter-rater reliability and accuracy, counting how many nouns, verbs, and so forth, and how many new words produced at each visit. But data do not speak for themselves. The quality of data depends on how they are coded and interpreted.

Hart and Risley coded for six "quality features" they identified (with no explicated basis in any kind of linguistic, psycholinguistic, or cognitive research) as causally linked with children's language learning and cognitive development, their reasoning, ability to learn, and hence, future life chances.

On page 76, they describe how they came up with these "quality features":

> We needed to describe more specifically what we saw parents saying and doing that seemed to add quality to everyday interactions. As with our impressions about the stability of a family's style of interacting, we came away from our observations with **impressions** concerning what made some interactions, in every family, more memorable than others as occasions for teaching and learning. We selected examples of these **memorable interactions** and used them as a basis for describing the parent behaviors that **seemed** to make these interactions higher in quality ("better") than others in terms of their developmental importance to language learning. (p. 76, emphasis added)

They arrived at features like "Feedback Tone." Tone denotes the prevailing affect of parent-child interactions, as exemplified by the ratio of affirmative feedback (parent repetitions, expansions, extensions of child utterances), plus words such as "good" and "right" to the total feedback (affirmatives plus prohibitions):

Parent: What's that?
Child: Juice.
Parent: Right, juice. It's orange juice. Good.

This is coded as positive feedback tone because of the repetition, expansion, and affirmation, "good." Sounds like the IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) pattern in school, right? Well, there's increasing evidence that the IRE pattern (teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation) does NOT support reasoning, or the development of deep conceptual understanding. It's also culturally specific—the dominant pattern in US schools, but not in other countries, such as Japan.

Another quality feature is Guidance Style (denoting the amount of children's experience with opportunities to choose as exemplified by utterances such as "Can you close the door?" as opposed to directives, like "Close the door."). Any linguist who studies pragmatics will tell you that "Can you close the door?" vs. "Close the door" are formal variants with the same directive function. "Can you close the door?" doesn't offer the

child any more choice than "Close the door." The difference is in politeness norms and conversational style, and different sub-cultures tend to be more or less direct in their conversational styles.

In fact, all of the so-called "quality" features have to do with politeness and cultural preferences, based on middle class, academic researchers' "impressions" that these features result in higher quality interactions.

There is no research basis for saying that in the case of these differences in conversational style (such as directness over indirectness) that one is cognitively superior. Hart and Risley coded for upper middle class/academic or professional politeness and interactional patterns, found that the upper income families used more of them, and simply asserted that more of the quality features is better in producing learning-related outcomes. They identified upper and middle class features of talk, coded and counted them and found, guess what, they correlate with class.

In short, here's how Hart and Risley go wrong. They code for and count for upper middle class (professional/academic) trappings of language (with no research evidence that these forms of language relate to reasoning, memory, intelligence, or ability to learn). They find huge differences between upper income professional and welfare families, in amount of talk, vocabulary size, and the nature of the talk, in terms of politeness and conversational style. The poor families are all black. The upper SES families are all white except one. Race, ethnicity, and class are hopelessly confounded.

Hart and Risley ignore decades of sociolinguistic and anthropological work on minority and working class speech communities that demonstrates robustly the highly verbal nature of these homes and communities, the documented linguistic richness of these homes. Hart and Risley ignore the work that explores the power of narrative in developing highly abstract and analogical powers of storytelling, reasoning, and argument. They do not code for narrative and they do not code for talk to other adults in the environment, in spite of the fact that work on cultural differences indicates that middle and upper class American families are quite unusual (across the world's cultures) in the degree to which they talk to their infants, and treat them as conversational partners.[2]

Hart and Risley Results

What do they find? Their most robust finding had to do with vocabulary—the high correlation with SES with respect to vocabulary use and vocabulary growth.

This is the study that has generated the often quoted "30-million word gap" between rich and poor children by age four.

The 30-million word gap comes from extrapolating from their six welfare families and 13 upper SES families—based on an hour per month of tape recording in these families, with an observer from the university, over a period of two and half years. Extrapolating from one hour a month and the average number of words heard and spoken (making all sorts of assumptions that would likely not hold, like these hours were representative of every single other waking hour of their lives), they ended up with the 30-million word gap, by the age of four.

The other most significant part of the study is the finding that, more than any other measure, the quality features in parents' talk correlates directly with SES.

The articles I mentioned at the outset by Dudley-Marling and Miller expose numerous methodological problems in the Hart and Risley study. But putting all of these methodological problems aside, even if we accept that Hart and Risley are capturing real differences, we still have to ask are these differences *meaningful?*

Hart and Risley find that the number of vocabulary words used and heard correlates with results on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and the Stanford Binet IQ test at age three (which Hart and Risley talk about as cognitive "accomplishments" by age three). This is not surprising because the PPVT and Stanford Binet IQ test at age three are in large part vocabulary tests. But there is no evidence that vocabulary size correlates with ability to reason with evidence, interpret others, or think abstractly.

Implications of These Findings?

Hart and Risley argue the language environment in the home determines the linguistic and cognitive "outcomes" of these children—massively. Here are a few quotes:

> "By the time children are 4 years old, intervention programs come too late and can provide too little experience to make up for the past." (p. 2)

"Differences between families in amount of talk were so persistently characteristic of ongoing family life that they added up to massive differences." (p. 70)

"Skills and knowledge can be improved or retrained; much more intractable are the differences in confidence and motivation gained from years of practice and encouragement in manipulating a vocabulary of symbols and using them to solve problems." (p. 194)

By the way, this last claim is completely unfounded. Hart and Risley didn't assess confidence and motivation, or problem solving—they counted vocabulary, and simply assume or assert that confidence comes from quality features like positive encouragement, and repetition, saying "Juice, right, good" which, again, are just upper middle class forms of talk.

But the take-home message of the Hart and Risley work, bolstered by the "trust me" precision of their charts and graphs, is crystal clear. By the time these low SES kids enter pre-school at four, it's too late. They're broken. They lack confidence (because they missed out on so many middle class-type affirmations and self-esteem boosters), and they lack IQ, and they lack expansive vocabularies, and all of these differences correlate with "cognitive accomplishments" by age three—and simply has to impact these children's educability—that's the precipitous leap of faith for which there is, finally, no evidence.[3]

In addition to claiming cognitive accomplishments due to language by age three, they claim that their findings from the first three years from life explain "intellectual accomplishments" at age nine as well. This is a huge claim, and really the unstated basis for the extensive interest in the book. These differences are claimed to be "meaningful" differences—affecting kids' lives and life chances in school and society beyond the age of three.

They managed to find 29 of the 42 kids at age nine or 10, and gave them a large battery of tests measuring language, IQ, and school performance.

"We were awestruck at how well our measures of accomplishments at 3 predicted measures of language skill at 9-10" (p. 160) (basically, again vocabulary).

And then Hart and Risley mention—without any real examination—a critically important finding: that these language patterns do NOT relate to educational outcomes (IQ scores or performance on school tasks or tests) in 3rd grade.

This is really the story that should be reported—buried in one paragraph on page 161 and in footnote 6 on page 173 is the following finding:

> We saw no association between rate of vocabulary growth and the children's third-grade scores in the academic skill areas of reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic or with scores on the Otis-Lennon School Ability Tests, of verbal and nonverbal reasoning. Nor was there any association seen between either vocabulary use or IQ test score at 3 and performance in these other academic skill areas at 9-10. (p. 161)

> We saw no association between children's accomplishments at age 3 (rate of vocabulary growth, vocabulary use, IQ score) and achievement in third grade in academic skill areas other than those specifically related to language. (Footnote 6, p. 173)

No correlation with school or cognitive outcomes…cited widely—over 100,000 citations on Google in .15 seconds.

Cited by very smart, very serious and well-meaning educators, linguists, psychologists, sociologists, politicians and policy makers—glowing about how important this book is. Again and again, one reads, "Hart and Risley's landmark study," "groundbreaking work," "classic investigation."

This is pseudo-science of the worst sort—hidden in what looks like rigorous, highly quantitative definitive results, results offered to guide public policy to promote social justice and equity.

Sadly, their work has generated lots of implications for intervention and public policy—Peggy Miller ends her paper saying, "While putting the final touches on this chapter, we heard a broadcast on National Public Radio ("Closing the Achievement Gap with Baby Talk," January 10, 2011) reporting Hart and Risley's vocabulary findings and describing an intervention program based on these findings. *In this program low-income parents are taught to talk to their babies*." Again, I want to remind you that people from different cultures talk differently to infants, and no one approach or style has been shown to be cognitively superior to another in helping children acquire their native language or grow up to be smart.

In the era of the Common Core, unchallenged research "findings" will spread more easily to every school district in the country. Here is a slide from a videotaped presentation on "*Student Engagement & Future Focus*," by Dr. Lisa Leith, available to all through a webinar for the School Improvement Network, posted on the Common Core 360 website:

Research about language in children from ages 1 to 3 years from stable households by economic group.

Number of words exposed to	Economic group	Affirmations (strokes)	Prohibitions (discounts)
10 million words	Welfare	1 for every	2
20 million words	Working class	2 for every	1
30 million words	Professional	5 for every	1

Source: Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children *(1995), by Betty Hart & Todd R. Risley*

Fig. 1: http://www.schoolimprovement.com/pdf/common-core-standards-student-engagement.pdf

This slide promotes Hart and Risley's totally unfounded ideas about conversational style (affirmations vs. prohibitions) as definitive truth, reflected in the "research about language in children," as if the 30-million word gap is common knowledge in the field.

Here's the counterargument: There is no evidence that there's anything wrong with the fundamental linguistic and reasoning skills these kids bring to school. Language is hard-wired in us. These kids get what they need in terms of their linguistic system. They get the grammar and fundamental ability to think with language as a primary cultural tool. They get the ability to learn—to learn language and to learn with language—and

so whatever they bring from home in terms of discursive repertoires, styles, vocabulary, narrative strategies—they are powerful language and discourse acquirers.

Early language acquisition is not like other social factors—such as nutrition, health care, or environmental toxins. If a kid brings his home grammar and dialect to school, even if that child has a smaller vocabulary than an upper class child, it's not the same kind of difference as the child who brings a toothache or lead poisoning, vs. the child who has had adequate health care. Your primary discourse or home language, or the size of your vocabulary, isn't the same kind of thing as basic nutrition or healthcare.

Every shred of linguistic and linguistic anthropological evidence suggests that the home language kids bring to school is *good enough*—is all they need as a linguistic and cognitive base to be perfectly good learners. If they engage in subject matter that requires more words, they have no trouble expanding their vocabulary if the words and concepts are meaningful and useful. *So when does difference become a deficit?*

Doesn't this difference in vocabulary or upper middle class academic conversational style give the wealthy kids an advantage? The answer is complex. Yes, in some respects, and no in others. When poor parents are working three jobs and not around as much to mentor their children, help them with homework, or take them to museums and libraries, their children do not have the same kinds of exposure to and opportunities to learn the kinds of things that are valued in school. While these kids have no fundamental deficit in their language or language learning abilities, they have had less access to academic experiences and conversation. In this regard they start school at a disadvantage. The things that schools value and assess are not the things that these children come to school well practiced in.[4] On the other hand, it's possible that upper middle class kids get good at spouting big words and concepts, without deep understanding. They get good at sounding smart, but their knowledge is often very superficial (see Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2003, for a study of upper middle class and working class fourth graders' reasoning about seasonal change).

But here's the bottom line: Even if kids come to school with an advantage with respect to style or vocabulary, kids are remarkable language and discourse acquirers. There's no evidence that poor kids—immersed in a rich and rigorous, and cognitively demanding school environment, with lots of support to engage in academically productive discussion—can't catch up quickly, and even demonstrate advantages in reasoning power, that come from their early home socialization that emphasizes observation and independent sensemaking (Michaels et al., 2003, Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2009). It's not clear that differences in early home experience with language is cognitively an

advantage or a disadvantage, but in any case, it's "good enough" so that it doesn't have to make a difference in the long run. *Clearly, no one is a native speaker of physics*.

Interpreting the "Socializing Potential" of Utterances in Isolation

Let me give you one example of how easy it is to read deficit into difference, when exploring the impact that home language has on educability. This one comes from the work of Ruqaya Hasan, cited in an article by Gordon Wells—two researchers I might add who are totally committed to research that promotes equity and access in schools.

Sociologists and sociolinguists have long documented differences in the ways that parents engage their young children in dialogue at home, and many have noted the explicit versus implicit nature of information exchange or support for reasoning. Wells (2007) cites the early work of Basil Bernstein (1975) on elaborated versus restricted codes:

> [Bernstein] theorized that, although all had access to the same language, adults of different social classes tended to adopt characteristically different ways of using language – different 'orientations to meaning' – according to their involvement in material and symbolic production, either as laborers, directors or creators; these differences would then carry over to the ways in which they talked with their children, thereby differentially preparing the children for the ways in which they would be expected to use language in the context of formal education. (p. 257)

Wells (2007) links these ideas to Hasan's (2002) work on visible versus invisible mediation, which Wells sees as an empirical test of Bernstein's theory:

> [Hasan] compared the ways in which Australian middle- and working-class mothers talked with their preschool-aged children in the course of their everyday activities. As Bernstein had predicted, she found systematic differences, which, she suggested, would be consequential in the context of the children's subsequent formal education. To theorize the connection, she proposed a distinction between two modes of semiotic mediation that she observed in her data. The first and most pervasive she termed 'invisible.' This mode of mediation typically occurred on the fly, in the course of some other activity, and the sequences of talk were so brief and apparently insignificant that they hardly merited being called discussions. Yet, as she explained,

because of their frequency and the different semiotic orientations they may enact, they are critical in establishing what she calls children's 'mental dispositions.' (p. 257)

What are the links between elaborated and restricted codes, visible and invisible mediation, and Wells' notions of monologic and dialogic discourse in the development of knowledge?

Let's take a look at an example of what Hasan (2002) calls "invisible" mediation, characteristic of working class parent/child interactions, and which Wells thinks of as monologic, as opposed to dialogic:

Mother: Put it up on the stove and leave it there.
Karen: Why?
Mother: Cause.
Karen: That's where it goes?
Mother: Yeah. (p. 113)

Wells, in citing Hasan's work, contrasts this with an example of a more expanded dialogue between a mother and a preschooler, one that closely resembles Hasan's (2002) definition of "visible" mediation. In this exchange, a mother and her four-year-old daughter are talking about their neighbors' impending move:

Mother: Did you know that they are going to leave?
Kristy: No.
Mother: They've been building a house.
Kristy: Mm.
Mother: Oh they haven't been building it, somebody else has been building it for them, and it's nearly finished, and they're going to move to their house in May.
Kristy: Why in May?
Mother: They're going to wait until the end of the school term.
Kristy: Mm.
Mother: Because Cathy goes to school now, and then she will change to her new school after the holidays.
Kristy: Mm.
Mother: If they'd moved earlier she'd only go to the new school for a week or two, and then they'd have holidays, you see, it would mess it up a bit for her. (p. 118)

Wells notes that, while both children ask "why" in these two dialogues, different semiotic orientations are enacted in the way their mothers respond. Examples of this kind are often adduced to suggest stark contrasts between middle-class and working-class patterns of interaction, reminiscent of Hart and Risley's findings on amount of talk, vocabulary, and parental expansion and elaboration. And while Hart and Risley would talk about vocabulary differences and quality features in the mother's talk, Wells' article characterizes monologic versus dialogic discourse. It makes sense that we would see the first example (where the mother simply says "because" in response to the child's "why?") as an example of a *monologic* or authoritative or transmission mode, where the child is subtly being told NOT to question or challenge, and is not provided a model of highly explicated reasons. In contrast, the second example looks like a *dialogic* mode of interaction, where the child's "why questions" receive highly elaborated and explicated answers, and the child is presumably being socialized into a "deliberative" culture, where reflection and questioning and seeking explicated reasons is encouraged.

Why do we automatically "read" these two examples this way? On closer examination, one could argue that the first example is socializing the child to be an independent thinker, a child who is expected to be an active inferencer and reader of others' motives. The mother might be seen as implicitly cuing the child to think and figure things out by herself. She might be saying, "you don't have to be spoon fed; you're smart and alert and can read between the lines." Interestingly, the child responds to the mother's "because" by completing her thought: "That's where it goes?" She is checking with the mother, "Is this what I was supposed to infer? Did I get it right?" The mother indicates that the child got it. One might indeed look at this exchange as a subtle but highly dialogic exchange—where the child is being guided to use others' actions and words as "thinking devices" from which to generate meaning for herself. The exchange is quite implicit in its mode of instruction, and perhaps that is why Hasan calls it "invisible." It does not entail any elaborated explanation "in so many words." But there is evidence of high expectations for reasoning ("you can figure this out"), and evidence of scaffolded support for culturally valued recognition, reflection, and reasoning going on.

In a similar vein, one might well consider the second example (about the neighbors' impending relocation) to be a case of highly monologic information exchange. The child asks the mother "why" and receives something of a lecture. The child takes it (saying "mmm … mmm"), without any evidence of thinking, challenge, or inferencing. It might well be looked at as socializing a child to "take" authoritative explanations on faith. The mother provides explicit and elaborated reasons, but does not scaffold or encourage the child to reason, to figure things out for herself, or use others' words as a thinking device. This kind of recurring exchange might well prepare a student to take

information from the teacher or from the textbook and spit back explanations that do not reflect any deeper sense-making ("It's because a vacuum sucked the water up the straw." "It's because of density." "Oh, it's because y = mx + b.").

The deeply destructive, pernicious thing about the Hart and Risley study is that it presents what seems like totally rigorous, careful, objective science (what under careful inspection is nothing more than pseudo-science)—that gives teachers, educators, policy makers the "proof" they need to believe that these poor kids aren't smart, aren't good learners, don't have adequate language to think well with. The very thing that teachers need as a foundation in working productively with these kids—*the belief that these kids are capable*—and the one thing the work in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology has shown definitively—*these kids are remarkable language users and learners*—is undermined by Hart and Risley. Teachers (and policy makers) are informed that these kids are riddled with deficits, in language, vocabulary, and in their ability to think well and abstractly. That undermines the kind of trusting foundation between teachers and their students that needs to be presumed if it is to be built. So here we have the worst kind of pseudo-science—creating a really pernicious, damaged, and damaging foundation for building intersubjectivity, trusting relationships in schools—the view that these kids are deficient in their language and thinking by the time they are four. If you don't presume intelligence, you can't nurture it. *This is where difference actually leads to real deficits—in learning and life chances*.

What goes wrong in school with poor children is the building of trust, trusting relationships, built around a rigorous set of learning activities, and the sense that these children are powerful learners—with high quality, cognitively demanding materials and instruction. Here, all of the work on conversational cooperation and intersubjectivity has it right.

To paraphase Ragnar Rommetveit's (1985) famous words: In order to achieve intersubjectivity you have to presume it.

Similarly, in "socializing intelligence" (Lauren Resnick's term), in order help kids get smarter, you have to presume they're intelligent to begin with. In order to open up the conversation to reasoning, you have to believe your kids are good reasoners.

An Alternative Perspective

Is there an alternative perspective and are there alternative policy implications? Yes. One only need look at the recent work on "Academically Productive Talk" or "Accountable Talk" (Michaels et al., 2003; Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, in press) describing pedagogical practices that promote language and discourse acquisition, and research on these programs demonstrating robust learning gains and intellectual accomplishments by low SES students, English Language Learners, and students who have traditionally struggled or failed in school.

The work on Accountable Talk (based on extensive linguistic, cognitive, and anthropological research) presumes that kids—all kids—are remarkable language users and learners, and guides teachers—at every grade level—to open up the conversation to student reasoning, building on the linguistic skills the students bring—supporting students to:

- Expand and clarify their own ideas
- Listen carefully to their peers, take them seriously
- Dig deeper into their reasoning with evidence
- Think with others

Even at Pre-K, teachers can be introduced to talk moves and tasks that do this—and once they open up the conversation, you hear teachers say things like, "I had no idea they were so smart." "I never thought HE (he's special ed) had such amazing ideas." In order to promote thinking/ reasoning/ intelligence, you have to presume it.

The really sad thing is that it's not like we don't know better: Research in and out of classrooms has also provided us with principled knowledge about the resources students as language makers and language users bring to the classroom. Regardless of children's race, culture, or socioeconomic status, ALL biologically intact children have well-developed "ways with words" ways of telling stories, giving accounts, providing reasons, abstract arguments, and evidence. This has been robustly documented in the classic research literature on children's language and culture, in the fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, developmental psychology, and cognitive science. (Miller, 1982; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Gumperz, 1981; Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Gee, 1996; Edwards & Westgate, 1987; Hymes, 1996; Collins, 2000; Resnick & Nelson-Le Gal, 1999; Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Wells, 1993). Linguists have shown—definitively—that all biologically intact children are grammatical speakers of their home language, that is,

they use language in consistent and rule-governed ways (Labov, 1969; Pinker, 1994). While their dialects may be different from Standard English, all children speak their home dialects as native speakers, with fluency and correctness. Many children even bring a second language to the classroom at a level of sophistication and fluency that few of their teachers can match.

If children have such amazing linguistic abilities, why do we recur to deficits in kids' language to explain school failure? Why does it seem that some students don't bring much, if any, language from home, or don't talk well about academic subjects? These are very common and widespread reactions that teachers have to a culturally and economically diverse group of students. And these are intuitions (based on cultural and linguistic differences) that get reinforced and reified by so-called scientific research leading to claims about vocabulary deficiencies, cognitive disabilities relating to language deficits, and the culture of poverty resulting in language deficits. Hart and Risley's book is just the most highly regarded and cited, with far too little targeted critique from linguists and sociolinguists who know better.[5] The linguistic deficit work feeds a need for educators to blame something or someone for the children's failures to learn in school. And, sadly, the Hart and Risley work plays into the ideological framework of the social justice-oriented activist researchers who want to blame poverty. But in this case they aren't. They're blaming parents and parents' linguistic and cultural practices—with absolutely no linguistic or cognitive basis for claiming that vocabulary size at age three, or parenting style, whether you use indirect or direct requests, or lots of affirmations or expansions, affects one's confidence, or ability to reason, interpret, or learn.

And yet, this pseudo-science helps teachers blame the parents and the children, but not their own classroom tasks and instructional practices. It also flies in the face of the many, many existence proofs that show that schools with poor children can close the gap and get extraordinary learning to happen. The most damaging message of all in this book, and the language deficit intervention and policy work that makes reference to it, is that it lets the educational establishment off the hook, by colluding in the argument that by age four these kids have irremediable linguistic deficits. Here's what Grover Whitehurst, Assistant Secretary of Education for Research and Improvement, citing Hart and Risley's work, had to say in July 2001: "Children who aren't talked to, who aren't engaged in rich language interaction with their parents, are going to have low levels of vocabulary and conceptual development, and this will affect their later reading and academic achievement."
(http://ies.ed.gov/director/speeches2001/2001_07_26e.asp).

But we know from every shred of work on intersubjectivity that intelligence is largely social, that in order to promote the development of reasoning and intelligence in action, you have to presume it. You have to believe your kids are smart in order to help them get smarter. The work that pushes language deficits as an explanation for school failure—in the guise of science—does a huge disservice to teachers—not to mention adding insult to injury to children, parents, and the linguistic and cultural resources that are very much intact. It locates school failure in children (with no credible basis) rather than in schools as places where children are failing to, but can, under the right circumstances, learn extraordinarily well.

Notes

1. This paper was originally presented at AERA (New Orleans, 2011), in an invited symposium on "The Return of the Deficit Framework."

2. The astonishing "erasure" of knowledge emanating from sociolinguistic and anthropological traditions stems from a deep, unexamined methodological hierarchy that treats quantitative work as inherently more valid than ethnographic, qualitative, discourse-analytic work. (I owe this point to Peggy Miller, personal communication.)

3. "Differences between families in amount of talk were so persistently characteristic of ongoing family life that they added up to massive differences. …In an average 14 hour day, a child spoken to 50 times per hour will hear 700 utterances; a child spoken to 800 times per hour will hear more than 11,000 utterances. … At the extremes in advantage we saw the consistence and magnitude of the differences in home environments and early experiences we thought separated the daily lives of professors' children and children from impoverished families. Yet, despite those differences, all 42 children learned to talk. **All the parents had apparently provided whatever amount of experience was necessary for the children to become effective users of the language**" (pp. 70–71, emphasis added). That's when they went looking for what they called "quality features" of interaction.

4. In commenting on Hart and Risley, Jim Gee (personal communication) notes the following: In a society where poor people are working three jobs they simply are not around enough to engage in as much talk as middle class parents. The "quality" of talk issue is a red herring, in my view. When parents talk about their experiences with their children and do not just play 20 questions with them, it is good for the

kids' school-based language development regardless of the parents' class or any linguistic measures of "quality" or "complexity." H&R's book is sadly written in a deficit language at times. Their sophistication in linguistics is poor. But their point that interventions where more adults of any social class talk to and work with more kids of any class are helpful is well taken. The same thing is shown in Susan Neuman's library studies (Neuman, 1996, Neuman et al., 2006). The problem the poor kids had was not any deficit in language, it was that no adult was there to mentor them (they were at work), while adults were there to mentor the richer kids. The deficit is in our neo-liberal society, most surely. But that does not mean poor kids are not being cheated. There is also, of course, the problem that what correlates with school success (e.g., Latinate vocabulary) is created by the way we do schooling. That means we either teach kids the correlates or change how schools operate. Decrying the correlations but keeping schools as they can become a "liberal" way to cheat poor children. As for it being "over at 4"—it is only over at 4 or 40 because institutions are built to make that happen. As Shirley Brice Heath said long ago, schools are a good place to practice literacy and other skills, but not to acquire them, in many cases. We live in a society that uses its public school system, by and large, to create service workers, allowing those who can escape to better schools to take the few good jobs at the top.

5. But see Miller & Sperry (in press) for a helpful critique.

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Commentary

Getting Back on Track: The Importance of Play and Storytelling in Young Children's Development

Vivian Gussin Paley

ABSTRACT

In this interview, Vivian Paley describes how her curiosity and love of young children led her to work in early childhood education. She shares some of her own learning experiences with children that eventually resulted in her writing 13 books. As children go to school earlier, there is less and less time for play. This dramatic play and re-enactment is critical for children and constitutes an "original level playing field" in classrooms with wide diversity in culture and language. Finally, she explains that the most important characteristic of an excellent early childhood teacher is that of valuing kindness, in order to create a classroom that is fair and inclusive.

Can you share with our readers what prompted you to become an early childhood educator?

My first experiences in a classroom during and after college were with young children and thereafter I enjoyed the experience so much…something told me this is the age that I could speak to. My student teaching was in the third grade, first grade, and kindergarten, and always I felt a sense of excitement being with kindergarten children and preschool children. There is nothing really unusual about this. I don't know how other people pick the age of education that they would want to become involved in, but something about the curiosity and freedom of expression of young children made me pick up some of that same excitement of posing questions and looking for answers in their make-believe worlds.

Your wonderful books on your classroom experiences with young children show what an excellent observer of children you are. Can you talk about the specifics of how you managed to do this while teaching?

I found out that observing, listening, recording, re-observing, re-commenting, and writing it all down was the same thing as teaching. I discovered that it was this ongoing narrative that in fact matched the child's own discovery of an ongoing narrative—call it play, dramatic play. It was a very exciting realization for me. It meant that I was always in my own laboratory and the questions that I had would be answered eventually right there. All I needed to do was listen to the children while they played, and join the conversations engendered by play.

Can you tell us about some of the most memorable events that you have had in your classroom and what you took away from these?

My goodness, there are so many memorable events, but I would have to say that my realization that the children's play told stories that needed to be re-enacted was one of the most important. My discovery of this next activity beyond play, that was the natural extension of play…all of these stories meant the most to my own development. When children played at home, weren't in school yet, and had so many more hours of play and re-play and a kind of leisurely examination of their own thoughts, their own ideas, with words, without words… the extension of that play onto a written page to be acted out by their own peers was not as necessary as it has become now. When children play in a crowded classroom of 20-25 students…their play needs to be seen again, heard again, on a pretend stage, transposed into a story in their own words.

It was in the writing of "Wally's Stories," where I realized that a child who is pretending to be a dinosaur bumping into block structures and doll corners is trying to tell a story in his own way. In a crowded doll corner and blocks it's hard to tell a story in your own way. A dozen other people are trying to tell their stories in their own way. But if the core of that dramatic experience can be captured in a few sentences, a few scenes, and then re-played, we are on the next Vygotskian step up the ladder. The child is able to re-create the scene by dictating it to an adult, and it is re-enacted on a stage with his classmates. This is a very exciting extension and I still am working to see how this activity can help us with the new approaches to early education. Perhaps the storytelling and acting can bring us back to the original play impetus where it begins.

What will happen if that is cut out of classrooms?

We are making changes galore and we don't know what will happen. We are almost cutting out a year, the kindergarten year, of imaginary play, storytelling, invention, leisurely hours of developing an idea, arbitrarily substituting a curriculum that used to be commonplace in the first grade. In other words, here's the situation: we now expect, by the end of the kindergarten year, pretty much what we used to anticipate and plan for by the end of the first grade year. If you think about it, we have eliminated a whole year of storytelling, story invention, characters, plots. What will happen? It takes time to know what will happen.

A lot of people think young children are not as happy in school as they used to be and don't act as nice to each other. I'll tell you something interesting: in a student-teacher practicum I was asked to talk about my book, "Boys and Girls." It was 30 years ago that I did the research, the teaching that led to an analysis of how boys and girls looked at each other and themselves in the kindergarten year. Someone in the colloquium with a great deal of anxiety said, "But how can we do this today, how can we examine kindergarten children the way you did, if we don't see them playing the way you did?" That's a good question. Perhaps these student teachers will discover for themselves ways to bring more play into their classrooms, and how to connect the storytelling and acting to play.

In your estimation what are the most important aspects of early childhood education?

In the beginning before early childhood education began "earlier and earlier," when I started teaching, most children started school in kindergarten. When preschool was added, its agenda was play—everyone understood that…keep the children happy…let the little ones learn how to play. As the age of entrance became younger, I took a hiatus from kindergarten and taught six years in the preschool. I was learning so much that in the six years I wrote three books, "Mollie Is Three," "Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays," and "The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter." The best part was that the children were learning the same things I was learning.

The most important pathways to this early education were found in their dramatic play. Being in a place where every kind of dramatic, verbal, social, literary, and cultural idea can be played out, where words themselves can be examined by a dozen children at once…stories all around you, observing how problems are solved by so many different kinds of children coming from so many different places is essential. What a rich addition this is to our children in this technological age. Given that there's nothing we can do about the technology overwhelming us, I prefer not to spend my time thinking

about it, but rather what are the cultural opportunities available if one takes advantage of the storytelling abilities of young children, almost from birth on.

Let's go back to "peekaboo," the beginning of story. The adult didn't invent it—the adult merely added some more words…the infant not yet having gotten to that stage. But it's the infant who begins the story: "Where is that nice smiling person? Gone. Will she come back? I'm afraid. Ah here she is, back again. Peekaboo, peekaboo." This is the beginning of the child as his own narrator. It is the child's job in our cultural history of mankind—this is the learning tool, the job of asking her own question and then playing around and finding out the options. What we tend to do is bring the answers, the adult-established answers, to so many subjects earlier and earlier into a child's life. Now, what is the task of early childhood? I would say, number one, to learn to listen to others—and you do want to listen to others when they're telling you stories and to learn to express your own narrative. You want very much to give them back the gift that they have given you. And then, we play around with the combination of a half a dozen different narratives and see where they go: "What if the mother and baby do this? What if there's noise at the door? What if there's a big wind and it looks like a hurricane? What if the bad guy comes and where is Superman? Are the pirates good or bad? Are pirates always bad?" No end to it. It is the beginning of abstract thinking, of concentration, of focusing on a subject, and focusing on people.

The good news is we can easily make changes in the direction of early education. Two years ago, for example, the director of early childhood education in the Boston public schools happened to be down in Orlando when I gave a talk for NAEYC, which I called "Who Will Save the Kindergarten?" He thought that was an interesting title—that's why I gave it the title, to interest people—and it spoke to him. His name is Jason Sachs, by the way. He came back to Boston and before a year was up, before several months were up, he imagined all of the Boston kindergartens and four-year-old groups, some 350 classrooms, taking one-third of their curriculum and train teachers to bring storytelling and story acting into their classrooms. To my mind it is a major way of saving the kindergarten, and re-integrating these narratives into the entire life of the kindergarten and preschool. They're going into their second year in Boston, with more classrooms added to the storytelling/acting curriculum.

In a few weeks I'm on my way down to Houston, Texas, to help them celebrate the 25th year of storytelling and acting in their early childhood centers; the stories are there if we provide the structure. It does not interfere with any other curriculum that the school has planned, and is the glue that can hold everything together.

By the way I should mention that in London, England, they have been doing what they call the "Helicopter Project" for 20 years. It is named after "The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter," and entails storytelling and story acting in their early childhood, especially inner-city classrooms, where you have a dozen different languages being spoken at once, and great collections of immigrant groups. The project is expanding throughout England.

It's been a long time since "Wally's Stories" [in 1981] where I first discovered for myself the storytelling and story acting curriculum. It makes more and more sense now all these years later. It took us a very short time, as these things go, to suddenly switch to a kindergarten that looks like first grade. *It's a very short time* since we began this new kind of kindergarten. I'm sure it's very much the same in Canada, am I correct? We shouldn't be surprised if suddenly teachers, principals, parents, grandparents—everyone is aware that it's gone too far. It shouldn't surprise us that it might take a little bit longer to get back on track. And I think we can manage to do it. Why? Because every new class of little children doesn't know what's been going on, luckily can't read or write. They know they have come into this world to invent stories, they know that's why they're here. They're here to play and to find out where they belong in a group and how that group creates a community. If you look at everything that's going on in kindergartens and in some preschools, and you think about this, the storytelling, story acting activity is the only *level ground*. You can bring children from all levels of society and background, rich and poor and middle, hearing the King's English at home, hearing no English at home, and you put them into an environment where there are playful scenes that they all imagine, dictate, and act out, and you are hard put to say which child is in special education, which is in a regular classroom, and which young child is in a gifted classroom. Here we have the original level playing field. All the children, even the children without spoken words, for one neurological or experiential reason or another, see the story acted out in their heads and can be helped to put it on the stage with their own classmates. It is the levelling and uplifting activity and we can't do without it.

What particular qualities then should school districts look for in potential early childhood teachers?

First, find teachers who really enjoy being with children, who really like little children. We want people who are curious about what children say and do. They are curious about finding out what children already know and how this innate knowledge can be used to create a conversation, an ongoing conversation. Most of what you look for in an early childhood educator, it seems to me, is not different than in a teacher who teaches middle school or high school. To be more precise, you want someone who is nice to every child and sets an example, a very visible example, of being nice

to all children, to other teachers, to parents…who is kind, someone who has thought a great deal and continues to think about the value of kindness as one of our earliest learning opportunities.

I would want teachers who look for opportunities every day to make children happy, and who find ways to make their classrooms fair, equitable, and inclusive. Now that's something that I would treasure and promote.

And for all of us who teach young children, let us wonder: Why is play everything in the world to them? How do we teach children to be kind to each other? How do we use their love of play to bring good conversations into the classroom?

More and more I think that what we are lacking in bringing up children and, indeed, in our own lives, are *good conversations*, starting at age two and three. How well can we carry on good, interesting conversations, tell good stories that grow into other good stories. The storytelling classroom gives all of us our best beginnings to a lifetime of learning. Luckily, children are born to be storytellers. They will remind us of how it is done.

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Vivian Gussin Paley writes and teaches about the world of young children. She examines their stories and play, their logic and their thinking, searching for meaning in the social and moral landscapes of classroom life. A kindergarten teacher for 37 years, Mrs. Paley brings her storytelling/story acting and discussion techniques to children, teachers, and parents throughout the world. Mrs. Paley received the John Dewey Society's Outstanding Achievement Award for the year 2000, and, in 2004, was named Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts by the National Council of Teachers of English. Her books include *The Kindness of Children* (Harvard University Press, 1999), *In Mrs. Tully's Room* (Harvard University Press, 2001), *A Child's Work* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), and *The Boy on the Beach* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Commentary

Connecting With Children—Something That Cannot Be Taught

Tim Peters, The Priory School

ABSTRACT

Tim Peters always knew he wanted to be a teacher but it was his experience as a ski instructor and the special connection he had with his students that confirmed his choice. In this interview, Mr. Peters explains that a key component of early childhood curriculum is to provide balance between structure and novelty and among school, extracurricular activities, and play. While the mandated curriculum has to be addressed, he advocates setting aside time for projects to create engagement both for the children and the teachers. He also expresses his views on differentiated learning and the importance of collaboration. Lastly, he believes that hiring teachers who are able to connect with students is key to creating an optimal learning environment.

What attracted you to early childhood education?

Growing up I always thought I would be a high school history teacher. When I went through university, that's what I thought I was going to be. I had a love for history and a love for educating—or I thought I did at that time—and I had a love for learning. I was a ski instructor in Switzerland and what happened was, because I was the new guy, they gave me the classes nobody else wanted. I found myself with six year-olds who didn't speak English…they were from all over Europe. I've never worked harder than that first week in my life. I was just trying to communicate with these children, but the main thing that was happening was that I was connecting with them. When I was finished that week I was exhausted but I felt so rewarded. I realized then

that I had a lot of patience and a way of connecting with children that didn't necessarily have to be verbal. I got more clients like that and ended up ski instructing for a small international school. I enjoyed it so much that I decided to back to Queen's University for my teaching degree in early childhood education.

What do you consider to be the most important components of an early childhood curriculum?

We know that children like structure to their day but they also like novelty in the exercises. If teachers can set their day where the children can expect but also be surprised as to how it's going to be delivered…I think it makes children feel comfortable, but it also gives them that element of engagement that comes when something is new. I found when I was a grade one/two teacher for many years that, particularly when I was beginning, I was very set on how the day should run. But of course what happens then is you start to lose all the teachable moments because you're not as flexible as you learn to be as you get more experience. When you're setting the curriculum you should look for those non-negotiables that children have to learn, but look for novel ways for them to approach it. For example, I was substitute teaching in grade one last week, and the children were learning an alphabet song. The children said, "This is our song; it's right here." But I said, "We're going to up make a new one today." You could see that they were a little bit surprised, and maybe even a little bit frightened, so I got my guitar out and we said, "This is the way the song's going to go now." We made up our own song and within 10 minutes of singing that song the children knew it...it was in their memory…and it was novel for them. They had had the same song for the last six or eight weeks, then all of a sudden learned a new one. I think little shots to the curriculum like that can really go a long way.

For very young children what do you consider to be the optimal balance among school, extracurricular activities, and play?

If a school is going to achieve an optimal balance for all their children, they have to have a really nice "menu." They have to have a menu that is flexible and convenient for parents in today's age. The majority of our parents, both parents are working, so we make sure that whatever we're offering is very flexible and easy for the children to access without the parents having to shift them around here and there.

We're going to continue with a liberal arts grounded curriculum, but at the same time if there's a couple of periods in the week where they can have a choice of what they're going to do—whether they want to do some robotics or a cross-curricular

bilingual project with the French teacher and the English teacher—I think that's a balance you need as well. Again, it goes back to the novelty aspect of it where it's not the same week over and over again; there are new things that they're looking forward to. I think it also goes for teacher engagement too when you have something like that. Last year, being new to this school, I asked the teachers—we had a vision-planning session in January—I asked them what they would see as something that they would find really engaging as teachers and would be exciting for them in the future. And they said, "To have some kind of 'throw out the curriculum' time and do a cross-curricular exercise or project that was undefined…" The idea was to see what learning comes out of it and after year two you can project what kind of learning comes out of it and set some metrics to it…but in the first year just to try something completely new. That's what we're doing this year after the November report comes out, we have this window of time from the third week of November to the second week of December where the teachers are encouraged to put their curriculum on hold for a while, meet up with a partner in the school, and do something exciting, whether it be with Music and French, or Art and English, or computers and what have you… And there will be no judgment on it and we'll see what kind of learning can come out it…the teachers are excited about it—to be honest, some are a little bit scared about it too—there's no expectations for me as to what's actually going to come out of it, other than something new, and we'll see where it goes from there. I think you need that balance, and then we'll go back to the curriculum. Of course, living in Quebec you have the non-negotiable competencies that are mandated by the Quebec government. Every school in Quebec has to report on those and we will continue to do so, but I think giving that novelty is important.

Can you talk a little bit about this new venture you're doing with cross-curricular activities and how it looks in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two?

My projection is it will look very messy, but it will also look natural. For the children in grade one and two they'll just see it as something that's exciting: *Why are these two teachers together? I've never seen this before.* Whereas the teachers will have an idea of where it's going but the children really will be exposed to something new. I don't have the plans for what our grade one and two teachers are doing but I'm assuming they'll probably get the specialist involved. It will be something like…perhaps they'll do a composition in music for which they'll write some words that will based upon the vocabulary that the grade one teacher is hoping that they would achieve at this level. Or it could be a French skit where our art teacher is involved, helping the students build some kind of a skit in French. It will be a messy process, a busy process, and one that will involve what I think is the healthiest of classrooms; when you probably walk in and can't find the teacher because they're all over the place trying to figure out where children

are learning best. I think it will be messy but it will be fun. We think that "happy children learn best" at our school—that's our theme and I think this initiative fits with the mission of what we're trying to do.

What are some of the ways that you ensure that the early childhood classrooms in your school have differentiated instruction?

I think the best way for us to make sure we're having differentiated instruction is to first know what the objective is. At the beginning of the year I spoke with teachers about the fact that on the wall should be what are the learning objectives right now in the classroom. Differentiated learning doesn't mean you have different learning objectives—well it can in a drastic case, but generally speaking differentiation means you are flexible on how one can achieve the objective, how are you going to differentiate so that everyone is successful at achieving these objectives. And the objectives should be loose enough so that children can surpass them if that's their maturity level or their capability at this time in their life. For example, in grade one if you walk into the classroom…in the fall they were talking about "how do trees affect our ecosystem?" The children should be able to know that's what their learning objective is and from there as long as the teacher is comfortable with that objective…then they're able to break it down and figure out the different ways that children can achieve that objective. Some of them might be able to read a couple of books, watch a movie, do some research that is guided or self-directed but occasionally overseen by the teacher, or in a group can and be able to write out what their learning is to this point. Other children would never be able to write how a tree is important in the ecosystem…they would have to do drawings for it…another might have to dictate it…another one might have to find a way of showing how they achieved this objective that the teacher did not even think about when planning the lesson.

I think the first step of differentiated learning is to say, "It's okay: we do all actually have an objective here," and to feel comfortable and solid in that and then be able to chop it down from there to allow children the voice to determine how they are going to show you that they understand. When parents get concerned about differentiated learning, they think that the teacher is going to label certain kids as gifted and certain kids as challenged and everyone is going to have a different learning objective. Then, the focus is not going to be on getting everybody to those non-negotiable objectives, which children have to learn. That's my starting point for differentiated learning. I also think as a small independent school where we have a lovely environment for that, we're very fortunate we have classes of 12 for many of our classes. Just that alone enables us to have small group work, to have less distractions that a bigger group provides. I think

you have the right environment and you also have the right philosophy of teachers… you have teachers who realize that when 12 kids come into the classroom, those are 12 different individuals that are going to learn 12 different ways and for the teacher to realize that "it's my job to affect them"; it's not their job come into my mould. You need that frame of mind and that goes right back to the hiring process.

How can collaboration be fostered among young children while at the same time preparing them to handle some of the competitive aspects of life that they will face as they get older?

Collaboration among children is best when there's less "shoulder checking." If you can set an environment where the children aren't saying, "Why's he doing that and why am I doing something different?" An environment where they can really understand what their learning objective is and what their respectful task is. Every child in the class at all times should have a respectful task so they know what they need to achieve and they feel comfortable that they can achieve it…and they have been a part of the goal-setting process so they know where they're trying to get to. From then on they're not frightened about working in a group because when people get frightened about working in a group what they're really frightened about is exposing what they don't know. If the children are comfortable, saying, "He's working on that, I'm working on this…", that's okay, we're all going to get to the same place eventually, we're all going to graduate from the school, go to a good high school…life is going to be fine. It doesn't matter right now what your challenge is and what my challenge is because they are both valid goals. Then you can put students together and they can learn from each other in a way that isn't threatening.

Many people have spoken about how collaboration now would have been seen as cheating a generation ago, and that's part of just not having that shoulder check. So when people say, "He's looking at my work," I reply: "Well good for you, there must be something there that he likes about your work. It's okay; it's your work. Just because he might get an idea from your work doesn't necessarily mean that he hasn't changed it a little bit…it's now his work too." I think you have to set the environment to make sure that collaboration isn't competitive, and then set an intrinsic competitive aspect to it. I think that in school the competition should be internal, something where you are really striving to achieve a certain level of mastery for yourself—sorry, I don't love the word "mastery" because it means there's nowhere else to go from there—what I mean is a certain level of fulfilment in achieving the task or goal that you have set for yourself.

If you look for example at The Priory the way the Heritage Fair is run: all the children in the entire school participate in it. There are different expectations for different classes. At the end of it we have, just like a science fair would do, we have all the children in the gym displaying their projects and what have you. However, the judges aren't judging one against the other; they're judging each project on its effectiveness, on how well it was presented, what the judge learned from that project. Then, the awards are given out, but there's not first, second, third place awards. There are simply awards for all the projects that the judges feel have taught them something new today. Some years there may be three awards given, others there may be 10. It's a lovely experience. Everyone gets a participation award, and there are certain ones that are recognized but they're not recognized as one, two, three, four. And it's the same thing for our public speaking competition that we started last year, where we don't give out medals for certain places; we give recognition for a certain competency that we think is a respectful task for a certain grade.

What are the best ways to give young learners a good start at becoming bilingual?

The best way is for it to just again be natural. The thing that we have to do for children is give them this lovely gift of bilingualism, living in Quebec, where it's natural. Children should never think, "I do French in that room." It needs to be that French is a way of life…it's not a subject…it's not three competencies on a report card…it's a way of living your life. Many schools, including The Priory, would say the same thing, and we make sure there are many different disciplines in French…so they're going through their day being exposed to French in many different ways.

I think that the parents ultimately have to "role model" that as well. I need to recognize what a struggle it is for an English learner to sit in a 90-minute French class—it's exhausting. And I find it exhausting. We need to make sure that we're adapting our 90-minute French classes so that there's a lot of movement and breaks in it for them as well. I need to role model it. I need to go into the French classroom…I was in grade four French yesterday and they were doing Halloween poems and standing up and dictating the poem and some of them had memorized it, so I got up and did one too, to show them how hard it was. Of course, I wasn't very good at it but I tried. They saw, "Mr Peters is trying too" and I think they need to see that from their parents as well. English mother-tongue families will send their children to a school saying, "You have a good French program, make them bilingual." If there's no way for them to attach their French to real life then it's just an abstract thing. School needs to be life; it can't be a separate thing to prepare you for life. Children need to go home and be validated for this amazing adventure they're on to learn French and they need their parents trying

to learn French, and they need to do some activities on the weekend that are French. You'll never achieve bilingualism if you don't have that.

Growing up in Ontario is probably why my poem in grade four yesterday was so terrible. I grew up in Ontario and went through a bilingual program in an English city with all English families. As much as the teachers were trying to teach me French, I didn't really have any connection to what French really was. It has to mean something.

What are the most important qualities you look for when hiring an early childhood classroom teacher?

I guess if you go back to what I was saying about how I came into early childhood education, I didn't have a curriculum and I didn't have even knowledge of what a grade one student should be learning. When I first realized I was meant for this profession it was because I had a connection with children. I think that the way that we interview for positions is really completely on its head. I think that the first thing we should do is make time for potential teachers to come in and teach the children, read them a story, see what they're like on recess duty—how do they handle the situation where there is a conflict on the soccer field. Something like that where you can see what the person is and how they relate to children. From there, I think if someone has that connection with children at their core then you can teach anybody what grade one or two needs to look like and so forth. You can teach the pedagogical part of it but you can't teach the connection with children. And, of course, when children come home parents will often often ask: "How was school and how are you doing?" but the first thing the child wants to know is, "Was my teacher nice and does my teacher get me?" Years ago I worked with someone who said, "It's not my job for children to like me." And I remember hearing that in one of my first years of teaching and thinking the opposite: "If you don't have that, you've got nothing. You're pushing a stone uphill for the entire year." I think that connecting with children on a personal level is the first thing that children need.

Can you describe an early childhood success story that stands out in your experience as an educator?

When I was teaching years ago there was a boy who was constantly getting into trouble with other students, mainly in his own grade. He was an only boy, an only child and one of these children who could speak to adults with no problems but he just didn't know how to speak to children. It was a real problem for a while; we weren't sure what to do. And I said, "You know what? We're going to put him in charge of the younger children's recess. We're going to give him a little bit of training but he's actually going to

be in charge…" because he was a great *policeman*, as you can imagine. We gave him a couple of skill sets like, "This is how you defuse the situation." "Let them talk it out first." "Make sure the children come up with a solution—you don't give them the solution; let them come up with it so they're part of the problem-solving process." The boy that we saw helping out with the younger children, because we knew he had a certain level of maturity, was completely a different boy than the one we saw interacting with his peers because what he needed was responsibility; he needed to be seen almost as an adult. The younger children adored him…and he walked a different way; physically you could see that he was walking a different way by the end of that year. I think that that made a huge change in his life. I see his parents on the streets of Westmount decades later and they still are thankful for the experience their son had. I think recognizing his uniqueness and harnessing it instead of making him conform to the structure of the school was the big part of his growth.

The other example was a boy who, he broke my heart, he was a really nice boy but very immature for grade one. I don't know if he was a "dérogation" or just one of those boys that was at a completely different maturity level. He couldn't get anybody to come to his house for a play date and it was getting in the way of all his learning, as you can imagine. Here's a child who has no friends and he can't seem to make any. I had a meeting with the parents and said, "Let's get some play dates going" because that will just open up all kinds of avenues for him. But no one would take him up on it. What I did is I announced to the class that *I was going to his house* for a play date—this is when I was a grade one teacher. He lived in Saint-Lambert and I had never been there before on the South Shore and I remember the mom just saying, "Really? You're going to come for a play date?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm going to come for a play date and talk about all the cool things that this kid has for a week." I was going to refer back to it in class. I went to his house and we played LEGO, we did stuff, I met his sister, the mom cooked us a little snack after school and I had a play date. And then I went back, and sure enough, the other kids were amazed and they had some kind of a connection with this new boy that they never…they just didn't have the maturity to ask him about or to explore themselves. Not that I have the time to do that all the time, but it was one of those times in my life where I thought, "I gave up an hour or two and it made a real difference and I'll never forget it." That's the way I live my life now, I try not to miss those moments. If you think it's the right thing to do, chances are it probably is.

Tim Peters is Head of The Priory School, where he feels very fortunate to be able to help create an environment in which "Happy Children Learn Best." Having spent his previous five years as Assistant Head of School at St. George's School of Montreal, and seven years at Selwyn House School as a kindergarten and grade one/two teacher, Tim has had experience with all aspects of elementary school life. Tim believes that the elementary years of education are the most important and that it is during this time of development that children learn who they are, how they learn, and how they can have a positive impact on their well-being and the well-being of others. Tim is the father of three young children.

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Gay and Lesbian Families in the Early Childhood Classroom: Evaluation of an Online Professional Development Course

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ABSTRACT

Including families is an important theme in the early childhood classroom. Teachers, however, report feeling unprepared when a child's family is composed of same-sex parents. Gay and lesbian families, in turn, feel invisible, silenced, and excluded. Overall, the topic is rarely covered in teacher education programs—in response, an online course on gay and lesbian families was developed. Teachers assessed the knowledge conveyed, comfort with the content, and helpfulness of the tools provided. The findings confirmed that most teachers had received no pre-service or professional development training on the topic. The majority wanted training that included tools for being inclusive and welcoming.

Introduction

When families who diverge from the traditional family norm feel included and welcomed into the early childhood classroom, children are introduced to the richness of diversity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Anti-bias curriculum guides encourage educators to discuss and introduce children as early as possible to diversity, including family diversity, as one means of stemming prejudice, yet many educators have reported feeling discomfort in welcoming families headed by gays or lesbians (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). This topic is rarely addressed in teacher training programs, professional development courses, or early childhood curriculum guides (Duke & McCarthy, 2009; Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008).

Advocate groups for gay and lesbian parents have argued that books should be present in the classroom, gay historical figures should be discussed, and posters should be displayed on the wall depicting gay and lesbian parents (Burt, Gelnaw, & Lesser, 2010). Many other groups, including parent groups, have felt strongly that outright activism was inappropriate (King, 2003; Landan, 2009; Rosenblum, 2011). These groups have suggested that non-intrusive acceptance and a school climate that does not tolerate derogatory homophobic comments represent more comfortable options. Currently, guidelines are minimal on how to welcome gay and lesbian families.

Background of the Problem

Over the last 20 years, the field of early childhood education has increasingly emphasized anti-bias education so that the educational experience of children prepares them for living in a diverse, multicultural world (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). In spite of this trend, a stereotype remains that family means White, middle class, English speaking, and living with a mother and a father. Family diversity, however, is no longer an exception; it is the norm. Families vary by culture, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Obtaining precise data on how many children live in gay or lesbian families is difficult because U.S. census data do not include these families. A Williams Institute analysis of Census 2010 data revealed that 3.8% of Americans openly identified on surveys as being gay (Williams Institute, 2011). This would translate to nine million people; however, the number of these individuals who are raising children is unknown. The Family Equality Council (2008) reported that one million gay families are raising two million children, yet the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN, 2003) reported a far higher number of six to fourteen million children who are estimated to live in gay or lesbian families. Canada does include same-sex couples, both married and common-law, in census data. The 2011 Canadian Census reported 64,575 same-sex couples with 6,410 children living at home (www12.statcan.ca). This is an increase of 42.6% from 2006 and reflects only those willing to identify their sexual orientation. Janmohamed (2010) feels strongly that a “queer perspective” must be brought to early childhood classrooms as “queer parents are a growing demographic in Canada” (p. 310).

While accurate data are not available, these families hope for their children to find inclusion in early childhood centers, but have reported that they have remained silent, not revealing their same-sex status, out of fear their children would experience discrimination from other children or from the staff (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). Early childhood educators, in turn, have expressed discomfort in introducing

this topic in the classroom because of religious, moral, and/or cultural beliefs about same-sex relationships (Duke & McCarthy, 2009). Some have reported feeling that early childhood is too young an age for this topic or that it is the responsibility of the family, not the school. Others have feared reprisal from other parents, supervisors, or the school district (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). Some have advocated for the issue to be included, arguing that avoiding the topic marginalizes, silences, and perpetuates homophobia (Lesser, Burt, & Gelnaw, 2005).

The topic of welcoming and including gay/lesbian parents in the early childhood classroom is controversial, with minimal research to inform educators. The few educational guidelines that exist were developed primarily by gay/lesbian advocates, yet this is an issue that cannot be ignored, as the number of children estimated to live in gay or lesbian families is increasing (Family Equality Council, 2008). As these children enroll in preschool programs, ideally, teachers should be forming partnerships with their parents because children thrive when parents and schools work together (Lilly & Green, 2004). The needs of young children require communication, coordination, and trust between families and early childhood teachers (Allen, 2007). While teachers have acknowledged the importance of building partnerships with parents, they have reported feeling unprepared for including gay and lesbian families, as the issue was not addressed in their teacher education programs (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008; Turner-Vorbeck & Marsh, 2008). These same teachers have said they would like to know about resources for creating a welcoming, inclusive classroom, as the students with two moms or two dads are often ridiculed, with other children calling their mother and/or father "dyke" or "fag" (GLSEN, *Playgrounds and Prejudice*, 2012). When pre-service teachers were asked how they defined "family," gay/lesbian families were the least likely to be included in how they constructed their definition of family (Larrabee & Kim, 2010). This was confirmed by an online opinion poll of 1,099 K-6 teachers. *Playgrounds and Prejudice* (2012) found that 89% of the teachers polled said they included representations of different kinds of families, but only 21% reported any representation of gay and lesbian families. When the students were polled, only 18% said they had been taught about families with two moms or two dads.

Psychologically based research on lesbian-headed families began in the 1980s, and researchers found that children who grew up in these families were as emotionally healthy as children from single mother-headed or heterosexual families (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Hoeffer, 1981; Kirkpatrick, Smith, & Roy, 1981). Educational research, on the other hand, tends to be more ethnographically based. A classic study of competing values emerged when gay parents and a politically conservative superintendent argued vehemently over the use of a curriculum, *Children of the*

Rainbow, developed by the New York City Board of Education (1991). This was an early childhood curriculum designed to include gay and lesbian-headed families. Fierce controversy resulted, and the curriculum was eliminated, with the majority of New York City school districts deciding to postpone any mention of lesbian and gay parents until the upper grades. Confrontations emerged in other districts, as well, including Provincetown, Massachusetts (Bedard, 1997), throughout Oregon (Egan, 1992), and more recently in Alameda, California, a suburb of San Francisco (Landan, 2009). The curriculum proposed in California was developed in response to derogatory name calling by children as young as kindergarten age. Ultimately, the curriculum was not adopted because of strong opposition by parents. When school psychologists in New York State completed a survey, they indicated that while gay/lesbian families were visible, they did not perceive the school environment as very open or welcoming for gay/lesbian-headed families (Bishop, 2010).

Overall, minimal research exists at the early childhood level on whether and how to include gay and lesbian parents. One study (Robinson, 2002) conducted in Australia surveyed 49 early childhood educators and found that only a quarter "considered addressing gay and lesbian issues important in developing children's critical thinking and awareness of the broader social, political and economic discrimination that sexual minorities face in their daily lives" (p. 427). Furthermore, Robinson (2002) found teachers believing a "myth that issues affecting the lives of sexual minorities have no bearing or relevance to the lives of heterosexuals" (p. 429). Duke and McCarthy (2009) reviewed multiple databases for studies related to gender and sexuality in early childhood educational settings. Overall, they concluded that only three studies critically examined how teachers could construct "equitable partnerships with LGBT parents in ECE school settings characterized by homophobia, heterosexism and sexism" (p. 400). Interestingly, all three studies were done by members of a gay and lesbian research group at Bank Street College during the 1990s. The researchers asked provocative and challenging questions such as, "To what extent are teachers able to make choices that reflect their educational commitments and to what extent are they limited by the circumstances in which they work?" and "Is it the teacher's role to reflect current societal attitudes or to invite discussion of taken-for-granted attitudes?" (Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin, & Wickens, 1996, p. 283). While concluding that change is "a slow process that requires equal parts of patience and persistence," the researchers found teachers who were eager for more training and information (p. 283).

Overall, teachers have felt poorly prepared and frightened of the repercussions of addressing the topic; gay and lesbian families have felt invisible, silenced, and excluded; and children have increasingly heard taunts that are derogatory about

same-sex attraction. This is a challenging area with strong feelings on both sides of the controversy.

Perspective

Teachers' discomfort with the inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the classroom has resulted from many interwoven themes. Some have personal prejudicial feelings that have stemmed from a group to which they ascribe (Krueger & Clement, 1994). Others hold societal stereotypes that were conveyed through their culture, socialization in their family, or repeated exposure to messages transmitted through the media (Brown, 2010). Some have feared they would lose their job if they addressed the topic of same-sex parents through books, posters, or classroom discussion (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). In addition, a myth has existed that young children who play in the opposite gender role will grow up to be gay, lesbian, or transgender. Studies have not supported this conclusion. The development of gender identity is in flux during the early childhood years, is complex, and is not yet fully understood (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2007). Reducing prejudice and changing stereotypes are challenging, as strongly held beliefs are difficult to change (Schneider, 2004).

Purpose of the Current Study

The current study was designed as a preliminary exploration of whether teachers desired training around including gay and families in the early childhood classroom, and if so, in what format and around what topics. Early childhood educators/teachers completed and evaluated an online professional development course I developed entitled, "Gay and Lesbian Families in the Early Childhood Classroom." The course did not advocate for any specific position, but rather educated and stimulated critical reflection by posing dilemmas for self-reflection, dispelling myths from facts, and exposing hidden biases through a classroom vignette. Because this was designed as a standalone course, neither a discussion board nor interactive assignments were included. Following completion of the course, an online survey was used to gather feedback about multiple components of the course. The survey questions focused on past training on this topic, preference for online or in-person training, and which topics in the course provided benefits and which created discomfort.

The survey also examined teachers' levels of comfort working with gay and lesbian families. Factors that led to differences in teachers' perceptions, such as educational setting, hearing children use derogatory remarks, hearing put-downs around atypical gender role play, as well as age group taught were considered as they related to an interest in training.

Mode of Inquiry

Participants.

Early childhood teachers and administrators were invited through an email letter to take an online professional development course and to complete the survey. Private, faith-based, and franchised early childhood programs were included in the sample. These programs were identified from the current list of the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The largest majority of programs were private, and at least 10 of the programs were faith-based.

Procedures

An email letter was sent to the director of each program explaining the nature of the research and requesting that an accompanying letter be given to individual teachers inviting their participation. Each teacher who was interested in participating first signed an Informed Consent, which then opened an online version of the professional development course. At the completion of the course, a radio button opened the survey. All three were sequenced and linked through Survey Monkey, making them easy for participants to access, complete, and submit online. This assured anonymity, as I had no way of linking survey responses to an individual teacher or to a specific early childhood program. A total of 27 teachers completed the course and the survey.

Data Sources

The online survey included some preliminary questions to determine whether training on this topic was indeed sparse, and if so, whether early childhood educators had an interest in receiving training. The survey was developed to assess the five components of the course:

- *Pro/con* provided an overview of the differing opinions on including information about gay and lesbian families in the early childhood classroom. Exploring the *pro* position, teachers read an advocacy article that appeared in *Young Children*, a publication of The National Association for the Education of Young Children. The article provides concrete and practical steps to create a culture of inclusion. The full article, "Do No Harm," can be found at http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201001/LesserOnlineExtra2.pdf

Examining the *con* position, teachers read an excerpt from "Queering The Schools" that vehemently criticized material presented by The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educational Network (GLSEN) at a conference in 2002. The excerpt is available at http://www.city-journal.org/html/13_2queering-the-schools.html Two films, *It's Elementary* and *That's A Family*, are referenced in the article and the link for accessing the trailers of the films was provided: http://groundspark.org/our-films-and-campaigns

Teachers were asked to reflect on the early childhood center in which they taught and to place their setting on a continuum from the pro position to the con position.

- *Difficult Moment* presented an unexpected question by a parent requiring a response by the teacher. A short overview of the scenario is provided below:

You are a first-year teacher in a private early childhood center. Two of the children in your classroom come from very loving and supportive same-sex parent families. One of the families brings you the poster shown below and asks you to hang it in the classroom. Reflective questions on how to handle this are posed, such as, "Would you hang the poster and if so, how would you introduce it to the students? What would you say if another family objected? If you decide not to hang the poster, what would you say to the family who brought in the poster?"

Fig. 1: Rainbow Families Council (2010)

- *Fact or Myth* provided research findings that confirmed or disconfirmed common beliefs about gay and lesbian families. For example:

  Children raised by same sex couples are more likely to be gay, lesbian, or to experience gender identity confusion as adults.

  Children as young as the preschool years are using the word "gay" as a derogatory term in schools.

  Each teacher circled whether the statement was a fact or a myth. After responding, the correct answer was provided, on a separate page, with a short paragraph summarizing the research showing the statement to be a fact or a myth.

Fig. 2: Family photo—take one

- *Hidden Biases* included a short scenario in which stereotypical judgments were made about a child who played outside his gender role. Briefly, this scenario actually occurred in a 4-year-old class in New York. Hugh came to class each day, put on a princess costume and told the teachers and other children that he was a girl. The teachers were dismayed and assumed that his gender variant behavior indicated "homosexual transgenderness." While this term does not exist in the literature, the assumption was that Hugh would grow up to be homosexual, transgender, or both. Teachers were asked to reflect on how they might handle such a situation (Williams & Norton, 2009).

Fig. 3: Dyson Kilodavis on The Today Show, Jan. 3, 2011

- *Tools* gave teachers ideas for inclusion of gay and lesbian families in a manner that was likely to be acceptable, such as "Take this home to your family," rather than "Take this home to your mother and father" indicated "homosexual transgenderness." While this term does not exist in the literature, the assumption was that Hugh would grow up to be homosexual, transgender, or both. Teachers were asked to reflect on how they might handle such a situation (Williams & Norton, 2009).

Fig. 4: Family photo—take two

Participants were asked to indicate on a 1 to 4 scale how beneficial each of the five sections of the course was to them. Participants were also asked to indicate, on a five-point scale, their level of comfort with the same five sections of the course.

Demographic data, such as number of years teaching, gender, age of students, and the characteristics of the early childhood program in which they taught, were collected to determine whether participants' feelings about this topic varied with specific demographics. To assess whether interest in this issue stemmed from current classroom behavior, questions were also posed, such as: Has a child in your classroom ever asked about the issue of same-sex parents? In other words, a child might ask, "How can Deitrich have two dads?" Teachers were also asked about hearing children in their classroom use negative language about gays and lesbians, such as "fag," "faggot," "that's so gay," or "dyke."

The quantitative data from the survey were analyzed with the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 19.0. Descriptive statistics are reported for all variables. Independent-samples *t*-tests were run to determine differences between groups of participants. Significance was determined at the $p = .05$ level.

Results

The results showed that only two of the teachers had received any training on this topic during their teacher-training program, and only one had received training through a professional development course. Still, 18 teachers indicated that they had gay and lesbian parents in their classroom. As expected, the need for teacher training on this topic is high, and the majority of teachers reported that they would like training, as they felt uncomfortable with the topic.

Less than half of the teachers reported that they had heard the children in their classrooms use negative language about gay and lesbian individuals. Similarly, less than half had heard put-downs directed at children who played outside their gender role. Nevertheless, all but three teachers said they would like suggestions for how to respond if they heard their students demean others around their topics.

Most teachers reported some discomfort to considerable discomfort with the topic of gay and lesbian families. Six reasons for discomfort were described: Lack of training, worry other parents would disapprove, concern for keeping their job, a belief the children were too young, personal feelings, and faith. The top two reasons for teacher discomfort were a lack of training and worry that other parents would disapprove. Personal feelings and faith created some discomfort, but for only seven of the 27 respondents.

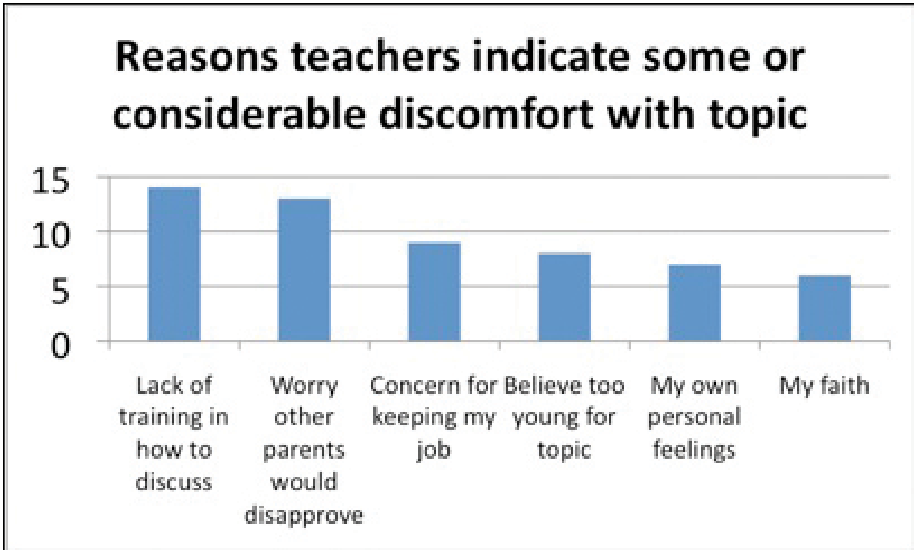

Fig. 5: Reasons for teacher discomfort

Online training was appreciated by the teachers, and 92% of the respondents indicated that they felt more informed after completing the course.

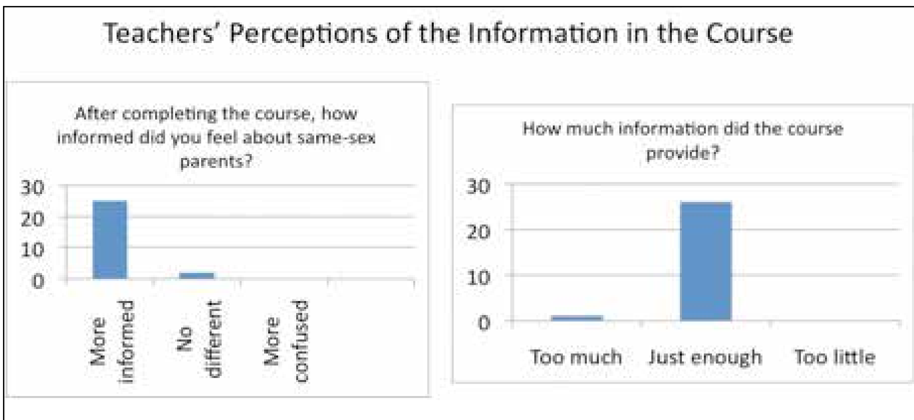

Fig. 6: Teachers' perceptions

The technology was reported as easy to use by 66.7% and as reasonable by 33.3% of the teachers. None of the participants indicated that the technology was too difficult. Of the course components, the one found most beneficial was that of having tools to use in the classroom.

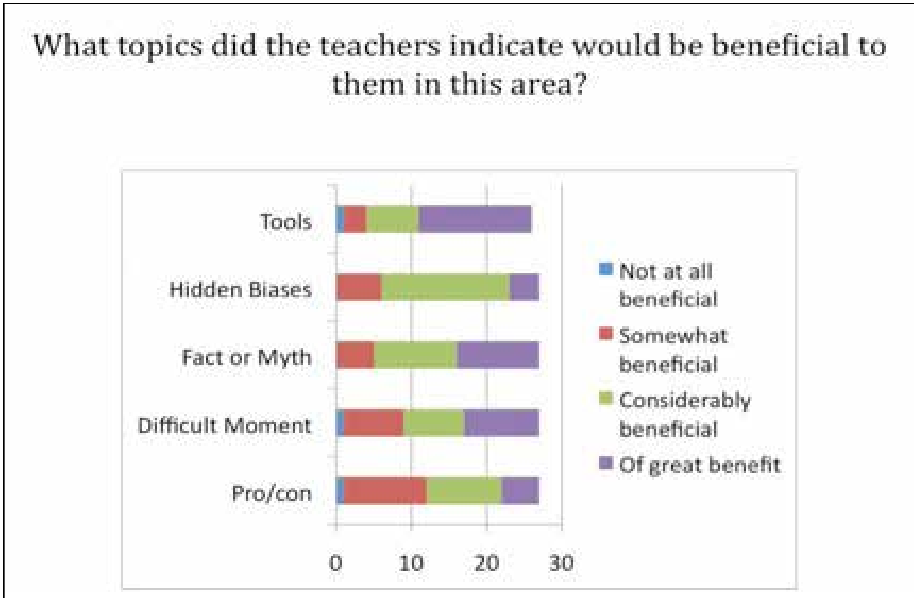

Fig. 7: Topics beneficial to teachers

Overall, the teachers in the study, regardless of their setting, indicated that they would like training on the topic of gay and lesbian families. They reported that their discomfort with this topic stemmed more from a lack of training than from their faith or personal feelings.

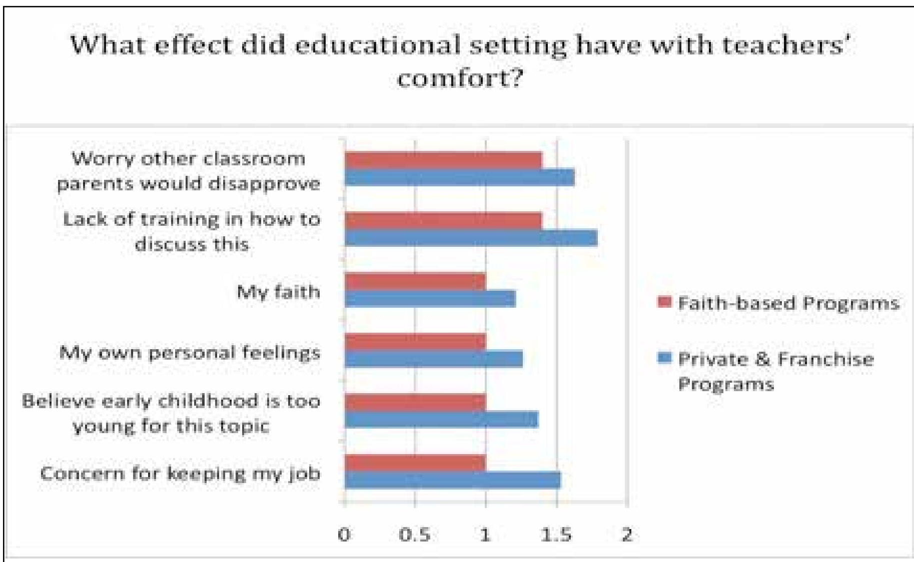

Fig. 8: Impact of educational setting

Those who confirmed hearing derogatory remarks about homosexuality in their classrooms were more likely to indicate that training would be beneficial.

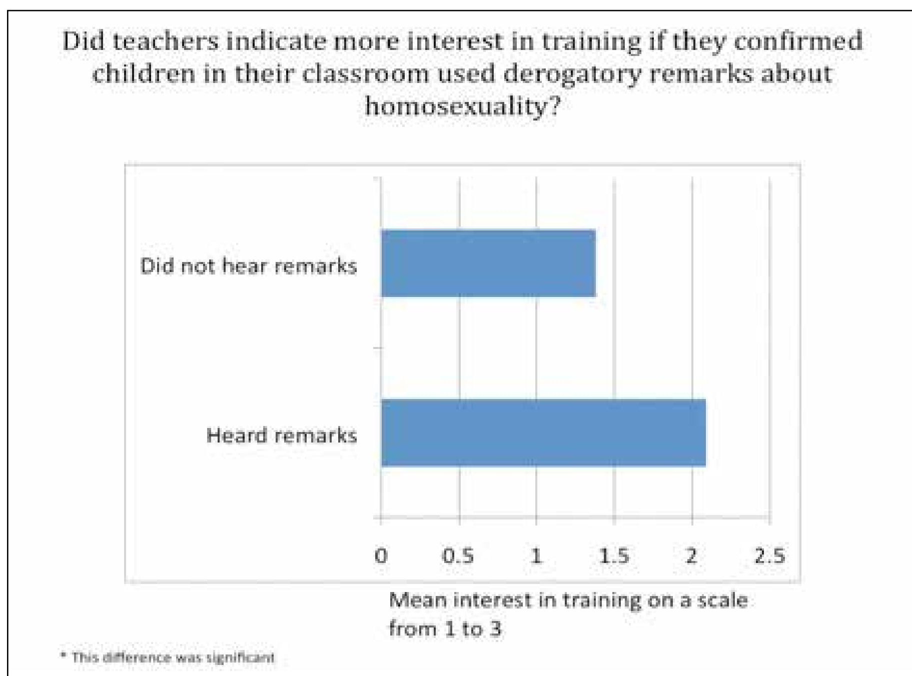

Fig. 9: Use of derogatory remarks in the classroom

Finally, teachers of four- and five-year old children were more interested in suggestions for responding to negative remarks than teachers of younger children. Easy-to-implement tools, such as immediate responses to put-downs or questions from children, held higher interest for teachers than a full curriculum on the topic.

Teacher Reflections

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were invited to share reflections, thoughts, and any ideas about how the online course could be improved. Ten teachers responded to the invitation. Overall, their comments were positive about both the content of the online course, as well as about their desire to have training, tools, and materials on this topic. One teacher expressed unease with asking for training on this topic. Another teacher felt discomfort with a video clip, *It's Elementary*, which shows the

use of a gay/lesbian curriculum in an elementary school. The participants' comments are shared below:

- Helpful information and gave me some additional resources.
- I have much to learn and welcome as much support as possible. I was uncomfortable with the video clip, *It's Elementary*. Before introducing this topic, I would need to see how the administrators at my school would like to approach the topic.
- I liked this course. Would appreciate more intervention ideas around put-downs.
- I teach in a public school. I would love more tools and material to use.
- I think this topic is very tough.
- I thought this was a very informative and beneficial topic that not many people talk about and should be talked about and discussed more often, as there is a growing population of openly gay and same sex couples.
- Informative course—liked learning online.
- This topic is important but makes me uneasy as a young teacher to bring it up with my center. Nothing was mentioned in my training. More is needed.
- This was a great course. I especially liked the reflections. They made me think.
- Training like this is very needed. This is done tastefully. Some of what I have seen advocates too strongly.

Significance of the Study

As children from gay and lesbian families are entering early childhood educational programs, many teachers have no training in this area. Most have reported that the topic of welcoming these families was not addressed in their teacher training programs (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). Presently, minimal guidelines, tools, or strategies exist for teachers.

Family is an important theme in the early childhood classroom. This is how children make sense of the world and of their own identity. Important messages are conveyed about valuing and respecting differences during these early years. In fact, the preschool classroom may be the first time children with gay or lesbian parents become aware that their family is different than other children's families. Whether to address this issue with young children is controversial. Some teachers have reported that they would like training, while others hold beliefs that the topic is inappropriate at a young age, and is best left to the family (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). Regardless of the school's position or the individual beliefs of teachers, there are minimal guidelines, tools, or strategies in this area. What does exist consists of a brief mention of the issue in recent anti-bias curriculums, or lesson plans developed by strong advocates for the

inclusion of this topic (Burt et al., 2010; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Teachers express concern as they have heard derogatory put-downs being said by children as young as four or five years of age (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). These same teachers are acutely aware of the suicides of middle and high school-aged students who have suffered victimization and humiliation for being or even appearing to be gay or lesbian (Espelage & Swearer, 2008). Tools, strategies, and even entire curricula are slowly emerging to support middle and high school teachers in addressing this issue; however, few exist for the early childhood professional (Burt et al., 2010).

In the past, parent groups voiced strong outcries and vehement opposition when this topic was considered for inclusion in school curriculum (Landan, 2009). Understandably, teachers are uneasy about having books in the classroom that portray gay and lesbian families; about answering questions posed by their students; and about how to address, welcome, and include a lesbian mother and her partner or two daddies (Casper & Schultz, 1999).

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings from this study confirm that most teachers in the study, regardless of the educational setting in which they taught, wanted training on the topic of gay/lesbian families. This topic was not addressed in their teacher training programs or in their current job setting. They felt they lacked guidelines, tools, or strategies, which left them feeling uncomfortable. Most of all, the teachers wanted tools for how to be inclusive and welcoming, without specifically discussing the topic with the children via a comprehensive curriculum. Diversity training of the type that includes examining personal biases, reflecting, and becoming aware of hidden institutional/societal stereotypes was not the type of training that the early childhood educators in this study found appealing. Rather, they indicated that they appreciated having the summary of research findings provided to them, as was done in the *Fact or Myth* section.

When asked about having articles for their own reading, the respondents showed low interest. Having books in their classroom on the topic was controversial. Some said they would like recommendations of picture books on the topic, while others felt uncomfortable with any books unless approved by the principal or administration. Online training was endorsed by a large majority of the teachers; however, they were self-selected. They were comfortable with the technology necessary to complete a stand-alone course, and they were willing to set aside 30 to 45 minutes of their time to

participate in the study. Online professional development and learning in areas not covered in teacher training programs appears to be an important new direction to assure that teachers have the preparation for creating an inclusive and welcoming classroom for all children. It is important to note the limitations of this exploratory study, which included a small sample size from a limited area, as well as self-selected participants.

Recommendations for Practice

The most potent suggestion from this study is that urgently, teacher education programs need to include training in the inclusion of gay/lesbian families. Furthermore, since most teachers received no training during their teacher education, professional development courses and in-service training are also essential for those currently teaching. Training needs to be done in a developmentally appropriate manner with a specific focus on early childhood educators. Robinson and Ferfolja (2008) found that this topic was rarely addressed in pre-service teacher education because of "childhood innocence," and a belief that early childhood education spanned too young an age. Casper and Schultz (1999) attributed this belief to the theories and research of developmental psychologists who have imparted the notion that children are too young for adult social issues, and accordingly educators want to shield them from such issues. Furthermore, they pointed out that what is change for adults may not be so for children: "Many children have never known a world without lesbian and gay families" (p. 12). Overall, data from the current study found that this topic was not discussed in teacher education programs and this lack of training was the primary reason that teachers indicated discomfort with the topic.

More than half of the teachers, who had observed children using derogatory language, or playing outside of their gender role, indicated that these observations were not primary reasons for their interest in training. Rather, the teachers appeared to desire training because they felt uncomfortable discussing the topic. Most of all, teachers wanted tools and strategies for including gay and lesbian families; they were not interested in utilizing an explicit curriculum on the topic. Their preference was for ways to be welcoming to same-sex families without specifically introducing the topic to the children. Regardless of setting, teachers indicated not only a strong desire for training, but also for guidelines from the administration on whether to directly discuss the topic. They wanted the school director to define the climate of the school and to decide whether books on the topic could be in the classroom. They also wanted suggestions about how to respond to direct questions from young children on the topic.

The teachers indicated a strong interest in online training; however, the teachers who completed the online course self-selected and were not drawn randomly. It is possible that those who had more interest completed the course and the survey. Some potential participants may have opened the course, found it of no interest for any number of reasons, and then opted out without completing the course or the survey. More research is needed on whether online learning is a preferred modality for conveying knowledge around controversial topics rather than school-wide professional development forums or seminars. The anonymity of an online course may allow more comfort with a difficult topic than a participatory professional development course with colleagues.

In addition, more research with larger samples from different geographical locations would confirm how this interest varies by urban and rural areas, regions of the country, and among different ethnic groups. A qualitative study using interviews would allow more directive questions and explanatory responses, which would clarify the training wishes of early childhood teachers. More specific knowledge would benefit those designing training programs to match the interests and needs of educators.

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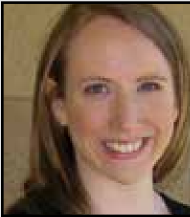

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Despite the Odds: Factors Related to the Academic Success of First Grade Students From At-Risk Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that family income and linguistic background are related to students' academic achievement, as evidenced by the gaps in the academic achievement levels of children from families with high or low income, and children with English as their first or additional language. However, there are students who succeed despite these risk factors. In this qualitative study, we interviewed two cohorts of parents who had first-grade children doing well in school. Even with the limited sample size, there were some consistent patterns in the environments of these children, namely, warm parenting with boundaries; academic capital in the home; thoughtful guidance of activities at home; close-knit family; and positive experiences at school.

Introduction

Research shows that there are significant differences among the academic achievement levels of students as a function of their backgrounds, such as their ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic (SES) characteristics, and their parental education levels. This pattern is usually labeled as the "achievement gap," a serious educational inequality. Carpenter, Ramirez, and Severn (2006) caution that instead of a single achievement gap, one should/can consider "gaps" and note that different background characteristics lead to achievement gaps of different magnitudes. One very important background to consider is the family income level. As Duncan and

Brook-Gunn (2000) summarized, the risk of repeating a grade and dropping out are two times higher for low-income children compared to their peers from homes with higher SES levels. In an analysis of large-scale data in the USA, Reardon (2011) discovered that the achievement gap as a function of SES is widening, and family income is now as strong a predictor of academic achievement as parental education. To give a more concrete example, in the USA, in the 1950s, the difference in test scores was about .60 standard deviations when comparing children from high- and low-income families, and now this gap has doubled (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Reardon, 2011).

In another study, SES was the strongest predictor of academic achievement as well, even when the data were analyzed separately for white, African-American, and Latino students (Carpenter et al., 2006). This study also showed that being in an English as a Second Language program, implying a linguistic minority status, was another strong (negative) predictor. Carpenter and colleagues found that race itself was not as strong a predictor as these other variables. For all three race groups, parental involvement also appeared as a strong factor in achievement. These results lead to the question of why the family income matters.

In qualitative analyses of home environments that included time diaries, Philipps (2011) identified significant differences in home practices of high- and low-income families on factors such as how much time is spent with children, and how that time is spent. In a nutshell, high-income families have more time invested in their children and during that time provide varied activities, including a rich linguistic context. Burgess, Hecht, and Lonigan (2002) found that parental education and occupation alone explained some of the variance in letter-name knowledge of children. However, regardless of income and education levels, home literacy environments (operationalized as the "interactive" environment that included both the child's and the parent's book-reading and TV-watching habits) predicted many components of literacy such as oral language, word decoding, and phonological sensitivity. In other words, income seems to be a predictor specifically, because it is closely tied to the type of activities at home and thus, what is done at the home is the important component.

Although poverty and linguistic minority status constitute risk factors and predict low academic achievement (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Ram & Hou, 2003), there are students who come from low-income households or have different home languages, and do succeed. Researchers have explored possible factors that might cause these children to beat the odds.

According to Milne and Plourde (2006), presence of educational materials, social support, time for homework and academic activities each day, availability of parents, limited amount of television watched, and preschool attendance are all factors that contribute to academic success for these children. Similarly, Zadeh, Farnia, and Ungerleider (2010) found in a Canadian study that home enrichment can offset risks related to low maternal education. It must be noted that around the globe maternal education is a stronger predictor of children's well-being and academic achievement (for a review see Levine, Levine, Schnell-Anzola, Rowe, & Dexter, 2012), but in this study we have asked about the educational levels of all adults in the home.

In the current study, our goal was to deepen our understanding of the environmental contexts of successful children. More specifically, the purpose was to identify the characteristics of these homes, so that this information then could be shared with other families and schools, to help all children succeed, regardless of their family backgrounds. In a qualitative study, we interviewed parents/guardians of first-grade children doing very well in school, and identified the common themes that were reported by these adults. First grade was selected as the focus of interest because that is when the most basic academic foundation, namely literacy, is established, later affecting all other academic achievements. However, it is not only educational activities at home that make a difference. Therefore, we have asked questions about the relationships between the child and the adults around that child, the support systems for the family, and the school experiences of both the adults and the children.

Methods

There were two cohorts in this study, hereafter called Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. In Cohort 1, the parents/guardians were recruited from two charter schools in a Midwestern city in the United States. The school administration sent letters to parents/guardians of the 40 first-grade children who performed in the top 25% on the reading section of the standardized test (MAPS) given in that school. In that letter, the parents were also asked to self-report their household income, the number of people living in the home, and language spoken in the home. Of the 40 letters, 28 were returned to school (70% return rate). The parent responses indicated that of the 28 responses, only nine were eligible to be included in our study because their income level met the federal poverty guidelines. This ratio clearly illustrates that only a few children with a low socioeconomic status (SES) were represented in the subset of children who were doing well in reading.

Of the nine eligible families, five agreed to be interviewed (55% participation). The data reported as Cohort 1 are from these families. All five had female students enrolled in first grade. Two children were American Indian and one child had one Latino parent. The interviews took place either in the homes or in a public space depending on the wishes of the parents/guardians. The quotes below labeled as Interviews #1-5 are from this first cohort.

In the second cohort, there was a special focus on a linguistic minority group, namely Hmong parents living in the United States. The Hmong people, originally from South East Asia, are a large minority group in Minnesota who came to the U.S. immediately after the Vietnam War (Lee & Pfeifer, 2000). The Hmong aided the U.S. in the guerilla warfare and in turn, were offered an alliance and acceptance in the U.S. The largest population of the Hmong people are in California (approximately 65,000 in year 2000), Minnesota (approximately 42,000) and Wisconsin (approximately 34,000). Given that Minnesota has the second largest population of Hmong people that is continuing to grow rapidly, this minority group was of interest. The Hmong people, just like any other group of immigrants, face many risks when it comes to educational attainment. As one of the newer minority groups, the Hmong face the risks of falling behind academically because of the language barrier, and having a written language that is relatively new (late 19th century) compared to other languages. The Hmong also face cultural risks as well, when some parents worrying about losing their children to the "American culture," may want to hold their children back from achieving academically.

The participants in the second cohort were recruited through communication with members of the Hmong community and identifying schools that mainly enroll low SES students in that community. The recruitment process involved parents contacting the researcher if they were interested in participating and have met the following three requirements: (1) Have a child in first grade who is doing well in school; (2) At least one parent is Hmong; and (3) Their income is below poverty level. Interested parents called the researcher, and decided on the time and place for the interview. As in Cohort 1, the study took place either in homes or in a public space as requested by the participants. In Cohort 2, there were five parents who agreed to participate and the sample had four girls and one boy. The quotes below labeled as Interviews #6-10 are from this second cohort.

Materials

Adult survey: Parents/guardians were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire based on a study done by Milne and Plourde (2006). All parents/guardians were asked an identical set of questions and if needed, certain responses were expanded upon for clarification. Cohort 2 had additional questions about their proficiencies in Hmong and English and their daily use of these two languages. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed in Cohort 1, and were written during the interview in Cohort 2.

The questionnaire started with items asking about the child's family, and participation in preschool, kindergarten, and after-school programs. The questions that followed were about what a typical weekday and weekend look like, types of activities at home, amount of TV watching, playing electronic games, and reading books. There were also questions about the relationship between the parent/guardian and the child, what the child thinks about school, parent/guardian's own experiences with school, and the parents' expectations for the child. Family and community support were also topics of question. We ended by asking the parents/guardians for their recommendations and suggestions for other parents to help their children do well in school.

Child test: If parents approved, their child completed the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (word identification section) and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) to verify that they had advanced literacy and language skills helping them do well in school.

Results

Child Data

Two children in Cohort 1 were tested with the PPVT and Woodcock Reading Mastery Test to verify their academic levels. Both of the children had vocabulary skills at or a little beyond their age level, and were reading at a second grade level. The remaining three children could not be tested, but since the school had already checked their standardized scores and selected them accordingly, this was not a problem. However, all five children in Cohort 2 completed the Woodcock test because we did not have the standardized test information from their schools to indicate academic levels. These first graders in Cohort 2 had word identification scores that ranged from grade equivalencies of 2.2 to 3.9. These data verified the parental reports that the children are doing very well in school.

Adult Data

To analyze the data, we followed three steps. First, the interview transcripts were organized in a Microsoft Excel file. Each column in the table was dedicated to a single question on the survey and each row had the actual answers given by a parent/guardian. This table enabled us to simultaneously examine all the answers given by all adults to a particular question. In the second step, we identified the basic ideas/approaches in each answer. In the third step, we grouped the specific ideas into more general themes. A consistent theme was defined as the one that appeared across all the participants. In addition to checking for the appearance of a theme in all 10 interviews, there was also the search for counterexamples to reach data stability. Counterexamples helped us identify inconsistencies to a theme and we did not include themes that were not similar across at least eight participants. Because all families answered the same questions, the responses could be easily compared for similarities and differences. In a few instances, the theme could be found in another question of the survey, for example, in the very last question which asked the parents/guardians what recommendations they had for other parents. Across the 10 families, some very consistent patterns emerged:

1) Warm parenting with boundaries.

This theme had several subcomponents and reflected Baumrind's (1967, 1968) classical definition of authoritative parenting:

(a) Parent has a close relationship with the child and is responsive to the child, talks about many things with the child [The number by the quote indicates the participant number, with interviews #1-5 from Cohort 1, and interviews #6-10 from Cohort 2]

- "We watch their activities and we talk pretty openly about everything. If she asks me a question I always find the answer for her." #3
- "Be there for your child. Listen to them. Love them. If they have a problem, tell them how to solve it. Work with them." #2
- "I am her mother and I can say, like friends. We are very close. We talk, read, and try writing together. We talk about what she wants to be when she grows up and what she did at school that day or she likes talking to me about clothes. It is a lot of random stuff though." #6

(b) Parent recognizes the child's potential and has high expectations

- "She is also very social which helps her at school because other kids provide positive reinforcement." #5
- "She is naturally driven, she likes to do well. She is very responsible, she is always

on top of what needs to get done, I do very little. She lets me know what needs to be done." #4

- "I would expect her to get at least a bachelor's degree." #4
- "A lot of what is helping her [do well in first grade] is that she is intelligent." #1
- "I want her to try and obtain her Ph.D... Doesn't matter in what." #7

Only one parent aspired lower:

- "As long as he finishes high school." #10

(c) Values, own culture, and language are emphasized

- "At home we teach her Ojibwa." #2
- "If it's powwow season we go to powwows together." #1
- "I tell her stories in Hmong and the kind of life my parents lived back in Laos and Thailand." #6

(d) Family goes on outings

- "She has a library card at the public library and [we go] probably two times a month. We go to the children's museum, the zoo; we've been to the aquarium, the depot. During the summer they go on all of these field trips every single day [and] during the winter maybe once a month." #5
- "My brother and I take them to the library and we go pretty often since I am a homemaker." #8.

(e) Family provides discipline and clear boundaries

- "I'm very disciplinarian for today's standards. No is no. For bad attitude there is consequences." #4
- "Guidance and discipline [is important]. They need to know what is wrong and to do what is right. I see that being huge...more than the educational part." #2

2) Academic capital in the home.

(a) Parental Education

At least one guardian has a college degree in Cohort 1, and both parents/guardians have at least a high school degree in Cohort 2.

(b) Many children's books in the house

In Cohort 1, families reported having 100+ books. In Cohort 2, the number of reported books was smaller but still ranged from 15-70.

(c) Started reading to the child at a very young age

- "I started reading to her right from the beginning because she had that older sibling." #5
- "I read to her when she was younger, like a baby, but now not so much anymore." #6.
- "Yes, I do read to her and I've read to her since she was probably like one. That's when children start to understand some of what you are reading to them." #7.

3) Child and adult Hmong proficiency (cohort 2 only).

All mothers reported Good to Very Good English reading, writing, and speaking levels. Their Hmong proficiencies were Good to Very Good in speaking and understanding the language, but in terms of reading and writing, there was some variability among the mothers. Some were proficient and others weak in Hmong reading and writing.

Mothers reported that their children had Good to Very Good understanding of spoken Hmong, but their speaking, reading, and writing skills were limited despite the fact that in the homes, Hmong was spoken, especially with grandparents.

- "They hear Hmong every day because her grandparents, my in-laws live with us." #8
- "No Hmong books, but she loves watching Hmong movies, she understands the movies better than I do sometimes! She also loves the dramas in the Hmong movies." #8

  One exception was the child whose parents were divorced and he was no longer hearing Hmong as much because he was living with his non-Hmong parent.
- "(Not surrounded) by Hmong speakers, now that we're divorced." #10.

4) Thoughtful guidance of activities at home.

(a) Spend time doing homework and educational activities at home

- "We end up usually reading 30-40 minutes a night." #5
- "She'll read to me or I'll read to her." #1
- "My children and I have a daily routine. I wake up, get dressed, and cook breakfast. I wake up my children, help them shower, get dressed, and ready for the day. I make them eat breakfast and make sure they catch the bus on time. Sometimes I will drop them off. Once they get home from school, the first thing I do is have my children take out their homework and I'll help with homework. Then I get dinner

ready around 5 or 6. After dinner, I have my kids read for at least 30 minutes, I let them watch TV for about half an hour to an hour before bed then it is time for bed and a bedtime story. Every weekday but weekends it is more relaxed." #7.

(b) Some limit TV and electronic use

In Cohort 1, there were stricter limits on TV watching as compared to Cohort 2. In Cohort 2, three families reported more than two hours of TV.

- "...45 minutes a day if that. When she was younger she would watch educational channels." #2
- "I don't like them watching TV. I let them watch movies but not TV." #1
- "During the weekday, she watches about a half hour to an hour of TV but during weekends I would say about two hours per day. She is on my iPad a lot playing games so she does not watch much TV." #7

5) Close-knit family.

(a) At least two adults live in the home and are involved in raising the child, but can be of different configurations. One child was being raised by her grandparents, another had a stepparent.

(b) Little time spent with friends, but more with relatives especially in Cohort 2

- "(extended family) is very much a part of her life. They always celebrate with us and constantly come over to our house to visit us and the kids." #7.

(c) Older siblings serving as role models
Except for one child, all children had older sibling(s)

- "Her older sister helps her [do well in first grade]. She teaches her things." #3
- "Her father and her grandparents but especially her older siblings because they have helped a lot with helping her in school." #6

6) Positive experiences in school.

(a) Enjoying school

Except for two children whose parents reported that the child is "neutral" about school, all eight parents/guardians reported that their children enjoyed school and all reported that their children are interested in school.

- "She enjoys every part of school." Interview #2

(b) Parents/guardians value school and stay in touch with the school

Except for one child who was homeschooled, parents reported that they like their child's school and attend conferences and other activities regularly.

- "My kids don't miss school unless it's a snow day or they are really sick and usually I call or email the teacher for the homework assignment or if one of the twins isn't sick, I make sure she gets the homework for the other twin. I go to parent teacher conferences, open houses, dances, school song performances. A lot of the stuff they always do." #9.
- "She only misses school if she is sick or something is happening with her mom." [This child's mother was on assisted living because of serious medical issues and the child was being raised by her grandparents.] #2
- "If she misses school it's primarily because of her asthma and allergies. If she misses, we have her catch up when they get back. We attended conferences, scholastic book fairs, plays, movie nights, basketball games. We come to everything because they don't want to miss out. We talk with her teacher and come to observe classroom at least three times at the beginning of the year. After that I just talk to them through phone or email and sometimes I volunteer for outings." #4

Discussion

Despite the small and limited sample, some consistent themes emerged from the parent interviews, thus suggesting factors that enable low SES and language minority children to succeed in school. The patterns replicate previous work and reiterate the importance of warm and responsive parenting, providing an enriching environment, valuing school, appreciating the child's potential, and forming high expectations. These are factors that have been identified in other research as supporting the academic achievement of children (Burgess et al., 2002; Milne, & Plourde, 2006; Philipps, 2011; Zadeh et al., 2010). However, interestingly, attending preschool or after-school programs were not consistent themes in our sample.

Overall, these interviews provide a window to what the families of successful children are doing at home. In our study, these parents/guardians are conscious and deliberate about their practices at home, and are able to articulate them clearly. They are quite warm and responsive but set clear boundaries. They also provide a linguistically rich environment with daily, fluid conversations, discussions, and academic support. They started reading to their child at a young age and continue to read with them daily.

Since these parents and guardians are cognizant of what helps their children, schools could consider using these families as a resource in their efforts to reach parents, and to build stronger home support for all students.

Studies should be conducted in the future with larger sample sizes to confirm the trends suggested by this study. Having a broad range of ethnicities, cultures, and languages represented would make the study more generalizable. In addition, more comprehensive measures could be used to determine the academic level of the child. One limitation of the study is that The Woodcock Reading Mastery Test and PPVT measure only specific areas of academic ability. Although vocabulary and word recognition proficiencies are closely related to literacy development, in future studies, a wider range of academic ability (e.g., math) should be measured. We also recognize that some of our themes do not have clear-cut structures. For example, "warm parenting with boundaries" covers an array of parental responses. It does not refer to one type of parental response, but includes some evidence of both closeness with the child and some discipline.

We would like to end this discussion with a caveat. Although we focused on what the families were doing to support their children, and to ensure their academic success, this does NOT mean that the achievement gap can be resolved only if the parents were to adopt the right approaches at home. We should also consider the broader societal picture. Reducing the income disparity in the society, one of the main reasons for the achievement gap, can help all parents have the necessary educational foundations, time, and resources to help their children. We hope for the days when the odds against the children are minimized, and all children thrive and succeed.

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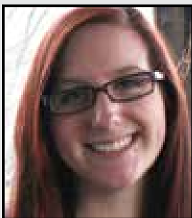

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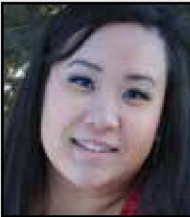

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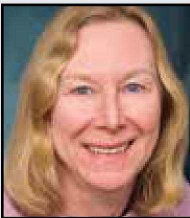

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Bilingualism in the Early Years: What the Science Says

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ABSTRACT
Many children in North America and around the world grow up exposed to two languages from an early age. Parents of bilingual infants and toddlers have important questions about the costs and benefits of early bilingualism, and how to best support language acquisition in their children. Here, we separate common myths from scientific findings to answer six of parents' most common questions about early bilingual development.

Bilingualism in the Early Years: What the Science Says

Bilingual parents are vocal in their desire to raise proficient, dynamic bilingual children. They have questions, and they want answers. But there is a complicated history of positive and negative press about raising children in bilingual households, to the point where some pediatricians—even today—recommend against exposing children to two languages. Attitudes against early bilingualism are often based on myths and misinterpretations, rather than scientific findings. Here, we aim to address the most frequently asked questions about childhood bilingualism using research findings from a variety of scientific fields including developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, education, linguistics, and communication sciences and disorders. This article is intended for parents and the many people who parents turn to for advice about fostering successful bilingual development: preschool teachers, elementary teachers, pediatricians, and speech-language pathologists.

Bilingualism refers to the ability to use two languages in everyday life. Bilingualism is common and is on the rise in many parts of the world, with perhaps one in three people being bilingual or multilingual (Wei, 2000). Contact between two languages is typical in regions of many continents, including Europe (Switzerland, Belgium), Asia (India, Philippines), Africa (Senegal, South Africa), and North America (Canada). In the United States, a large (and growing) number of bilinguals live in California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, and New Mexico. In California, for example, by 2035, it is expected that over 50% of children enrolled in kindergarten will have grown up speaking a language other than English (García, McLaughlin, Spodek, & Saracho, 1995). Similarly, in some urban areas of Canada such as Toronto, up to 50% of students have a native language other than English (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008).

Despite the prevalence of bilingualism, surprisingly little research has been conducted on the topic, particularly on the foundations of bilingual language learning in infants and toddlers. The science of bilingualism is a young field, and definitive answers to many questions are not yet available. Furthermore, other questions are impossible to answer due to vast differences across families, communities, and cultures. But with an accumulation of research studies over the last few decades, we are now equipped to partially answer some of parents' most pressing questions about early bilingualism.

There are few venues for communicating scientific findings about early bilingualism to the public, and our goal is to distill bilingual and developmental science into practical, accessible information. We are researchers who study bilingual infants and children, and as such, we interact with bilingual families regularly. When we give community talks to preschools and nonprofit organizations about language development in early childhood, the question-and-answer period is invariably dominated by questions about early bilingualism. The consistency in questions is astonishing. Are bilingual children confused? Does bilingualism make children smarter? Is it best for each person to speak only one language with a bilingual child? Should parents avoid mixing languages together? Is earlier better? Are bilingual children more likely to have language difficulties, delays, or disorders? This article is organized around these six common questions.

1. Are bilingual children confused?

One of the biggest concerns that parents have about raising children in a bilingual household is that it will cause confusion. But is there any scientific evidence that young bilinguals are confused? The first question to ask is what confusion would look like. Except in the case of neurological disorders (Paradis, 2004), fluently bilingual adults can

speak whatever language they choose in the moment, and are clearly not confused. But what about bilingual children and infants?

One misunderstood behavior, which is often taken as evidence for confusion, is when bilingual children mix words from two languages in the same sentence. This is known as code mixing. In fact, code mixing is a normal part of bilingual development, and bilingual children actually have good reasons to code mix (Pearson, 2008). One reason some children code mix is that it happens frequently in their language communities—children are just doing what they hear adults around them do (Comeau, Genesee, & Lapaquette, 2003). A second reason is that, just like young monolinguals, young bilinguals are sometimes limited in their linguistic resources. Similarly to how a monolingual 1-year-old might initially use the word "dog" to refer to any four-legged creature, bilingual children also use their limited vocabularies resourcefully. If a bilingual child does not know or cannot quickly retrieve the appropriate word in one language, she might borrow the word from the other language (Lanza, 2004). Rather than being a sign of confusion, code mixing can be seen as a path of least resistance: a sign of bilingual children's ingenuity. Further, bilingual children do not seem to use their two languages haphazardly. Even 2-year olds show some ability to modulate their language according to the language used by their conversational partner (Genesee, Boivin, & Nicoladis, 1996). There is also evidence that children's early code mixing adheres to predictable grammar-like rules, which are largely similar to the rules that govern adults' code mixing (Paradis, Nicoladis, & Genesee, 2000).

What about bilingual infants? Again, the research is clear: bilingual infants readily distinguish their two languages and show no evidence of confusion. Languages differ on many dimensions—even if you don't speak Russian or Mandarin, you can likely tell one from the other. Infants are also sensitive to these perceptual differences, and are particularly attuned to a language's rhythm. Infants can discriminate rhythmically dissimilar languages like English and French at birth (Byers-Heinlein, Burns, & Werker, 2010; Mehler et al., 1988), and by age 4 months they can tell even rhythmically similar languages like French and Spanish apart (Bosch & Sebastián-Gallés, 1997, 2001; Nazzi, 2000). Bilingual infants may be even more sensitive than monolinguals when it comes to discriminating languages. Recent research has shown that 4-month-old monolingual and bilingual infants can discriminate silent talking faces speaking different languages (Weikum et al., 2007). However, by 8 months of age, only bilinguals are still sensitive to the distinction, while monolinguals stop paying attention to subtle variations in facial movements (Sebastián-Gallés, Albareda-Castellot, Weikum, & Werker, 2012; Weikum et al., 2007). Instead of being confused, it seems that bilingual infants are sensitive to information that distinguishes their languages.

2. Does bilingualism make children smarter?

Popular books such as *The Bilingual Edge* (King & Mackey, 2009), and articles such as *The Power of the Bilingual Brain* (*TIME Magazine*; Kluger, 2013) have touted the potential benefits of early bilingualism. One of the most important benefits of early bilingualism is often taken for granted: bilingual children will know multiple languages, which is important for travel, employment, speaking with members of one's extended family, maintaining a connection to family culture and history, and making friends from different backgrounds. However, beyond obvious linguistic benefits, researchers have investigated whether bilingualism confers other non-linguistic advantages (Akhtar & Menjivar, 2012).

Several studies have suggested that bilinguals show certain advantages when it comes to social understanding. In some ways, this is not surprising, as bilinguals must navigate a complex social world where different people have different language knowledge. For example, bilingual preschoolers seem to have somewhat better skills than monolinguals in understanding others' perspectives, thoughts, desires, and intentions (Bialystok & Senman, 2004; Goetz, 2003; Kovács, 2009). Young bilingual children also have enhanced sensitivity to certain features of communication such as tone of voice (Yow & Markman, 2011).

Bilinguals also show some cognitive advantages. In particular, bilinguals appear to perform a little bit better than monolinguals on tasks that involve switching between activities and inhibiting previously learned responses (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012). Although these advantages have been mostly studied in bilingual adults (Costa, Hernández, & Sebastián-Gallés, 2008) and children (Bialystok & Martin, 2004), new evidence suggests that even bilingual infants (Kovács & Mehler, 2009a, 2009b) and toddlers (Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya, & Bialystok, 2011) show cognitive advantages. Additionally, there is some evidence that bilingual infants are advantaged in certain aspects of memory, for example generalizing information from one event to a later event (Brito & Barr, 2012).

Research has not been able to determine exactly why these advantages arise, but there are several possibilities. Bilingual adults have to regularly switch back and forth between their languages, and inhibit one language while they selectively speak another. Some researchers suspect that this constant practice might lead to certain advantages by training the brain (Green, 1998). Amongst infants, the need to constantly discriminate their two languages could also play a role (Sebastián-Gallés et al., 2012). However, it is important to note that bilingualism is not the only type of experience that

has been linked to cognitive advantages. Similar cognitive advantages are also seen in individuals with early musical training (Schellenberg, 2005), showing that multiple types of enriched early experience can promote cognitive development. Regardless of origin, it should be noted that the "bilingual advantage" has sometimes been overplayed in the popular press. So far, bilingual cognitive advantages have only been demonstrated using highly sensitive laboratory-based methods, and it is not known whether they play a role in everyday life. Thus, the reported advantages do not imply that bilingualism is an essential ingredient for successful development.

3. Is it best for each person to speak only one language with a bilingual child?

One popular strategy for raising bilingual children is "one-person-one-language," a strategy first recommended over 100 years ago (Ronjat, 1913). Theorists originally reasoned that associating each language with a different person was the only way to prevent bilingual children from "confusion and intellectual fatigue." While appealing, this early notion has been proven false. As discussed above, there is no evidence that bilingual children are confused by early bilingualism, and the cognitive benefits associated with bilingualism run counter to the notion of "intellectual fatigue."

It is still important to consider what strategies families can use to promote early bilingual development. Research has shown that a one-person-one-language approach can lead to successful acquisition of the two languages (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004), but that it does not necessarily lead to successful acquisition of the two languages (De Houwer, 2007). Further, children who hear both languages from the same bilingual parent *often do* successfully learn two languages (De Houwer, 2007). A one-person-one-language approach is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* for successful bilingual acquisition.

Several other factors have proven to be important to early bilingual development. These factors might lead some families to use a one-person-one-language strategy, and other families to use other strategies. First, it is important to remember that infants learn language through listening to and interacting with different speakers. Infants need to have a lot of exposure to the sounds, words, and grammars of the languages that they will one day use. Both quality and quantity matter. High quality language exposure involves social interaction—infants do not readily learn language from television (DeLoache et al., 2010; Kuhl, Tsao, & Liu, 2003), and low-quality television viewing in infancy has been linked to smaller vocabulary sizes in bilingual toddlers (Hudon, Fennell, & Hoftyzer, 2013). Opportunities to interact with multiple different speakers has been linked to vocabulary learning in bilingual toddlers (Place & Hoff, 2010).

Quantity can be measured by the number of words that children hear per day in each language. Quantity of early exposure has a profound effect on children's ongoing language development: hearing more words gives children a greater opportunity to learn a language, which leads to later advantages in school performance (Hart & Risley, 1995). For bilingual children, it is important to consider the quantity of their exposure *to each* language. While a bilingual's two languages do influence each other to a certain degree (Döpke, 2000), in many ways they travel on independent developmental paths. Bilingual children who hear a large amount of a particular language learn more words and grammar in that language (Hoff et al., 2012; Pearson & Fernández, 1994), and show more efficient processing of that language (Conboy & Mills, 2006; Hurtado, Grüter, Marchman, & Fernald, 2013; Marchman, Fernald, & Hurtado, 2010). Bilingual parents thus need to ensure that their children have sufficient exposure to the languages they want their children to learn. We return to this topic in the next sections.

Relatively balanced exposure to the two languages is most likely to promote successful acquisition of both of the languages (Thordardottir, 2011). In situations where each parent spends equal time with a child, one-parent-one-language can be a great way to ensure equal exposure. Conversely, exposure to a second language only when grandma and grandpa visit on the weekend, or when a part-time nanny visits on a few weekdays, or when a language class meets on Thursday nights, will not lead to balanced exposure. Imagine an average infant who sleeps about 12 hours a day, and so is awake 84 hours per week. A single afternoon (~ 5 hours) is only about 6% of the child's waking life, and this exposure alone is unlikely to lead to acquisition of a language. Similarly, in homes where one parent is the primary caregiver, a one-parent-one-language is unlikely to lead to balanced exposure.

Unfortunately, providing perfectly balanced exposure in the early years will not necessarily ensure later bilingualism. As children become older, they become more aware of the language spoken in the community where they live, and are likely to use this language at school. This is known as the majority language, while other languages that are not as widely spoken are known as minority languages. Even if initially learned in preschool, minority languages are much more likely than majority languages to be lost as development continues (De Houwer, 2007). Many experts recommend providing slightly more early input in a minority than in a majority language, and where possible providing children with opportunities to play with other kids in that language (Pearson, 2008). Raising a bilingual child in communities that are largely bilingual such as Miami (Spanish-English), Montreal (French-English), and Barcelona (Catalan-Spanish) provides fewer challenges for ensuring the ongoing use of the two languages.

So what language strategies should parents use? The best answer is that parents should use whatever strategy promotes high-quality and high-quantity exposure to each of their child's languages. This could include structured approaches such as using different languages as a function of person (one-person-one-language), place (one language at home, one language outside), or time (alternating days of the week, or mornings/afternoons). Some parents insist on speaking only one language with their child, even if they are able to speak the other (Lanza, 2004), to ensure exposure to a particular language. Other families find that flexible use of the two languages, without fixed rules, leads to balanced exposure and positive interactions. Each family should consider the language proficiency of each family member as well as their language preference, in conjunction with their community situation. Families should regularly make an objective appraisal of what their child is actually hearing on a daily basis (rather than what they wish their child was hearing), and consider adjusting language use when necessary.

4. Should parents avoid mixing languages together?

Many parents of bilingual children are bilingual themselves (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). Code mixing—the use of elements from two different languages in the same sentence or conversation—is a normal part of being a bilingual and interacting with other bilingual speakers (Poplack, 1980). Code mixing is relatively frequent amongst bilingual parents as well (Byers-Heinlein, 2013), and even parents who have chosen a one-parent-one-language strategy still code mix from time to time (Goodz, 1989). But what effects does hearing code mixing have on the development of bilingual children?

Research on the impact of code mixing on bilingual children's development is still quite limited. One study of 18- and 24-month-olds found that high amounts of code mixing by parents was related to smaller vocabulary sizes (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). However, other studies have found no relationship between code-mixed language and early language development (Place & Hoff, 2011). Further, studies are beginning to reveal that bilingual children as young as 20-months are able to understand code-mixed sentences, and show similar processing patterns as bilingual adults (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). This would suggest that bilinguals are able to cope with code mixing from an early age. It has also been suggested that while code mixing might make word learning initially difficult, it is possible that practice switching back and forth between the languages leads to later cognitive benefits (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). Unfortunately, the jury is still out on whether exposure to code mixing has developmental consequences for bilingual children, but we are currently working on several research projects that will help answer this question.

It is important to note that considerations of code mixing also have important social implications. In some communities, code mixing is an important part of being bilingual and being part of a bilingual community. For example, code mixing is the norm in some Spanish-English communities in the U.S., and Afrikaans-English code mixing is the norm in some parts of South Africa. Different communities have different patterns of and rules for code mixing (Poplack, 1984), and children need exposure to these patterns in order to learn them.

5. Is earlier better?

Many people are familiar with the concept of a "critical period" for language acquisition: the idea that humans are not capable of mastering a new language after reaching a certain age. Researchers disagree about whether a critical period exists at all, and they disagree about when this critical period may occur—proposals range from age 5 to 15 (Krashen, 1973; Johnson & Newport, 1989; Lenneberg, 1967). Disagreement aside, research on bilingualism and second language learning converges robustly on a simple take-home point: earlier is better. There may not be a sharp turn for the worse at any point in development, but there is an incremental decline in language learning abilities with age (Birdsong & Molis, 2001; Hakuta, Bialystok, & Wiley, 2003).

This point is best understood as an interaction between biological and environmental factors. Researchers have argued that biological change during the first two decades of life results in a reduced capacity for learning and retaining the subtleties of language (Johnson & Newport, 1989; Weber-Fox & Neville, 2001). In other words, our brains may be more receptive to language earlier in life. But importantly, our environment is also more conducive to language learning earlier in life. In many cultures and in many families, young children experience a very rich language environment during the first years of life. They hear language in attention-grabbing, digestible bundles that are targeted skillfully at their developmental level (Fernald & Simon, 1984). Caregivers typically speak in ways that are neither too simple nor too complex, and children receive hours and hours of practice with language every day. This high-quality and high-quantity experience with language—a special feature of how people communicate with young children—often results in successful language learning. It gives children rich, diverse, and engaging opportunities to learn about the sounds, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences that comprise their native language. But beyond the first years of life, second language learning often happens very differently. Older children and adults do not usually have the same amount of time to devote to language learning, and they do not usually experience the advantage of fun, constant, one-on-one interaction with native speakers. Instead, they often find themselves in a classroom, where they get a small

fraction of the language practice that infants and toddlers get (Lew-Williams & Fernald, 2010). In classrooms, words are defined for them and grammar is described to them. Defining and describing can be effective, but they are not as powerful as discovering language from the ground up.

Applied to bilingualism, these maturational and environmental differences between younger and older learners indicate that it is most advantageous to learn two languages early on in life. Bilinguals who learn two languages from birth are referred to as simultaneous bilinguals, and those who learn a first language followed by a second language—whether as toddlers or as adults—are referred to as sequential bilinguals. The evidence points to fairly robust advantages for simultaneous bilinguals relative to sequential bilinguals. They tend to have better accents, more diversified vocabulary, higher grammatical proficiency, and greater skill in real-time language processing. For example, children and adults who learn Spanish as a second language typically struggle to master Spanish grammatical gender (e.g., "is it *el gato* or *la gato*?"), while people who learn Spanish and English from birth show reliable and impressive ease in using grammatical gender (Lew-Williams & Fernald, 2007, 2010).

However, parents should not lose hope if they have not exposed their children to each language from birth. Infants' brains and learning environments *are* special and non-recreatable, but there are many other ways to foster bilingual development. Here we overview two possibilities. First, some parents (particularly those who can afford childcare) choose to hire bilingual nannies or send children to bilingual preschools, in order to maximize their children's exposure to another language. This can certainly result in increased bilingual proficiency, but it is essential to provide continued opportunities to practice *each* language once the child is older. Parental expectations should be quite low if children do not have opportunities to continue learning and using a language throughout development. However, keep in mind that bilingual exposure does not necessarily translate to being a bilingual who is able to understand and speak a language fluently. Researchers generally consider a child to be bilingual if he or she receives at least 10-25% of exposure to each language (Byers-Heinlein, under review; Place & Hoff, 2011; Marchman et al., 2010; Marchman, Martínez-Sussmann, & Dale, 2004), but this level of exposure by no means guarantees functional bilingualism (De Houwer, 2007).

Second, there are language immersion programs in elementary schools in many of the world's countries, including the U.S. and Canada. Their goal is to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and multicultural proficiency among both language-majority and language-minority students. In the U.S., hundreds of immersion programs have been

established in the last four decades in such languages as Spanish, French, Korean, Cantonese, Japanese, Mandarin, Navajo, and Hebrew. There are currently 434 or more immersion programs in 31 U.S. states (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011). French immersion programs are available in all 10 Canadian provinces, with enrolment ranging from 2-32% of students depending on the province (Statistics Canada, 2000). Immersion programs confer advantages over other formats of language instruction that are typical in high school and college classrooms. In immersion programs, the second language is not necessarily a topic of instruction, but a vehicle for instruction of other curriculum subjects. In terms of the quantity of language exposure, immersion classrooms do not rival infants' language environments. However, they often foster functional bilingualism, and equip children with language skills that help them in later educational and professional contexts.

The take-home messages about bilingual language exposure are clear: more is better, and earlier is better. If you are 75 years old and you have always wanted to learn Japanese, start now. Language learning becomes more challenging with time, for both maturational and environmental reasons, but for those who are motivated (Gardner & Lambert, 1959), it is never too late to learn a new language.

6. Are bilingual children more likely to have language difficulties, delays, or disorders?

Bilingual children are *not* more likely than monolingual children to have difficulties with language, to show delays in learning, or to be diagnosed with a language disorder (see Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2010; Petitto & Holowka, 2002). Parents' perceptions are often otherwise—they feel that their child is behind due to their bilingualism—revealing an interesting disconnect from scientific findings. Science has revealed an important property of early bilingual children's language knowledge that might explain this misperception: while bilingual children typically know fewer words in each of their languages than do monolingual learners of those languages, this apparent difference disappears when you calculate bilingual children's "conceptual vocabulary" across both languages (Marchman et al., 2010). That is, if you add together known words in each language, and then make sure you don't double-count cross-language synonyms (e.g., dog and *perro*), then bilingual children know approximately the same number of words as monolingual children (Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993; Pearson & Fernández, 1994).

As an example, if a Spanish/English bilingual toddler knows 50 Spanish words and 50 English words, she will probably not appear to be as good at communicating when compared to her monolingual cousin who knows 90 English words. However, assuming

10 of the toddler's Spanish words are also known in English, then the toddler has a conceptual vocabulary of 90 words, which matches that of her cousin. Even so, knowing 50 vs. 90 English words could result in noticeably different communication abilities, but these differences are likely to become less noticeable with time. This hypothetical example about equivalence in vocabulary is supported by research showing that bilingual and monolingual 14-month-olds are equally good at learning word-object associations (Byers-Heinlein, Fennell, & Werker, 2013). This offers some reassurance that young bilinguals—like young monolinguals—possess learning skills that can successfully get them started on expected vocabulary trajectories. There is also evidence that bilingual children match monolinguals in conversational abilities; for example, when somebody uses a confusing or mispronounced word, or says something ambiguous, bilingual children can repair the conversation with the same skill as monolinguals (Comeau, Genesee, & Mendelson, 2010).

Just like some monolingual children have a language delay or disorder, a similar proportion of bilinguals will have a language delay or disorder. Evidence that *one* bilingual child has a language difficulty, however, is not evidence that bilingualism leads to language difficulties in general. The challenge for pediatricians and for speech-language pathologists is to decide if a bilingual child does have a problem, or whether her errors are part of normal development and interaction between the sounds, words, and grammars of her two languages. If parents are worried that their bilingual child does have a delay, they should first consult their pediatrician. Pediatricians sometimes have a tendency to say, "Don't worry, her language is completely normal." This statement will end up being false for some children who will end up diagnosed with language difficulties, but it is more likely than not to be true, especially considering that parents can be inaccurate when estimating their bilingual child's language skills. In some other cases, health care providers with concerns about language impairment may recommend against raising a child in a bilingual environment. This recommendation is not supported by the science of bilingualism. Bilingual children with specific language impairments (Paradis, Crago, Genesee, & Rice, 2003), Down syndrome (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2005), and autism spectrum disorders (Peterson, Marinova-Todd, & Mirenda, 2012) are not more likely to experience additional delays or challenges compared to monolingual children with these impairments.

If parents do not feel comfortable with a pediatrician's opinion, they should find (or ask for a referral to) a speech-language pathologist with expertise in bilingualism, if at all possible. Early intervention increases the likelihood of a positive outcome. The problem is that few clinicians receive quality training about the learning needs of bilingual children, which in some cases leads to a misdiagnosis of bilingual children as having

delayed or disordered language (Bedore & Peña, 2008; Kohnert, 2010; Thordardottir, Rothenberg, Rivard, & Naves, 2006). The time is past due to eliminate such simple misunderstandings in clinical settings. A bilingual clinician, or an individual who has training in bilingualism, will take care in assessing language skills in both languages, in order to measure the child's entire language profile. Parents should keep in mind that clinicians have a very difficult job when it comes to assessing bilingual children. They have to (1) accurately assess a bilingual child's language abilities in each of her languages, (2) integrate the child's problematic and unproblematic abilities in terms of sounds, words, grammar, and conversation in each language into a coherent whole, (3) evaluate whether the child is delayed and/or disordered in one or both languages, (4) weigh the child's linguistic/cognitive capacities in comparison to typically and atypically developing monolingual children and, when possible, bilingual children of the same age, and (5) develop an effective intervention that targets subareas of linguistic/cognitive competence in one and/or both languages. This is a tangled landscape for intervention, but one that can be assessed thoughtfully. Regardless of whether parents pursue intervention, they can help children gain bilingual proficiency by using both languages as regularly as possible in enriching and engaging contexts. Furthermore, parents should keep in mind that both monolingual *and* bilingual children can best show off their skills when using language that matches their daily experiences (Mattock, Polka, Rvachew, & Krehm, 2010).

In summary, if you measure bilinguals using a monolingual measure, you are more likely to find false evidence of delay. Fortunately, researchers and clinicians are now developing bilingual-specific measures that paint a more accurate picture of bilinguals' global language competence.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reviewed what the science says about six of parents' most commonly asked questions about early bilingualism. Research demonstrates that we need to reshape our views of early bilingualism: children are born ready to learn the language or languages of their environments without confusion or delay (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008). To promote successful bilingual development, parents raising bilingual children should ensure that their children have ample opportunities to hear and speak both of their languages. As children get older, interacting with monolingual speakers (especially other children) is important for motivating ongoing language use, especially for minority languages not widely spoken in the community (Pearson, 2008).

Teachers, pediatricians, and speech language pathologists play an important role in dispelling common myths, and in communicating science-based information about early bilingualism to parents.

While our focus here has been on language development, it is also important to recognize that early childhood is also a time of profound emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. Bilingualism will be a priority or even a necessity for some families. Other families might choose to focus on other aspects of development. In some cases, where families are not fluent in a second language, early bilingualism might be unrealistic. Here, it is important to keep two things in mind: 1) bilingualism is only one way to promote successful early development, and 2) second language learning is possible at any age. Language—any language—is a window to the world. It is better for parents to provide plenty of input and interaction in a language they are comfortable in, than to hold back because they are not fluent or comfortable in the language.

When it comes to raising bilingual children, myths and misunderstandings are common, but facts are hard to come by. Together with researchers around the world, we are working hard to continue providing scientifically based facts addressing parents' most important questions about early bilingualism.

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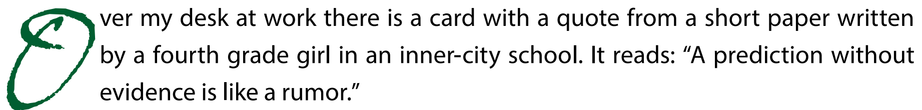
The Brilliance of Children

Pat Cordeiro and Leslie Sevey, Rhode Island College

ABSTRACT

Capturing and appreciating the brilliance of children as they share their unique insights has been a focus for researchers, educators, theorists, and humorists. Appreciating what that means and recapturing the effort may well be the challenge for the 21st century in education. Assigning children roles as co-collaborators in the educational process may be the only successful response to reversing the current path of education that makes children the objects of actions, and adults the agents of the action. Children's agency is derived from their parallel participation in learning, when their understanding is equally important to that of the teacher.

ver my desk at work there is a card with a quote from a short paper written by a fourth grade girl in an inner-city school. It reads: "A prediction without evidence is like a rumor."

This student was involved in a schoolwide initiative to develop critical thinking in young students; clearly she understood. In her clear and plain statement, she captures the essential element of deep analogical thinking, comparing a prediction, which she is trying to learn about, to a rumor, which she already knows about, because in her life as a fourth-grader, rumors may be rife. She incorporates in her simple sentence the essential element of attaching evidence to a claim, the foundation of democratic thinking. What an insightful, clear, and simple statement of a fundamental rule of documented critical thinking—you must have evidence to back up a claim (Hillocks, 2011) or you are not thinking critically.

To me, this is so profound and so brilliant—a thought from a fourth grader who was given the opportunity to think and express her deep thinking on paper. I can only wonder, where did this go? I found it on a paper taped to the school principal's door. I copied it because I found it so compelling and astonishing for a young thinker. Was I the only one who noticed?

In another fourth grade inclusion class in an inner-city school, young students study geography. With the teacher's help, the students try to understand the difference between "natural" and "man-made" landmarks. They delineate the differences and list the criteria for classifying landforms and landmarks into one category or the other: "natural" landmarks are made of natural materials, no person has changed them, they were built by nature and without tools, they are notable and visited by people; people today come to visit them. "Man-made" landmarks may be natural landforms that have been changed by the works of man, their design may involve the use of tools, they may include more than natural materials, they are notable and visited by people; they have been created by people. The students in this class even consider monuments like Mount Rushmore as a "cross-over" landmark, first notable as a natural landmark, and then fitting the criteria for a man-made landmark.

And then a student asks, what about "animal-made" landmarks, like beaver dams, he says? How do we classify them—are they "natural" or "man-made"? And as the discussion proceeds, there is no easy answer to his brilliant question. No matter which criterion is used, "animal-made" landmarks stand alone—they are not made by nature or humans, they usually don't involve the use of tools so they don't qualify as "man-made" but they are made from natural materials and no human has made them, so they qualify as "natural;" people do come to visit them, photograph them, write about them, so they can be classified in both categories. What to do with this brilliant idea of a third category? This child's idea remains an enigma in the usual binary classification taught in geography lessons with classification schemes for young children, man-made versus natural—a brilliant and unresolvable find—a third category in a dichotomous scheme.

Kids Say the Darndest Things

No one listened to children better, documented their words more thoroughly, or enjoyed children's brilliant insights, literalness, and forthrightness, than Art Linkletter. No one asked better questions of children and honored them with attention, response, and respect than Art Linkletter. His early radio and television show, *CBS House Party*, ran

for 14 years, while he interviewed 14,560 children (Linkletter, 1959). His books captured what Linkletter had learned about children over his many years of interaction with them, documented particularly in his summary book, *The Secret World of Kids* (1959).

Often he admired children's natural and naïve sense of humor: "*What can your dad do around the house?* -Well, once he tried to fix the car. What happened? -We had to get a new car." (p. 271). Or, "*You have quite an imagination. Suppose a tiger came along and said he wanted to eat you.* –I'd put him on TV because he could talk. *What would you call the program?* –Me and the Talking Tiger" (p. 111). Or this one, "One day on our House Party program I asked a six-year-old, '*What's your favorite toy?*' And he brightly replied, 'Anything my big sister is playing with!'" (p. 95).

Often Linkletter was struck by children's innate sense of logic, their practicality, the brilliance of their direct thinking: "I asked the future lion tamer what he had to remember if he wanted to succeed with his four-footed friends. 'To stay away from their mouths,' he replied promptly, which summarized *that* profession very neatly" (p. 111). Or this one: "*Five-year-old*: 'I've got the smartest dog. All is to say is 'Are you coming in or aren't you?' and he either comes in or he doesn't" (p. 260).

Parents were invited to send in recordings of their children's sayings. Linkletter reported that, "the result was a flood of mail" (p. 260), including this gem:

> My two-year-old, George, was playing in the yard when a cat came strolling by. He started to pet it, so I called out, 'George, that cat doesn't know you. He might scratch you.' He bent over, looked the cat straight in the eye and said, 'Cat, I'm George Blackwell.' (pp. 263–264)

Even at two years of age, children are speaking in logic.

Sometimes, Linkletter captured children's philosophical nature and their brilliant thinking about life. He writes:

> Some have remarkable insight. The other day I asked a young lady of six to describe her conscience for me. Her answer came out in a rush, with no time for punctuation: "It's a gray ghost inside you with a friendly face but it stops smiling when your nerves begin to write a note to it when you want to do something bad and when the ghost sees this bad note he gets very angry and yells 'Stop!'" (p. 142)

Linkletter notes that it's not possible for him to pick out his favorite example of children's thinking, but comments: "I think the one-word answer that impressed me the most, though, in this atomic age, came from a kid who thought for a moment when I asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up and finally said, 'Alive'" (p. 284).

He recounts an interview with "a darling little girl whose shy answer to a question summed up for me all the magic and freshness of the secret world of kids. 'Have you ever been in love?' I asked her. 'No,' she said, 'but I've been in like.'" Linkletter notes, "Maybe that isn't my all-time favorite. But it'll do until a better one comes along" (p. 284).

Linkletter saw himself as an "incurable optimist" and thought that, "children are just about the most wonderful gadgets ever invented" (p. 285). He notes that one of his purposes was

> to open up a few channels of communication between the weary world of adults and the Secret World of Kids. To enjoy a child, you must understand him. To understand him, you must communicate with him. What I've been trying to put on paper here is a blueprint for understanding and enjoying kids. (pp. 285–286)

He hopes that parents will enjoy their kids: "If once a day, for five seconds, you stop and consider what a fantastic privilege it is to bring life into the world and help it grow, I think you'll be a better parent – and a better person" (p. 286). Shouldn't this admonition apply to schools and teachers as well?

Gareth Mathews and Childhood Philosophers

A scholar, Gareth Mathews, was also documenting children's thinking and analyzing the brilliance of their words through a philosophic lens in his two books (1980, 1994) on remarkable early childhood thinking. In his first book, Matthews notes that, as a college professor, he found himself "worrying about how to teach introductory courses in philosophy to college students" (1980, p. *vii*). He notes: "It occurred to me that my task… was to reintroduce my students to an activity that they had once enjoyed and found natural, but that they had been socialized to abandon" (p. *vii*). What follows in this first book are nine short and succinct chapters documenting philosophic thinking in very young children, gathered by Matthews and others who he calls, "simply people who like children" (p. *vii*).

Six-year-old Tim speculates on whether we can really know reality: "Papa, how can we be sure that everything is not a dream?" (p. 1). Four-year-old John takes his first plane ride and says, rather relieved, "Things don't really get smaller up there" (p. 4). Five-year-old David worries about whether apples are alive, deciding that it is alive when it's on the ground, but not when it's brought into the house (p. 6); seven-year-old Michael ponders whether the universe is infinite: "It's nice to know you're *here*…It is not nice to know about nothing. I hope [the universe] doesn't go on forever because it's obvious it can't be anywhere" (p. 35); six-year-old John notes that while he has body parts that he calls "his arms, his head,' he also has possessions that he calls 'his toys'. He wonders: "Which part of me is really me?" (p. 86).

For each example he re-creates, Matthews discusses the deeper philosophic questions behind the childish words, invoking philosophic and psychological theorists, comparing the children's ideas to larger and more well-discussed ideas, and always maintaining a stance of wonder toward the brilliance of what children think and say. Four-year-old Sarah, Matthews' daughter, is concerned about how the family cat, Fluffy, caught fleas. Matthews (1994) explains that fleas jump from one cat to another, and to another and so on, till they reach Fluffy. Sarah pauses and responds: "But Daddy… it can't go on and on like that forever, the only thing that goes on and on like that forever is numbers!" (p. 1). Luckily, Matthews (1980) is there to capture and reflect on the moment. He notes that puzzling over a new idea is "quintessentially philosophical" (p. 2) and finds that "Puzzlement and wonder are closely related," an idea he supports by turning to the philosopher, Bertrand Russell, who writes that philosophy "has at least the power of *asking* questions which increase the interest of the world and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life" (Russell, in Matthews, p. 2).

How to Foster Brilliance—Or Can We?

The question for education of today's and future young children becomes, How can we accommodate children's brilliant thinking and still complete the curriculum? Or more to the point, do we have time for children's brilliant thinking?

Several years ago, the late Australian educator, Garth Boomer (1989), gave a talk in which he addressed questions of best practices in education. He entitled his talk, "Literacy: The Epic Challenge Beyond Progressivism" and defined progressive teachers as ones who are "boundary riders," who "have chosen to teach at the edge of your

understandings rather than to operate from safe and stable ground. You are modern teachers, progressive teachers, enquiring teachers. You anticipate discovery" (p. 1). He then goes on to define the characteristics of such teachers, beginning with "caring" that is "shown by careful teacher listening and response"; and is "individual oriented/experience based;" he notes: "Each child is valued for his/her uniqueness. The child's expression of personal meaning is encouraged and rewarded as having intrinsic worth because of its authenticity" (p. 3).

As he continues to think about how to operationalize this, Boomer develops the idea of an "Epic Teacher." He notes: "Every now and then we are lucky to have a significant idea…essentially that we should deliberately teach each student how to read the curriculum (and the school)…" (p. 9). As he read Benjamin's (1983) "Understanding Brecht," he says the book "…took me further along the path of construing a new kind of post-modern, post-progressive teacher – the pragmatic radical – or, to be more evocative, the EPIC teacher" (Boomer, 1989, p. 9).

Drawing on the work of Bertolt Brecht in drama and theatre production, Boomer appropriates Brecht's creation of a new kind of theatre, and then Boomer applies this to teaching. Brecht reacted against the naturalistic theatre performance mode that was designed to surprise and woo an audience that had willingly suspended disbelief. In such theatre, the stage curtain draws the line between the staged performance and the audience, creating a "fourth wall," a wall that clearly and terminally separates the story from the viewers, a wall designed to preserve "the art that conceals art" (p. 9). Boomer notes that this naturalistic approach to theatre "…takes pains to hide its origins and its intentions. In a very direct sense, naturalistic theatre is charming" (p. 9).

And, of course, Boomer's logical conclusion is that

> most progressive teachers are in the performative naturalistic mode…charming… The teacher is almost able to make his or her role invisible….The curriculum is almost like doing what comes naturally…Children are manipulated because the curriculum is… constructed and the teacher, in seeming not to design has palpable designs on the learners. (p. 9)

He concludes: "…the naturalistic classroom is unhealthy and essentially disempowering because it tends not to expose its own deep intentions and because it renders itself relatively immune to critique and transformation by the learners" (p. 9).

So Boomer turns to Brecht and his Epic Theatre that cultivates what Brecht called "the alienation effect." The curtain between the play and the audience, what is called in theatre "the fourth wall," is pulled back, and the audience is asked to distance itself from the play and respond critically to the drama, to be "alienated" or "estranged" from the naturalness of the drama. In Brecht's plays, performers address the audience directly, stepping out in front of the curtain, breaking through the "fourth wall," requiring the audience to invoke belief, calling back the previously suspended belief and actualizing it, developing "a critical frame of mind" (p. 9), and becoming part of the "didactic" drama that is intentionally designed to effect change in the audience. Brecht's alienation effect is an intentional, "self-conscious," and didactic move to engage the audience fully and consciously in the problem at hand.

In light of Brecht's work, and to counterbalance a curriculum that might be merely entertaining, Boomer asks, "What would an Epic Teacher do?" (p. 10). Boomer's own words speak volumes and are worth repeating here:

> An Epic Teacher, unlike the naturalistic teacher, would show the students that the curriculum is a construction designed to have certain effects on them. He or she would be continually taking students behind the set of his or her own theatre of performance, to see the scaffolding and the construction technologies. The Epic Teacher would assiduously cultivate an estrangement effect both with respect to his/her own views and with respect to the ideas and knowledge being promulgated. The students would be expected to be engaged and yet critical; moved and yet gently skeptical. The teacher would work dialectically to confront the values of the learners and also to confront and gently undermine him/herself. The classroom itself, as a community or sub-culture, would be rendered problematic. The teacher would be overtly didactic. Whereas the naturalistic teacher could manipulate by deceptions or "silences," the Epic Teacher would manipulate explicitly and self-consciously. (p. 10)

Early childhood education in the 21st century offers one avenue for beginning to not only actualize Boomer's vision of "a curtain pulled back" to reveal the curriculum, but also to provide a potential avenue for valuing and forefronting the brilliance of children. This theory is known in early childhood education in Reggio Amelia schools as "pedagogical documentation."

What Is Pedagogical Documentation?

Pulling Back the Curtain

Pedagogical documentation has many purposes as described by the educators of Reggio Emilia, including: enhances the learning by the children; informs parents about their children's experiences in order to engage the families as a learning/teaching partner; serves as a basis for teacher research; and finally, provides evidence of children's learning and progress (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1995). Documentation often comprises teacher-written descriptions of projects, transcriptions by teachers of children's words, photographs, and samples of the children's symbolic representations, and is often posted in the classroom (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1995). Documentation can offer teachers and children the "opportunity to revisit, reflect, and interpret;" by supporting their memory so that they can "retrace their processes, to find confirmation or negation, and self-correct" (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 122).

The Reggio Emilia Approach is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed through relationships where the

> central act of adults, is to activate, especially indirectly, the meaning-making competencies of children as the basis of all learning. They must try to capture the right moments, and then find the right approaches, for bringing together, into a fruitful dialogue, their meanings and interpretations with those of the children. (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 81)

Intrigued by the use of pedagogical documentation to "enhance the learning by the children," as is stated above, Leslie studied the HOW. She wondered about how the children used the pedagogical documentation and what was the impact it might have on children's thinking processes, including memory, reflection, and critical thinking.

In the "Making Teaching Visible Project" (Project Zero, 2003), the research team identified features that capture the essence of documentation, which includes "sharing back with learners" (p. 17). They explain that

> documentation contributes to children's own understanding of how they and others learn; it serves as a reminder of what goes on in the classroom, offering students an opportunity for reflection, for evaluation of other children's theories and hypotheses, and for self-assessment. (p. 17)

Leslie found this to be true, that in order for the children to be able to reflect, the pedagogical documentation needs to be used as an external form of memory to first help them revisit the experience and reflect on what transpired. However, pedagogical documentation can also allow the teacher to support the learners in reflecting on their own strategies and even in some cases begin to think about their own decisions or thinking.

In other words the pedagogical documentation needs to be used as "bits and pieces along the way" (Sevey, 2010) rather than is often understood about documentation by teachers in the U.S. as "snapshots taken at the beginning and end of a process, and at isolated moments along the way" to be able to showcase the learning (Seidel, 2001, p. 308)

Examples of documentation—"pulling back the curtain".

In this exchange with AL the teacher was using documentation to support his memory of the previous experience with marbles and ramps. AL used the documentation to identify where he encountered a problem and explain the solution he devised.

Teacher: Does anyone remember this project here (referring to the photo on the documentation panel) *that they were doing?*

AL: ***I know—that was my group*** [the photo has refreshed his memory]

Teacher: Your group—ok AL what was happening in this picture?

*AL: You can't really see the tube in the cup—**the track is in the tube in there and if it's against the back of the cup the tube is in there and the marble goes down and it hits the track all the time*** [he explained the problem]

Teacher: So it hit the track on the front part – let's see you said that marble comes down here—and the tube is in there—it's hard to see because it's a clear tube—and the marble fell here—and you said it did what?

AL: It bounced back and then it hit the track.

*Teacher: So did it bounce back out of the cup? No (AL shook his head no)—so **you found a way to trap it in there so it didn't bounce back out** (11/2/09 – week 6) (p. 62).* [The teacher rephrases his explanation to demonstrate the solution]

In this example student IS reflected on what happened in a previous experience that was **displayed on the documentation panel**. The teacher referred to the experience and IS was able to explain why the marble was going slowly and considered the change her group made to its track. IS then shifted her thinking to be able to explain why the marble didn't land in the bucket.

Teacher: IS come on up a minute—this looks like your group's plan here—this was your first try—what were you doing there?

*IS: Umm—**we were trying to drop the marble into the bucket—but I think it was going slow** [problem encountered]*

Teacher: Why do you think it was going slow?—looking at this picture—what made it go slow?—why did it go too slow?
IS: *I think it was flat [student's definition of the problem]*

Teacher: What was flat? Show me on there—you think that was too flat and the marble didn't go or it went really slow

IS: Yeah.

Teacher: (referring to the documentation) Then you changed your plan a little bit and I see you did something here—what were you doing here?

IS: We were making a bridge over the bucket and the marble went down and we tried it dropping into the cup.

Teacher: Did it work?

IS: Yes, I think.

*Teacher: (referring to the photograph) You lifted it up a little bit and put it on the side of the bucket—then you changed it a little bit more—now you've got **something going up though**—hmmm—did that work?*

IS: No.

Teacher: Why?

*IS: **Because the marble can't go up and then drop into the bucket** (11/9/09, week 7) (p. 69).* [We can see the student is beginning to refine her understanding of the forces of gravity]

The kindergarten students were exploring the idea of chance versus strategy. They began with a game where they pulled items out of a bag and recorded what they got. On this day they were exploring the game of tic-tac-toe. In the whole group reflection after the experience, where documentation had been collected (photographs) and was being displayed, the teacher asked the students to reflect on the experience.

Mrs. R: So Ben you said you tricked Harper a couple of times, what does that mean?

Ben: I started out with one in the middle and then she put some here and I put one here.

Mrs. R: So your strategy, I am using the word strategy and you used the word trick. You had a plan that you always wanted to put it in the middle. That's called a strategy. What's the difference between this game and the game you pulled things out of the bag?

C: You didn't know what you were going to get.

A: You couldn't look inside the bag. This game, tic-tac-toe, you could look.

Mrs. R: When you played that game you never knew what you would get and this game you could make a plan.

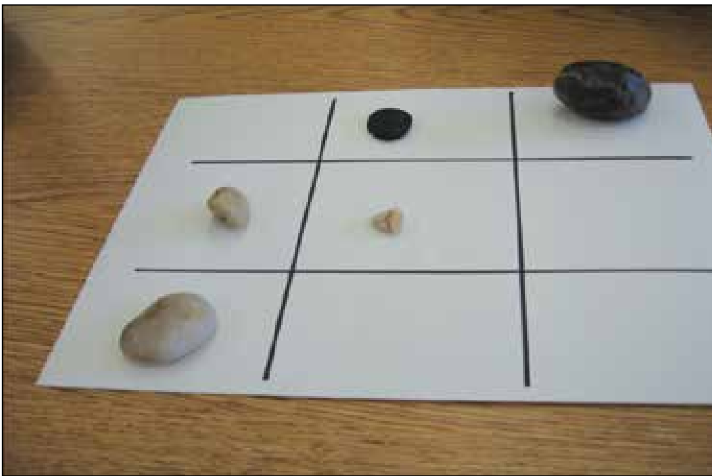


Fig. 1: Tic-tac-toe

The kindergarten students were continuing their exploration of the concept of chance versus strategy. The teacher provided a variety of games for the children to play as they developed their understandings of chance and strategy. On this day the teacher provided a game that was based on strategy but she did not define this for the students ahead of time, rather she asked them if they thought the game was based on chance or strategy.

Mrs. R explained the rules for the game "The Last Survivor": You will need to decide whether you will take one rock or two rocks for each turn. There are 13 rocks total. The person to take the last rock wins.

She asked the students if they thought this game was chance, and was it fair? The teacher asked two children to come up to the front to demonstrate a practice round. After they completed the practice round she asked…

Mrs. R: Do you have an idea?
Bobby: The person who goes first always wins. There's thirteen, if someone has three people and two people on their side that's three. He took one, she took one, then she could win. It depends on how you take the rocks.
Ava: If you take one rock then it might mean that you could win.
Mrs. R: Each of you took two each time, Maddy and Bobby.

Conclusion

It is hard these days to find examples of how we might maximize children's brilliant thinking, either in schools or out; no one is doing quite what Linkletter and Matthews did as they documented children's thinking so thoroughly and with such optimism, admiration, respect, and reflection. True, there is a cable network program called "Seriously Funny Kids," on which moderator Heidi Klum plays the *straight man* to selected young comics with unique ideas. And an advertisement for an insurance company regularly features a man sitting at a low table with four kindergarteners, a different group each time, while the children express their ideas on a variety of philosophic questions, such as "Is fast better than slow?" Children's responses are charming, adult reaction is appropriate, but such current efforts all fall far short of earlier efforts to document and understand the ideas and brilliance of children's thinking.

Educators and psychologists, most notably, have listened closely to children's words, both spoken and written, with insightful and influential conclusions. Donaldson (1978) in "Children's Minds" observed and documented children's developing thinking and concluded:

> By the time they come to school, all normal children show skill as thinkers and language users to a degree which must command our respect, so long as they are dealing with "real-life" meaningful situations in which they have purposes and intentions and in which they can recognize and respond to similar purposes and intentions in others….He is conscious of the outer world that he is dealing with and of his goals in that world. Then he cannot fail to be aware of himself as an agent in that world, coping with it. (p. 127)

Paley's many books document various aspects of her kindergarteners' talk, play, and thinking. In her 1990, "The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter," she notes:

> …aside from all else we try to accomplish, we [teachers] have an awesome responsibility. We must become aware of the essential loneliness of each child. Our classrooms, at all levels, must look more like happy families and secure homes…the kind in which all family members can tell their private stories, knowing they will be listened to with affection and respect. (p. 148)

In her books, Gallas documents and analyzes children's learning and language development in her classroom. In her 2003 "Imagination and Literacy: A Teacher's Search for the Heart of Learning," she writes "…educators must reclaim, rename, and reimagine teaching and learning" (p. 165) and "Imagining new educational worlds is a project that would require us to throw aside so many assumptions about the world and the purposes of education" (p. 167).

These writers certainly do serve to preserve children's unique and thinking but they are few and far between, and far away from now. Today's view of children is often more interested in the content that children have acquired in their few years and the data that can be collected from testing them, than from the remarkable and notable instances of children's thinking and insight. I think most would agree that American education today is not equipped to accommodate much brilliant thinking, either in curricular design or day-to-day classroom scheduling. Government grants and agencies in many places have mandated curriculum, standards, and testing which all drive the day-to-day practice of classroom teachers. Gallas notes: "All my years in public education have rendered me unable to proceed – unable to imagine what schools would look like if imagination were recognized as the necessary center of learning and growth" (p. 167). Even 10 years ago, in her publication, education was moving farther and farther away from finding a place in schooling for children's thinking and imagining. She continues: "…the outcomes of such learning won't fit within the framework of 'measurable outcomes,' standardized tests, rubrics, programmed learning" (p. 168).

In company with Boomer, Gallas concludes:

> The social alterations of such learning shift power and authority from the teacher alone to the teacher and students and that, above all, will provoke discomfort in those who most fear disorder, those who believe that disorder (talk, movement, laughter, joy?) is not present in serious learning environments, those who believe that disorder means loss of control and that loss of control is always dangerous. (p. 168)

So the question becomes, “Is there any way to foster and grow the development of children’s brilliance in today’s classroom market?” We must begin with children themselves and their capacity for greatness, “the boundless potential that all our children represent” (Gallas, p. 169). In “Closely Observed Children,” Michael Armstrong (1980) strives to understand children’s understanding and notes that, “One way of beginning is to examine, with careful sympathy, the thought and action of the children who we ourselves are teaching” (p. 206).

And so we come full circle, returning back to notions of listening to children as the key to educational security, listening with respect and admiration, with curiosity and insight, and with humor and an open mind. We come back to Linkletter’s (1959) attempt to create “a blueprint for understanding and enjoying kids” (pp. 285–286) after he spent so many years doing just that. We listen to Armstrong (1980) as he seeks to “draw attention to one particular feature of the early life of reason” (p. 206), a feature he sees as essential to intellectual growth: “That feature is the seriousness of purpose in children’s thought and action: their high intent” (p. 206). Returning our focus to children, recapturing a sense of wonder at their unique thinking, “pulling back the curtain” and making them partners in their own learning, sharing authority and power, and listening very carefully to what children have to say, may shift education to a better place, a place where “our educational system is meant to serve the interests and well-being of children, rather than those of adults” (Gallas, 2003, p. 168). Perhaps we are still trying to understand Linkletter’s (1959) attempts to “open up a few channels of communication between the weary world of adults and the Secret World of Kids” (p. 285). If so, perhaps there’s still time to capture children’s “seriousness of purpose, their high intent” (p. 206) and understand what it means.

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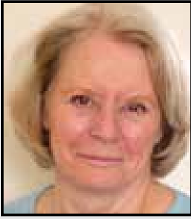

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Listening to Children's Voices: Reflections on Researching With Children in Multilingual Montreal

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss methodological and ethical issues related to researching with children in a way that respects and validates their voices. Drawing on vignettes from one of the author's inquiries with young multilingual children, we share strategies we see as central to positioning children as knowledgeable and active agents in their own and our learning. We propose three main criteria for doing qualitative research with children: fostering respectful relationships; using creative methods; and listening attentively to children's stories. We discuss what these criteria can contribute to early childhood education, both in formal and non-formal settings.

Researching *with* children involves actively listening to their voices and validating their stories; working with young children can open spaces for meaningful, respectful, and inclusive engagements in learning in both formal and non-formal educational settings. Yet, the insights and ideas of young children are too often overlooked as important and valid contributions to understandings of issues that directly affect the children themselves (Howe & Covell, 2005; Lewis, 2004). In this paper, we hope to contribute to a movement that challenges this silencing of children and to emphasize the importance of doing research *with* children, not *about* them (e.g., Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellet, & Robinson, 2004; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Maguire, 2005; James & Prout, 1997). As doctoral student researchers working with qualitative methodologies in our research with children, we shed light on the importance and value of listening to and affirming the voices and knowledges of children. We argue that qualitative research is enriched when the voices of children are respected, valued, and encouraged.

We share strategies we see as central to positioning children as knowledgeable and active agents in their own and our learning and show how much we learned from children when we used these strategies. We conclude with a discussion of what these learnings can contribute to early childhood education, both in formal and non-formal settings.

Setting the Scene

The context of our inquiries is multilingual Montreal. Montreal is the largest city in the province of Quebec and it receives and integrates over 85% of the immigrants to the province (Statistics Canada, 2006). Though Canada is officially bilingual at the federal level, since 1977, with the enactment of Bill 101, French has been the sole official language in Quebec. Bill 101 mandates that children of immigrants be educated in French and there are strict rules regarding who qualifies for a Certificate of Eligibility, which is required for admission to English schools; as a result, over 90% of children in Quebec are now educated in the French sector (Sarkar & Winer, 2006). Though Bill 101 aims to protect French language and culture, an inadvertent effect of this language policy, at least in the multiethnic metropolis of Montreal, has been the increase of multilingualism (Lamarre & Dagenais, 2004). In fact, Montreal is the city in North America with the highest number of trilinguals (Lamarre, 2003) and the rate of multilingualism seems to be increasing. For example, almost 80% of children in Quebec attend daycares, many of them in languages other than those they speak at home (Perreault, 2002; Poliakova, 2002).

Multilingual children in Montreal take their multilingual language resources with them when they enter formal education contexts. Despite the increasing linguistic diversity classrooms, educational policies and practices remain, for the most part, stubbornly founded on monolingual ideology (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2009; García, 2009; Hélot, 2007), which is the idea that languages need to be kept separate in order for learning to take place. This ideology affects multilingual children directly by constricting spaces for them to draw on their language resources in their learning. This has implications for how children come to see themselves and others.

Our inquiries are located in this context and we are exploring how multilingual and multiethnic children are navigating the linguistic landscape of Montreal. However, we feel that the criteria we propose in this paper would resonate in other educational contexts as well. With this background in mind, we shift the discussion to key

methodological issues in researching *with* children in a way that respects and validates their voices. We begin by locating our thinking in what James and Prout (1997) called the "new sociology of childhood."

Child-Centered Qualitative Research

Child-centered research focuses on actively involving children in the research process and is primarily concerned with questions and issues that are of importance to the lives of children and young people. The research process must be meaningful to children. In other words, researchers must think about the relationships they build with child participants, how they communicate and build trust, and how the process may provide children with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and competencies.

With the rise of the new sociology of childhood, children are increasingly becoming active participants in qualitative research processes. We agree with Christensen and James (2008), however, that much of the research that is "avowedly child-focused" does "little to enable us to learn from children's own perspectives on their everyday lives and experiences" (p. 1). We take seriously Strong-Wilson and Preece's (2009) statement regarding "the importance of creating shared spaces for dialogue between adults and children. It is in these spaces that some of the stories most meaningful to children and childhood will grow" (pp. 4–5). How may we better understand the ways in which children develop agency through their interactions with peers and adults in a linguistically and culturally diverse context, such as Montreal? We seek to understand the interests of children and to engage them in meaningful, enriching experiences. By listening attentively to children's voices and engaging children as co-researchers, we hope to understand more about their complex, dynamic, and multi-faceted social worlds. As Geertz (1986) wrote, "We cannot live other people's lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try. We can but listen to what. . . they say about their lives" (p. 373). This points to the critical question of how to approach doing research with children and ensuring that children's voices are heard and acknowledged.

When children's voices are silenced or overlooked, this reinforces beliefs that children are inferior beings whose opinions are not worthy of including in research (Howe & Covell, 2005). There *is* value in gathering and documenting adults' perspectives, yet there is also a danger of interpreting such data as representative of children's own understandings and meanings (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Janzen (2008) called for more childhood research that provides opportunities and spaces for children to

co-construct knowledge, cultures, and identities. What we learn from researching with children can impact the lives of the children we're working with, but also others in similar situations. Young children can highlight what is salient to them and can complement and sometimes contradict adult perspectives (Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003; Waller, 2006). By approaching children as knowledgeable, we are positioning ourselves as people who want to learn from them, who are genuinely interested in what they say and do (Christensen & James, 2008). This reflects what Graue and Walsh (1998) called the "humble researcher position."

We now turn to discussing some vignettes from Alison's inquiry with four multilingual Japanese-Canadian children in Montreal which illustrate how she has tried to take a humble researcher position and some of the strategies she has used to co-create conditions for children to voice their experiences and share their stories.

Introducing the Children

Over a period of six months, Alison visited four Japanese-Canadian children at their homes with the aim of understanding how they make sense of their multilingualism. The home visits were all audio-recorded on two digital voice recorders (one often became a toy). The children are[1]: Henry (age 6) and Elizabeth (age 4), who are brother and sister. They speak Japanese, English, and French. James (age 4) speaks Japanese and English. He knows he will learn French when he starts school next year, like his older brother has. Taichi (age 4) speaks Japanese, English, and French.

Conversations with Children

Children make sense of their feelings, emotions, memories, identities, and experiences through stories. As child psychologist Susan Engel (1995) wrote, "It is through telling stories that children develop a personal voice, a way of communicating their unique experience and view of the world" (p. 2). Thus, in order to welcome children's voices, in our methodological approaches we have deliberately avoided an interview approach and aimed instead to co-create conditions for conversations with the children. Maguire (1999) found that "[c]onversations with children in informal settings rather than structured interviews are more useful ways to gain insights into children's lives, their understandings of their situations, [and] their cultural identities" (p. 131). In addition, James (2001) argued that especially when doing research with children in their homes, where they are positioned as relatively powerless in relation to their parents, engaging in informal conversations with the children, rather than conducting formal interviews, gives them more control over the flow of the dialogue. As we show in the vignettes

that follow, creating the conditions for conversations with children can open spaces for children to voice their stories, which can help us gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on issues that relate directly to their lives. Here we illustrate the strategies we feel are central to listening to and engaging with children.

Respecting

Respecting the children's spaces and interests is central to shaping the inquiry and to creating spaces for conversations that are led just as much by the children as by the adult researcher. As Alison learned, though it is tempting to arrive for the home visits with an agenda of what she wanted to get out of the interactions, respecting means that any agenda had to be co-constructed and negotiated.

Though easy enough to say, negotiating an agenda in the moment of interaction can be harder to do. We share here an example of a moment when Alison was finding it hard to let go of her expectations. At the end of her first visit with Taichi (age 4), he told her that he wanted to do some drawing next time, so the next time, she brought a stocked craft bag, fully expecting to spend this home visit drawing with him. Clearly, he had other ideas.

Alison: Do you want to see what I brought with me today?

Taichi: What did you brought?

Alison: I brought stuff for colouring. Do you like colouring? I've got pencil crayons, crayons, markers, paper.

Taichi: I have paper here. [He doesn't want mine].

Alison: I brought a picture of a person. [I show him a paper with the out-line of a person].

Taichi: I don't want a picture of a person.

Alison: Okay. . .I brought some folders. Do you know what these are? [I take plastic folders out of my bag].

Taichi: What's inside them?

Alison: Nothing, but you could put your drawings in them and then it would be like a book. [He picks up my box of markers]. Do you want to open them?

Taichi: I don't want to open them.

Alison: No. Do you want me to open them?

Taichi: No.

Alison: Well I'll leave these here if you want to do some drawing. Can I draw a picture for you?

Taichi: I don't want pictures.

Alison: No pictures.

[Taichi runs out of the living room to his room and returns a minute later with a train set puzzle from Japan. We put the track together and play trains for a long time].

As a researcher, letting go of the power to direct interactions is not always as easy to actually do as it is to write about doing. Indeed, Maguire (2005) noted that she rarely saw researchers writing about how children challenged or resisted their agendas. However, Alison found that the children have very explicit ways of resisting her agenda (e.g., by physically leave the room), if she tried to impose one. When she is in the children's homes, she is on their turf and they want to be largely in charge of the interactions. And as a humble researcher, Alison has done her best to respect that and let the children lead the negotiations of the rules of play.

Respecting involves letting go of power and control; it involves listening, being non-directive, and being humble in the homes and spaces of the children we are working with. Within this climate of respect, there are several types of activities Alison engaged in with the children, which have been very productive for generating data.[2] These are discussed below.

Drawing

Vygotsky (1978) argued that children's drawings are representations of story. Drawings can serve as a productive tool to engage children in conversations about their visual representations (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Kendrick, McKay, & Moffat, 2005). We would like to emphasize the importance of paying close attention to the conversations that take place *while* the drawing is being created since this is when meaning is emerging and being co-created. As Roberts-Holmes (2005) noted, once a drawing is done, young children will not often have much to say about it. As Alison found in her inquiry, talk around drawings is meaningful only in the moment, but after the drawing is done and the children have moved on to the next activity (e.g., a giant tickle fight), the conversations about the drawing are minimal to none. In addition, drawings

do not need to be done by the children alone. In fact, collaborative drawings led to very rich conversations.

Alison arrived for each visit with a craft bag, stocked with slightly different things, but always copies of a paper with the outline of a person on it. The idea was to ask the children to colour in the person, using a different colour pen for each language they speak, and that this would be a nice way to elicit conversations about their understandings of their multilingualism. In practice, this never happened, but the collaborative drawing Henry (age 6), Elizabeth (age 4), and Alison did on the person outline ended up creating the conditions for a very rich conversation about their language practices. The drawing became very multi-layered; as they drew, a co-created story emerged.

Fig. 1: Collaborative drawing

Alison: So, let's see. I speak English, French, and a bit of Japanese and a little bit of Spanish [as I say this, I pick up a different colour marker for each language]. . . . Because I speak only a little bit of Spanish, I'm just going to make purple ears. Just a little bit.

Henry: And what about English? You speak English . . .

Alison: I speak mostly English [I am colouring the body with red for English]. Which part do you think I should do? How far should I go?

Henry: Maybe like that. [He points at the knees, so I stop the red at the knees. Elizabeth is watching, and colouring in her own person with

purple stripes]. . . . French, you could go for the face. . . . Elizabeth speaks Japanese the most. [She nods]. I speak English, then Japanese.

Alison: And what about French?

Henry: Yeah, and Spanish.

Alison: Yeah, English the most and then Japanese?

Henry: Then French, then Spanish. A bit of Spanish. Maybe I could do two ears like you.

Alison: Two ears of Spanish. . . . Do you ever speak in French when you do activities? Or just at school?

Henry: Just at school. Sometimes when I have a friend come over.

Alison: What about when you go shopping to the store, do you speak French?

Henry: To who?

Alison: To the people in the store. Do they speak French?

Henry: If they speak French to me, I speak French to them.

Doing this collaborative drawing created spaces for Henry to share his understandings of his and his sister's multilingualism.

Reading Stories

During Alison's first home visit with Taichi (age 4), he was really excited and wanted to show her all of his favourite toy cars and trucks and his big stuffed Totoro (a popular Japanese animation character). At first, Totoro was something to throw at the wall. But, when Taichi started jumping on his bed, Totoro became a character in play and told Taichi that he wanted to settle down a bit and read a book together.

Fig. 2: Totoro joins the conversation

Totoro picked a Japanese book to read. Fushigi Hakken Ehon is a picture book about two types of insects.

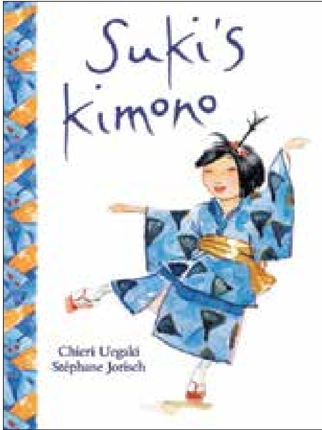
Fig. 3: Fushigi Hakken Ehon

Though it was hard for Alison to read the book in Japanese, doing so created opportunities for negotiation of meaning and for Taichi to correct her pronunciation. In doing this, Taichi got to position himself as a competent Japanese speaker.

> Alison: What's this?
>
> Taichi: Mitsu. Mitsu.
>
> Alison: Mitsu? [I am checking my pronunciation. Mitsu means honey or three, depending on how it is pronounced].
>
> Taichi: Mitsu. Mitsu.
>
> Alison: Mitsu?
>
> Taichi: Honey. [He gave up on me getting the Japanese pronunciation right and switches to English to make sure I understand].

Later in the book, there is a page with different insects to count. Interestingly, Taichi counted them in Japanese, likely because this is how he reads the book with his mother. At one point when Alison was reading to him, he said, "Your Japanese is very funny." She had to agree.

During Alison's last visit with Henry (age 6) and Elizabeth (age 4), she brought them a book to thank them for spending time with her. The book, "Suki's Kimono," is written by Chieri Uegaki (2003), a Japanese-Canadian author. It is about a young girl, Suki, who wears her kimono to the first day of grade one. She gets teased, but shares the story of the summer festival she went to with her *obaachan* (grandmother) in this kimono.



At the end of her story, her classmates loudly applaud her. There is a strong message of accepting differences and being proud of your cultural heritage.

Fig. 4: Suki's Kimono
Cover of *Suki's Kimono* by Chieri Uegaki, illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch reprinted by permission of Kids Can Press Ltd., Toronto, Canada. Text © 2003 Chieri Uegaki. Illustrations © 2003 Stéphane Jorisch.

As soon as Henry and Elizabeth saw the cover of this book, they were captivated. As Alison read, Elizabeth asked more and more questions and responded to Suki's actions with her own (standing up and mimicking Suki's dance). Henry, on the other hand, became very quiet and seemed to be thinking deeply about the story. When Alison finished reading the story, Elizabeth ran to her room to get her kimono. Henry took the book and slowly turned through all the pages and said he liked the book "very much." Elizabeth said she liked the part where all the classmates clapped for Suki.

Reading this book and talking about it seemed to serve as a mirror for these children as they could recognize parts of their own lives in the book. The shared reading experience enabled the children and Alison to engage in dialogue and provided the opportunity to playfully enact parts of the story. In the excerpt below, Elizabeth uses her imagination to engage with the story as she listens to Suki's vivid description of her experience of dancing at the festival, barefoot on the grass.

Alison: [I am reading the story]. "Suki took a deep breath and continued. The best thing was that my obaachan took me to a festival. And there were dancing girls, dressed like me, and they danced like this. She took a few steps and swayed her arms sideways" [Elizabeth is moving her arms a bit now]. "Look now she's dancing, someone said. But Suki didn't hear. She hummed the music she remembered hearing at the festival. She remembered how it felt to dance barefoot in the open air, on fresh-cut grass that tickled her toes."

[Elizabeth is standing up now, with her hands in the air, just like picture of Suki, her toes wiggling]. "She tried to picture the other dancers. How they moved forward in a circle."

Elizabeth: It doesn't tickle.

Alison: Well, there's no grass under your toes, is there? "They stamped their feet, first right, then left, swung their arms, first up, then down. How they stepped back and back and back, then clapped."

Elizabeth: Now it tickles. Now it tickles! [She has taken off her socks and is wiggling her toes in the shag rug.]

Alison: Does it tickle? "When Suki couldn't remember the next step, she just made it up, just to keep on dancing. 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, stop." She made up her own dance. "When she finished, the room seemed very quiet. Everyone was watching her."

An important part of these shared reading experiences from storybooks are the social interactions and dialogue that occurred throughout. The stories provided an interesting point of discussion for Alison and the children, as the children related their own knowledge and prior experience to the visual images and words of the stories. While reading the stories, Alison tried to listen attentively to the questions and comments made by the children and they seemed eager to share their thoughts and opinions.

Playing

Vivian Paley, preschool and kindergarten teacher and writer, has described the centrality of play and stories to children's lives. In *The Girl With the Brown Crayon: How Children Use Stories to Shape their Lives*, Paley (1997) portrayed the remarkable way in which children related their own lives to the stories they read and how the texts became a springboard for discussion about complex issues such as gender equity and race, as well as their emotions and relationships. Playing with children and providing spaces for children to play is a critical part of creating conditions in which children can share their voices and their stories. Play was the primary method of generating data with the children in Alison's inquiry. There are endless ways to play and children all have their own favourite games to play or ways to play. Here, we illustrate how engaging in play that is largely led by the children creates spaces for meaningful conversations with them.

Playing with toys.

Fig. 5: Props for "Canada and Japan"

For a couple of weeks, James (age 4) and Alison played a game he came up with called "Canada and Japan," where the carpet in his room was Canada and the train track was Japan. They would drive around to shops and gas stations and parking lots, and amid lots of "vroom vroom" driving sounds, every now and then, they would comment on what they might hear people saying in those places.

Alison: And when you go shopping, do you hear people speak French?

James: Yup, and English and Japanese.

Alison: And Japanese? Do you think everyone speaks Japanese?

James: Yeah.

Alison: Everyone, everyone in Montreal, in Canada?

James: In Canada, they speak only English.

Alison: Only English.

James: Yeah.

Alison: What about in Montreal?

James: Yup.

Alison: Only English?

James: In Montreal? Yes.

Alison: And where do people speak Japanese?

James: In Japanese school.

Alison: And Japan?

James: Yeah. That's where Baba and Jiji (Grandma and Grandpa) live. Can you draw this? [He wants me to finish colouring a car. He has had enough of my language questions.]

Through imaginative play with James, he demonstrated a strong bilingual and multi-ethnic identity and a keen awareness of how different languages "fit" in different places, though he is still working out explaining where they fit. We are sure that it would have been difficult to access this type of knowledge directly through an interview-type approach.

Playing games.

None of the conversations with the children took place in isolation from other activities; there was always something going on behind the scenes of the conversations. Activities give children something to focus on. They also help avoid the temptation, as an adult researcher, to fall into a question-and-answer interview-type interaction (Roberts-Holmes, 2005).

The first time Alison visited Henry and Elizabeth, they had just borrowed a board game from a friend, called "City Square Off." They were excited about the game and wanted to play it. They sat down in the hallway and started to play the game, so Alison joined them. As they played, they chatted. Attention was mostly focused on the game (e.g., negotiating turns, reflecting on moves, predicting later moves), but conversation flowed easily to other things.

Alison: Does anyone else at your school speak Japanese?

Elizabeth: Um, yes. But my Japanese girl goed somewhere.

Alison: Where did she go?

Elizabeth: Vancouver.

Alison: That's far away.

Henry: There's one in grade seven. I know him. His name is Ryu-kun.

Alison: And he's Japanese?

Henry: Yes. His mom is from Japan. He speaks the same languages as us.

Alison: The same three. French and English and Japanese. So when you see him, what language do you talk to him in?

Henry: Any language.

Elizabeth: And the Vancouver one too.

Alison: You speak to her in any language or in Japanese.

Elizabeth: Japanese and English and French. . . . I speak a lot of Japanese.

Henry: Okay, put it down. [Henry is bringing attention back to the game and telling me to put my block on the board.]

Clearly, what we have shared here only represent a fraction of the many and varied ways to play with children. We have chosen these particular vignettes because they illustrate the dynamic, active, negotiated process of generating data with young children. We would like to highlight one more very important element of doing research with children: being playful.

Playfulness

When Alison first visited the children in their homes, there was always some negotiation of expectations on everyone's behalf. The children were trying to figure out what kind of adult she was; the mothers were trying to figure out whether to be in the room or elsewhere (they soon realized they could use the time to do something else). Alison was trying to figure out what the children were interested in. A great way to break this ice and start to sort out some of this negotiation of expectations is to be silly and playful with the children.

We share one of many examples of giggles Alison shared with the children. In her first visit with James he asked her to draw him some pictures of his favourite toy car, which he coloured in and cut out. They were sitting on the floor, his box of washable Crayola markers in between them.

James: See the bubbles here? That means sky blue. [Washable markers all have bubbles on them].

Alison: Wait a second. [I pick up a yellow marker]. This has bubbles on it too. That's not sky blue.

James: Why?

Alison: It's yellow. Is it sky yellow?

James: No [laughs].

Alison: [I pick up a purple marker]. Sky purple?

James: Yeah [laughs].

Alison: [I pick up a green marker]. Sky green?

James: [Giggles].

Alison: That's too silly! [I pick up a pink marker. We make eye contact]. Sky,

James/Alison: Pink! [We laugh. I pick up a red marker].

Alison: Sky, [We pause and make eye contact to get the timing right].

James /Alison: Red! [More laughter].

Alison: Now what are we going to draw? [I think the game is over].

James: Sky. Do this one. [The game is not over].

Alison: What this one? Sky,

James: Black! [We laugh].

Alison: What else? Are there more?

James: Yeah there are. Purple. [This goes on until James decides the game is over].

Moments like these were just as important in Alison's inquiry as the ones where the children were talking about their understandings of multilingualism. Being playful with the children helped build a rapport with them; as such, it is an essential ingredient for generating data with young children.

Learnings for Early Childhood Education

Child-centered research involves considering the interests and strengths of children in order to ensure that children actively participate in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this paper, we have provided examples of how children express their thoughts and ideas through conversations, responding to stories, drawings, and through play. From our discussion, we have drawn three criteria that we believe are essential for researching *with* young children, as well as for working with children in various early childhood contexts.

1. Respectful relationships

Maori scholar Mere Berryman (2012) emphasized how important it is "to establish respectful relationships [- it] is central to both human dignity and the research." Having respect for children and caring about issues that are important to them is central to

researching with children. Researching with children requires self-reflexivity, an awareness of ones' own values and interests, as well as being open to the ideas and perspectives of children. Alison showed how being respectful of children's wishes can sometimes be at odds with the researcher's own agenda, which highlights how critical it is for respectful relationships that the agenda be negotiated and co-constructed. We are guided by Vivian Paley (1986), who wrote that, "When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected" (p. 127). A key to establishing respectful relationships with children is to listen to them closely and to be genuinely open to their thoughts and ideas, and acknowledging their life experiences. Doing qualitative research with children requires time to come to understand their interests and to build a relationship and a rapport with them.

2. Creative methods

In this paper, we have shared some examples of creative methods that opened spaces for children to express themselves and share their experiences and stories. These included drawing, reading stories together, and playing with toys, stuffed animals, or board games. This emphasis on creative methods is in line with the arts-based educational philosophy of Reggio Emilia, which states that children express themselves through many languages. As art educator Sylvia Kind (2010) wrote, "Drawing, painting (and the use of all languages) are experiences and explorations of life, of the senses, and of meanings" (p. 121). Using creative methods is central to researching with children, particularly in research involving children's voices and stories. It involves a great deal of imagination and playfulness. Of course the methods used should be relevant to the children, and they are often the ones who come up with the methods and decide on the rules of play. It is important as a researcher and as an educator to ensure that children feel they have agency to do this. This opens up spaces for conversations with children, spaces where children's voices are respected and validated.

3. Listening

Researchers are beginning to pay more attention to the stories of young children and to the role of children's narratives in constructing their identities, revealing that, "stories and storytelling are vital to children themselves and to their development" (Engel, 1995, p. 3). Educators in Reggio Emilia schools and in the New Zealand Learning Stories project have used stories to document the unique experiences of young children (Berger, 2010; see also Carr & Lee, 2012). Berger (2010) discussed how educators acknowledge the plurality of their classrooms through "pedagogical narration," which enables children's multiple identities to "emerge in an unexpected and creative

manner" (p. 71). Pedagogical narration involves collecting and documenting the stories of children through various materials including both texts and images that are then displayed "as a provocation to continue the discussion, reflection, and interpretation of the pedagogical work among teachers, children, parents, and community members" (Berger, 2010, p. 63).

Like childhood researchers Dyson, Engel, Maguire, and Paley, we have found that when we listen to children, they open up and share their stories. By listening attentively, researchers and educators acknowledge the importance of what children have to say. As Engel (1995) wrote, "[c]hildren are often deeply social in the way that they approach the task of constructing stories. They need responsive, engaged, attuned listeners and collaborators in order to go on trying to express and create themselves through their stories" (p. 218). Listening to children means taking the time to get to know them and to building trusting and respectful relationships.

Closing Remarks

In this paper, we have drawn on some vignettes from Alison's inquiry to illustrate what we feel are three central and intricately related criteria for doing qualitative research with children: developing respectful relationships; using creative methods; and listening attentively. However, we feel that these criteria can guide not only researchers, but also early childhood educators in their engagements with young children in both formal and non-formal educational settings. In our own developing work as researchers in early childhood education, we would like to further explore methodologies that will allow us to work with children, listen to their stories, and validate the multiple ways they express their identities.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. We prefer, like Graue and Walsh (1998), to speak of generating data rather than collecting data. Whereas the latter seems to suggest that data already exist and are ready to be picked at the researcher's convenience, the former reflects an active, engaged, and negotiated process.

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Developing Multi-Agency Partnerships for Early Learning: Seven Keys to Success

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing emphasis on early years education in Ontario provided a rich context for this research project, commissioned by The Learning Partnership (TLP), to evaluate a new provincial project called FACES (Family and Community Engagement Strategy). This initiative seeks to extend and enhance community-based, multi-agency partnerships that support young children and their families in successful transitions to school. Interview data from individuals and focus groups suggest re-thinking early childhood education practices to include innovative multi-agency, community-based partnerships. "Seven Keys to Success" in building multi-agency partnerships emerged from the data providing direction for educators and policy makers.

Introduction

Effective transitions to school for young children and their families involve a complex range of knowledge, skills, aptitudes, and attitudes in differing community contexts. In an earlier study, Campbell, Elliott-Johns, and Wideman (2008, 2010,) identified six mutually supportive and essential keys to the success of a multi-agency project, "Welcome to Kindergarten" (WTK), a project seen to generate high levels of community participation and commitment. The WTK partnership project in North Bay focused on preparing children for the transition to Kindergarten. Both the WTK project and the research conducted were funded by The Learning Partnership (TLP), which sponsors WTK nationally.

As a brief backgrounder, six keys to success were identified in the initial study as assisting in creating and maintaining an active partnership project among independent community agencies: 1) the community had already identified early literacy learning as a priority; 2) it involved itself voluntarily in the project because it saw WTK as a potential source of help in addressing the problem identified; 3) the project was treated as a creative partnership among TLP and the local agencies; 4) there was significant scope for local leaders to shape the project to meet the needs of the community as well as the requirements of TLP; 5) there was a strong spirit of collaboration among all the partners, and; 6) collaboration among partners was grounded in trusting relationships that facilitated informal inter-organizational action.

The initial study also concluded that high levels of community participation and commitment generated in the North Bay multi-agency partnerships were the result of an alignment of these six keys. While the existence of committed and capable leadership was clearly identified, authentic, shared, and responsive leadership (Begley, 2001) also played an essential role in the development of all six keys by creating vision, developing widespread understanding and agreement, mobilizing resources, and building relationships. Shared leadership between TLP and participants in the agencies was devoted to a common cause. Furthermore, partnership, trust, collective purpose, and community efficacy resulted in coordinated and widespread collective action and the promotion of early learning as a *shared* endeavour.

Building on the previous study, in 2010 TLP sponsored "Family and Community Engagement Strategy (FACES)" and supported the work of multi-agency projects in three geographically and economically diverse communities in Ontario. The three site-based projects were evaluated over two years and some of the results, including how the six keys to success identified in the earlier study also pertained to these three cases, are presented. (Note: The term "community agency" is used to describe a variety of service providers including: child care; community living; best start network; children's treatment; early years; parent resource; developmental services; public libraries; public health; and district school boards).

Background to the Current Study (Evaluation of FACES)

TLP describes itself as a "*national not-for-profit organization dedicated to championing a strong public education system in Canada through innovative programs, credible*

research, policy initiatives, executive leadership, and public engagement" (http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca/files/download/e12171144a2f686) and the overall goal of FACES was described as follows:

> to develop a coordinated community-based model that will strengthen and extend the Welcome to Kindergarten program's engagement of families in early learning activities. The goal of FACES is to enhance each community's ability to support families and young children during the transition to school. (http://www.tlpcanada.ca/page.aspx?pid=692)

Consistent with this broadly stated goal, each of the three communities involved committed to work with TLP for three years to develop a coordinated, community-based FACES model, one seen as sustainable within the situated context of the community. Thus, supported by TLP, each community had its own FACES coordinator, established its own multi-agency steering committee with two co-chairs, and initiated activity in a number of schools or community hubs.

In forging the partnership between TLP and the three communities, there was agreement that each of the three FACES projects would be evaluated as it developed. The purpose of the evaluation was to tell the stories and celebrate the accomplishments of the three communities, individually and collectively, as they worked toward the FACES goals, with the intention of sharing their experience with other communities interested in establishing their own FACES projects. The goal of the evaluation was not to judge individual community agencies, school boards, schools, educators, or parents, but rather to analyze the impact of FACES processes and activities.

Contextualizing the Research in the Literature

A review of literature pertinent to community development, early learning initiatives involving parents and community, and leadership in multi-agency partnerships assisted in situating the research in context.

In essence, the development of FACES projects involved a process of community building among agencies including schools, parents, and children. Block (2009) cites work by a number of theorists (Alexander, 1979; Bornstein, 2004; Erhard, Jensen, & Zaffron, 2007; Koestenbaum, 1991; McKnight, 1994; Putnan, 2000) on the development

or restoration of community in American life. Block sees community being developed through a process of possibility-focused conversation involving members of the community to develop vision, purpose, and action.

Early literacy and numeracy initiatives, involving parents and input from the broader community, have long been recognized as beneficial to young children in preparation for positive and successful transitions to school (Heath, 1983; Hill, 1989, Elliott-Johns, 1999; Mustard & McCain, 1999, 2002; Bouchard, Bender, Poulin-Mackey, & Letain, 2004; Mustard, McCain, & Shanker, 2007). The current emphasis on early years education in Ontario, including the introduction of full-day Kindergarten, provides a rich and dynamic context for the FACES project.

Ways to build greater collaboration and shared leadership through school-community, multi-agency partnerships are frequently reflected in the practices of school leaders and teachers who are described as demonstrating confidence and the collective capacity to make improvements (Bryk & Schneider, 1996, 2002; Claxton, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Fullan, 2005). Significant to such leadership is the ability to model and facilitate implicit "ground rules" for building effective, collaborative relationships. Barkley (2008) identified respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity as key elements for building effective collaborative relationships. Barkley's elements offer guidance for the successful development of multi-agency partnerships and, in turn, provoke questions that appear to shape, tacitly or explicitly, participants' interactions.

The evaluation of the FACES initiative offered opportunities to pursue our earlier work further, and in greater depth. This was significant because Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) see multi-agency, integrated services for young children and their families rapidly becoming part of the new policy landscape in education. Recent emphasis in the UK on "multi-agency partnerships" (Cheminais, 2009) contributes to and supports the efficacy of combining community and educational resources in the interests of early learning. Pelletier and Corter (2005) pilot tested an early childhood integrated services model that sought to meet the needs of diverse families in the Toronto region. Their findings clearly underscored the need for teachers to foster and sustain partnerships with families in which the school is the hub of the community.

In summary, there is widespread recognition of the importance of early childhood learning and transitions to school in the development of children, and a movement toward multi-agency partnerships that support families in this regard. Since multi-agency partnerships are relatively new in the education landscape, we see it as advantageous to identify potential keys to success.

Methodology and Methods

Research was conducted during the development of the three projects and data from individual interviews and focus groups captured participants' thoughts, feelings, and processes experienced over time. Case study and action research methodologies were combined, and the three communities were each treated as a distinct case. The case study approach is ethnographic, thus building a picture of an emerging culture in each case and across cases (Coles, 1989; Sacks, 1985, 1992, 1995; Stake, 2000). Participatory action research was a fundamental strategy that supported the FACES steering committees in ongoing planning, implementation, and review of their respective FACES projects. Following McNiff's (2000) action research cycle, the study monitored and evaluated new directions taken in each community, providing feedback the communities may use to confirm and adjust plans and future actions.

During the spring of 2011, the evaluation process was developed collaboratively with the three community steering committees and TLP. Two cycles of data collection were planned—the first in the Fall 2011 and the second one a year later. Individual and group interviews were conducted with project coordinators, steering committee co-chairs, and steering committee members from the community agencies including school boards. Where local school-based FACES activities had begun, four or five schools were selected, based on their diversity and willingness to participate, and interviews were conducted with each of the school principals, groups of participating educators, community agency representatives, and parents. Data were analyzed to create a picture of FACES development in each of the three communities, and across the communities. This paper reports on results and conclusions from the inception of the projects to December 2011.

The research continued to build on the case study methodology of the earlier study. However, instead of being conducted after completion of the multi-agency project, the current study worked with all three communities during the development and operationalization of their projects.

Discussion of Results

The results confirm and enrich each of the six keys identified in the earlier study, and a seventh key also emerged: Evidence of Success.

1) Authentic Community Problem

Each of the communities decided to enter into the multi-agency project, having identified an authentic community problem related to the well-being of children and their families, early learning, effective transitions to school, and a problem leaders wished to address together. Specifically, the evaluation supported and also added to the previous study in two ways.

First, we found the way the community framed its problem strongly influenced the specific goals and directions of the partnership in that community. For example, one of the communities was motivated by how to improve its low Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores while another was motivated by how to support its marginalized families. Based on differences in the authentic problems they identified, the projects in these two communities developed along very different lines. The former organized around the provision of school-based FACES sessions for parents and their children, and the latter in the development of community-agency-based "hubs," in which schools were only one of a number of partners.

Second, there was evidence that, despite superficial agreement among the various participants on "what the problem was," there were often multiple, tacitly held interpretations of the problem and how it might best be addressed. It therefore took time and substantial effort, particularly within the steering committees, to identify different interpretations and perspectives among the community partners, and build understanding and agreement as a basis for sustainable commitment and planning for collective action.

The identification of an authentic community problem provided compelling motivation underlying the establishment of multi-agency projects. For example, there were distinct benefits to devoting substantial time and effort to dialogue around different understandings of the problem, thus building common understandings and agreement.

2) Viable Source of Help

Results confirm the conclusion from the previous study that community leaders "bought into" the multi-agency partnership with TLP because they regarded the specific project (in this case FACES) as a potentially significant source of help (e.g., resources, ideas, and/or practices) in addressing the authentic community problem they were experiencing. For example, FACES was perceived by many as a source of help because it was an extension of the already-established WTK program—that is, designed to

enhance transitions to school and the ability of families and community agencies to support those transitions. This study also supported and enhanced our earlier understandings in three ways:

First, the extent to which perceptions of why and how FACES could help were shared within the steering committee had the potential to affect the cohesiveness of the multi-agency partnership and commitment by individuals and groups. Again, there was a tangible need for ongoing dialogue around such questions among the partners (and particularly during planning of activities).

Second, the ways in which the steering committee saw FACES helping to address their authentic problem influenced the goals and directions of the emerging project. For example, when FACES was understood as an extension of WTK, initial action was to provide parents and their children with a number of additional school-based sessions like the WTK session held the previous spring. However, interviews in some communities suggested that, as understandings of FACES developed through ongoing dialogue, actions expanded well beyond those initially chosen.

Third, the extent to which local perceptions of FACES coincided with those of TLP provided learning opportunities for *both* TLP and the partnering community. These opportunities needed to be addressed through dialogue and negotiation at the community level, within TLP as an organization, as well as between these two. Differences in perspective and efforts to resolve them also proved to be valuable sources of learning for TLP, with the potential to re-shape TLP's own understanding of how to promote parent and community engagement in early learning.

Successful projects coalesced around the central organization's initiative (in this case, TLP's FACES) because key leaders saw the initiative as a probable way to address an authentic problem identified by the community. The degree to which this perception was shared among participants could directly affect cohesiveness of the project.

3) Creative Partnerships

As in the previous study, TLP intended the FACES projects to be creative partnerships rather than a traditional top-down adoption and implementation model. Thus, there was an expectation that FACES would meld TLP goals and resources with local goals and resources to create something that "worked" and was sustainable within the community itself. Steering committees were thus established in each community to

shape projects and carry them forward. Ongoing project development was facilitated by dialogue across projects and with TLP itself during regularly scheduled meetings of TLP staff with project coordinators.

The current study enhanced the results of the first in two ways. First, the boundaries set by the central sponsoring agency (TLP) might affect local project development. For example, if boundaries are too tight, there may not be enough room for local development; however, if boundaries are too loose, the broader range of possibilities may increase the complexity of local decision-making and inhibit or delay action. The definition of FACES and the goals set by TLP allowed for wide-ranging project development; each of the communities, and TLP, continue to work towards increased understanding of FACES, and how it relates to particular contexts.

Second, as enhanced understandings of the boundaries of FACES were cultivated, decisions and actions evolved. For example, working from their initial understanding of FACES as an extension of WTK, some communities began by supporting schools to provide two or more FACES meetings each year in addition to their earlier WTK meetings. As dialogue about FACES expanded, communities also began to think about creating additional activities and resources.

Over time, steering committee dialogue around the meaning and scope of FACES resulted in a much clearer focus on what FACES might contribute to their work. Participants acknowledged that FACES became a vehicle for mobilizing community responses to perceived needs.

The relationship between the central organization (TLP) and local partners provided substantial scope for knowledge creation (Hannay, Wideman, & Seller, 2007): Each project meshed the central organization's goals and resources with local goals and resources to create something that worked within the community itself. By association, boundaries set for the projects by the central organization affected local project development. Situations may occur where boundaries are clarified as projects develop, resulting in further evolution of project decisions and actions both centrally and locally.

4) Dedicated Local Leadership

As in the previous study, participants indicated that the dedication and ability of local leaders was critical to moving projects forward, while the national TLP leaders tended to act in a supportive and advisory role. The nature of strong local leadership clearly demonstrated a direct response to the pressing community problem, including

the need to identify collaborative goals that led to collective action in partnerships among independent agencies.

We found that leadership took different forms, being situation dependent in each community, and it remains to be seen how different leadership styles will influence the sustainability of FACES initiatives involving independent partnering organizations over time. Leadership was exercised within collaborative contexts that enabled local leaders to negotiate with TLP how their projects could be shaped to meet community needs. Complex and multiple responsibilities within contemporary leadership roles often require clarification and support, and can present challenges if not communicated effectively. However, skillful leaders found ways to navigate such challenges successfully, bridging their individual efforts with partnerships that embraced the expertise and interests of their colleagues and available resources.

Project coordinators played a key role in the development of FACES in each community. They brought with them quite different qualifications and backgrounds (e.g., one was also executive director of one of the community agencies; the other two were independents—one a retired school principal and the other having no previous employment with any of the partners). This rich array of leadership experience clearly shaped and supported the three projects as unique entities within the broadly defined goals of FACES.

While the coordinators' role took a variety of forms in each community, the role tended to demonstrate vision, organizational skills, the ability to mobilize others, and effective communication. Participants frequently mentioned the critical role of the coordinator and attributed their continued involvement in FACES directly to the coordinator's leadership. Success was consistently attributed to the skills and knowledge of the project coordinators—specifically, their ability to "pull it all together," and to motivate the involvement of others.

The importance of *shared* leadership in steering committees that included diverse and independent community agencies was consistently highlighted. As researchers, this became more evident as we participated in steering committee meetings, FACES events, and interviews. A "nesting" of various leadership/support roles seems inevitable when, for example, early childhood educators, health professionals, social workers, regional managers, and school board personnel are engaged in vibrant discussions as members of a relatively large committee with a clear, common focus.

Furthermore, strong local leadership combined with collaborative skills and shared across steering committees contributed to promoting and sustaining the developing work in each community. Individual committee members were already well-respected members of the specific agencies with which they worked; thus they were also powerful catalysts for promoting multi-agency partnerships related to FACES. Diverse voices at the table enabled and informed multi-faceted discussion and opportunities to learn from each other about the different sectors, each with its own specific interests and priorities but collaborating for the common good of the community.

5) A Spirit of Collaboration, Generosity, and Support

Participants noted a spirit of collaboration, generosity, and support for the FACES projects across all the various participating agencies. This spirit made possible collective action for a common purpose as leaders made available existing organizational structures and resources to support the project. Examples of effective collaboration mentioned by participants included: community agencies making representatives available for steering committee work and to plan/lead FACES sessions for parents; internal collaboration among school administrators and educators to organize and host local FACES sessions; and the availability of independent guest presenters from the community for FACES events.

While levels of collaboration varied from agency to agency and were specific to the goals of the individual projects, it is important to note that project activities also made collaborative, community-partnership processes (Furman, 2004) visible to the community. Visible collaboration was consistently cited as highly significant because agencies (including schools) were seen as working together to demonstrate shared support for parental engagement in early learning.

As FACES projects developed, data collection provided rich insights into how the steering committees evolved as teams. This evolution and the accompanying growth in relationships among members became a central characteristic of the work. For example, each committee comprised a diverse group of individuals representing a range of independent community partners, many with their own academic and professional history, qualifications, priorities, knowledge, and expertise. As partnerships progressed, participants described emerging abilities to understand and appreciate each other's organization, roles, and ways of thinking, and their growing comfort in constructively challenging one another's assumptions and thinking to build broader consensus.

Members described their growing commitment to participating in the projects and appreciation for the emerging synergy in working with others. Accomplishments of project coordinators, steering committee co-chairs, and steering committee members included creating a cohesive, open, and reflective atmosphere conducive to reaching agreement among diverse, voluntary partners on common goals and collective action to achieve them.

A key accomplishment in each community was the gradual development of closer working relationships between school boards and the other community agencies. Surfacing and exploring this issue, either explicitly or tacitly, was reflected in the dialogue and considered a significant accomplishment—although further work needs to be done to draw a larger number of partners in each community into the projects.

Variations in FACES project goals and actions were inevitably derived in part from the approach taken to collective efforts to promote engagement in early learning, and were accompanied by different challenges. For example, school-focused projects had the challenge of fully developing the role of other community agencies; on the other hand, projects that were more community focused had the challenge of developing the role of the schools.

Collective action among participating agencies was facilitated by a spirit of collaboration, generosity, and support that, in turn, assisted in making existing organizational structures and resources readily available to the projects. Inter-agency collaboration was also strengthened as mutual understanding and appreciation developed. The ability to draw participating school boards into closer alliance with other community agencies working with young children was seen as a major accomplishment of the steering committees, and active participation by multiple agencies in project events (e.g., local FACES sessions with parents, children, and educators) made multi-agency partnerships increasingly visible to the public.

6) A Network of Trusting Relationships

Participants noted that collaboration was achieved through informal actions grounded in trusting relationships among individuals rather than on formal negotiations, contracts, and checklists among agencies. Trusting relationships among individuals and agencies contributed to higher levels of informal collective action among agencies at both steering committee and local school levels. There was increased evidence of shared ownership for FACES within the wider community (educators, community

agency personnel, and parents), fuller understanding of FACES, and identification and implementation of engagement strategies for young children and their families.

Participants noted that trust thrived as participants collaborated in common cause. Many comments in interview data indicated that work related to FACES had assisted in raising awareness of the efficacy of individuals from multiple agencies working together as community partners. As one participant stated:

We've been used to working in silos but it feels like we're coming to a place… of seeing the "bigger picture"… It's not about who we are and whom we represent, as much as how we may be responsive? How do we best use the collective resources that we currently have?

As in any activity involving a school, the principal's support was recognized as vital to the success of FACES and the value of a visibly supportive principal, who also actively contributes to FACES in collaboration with representatives of other community agencies, cannot be underestimated. In both research studies it was noted that principals facilitated the availability of school resources, arranged release time for teachers, and mobilized educators and community partners to operationalize plans within the schools.

One challenge identified over and again in interviews was the dissatisfaction with frequent turnover of staff within various agencies, including school boards, and the detrimental effect of this on building and maintaining trust, understanding, and agreement. To counteract the impact of staff turnover, dialogue about project values, goals, and actions must be ongoing. Discourse, reflecting implicit "ground rules" for building effective, collaborative relationships, seems to be adopted (whether formally or informally) as a way of working with many different colleagues (Barkley, 2008). In our experience, the nature of discussions at the steering committee table reflected acknowledgement of key elements essential to day-to-day social exchanges in a diverse community of collaborative co-workers.

Evidence in all three projects suggested the emerging recognition and articulation of a "continuum of care" for children and their families based on mutual trust, and the pursuit of viable approaches to engaging multi-agency partners in meaningful ("authentic") ways. One participant said:

It's not just (about) community partners and schools; it really is about us creating a continuum of care and engagement for families from newborn—the engagement of our schools boards, our health units, our specialized services, and our umbrella agencies

with regard to child care and serving families with any kind of need. It includes the building of trust and the trust transfer between community partners, schools, health units, and (others).

Inter-agency collaborations are often grounded in trusting relationships among individuals. Initially, a multi-agency project may build upon relationships that bridge the agencies and pre-date the project itself. However, trust becomes extended and enhanced as project participants collaborate in common cause and participants are drawn beyond their "silos" into an emerging continuum of care for children.

7) Evidence of Success

As one of the keys to success in multi-agency partnerships, evidence of success was somewhat overlooked in the earlier North Bay study (Wideman & Campbell, 2006). The research conducted after the WTK project had been completed and success, in terms of community commitment and participation, was a given. However, it became apparent in the current study that participants in multi-agency partnerships need to see ongoing evidence that their efforts are resulting in movement toward the goals to which they are committed. This supports what Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2009) term participants' belief in attainment—that is, the faith that one's efforts will bring success, without which there is little motivation for collective action toward agreed-upon goals.

Participants saw developments within the steering committees as ongoing evidence of success because those developments laid the foundation for FACES planning and outreach action. Enhancing trust-based, collaborative relationships among independent partners, developing common goals and undertaking collective action, creating processes for actualizing FACES in the communities, and learning from the results of their work have all proven to be fundamental to the FACES projects. Steering committees were able to establish collaborative inquiries into issues affecting parental and community engagement that went beyond talk, to include collective action to address the needs of each community. For example, these inquiries recognized the importance of planning for inclusion of non-traditional families, extended families, new Canadian families, Aboriginal families, marginalized families, economically disadvantaged families, and families of children with learning challenges.

FACES projects resulted in participants moving beyond their individual roles and contexts, toward greater knowledge of, and appreciation for, colleagues in other agencies. Participants themselves reported this development as evidence of success

(Block, 2009). Bringing FACES participants together in professional learning sessions, to focus on common goals, plan together, and to co-lead events, was also extremely successful in facilitating ongoing collaboration. Effective professional learning events included learning about EDI scores and their implications for community needs; learning about other community agencies and programs; modeling effective leadership; learning from each other; obtaining information about funding and resources; sharing planning templates and exemplars for FACES sessions; and co-planning FACES sessions.

There was ample evidence the efforts that began in the steering committees were extending into the wider communities. It also became evident that FACES sessions were providing a venue for families to become more aware of community resources available to them. As a result, FACES was increasingly regarded as beginning to provide a service in terms of easing access to community support.

Participants increasingly felt that FACES was beginning to provide effective parental education in strategies for supporting their children's early learning.

Over time, accomplishments of the steering committees included being able to grapple with a variety of endemic challenges affecting FACES. These included how to address staff time constraints and the use of funding, and how to engage more families in their children's early education. A continual challenge was how to attract greater numbers of parents to FACES sessions. Various schools tried a number of ways to support family attendance, and there did not seem to be one "magic" formula for success: Busy families needed flexible options to maximize their attendance. Participants mentioned a number of strategies mobilized to attract parents including: providing information about FACES sessions through a variety of community agencies; scheduling sessions at a variety of times; repeating sessions; advertising compelling topics; providing child care during FACES sessions; continuing to create opportunities for parents and their children to experience activities together; and providing multiple invitations to parents in print, via telephone, and through personal contact. One parent said, "*Mostly I came because the teachers made a point of asking me. Once you say you're going to do something, you have to do it and I would've felt bad if I hadn't come*."

Communities discussed the need to identify variables and appropriate criteria for measuring the impact of their work in the community over the duration of the projects. For example, one participant said, "*At this stage, we can't define success solely in terms of how many parents attend a FACES event because schools all begin in different places in terms of parental engagement*." FACES was clearly recognized as attempting to address complex and long-standing problems, problems which may well take significant time

and effort to address in any one community. At the same time, it was recognized that building parental engagement with schools and other agencies in their children's early learning is a complex problem that may take significant time to address optimally.

Conclusions

Based on the results from the original study examining the North Bay model and the current study of three additional site-based multi-agency partnership projects, we have confirmed and enhanced our understanding of six keys to the success of multi-agency partnerships and added a seventh—evidence of success. Every one of the seven keys plays a vital role in pulling together a network of central (in this case TLP) and independent community agencies to develop and sustain effective collective action by the partners towards effective transitions to school for young children and their families. We believe that attending to the seven keys can assist authentic leaders to assess and strengthen projects as they develop. To recap, the seven keys are:

1. Identifying a common problem as an authentic community priority;
2. Recognizing a particular program or strategy (in this case, WTK or FACES) as a potential source of help to address the priority;
3. Treating the resulting project as a creative, knowledge-creation exercise; involving a central organization (in this case TLP) and community agencies as partners;
4. Ensuring significant scope for dedicated local leadership;
5. Enhancing a spirit of collaboration, generosity, and support for the project among the community agencies including school boards;
6. Enhancing trusting relationships that facilitate flexible and informal inter-agency action;
7. Identifying and celebrating ongoing evidence of success as the project develops.

Observations of the three multi-agency partnerships as they developed confirmed and enhanced two understandings initially identified in the North Bay study. First, we continue to think that while the existence of committed local leadership is identified as one of the seven keys, the quality of leadership emanating from the collaboration between TLP and local agencies played an essential role in the development of all seven keys. In North Bay, it was found that authentic leadership (Begley, 2001)—inclusive, creative, visionary, and responsive to circumstances—was shared among allies devoted

to a common cause. In the three FACES projects, leadership took different forms (from more directive to more facilitative), being situation dependent in each community. It remains to be seen how different leadership styles will influence the sustainability of projects over time. However, there is substantial evidence that leadership that is shared, builds relationships, creates vision, develops widespread understanding and agreement, and mobilizes resources, contributes to sustainability because it responds to the inherent independence of the partnering organizations and their voluntary participation. Leadership of projects involving a number of independent, voluntarily participating organizations is regarded as requiring a skill set more akin to volunteer co-ordination across agencies than line management within a single agency. Thus, for example, building common understandings and agreement through dialogue appears fundamental to engaging in collective action and preventing partners from "falling away" over time. As one leader explained, "*We think that every decision must be made by consensus because it is the only way to ensure agency buy-in and make the FACES project sustainable in the long run*."

Second, development of the three FACES projects confirmed and enhanced our conclusion that, in multi-agency partnerships, it is the quality of relationships that makes flexible and effective collaborative action possible. This echoes the conclusion of Couture, Delong, and Wideman (1999) who wrote:

> For us the key factor is the trust relationship among the project leaders that enables them to identify and resolve issues that are crucial to the success of the partnership… issues of power and voice are far more likely to be resolved positively within the context of strong collaborative relationships. (p. 9)

We would go further and suggest that the development of relational trust needs to be a priority at all levels of a project because it is a fundamental basis for dialogue that moves participants beyond their "silos" and into a space where multi-agency collaboration is not only possible but can also thrive (Block, 2009). Relational trust has been described as the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance education and welfare of students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 45)—and this notion resonated in interview data about the development of working relationships in the steering committees and among schools and community agencies. Bryk and Schneider (2002) identified respect, competence, personal regard, and integrity as critical elements of trust and argued that, when social trust is part of the everyday discourse among school and community partners, it offers a key resource for informing and changing practice. Bryk and Schneider's conclusions about relationships in school communities also reflect our experiences of observing the development of multi-agency partnerships:

> An interrelated set of mutual dependencies are embedded within the social exchanges in any (school) community. Regardless of how much formal power any given role has…. All participants remain dependent on others to achieve desired outcomes and feel empowered by their efforts. (p. 41)

In short, continuing to embed the discourse of relational trust in the ongoing development of energetic, collaborative relationships among the various community partners proved essential to further enhancing efforts in all three communities.

Implications

Our experience with the three communities supported an earlier assertion (Campbell, Elliott-Johns, & Wideman, 2010) that multi-agency projects demand the use of synergistic and generally collaborative approaches to what Cheminais (2009) called the "joint planning and delivery of co-ordinated services" (p. 4). Consequently, the leadership approach to such projects certainly must have more to do with partnership, alliance, and an ethic of community (Furman, 2004) than with rank and hierarchy (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Corter, Patel, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2008). Furthermore, because they involve autonomous organizations, projects cannot be based effectively on a technical-rational epistemology (Schon, 1983) involving hierarchical structures and adoption/implementation models. The current study may contribute to ongoing efforts to address top-down/bottom-up tensions through improved knowledge of the phenomenology of educational change (Fullan, 2000, 2005; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). As Campbell, Elliott-Johns, and Wideman stated in 2010:

> The tension between top-down and bottom-up changes may be addressed when central authorities support local initiatives to develop creative solutions to shared problems. For such a process to work, central leaders need to take a partnership stance and, within broadly stated expectations, honour local leadership, collaboration, and decision-making. (p. 7)

One critical contribution of FACES was the provision of support for communities to engage in dialogue regarding community support for early learning. In writing about the creation of community, Block (2009) emphasizes the critical role conversation plays in creating a future different from the past—conversation in which leaders use their social capital—"the quality of the relationships and cohesion that exists among its citizens" (p. 5) "to transform the isolation and self-interest within our communities into connectedness and caring for the whole" (p. 1).

We believe the seven keys to success described are characteristic of effective approaches to multi-agency partnerships for early learning and successful transitions to school. Our work also supports the assertions of Corter et al. (2008) that because each community is unique, multi-agency partnerships in those communities must be unique as well, and, therefore, that the development of each project must be treated as an opportunity for knowledge creation (Hannay, Wideman, & Seller, 2007). One-size-fits-all approaches to educational change are inadequate (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009) and highly effective, authentic, and responsive leaders are needed, leaders who can bring all partners together to create solutions in context.

As Cheminais indicated (2009), and as a direct result of the work reported here, we believe there is a pressing need for more comprehensive understandings of relationship building in multi-agency collaboration, and more effective community partnerships that support early learning. The "Seven Keys to Success" may also provide further insight and inspiration for other communities as they too address issues and challenges in the education of young children and their families.

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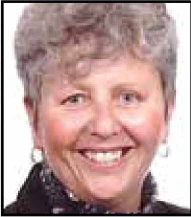

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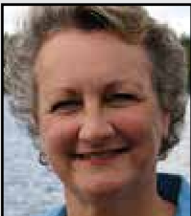

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"School Readiness": The Struggle for Complexity

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the challenge of engaging critically with dominant discourses of "readiness" in early childhood education. Drawing on the current context of early childhood education in England, this paper argues that dominant discourses of "readiness" are reliant on an underlying logic of mechanistic causality that acts to reduce complexity and marginalize difference and diversity. Calling for a radical reconceptualization of "readiness," experiences from practice are weaved throughout this critical discussion, highlighting the impact of dominant discourses of "readiness" in situated practice and the challenges that can be faced by engaging critically with this discourse.

Introduction

For many years debates concerning early childhood education have had a particular interest in notions of "readiness." The "Starting Strong" reports, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001, 2006, 2012), identified contrasting international trends in the conceptualization of "readiness" within educational debates, influenced broadly by either a "social pedagogy tradition" or a "pre-primary" approach to early education. Social pedagogy approaches were found most commonly within Nordic and Central European countries, whereas pre-primary approaches were identified within countries such as Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States (OECD, 2006). Pre-primary approaches were broadly characterized by a focus on the "knowledge and skills useful for school, viz., literacy, math and scientific thinking" (OECD, 2006, p. 61). Also recognized was a tendency for this approach to focus on a standards-based model of education, referencing particular child outcomes as a measure of what

children should know and be able to do as a result of their participation in early childhood education.

Moss (2012, 2013) has linked pre-primary approaches with a dominant discourse of "readiness" that conceptualizes early childhood education and care as a preparatory phase, readying children for the specific demands of compulsory education. Moss identifies England as an active example of this dominant "readiness" discourse, highlighting the prominence of "readiness" within education policy and decision-making. He cautions that the status of this dominant discourse is problematic, being underpinned by conservative views of the child, education, learning, and knowledge, that are taken for granted within the context of compulsory school education and pushed down into early childhood education policy and practice. Within this article it is argued that dominant conceptualizations of "readiness" are detrimental for some children, acting to systematically reduce complexity in the way that their learning and development is understood and valued within early childhood settings. Linking this critique to Deleuzian notions of "becoming" (Stagoll, 2005a) this article proposes an alternative way of thinking about "readiness" in early childhood education, that works against the systematic complexity reduction (Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Gustafson, 2010) of currently dominant discourses, and strives for understandings of "readiness" that recognize difference and diversity as positive aspects of educational communities.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of the English policy context for early childhood education, leading to a discussion of the conceptualization of "readiness" within this political policy context. The second part engages with dominant notions of "readiness" as mechanisms of complexity reduction and discusses the potential of reconceptualizing "readiness" as a concept of "becoming." This critical discussion and reconceptualization is emergent from the early phases of my doctoral work which focuses on challenging and reconceptualizing dominant discourses of "readiness" in early childhood education in England. Reflections from my own professional practice as an early childhood teacher are woven into the text, in the hope that they may resonate with others, providing a stimulus for the critical consideration of concepts and practices of "readiness" and of the challenges faced in early childhood education.

This paper concludes by highlighting the need for research and critical thinking that engages with "readiness" at both a conceptual level, challenging the theoretical ground on which dominant understandings are based, and also exploring the possibilities for alternative understandings of "readiness" which might have an impact on policy and practice and on the day-to-day experiences of early childhood communities.

The English Policy Context

Early childhood education in England has recently undergone a process of review and transformation. The current iteration of policy guidance, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2012), encompasses official standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to the age of five. The EYFS encompasses early childhood education throughout preschool and the first (Reception) year of primary school. As a statutory framework, the EYFS "sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe" (p. 2). The position accorded to "readiness" as an outcome of the EYFS is explicit, stating that, "It [the EYFS] promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life" (p. 2). Crucially, the statutory framework specifies that planning, provision, and assessment *must* be built around seven particular areas of learning and development and that all children *must* be guided towards the achievement of 17 "Early Learning Goals" (ELGs)—statements that detail the knowledge, skills, and understanding that children should have acquired by the end of the EYFS.

In addition, a series of non-statutory materials (Early Education, 2012; DfE, 2013) are available to support the ongoing formative assessment of children's progress towards the ELGs in all seven areas of Learning and Development. These materials are intended to be used "throughout the early years as a guide to making best-fit judgments about whether a child is showing typical development for their age, may be at risk of delay or is ahead for their age" (DfE, 2013, p. 3). Each aspect of learning and development is broken down into a "typical range of development," denoted by a series of six overlapping age/stage bands leading to the ELG in each area. At the end of the EYFS each child's progress and "readiness" for the next stage of education is assessed against the ELGs as part of the statutory EYFS Profile (Standards and Testing Agency, 2013). This summative assessment judges whether children are considered to be meeting, exceeding, or not yet reaching expected levels of learning and development (DfE, 2012), and therefore whether they are considered "ready" for more formal learning in Key Stage 1.

Readiness in the EYFS

Meisels (1999) highlights the complexity of characterizing "readiness," identifying four dominant conceptions: idealist/nativist; empiricist/environmental; social constructionist; and interactionist. Dominant within the EYFS are understandings based on idealist/nativist and empiricist/environmental conceptions. An idealist/nativist frame understands "readiness" as a phenomenon that occurs within the child, dependent on inherent, maturational processes. With strong links to concepts of "readiness for learning" (Kagan, 2007), "readiness" in this context relates to developmental progression within which children are considered "ready" to undertake specific learning once they have acquired particular developmental capacities. This focus on maturational development is evident in the construction of pedagogical progression advocated by the EYFS, which states that, "As children grow older, and as their development allows, it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults, to help children prepare for more formal learning, ready for Year 1" (DfE, 2012, p. 6). This expected progression assumes that development precedes and determines learning and that a child's level of maturational development determines what they are "ready" to learn and how they are "ready" to learn it. This maturational concept of "readiness" is also evident within the structuring of the EYFS support materials and their use of norm-referenced developmental statements to suggest a "typical" trajectory towards the ELGs. It is expected that whilst children's developmental rates of progress will differ they will follow a more-or-less typical trajectory, deviation from which may be an indication of deficit in the child.

In contrast to this idealist/nativist frame there is evidence of "readiness" as an empiricist/environmental concept (Meisels, 1999). Within this frame, "readiness" is emphasized as an apparatus that provides children with the skills, knowledge, and experiences they are considered to need to be ready for formal schooling (Brown, 2010). This is evident within statements of purpose in relation to the EYFS framework including: that it "defines what providers must do (…) to promote the learning and development of all children in their care, and to ensure they are ready for school" (DfE, 2012, p. 4) [emphasis added]; and, in relation to the ELGs, that they "summarise the knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the reception year" (p. 4). In contrast to the nativist focus on "readiness for learning" (Kagan, 2007; Whitebread and Bingham, 2011), this environmental model can be related to a concept of "readiness for school." Kagan (2007) identifies this as a more "finite" construct than that of the developmentally driven "readiness to learn." It can be considered a more "concrete" form of "readiness," focusing on external influences and observable

evidence of learning and development. The desired end of this form of "readiness" is the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills, and experiences that are explicitly "taught" to children through interaction with their environment. The role of the adult in fostering this form of "readiness" is to "guide the development of children's capabilities" (DfE, 2012, p. 4) … "through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity" (p. 6). Children's engagement with their social and physical environment is therefore expected to underpin the learning and development of specific key skills and capacities needed to become "ready for school."

The complexity of "readiness" within the EYFS means that these contrasting conceptions do not operate in isolation. They interact, contradict, and impact upon each other, contributing to understandings and interpretations of "readiness" in practice. These conceptions are also among a number of different understandings and interpretations of "readiness" in the context of early childhood education practice. It is argued here, however, that these are the most dominant contemporary influences on "readiness" as a policy discourse and therefore have particular significance for the way in which "readiness" currently is understood and enacted within mainstream early childhood settings, as the following reflection indicates.

Reflection 1

At the time I was the local nursery teacher and it was the beginning of the academic year. I was meeting with the local school to discuss their current intake of Reception children. I remember feeling frustrated as children were talked about as points on a scale, categorized into groups according to age/stage bands. Individual children's successes and challenges were discussed only in terms of the pre-determined skills, attributes, and goals detailed in the EYFS and specifically the Early Learning Goals. Particularly frustrating was the apparent lack of interest in the individuality of the children themselves. A colleague of mine, in response to concerns over a child's ability to sit still and concentrate for the duration of a teacher-led session, made reference to documentation from his time in nursery, showing him sustaining focus for periods of over one hour. The response was that this level of focus was only within activities he had chosen and developed himself, and he now needed to learn to behave appropriately in "classroom situations." Discussion continued in this vein and I felt that my practice as a nursery teacher was being called into question, being criticized for not drilling children in how to sit still and keep quiet, ready for school-based learning. I remember wondering where the space was for individual children's passions and creativity, for teaching strategies that focused on the complexity the children themselves brought to the school environment, as opposed to how they could be brought to conform to expected and predicted identities and characteristics. It seemed that the complexity and difference that

children brought to the school environment was being silenced by the traditional practices and discourses of the school culture, being systematically suppressed and channelled along pathways that could only ever lead to a narrow and limited form of success, or else failure.

A Political Rhetoric of "Readiness"

The past few years in England have seen significant government concern over children's "readiness" to start compulsory schooling. This concern has been particularly evident within political discourse and decision-making emanating from speeches and government commissioned reports. In a speech made in 2011, the English Secretary of State for Education declared that, as a nation, "we need to make sure that children arrive in school ready to learn" (Gove, 2011). The apparently escalating political anxiety over children's "readiness for school" and the related concept of "readiness to learn," was clearly demonstrated through Gove's concern that, on starting school, "…a growing number of children cannot form letters or even hold a pencil. Many cannot sit still and listen. Many can scarcely communicate orally, let alone form a question" (Gove, 2011). Gove alludes here to a concern over the kind of "readiness for school" discourse described above, within which children are considered to be emerging out of the EYFS without the knowledge and skills considered necessary to participate successfully in a school environment. The outcome of this escalating political anxiety has been identified as leading to increasing intervention by government in early childhood education and care (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011). Since 2010, the English government has commissioned a series of "evidence-based" reports focusing on the importance of the early years in preparing children to be successful in later life (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011). In response to the Government's interpretation and use of the recommendations of these reports, there has been mounting tension among the English early childhood sector that an increasing focus on a specific notion of "readiness," as a normative developmental goal and the acquisition of particular knowledge and skills, is leading to children being measured against "a 'deficit model', a set of inappropriate, one-size-fits-all standards of 'readiness' for school" (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011, p. 1).

These concerns are connected with what the OECD (2001, 2006) and Moss (2012, 2013) describe as "schoolification." The 2001 OECD Starting Strong Report warned of "a risk of downward pressure from a school-based agenda to teach specific skills and knowledge in early years" (p. 41). The 2006 OECD Report built on this concern highlighting that the "readiness for school" discourse dominant in many countries was attractive as it held out "the promise to education ministries of children entering primary school already prepared to read and write, and being able to conform to normal classroom procedures" (p. 63). In England, this "school-based agenda" has been strongly focused

on the raising of standards and outcomes for children at later points during their school careers, and this downward pressure has been critiqued as bringing inappropriate practice into early childhood education, subjecting children's formative experiences to a "conservative and impoverished form of education" (Moss, 2012, p. 15).

It is important to note, however, that whilst "schoolification" may have connotations of "taking over early childhood institutions in a colonising manner" (OECD, 2006, p. 62), this has not necessarily been the explicit intention of education ministries and teachers, who in many countries have been "strong advocates of learner-centred education and active learning methods" (p. 62). It is my contention in this paper however, that whether or not "schoolification" is an explicit intention of governments and policy makers, its effects are evident within current policy frameworks, and for some children, this is having a detrimental impact on their early childhood experiences.

Reflection 2

For some children starting school is a positive experience. For others, however, the transition is not so smooth. Toby (pseudonym) had not always had an easy time at nursery and relied heavily on the relationships he had built with key people. He had attended nursery full time for many years and routines and experiences had been adapted in order to provide an environment within which he could know success. His transition to school had been carefully planned with his new teacher, however I was anxious about how he would take to this new environment and to the increased structure and different expectations. Through discussions with his new class teacher I was acutely aware of her concern that it would be significantly more difficult to adapt the traditional routines and expectations of the school environment than it was in nursery. She was concerned over the much lower ratio of adults to children and worried that he would struggle with the culture of whole class participation and the increased proportion of time he would be expected to participate in adult-led activities, over which he would have little or no control. I remember talking to his class teacher after Toby had been in school for a few months. She emotionally told me that he was now attending school part time, that it had been decided that he was not "ready" for full-time attendance. She told me about her feeling of failure that she could not provide an environment that supported him, but that the expectations on her, on how she would perform as a teacher, would not allow for her to make the adjustments she felt she needed to. She told me of the pressure to deliver whole class literacy and numeracy sessions and the expectation that all children participate. She told me of her struggle to support this child under the very great expectations of the school culture and shared her concern that she could not see, in this environment, how this child could ever be successful. At four years old, in this academic world, he was already a failure!

Mechanisms of Complexity Reduction

Among the most detrimental effects of this "schoolified" discourse of "readiness" is its operation within early childhood contexts as a mechanism of complexity reduction. Lenz Taguchi (2010) suggests that policy makers tend to look for general structures and one-dimensional standards for practices that would seem to provide consistent and equal quality for all by treating and evaluating everyone by the same universal, comparable, and centralized standards. Biesta (2010) states that one of the most prevalent ways in which complexity is reduced within educational contexts is through assessment practices that decide which outcomes of learning count. In the context of the EYFS, this complexity reduction can be linked with a dominant discourse of "readiness." Understanding the ELGs as summarizing "the knowledge, skills and understanding that all young children should have gained by the end of the Reception Year" (DfE, 2012, p. 4), it can be interpreted that these goals act to validate the learning and development trajectories that are officially considered to be important in terms of children's "readiness" for Year 1. This validation becomes problematic since by selecting certain desirable characteristics of "readiness" in relation to learning and development, the ELGs, by definition, act to invalidate and exclude other characteristics that may be considered, in this policy context, irrelevant or less desirable in terms of "readiness" in a school environment.

The EYFS is a particularly interesting example of the type of complexity reduction discussed by Lenz Taguchi (2010) and Biesta (2010). Among its overarching principles, the EYFS states a belief that "every child is a **unique child**, who is constantly learning" (DfE, 2012, p. 3) [emphasis original]. As Biesta (2010) identifies however, if it is granted that learning is a ubiquitous phenomenon in which children are continuously engaged, then the use of assessment processes that make reference to specific goals and outcomes can be seen as a very specific way to channel or tame that learning. This notion of "taming" is also explored by Olsson (2009) who states that a lot of effort is put into the "taming" of children's subjectivities through processes of "predicting, controlling, supervising and evaluating according to predetermined standards" (p. 6). These act to fix representations of "readiness" and do not allow room for movement or flexibility in terms how "readiness" is understood in the context of early childhood education. "Readiness" is conceptualized as part of a linear hierarchy within which children move progressively toward a threshold of "readiness" which, once passed, leads to a higher level of learning and development. The kind of logic that underpins this hierarchical notion of "readiness" can be understood through the metaphor of the tree, assuming a mechanistically linear structure within which learning and development work through fixed and deterministic relationships of cause and effect. Within this aborescent schema

(Stagoll, 2005b) the ordering of progression is strictly hierarchical, with each element, or developmental outcome, fixed in its final position according to a superior concept (Stagoll, 2005b) or understanding of "readiness." As the logic of this schema does not permit movement that cuts across or diverges from the hierarchy of learning and development, it acts to reduce the number of officially valued outcomes and trajectories to those represented within statutory assessment mechanisms. Space for outcomes that may be different, unexpected, and unpredictable risk becoming squeezed out of such a reductionist framework and the conservative educational climate that produced it.

This reduction of complexity is recognized by Moss (2013) who claims that current systems of early childhood education in England are aligned with "a dominant narrative of normativity and performativity in which the purpose of education is conformity to predetermined performance criteria" (p. 5). It is argued here that such systems act to foster a hierarchical concept of "readiness" that assumes, not only that early childhood must serve the needs of subsequent stages of education, but also that practices and pedagogies are only of value in relation to how "effectively" they achieve specific goals and outcomes for all children. Ball (2003) suggests that central to the functioning of this type of performative regime is the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures and categories of judgment. He also suggests that the operation of performative technologies, such as curriculum frameworks and assessment procedures, are instrumental in reducing complexity within educational environments. He states that complex organizations, such as schools, are multifaceted and diverse and that within a performative regime it is likely that the choice of what is to be privileged and cultivated will be informed and driven by priorities and constraints set by the policy environment. Within an environment that claims to believe that "every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential" (DfE, 2012, p. 2), it is ironic that this potential is measured according to such fixed goals and outcomes, that effectively position some children as falling perpetually short of where their potential for learning and development is considered to be. Lenz Taguchi (2010) alludes to this paradoxical trend in early childhood education, stating that the more the complexity of early childhood settings increases, through a "push for increased inclusion of children and families with diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, social and economic backgrounds" (p. 14), the greater the desire seems to be for processes of reduction and increased control that risk shutting out the very inclusion, equality and social justice they aim to achieve. She suggests that such a hierarchical model of education will always begin by defining the outcomes upon which educational practice is to be built, starting with what is to be achieved and assessed. Based on such understandings, the effectiveness of pedagogical practices can only be understood as corresponding to the outputs they generate and their accordance with prescribed standards and

outcomes. The logic of this system therefore rests upon an ontological certainty about the value of particular aspects of knowledge and modes of expression and their position within a fixed hierarchy of knowledge.

Crucially, it is not just the assessment act itself that reduces complexity in this context. The recursive process of "planning, observation and assessment" that is recommended within the EYFS support materials (Early Education, 2012) embeds the effects of complexity reduction throughout the system as a whole. Biesta (2010) describes this effect as the "anticipation of assessment" (p. 9), which in relation to the EYFS means that early childhood educators, in the process of planning and evaluating their support of children's learning and development, will themselves "select certain actions and not others in anticipation of the intervention of assessment later on" (p. 9). Complexity is therefore not only reduced for the ways in which children's learning and development is understood and valued, but also for the experiences that are offered to children within early years learning environments.

Mechanistic Causality

As an early childhood teacher I have often experienced a struggle between meeting the professional demands of an outcome-driven and assessment-led curriculum, influenced by particular dominant discourses of "readiness," and finding space for the complexity of children's learning and development to emerge and be valued within a wider concept of "readiness" that is cognizant with such complexity. A significant contributory factor within this struggle has been the underlying logic that informs dominant, policy-based notions of "readiness." This logic can be referred to as a form of "mechanistic causality" that works according to an aborescent schema (Stagoll, 2005b), the effect of which is an education system that is considered to operate close to a state of equilibrium, within which trajectories between inputs and outputs are considered to work through stable and deterministic mechanisms (Biesta, 2010). Specific pedagogical inputs and early intervention strategies are seen as technical foci, the application of which should bring about specific learning and development outcomes for all children. The child, therefore, becomes the effect of such disciplinary mechanisms (Simons & Olssen, 2010), with anomalies being explained by recourse to an idealist/nativist notion of developmental deficit within the child. This reductionist approach fosters a hierarchical understanding of the value of certain outcomes in relation to specific inputs. In relation to "readiness," those outcomes that align with the needs and demands of compulsory school education and that prepare children to be successful within a mainstream school environment are privileged, creating "calculable divisions in ability that order participation along these lines" (Gustafson, 2010, p. 96).

"Becoming-ready": reconceptualizing the logic of "readiness".

Whilst certain conceptualizations of "readiness" may be dominant in the English early childhood education system, this does not mean that there are no alternative understandings. In challenging dominant notions of "readiness" in the EYFS, this paper argues that it is necessary to critique and reconceptualize the very foundations on which these dominant understandings are based. In contrast to the currently dominant notions of "readiness" described in this paper, I believe that the notion of "becoming" has the capacity to open up to new ways of thinking about, and engaging with, "readiness" in early childhood education. Specifically, this notion of "becoming" is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who conceptualize "becoming" not as a fixed linear relation or correspondence between points, but as the flow of experimentation and change that occurs in the state of being in-between. A concept of "becoming-ready" therefore would shift the focus of "readiness" from the acquisition of specific learning and development goals, to the process of learning and development, to the "connections and micro-events" (Jackson, 2013) that occur through children's engagement with their world. Crucially, this concept of "becoming-ready" would value process in its own right, as the here and now, the complexity of the moment, rather than as merely a mediator for future development or as preparation for things to come (Olsson, 2009). Where a concept of "becoming-ready" departs radically from dominant notions of "readiness" is in its rejection of fixed goals and outcomes. Not only is the concept of a predetermined standard of "readiness" undesirable, it is incomprehensible within this framework of "becoming." As Jackson (2013) states, "Becoming is a constant, fluid process of changes, interactions and transformations" (p. 117) and as such, who or what a child is to "become" cannot be predicted in advance of the moment of "becoming." The concept of "readiness" as concretely represented within assessment and curriculum policy is unthinkable from this logic as it implies, not only that "readiness" can be fixed as a state of becoming, but also that until this fixed state is reached, the child is somehow incomplete. However, in rejecting the determination of fixed goals and end points, a concept of "becoming-ready" recognizes that children are constantly engaged in "processes of complex material unpickings and entangled situations" (Cole, 2011, p. 552). The child cannot be considered incomplete as there is no fixed outcome of "readiness" waiting in the future for them to aspire to. They are complete in each moment as they engage with their world, each moment becoming something else and being confronted with their "readiness" for situations as they arise over and over in the moment. As Sellers (2013) states, "becoming is not about becoming anything specific" (p. 79), it cannot be conceived by comparing a start-point and an end-point and deducing the differences between them (Stagoll, 2005). A Deleuzian understanding of "becoming" does not aim towards the kind of teleological orientation of goals and outcomes that dominate early childhood education policy. Instead, it pushes beyond

the known, beyond the predetermined destinations and end points to the unknown new (Marble, 2012). Of importance within this conceptualization of becoming is the movement and flow that occurs as children reach out to their unknown potential and connect with their world in the process of creating and solving problems. Olsson (2009) likens this kind of "becoming-in-the-moment" to the activity of a surfer, stating that: "The surfer surfs not to get ahead, to get somewhere, but for the moment. Surfing is about living the moment to the fullest capacity of one's body, and to stretch out beyond that" (p. 5). As the surfer takes on each new wave, they test their "readiness" to respond to the situation that presents itself. Their "readiness," as the child's, can be understood as being constructed in their creative responses to the problems and challenges the world presents and in their potential for acting and affecting as they "vibrate and resonate together with the world in the process of solving/constructing problems" (p. 5). Crucially, becoming-ready is never a concrete or finalized state as it happens continuously, over and over again in the complexity of daily life. The event of becoming-ready can never be predicted or prescribed in advance. As Sellers (2013) reminds us, for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming does not involve progression or regression culminating in specific ends, and as such, becoming-ready does not correspond to the successive acquisition of specific skills and attributes.

Reflection 3

I remember observing a teaching student leading a music activity with a group of children, all of whom were due to start school in the coming Autumn term. Part of this group was a young girl about whom the nursery team had raised concerns regarding her "readiness" to start school. I watched as the student teacher tried hard to involve her in the activity but the girl repeatedly wandered away from the small circle of other children, choosing other resources and spaces to be in at that moment. After a few attempts to bring her back to the group, the frustrated student gave up and left her, crouched beside a nearby table where she had found a small selection of play people. As the observation continued my attention was drawn repeatedly back to this child. She watched as the group sang and acted out counting songs and I could hear her humming the tunes, interspersed with lines from the songs. As the group mimed frogs jumping, one by one into a pool, she made her play people jump off the table one by one. It struck me that she was just as engaged with the content of the group activity as any of the children still in the circle; she had just chosen her own manner of participation. Reflecting on this episode now, sometime later and in the context of "readiness," I can see how my concerns over this child's "readiness" for school were deeply invested in normative notions of "readiness" as being linked to following adult direction and performing a particular type of participation. As a process of becoming-ready however, the complexity of this child's participation can be seen. Presented with a challenging situation

she had developed her own strategy for successful participation. Each time she moved away from the group she remained within visual and auditory range, continuing to listen and respond to the group from the alternative spaces she had chosen. Presented with a problem, that of sitting with the group throughout this activity, she had constructed her own creative response: In that moment she had created the context for her own readiness to participate. Her "readiness" did not conform to the normative notion that dominated my thinking at the time, but nevertheless she acted effectively in the process of her own becoming-ready and in responding to the challenge that faced her.

Conclusion

Gustafson (2010) asks, "Where is the space for additional complexity" (p. 98) in contemporary education. In concluding, this article asks the same question of the early childhood field in England. In a regime dominated by discourses of "readiness" that privilege norms, goals, and outcomes, where is the space for those outcomes of early childhood education and those experiences of childhood that fall outside of these predetermined categories? Where is the space "for outcomes that are not predetermined, that are unexpected, that provoke surprise and wonder?" (Moss, 2013, p. 41).

In his critique of "the resistible rise of school readiness," Moss (2012, p. 355) advocates a reconceptualization of the relationship between early childhood and compulsory school education and, as a result, understandings of "readiness." He proposes a "vision of a meeting place" within which values, ethics, understandings, and practices are shared between education sectors. I would argue that such a space would provide the opportunity for the emergence of reconceptualized understandings of "readiness" such as the concept of "becoming-ready" discussed in this paper. It would be pessimistic to suggest that there are currently no such spaces for the emergence of complexity and non-hierarchical understandings of "readiness," however in my experience, these spaces are often small and in the face of dominant policy-based discourses, voices and experiences from within these spaces can become lost and marginalized, consigned to the fringes of the mainstream, or silenced completely.

In concluding this article I argue that one vital step towards opening spaces for alternative understandings of "readiness" is to actively seek instances of resistance to dominant discourses and to find spaces within the educational landscape where such alternative understandings and narratives of struggle and resistance against dominant discourses can be heard. Stories of resistance must be celebrated openly, exposing the

challenges and struggles of those who choose to think and act critically in response to the status quo. In response to dominant discourses of "readiness" within early childhood education in England, I would argue that there is a need for further radical critique of the conceptualization and representation of "readiness," building on the work of critical thinkers such as Ball and Moss in order to develop alternative understandings of "readiness" in practice, such as the notion of "becoming-ready" developed in this paper. Such radical critique is undoubtedly difficult. However, I believe that it is important, perhaps now more so than ever in the light of continued moves towards normativity, performativity, and the reduction of complexity in early childhood education. It is incumbent upon those of us working in the field, whether as practitioners or researchers, to ask difficult questions of ourselves, our practice, and the kind of education system we want to create for our children. We must draw on the encouragement of critics such as Moss to take a critical path, to summon the courage to put "our heads above the parapet" in the critique of the status quo, and hopefully, in the process, open up space for additional complexity in our understandings of "readiness" and of early childhood education more generally.

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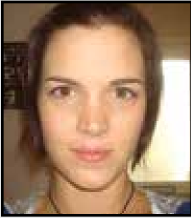

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Wondering With Children: The Importance of Observation in Early Education

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ABSTRACT
This paper asserts that through the process of observation, documentation, and interpretation of children's goals, strategies, and theories, teachers gain insight into children's thinking. As a result of this process, teachers are better able to engage children in conversations and investigations that have the potential to extend their learning in both depth and breadth. Utilizing brief video clips of both children and adults to support its premise, the paper outlines and discusses relevant aspects of observation for understanding and introduces the concept of the videative as a powerful resource for revisiting and analyzing documented observations.

Introduction

Children are sometimes spontaneous, sometimes reserved; joyful now, sad later; friendly and reserved; competent and naïve; talkative and quiet. To be childlike is to experience an almost unpredictable array of discoveries, emotions, and levels of energy. Children are unique and complex and thus often difficult to comprehend. And they do not readily engage us in dialogue in order to explain the reasons for their caprice as they explore the world that surrounds them. Yet, as teachers, it is important for us to know our children deeply, to flow with their currents, and to extend their nascent theories about how the world works.

Given the delightful yet often enigmatic characteristics of young children, we learned decades ago that in order to comprehend children we must begin by observing them as they play. But what do we see as we observe, and how do we use our observations to enhance our effectiveness as teachers?

Five Reasons to Observe Children

Here are some of the reasons that teachers offer when asked about the value of watching and listening to children:

- If I watch the children play, I can discover their interests.
- By observing children, I can assess their developmental levels.
- I look to see what strategies children use to attain their goals.
- Observing children helps me know what skills the children need to practice.
- When I observe children at play, I learn a lot about their personalities.

We want to use these reasons again, so we will provide an example that illustrates the general meaning of each:

- Interests—He loves to play with trucks.
- Developmental level—She throws the ball either very hard or not at all, but she does not vary the throw along a continuum of very hard, hard, and soft.
- Strategies—She tries to influence her friend's actions by controlling all of the crayons.
- Skills—She has trouble stringing beads onto a knotted shoestring.
- Personality—She is reserved and does not like to take risks.

In essence, we can learn at least five attributes of our children when we observe them closely:

- Their interests and preferences
- Their levels of cognitive and social development
- Their strategies for creating desired effects
- Their skills and accomplishments
- Their personalities and temperaments

Each of the preceding objectives for observing is relevant if we desire to learn about children and thus improve the quality of our teaching. But we think that one of these objectives is best suited for gathering information in order to engage in high-level conversations with young children about their theories and attitudes, conversations that can support and extend their learning in both depth and breadth.

If we truly want to have high-level conversations with children about their beliefs, expectations, and assumptions about how something works or why something occurs, what do we need to know about the children? Quite simply, we need to know their beliefs, assumptions, and expectations so that we might enter the conversation with a paraphrase or counterpoint:

- Knowing children's interests might help us prepare the environment, but it does not help us have better conversations.
- Knowing children's skills might help us think about games to play that might encourage them to practice their skills, but it does not help us have better conversations.
- Knowing children's developmental level might help us predict what questions the children can answer, but it does not help us enter into a meaningful conversation with the children.
- Knowing something about a child's personality might help us be sensitive about our tone of voice or help us know what topics to avoid, but it does not help us have better conversations.

In order to have a meaningful conversation with a child, we need to know what the child thinks can be done in real situations (possible goals), and we need to know the procedures that the child believes will make things happen (possible strategies). If we have watched and listened long enough to determine the child's goals and his strategies for attaining those goals, then we have both a resource for understanding the child and an interesting basis for a high-level conversation.

We might say, "It seems like you think the ball will roll faster if you make the incline steeper." Or we might say, "Do you think you will have more friends if you have crayons?" But then in revisiting an experience with a child, putting that experience into words, we need to go beyond the observed strategies and consider the theories that make those strategies reasonable.

Considering children's theories requires more than a careful transcription of what they say and do. We have to dig. We have to abstract the meaning of elliptical sentences, aborted movements, or a confusing explanation, request, or description. Children are competent learners, but as teachers, we have to slow down, carefully observe, and study our documented observations in order to understand the ideas that they are attempting to convey. In addition to slowing down, observing, and studying children's actions and narration, understanding children's theories requires a general knowledge of child development and a willingness to speculate.

In the pages that follow, you will view several video clips of children engaged in play. Observe the children in these clips carefully. Then read our speculations on what the children may be thinking (possible theories) and our ideas about what we might say to the children on another day as we revisit the experience that we have observed.

Goals, Strategies, and Theories

As we observe children, we need to consider their goals. What effects are they trying to create? We observe their actions and listen to their comments to determine the strategies they choose to attain those goals. The relation between the strategy and the goal will reveal a possible theory, a theory about how to make the desired effect occur. The theory, correct or incorrect in an objective sense, makes the child's choice of strategy sensible. The theory comes from us. It is our speculation. It is our attempt to find an entry into the child's world. All high-level conversations begin with someone speculating about the meaning of the other person's words or actions.

Watch this 2-year-old boy named Toby, who is trying to hit a large ball with a golf club. Observe not only what he does but also think about what he does not do (**view video**, 1.3 MB). [The video files in this article require QuickTime for viewing. The files take a minute or two to load after clicking on the link. Readers can download the free **QuickTime** player.]

Toby's goal is to move the ball across the grass. To accomplish this goal, the strategy he chooses is first to make contact with the ball by placing the head of his golf club on the ball's side and then to push the ball forward, using a shoveling action. He does *not* move the club back away from the ball and then swing the club swiftly forward. **Let's watch this video clip again** (1.3 MB).

We could say that Toby needs to develop his ability to hit the ball and encourage him to try again. We might show him how to draw his golf club back before he makes contact with the ball. But what if instead we try to determine why Toby hits the ball in this way. What theory does he hold that makes his strategy reasonable to him?

We can speculate that Toby is thinking, "Why would I draw the golf club backward if I want to make the ball go forward? It is reasonable to place my golf club on the ball and shovel it forward because I know that the club has to make contact with the ball in order for it to move. So, I place the club in contact with the ball and push it ahead."

What implications does this approach to observation have for our conversations with young children? Instead of showing Toby how to hit the ball correctly, we can address Toby's thinking. We might say, "You pressed your club against the ball and shoveled it forward." We deliberately choose to use the verbs, "pressed" and "shoveled" in order to encourage Toby to reflect on his strategies, the procedure he selected to reach his goal. In time, the child will comprehend the meaning of the verbs that describe his actions and will learn to reflect on those actions. And eventually his ability to reflect will help him "repair" his misunderstandings or theories about how things work or how to make a desired effect occur.

If one strategic action made by a child can reveal an implied theory, then a set of related actions can prove even more helpful in comprehending and conversing with children. The following video clips show Jack, a 4-year-old boy, playing at the water flume at Boulder Journey School in Colorado. The flume is about 40 feet long; there is a gentle flow of water coming from the high end, and sand has been spread along the floor. Jack is attempting to get his lightweight ball to roll or float from the high end to the lower end of the flume.

Notice the varied strategies that Jack uses to attain his goal. Sometimes he releases the ball, sometimes he tosses it, sometimes he slaps it, and sometimes he raises and carries it through the air to a spot further down. Why does Jack make these adjustments? What are his theories about the ways in which the ball will interact with the changing nature of the flume's floor? Click on the links in the paragraph below to view Jack's strategies and think about his possible theories.

We can consider each of Jack's selected adjustments individually and speculate on the theory that makes each adjustment reasonable. Jack begins by lifting the ball (**view video**, 0.4 MB) over the wet sand, then dropping it a slight distance down the flume. But this is not interesting because it doesn't make use of the flume's incline.

So Jack places the ball on the smooth, inclined surface of the flume floor and releases the ball (**view video**, 0.2 MB) with open fingers. He seems to understand that because the surface contains no sand, it is smooth enough to allow the ball to roll on its own. When the ball encounters the water, Jack slaps the ball (**view video**, 0.3 MB), as though he knows that it is stuck but not completely immobile. Then when the ball comes to a raised area, a hump in the flume, Jack determines that a lift, a release, or a slap will not work. He raises the ball and airlifts (**view video**, 2.1 MB) it over the hump, making noises like an airplane as he walks downstream. Clearly Jack holds several sophisticated theories about how things work, illustrated by his strategies. Watch again.

Lifts | **Releases** | **Slaps** | **Raises**

How can we use our understanding of Jack's thinking to engage him in a high-level conversation? Perhaps we have captured Jack playing with the ball in the water flume on video. We might sit with Jack, revisit the video, and reflect on his actions. We can say, "That time instead of releasing the ball, you slapped it." By creating a narrative that puts Jack's selected adjustments into words, we are supporting and encouraging him to not only think about his strategies but also to think about the associated theories.

Observing children provides us with a key that allows us to enter their wonderment. Once inside, we must not be afraid to speculate on what they might be thinking. Our theory about a child's theory must be evident in our comments or questions. So rather than ask the child a general question, "Why did you do it that way?", we might instead make a specific comment based on our observations and say, "That time you had to toss it. Before you were able to just let it go." If our speculations are inaccurate, the child will let us know by either correcting our misconceptions or ignoring our remarks. On the other hand, if our speculations are accurate, they should serve to bring the child's theories into consciousness, and we can anticipate that we will receive an explanation from the child.

Knowing What Someone Knows

The following video clips focus on a 4-year-old girl, Avery, who is trying to get her large and loveable dog, Jasmine, to lie all the way down on the bed that Avery has made. Avery is successful in getting Jasmine to place her body on the bed, but she is not able to coax Jasmine to put her head down. Avery wants Jasmine's head down. To accomplish her goal, she makes a pillow. This strategy appears reasonable. The pillow

gives Jasmine a spatial clue for what to do. Avery adds a blanket, another cue for sleeping, then pats Jasmine's head rather hard, almost as if Jasmine just needs to be encouraged. **Watch this clip** (7.1 MB).

View transcript of video | View both video clip and transcript at the same time

When these strategies don't work, Avery decides to give Jasmine a treat. Perhaps she remembers that one can train a dog to do tricks using a treat in some way. But then Avery gives Jasmine her treat before she accomplishes her task. What might Avery be thinking? Why does she choose this strategy? What theory makes the strategy reasonable to her? **Watch this clip** (3.3 MB).

View transcript of video | View both video clip and transcript at the same time

Perhaps Avery is thinking, "If I am kind to Jasmine, then Jasmine will do what I ask." This theory makes sense on one level, but if we go deeper, we realize that the theory assumes that Jasmine will understand that after she is given a treat she must comply with the stated request. It also assumes that Jasmine knows what Avery wants her (the dog) to do.

Our theory about Avery's theory provides a beginning point for revisiting the experience with her. We can encourage her to make her thinking more explicit by saying, "Jasmine likes the cracker, but does she know what you want her to do?"

Observing Children for Understanding

Review the Research on Child Development, Including Children's Milestones and Misconceptions

While observing the video of Avery and her dog, Jasmine, we must think about the research surrounding children's theory of mind (Leslie, 1987). Theory of mind concerns the child's need to take the perspective of another in order to communicate effectively. In this scenario, Avery's theory of the dog's mind includes the notion that "she knows what I am thinking." Child development research also holds that preschool-age children tend to blame the listener when communication fails rather than revise their message (Girbau, 2001; Glucksberg, Krauss, & Weisberg, 1966). The child may think, "You are not listening" instead of, "My message needs to be more explicit." A general knowledge

of child development, including research on theory of mind might lead us to comment, "Maybe Jasmine only understands dog language."

To see a more complete analysis of Avery's interaction with Jasmine, view this **more extensive set of videos** (HTML page and QuickTime files; may take a minute or two to load).

Review Classic and Contemporary Research on Knowledge Domains

Although it is important to review the significant research in child development, some types of research are more helpful for teachers. Research about broadly defined concepts, such as class inclusion and transitivity, probably will not help us interpret the relevant details of an ordinary moment or have a constructive conversation with a child. Children are curious about events and phenomena, such as why the hamster died and where shadows come from. To connect with their curiosity, it is essential to know what the research says about children's understanding of knowledge domains, such as death and shadows.

Research moves us beyond treating knowledge domains as topics that are no more than lists of facts. Research helps us understand why some aspects of a domain are easy to understand and other aspects are more complex. For example, constructivist educator Rheta DeVries conducted a study on the development of children's understanding of shadows. She found that to understand shadows as a cause-and-effect system, children had to understand that a shadow is not the projection of a black light but rather is the absence of light when light, person, and wall are placed in a special relation. This study is described in DeVries (1986).

Look for research on familiar domains of knowledge or familiar problem-solving domains, such as block play, jigsaw puzzles, board games (DeVries & Fernie, 1990), pretend play scripts, early number concepts (Gelman & Gallistel, 1978), friendship, illness (Kalish, 1996), money (Furth, 1980), family resemblance (Springer, 1992), morality (Coles, 1997), and so forth. Be particularly alert for research that helps you understand the characteristics that make one domain different from other domains and the stages in learning that domain. You can find a good summary of domain knowledge in Wellman and Gelman (1997). For a set of video clips that are arranged around problem-solving domains **download this list from Videatives, Inc.**

Review Documented Observations Many Times

Subtle but important details will reveal themselves as we review and analyze our notes and video clips.

Often we do not notice the cleverness of a child's work until we view a video clip several times, as in the case of Kieran, a 3-year-old boy who is gluing plastic caps and felt buttons onto a wooden board. Watch the first part of this **video of Kieran's work by clicking here** (17.0 MB).

When the first author first viewed this videotape, he found it rather uninteresting, a child engaged in a relatively routine gluing activity. Then, after reviewing the tape three times, he noticed that Kieran was improving the efficiency of the strategy that he was using to make a symmetrical pattern, removing unnecessary steps. For example, instead of dabbing glue in one spot and placing an item on the glue, Kieran began to place extra glue on his spatula so that he could dab two spots of glue on the board before he placed items on either spot, thus eliminating a trip to the glue dish. **Watch this animated graphic that shows how Kieran eliminated steps** (0.9 MB).

An activity that at first viewing appeared mundane turned out to be a profound example of self-regulated learning or what Piaget called the schematization of actions. The separate acts of "getting glue to dab" were schematized, that is, Kieran began to see the "form" of the sequence. He might have been thinking, "First I get glue to dab for one item from the junk bin, and then I return a second time to get more glue to dab for a matching item from the junk bin." Once Kieran begins to think at this level of abstraction—first, more, second—he is able to reason, "If I am always going to place a second dab of glue for a matching item from the junk bin, I might as well get enough glue for two dabs on the wooden board."

To see a more complete analysis of Kieran's play, view this **more extensive set of videos** (HTML page and QuickTime files; may take a minute or two to load).

Look for Laughter—Which Often Means That an Expectation or Theory Has Been Violated

Laughter can come from the children or the teachers; both are relevant to our understanding. In the video of Victoria, we observe her pretending to dish mashed potatoes onto her teacher's plate. With great skill, she pretends to scoop the potatoes with her spoon and then empties the potato-filled spoon in a space not occupied by baked potato or cucumber. When Victoria discovers a grape in the pan, she eats it with great

relish. The teachers laugh. Why might the teachers laugh? **Watch this brief video clip** (11.6 MB).

View transcript of video | View both video clip and transcript at the same time

Perhaps the teachers laugh because Victoria has conveniently slipped out of the pretense mode to eat a real grape. It is as though she is saying, "Pretending is ok, but you don't need to pretend when you have a real grape to eat." This navigation in and out of a pretend frame is an essential aspect of children's play. As their play develops, children mark pretense as such by using phrases such as "Let's pretend." Then they proceed to negotiate a script together; a script that they act out.

Look for the Aborted or Abbreviated Action—Which Often Means That the Child Has Changed Her Thinking or Is Thinking About What Strategy to Choose Next

After viewing many video clips of children, patterns in the ways in which they approach problems begin to emerge. For example, if they are confident that their strategies will produce the desired effect, their actions flow uninterrupted. But as soon as they anticipate a problem, they pause and/or change directions. Pauses and changes in a child's actions provide us with a cue that the child has a thought that merits interpretation. Consider Kaylie, a 2-year-old child who is playing on the kitchen floor with plastic lids, containers, and measuring cups. For some time, she has been trying to place a blue lid on a clear container. At a certain point, Kaylie picks up a measuring cup and moves the blue lid to rest on its open end. However, the blue lid cannot rest on the measuring cup's rim because the open end of the cup is larger than the lid. Kaylie pauses. Then she lets the blue lid fall to the bottom of the cup and presses it down firmly. What does Kaylie's pause mean? Watch this **brief video clip** (1.4 MB).

Based on Kaylie's previous actions with the blue lid and the clear container, we can speculate that her goal is to make the lid fit on the measuring cup and that she holds the theory that the lid should fit on the top. That is why she pauses; she wants to find a way to make the lid come to rest on the top of the measuring cup. When her initial strategy doesn't yield the desired results, Kaylie theorizes that the lid might fit best on the bottom of the measuring cup. If the lid fits somewhere, then her goal of fitting the lid has been achieved. We understand that Kaylie is not interested in closing the container but rather in finding a place for the blue lid to comfortably rest. Watch this action again by **clicking here**.

To see a more complete analysis of Kaylie's play, view this **more extensive set of videos** (HTML page and QuickTime files; may take a minute or two to load).

Look for the Co-construction of Knowledge—Where Children Are Supporting or Extending Each Other's Work

Children often collaborate with one another, performing different but complementary actions in order to attain a shared goal. One child adds a block to the top of a tower, while another child steadies the bottom. One child pokes a hole in a piece of clay knowing that her friend waits with a flower stem to insert in this hole. One child holds the end of the tablecloth firmly, while another child smoothes out the ruffles. Children may also extend one another's ideas. One child rolls a piece of clay and creates a snake. A second child does the same but then bends the snake, creating a closed circle. The first child is intrigued and does the same with his clay snake. Note that the second child required the first child's idea in order to create his extended idea, which the first child then adopts.

Look for Examples of Representation—Where Children Are Inventing New Ways to Capture or Express Meaning

Children can use representation as a forum for the co-construction of ideas. Two boys, Zachary and David, draw a map without much attention to scale. Nevertheless, their symbols capture interesting aspects of shape, location, boundary, and part-to-whole relations. In the first moments of the video of this scenario, Zachary makes an "X" inside a circle and announces, "That's were I live." David extends Zachary's idea and indicates (off camera) a place on the map where his grandfather lives. David speculates about the distance between his grandfather's house and Boulder and ponders, "But my grandpa lives in Iowa." To justify the discrepancy between actual distances and a map's scale, he explains in response to his teacher's question, "But it's a pretty big map." **Watch this video clip** (11.2 MB).

View transcript of video | **View both video clip and transcript at the same time**

In another segment of the map-making activity, David explains that he is drawing the trajectory of missiles, straight lines that are not connected to anything. Zachary adds qualifiers to these missile lines: swirling marks and "Xs." Zachary explains to the teacher that the swirling marks indicate that the missiles have exploded and the "Xs" indicate that the missiles have not exploded yet. **Watch this video clip** (15.5 MB).

View transcript of video | View both video clip and transcript at the same time

By degrees, David and Zachary work together to improve the readability of their symbol system, thereby making it possible to make relevant comments about what the map "says." When children make their thoughts visible through representation, they are better able to have focused conversations with adults and peers. Indeed, representations also encourage children to reflect more carefully upon their own meanings and theories.

Look for Examples of Meta-cognition—Where Children Are Thinking About Thinking

We often hear a child say, "I am not very good at this" while attempting to draw something such as a face. This comment indicates that the child has evaluated his own ability. The child has done more than simply remember the last time he tried to draw a face. He also remembers his thoughts, his assessment of the quality of his drawing. The child is thus thinking about his thinking.

When we reflect on this comment with a child, we do not want to focus our attention on drawing skills. We want to focus on the child's thinking, the reasoning behind his evaluation of self. So we don't want to offer counter-examples of his drawing ability by saying, "Oh, I have seen you do this rather well." This statement might well end the conversation. On the other hand if we ask, "What is it about a face that is difficult to draw?", we potentially launch a dialogue with many possible twists and turns. We are encouraging the child to be more conscious of the details of his evaluation. In so doing, the child might well develop a drawing strategy that avoids, compensates for, or overcomes the difficulty that he has identified. If the child is too young to articulate his reasons for thinking that he is not good at drawing faces, we can summarize his thoughts by saying, "You remember doing this before and not liking the face you drew." This statement provides a more articulated expression of what the child most likely meant when he said, "I am not very good at this." Our descriptive summary orients the child to his thinking and creates a base from which he can begin to think about his thoughts.

Meta-cognition also refers to thinking about someone else's thinking. You observed one example of this when Avery tried to communicate her desire to Jasmine, her dog. Avery was thinking about Jasmine's thinking, assuming that Jasmine was not paying attention to her request. Once we develop a sense of the assumptions that children are making about their own thinking or someone else's thinking, we can engage them in high-level conversations as we wonder along with them about the meaning of their world.

Define the Children's Theories at a More General Level

Our speculation about what theory a child might hold, a theory that makes his chosen strategy reasonable, can inform subsequent conversations as we revisit similar experiences with other children. However, for our speculations to be useful with other children in new situations, they must be defined at a higher level of generality. Following are some examples of children's theories that came from an analysis of their comments. In the first set of examples, the theories are specific to one context. In the next section, they are defined at a higher level of generality. The more general definition can help us identify children's theories even when the context changes.

Specific theories:

- Since a worm has no legs, it moves by sliding on a surface.
- A shadow on the floor is like a spot of black paint than can be hidden with a blanket.
- A baby chick gets out of its shell by rolling the shell off the table.
- Air blows out of both ends of a floor fan.
- If the puzzle piece does not fit, I should discard it and try another.
- My friends will like me if I let them play with my toys.
- A party balloon floats up because the air inside pushes up on the top.
- If I cannot have a turn pushing the stroller, I will ask my friend to push me.

General theories (*in italics*). Note that several of the general definitions include a theory that the child does not hold. Thinking about the theory not held can help us determine the next possible developmental step in the learning progression:

- Since a worm has no legs, it moves by sliding on a surface.
  >>> Things that are not elevated cannot move in discrete steps.
- A shadow on the floor is like a spot of black paint that can be hidden with a blanket.
  >>> Even spots that move can be hidden with a cover—as opposed to, some moving spots indicate the absence of light.
- A baby chick gets out of its shell by rolling the shell off the table.
  >>> Enclosing objects can be cracked through hard contact with outside surfaces—as opposed to, enclosing objects can be cracked from within.

- Air blows out of both ends of a floor fan.
  >>> *A fan only blows wind out—as opposed to, fans suck air in and then blow air out.*
- If the puzzle piece does not fit, I should discard it and try another.
  >>> *Objects either work or do not work—as opposed to, an object can be modified if it does not work.*
- My friends will like me if I let them play with my toys.
  >>> *What I give to my friends will always please them—as opposed to, my friends may not like or want what I give them.*
- A party balloon floats up because the air inside pushes up on the top.
  >>> *Floating is caused by an upward push—as opposed to, the relative density of two mediums causes floating.*
- If I cannot have a turn pushing the stroller, I will ask my friend to push me.
  >>> *If I cannot be the agent of the action, then I can be the recipient, which at least keeps me in the game.*

Conclusion: A Summary of Ways to Use Our Observations

- Compose a list of possible goals, strategies, and theories revealed in your observational records (e.g., video clips).
- Choose the theories that are most reasonable given the children's experiences and most consistent with what you know about child development research.
- Discuss the ways in which the identified theories can be extended within and across various contexts.
- Find key segments in videos and revisit these segments with the children.
- During the video revisiting, focus on the children's thinking as well as their actions (click here to read about ***Instant Video Revisiting***).
- Modify materials, make comments, and ask questions in ways that might provoke new perspectives on the identified theories and strategies.
- Encourage and support children in making their thinking visible to themselves for study and revision (e.g., drawing their faces, looking at their spoken words in print).

- Give children the tools necessary to represent their theories and communicate them to others (e.g., presenting to a video camera, drawing maps and other graphics, adding comments to photographs of themselves at work).

Digital video allows us to observe and document children's explorations and investigations and to revisit our documented observations in order to determine the children's goals and the strategies they choose to attain those goals and to speculate about the theories that make the children's strategies reasonable. One strategy for revisiting video documentation that we have found most useful is the creation of a videative, a series of brief video clips embedded in explanatory text. The process of selecting video clips and composing the explanatory text contained in the videative enhances our understanding of the explorations and investigations we have observed (what), why our observations are relevant (so what), and how we can support and encourage the children's thinking in both depth and breadth (now what). To learn more about the videative as a powerful resource for educators, we invite you to go to http://www.videatives.com/videatives/demo

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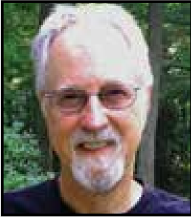

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How We Learn Together: Young Children (and Their Mums) Using Animal Metaphors and Imagery to Understand and Manage Learning

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss the "Language for Learning" project which used animal metaphors and imagery in an early childhood education setting as a way of enabling children to understand and manage their own learning. The concept of "learning power" was communicated through metaphor and the use of image, movement, and music, which in turn led to the development of a rich and local language for learning. An unexpected outcome of this project was its capacity to generate positive learning experiences for young children and their parents, and to generate personal and social transformation within the wider community.

Introduction

Children growing up in disadvantaged households in the United Kingdom (UK) achieve significantly lower levels of educational success than children from more affluent families. The gap in skills, abilities, attitudes, values, and dispositions emerges early and along many dimensions, and widens during the course of pre-, primary, and secondary schooling (Feinstein, 2003; Goodman, Sibieta, & Washbrook, 2009). There is clear evidence that these educational deficits are apparent early in children's lives and even before entry into school (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Indeed, the gap between children from poorer backgrounds and those from better-off backgrounds widens through the school years, especially during the primary school years. Not only are there big differences in cognitive development, but also in their social

and emotional development. Goodman and Gregg (2010) also draw attention to significant differences in what they term the "early childhood caring environments," especially with respect to family interactions such as mother-child closeness and the home learning environment. They suggest that, "differences in the home learning environment, particularly at the age of three, have an important role to play in explaining why children from poorer backgrounds have lower test scores than children from better-off families" (p. 6). They also propose that, "many aspects of the early childhood caring environment do have a positive effect on children's social and emotional development, meaning that policies aimed at improving health, parenting skills and the home learning environment could still be very important" (p. 6).

The Language for Learning project was based in a specialist nursery school in a socially deprived area of a city in the southwest of the UK. It was an initiative designed to raise aspirations within the local community by offering a tangible focus on learning and achievement for children and their parents. Nursery schools provide early childhood education for children aged between three and five years old; the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework that governs the kind of educational provision young children should experience in order to learn and develop well at this age (Department for Education, 2013). The Language for Learning project refers to the seven dimensions of learning of "learning power" (Deakin Crick, 2006; Deakin Crick, Broadfoot, & Claxton, 2004; Deakin Crick, McCombs, Haddon, Broadfoot, & Tew, 2007) together with the animal characters that have been developed for each of the dimensions. These are:

- Changing and Learning (chameleon) – A sense of changing and growing as a learner
- Meaning Making (spider) – Making learning personally meaningful by making connections between what is learnt and what is already known
- Curiosity (cat) – An inclination to ask questions, to get below the surface of things and come to own conclusions
- Creativity (unicorn) – Risk taking, playfulness, lateral thinking and using imagination and intuition to learn
- Learning relationships (bees) – The ability to learn with and from other people and to learn on my own
- Resilience (snail) – The tenacity to persist in the face of confusion, not knowing and failure

- Strategic Awareness (owl) – Being aware and actively managing my own feelings, processes, and strategies

The use of animal metaphors and imagery to communicate the concept of "learning power" proved to be a powerful way of enabling young children to understand and manage their own learning, as well as re-engaging their parents in learning. The ideas were introduced to the children through the use of images, movement, dressing-up clothes, puppets, stories, and songs, and over time this approach became embedded in the school and its curriculum.

Supported by the school, a group of children and parents worked together to design a large mural depicting the seven animals, which was then painted on a shop wall in the community. The parents subsequently wrote a booklet in which they shared with other parents how to help their child learn. Doing this work enabled mums to reflect on their own experiences of school, and in some cases to confront and overcome their own profound fear of school (particularly the secondary school they went to when they were young). Other local primary schools also began adopting the ideas and designed their own murals.

Fig. 1: The community mural, depicting seven dimensions of learning power

The Ecology of Learning

It is now widely agreed that schools in the UK need to develop a coherent and consistent approach to learning (Hopkins, 2000; Watkins, 2001, 2006). This involves making learning, as a process and participative experience, explicit whilst also valuing the learner's sense of his or her own identity as a learner (Deakin Crick & Wilson, 2005). Essentially, the classroom culture needs to promote thinking and learning, and be a place where teachers model their own curiosity and desire to learn (Watkins, 2001). Children and young people should talk about and reflect on their learning, and learning skills and dispositions should feature in learning intentions. Schools are also expected to make thinking visible by displaying thinking tools, encouraging collaboration and dialogue, and valuing the students' own thoughts and questions (de A'Echevarria, 2008). Such an approach requires children and young people to not only talk about what they have learned about a particular subject, but also to talk about the thinking and learning process itself. Encouraging them to think about how their learning relates to other areas of the curriculum and in everyday life is also to be encouraged, and the teacher's thoughtful questioning supports metacognitive thinking of this kind.

> Schools that promote effective learning emphasise intrinsic motivation, social relationships for learning, and an overall learning culture. They are learning organisations, making many connections within and beyond their boundaries. "Learning-enriched" schools display more sense of purpose (i.e. learning), and are less routinised than the learning impoverished school. Teachers see peers as a resource, and continue to learn: new teaching ideas come from colleagues and their own creative solutions. The greater teachers' opportunities for learning, the more their students tend to learn: pupils achieve better in learning-enriched schools. (Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner, & Whalley, 2002, p. 6)

Powerful learning (Hopkins, 2000) is another way to speak of this approach; that is the development of a range of learning strategies, or meta-cognitive skills that enable students to:

> integrate prior and new knowledge; acquire and use a range of learning skills; solve problems individually and in groups; think carefully about their successes and failures; evaluate conflicting evidence and to think critically; and accept that learning involves uncertainty and difficulty. (p. 140)

Skills such as these enable learners to manage their own learning so that both their learning capability and self-esteem is enhanced.

Learning power (Deakin Crick, 2006; Deakin Crick et al., 2004) is one approach to learning that seeks to address the kind of issues raised above. It is a way of describing the complex mix of dispositions, lived experiences, social relations, values, and attitudes that combine to influence how an individual engages with particular learning opportunities.

Early on in the development of learning power, it became apparent that "personifying" each of the learning dimensions with an animal character proved to be a creative and captivating way of engaging children in talking about learning in general and their own learning in particular (see Millington, D. in Deakin Crick 2006). Indeed, as the concept of learning power was rolled out in other learning communities, it became apparent that ownership of the language for learning vocabulary became specific to each learning situation. For example, work in this area with Australian students in an Indigenous Learning Centre in New South Wales demonstrated the importance of reworking the animal characters to reflect native Australian animals as icons for learning power, rather than accept the Western characterization of the learning dimensions (Deakin Crick & Grushka, 2009).

A key facet of the development of the seven dimensions of learning power has been this rich metaphorical aspect. Discussing the importance of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) state that our conceptual system—in terms of how we think and act—is essentially metaphorical in nature. Furthermore, they suggest that thinking, experiencing, and doing is very much to do with metaphor. What perhaps is particularly relevant here in relation to the language for learning is that using objects (i.e., the animals) to understand experiences provides the opportunity to "treat them as discrete entities" which then allows us to "refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and by this means, reason about them" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 25). The animal characterization has created the possibility of shared metaphors that not only hold key concepts about the process of learning, but which also make it possible for the learner to identify with. Metaphor and image together create the possibility of rich connections between the learner and the learning experience, as well as the possibility of more effectively scaffolding learning (Deakin Crick & Grushka, 2009).

Community-Based Research

The extent to which the language for learning had been developed in this particular community was only bought to the attention of researchers some years after

its development. Whilst what the school had done could be described as a piece of community-based research, it was only later that the head teacher invited me into the school to see what had been achieved and the impact it had had within the school and wider community. Community-based research has been described by Hills and Mullett (2000) as:

> …a collaboration between community groups and researchers for the purpose of creating new knowledge or understanding about a practical community issue in order to bring about change. The issue is generated by the community and community members participate in all aspects of the research process. Community-based research therefore is collaborative, participatory, empowering, systematic and transformative. (p. 2)

So, although not designed as a piece of community-based research, this inquiry does reflect the principles on which such research proceeds because it

- creates new knowledge upon which to base practice
- provide[s] information which is in some other way directly useful to the community in which it is initiated
- values the work and perspectives of each participant
- deals with a problem or practical issue which has been identified by the community as being important to the life/health of that community
- allows people to develop new ways of thinking, behaving and practising
- makes a lasting contribution to the community (Hills & Mullett, 2000, p. 3)

My research included in-depth interviews with the head teacher, the project leader, two nursery assistants, and one of the school cleaners who was also a local youth worker. I also interviewed the art teacher who had helped to produce the mural and four mothers, two who had been involved in creating the mural and two whose children were then attending the nursery. I spent a morning in a nursery classroom in order to experience firsthand how children were using the learning language, and I also joined one of the parent singing sessions. To summarize then, the research data included interviews, field notes and observations, photographs and artefacts. As well as finding out about the development of the project, I was particularly interested to hear what it was about the project that caught the interest and imagination of children and parents; its significance for the school and community and what aspirations there were for its ongoing development.

The Language for Learning Story

The original research (Deakin Crick et al., 2004) which informs the theoretical perspectives on effective learning and learners adopted in the Language for Learning project sought to define a good learner and to devise an assessment instrument (ELLI – the Effective Lifelong Learning inventory) which could be used to assess an individual's capacity for learning at any time in a given setting. It also explored how such information might be used to support an individual or group's learning energy. At the same time, work was undertaken with a small number of schools and teachers to see how useful the concepts might be in practice.

Embedding the Language

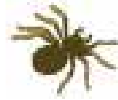
The Language for Learning project exemplifies what happened when one inspired headteacher sought to adapt the ideas for use within her early years setting. Following a successful pilot by one of its teachers, the Language for Learning project was rolled out across the nursery school. A whole-school approach and ongoing professional development work with the staff in how to use the language was crucial to its success, and it gradually became embedded across the curriculum in every class. Learning as they went along, staff captured words and phrases they heard children use and developed language mind maps for each of the animals/learning dimensions. Figure 2 demonstrates the mind map generated for Changing & Learning.

Fig. 2: Mind map for changing and learning

The development and use of this community-generated language reinforced the community generation and ownership of the Language for Learning project. A number of strategies were used to help parents understand the Language for Learning project and to support them in using it with their children. These included a presentation to new parents, information on notice boards and in letters, and songs written based on each of the animals. Parents were regularly invited to join in class singing sessions where they become familiar with the songs and the ideas they represented. One of the songs is included here.

Making Connections (To the tune of Incy Wincy Spider)

Web weaving spider
had a silky thread.
Connected all the thoughts
to make ideas in his head.



Another way in which the learning language was reinforced was the use of stickers that explained how children had used or applied their learning language during the day. One of the stickers is shown here.

Fig. 3: Example of sticker

Although all the learning dimensions were used throughout the year, there was a progressive focus on each of the animals. Careful planning identified how the animals linked to the focus of class activities, and tried-and-tested activities plus new ones were included.

Making the Mural

Thrilled by the impact the use of the learning language was having on the children's learning, especially their language development and their ability to reflect and talk about their experiences, the school decided to take things further by creating a mural.

Entitled "How we learn" and located in the heart of the community where people would walk past it every day, it would be a reminder of the learning taking place in the nursery school. An art teacher from the nearby secondary school was enlisted to help facilitate it. Being involved in such a venture was a considerable challenge for those parents who agreed to be involved. But over time they came to understand more about how their children were approaching learning and how they could develop in this respect, too.

Eventually, a suitable location for the mural—the end wall of a row of shops in the heart of the community—was identified. The site was very run-down and unsightly with beer cans, broken glass, and syringes, but in time the site was cleared, paving slabs were put down and the school caretaker painted the wall white ready to be painted on. Everyone was concerned about how safe the mural would be but the school cleaner and local youth worker encouraged them to trust that people would value something that had been created by the families of the community.

There was considerable local interest in what was happening as school staff, parents, and children gathered one summer's evening to begin making the mural. Local adults and young people wanted to know what was going on and how they could help. In the end, local residents, family and friends, together with a number of young people, worked together to get the outline onto the wall. The next day the painting of the mural started. To begin with, the parents were unsure about the children being involved in painting the mural because they thought they were too young and would mess it up, but the school staff reminded them that it was their mural as well. Anti-graffiti paint was put over the top, but the mural has not been defaced. The local press were invited and the community proudly celebrated what had been achieved.

Fig. 4: Two community policy officers standing in front of the children's mural

Creating the Booklet

Everyone felt that the mural was a great success and were really proud of what had been achieved, but it was decided that some explanation was needed and so the mural-making team set about creating a booklet to explain the mural. The parents decided to talk about the barriers to learning because they realized that through this process they had changed, compared to what they were like when they first came. Once completed, the booklet was distributed to parents within their own nursery and was also subsequently distributed in other local schools. Affirmation of the contribution the Language for Learning project made to children's learning came when the nursery school had a successful school inspection soon after (Curtis, 2008). The inspector was really impressed with what he saw and heard, and recounted one particular encounter in which he was particularly impressed by the children's use of the language. The scenario went like this:

> Masie, one of the children, was in the role-play area banging two bricks together. He went over to her and said, "What are you doing?" She said, I am learning like the spider and making connections in my learning because Miss Jenny read us the story of the elves and the shoe maker yesterday and today I have remembered and I am role-playing and I am being the shoe maker.

In every class the inspector went into there were different examples; it wasn't just a case of staff describing what they did, but the children were actually using the language. He was also given a sticker by one of the children and the child was able to explain why the inspector had merited this sticker. The Ofsted inspector's positive feedback was proof that the school was onto something exciting.

Success Factors

1. A learning language and vocabulary.

What seems to be important here is how the Language for Learning project provides a framework for all parties—professionals, children, and parents—to talk about learning. In this way, learning takes centre-stage within the school community—a common language or framework for talking about learning and for making learning explicit. Although the language was made "childlike," it was relevant to everyone. It provides a way for children to respond, talk about what they are doing, and how they are learning, thereby enabling them to take a more proactive and participatory approach to their learning, supported by those who work with them. Even if children do not have the use of language, they are able to describe how they have been learning by identifying the appropriate animal.

2. A flexible design for professionals to use.

One of the reasons for the success of this project seems to lie in it being a set of key ideas, yet flexible enough for professionals in different settings to design and implement, as evidenced by the extent to which it has become embedded within the school. This has only been possible by the school staff shaping its development and delivery. Rather than being something to be "fitted into" an already busy school schedule, it has become so much a part of the school's approach to learning that "it's just happening." It also proved to be the means by which staff could create a purposeful learning environment within the school.

3. A fun way for children to talk about learning.

The Language for Learning project provided children with a vocabulary with which to engage in their own learning. The animal imagery proved to be particularly appealing to children, and because of their familiarity with the imagery and its associated language the children were also able to draw on it and apply it in novel situations and contexts. Because the influence of the language extended beyond the nursery school to the home, it meant that parents/caregivers could feel part of their children's learning experience—and reinforce the learning language. Thus, the sustained involvement of children was central to the project.

4. A positive experience about learning for parents.

In contrast to the negative learning experiences of many of the parents involved, this approach proved to be a positive one, but only because school staff took the time and care to give the parents the support they needed. A variety of strategies were used to communicate this vocabulary of learning to parents/caregivers, and in time they too found the animal characters appealing and engaging. In the head teacher's view, the Language for Learning project was a really powerful way of engaging and empowering not only children but their parents too. She continued:

> Many parents in this community feel that learning or school was done to them, it was something that was delivered and they were on the end of it and it didn't really mean very much. They got through it but they didn't actually aspire to be part of it or to take it anywhere, and once school was finished it was over. I think we have engaged parents at a different level.

Another reason for the success was the thoughtful way in which parents' involvement was managed, especially given the nature of the parents' own learning experiences at school. Overcoming the barriers created by such experiences played an important part in parents subsequently being able to articulate their hopes and aspirations for their children. The head teacher explained:

For many parents the experience was very stressful as they were afraid of failing. They had negative associations with school from when they had been there and they brought these anxieties to the workshop. The teachers worked with the parents to build their confidence and reassure them that they could not fail. The atmosphere changed during the process and all of the parents commented at the end on what a positive experience it had been and that they had surprised themselves. Some even cried because they were so relieved that they had actually been able to do it; their level of self-esteem was so low. This huge learning curve for the parents highlighted to us the importance of including them in the projects. If our children were to learn they needed their parents learning alongside with them.

5. A significant contribution to the wider community.

The project was significant to the school and its community because the process of learning how to do something—and then actually applying those skills within a real setting—brought the whole thing to life. There was also considerable pride amongst the school staff, and the wider community, for what the children and the parents had done, and because of that the local young people have shown respect for the mural and it has not been vandalized.

Conclusions

If community-based research is collaborative, participatory, empowering, systematic, and transformative (Hills & Mullett, 2000), then what happened in this nursery school community is a interesting example of what is possible. In terms of the principles on which such research proceeds, I suggest that:

It created new knowledge upon which to base practice.

An important factor in the engagement of both children and adults, and in enabling them to take responsibility for their own learning, was the use of imagery and metaphor. What seems to be important is the capacity of image and metaphor to communicate at a more fundamental level than words. The learning power animals—for example, the strategically aware wise owl—enable the individual to project particular qualities on to the owl, and then, when he or she is ready, to "own them" for him/herself. The animals also "de-centre" the teacher and carry a message of empowerment to the individual.

It valued the work and perspectives of each participant.

A key aim of the project was to enable parents in the community to be more able to engage with learning for themselves, especially given that for many parents their own experiences of school and learning was disempowering. This meant that even the idea of participating in something like this was a considerable hurdle for many of them, to the point that some could not even walk through the doors of the school they went to. However, over time and with the support of the school staff, a remarkable change occurred. The parents gradually began to interact more confidently and became more aware of what they could achieve. The subsequent conversations they had about barriers to learn, together with their quotes about learning which were included in the booklet, could be viewed as significant steps in their own changing and learning.

It dealt with a problem or practical issue which has been identified by the community as being important to the life/health of that community.

The Language for Learning project challenges many of the key assumptions often made in relation to the achievement of white working class-children—especially in relation to the likely influence of previous generations on the experiences of children. It is obviously apparent that some of the young mothers who participated in the project and whose stories are included here did indeed feel marginalized from/through their educational experience and under-achieved at school. However, their narratives are evidence that the Language for Learning project offered parents a way of overcoming theses influences through a new understanding of learning and themselves. Indeed, the very process of designing the learning booklet proved to be almost a "therapeutic" way of working through their own beliefs about themselves and schools.

It allowed people to develop new ways of thinking, behaving, and practising.

This project adds to what we know about the ecology of learning and transformation in the context of community. It links school-based "learning to learn" strategies to the re-engagement of parents with formal learning and to social transformation. It provides an in-depth understanding of how sophisticated ideas and opportunities around lifelong learning and empowerment can be communicated, and taken up, through metaphor and imagery.

It made a lasting contribution to the community.

What was striking about this project was how these ideas grew legs, walked into the local community, and had an impact on community learning and well-being. It enabled children, their parents and caregivers, and their community, to take responsibility for their own learning and change; and contributed to building and developing a stronger local community.

Given what we know about cognitive, social, and emotional development in early childhood, and the important role of the home learning environment, this kind of strategy may well make a significant contribution in this area. This was a highly original social phenomenon and an outcome of an "engaged" research program and local school self-evaluation. Although only a small-scale inquiry, this initiative demonstrates in a powerful way that when the language of learning is made explicit and is consistently promoted by all members of a school community, it not only has a considerable effect within the school community, but also ripples out into the families and homes within the wider community too.

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The Canadian Forest School Movement

Zabe MacEachren, Queen's University

ABSTRACT

This article documents the rationale and benefits of Forest Schools, while also describing why the organization Forest School Canada was formed. It is based on interviews with two people: Heather Andrachuk, a new teacher in a forest school, and Marlene Powers, a founder of two forest schools and the executive director of Forest School Canada. Narrations from these two women are used to describe the ethos and the pedagogy that results from working within Forest Schools and the origins of Forest School Canada (2013). It also briefly outlines the way Forest Schools serve as an approach to environmental education for early childhood through the development of a sense of attachment to nature.

Introduction

Imagine a first day at school where your parents drop you off not at a building, but at the edge of a forest. You see no playground, just trees and meadows. A smiling teacher greets you and invites you to place your lunch in her large pack basket. You sit on a log in a small circle and meet your classmates for the year. You will soon be spending the rest of the day exploring your "classroom," which others call "nature." You will come to view plants, stones, and animals as fascinating teachers that capture your curiosity with new seasonal changes to notice every day. This could be a first day of school for a Forest Kindergarten student.

This article is based on two interviews I conducted with Marlene Powers and Heather Andrachuk. Marlene has taught in and founded both a Forest Preschool and a Kindergarten. She later hired Heather Andrachuk to teach at the Forest Kindergarten

because she wanted to dedicate her time to launching Forest School Canada (FSC), the national organization that supports others' efforts to create nature-based programs for early childhood. Today, Marlene is the executive director of FSC. Heather Andrachuk graduated from the Queen's University Faculty of Education Outdoor and Experiential Education program and went directly into her first teaching position as a FS Kindergarten teacher. Heather's ideas offer a first-time teacher's account of the preparation required to teach outdoors all day. The interviews with Marlene and Heather begin to document the development of Forest Schools (FSs) in Canada. They describe the ethos and rationale of FSs, the reason why FSC was created, the benefits and pedagogy resulting from teaching outdoors, and the way FSs fill a gap by providing both a play-based and an environmental education for very young children.

Forest Schools Ethos

FSs can occur in many natural settings and can be identified by many terms (forest and farm program, field and forest program, nature kindergarten, etc.). The fundamental idea of a FS is to create opportunities for children to spend more time playing/learning in natural settings. The term FS is generally used to represent a broad ethos based upon getting children outside to learn directly from nature in a play-based pedagogy (Cree & McCree, 2012). Marlene states that FSs are based upon promoting "regular, repeated access to a natural space, which could be a farm, a forest, a municipal park, a conservation site, a beach, any natural space that children have a long period of time to build a relationship with and be in." Also unique to a FS is the way the place becomes a teacher and the way the human teacher encourages children to learn from nature. The use of play in a natural setting is what establishes FS as a unique pedagogy different from conventional environmental education curricula. Marlene states:

> The defining feature is the emergent and play-based curriculum; I think it is fundamental to a FS and is what differentiates a FS from any other environmental program. Environmental education has a rich history and has so much to offer to schools and educators in Canada, but FS education is not about a defined way to do something.

FSs have increased in popularity as early childcare options because parents and teachers recognize the health benefits of promoting outdoor activities and a play-based learning pedagogy.

The FS movement first originated in the Scandinavian countries, where popular culture prides itself on outdoor living. About 15 years ago, the FS idea was established in the UK through the development of practitioner courses (O'Brien & Murray, 2006). In 2007, Marlene opened Carp Ridge Preschool, outside of Ottawa, the first FS in Canada. Today the movement is catching on quickly around the world.

Ethos and Rationale for Forest Schools in Canada

Marlene's desire to establish Carp Ridge Forest preschool was sparked when she noticed a gap in what was available in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. In our interview, she describes how her degree in Social Work had led to work experiences where she used environmental education as a means of therapy and a way of developing community capacity. As a passionate environmentalist and outdoor enthusiast, she noticed how the two fields fit nicely together. After moving to Ottawa in 2006 and acquiring a child development position with Childrens' Aid, she became involved with day cares and cooperative nurseries. Her professional work immersed her in researching alternative education programs and curricula for Early Childhood Education (ECE), and she quickly became aware of how little environmental education was being offered to very young children.

There is growing public awareness that each generation seems to be spending less time outdoors and more time indoors engaged with our prolific technological devices. Marlene's awareness of these changes was highlighted in her recollection of growing up in Newfoundland. She described her family's practice of living off the land and explained how "sustainability was embedded in their culture," even though it was "a term that they would never have used." She recalled that she and her twin sister, from the age of three on, had been sent out to play in the forest and on rocky beaches all day and were expected to come home and indoors only in order to fulfill their "primal need to eat or sleep." The idea of an early childhood centre was "not even a concept that [she] had heard of until [her] early years in university." Marlene's motivation to find a suitable program for young children also came from recognizing that her own current connection to the natural world was not as strong as it had been in her childhood. She resonated strongly with a popular book published at this time, "Last Child Left in the Woods," by Richard Louv (2005), which coined the term "nature-deficit-disorder." She was seeking a program for the young children she was working with that would offer the freedom she remembered from her childhood in Newfoundland.

Marlene's first encounter with the idea of an FS came through reading Carl Honoré's 2008 book, "Under Pressure: Rescuing Childhood From the Culture of Hyper-Parenting," in which he mentioned an FS in China: She clearly recalls that moment when all her interests came together. As she was then pregnant for the first time, she aspired to make available such a program for her own children. This initial reading about FSs led to much more intensive research on the subject. She contacted FSs around the world and asked them how they began and for other valuable information regarding their administration and teaching responsibilities.

The Organization: Forest School Canada

After realizing the work involved in establishing two successful FS programs at Carp Ridge (the preschool and kindergarten) (2013), Marlene turned her focus to providing support for others to establish similar outdoor-based programs, especially for young children. Her success at Carp Ridge and previous research and networking had established her as a Canadian leader on this subject. She started to be invited to make presentations at Early Childhood Educational events and Environmental Education conferences. As she tried to support others' efforts to take children routinely outdoors, she realized that a more formal institution was required. Marlene wrote several proposals and was successful at obtaining various forms of support that allowed her, in 2012, to found and become Executive Director of Forest School Canada (FSC). Marlene's intention was to begin to create a network for support, education, and accreditation for concepts associated with the FS movement in Canada. As part of FSC's launch, she arranged for Clair Warden, a leading researcher and promoter of Forest Schools around the world, to come and lead workshops and webinars. Clair Warden founded *Mindstretchers* in Scotland and has authored numerous curriculum-based books that offer teachers support and provide a rationale for ways to promote fundamental outdoor learning experiences for students (Warden, 2013).

In the summer and fall of 2013, FSC offered pilot practitioner courses across Canada to aid educators in fulfilling their interest in establishing and working in FS settings. The pilot courses were based upon a practitioner program developed in the UK that uses a three-level course model (UK Forest School Association and Training at Bishop's Woods), but was also grounded in the realities of the Canadian experience. The plan is to eventually establish a means to educate and certify FS educators in Canada. A certifying organization is required to establish guidelines and standards of practice for taking

very young children outside in order to address the public's concerns and to ensure that the benefits of FSs are not forgotten.

In a practitioner program, teachers would learn how to use a play-based and nature-focused pedagogy in their programs, as well as how to ensure it is done in a safe learning environment. Foremost is the idea of preventing any unfortunate accident from happening at a future FS. Many Canadian outdoor educators realize that the only benefit of the 1978 Timiskiming disaster (when 13 school children died in a canoeing accident) was the establishment of ORCKA: the Ontario Recreational Canoeing and Kayaking Association (Raffan, 2003). Like ORCKA and other similar certifying agencies, FSC plans to establish safe standards of practice and training opportunities for educators to learn ways to effectively take very young children outdoors.

Heather Andrachuk, who was present at the FSC launch, stressed the idea Claire Warden shared about the importance of teachers learning to distinguish risks from hazards. Heather shared accounts of young children learning to take healthy risks for their growth and development. Ensuring that such ideas become established in professional FS teachers' education is a prime example of the way an organization like FSC can serve educators. Many teachers have limited personal experience with being outdoors and even less working effectively with children in natural settings so everyone remains safe. Most teachers need to learn effective ways to allow children to learn to take appropriate risks for their abilities in natural settings beyond a schoolyard. In the UK and Scandinavian countries, many FS children are taught to handle hatchets, knives, and fires in a safe manner under the guidance of their teachers. Most current Canadian teachers need guidance themselves in order to use such tools and to establish safe practices with children. As well as establishing guidelines and protocol for establishing FSs, FSC is also part of a team that is designing a model FS facility at Ottawa`s Equestrian Park. Policy research and initiatives will continue to evolve through FSC and the Ottawa FS model site; the aim is to establish evidence and give priority to the value in FS programs.

Currently, the various FSs that are running are mostly associated with private schools. Marlene expressed a strong interest in bringing the ethos of Forest Schools into the public school system through the work of FSC. One example does exist. In British Columbia, a Nature Kindergarten has been started within the Sooke District School Board, which makes it the first public-based program in Canada. Marlene is exploring how FSC can make links with universities so that teacher candidates and continuing teacher education courses can encourage the ethos behind Forest Schools and promote safe, educational learning opportunities for children in the public school systems.

Environmental educators support the FS model because it provides an authentic and enriched means for children to learn based upon the extended periods of time they would spend outdoors in nature. An example exists in Denmark, where the concept of Forest Schools extends into the higher grades: weekly or biweekly for one day, a whole school moves to a local natural area to conduct all of its daily subjects (Mygind, 2011). Danish teachers have come to expect to teach all their subjects outside one day a week. As more and more Canadian parents and teachers recognize the rewards of teaching and learning outdoors, such a practice may also begin to occur in Canada. As Marlene articulated: "When outdoor learning is routine for young children, they will begin to demand being outside as they grow up."

Benefits of Forest Schools

Very young children receive many benefits from spending their formative years outside. Being outdoors provides diverse learning opportunities, which indoor confined spaces do not offer. Health benefits arise from an environment that challenges physical ability, including fine and gross motor skills. Empowering respect for and love of nature results as time spent learning outdoors is increased. A sense of self is reaffirmed as confidence grows through the continued sharing of new adventures with friends and teachers.

Marlene elaborated on a few learning exceptionalities that do well in FSs and mentioned the research that is just beginning in this area (Pavey, 2006). For instance, she described children with autism who do better in the outdoors where sound does not bounce off walls and individuals with hyper-activity who benefit from fully expending their energy so that learning patterns are not interrupted. Marlene explained:

> For children with autism and ADHD, there has been documentation of benefits. Because an outdoor space doesn't have walls, the noise is not as loud, it does not over stimulate. Children in an FS can often walk away from situations; [they can] take a breath or take time away if they are getting overwhelmed. With four walls, they can't do that as easily because [learners walking out of a classroom] are harder to supervise. People think it would be harder to supervise [learners] outdoors, but I think it is easier [outdoors] to manage those behaviours."

Other children with exceptionalities who tend to do better in FS than in conventional schools include those who are hyperactive or who have ADHD. There is still no

conclusive research to support any claim, but some initial studies are demonstrating that being immersed in natural colours and views rather than in bright colours, as are often found on children's toys, may have a calming effect on children (Norton, 2006; Hoicowitx, McNerney, Jidspm, & McCoy, 2003). Other research has noted the beneficial role natural sounds can have on calming individuals (Lakovides, Illiadou, Bizeli, Kaprinix, & Fountoulakis, 2004).

Heather offered specific narrations of individual students benefitting from an FS curriculum. One incident she outlined involved a student who loved the FS program but was very clumsy moving through the woods, which early on resulted in bruises and sore spots that required her to rest at home. After a discussion with the child's parents, Heather specifically started to help the child slow down and think through more complex movements over logs and branches. She said the results of this guidance were very positive. Rob McDougall, Outdoor Education Coordinator for Gould Lake Outdoor Centre, mentioned that he is surprised at how many more children are twisting their ankles and struggling to move on uneven ground; he could not recall previous years at the Outdoor Centre when as many little injuries occurred as in the past two years (McDougall, 2013). Rob suspects that some children are spending most of their lives moving only on level surfaces such as flat floors, stairs or escalators, and manicured, leveled fields; the children's formative years of development lack the diverse terrain that would require them to make subtle ankle shifts as they balance and move on hillsides or uneven ground, as frequently occurs in natural settings. Carla Hannaford's 2005 book *Smart Moves* provides many details concerning the role various movements play in child development—at both the physical and neurological levels. Many of her examples outline the complexity of outdoor movement compared to movements done with standardized apparatus. Outdoor movement on varied terrain provides enriched learning opportunities for coordination, neural development, balance, and overall fitness. Heather provided specific accounts of the way her students' physical growth and self-confidence were improved throughout the year as she provided guidance and reminders to them as they repeatedly attempted various climbing routes they encountered throughout the FS day.

Whereas FSs benefit children with specific learning needs and individuals who need more varied terrain for full physical development, all children benefit from FSs through the opportunity they provide to establish a deep fascination with the natural world. Heather shared a detailed account of one incident that clearly transformed an energetic group of boys for the year. Visitors to the Carp Ridge Centre told Heather that they had just seen a great horned owl. Heather immediately got the students to don the

snowsuits they had just taken off for lunch in the wall tent, so that they could try to spot the owl on this very cold February day. Eventually, a few of them spotted the owl; they all quietly moved closer until they had a good view of the bird. Heather explained:

> I did not have to say anything or prepare the children at all, but they knew this was a really important, awe-inspiring experience. This was a group of very active boys who normally were not quiet in any sense of the word. There was not a peep out of any of them; they just watched [the bird]. The bird was spinning its head, looking at us and looking away. When the children wanted to speak, they spoke in whispers, asking such questions as: "What is it doing? What is it looking for? What kind of things does it eat? What sounds does it make?" The children were absolutely enraptured: no complaints about being hungry or being cold; jaws open and eyes wide.

This owl-spotting experience would be an event that the children referred to throughout the rest of the year. Heather emphasized her amazement at having children mention that they wanted to make the sound of a mouse under the snow so that "maybe the owl will fly again and maybe it will come at us and we can see more of it." Another child commented that the owl was the same size as his baby brother. Encounters with other beings, as occur in natural settings, provide an ideal learning atmosphere that allows children's curiosity to become both focused and expansive as they make connections to their own lives.

As children are allowed to follow their whims and explore their interests in nature, so too do they explore and develop a confidence and sense of who they are. Marlene shared one of her proudest moments, which involved her daughter Hazel, who she described as "super quirky and funny and a real firecracker of a character." When Hazel started FS, remembered Marlene, she was afraid to walk on ice and be near water. Marlene continued:

> I remember seeing her in the FS with her frilly ballerina tutu on in the rain, with full rain gear, with mud gear filled with mud, and her doll under her arm. [I was proud] to see how she could still be who she is and still have her fears and different neuroses and quirks, and to see how she can still love being outdoors. [Now] every day she goes down to the river at home, and she loves it. Seeing my children live that way is what I am most proud of. I am sure that the Forest School is a big part of that, but also it has so influenced and affirmed how I parent.

It is hoped that FSC will be able to provide a means to do research and better document the benefits FSs seem to offer, so that other educators and parents will feel supported in

including more outdoor learning opportunities in their practices. The goal is to expose students to nature more often in order to improve their health and learning and to enrich their overall development.

Developing Pedagogy for Forest Schools

The social context created in an FS setting, which does not have the confinements of walls, offers a unique opportunity for interactions between nature and child, teacher and child, and classmates and child. All of these interactions offer a rich means to foster language and communication skills. For the FS teacher, the setting requires different behaviour management techniques. Heather realized quite quickly in her teaching experience that she needed to involve students in the planning of the day. Involving students in planning their learning is not new in education, but unfortunately it is still not a standard practice that all teacher candidates are assured of experiencing on their practicum. Some teaching styles or school curricula encourage open-ended structure and a large degree of student-determined inputs (Summerhill School, 2004; Central Advisory Council for Education, 1972). Such open teaching and learning styles need to be encountered routinely in order to become part of an established teacher's practice. Heather had to sort out many things on her own because she worked alone in a unique setting that required flexibility. Similar to A.S. Neills's Summerhill Free School, she found a solution in a self-designed, consensus-based process that involved her young children's input (Summerhill School, 2004). She explained:

> The biggest challenge that stood out for me was learning about behaviour management in a different setting than an educator might have in a conventional setting with four walls and typical classroom resources. It was a lot of trial and error for me and for the students to learn about how we would cooperate—the kind of dance we would do and what would work best. I learned that I did not have to be doing a lot of the classroom management and curtailing a lot of what the children were doing. Rather, I could create an environment for them that would allow them to be themselves and be comfortable in the space they would create for themselves.
>
> A lot of my practice revolves around democracy with the children [with] each of us having an equal voice. I am not the boss of them, and they are not the boss of me, and each of us is the boss of ourselves. We all have our voice and advocacy. That really helped me in learning about them and what would work for them in this different setting: In the morning, we have what I call our morning meeting. And that is,

> for the most part, the only time during the day that I really like to require the children to be part of what we are doing. The rest of the day, they get to choose what they participate in or don't want to do, and I facilitate that. But in the morning, I find it really important for us to set up expectations for the day, to "touch base on how we are feeling," what we are bringing that day emotionally, socially, from home what is happening, anything exciting or interesting or upsetting in their lives. And then we plan the day from there. Everyone gets a say in what we are interested in doing for the day and what we might like to undertake. And then we "map out the day" based upon that. For the most part, we can come to consensus on that. I prefer to come to consensus rather than compromising because, to me, when you compromise, no one ever really gets what they want; but, for me, when we come to consensus, it means everyone gets what they want.

Heather's explanation of the way the group created a schedule for a day is based on young people's ability to move between familiar terrain and the construct of a map. As a professional outdoor educator who frequently teaches navigational skills, I was very intrigued to listen to Heather's descriptions of her students' sense of direction and way-finding ability. Future research may be able to address the role that exposure in early years to wandering freely outside provides, such as a sense of direction in adults. I have, a few times, experienced university students afraid to enter small woodlots in case they could not find their way out. I also have noticed teachers' growing dependence on navigational devices, such as GPS, and struggles to follow a map or teach mapping skills to others. Heather's mapping and planning a day seems to invite future research that explores how routine childhood wandering influences a sense of direction:

> When we literally map out the day, the children are very amazing to me. I mean four-, five-, and six-year-olds are amazing. I mean amazing at understanding landscape and direction once they become comfortable with a site. We will often create a map and physically draw it out in the snow, sand, or dirt or use objects such as twigs and rocks and leaves, to make a map. Then [we] use it to talk about what we are going to do and how we are going to get from place to place, where we are going to go, and in what order we are going to do things. Then we get to talk about it; for example: "If we go there, we might not have time to do this [thing] that you wanted." Then I ask: "Are you OK with that? If we can't do your thing [today], is it OK if we start the next day with it?" And most often it is no problem at all.

Heather has demonstrated a confidence in her own ability to learn and adapt a pedagogy for teaching in the outdoors. Heather's narrations also emphasized the rich language and cognitive development that these children develop by learning how to

express themselves using constructs of time, place, and the need to be considerate of one's classmates. Heather uses her morning circle to plan a day and give rhythm to her yearly cycle. She then accompanies the children as a group as they wander and loosely follow the plan they set forth in their morning circle. As she travels all day with the children, she circulates through small group conversations aiming to add ideas that build upon their initial awareness and interest. She takes her clues from their observations and role models new observations, terms, and additional questions to encourage their curiosity and further intrigue in the subject. Her awareness of curriculum guidelines is brought to the foreground of an interaction after a student makes an initial related inquiry. For instance, if a student notices an insect has a certain number of legs, Heather may then encourage all insect legs to be counted by the children and compared to what they have seen on previous days. Both the social dynamics of a forest school and the opportunity to become aware of changing natural phenomena provide rich settings for developing language skills.

Forest Schools as an Approach to Environmental Education and Play-Based Education

Both Marlene's and Heather's commentaries emphasize the rich environmental skills and relationship to place that FS students develop. Heather is uniquely capable of commenting upon this because her graduate research focused on citizen science programming. Citizen science is based on educating local citizens in ways to accurately document various natural phenomena and their yearly changes (e.g., monarch butterfly migrations, yearly bird and frog monitoring counts). Such documentation has proven very valuable to scientists and environmental advocacy groups. Heather referred to being continually impressed by the natural phenomena these young children notice, such as the distinction between insects found in the forest versus fields. Heather's FS students constantly find new insects and ask questions she is unsure how to answer, but she loves the research she is continually called upon to do so that the next time a phenomenon is noticed she can introduce students to new terms and dialogue to further encourage their problem-solving and questioning skills.

Nature provides children with an infinite number of reasons to ask questions and dialogue with teachers and peers about what they are observing. The opportunities nature provides to spark student interests are unmatched by any computer program, once students learn the language and terminology associated with following their curiosity. Some of what motivates people to start an FS is the recognition that children of all

ages, including early childhood, need to be offered an enriched opportunity to develop eco-literacy. Marlene emphasized the way an FS provides the ability "to understand the life cycle, handle natural and sustainable materials, and offers the everyday opportunities to raise ideas about personal impact and compassion." She concluded that,

> her number one driving force for establishing an FS was to try and infuse that sense of passion, inquiry, inspiration, and attachment to the natural world, with the hopes that it will have long-lasting impacts on how we live and the kind of leaders we are creating for the future.

Both Marlene and Heather are dedicated to the idea that to be a professional educator in an FS means that you must have a strong understanding of the way play-centred learning in nature can unfold and know how to use an emerging curriculum based upon what is noticed in the learning site each day. Many Early Childhood Education programs already use or are turning towards a child-centred, play-based learning approach (for example, Ontario's all-day kindergarten curriculum). However, FSs' emphasis on allowing the natural features of a place to teach the children may be new to many educators. Marlene describes how a teacher can work with an evolving sense of play instead of fully directing or controlling every situation:

> I think it is a lot harder to be an educator who knows how to stimulate, [be] active and engaged and creative and imaginative and [offer] child-directed learning—and then get out of the way. . . . [Often teaching] is too directed: "I am the expert; I know everything; I am the teacher." That kind of teacher takes control over a situation. The process of teaching in an emerging context and knowing when to be involved and when to get out of children's way takes a very skilled, educated, intuitive, and imaginative educator. Our hope is that FSC shapes the education field, not just to give children an opportunity to be in an education setting like this, but also to give educators an opportunity to teach in this way, in a more inspiring, intuitive, and imaginative way.

Marlene also raised the ideas that FSs benefit individual educators working in them and in the general field of environmental education:

> The FS movement empowers everyday educators, not just outdoor educators or people who have taken a university OEE program . . . . All educators are encouraged to take ownership and to be responsible for teaching environmental education. I think that the future of environmental education needs to be rooted in everyday

experience, in bringing nature into the promotion of environmental education so that it connects us to the environment we are teaching about.

Marlene has been impressed with the "very vibrant and engaged and passionate educators" who are seeking her out and asking her how they can do practicums at a FS.

Most environmental curricula, similar to many subject-based lesson plans, have well-defined curricula that flow from one predetermined activity to another, so that each step sequentially builds skills and concepts. However, a play-based curriculum allows children to follow their own curiosity about the natural phenomena that they are immersed in, while also having teachers and peers to interact with and converse with on the topic, so that their ideas and skills can be expanded in various directions depending upon the situation and its emergent opportunities. Marlene describes how a teacher's ability to use an emergent curriculum is one of the clear distinctions between conventional environmental education programs and FS curricula.

Both Marlene and Heather are passionate about using FSs to build children's primary attachments to the natural world in, as Marlene stated, "the same way we are building attachments to humans." Building attachment to nature requires a continued opportunity to be in nature and to recognize how human life is dependent upon natural systems and a healthy environment. FSs use the natural world at a critical time in children's development to build their healthy, caring sense of a place.

Conclusion

In today's world of prolific technological devices, of manicured playing fields and school grounds, and of enclosed buildings, it is inspiring to know that the FS movement is catching on and finding its way in Canada. The confidence, practices, and environmental awareness that an FS education offers young children is clearly needed today. Through FSC's practitioner courses and research that help to create safe standards of care and articulate the value of such programs, it is hoped that the FS movement will continue to grow and produce the leaders that will be needed to address future environmental issues. As Marlene states: "One of the powerful things about the FS movement for the environmental education field is that it acknowledges, legitimizes, and brings environmental education into the early years, a really critical time for attachment." As FSs create attachment to the natural world, they also offer a rich environment in which children (and educators) develop into healthy, confident, caring citizens.

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http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca

Learning From the Past to Inform Our Present: A Survey of the Evolution of Childhood and the Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

To understand the kindergarten of today, it is important to comprehend early childhood education of the past. This article surveys the evolution of childhood and of the kindergarten from past to present. The early schools of Oberlin, Pestalozzi, and Froebel are explored and focus is later placed on the past and the present Canadian/Quebec kindergarten system. Personal narratives from the classroom mark the conclusion of each section. These reflections encompass the overall emphasis of each segment by providing a look into the daily life of my teaching, hoping to bridge theory and practice.

The Evolution of Childhood and Kindergarten

How did the kindergarten become the stepping-stone to school culture and what role does Quebec have in this history? This article outlines the histories of childhood, kindergarten, and kindergarten in Quebec.

A Short History of Childhood

The notion of childhood is a fairly modern concept. Prior to the 16th century, *children*, as we now would consider them, were thought to be small adults. In his famed text, *Centuries of Childhood*, historian Philippe Airès (1962), outlines the evolution of childhood and family life. During the 13th century, artists included images of children into their paintings. Children were depicted with distorted bodies resembling those of developed adults only in smaller form. Although children were represented during the

13th century and the notions of childhood developed throughout the 14th and 15th century, it was not until the late 16th and early 17th century that the concept of childhood became more apparent. As described by Airès, literature of the time is riddled with language created specifically for children. Words such as *toutou* and *bonbon* were terms of endearment, however the concepts of childhood from the 17th century are far removed from those of today's society. Children of that time were exposed to adult life and all of its cruelties. Through researching the detailed diary of Henri IV's physician, Heroard, Airès discovered that Louis the XIII was known to have had sexual experiences at the whim of his elders before the age of three, and at fourteen years he was forced to bed his newly appointed wife. Heroard's journal outlined the many details of young Louis' life, many of which would today be considered shocking.

Historian J.H. Plumb (1971) adds to these thoughts with reference to popular art of the 16th century:

> There was no separate world of childhood. Children shared the same games with adults, the same toys, the same fairy stories. They lived their lives together, never apart. The coarse village festivals depicted by Breughel, showing men and woman besotted with drink, groping for each other with unbridled lust, have children eating and drinking with the adults. Even in the sober pictures of wedding feasts and dances, the children are enjoying themselves along-side their elders, doing the same things. (p. 7)

Airès (1962) writes of the shift from this barbaric view of infancy to the image of cherubs later associated with the child. This change was brought on by the reformed ideas of influential pedagogues from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that stood against such cruelties. They commissioned censored editions of timely classics, such as *Comedies of Terence* or the conversations of Erasmus, Mosellanus, and Vivès for their younger pupils. This resulted in ideas of protecting the child from the adult world, thus ensuring their innocence. The notion of the child as simplistic and naïve was echoed by the likes of Rousseau. His radical ideas found in *Émile* (1762/1892) fought to change the notion of childhood at the time. Rousseau opens this novel stating, "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hands of man" (p. 1). Rousseau valued play, the freedom of being a child and the possibilities of children learning by doing, not by pure memorization. These concepts of childhood connect to beliefs today. According to Airès, during the late 17th century, parents, like many today, held anxieties concerning the education of their children and their future. The child was now to stay pure and learn proper etiquette.

Neil Postman (1981), in *The Day Our Children Disappear: Predictions of a Media Ecologist*, reflects on what he views as the turning point in history when childhood, as we know it, came to be. The turning point was the invention of the printing press. According to Postman, during the Dark and Middle ages, daily life was conducted through oral communication and so to partake in everyday activity, all a child needed was the ability to speak. Reading was not necessary and only the elite and the clergy possessed this skill. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press created two distinct groups of individuals: those who knew how to read and those who did not. Society soon became literature based. The need for reading became apparent and children were isolated from the rest of the community as non-literates. In order to partake in this newly created world of mass printing, children needed the skill of reading, thereby requiring tutelage from a school. According to Postman (1981), "Going to school was the essential event in creating childhood" (p. 384) and the need of reading "made childhood a necessity" (p. 36).

History of the First Schools For Young Learners

According to Harry Morgan (2011), distinguished author and observer of early childhood education, the first school in the Western world for children under the age of six opened in 1767 to serve the working class, coal-mining families of the French countryside. Its founder was Johann Friedrich Oberlin, who believed in free education for less fortunate children whose parents could not afford to supplement their child's educational needs. In *Early Childhood Education: History, Theory, and Practice*, Morgan describes Oberlin's schools as places where teachers "encourage[ed] language interaction and storytelling as starting points for art and music, along with learner-initiated project construction activities." (p. 11). These school were nicknamed "knitting schools" due to the simultaneous knitting by the educators while they engaged in conversation with their pupils. Conversation played a great role for Oberlin, who wished for his pupils to learn proper French, rather than their spoken dialects, in order to avoid job discrimination in the big cities. Oberlin created a child-centered environment where children were encouraged to learn at their own pace, and partake in physical activities while sharing in artistic ventures such as knitting, drawing, and creating herbariums. Many of these curricula concepts continue to be seen in today's early educational institutions.

Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi is another prominent figure in the history of early childhood education. According to Norman Brosterman (1997) in his text *Inventing Kindergarten*, Pestalozzi, like Oberlin, educated students under the age of six. He, too, began his teachings with the less fortunate who were working in farmhouses and living in orphanages. In 1800, he established his first school for the poor in his own barn. Pestalozzi was a true pioneer in the field of early education

as his philosophies of education favored active hands-on-learning and observation. Pestalozzi (1894) believed that through observation of social interactions, the child creates his/her own interpretation, thus serving as a model for his/her personal behavior.

In her text entitled *Pestalozzi*, Kate Silber (1973) writes of the many aspects of Pestalozzi's work that differed from other educational institutes of the time. Like many students of the 1800s, Pestalozzi's first pupils were simply learning by repetition. This method was changed, for Pestalozzi rejected the notion of rote memorization. He ensured his pupils understood their lessons before reciting anything. Pestalozzi thought that children should be taught only what is developmentally appropriate. In this respect, students should never be deprived of learning anything that they are capable of learning, but they should not be troubled by teachings that are beyond their understanding. Pestalozzi's philosophies on education were translated and compiled to create *The Education of Man: Aphorisms* with an introduction by William H. Kilpatrick (1951). Pestalozzi believed in the education of the whole child where love, joy, and reflection were present. He stated that, "life itself is the true basis of teaching and education" (p. 36). One of Pestalozzi's students would go on to influence school structure around the world. This famed student was none other than Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten.

Froebel followed the teaching of Pestalozzi, yet created his own theories attached to Idealism and the philosophies of the American Transcendentalists of the time. Michael Steven Shapiro (1983), in *Child's Garden: The Kindergarten Movement From Froebel to Dewey*, simplifies Froebel's writings and summarizes Froebelian theories as such:

> At the center of Froebel's education system lay the idea that mankind was the embodiment of God's reason. Froebel believed that the material world was only the outward expression of the inner divinity of all things…childhood held a special meaning, for it was a relatively uncorrupted embodiment of God's reason. (p. 20)

According to Froebel (1861/1909), children were good natured and pure. Their growth, with regards to developing personal connections between their inner and outer world, needed to be cultivated. It was in Froebel's kindergartens that this growing and nurturing took place. The word *kindergarten* echoes this concept as the German word "*kinder*" translates as *children* and the word "*garten*" as *garden*. The kindergarten is therefore the garden of children.

Norman Brosterman (1997), author of *Inventing Kindergarten*, relates how Froebel's theories went against the traditional teacher-directed student-response educational theories in Germany at the time. These theories were based on the omnipresent

religious instruction of the Lutheran church. In order for the child to connect to his or her inner and outer world, *self-activity*, or what we refer to today as a child-centered curriculum, needed to be present:

> Learning originated in the child itself, and expression became self-expression instead of recitation. The role of the teacher was thus transformed from lecturer to guide, as she now directed the child's natural movement towards play with one another and with freely expansive, but carefully defined gifts. (p. 33)

In his kindergarten, Froebel (1861/1909) used "gifts" and the "occupations" as teaching tools. There are a combined total of 20 gifts such as spheres, cubes, paper rings, blocks, and so forth—objects which stay in their true forms. The "occupations" (e.g., clay, sand, cardboard, mud) could be manipulated. The purpose of these "gifts" and "occupations" was to teach respect and gratitude of natural harmony, while awakening the child's senses to construct, observe, express, and reflect. Froebel's "gifts" and "occupations" assisted his views of making education "possible for man to feel and spontaneously to develop, to educate himself…as a whole human on earth…and in the harmony and union with the whole life…" (p. 9). Although these objects are not the focus in today's kindergarten, according to Gerald Gutek (1972), author of *A History of the Western Educational Experience*, Froebel's work did have effect as it "contributed to the liberalization of, and the legitimizing of, the role of play and activities in early childhood education" (p. 231).

In *Early Childhood Education; History, Theory and Practice*, Morgan (2011) writes of Margarethe Schurz, a student of Froebel's, who opened the first U.S. kindergarten in Wisconsin. However, Elizabeth Peabody is known for founding English Kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts in 1860. According to Morgan, as a young woman, Peabody taught women in her mother's school and was introduced to Froebel's teaching from Schurz. She furthered her understandings of the kindergarten movement by traveling to Europe to study with Froebel himself.

History of the Kindergarten in Canada and Quebec

Barbara E. Corbett (1989), author of *A Century of Kindergarten Education in Ontario*, traces the beginning of the Canadian kindergarten movement. She credits Egerton Ryerson, the Superintendent of Education for Ontario at the time, for preparing the province for Froebelian education. As editor of the *Journal of Education*, Ryerson published numerous articles on Froebel's kindergartens starting in 1872. *Two Hours in a Kindergarten*, written by Edward Taylor (1872), describes the amazement of the author

after witnessing 62 young children dancing, drawing, and making models. Taylor's opinion was that kindergarten "was simply a supplement to natural processes" and gave the child "an awakened interest and an unfeigned devotion to mental pursuits" (p. 132). *The Kindergarten in Canada*, written in 1875 by an unknown author, spoke of the German kindergarten system's successes and the need for such a program in Canadian schools. The author eloquently concluded by stating:

> If something could be done to supplement the present school system, excellent in many respects, by the addition of something similar to the kindergarten in Germany, that which is now a desert in our community in Canada might soon bloom as the rose. (p. 40).

According to the 1872 article *Constructing Time Tables in Our Schools* by James Hughes, ESQ (1872), class schedules in Canadian schools were unlike those in Germany as Canada's time tables were made to meet the needs of the teacher and not necessarily the needs of the students. Hughes, Master at the Boys' Model School of Toronto at the time, stated, "the more nearly a teacher can approximate the plan of having all his pupils engaged at the same work, at the same time, the more easy will be his labour, and the more rapid the advancement of his class" (p. 26).

In 1876, Hughes became the Inspector of Schools for Toronto. He visited the kindergarten display at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, which had been credited by Peabody and her fellow Bostonians. After numerous observations of kindergartens in the United States by Hughes and his team, the first public kindergarten opened in Toronto in January 1883. According to Corbett (1989), the school received wholehearted support from the people of Toronto while Hughes traveled giving public lectures on the topic. This, along with the many positive articles in the *Journal of Education* helped pave the way for kindergartens to open outside of metropolitan Toronto.

Quebec's kindergarten history is a fairly new one. In her chapter *An Historical Overview of Child Care in Quebec*, Ghislaine Desjardins (1992) provides readers with a thorough account of Quebec's childcare past and describes how its path led to the creation of the kindergarten. Desjardins writes that although there was childcare during the first half of the 19th century, due to the efforts of the Grey Nuns and various orphanages, many mothers placed their children in their care as a last resort. The French-speaking population used most of these shelters. The English community had only one day care center during the 19th century, The Montreal Day Nursery, which is still in existence today. These children's shelters were overcrowded and by the end of the 19th century many of their doors closed and they became orphanages.

During the 20th century, Quebec society frowned upon working women, and held that no *proper* mother would allow another to raise and mind her child. Although there was sufficient demand for government-supported childcare, the Duplessis administration rejected the idea of assisting mothers working outside of the home. While various centers did exist, these shelters were privately owned, unsubsidized and often the care provided was not on par with social standards. Quebeckers were forced to wait for a government-supported kindergarten program. The Montpetit Commission (1933) stated the need for junior kindergartens, but it met with no success (Commission des assurances sociales de Québec, Ministère du Travail, 1933). On August 19, 1942, Prime Minister MacKenzie King highlighted the necessity for childcare in order to help with the war effort in his speech, *Canada and the War: Manpower and a Total War Effort*: "To help safeguard the welfare of the family, day nurseries for the care of children of working mothers are being established." In the 1950s, even after the baby boom and an influx of immigration, Quebec's daycares remained private. It was not until December 1979 that the Quebec government passed the *Child Care Services Act*, which outlined the government's agreement to play a role in the creation of childcare/daycare facilities (Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1979, chapter P-34.1). In total, 125 years passed before the Quebec government's view of childcare moved from being charitable, private facilities to being the responsibility of the government.

In *Il Était Deux Fois: L'Évolution De L'Éducation Préscolaire au Québec*, Madeleine Baillargeon's (1989) places more focus on the Quebec kindergarten itself. Baillargeon states that the first kindergarten program was created in 1915, but little is said as to its curriculum or educational philosophies. Baillargeon writes in more detail of the kindergartens during the 1930s as some establishments were appearing across the province. The children in attendance, however, were those of the affluent who could afford private services. The first French public kindergarten opened only in 1950.

Poulin and Richard (2002) also describe the history of kindergarten in Quebec, but focus mainly on the present. According to them, by 1974 nearly 97% of Quebec's francophone children attended a kindergarten and by 1978, kindergarten was made more available to those with lower incomes, anglophones and allophones. During the 1970s, the students attended on a half-day basis. The teachers of these classes were given much flexibility, because the official Quebec kindergarten curriculum was not written until 1981. Later, with the implementation of the full-day kindergarten in 1997, the government revised this curriculum. This program lasted only five years, and in 2001, following the new Quebec Education Reform, the government published *Le programme de formation de l'école québécoise*, which is still in use today.

With the new education reform, a major shift was made in both the role of the teacher and the role of the students. Teachers were no longer seen as the only possible expert on a subject, but as guides to the students as they discovered their world (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec [MELS], 2001). The students were no longer taught by means of rote memorization or graded according to regurgitated facts. Instead, they were evaluated based on competencies, which, when mastered, could be applied for lifelong learning. This position of the active learner, searching for information, applying learned skills to new tasks, asking questions, and developing a global awareness are key factors to the 2001 reform. These philosophies of education and the philosophies of the MELS (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport) are similar to a constructivist approach to education, an approach based on the notions that learners construct their learning based on their environment, social interactions, and experiences.

The MELS' (2001) fourth chapter on preschool education outlines what can be expected in a Quebec kindergarten classroom as follows:

> Activities are rooted in children's everyday lives and their human, physical and cultural environment. They give children the opportunity to discover various means of expression and creation and to become aware of the different languages that support and construct learning. (p. 52)

Reflection: An Activity Rooted in Life

After the school day had finished, a parent of one of my students approached me, asking for a quick meeting to speak about a pending situation in his home. This event would take "John" out of school for a prolonged period and alter his life as he knew it. The student in question had been adopted from China and his parents had their names on an adoption list for another baby. Their name had come to the top of the list and, any day, the family would leave together to meet and bring home a new baby. They did not know when they would receive the call, but when they did, everything in their lives had to stop and the adventure to China would begin. The parents were concerned not only for their son's education if he left for some time, but also for the disconnection he may experience being away from his peers and his daily routines. As a teacher, it was my wish to make this event a positive educational experience not only for John, but also for our classroom community as a whole.

As a group we conducted small research projects on China based on the questions provided by the students: Do they play hockey in China? What kind of food do they

have? Is it cold there? This process allowed the students to take part in inquiry learning, thereby gathering insight into the culture of a classmate. Through our research, John became mentally prepared and excited for his upcoming trip.

The family received the call to go to Beijing and with that, John left our class for an undetermined amount of time. In order to keep John connected to his school and his friends, our inquiries into Chinese culture were taken a step further while the family was overseas. Through the magic of technology we conducted Skype meetings between John and our class. The task of proving our research findings through primary resources was put forth to John as he stayed in China. He therefore continued the inquiry process and would report his findings to the class through Skype.

As per the Quebec Curriculum, this lesson stemmed from the realities of the students. They were introduced to a new means of communication and their understanding of our world was enriched. The likes of Oberlin, Pestalozzi, and Froebel would have supported this endeavor, as the research did not move beyond the scope of the children because the inquiry was based on their reality. There was no memorization, but only true experiences where connections were made to their present situations, thus leading to genuine understanding.

Looking into the history of childhood and kindergarten education outlines the process that has paved the way for lessons, such as the student-led research described above.

Kindergarten Today

Today, Quebec's kindergarten program borrows from many of the philosophies previously outlined. This section will demonstrate how the philosophies of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia enter the everyday curriculum.

Quebec's Kindergarten program respects Dewey's views of education, which he summarized in his 1897 *Pedagogic Creed*. He wrote that education should be child centered, and both action and interaction are necessary for deeper learning. The social world of the child and the community cannot be excluded from a student's education.

Teachers following the MELS program (2001) give students time for art and play, since "through their play and spontaneous activities, children express themselves, experiment, construct their learning, structure their thoughts and develop their worldview" (p. 52). The role of teacher as facilitator in the Quebec Education Program places

high demands on teachers to create a stimulating learning environment where learners can take an active role in their learning. Teachers must produce resources fitting the children's inquiries and they must maintain and provide students with ample opportunities to apply their learning to various classroom and life situations. When teachers are successful in fulfilling these requirements, students become both active and interactive with their learning, thus following the constructivist view of John Dewey and Jean Piaget (1973a, 1973b).

The MELS program (2001) places a great deal of importance on observation because it "makes it possible to follow the children's progress in the development of their competencies" (p. 52). Quebec teachers are active participants in the students' learning and are seen as "mediators between students and knowledges" (p. 5). The program echoes Vygotsky's (1978) *Zone of Proximal Development* as the teacher's interactions with students should allow for the child to "carry out increasingly complex activities, stimulate their desire to surpass themselves and help them become aware of new realities" (p. 53).

The Quebec curriculum is also in line with Vygotsky's (1931/1997) notion of *cultural-historical development*. *Cultural-historical development* theories state that, "through others, we become ourselves" (p. 105). Students enter the school environment with a multitude of diverse backgrounds. When teachers consider these contexts, and the students share their personal realities among peers, children become exposed to their world and in turn develop and reaffirm their identity. This idea of constructing one's identity is present in all subject areas taught in the Quebec curriculum. By exposing students to diversity, children learn to "affirm their choices and opinions, recognize their own values, accept differences and be open to diversity" (MELS, 2001, p. 32).

The Reggio Emilia approach, with child-centered activities focusing on relationships along with the child's ability to communicate through the *100 languages*, has its place in the Quebec kindergarten program. The mandate for MELS program (2001) is for a child to develop an eagerness for school and to nurture curiosity and a personal drive for learning while preparing him/her both socially and cognitively for the years of schooling to come. Like Reggio, play and unprompted activity are encouraged during the school day, and through cross-curricular competencies, subject areas are not taught in isolation. The community is involved and interaction becomes paramount for learning.

The Quebec kindergarten curriculum, although child-centered and based on cross-curricular competencies, lacks the core values of a Reggio Emilia curriculum. As Sue Fraser mentioned to Carol Anne Wien in their 2000 interview, there is a lack of explicit insight into the multitude of relationships, their development and their importance in

the kindergarten. The competencies outlined by the MELS, such as to affirm his/her personality, to perform sensorimotor actions, to complete an activity or project, to construct his/her understanding of the world, to communicate and to interact harmoniously with others (MELS, 2001) are, for the most part, focused on the development of the individual child—and not on the development of the child through the relationships created by interactions with peers, environment, community, and so forth. It takes a teacher who fosters a community of learners and values communication and empathy to implement Reggio values through the Quebec Education Program.

The Quebec Education Program for kindergarten, although encompassing the philosophies of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and, to some extent, Reggio Emilia, remains very broad, thus leaving much interpretation to the teacher to implement the curriculum. Future investigation into today's kindergarten classrooms and the curriculum realities implemented by Quebec's teachers would prove interesting research.

Reflection: "Kid of the Day"

In keeping with the Reggio idea of fostering and understanding relationships, and through interpreting MELS competencies of *affirming personality, interacting harmoniously with others*, and *communication* (MELS, 2001), I implemented "kid of the day" sessions at the end of each school day. This was one way for me to give the students personal satisfaction, confidence, and a sense of self-efficacy while developing group dynamics, empathy, and respect among students.

Appointed by the teacher, the "kid of the day" is a student who accomplished something *special* that day—overcoming a personal hardship, sharing, or helping a peer or simply starting the day with a smile. This child is singled out as the class sits together in a circle on the carpet. Once the teacher congratulates the student, it is left to the students to each take a turn in expressing one thing positive about the "kid of the day." It is understood that everyone has something good in him or her and we can all find that something. It is amazing to see the thought process and reflection as the students mature over time. At the start of the year many comments are superficial as they will mention how nice a child's hair, shoes or eyes are, but in time these comments become savvy. "I like how you played tag with me" or "I like how you helped me clean up the LEGO." They develop a heightened awareness of each other's good deeds and, of course, they all love being the "kid of the day" and hearing praise from their class community. These positive accolades breed positive relationships among the students. It allows students to contemplate their place in our class, their friendships and interactions. Founder of Reggio Emilia Malaguzi (1998) stated, "Children are not shaped by

experience, but are the ones who give shape to it" (p. 86), and it is the students who drive this simple yet deeply powerful activity.

In learning of our past we can inform our present and better our future.

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Creating an Early Childhood Nature-Based Play Space—A Success Story

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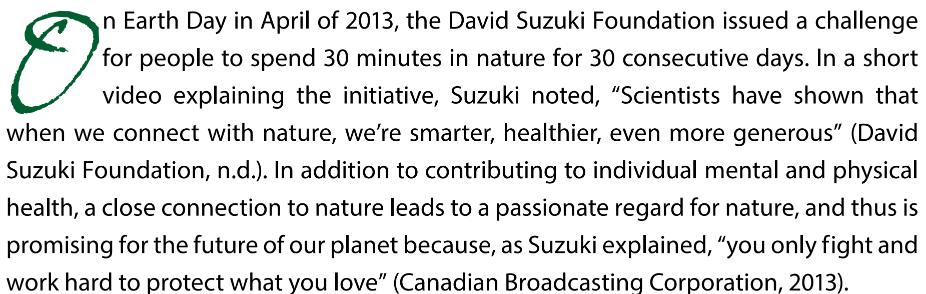
ABSTRACT

This article chronicles the successful expansion of an existing play space, filled with commercial play equipment, to include a nature-based area for the young children attending an early childhood program in a Canadian First Nations community. This change was sparked by the centre director's participation in a one-hour workshop focused on the importance of children being in nature. The subsequent process the director went through to provide a nature-based space is described here. The responses of the children and the early childhood educators to the new space are reported. Concluding thoughts about why this particular director might have been inspired and able to effect this change are offered.



On Earth Day in April of 2013, the David Suzuki Foundation issued a challenge for people to spend 30 minutes in nature for 30 consecutive days. In a short video explaining the initiative, Suzuki noted, "Scientists have shown that when we connect with nature, we're smarter, healthier, even more generous" (David Suzuki Foundation, n.d.). In addition to contributing to individual mental and physical health, a close connection to nature leads to a passionate regard for nature, and thus is promising for the future of our planet because, as Suzuki explained, "you only fight and work hard to protect what you love" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013).

These recent reminders of the importance of being in nature build upon more than a decade of research, in Canada and around the world, supporting the importance of adults and children spending time in nature (Louv, 2005, 2011). The research has sparked a sophisticated worldwide movement to increase children's experiences with

nature (childnature.ca; childrenandnature.org; Keeler, 2008). Even with all the research and resources available to support children spending increased time in nature, challenges related to changing educators' beliefs and practices and modifying outdoor play spaces can be significant. In a recent study, early childhood educators were asked to describe the barriers that prevented them from taking the children in their care outdoors for greater periods of time (Munroe & McLellan-Mansell, 2013). Almost all the educators expressed concerns about safety. Inadequate, poorly maintained, or impoverished, uninteresting outdoor play spaces with no provisions for the adults' comfort were listed as impediments to their taking the children outdoors.

Despite the complexity of transforming educators' beliefs and practices (Guskey, 2002), a promising story of change can occasionally be told. This article chronicles the successful expansion of an existing play space, originally filled only with commercial play equipment, to include a nature-based area for the young children attending an early childhood program in a Canadian First Nations community. This change was sparked by the childcare director's participation in a one-hour workshop during which she viewed images of nature-based play areas and listened to a review of the researched benefits of playing in nature. The process the director went through, from designing the nature-based space, to obtaining funding and deciding on materials for the space, is described here and the responses of the children and the early childhood educators to the new space are reported.

Following the description of the successful change to the outdoor space at this one centre, the author proposes some thoughts as to why this particular director might have been inspired and able to effect change for the benefit of the children in her program. Of the 30 workshop participants, representing eight First Nations communities in the province, only this one director was spurred into action to modify the outdoor space at her centre. This might suggest the workshop was a failure. In contrast, the fact that the workshop inspired one participant to make such dramatic change can be seen as a surprising, wonderful result. Single-event professional development sessions have long been acknowledged as ineffective in terms of causing changes in educators' practice (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Knowing this, there was little expectation that the workshop would do more than heighten awareness of the importance of playing in nature and spark interest in different kinds of outdoor play spaces. The action-oriented response of this one director is considered in relation to the concepts of horizontal and vertical transfer (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010), the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), and brain research, emotion, and learning (Wolfe, 2006).

This paper invites readers to celebrate a successful story of change. The review of the importance of children playing in nature and the description of the transformation of an outdoor play space may inspire others to bring elements of nature into their centre's outdoor areas. The concluding thoughts about why one woman might have been inspired to take action after attending a workshop may encourage those who design professional learning opportunities to modify some elements as they offer single-event sessions.

Playing in Nature-Based Spaces Rather Than Commercial Playgrounds

Researchers have found that children prefer to play in nature-based spaces rather than on commercial playground equipment. As one kindergarten-aged boy explained, "Climbing rocks is more fun than climbing trees—but climbing trees is more fun than the boring playground equipment" (Fjørtoft & Sageie, 2000, p. 84). Studying four- to six-year-old children's preferences for play in their schoolyard, Azlina and Zulkiflee (2012) found that the children "seemed to prefer the more natural play area that consisted of trees, a log, benches, sand and turf" (p. 282). They noted that children could have chosen to climb and slide on the playground equipment, but instead they chose to climb on the logs and benches in the more natural space. Perhaps some of the enjoyment of playing in nature derives from children's increased freedom to explore without the interference of adults (Handler & Epstein, 2010; Kernan, 2010; Little & Eager, 2010).

In addition to having fun, children have the opportunity to develop physically and socially and to enhance their reasoning and observation skills when they play outdoors (Handler & Epstein, 2010; White, n.d.). Fjørtoft (2004) conducted a nine-month-long study wherein one group of five- to seven-year-old children played in a natural environment (a forested area with shrubs, trees, rocks, and grassy spaces), and a comparable group of similarly aged children played on more traditional playground equipment (sandpit, swings, seesaw, slides, and a climbing frame). The researcher concluded, "When provided with a natural landscape in which to play, children showed a statistically significant increase in motor fitness" (p. 21). In particular, the children who had played in the natural setting had increased balance and co-ordination. Fjørtoft attributed this positive development in motor skills to the "complex [natural] physical environment, where the landscape structures provided diverse functions for play" (p. 38).

Fjørtoft (2004) also commented that “more demanding tasks” had been learned by the children who had played in the natural environment, perhaps due to the complexity afforded by the natural space. Many other authors have commented on the degree of challenge that play in nature offers, and they have suggested that the complexity of the natural environment leads children to self-monitor in terms of risk (Almon, 2009; Copeland, Sherman, Kendeigh, Kalkwarf, & Saelens, 2012; Handler & Epstein, 2010; Miller, 2007). Traditional play equipment often offers little to no challenge or risk because of increasingly stringent safety regulations for outdoor play areas. Surprisingly, such low-risk environments can actually result in children playing in dangerous ways as they seek to challenge themselves (Almon, 2009; Copeland et al., 2012; Dwyer, Higgs, Hardy, & Baur, 2008; Kernan, 2010; Stephenson, 2003). Gill (2005) quoted Helle Nebelong, a Danish landscape architect as saying,

> I am convinced that standardized play-equipment is dangerous. When the distance between all the rungs on the climbing net or the ladder is exactly the same, the child has no need to concentrate on where he puts his feet. This lesson cannot be carried over into all the asymmetrical forms with which one is confronted throughout life. (para. 4)

If willingness to take a risk is “fundamental to human learning as we endeavor to develop new skills, try new behaviors, develop new technology, and abandon the familiar to explore what we know less well” (Little & Eager, 2010, p. 499), perhaps we need to reconsider the effects of low-risk commercial play structures on children’s development.

Children who spend time in nature are more likely to develop an environmental ethic (Louv, 2005). “The health of the earth is at stake…. How the young respond to nature, and how they raise their own children, will shape the configurations and conditions of our cities, homes—our daily lives” (Louv, 2005, p. 3). Danks (2010) offered a compelling explanation as to how nature-based spaces lead to children’s development of an environmental ethic. A paved play space filled with plastic and metal structures makes the natural systems of the world invisible to children, whereas:

> ecological schoolyards provide opportunities for students to build awareness about local ecology and their own neighborhoods. They help children notice the birds in the city, the butterflies that visit their flower gardens, the patterns falling rain makes on the soil. Green schoolyards help students mark seasonal changes with the turning of leaves in the fall, the migrations of wildlife, and the length of shadows on the ground, and in so doing, make them better readers of their surroundings. (p. 5)

Ultimately, children who spend time in nature rather than in paved play spaces with commercial playground equipment "make connections between themselves and local natural systems… [and] learn that they have an impact on their environment and have opportunities to heal it" (Danks, 2010, p. 5). As the well-respected environmentalist Wallace Stegner wrote, "Whatever landscape a child is exposed to early on, that will be the sort of gauze through which he or she will see all the world afterwards" (cited in Danks, 2010, p. 12). Seeking to add to more than a decade of evidence confirming a correspondence between early experiences in nature and adult's environmental ethic, Vadala, Bixler, and James (2007) conducted lengthy interviews with 51 people between the ages of 18 and 35. "The individuals nominated were highly motivated and exceptional field naturalists, environmental educators, or conservationists" (p. 5). Ten non-outdoor enthusiasts made up the contrast or control group for this study. The researchers found that recreational and environmental preferences are determined in childhood, although they cautioned that the complexities surrounding this kind of research are many.

For First Nations people, spending time in nature and on the land has strong cultural implications. The Assembly of First Nations (n.d.) described the special relationship Aboriginal people have with the earth and all living things in it as a "profound spiritual connection to Mother Earth" (para 2). Participants in Greenwood and Shawana's study (2003) emphasized that including the natural environment in childcare settings would promote "holistic learning, a reflection of who we are" (p. 58). One might assume that in communities where the educators, children, parents, and grandparents are First Nations people, there would be fewer barriers to children spending time in nature-based settings; that this would be a high priority because of strong cultural connections to the land. However, there is considerable complexity inherent in education for Aboriginal children because of the need to intertwine the goals of mainstream academic success alongside "the essential establishment of children's identity valuing and giving expression to Aboriginal cultures" (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002, p. 309). Greenwood (2009) noted "one of the greatest challenges facing early childhood caregivers is to take principles of Indigenous knowledge and actualize them in current practice" (p. 75). The First Nations educators who collaborated with Munroe and McLellan-Mansell (2013) felt responsible for preparing the children for school, and they perceived that taking the children outdoors detracted from that goal. On the other hand, they expressed a longing for children to spend more time playing in nature, and they bemoaned the prevalence of "screen time" (Tandon, Zhou, Lozano, & Christakis, 2011) replacing outdoor time when children are at home.

There are many benefits that may arise from children spending time in nature-based play areas rather than playgrounds full of commercial equipment. As individuals, children develop physical, social, and emotional skills when they play in nature. It appears they also develop a sense of stewardship towards nature. Considering that children are our society's future leaders, the development of an environmental ethic is crucial. Vadala et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of adults providing opportunities for children to be in nature. The story that follows celebrates one early-years-program director's efforts to accomplish that goal.

The details offered in this story derive from a three-year research study in partnership with the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) First Nation Student Success Program (FNSSP) in Nova Scotia, focused on enhancing the experiences for children in early childhood settings. During conversations with the participants referred to in this article, the author took notes and scribed some direct quotes. The particular director whose story is described here read the final version of this paper and confirmed that the events surrounding this change to her centre's outdoor play space were accurately depicted.

Inspired by Images and Information

As part of the collaborative research with MK FNSSP, the author designed and led professional learning opportunities for the educators who worked in various early childhood programs in First Nations communities in Nova Scotia. The primary purpose of these workshops was to facilitate collaboration and networking amongst the educators on the topics of language and cultural enrichment. Prior to the first workshop, the author and the FNSSP coordinator visited many communities to see their early childhood programs and speak with the educators. During these conversations, some of the educators expressed frustration with their outdoor play spaces, and they asked questions about designing new outdoor areas. Although none of the educators (97% of whom were First Nations people) specifically linked their interest in improving outdoor play with the Aboriginal context in which they worked, devoting part of the first workshop to the topic of taking children outdoors was seen as complementary to the overall focus on the cultural enrichment of the programs.

Thirty early childhood educators and directors from eight First Nations communities in Nova Scotia attended the first all-day workshop. One hour of the workshop was focused on the importance of children being outdoors in nature. The author shared photos and information from a recent trip to Sweden, where she had visited

childcare centres with extensive and interesting outdoor spaces. The play spaces had some paved sidewalks for the young children to ride tricycles, but there were also a lot of shrubs, trees, grass, rocks, sand pits, small gardens, and an interesting slide built into the hill (Figures 1–3). Participants viewed a brief video describing several Swedish early childhood educators' inquiry into children's use of outdoor space (OMEP, 2010). Finally, the workshop participants viewed and discussed the DVD, *Leave No Child Inside* (Harvest Resources, 2006), which included inspiring photos of naturalistic outdoor play spaces for young children as well as research-based information on the benefits of outdoor play.

Fig. 1: Paved and grassy areas (Swedish child care centre)

Fig. 2: Slide and stairs built into the hill (Swedish child care centre)

Fig. 3: Flower and vegetable garden (Swedish child care centre)

Unbeknownst to the author, that hour of viewing images and discussing nature-based play spaces had a transformational effect on the director of one community's early childhood program. The workshop was held towards the end of October. By mid-November the director, Suzette,[1] contacted the author, asking to borrow the *Leave No Child Inside* CD (Harvest Resources, 2006). She indicated that she was applying for a grant to build a nature-based extension to their existing play area, and she wanted to include some of the information from the CD to strengthen her application. Towards the end of November, the FNSSP coordinator and the author visited the director at her centre and learned more about her plans.

Suzette confirmed that she was inspired by the images and information offered in the workshop. She exclaimed with regret that she had applied for and received funds for new playground equipment two years previous but had chosen a play structure from a glossy commercial catalogue (Figure 4). She had not known about nature-based materials and equipment for outdoor play spaces. White (2004) proposed,

"When most adults were children, playgrounds were asphalt areas with manufactured, fixed playground equipment such as swings, jungle gyms and slides, where they went for recess. Therefore, most adults see this as the appropriate model for a playground" (p. 1). This seemed to be partially the case for Suzette. Her previous decisions about playground equipment were to purchase commercial structures. But, she reported that her own fondest childhood memories were of messing around outside in natural spaces. The images shown during the workshop brought those memories back to her and introduced her to ways to incorporate elements of nature in outdoor play spaces for young children.

Fig. 4: Commercial play structure on gravel surface (Suzette's centre)

During the November visit, Suzette showed the author a plan she had created for a nature-based play extension to her centre's current outdoor play area (Figure 5). She had planned several pathways with concrete blocks, logs and tires, a hill and tunnel, a place to plant flowers, a place to dig in sand, a gazebo with a table and stools for children and adults to be protected from the hot sun or the rain, storage bins, and other benches, all situated in an area with grass, shrubs, and trees. Although there is a forest very near to Suzette's centre, supervision of the children in the forest poses some challenges and the ground is very wet. Suzettte wanted a fenced play area with natural elements, for children to have daily easy access without the necessity of written parent permission to take the children off site.

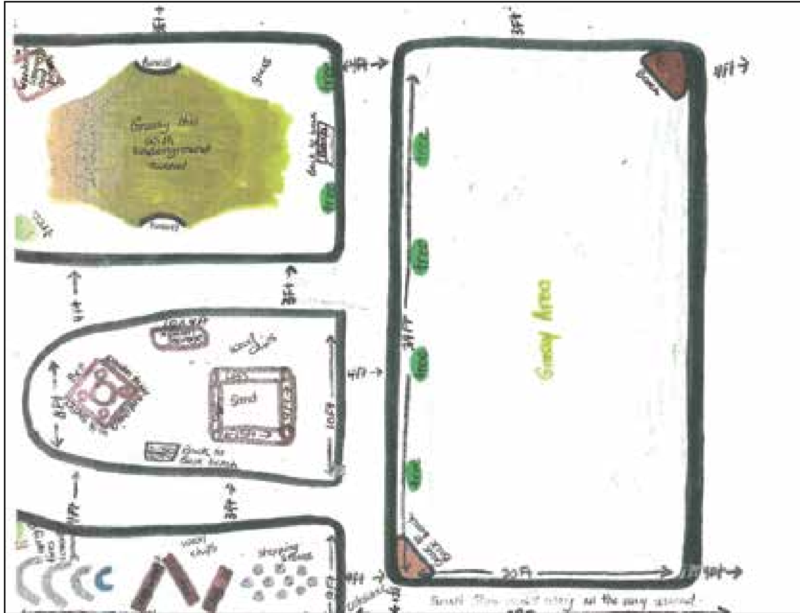


Fig. 5: Suzette's plan for a nature-based play space for her centre

As with many initiatives, the process of turning a dream into a reality may be slowed by unforeseen events. This was the case for the creation of Suzette's nature-based play area. While Suzette was negotiating with the potential granting agency for funds to build the new play space, she gained the impression that their representative was quite unfamiliar with nature-based play spaces. Indeed, the representative suggested Suzette hire a specialist to design a safe and appropriate space. Suzette declined to do that because of the expense, so the existing health and safety regulations were applied to her original plan. Suzette needed to make some changes to her plan, such as adding railings to reduce the danger of children falling off the top of the culvert that created the small hill in the space. She also had to ensure there would be no equipment that might hold standing water, so holes needed to be drilled in the tires that were to be embedded on their sides in the space. By March, the design for the nature-based play space had been approved, and the funds were awarded. The construction began in May, but progress was slow because the workers were also busy with several other building projects in the community, so when the young children finished their program in the middle of June, the play space was landscaped, but none of the play features were completed. After eight months, from the workshop in October to the middle of June, Suzette's dream had not yet become a reality, but it was close. Unfortunately, at that time, another professional opportunity arose that Suzette was very interested in

and for which she was well qualified, so she ended her tenure as director. She was sad to leave, but pleased that there would be a new, nature-based play space ready for the children when they returned to the program in the fall.

Early Responses to the Nature-Based Play Space

The author visited the community early in October, almost exactly a year after the workshop, to see the new play area (Figures 6–9) and to hear from the educators how the space was being used. When asked what she thought of the new space, one educator commented, "It's nice to look at, pleasing on the eye. It's an extra place to play. It's nice to have grass instead of rocks." Another educator added, "I like the gazebo and chairs; the children can sit in the shade. It would be nice to have a tea party out there." The educators described the new space as "peaceful and relaxing" and mentioned that the benches for the adults to sit were a welcome addition.

Fig. 6: New nature-based play space: covered gazebo for children and adults (Suzette's centre)

Fig. 7: New nature-based play space: interesting pathway, stepping stones, logs, and tires (Suzette's centre)

Fig. 8: Nature-based play space, tunnel, and bridge (with railings) at Suzette's centre

Fig. 9: Nature-based play space, with new grass and trees, and bench for the adults (or children) to sit (Suzette's centre)

The timing of the author's visit to the centre did not allow for any direct observation of the children playing outdoors, but the educators described the children's behaviour in the nature-based space as follows. "The children find things to do in there on their own. They roll down the hill, they make their own obstacle course on the stepping-stones, logs, and tires, and they like the tunnel. They play hide and seek—there are more places to hide in that space." Although the trees were small, the children were able to find leaves in the new play area for some fall crafts. The educators commented they had not been able to do that before.

Many of the educators' observations about the children's play in the nature-based space echo the findings of Fjortøft and Sageie (2000) and Azlina and Zulkiflee (2012), as described earlier in this paper. The children were engaged in different kinds of complex activities in the new space. When the educators commented that the children were able to amuse themselves and the adults could relax and sit on a bench some of the time, it seems as if they were confirming Mauffette's (1998) claim that "making the outdoors more enjoyable for everyone is of utmost importance" (p. 21) and may lead to increased time spent in that environment. In this particular case, however, the educators indicated the new play area had not resulted in their taking the children outdoors for any longer periods of time. They were still concerned with spending adequate time indoors, supporting the children's learning in areas more directly related to school success.

When asked if there were any challenges associated with the new play area, the educators admitted that the substitution of sawdust rather than wood chips was a problem because of allergies experienced by one educator. Also, the children only went into the new area when one of the adults went there. This was possibly because most of the fence around the original play space was still in place, with only a small opening leading to the new area. During an update conversation a year and a half later, the new director reported the sawdust was no longer a problem and that the children freely went into the new space even though the dividing fence was still up.

Suzette herself was a bit disappointed in the way the nature-based play area looked once it was actually constructed. She had thought it would be larger, with the various play areas more spread out. She acknowledged that she had not had a clear sense of the measurements necessary to provide the kind of play space she envisioned. Certainly, there might be some changes that would improve this space, but overall this remains a success story. The children do have an easily accessible, safe, nature-based play space to explore every day.

Change Sparked by a Single Workshop

This article has chronicled the change in outdoor play experiences afforded to one group of young children, with the addition of a nature-based play area. The creation of this new space was the direct result of Suzette's participation in one hour of information and discussion about the importance of children being in nature. For many years, researchers and professional development facilitators have been concerned that a single professional development session rarely leads to any change in educator practice (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997), yet that model for professional development still pervades. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) acknowledged that a single-event workshop may serve a purpose in increasing awareness of new instructional methods or curricular programs, but that such as session should be understood as a catalyst for change in teaching. The workshop may light the spark for a change, but it is usually not sufficient to fuel the fire long enough to lead to change in educators' practice. For sustained change in practice to occur after educators attend a workshop, several different forms of follow-up support such as: professional learning communities, coaching, mentoring, peer-planning and team teaching, administrative leadership, and provision of relevant resources are usually thought to be necessary (Borko, 2004; Darling Hammond, 2008; King, 2013)

Being aware of the usual ineffectiveness of a single-event session, the author and the First Nations School Success Program coordinator intended follow-up visits to each of the province's First Nations communities in the months subsequent to the full-day workshop. But before those visits could be planned, Suzette had taken the initiative by asking for information to support her application for a grant for a nature-based playground! This wonderful, but somewhat astonishing, result from the workshop caused the author to ponder what might have led to this action. Some thoughts are offered here about why this particular director may have been inspired and able to effect this change, with connections to the concepts of horizontal and vertical transfer (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010), the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), and brain research, emotion and learning (Wolfe, 2006).

Why do some educators easily incorporate ideas learned at a single workshop into their practice and other educators do not change their practice at all after attending the same session? Joyce and Calhoun (2010) introduced the notions of horizontal and vertical transfer to answer this question. The term *horizontal transfer* refers to "an easy transition from a workshop to practice in the workplace" (p. 100) and may occur when the idea or skill described in a workshop matches the way that the educator already teaches or thinks. *Vertical transfer*, on the other hand, is used to describe the learning necessary when "the content of professional development is outside the normal developed repertoire of the practitioners" (p. 101). Joyce and Calhoun explained that "the more complex and more unfamiliar [ideas] require more concentration and energy if implementation is to occur" (p. 100).

Joyce and Calhoun's (2010) conceptualization of horizontal transfer and vertical transfer may be further understood by considering the concept of the zone of proximal development, defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level… and the level of potential development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). According to Vygotsky, "it is a well-known and empirically established fact… that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's developmental level" (p. 32), and he proposed that the most successful learning would occur within the zone of proximal development. The concept of the zone of proximal development has been applied to teacher education, wherein teacher educators are encouraged to draw upon the pre-service teachers' prior experiences as building blocks for current and future learning (Warford, 2011). Such an approach has long been a tenet of adult learning (Knowles, 1984).

The notions of horizontal and vertical transfer, and the zone of proximal development are further supported by current descriptions of how the human brain works. Brain imaging techniques seem to confirm that learning occurs when people can

connect the ideas being presented to their current and past experiences. Wolfe (2006) explained that,

> the brain is designed to immediately filter all incoming sensory stimuli and select only those that are relevant at that moment so as to encode them. As the brain synthesizes the data, it makes a decision to drop any information that doesn't fit easily into an existing network. (p. 36)

Recent research on the brain also confirms the role of emotion in promoting or preventing learning (Wolfe, 2006). When information has an "emotional hook" (Wolfe, 2006) the brain "initially pays attention to and retains [the] information" (p. 39).

How do these notions of horizontal transfer, the zone of proximal development, brain research, and the role of emotions in learning relate to Suzette's actions after the workshop? Suzette did mention, during a conversation soon after the workshop, that she had fond memories of playing outside as a child, so it seems there was an "emotional hook." In another conversation, Suzette explained that she was somewhat surprised and frustrated by her own children not knowing how to play outside when there was no special equipment for them, and she stated that she thought her program should include more time for play. Perhaps Suzette's current thoughts about her own children and the children she taught situated the information offered during the workshop within her zone of proximal development, so that horizontal transfer—or learning—occurred.

Another factor possibly contributing to Suzette's persistence with establishing a nature-based play space was her prior success with applying for and receiving a grant for playground equipment. That achievement surely led Suzette to be confident in her ability to replicate her success. Finally, the fact that Suzette was the director of the centre gave her the authority to make the change in the outdoor play area. Some early childhood educators have listed lack of authority as a reason for not being able to effect change (Munroe & McLellan-Mansell, 2013).

A year after the first workshop, the author facilitated a second gathering of the educators of young children in the First Nations communities in Nova Scotia, and 75 people attended. Photos of the new nature-based play space were shown, and the educators from that centre participated in an interactive conversation about the details of changing their outdoor play space. All the participants in the room seemed to be inspired by the way the dream for change had become a reality for one of the communities, and several people left with plans to make changes at their centres. It seems this was an

example of what Wheatley and Frieze (2007) referred to as making progress toward a goal one instance at a time by connecting "with kindred spirits." Changes may not yet have been made in all the other communities, but the children at one First Nations centre in our province do have a nature-based space to explore and enjoy, where previously they only had a commercial play structure in an area filled with crushed rock. That is cause for celebration!

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the former director of the centre referred to in this article for permission to reproduce her nature-based playground design and for her suggestions and comments on this article. She also thanks the educators and the current director for their welcome and candid conversations.

Note

1. All the research participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Therefore, the pseudonym "Suzette" will be used for this director.

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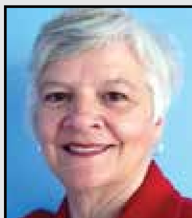

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A Look at Grade 2 Writing: Successes and Challenges in Early Literacy Development

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ABSTRACT

The keys to early literacy development to the end of Grade 2 are a strong foundation in the skills of printing and spelling. These provide the underpinnings that unlock the cognitive and linguistic resources youngsters are developing in the early stages of literacy learning. Illustrative examples of children's efforts in the writing process at the end of Grade 2 demonstrates the complex interaction between skills, cognitive and metacognitive thought processes, and vocabulary knowledge that launch youngsters into the next steps of literacy—one that significantly challenges them.

Introduction

Every year of educational advancement in a child's life presents distinct challenges. For youngsters in K–3, perhaps the single most significant achievement is the beginnings of writing: simply put, being able to transform and transpose thought to words to print, and shaping their ideas into coherent text to share with their intended readers—in itself a magical, mysterious process (Wolf, 2007). Grade 2 is an important milestone in this process: a growing body of research identifies this juncture as the point where "language by hand" (i.e., printing) must become legible and controlled and spelling must become increasingly accurate. Both of these skills must become automatized sufficiently by the early months of Grade 3 for youngsters to be able to unlock the cognitive and linguistic resources that have also been developing, so they may engage with the demands of curriculum and increasingly complex and sophisticated modes of writing in upper elementary school.

Evidence from standard measures across Canada suggests that students at all levels in the educational trajectory fall short in their writing proficiency (Roessingh, 2012a). This inquiry reports on an action research project that describes an analysis of 20 samples of Grade 2 children's writing and which also considers steps for instructional interventions that can support their ongoing quest to control the conventions of printing and spelling, and to increase vocabulary knowledge. Thus, it is that children can improve their abilities to communicate their ideas and thoughts in writing. The questions that frame this inquiry may be stated this way:

1) What is the role of printing and spelling in early literacy development, and how can these be evaluated in holistic terms by classroom practitioners?
2) How do children mobilize their spelling knowledge in the service of attempting to use their unfolding linguistic resources?
3) What are the early indicators of children's use of more sophisticated vocabulary in their written efforts and how are these influenced by the skills of spelling and writing?

An illustrative sample of excellent writing is included to reflect on these questions. This article is intended to give classroom practitioners insights into children's unfolding language and literacy development. In addition, this article seeks to provide practical, pragmatic approaches to looking at children's writing in hopes that this will inform instructional decision-making and informal assessment approaches in the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

This inquiry recruits its theoretical underpinnings from the research literature in early language and literacy development, most importantly studies relating to printing/transcribing and spelling, and studies relating to the role of vocabulary knowledge in generating precise and nuanced prose, beginning at an early stage of literacy development. These streams of research are briefly surveyed below.

Over the past 30 years there have been opposing views presented in the literature on the role and significance of printing and spelling as they may influence children's written efforts. For many years, time spent on writing, especially cursive form, has been presented in a negative light as an outmoded, even quaint skill—a relic of by-gone times when children submitted their printing for penmanship competitions. In the U.S. it has been dropped as a requirement from the Common Core State Standards (Korbey,

2013). Keyboarding and voice recognition software are thought to be a replacement for handwriting. More recently, however, there has been a resurgence of interest and recognition in the importance of direct instruction in the underlying skills of printing/writing and spelling (Berninger, 1999; Berninger & Fayol; 2008; Christensen, 2009; Bounds, 2010; Morin, LaVoie, & Montesinos, 2012).

Jones and Christensen (1999) underscore the importance of language by hand, as well as its speed and fluency, as a contributor to cognitive processes involved in composition. They highlight the complexity of the writing process, and the competing demands placed on the working memory if the low-level developmental skills are not fully automatized. Working memory has only a small, limited capacity to attend to the immediate demands placed on it. Thus, if a child's handwriting is very slow and belabored, he or she will have difficulty translating thought to words to print, and monitoring his/her work through metacognitive mechanisms for editing and revising, for example. In various studies cited in their work, Jones and Christensen note that both quantity and quality of written production is linked to speed and fluency of the underlying skills. These findings are consistent with work cited above, primarily led by Berninger in a series of studies over the past two decades. Alston (1983) provides a useful framework with illustrative samples of evaluating children's writing in Grade 2. Features to look for include spacing, letter formation, consistency, and fluency.

Similarly, spelling accuracy contributes to fluency in writing. When children are able to accurately and fluently put pencil to paper, their productive efforts are enhanced. Once again, spelling learned through outdated approaches such as memorizing lists of decontextualized words, and looking up and writing out dictionary definitions, may not have been replaced with a contemporary, more meaning-focused approach to learning the spellings of words (Joshi, Treiman, Carreker, & Moats, 2008). As a consequence, both spelling and writing instruction have largely been marginalized on the curriculum over the past two decades. According to Gentry (1982), children at grade 2 should be in a *transitional* phase, edging toward *correct* spelling by the end of Grade 3. Temple, Nathan, and Temple (2013) note that youngsters draw on multiple sources of linguistic and cognitive information as they refine their spelling acumen, however, developmental stages are visible in their written efforts. Memorizing, recognizing patterns, and understanding word structure and meaning (morphology) are all amenable to direct instruction and together support the development of accuracy in spelling skills.

Finally, there is a growing body of research evidence suggesting that vocabulary knowledge plays a far greater role in reading and writing than previously thought (Biemiller, 2003). Youngsters who speak a language other than English at home, a

growing demographic in Canadian schools both urban and rural, are at heightened educational risk due to their linguistic vulnerability (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009). While the early stages of literacy development tend to privilege narrative genre that can largely be accomplished with a limited, familiar vocabulary, the shift that begins to occur at the end of Grade 2 to expository modes of writing such as recounts, descriptions, sequence of events, and problem solving, requires nuanced and precise uses of vocabulary as well as a knowledge of text structure (Moss, 2004). The underlying skills together with vocabulary knowledge and genre understanding converge to challenge children to put their thoughts on paper. In the following section the procedures used to analyze children's writing are described and reported, and an illustrative example of excellent writing is included to demonstrate the successes realized and the challenges that lie ahead.

Analyzing Children's Writing

Twenty masked samples of Grade 2 children's writing were submitted to me in June 2013 by teachers participating in a school-based action research project. My role over the past year has been to mentor and coach the teachers, and to provide professional development activities including accessible scholarly research articles that would support them in their goal-setting for school improvement planning with a focus on vocabulary development across all grades. The objective of analyzing the writing samples was primarily to note and report baseline information on children's vocabulary use in a spontaneous piece of writing taken during class time as part of the normal instructional activities.

The children were asked to write to a prompt asking them to make a proposal for renovating the local Calgary Zoo. The samples were analyzed for the following:

1) A holistic score using a trait-based rubric for the overall quality of the writing: (4) Excellent, (3) Proficient, (2) Adequate, and (1) Limited.
2) A holistic score for spelling using a rubric adapted from Gentry's (1982) framework: (4) Correct, (3) Transitional, (2) Phonetic, and (1) Semi-pre-phonetic. Note that the pre-communicative stage is not assigned a value, thus reducing Gentry's five stages to four.
3) A spelling error score calculated by counting individual errors by the number of different words generated in the writing sample.

4) A holistic score for printing based on Alston's (1983) framework.

5) A vocabulary profile using public domain software available at www.lextutor.ca/vp/kids. This tool generates a profile from a sample of written discourse input into the site. Various indices of lexical diversity are reported including the total number of words (TNW), number of different words (NDW), and a coverage or use of words from high frequency words to low. The goal is to see evidence of children's increased use of more words, and especially a shift to words of mid to low frequency.

Taken as a whole, the samples reflected a number of useful insights. These are briefly described next, followed by a sample of one student's work that exemplifies the standard of excellence for Grade 2 writing.

The first thing noted aside from the writing itself was the pre-writing activity of sketching and coloring. The samples demonstrated a high degree of engagement with the task set to the children, a key requirement for eliciting samples that reflect a child's best efforts (Roessingh, 2012b). In a nutshell, this task was designed to provide challenge, while involving the children in a motivating, authentic activity that set the lexical bar very high. The goal was to elicit the full range of lexical resources available. The coloring and sketching appeared to provide a type of priming activity and a concrete starting point or scaffold for the writing itself. Figure 1 below is a representative sketch of that priming activity.

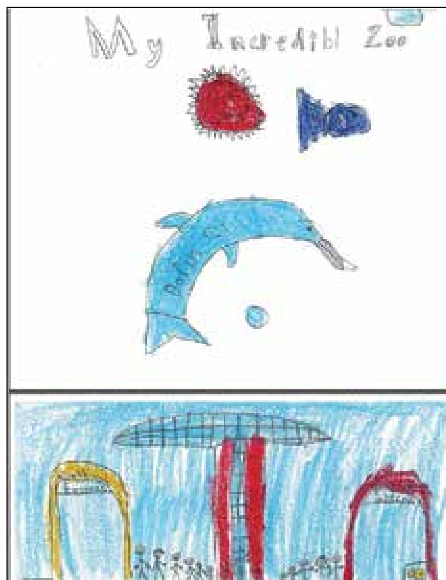


Fig. 1: Sample sketch

The holistic, qualitative score for the class set of papers reflects a distribution of scores represented in the provincial data as well (Roessingh, 2012a). Some 20% of the children's writing was scored as either "proficient" or "excellent" with 90% of the writing reaching the standard that might be expected of Grade 2. The content of the writing ranged from including amusement parks, themed areas (e.g., Jurassic Park), an aquarium, an Arctic display, pandas, Canadian wildlife, African wildlife, and more.

The vast majority of these writing samples reflected spelling in Gentry's (1982) *transitional* stage: exactly where the extant research suggests they should be at the end of Grade 2. Four of the samples were scored at the "correct" stage. Spelling was a strength for this class group. Very good efforts to systematically apply phonics rules for words not under control are noted. Many of these words are unfamiliar words or words that are not normally used in everyday conversational contexts, but that children might have heard in teacher-led classroom discussions or conversations with adults at home: "jieraf" (giraffe), "pengwens" (penguins), "creayt" (create), "egzibits" (exhibits), "pepal" (people), "difrent" (different), "incredibal" "incredibl" (incredible), "pease" (piece), "macanicul" "michanicle" (mechanical), "opinyin" (opinion), "speises" (species). There were just a few errors with patterned spelling: "peting" (petting) and "galoping" (galloping).

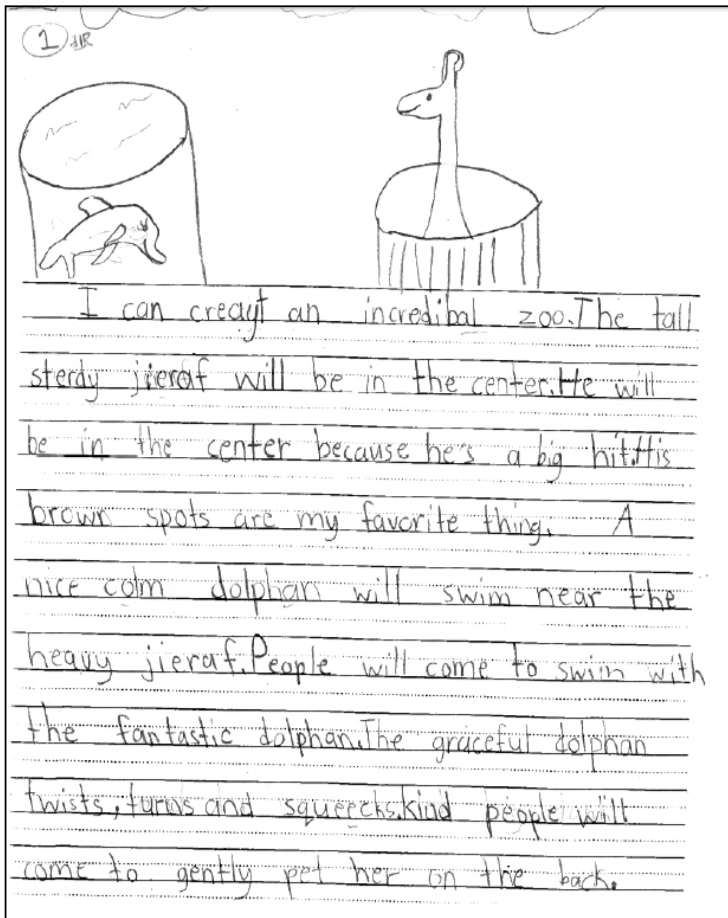
In addition, error rates were calculated for each sample, and again, this was an area of strength for this class group: four of the samples were near perfect (95% accuracy in spelling or more).

A holistic score was given for each sample for printing, taking into consideration features such as spacing, letter shape, and consistency. Alston's (1983) framework and illustrative samples of children's writing at age seven provided the model to accomplish this task. Here again was evidence of success within this group of children: most of the writing was scored as neat, controlled, and highly legible, though the impression of fluency/speed and ease of production was visible in just a few of the papers. Perhaps this is not only a matter of more practice, but also a shift to making letter connections in the development of a type of hybrid form of writing sometime in the next year.

Finally, each sample was transcribed, digitalized and the spelling corrected in preparation for submitting the sample to the vocabulary-profiling tool available at www.lextutor.ca/vp/kids. The data generated from these profiles was input to create a database recording all of the data described above. Due to the limits of the small sample size of just 20 papers, it is beyond the scope of this brief article to offer a more detailed analysis and interpretation of these data: they are part of a larger, ongoing longitudinal project investigating children's unfolding academic literacy skills over time. However, a few brief observations are worth mentioning.

Most striking was the enormous range in the vocabulary resources available at an individual level. This was visible in both the length (total number of words: TNW) and the number of different words (NDW) within the class. The range in TNW was from 29 to 196 words produced; average of 75 words. NDW from 17 to 111 words; average of 49 different words. In sum, within this class, the better papers were longer, used more and more varied vocabulary, and demonstrated strong spelling and printing skills.

Figure 2 demonstrates a writing sample at the standard of excellence. It is followed by the transcribed sample, the vocabulary profile, and some explanatory comments to guide the reader through the profile report.



I can creayt an incredibal zoo. The tall
sterdy jieraf will be in the center. He will
be in the center because he's a big hit. His
brown spots are my favorite thing. A
nice colm dolphan will swim near the
heavy jieraf. People will come to swim with
the fantastic dolphan. The graceful dolphan
twists, turns and squeecks. Kind people will
come to gently pet her on the back.

Fig. 2: Handwritten sample of excellent writing

I can create an incredible zoo. The tall sturdy giraffe will be in the center. He will be in the center because he's a big hit. His brown spots are my favorite thing. A nice calm dolphin will swim near the heavy giraffe. People will come to swim with the fantastic dolphin. The graceful dolphin twists, turns and squeaks. Kind people will come to gently pet her on the back. Ferocious tigers will roam in their humungous glass cage. A mother tiger protects her precious cubs. They play and eat with their mother. When the adorable cubs fall asleep for their nap they look so cute. Birds squawk and squawk. They eat their food and drink water. People take pictures while admiring the colorful wings. They are my favorite part of the zoo! I will also put owls in my zoo. There are going to be lots of different kinds of owls. Like the snowy owl and the great gray owl. All the owls are going to have infants. There is also going to be a zebra. And there are going to be one mom and 3 baby zebras too. And one giant daddy zebra.

Fig. 3: Transcribed sample of excellent writing

A closer analysis of the writing.

196 words. (Overall: 4, Excellent). Sketching and drawing as pre-writing seemed to engage the youngster. Sixteen spelling mistakes (16/111=86%), but these are systematic and reflect a great understanding of phonics as well as a "just about grasp" of many sight words. She/he really wanted to "push" and use words not under written control (create/creayt; giraffe/jieraf; dolphin/dolphan; ferocious/furotious; precious/perishes). This kind of risk taking should be encouraged, and reflects confidence that meaning will be conveyed. This youngster shows many early strengths with her writing: it reflects a strong sense of "flow" already with control over the kinesthetic requirements of "pushing the pencil." This allowed for the generation of all of her ideas and creative thoughts. Good sense of task demand. Well developed and elaborated. Great use of descriptors (adorable, precious) and good effort at creating cohesion through anaphoric pronoun references (he/his, they), repetition (dolphin), use of open class nouns (people), examples (snowy and great gray owl).

Home > VocabProfilers > English (Kids) > Output

VP-KIDS OUTPUT FOR FILE: Untitled

Stoplist (propers etc dropped): none (total 0 tokens)

Freq. Level	Families	Types	Tokens	Coverage %	Cumul.
Kid250 - 1:	47	55	126	64.29	64.29%
Kid250 - 2:	13	13	14	7.14	71.43%
Kid250 - 3:	6	7	8	4.08	[illegible]
Kid250 - 4:	6	6	8	4.08	79.59%
Kid250 - 5:	4	4	4	2.04	81.63%
Kid250 - 6:	3	4	9	4.59	86.22%
Kid250 - 7:	2	2	4	2.04	88.26%
Kid250 - 8:	2	2	2	1.02	89.28%
Kid250 - 9:	1	1	1	0.51	89.79%
Kid250 - 10:	1	2	3	1.53	91.32%
Off-List known:	5	5	5	2.55	93.87%
Off-List unknown:	[illegible]	10	12	6.12	100.00%
Total	90+7	111	196	100%	100%

Words in text (tokens):	196
Different words (types):	111
Type-token ratio:	0.57
Tokens per type:	1.77

Pertaining to onlist only

Tokens:	184
Types:	101
Families:	90
Tokens per family:	2.04
Types per family:	1.12

Page Menu: Tokens Types Families

Integral text: i can create an incredible zoo the tall sturdy giraffe will be in the center he will be in the center because he is a big hit his brown spots are my favorite thing a nice calm dolphin will swim near the heavy giraffe people will come to swim with the fantastic dolphin the graceful dolphin twists turns and squeaks kind people will come to gently pet her on the back ferocious tigers will roam in their humungous glass cage a mother tiger protects her precious cubs they play and eat with their mother when the adorable cubs fall asleep for their nap they look so cute birds squawk and squawk they eat their food and drink water people take pictures while admiring the colorful wings they are my favorite part of the zoo i will also put owls in my zoo there are going to

Fig. 4: Vocabulary profile of sample of excellent writing

VP profile is "rainbow-like," reflecting a lexical richness throughout: sturdy, roam, nap, calm, ferocious, precious, adorable. This writer does not over-depend on the high frequency (blue-coded words): doing so would have resulted in an "ocean" effect of predominantly blue-coded words. At Band 1, some 64.20% of the words have been used. At Band 4, 79.59% coverage is realized. The control over mid- to low-range vocabulary, words that might be described as *Tier 2* words (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002), is noteworthy: "adorable" is more nuanced and precise than "cute" and "small"; "roam" versus "walk." This youngster has used 15 words that stretch beyond the oral vocabulary repertoire of childhood—the "off-list known and unknown" words, and is beginning to extend productive vocabulary by way of words that represent more academic-like choices. This reflects a very strong profile (see Roessingh, 2012b). At 196 words in length, the writing is elaborated, developed, and *very long* for only a Grade 2 student at the end of the year!

This sample of excellent writing suggests this youngster "has it all." Most importantly, this writing suggests that strengths in printing and spelling lessen the cognitive load, unleashing the resources needed to generate ideas and to retrieve the vocabulary available to encode them.

In summary, to return to the three orienting questions, it would seem that printing and spelling play a key role in early literacy development, and they can be evaluated in holistic terms by classroom practitioners by way of simple frameworks and rubrics that have practical utility. Children mobilize their spelling knowledge in the service of attempting to use their unfolding linguistic resources by applying phonics information. Those with confidence in this skill are often risk takers, and this should be encouraged. Their spelling proficiency will catch up, over time. In the meantime, it is important for children to be supported in formulating their thoughts and putting them on paper for sharing with others over space and time: the magic of literacy learning. Early indicators of children's use of more sophisticated vocabulary in their written efforts are visible in the vocabulary profiles. They "stretch" from high- to low-frequency word use again, applying their spelling knowledge as best they can. Their writing appears well shaped, fluent, and under control.

Challenges for Grade 3: Next Steps

The writing demands in Grade 3 begin to accelerate in terms of vocabulary use associated with the requirements of the shift to expository modes of writing. Children who do not have the skills of printing and spelling under control may become increasingly frustrated with their inability to put to paper the language they may have. For other youngsters, especially English language learners (ELLs)—those for whom English is not the language of the home—apparent strengths in printing and spelling may quickly forestall further achievement in realizing a successful transition from early literacy to academic literacy development. This is largely dependent on a large and sophisticated vocabulary knowledge that can be marshalled, mobilized, and manipulated for the purposes of achieving academic tasks set by the curriculum and the teacher.

Teachers need to consider collecting an array of evidence that reflects on successful literacy-through-language learning and the associated skills needed. For this particular class cohort, three goals for the future were identified. First and foremost, a direct and explicit focus on vocabulary development is suggested (Biemiller, 2001), especially strategically targeting the mid- to low-range words that start to become central to academic literacy in the upper elementary school years. What native speaking children acquire through immersion, largely at home, ELLs must *learn* from their teachers. Words beyond the conversational domain (i.e., words that have Latin roots and that will increasingly appear in the informational texts children will encounter) also become central in children's learning needs, especially ELLs. Teacher-led discussions and

academic conversations on topics such as endangered species (Roessingh & Douglas, 2013) and teaching word analysis strategies are appropriate at this age.

Second, a shift to teaching expository modes of writing is timely at this point. Writing about procedures (e.g., recipes); instructions (e.g., how to play a given game or sport); recounts, descriptions, and sequence of events, are within reach (Moss, 2004). Part and parcel of this shift is teaching pre-writing and planning activities including drawing, sketching, listing, webbing as well as teaching the attendant skills of revising and editing upon completion of the writing task, perhaps using the peer group as a resource. Supportive and specific feedback are key to improving children's writing here.

Third, children need to shift to a writing style that is connected and allows them to develop fluency/speed while being legible (Morin, LaVoie, & Montesinos, 2012). This will help lower the cognitive bar and open up scarce, precious working memory space needed to generate thought, retrieve vocabulary (Berninger & Fayol, 2008), and deploy metacognitive skills for monitoring, revising, and editing their work.

Concluding Comments

It is overwhelmingly evident that children in Grade 2 are busy youngsters with a lot to learn. A more *balanced*, *process* approach to the early literacy curriculum is advocated: one that addresses the basic skills of printing and spelling in ways that engage youngsters in authentic, purposeful work, in contexts that are motivating and interesting for them. There is a role for direct and explicit instruction in the foundational skills as well as for time to be made available for mindful and effortful practice both at school and at home (Wren-Lewis, 2011). New genres associated with written expository modes, together with their structure, can be introduced as children begin to make the shift from literacy through language to language through literacy. There needs to be a strong focus on vocabulary learning for all youngsters. This requires a sustained, longitudinal effort. Finally, opportunities for celebrating and sharing their written efforts will remind youngsters that the outcomes of their written, creative work are nothing short of miraculous. By crossing this threshold in their literacy development, they become empowered to contribute in the give-and-take of a world of print materials in which they, too, can participate.

Acknowledgments

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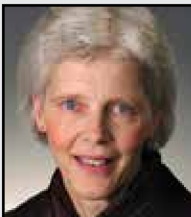

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LINK TO:

http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/kids

http://www.readingrockets.org/firstyear/fyt.php?CAT=34

Portraits of Home: Working in Community Daycare Homes in New Brunswick

Tara-Lynn Scheffel, Nipissing University

ABSTRACT

Part of a larger project involving the design and implementation of a first-time curriculum framework for early childhood care and learning in New Brunswick, this paper highlights the stories of Canadian early childhood educators working in home-based daycares. In particular, a common theme of "sense of place" is discussed in relation to four portraits that are presented in this article: (1) Home as Survival, (2) Transition to Home, (3) Home as Transition, and (4) Coming Home. Through each portrait, the role of life changes and transitioning towards new beginnings is discussed, along with possibilities and constraints for ongoing discussion and reflection.

Introduction

> *Throughout Canada and the world there is a growing recognition of the need to value and support the learning and child care of our youngest children. (NBCF, 2008, p. 3)*

With this purpose in mind, the *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care – English* (NBCF) sought to design "an emergent and engaging curriculum for children from birth to five, one that [would] encourage optimum development in an atmosphere of trust, security and respect" (p. 3). While the design and implementation of the curriculum framework has been explored elsewhere (Nason & Whitty, 2007; Whitty, 2009; Rose & Whitty, 2010), the goal of this article is to highlight the stories of four Canadian early childhood educators working in home-based daycares. From its onset, the NBCF recognized the distinctness of home-based settings and aimed to create a framework that was "suited for home-based and centre-based care" (NBCF, 2008, p. 3). Moreover, the implementation of the framework

aimed to provide spaces for early years practitioners "to raise critical questions from the vantage of their experiences" (Nason & Whitty, 2007, p. 277). With this in mind, my role in working with home-based educators began with the design of a professional institute geared specifically to this group of educators as they faced the implementation of this first-ever curriculum framework. It grew in response to educators' desires to seek out spaces for building collegial conversations as they explored what made them similar and unique to centre-based settings, and also raised questions of professionalism, legitimacy and the need for networking.

At the time of the study, there were 32 identified Community Home Day Cares in the province. According to the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2013), *Community Day Care Homes*, also known as *Family Day Care Homes* are approved childcare services located within an individual's home with a smaller number of children. Specifically, providers may provide services to:

- Three Infants (up to age 24 months), or
- Five children of the ages two to five, or
- Nine children who are of the ages six and over, or
- Six children where the children are of the ages five and under and six and over, including those of the operator.
  (http://www1.gnb.ca/0000/CommunityDayCare/index-e.asp?District_Name=DSF-NE)

For the purposes of this article, I will use the term *home-based* to encompass both this term and other similarly intended terms in the research literature.

A total of 21 home-based educators attended the institute with the addition of six others who identified themselves as similar to home educators (i.e., due to small or home-like spaces). As a Curriculum On-Site Support Facilitator, I was also assigned to work specifically with home-based educators as they implemented the new curriculum framework. This included on-site visits (3x2 hours), ongoing email/phone communication, and the collection of artifacts for developing curricular support documents. In particular, the goal was to create a support pamphlet specific to Community Day Care Homes (see Scheffel, 2010). It was here that the stories of four educators began to stand out. Wanting to hear more about their views as home-based educators, I invited them to participate in a focus group interview. The portraits that follow share the stories of these four educators that I came to know and work with throughout the project. First, however, while there is not a large amount of research looking at home-based daycares, it is here I turn next to set the context for what makes home-based daycares unique and worthy of this closer look.

What Makes Home-Based Daycares Unique?

Using the analogy of looking through "A Window into Home-Based Pedagogy," Wright (2004) offered the following comparison to centre-based care:

- multiple sites vs. one centrally located site;
- "personal" flavor of the educator's home vs. "public" flavor of a site designated for early childhood education;
- omnipresence of a single educator vs. multiple educators;
- everyday occurrences and contextually relevant tools vs. planned activity-based experiences. (p. 10)

Contextually relevant tools refer to those tools that uniquely make up the context of a home, such as baking for the arrival of a neighbor, watering plants in the garden, or walking to the mailbox.

Wright (2005) built on this comparison with eight insights for enriching understandings of learning environments within home-based early childhood settings. These insights supported her earlier comparison, suggesting that catalysts for learning occur from the movement between home and community, as well as the contextually relevant tools within home contexts. Interpersonal relationships were also found to characterize these home-based settings with strong connections forming between the children's and educator's families. In addition, the educator's role was viewed as critical to the learning environment. Time was also seen to be "both a constraining and enabling feature of these environments" (p. 43). For example, smaller numbers of children allowed for greater time with educators and sustained lengths of time for children's explorations. However, a visitor might interrupt or postpone a planned activity. Finally, the richness of home-based settings was considered valuable for both older and younger children.

Freeman and Vakil (2007) further acknowledged the uniqueness of home-based settings with four similar characteristics, including: small enrollments, a strong acquaintance with families that offers continuity in terms of home-school connections, and the use of multi-age groupings. Presenting four case studies, Freeman and Vakil (2007) discovered, "In the stories of Rose, Iris, Daisy, and Violet, their 'teaching' is not a delivery of curriculum to the child as it is a discovery with a more capable other" (p. 275). Drawing on the narratives of these educators, they shared five essential themes of learning. The first related to children's skills for learning and includes: learning through

observation, learning to resolve problems, and learning by investigation. The second theme involved essential opportunities, including: both child-negotiated, open-ended opportunities, such as a child wanting to add marshmallows when making muffins, as well as opportunities for hands-on learning. The third theme revolved around play, considering games and pretense involved when children engage in dramatic play. Social-emotional learning made up the fourth theme, while the fifth included that of meaningful learning, such as a visit by an elderly neighbor that became an opportunity for intergenerational learning. Reflection upon these themes and narratives was integrated into the professional institute, offering a starting point for discussions with home-based educators as they considered similar stories, opportunities for change and connections to curriculum goals.

At the same time, we considered Carter's (2005) suggestion that there are many lessons to be learned from family home providers. These lessons are referred to as strategies, emphasizing that they are purposeful rather than incidental. For example, displaying pictures to create a family-like environment creates a focus on home, suggesting an extension of family. Other strategies include forming neighborhood networks and collaborating on professional activities in order to emphasize the building of networks and collegial relationships. The last set of strategies focuses on developing awareness and policies, as well as advocating to create time for professional development.

From these discussions, key successes shared during the institute included being part of an extended family, freedom in planning/structure, and the ability to work from home. The most predominant concern revolved around feelings of isolation as educators shared their appreciation for having an institute focused solely upon their contexts. Like Carter (2005), it seemed that they, too, had experienced how "the different components of [their] field often stay[ed] in [their] own niches…we miss opportunities to cross-pollinate" (p. 71). Perhaps this is why at the conclusion of the institute, 24 participants expressed interest in joining an online discussion group as an opportunity for networking. While not the focus of this article, the discussion board reinforced a desire for ongoing conversation amongst these home-based educators, setting the stage for the portraits to be shared.

Recognizing the uniqueness of home-based settings, this paper builds on the research presented above to present a narrative case study of four educators with the goal of sharing insights within a Canadian context. The focus is on the educators themselves and their understandings of the work they do. While curricular discussions are inherent, what stood out most was a common theme of "sense of place" as contributing to sense of belonging when seeking out home as a workplace. This sense of place

took on four roles: (1) Home as Survival, (2) Transition to Home, (3) Home as Transition, and (4) Coming Home. Through each portrait, the role of life changes and transitioning towards new beginnings is evident.

Portraits of Home Educators

As I began to talk with the four educators about their work, it became apparent that all had chosen to open home-based daycares for different reasons and life circumstances. In particular, the role of life changes leading towards new beginnings rang true for each. For Margie (all names are pseudonyms), it was a divorce and the need to support her own children. Pat, on the other hand, wanted to spend more time with her son and found this was something that her previous job did not allow. Alternatively, Vanessa saw her home daycare as a stepping-stone to opening a larger daycare in the future. Megan, however, had worked for years as the director of a larger daycare and found herself seeking a smaller, home-based space for the children she worked with. It is their stories that I turn to next.

Margie: Home as Survival

"…My own experience was really all that I had to fall back on …"

Margie had been caring for children in her home for six years when in 2000, she received a letter in the mail inquiring as to whether or not she was using her home for a daycare. To Margie, it felt like "a slap in the face." It was a divorce and the need to support her own children that began her career as a home daycare provider, but it would be this letter that prompted her to become licensed.

Upon reflection, Margie shared: "The change was great…but it was really scary when you open up that letter and you think, OH! I don't have a job!" Personally, she struggled with the negative perception of care that the letter suggested, while professionally, she found herself setting new—and perhaps much needed—guidelines and regulations for a parent handbook.

With this change, Margie now named herself as a childcare provider instead of a babysitter. She hesitated to use the word teacher. "Not teacher. I don't use that word. I'm fine with provider because I don't have my ECE…so 'educator' doesn't seem to fit either." Despite this, she still felt a certain stigma associated with her work. When her husband introduced her work the reaction she often received was one of, "Ok, when is she going to get a real job?"

The children in Margie's care have always been of mixed age groupings, from infant to age 5. In terms of materials, Margie believed a sense of home was what parents were looking for, not expecting to have all the big items that a centre might have. This same understanding led her to treat the children in her care with the same respect they would receive in their own homes. Though she sometimes felt limited because she did not provide transportation, she found that parents often had a look of relief on their faces when she shared this with them. "They chose a community home daycare for a reason," she explained. "It's because they wish they could be home and they can't. So this is the next best thing."

One of the outdoor spaces she loved best as a home provider was her garden. The children, along with her husband's help, had created a "Garden of Wonders." Reflecting on the project, Margie found, "It was evident right away which children had been exposed to some type of gardening…I didn't bring out the little shovels for this very reason…so they would all experience the feeling of the soil in their hands."

The amount of extra time for documentation was one of Margie's biggest concerns and should the expectations become too great, it was the one thing that made her consider not running a home-based daycare anymore. "We only have so much wall space," she added. To help with this, she had decided to keep all of her inquiry-based planning webs in a binder to show her regional coordinator what they had read, learned, and explored.

"There is no escape," Margie said, especially when you work in the space where you live. But, "I love what I do." She recalled memorable moments of parents giving her credit in teaching their children, and of children accidentally calling her mom, knowing that they felt comfortable, valued, and safe with her.

Themes/Tensions Arising

Within Margie's story are several underlying themes. The first is the tension between public and private spaces. As a home educator, she shared her home space with her daycare and so tensions arose when it came to creating a space that fit both purposes. For example, Margie shared that while she appreciated the work that inspectors do, she wished there was greater understanding that home educators work independently and do not have someone to cover them at a moment's notice for a meeting. If a need arises with a child, the child must come first.

Inherent within this tension is another, that of personal and professional expectations. This arose in particular because of the curriculum implementation and the new perceived expectations being placed upon Margie, such as with the questions surrounding documentation and valued materials. Margie admitted to losing some of her enthusiasm as the new curriculum framework was introduced. Once the initial experience was over, however, her enthusiasm re-appeared. I suspect this was in part due to needing time to see how the new professional expectations fit within her personal expectations for care and learning. She was coming to understand, as Lewin-Benham (2011) discussed, that documentation is "an intentional collection" and a way of "recording and preserving evidence of children's activities and passions" (p. 141). Margie was very conscientious and so wanted to do what was expected of her. Yet, there were many unknowns in terms of how the curriculum would affect her personally as a home educator, such as cluttered wall space. Just as Lewin-Benham (2011) reminds us that documentation "releases walls from the burden of displaying commercial materials" (p. 141), Margie needed to find a way to display documentation that recognized the walls as her home. The use of a binder offered a negotiated tool for moving towards change.

Closely linked to the above tensions are the valuing of her home as a space for learning and herself as a childcare provider rather than a babysitter. As Margie shared, her experience was that of raising her own children. When it came to being licensed and creating documents such as a parent handbook, it was her "own experience" that she "had to fall back on…" And Margie did have expertise and knowledge to share. She became a mentor to Pat, who we will meet next.

Pat: Transition to Home

"I never saw my 2-year-old son…it was terrible…"

Pat started her home daycare six years prior to this study because she needed a life change. For 20 years she had worked in the hotel industry but found herself questioning why she was working 24-7, never seeing her 2-year-old son. "It was terrible," she reflected. Having gotten to know Margie, the provider at her son's daycare, Pat began to ask advice about starting her own daycare. Initially she took in three children in addition to her son, "just to see if it was going to work." She did not want to go through the process if she discovered it was not what she wanted to do. At the same time, she knew that once she made the decision to go ahead, it was going to be her business and she wanted it to be professional.

When it came to how she defined herself, however, Pat was hesitant to use words like educator or provider, instead placing the emphasis on the context: "I just say I have a daycare, I don't really….know." She also considered herself a "second mom."

As part of a quality standards group in her region, Pat volunteered to take on a leadership role in welcoming new home-based educators and helping them to navigate through the standards. She was also very vocal about wanting others to understand the experience of home-based educators, wishing at times that inspectors took the needs of their unique contexts into consideration more often. Flexibility was key, she believed. As a businesswoman she understood the need for standards and spot checks, and believed this was important. However, finding the time to engage in professional dialogue with inspectors about these standards presented challenges when, as the sole educator in her space, she was also caring for children during these visits. "How can I concentrate on what they want me to do," she questioned, "when I'm trying to look after [a] crying child?"

Pat was not convinced that the new curriculum framework had changed her practice in significant ways, believing it was very similar to what she was already doing. Like Margie, she felt the pressure of added time and expense for documentation and wondered how to show proof of what she had done without holding on to copies of everything. She had visited some larger sites, but found herself thinking, "I could not work with five hundred things on my wall everyday. It would give me a headache." "It's my home," she added." Despite her reservations, however, she noticed that the children did look to the documentation to revisit learning.

Remembering what it was like to be a parent with children in daycare, Pat found it difficult to ask her parents to do anything outside of the daycare, such as trips to Green Village, a local flower nursery, in particular as she did not take on this driving role herself. She also found it a struggle to bring community members into her space with her small enrollment. Recently she found herself pleading with a local bird expert to come and talk with the children as part of a bird project. A few years ago, she was able to convince the Fire Department to come for a visit, but had been unable to convince them since, due to her lower numbers as a home-based daycare.

Describing her context, Pat explained, "We're small and we're homey and we have such personal relationships with our parents." Recalling a mother crediting her for how well her son was doing, she reflected, "That's amazing to me because I don't have training. That was all just common sense," Pat reflected.

Themes/Tensions Arising

There is a recurring theme of professionalism in Pat's story—from credibility in advertising when recruiting new parents to joining the quality standards group. When it came to attending curriculum institutes with other early childhood educators, this was something that stood out to her as lacking in the field. Referring to both level of respect and even clothing, she stressed, "I have a lot of pride in my work. I built this business…" It is perhaps this same sense of pride about her work that left her feeling disconcerted when consistently struggling to bring community members into her space with her small enrollment. She was looking to her local community to value what she did but unlike Megan, whose story we will hear shortly, these opportunities did not always come easily.

Both Margie and Pat seemed to feel the pressure of accountability, though Pat was most vocal about this in our discussions. Questions such as how to prove the learning that took place and what to expect of inspectors and coordinators conveyed the pressure associated with demonstrating credibility within the profession. That this was a concern for Pat and Margie is perhaps not surprising given they do not have an ECE background and are drawing on other strengths and experiences, such as being a parent and running a business. These ongoing questions also speak to the newness of concepts within the curriculum framework, such as inquiry-based learning and not having a pre-set plan every day. As Whitty (2009) shares:

> Emergent curriculum (how the field has named the curriculum), which is defined as working from children's and educators' interests within a meaning-making paradigm (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Wien, 2008), was largely an unfamiliar concept with the field; typically children and educators were guided through the day by the clock and through the year by the weekly themes. (p. 46)

They were each left in a space of having to reconsider what they did as home-based educators, which momentarily took away the love they had for their work until they were able to ask questions, have someone visit them on-site, and recognize the flexibility within the curriculum framework that did not dictate they all be the same.

Vanessa—Home as Transition

"My goal is to keep growing…Eventually we'd like to buy another building…"

Prior to opening her home-based daycare, Vanessa had worked in the early childhood field for eight years. Initially pursuing a teaching degree out of province, she became

pregnant and opted to remain closer to home with the support of her family. Not long after, she completed her early childhood education. Interviewing at various daycares, she was disappointed to hear directive type comments such as, "This is what we do and this is how we do it." "What if I have an awesome idea?" she asked one of her interviewers. Feeling dismissed, Vanessa knew in that moment that this was not what she wanted. She needed "the freedom to grow professionally."

With the buying of her own home, she found the "the perfect opportunity" to open her own daycare. She researched and prepared all the necessary items for licensing, explaining: "I wanted to be taken seriously as a professional…if you're any bit educated in the field, you don't want to be called a babysitter." Aware of government grants for having infants and extended hours, Vanessa also took advantage of opportunities for additional funding.

Though a friend had warned her at the time about an upcoming curriculum framework for the province, she found herself excited to see the binder, secretly thinking, "That looks awesome." At the beginning, however, she admitted, "I was worried that I wasn't doing it right or there was a set way to incorporate emergent curriculum but there really isn't…it's what your group needs and [who] you are."

Though much of the framework was familiar to her from her coursework, she felt she "learned a lot more just to play…I've always done it but this has taught me how to just be in the moment with the kids." For Vanessa, it was also "encouraging to know that the government [was] taking more interest in educators." Her hope was that the field would become more professional, since she believed many were used to it not being this way.

The environment Vanessa aimed to create was "cozy," "family-oriented," and "child-centered." In terms of the layout and access to resources, Vanessa made "a big effort to put everything at their level." She also often changed the layout with input from the children. In addition, the children and parents were part of her extended family. Vanessa's father, known as "Grampy" to all the children, was also a frequent visitor, as well as her husband, who at the time was recovering from knee surgery. His injury instigated much play around doctors and providing care, with the children role-playing alongside him.

The park up the street served as a key outdoor space for walks and playful adventures. The children made pretend campfires under the picnic tables and flew to faraway lands on the swings. Vanessa also drove the children to various outside locations such as the local library and the fish store as part of their ongoing inquiries.

With regards to documentation, Vanessa agreed it could get overwhelming and reminded herself to set goals such as, "I am going to write one learning story for each child this month." She was encouraged by the children's excitement and their anticipation of new stories and pictures.

While Vanessa recognized that many of her home-based colleagues saw themselves as different from larger daycares, she saw them as more alike than different. As such, she felt both a need to get together with other home educators, but also to be included with the professional development that is required for all educators, regardless of context.

Themes/Tensions Arising

Vanessa thrived on learning, both for herself and the children. In addition to the professional development hours that were part of the curriculum implementation, she was taking additional qualification courses for her ECE. When I visited her site, she often shared new ideas she had implemented that drew on concepts and theories she was learning about in her coursework and identifying in the curriculum framework. One particular success involved holding an art show with the children as a way of both valuing their work and encouraging parents to come into the space. The online discussion board became a place for Vanessa to share this ongoing learning: "I just wrapped up a professional development course on Art and Creativity and I learned so much! It really reminded me that children's art is more about the process to the kids—the act of MAKING it, not the end product or result!"

Despite this venue for conversation, Vanessa expressed she had greater hopes for receiving more feedback from her colleagues about what she was doing: "I was so excited about my daycare's art show and not one person posted any reply or comment to my post on Monday. I am trying to be positive and keep it going but feeling frustrated I MUST say… "

For Vanessa, the online forum could not replace that personal, immediate feedback for which she had hoped, leading to feelings of frustration and isolation.

When it came to learning stories, Vanessa saw the value in this assessment practice, but also recognized the time needed to learn how to "understand children's thinking and their processes rather than just end products" (Hatherly & Sands, 2002, p. 3). Setting a goal of one per month, she was attempting to find her way through the "balancing act" described by Carr and Lee (2012), also recognizing the "learning curve in

using in-process documentation" from a learner perspective (Phillips & Swanson, 2006). Yet, despite this need for balance, Vanessa recognized learning stories as "relevant to all care settings, including Family Day Care" (Centre for Community Child Health, 2007, p. 3), as she worked towards the larger curriculum goals of sharing insights into children's strengths and interests.

Despite this recognition, Vanessa often felt as if she did not quite fit with the other home daycares, not in the sense of being part of their community, but feeling like she did things very different from them. Her youth and eagerness for new ideas, as well as her artistic bent, signified her uniqueness as an educator. Until she met up with Margie, Pat, and Megan, she had been struggling with the dichotomy of home daycare vs. professional daycare. She wanted to run her home-based daycare as a professional business but was unsure that others felt similarly. Like Pat, she took pride in what she did and wanted to be seen as a professional. Regardless of context, she desired for all early childhood educators to feel this same passion and pride.

Megan: Coming Home

> "I have learned since I came home to work that the more relaxed I am, the more free I am. The more I give to the children and myself, the more learning that takes place."

An educator and director, Megan worked in early childhood centres for 27+ years before beginning her own home-based childcare in 2005. Looking back, she thinks she was "cut out to probably be a teacher," but life experiences led her in a different direction and for her, working in early childhood education was a close alternative.

Unsure at first if she would become licensed, her regional coordinator asked her why she would go to all this work of providing a service within the standards and not license. Upon reflection, Megan realized it was freedom she was seeking, to be on her own and provide for children the way she had wanted to for years. She explained: "…when you work for someone else you have certain limitations as to what you can and can't do and sometime philosophies aren't the same..."

Her coordinator assured her that licensing did not mean she had to give up what she felt was best and so she became licensed.

Megan aimed to create a welcoming environment. "I want them to feel that when they come here, this is their home," she explained. "I want them to feel free and so welcomed." It is not a "running wild" or "boundary-less" freedom, she elaborated, but,

"…an environment where they would have one individual to oversee their day in their parent's absence, and this person would want to give them…a home away from home."

For this reason, Megan believed "the environment needs to be filled with their things." An avid photographer, Megan framed pictures of the children within her space as a way of documenting the learning that was taking place. In addition, she invited the children to join her in the process.

The outdoor environment also played a keen role in Megan's programming—from walks to the nearby riverbed in the summer to campfires and roasting marshmallows around a fire pit in the winter. The beauty of nature had a special place for both her and the children as they collected artifacts of their journeys (shells, rocks, pinecones, beach glass…) to be used for art making or held in special containers upon their return.

Megan noted that one of the biggest struggles as a home educator is having "no breaks in what you do." Balance was something she aimed for constantly in order to give time to both the children and herself. For this reason, she recommended looking to the community "to see what you can create for yourself," whether it is a neighbour who has wood to share or someone to read to the children. One senior neighbour in particular had become a prominent figure in the lives of the children in Megan's program. From Christmas baking to decorating the neighbour's cast when she broke her leg, the children had come to know and enjoy spending time with this special community friend.

At this point in her career, Megan selected her clients as much as they selected her, noting that it was learning about what will make a good fit. She wanted families to know they can call her if they are ever in need, "every bit as much as family." For Megan, this personal connection with families was one of the differences between larger centres and community home daycare, something she longed for in her previous experiences.

Themes/Tensions Arising

Starting her own home-based centre marked a sense of "coming home" to Megan, both physically and pedagogically in the new-found sense of freedom she felt as an educator. As a director, she had often felt constrained to gain board approval for ideas and create an environment that encompassed freedom to explore. Through her home-based learning environment, Megan could now share rather than defend her beliefs. In doing so, Megan recognized that, "in the early years, the environment *is* the curriculum"

(Lewin-Benham, 2011, p. 67). Relationships were also key to this understanding as Megan sought to create a family-like learning space for the children within her care. Similar to the goals of Reggio educators, Megan understood that "aesthetics means not only how something looks and functions but its potential to shape experience, and in doing so, to shape the mind" (p. 79). Megan's framed artwork, neighbourhood networking, and the blending of indoor-outdoor learning spaces all contributed to the uniqueness of her learning space and the lessons suggested by Carter (2005) as fitting of all early learning contexts.

Moreover, the idea of networking was central to Megan's story. For example, Megan took full advantage of her previous director role to speak with other directors and to attend local professional development opportunities that were initiated in her region prior to the province-wide curriculum implementation. In fact, Megan's name was often recommended to new home-based educators as someone from whom to seek advice and ask questions. With the new curriculum framework, Megan believed they were at the beginning of "something so special" for home educators in the province. Her advocacy, another one of Carter's (2005) lessons to be learned from home-based educators, resonated with her colleagues as they considered the unique programs and spaces they offered. Together, they began to share their voices from "the vantage of their experiences" (Nason & Whitty, 2007, p. 277), recognizing the ways they might do things differently from larger centres but with the same overarching goals in mind.

Despite her years of experience, Megan, too, struggled with feelings of isolation as a home-based educator. The reality of no breaks during the workday was intricately tied to a need to balance time for the children and herself. Creating community was one way that Megan aimed to achieve this balance, whether with the involvement of parents, trusted neighbours, ECE students, or co-workers. Unlike the others, she was financially able to hire someone to help offset her time for administrative details such as writing learning stories. Megan recognized the pay cut involved and that "hiring an employee in this size of a daycare" was likely unheard of. But it was important to her to find balance within her home context while still providing a home-space that was inviting and rich in learning experiences.

Conclusion

As with the research shared earlier, similar themes of interpersonal relationships, connections with families and community, and uniqueness of setting and learning opportunities stand out in these four educators' stories (Wright, 2005; Freeman & Vakil, 2007; Carter, 2005). Furthermore, while each became licensed for a different reason, they all found that licensing was an important step forward in legitimizing what they did. Similar to Lanigan's (2011) findings, they valued professionalism and believed that they offered "a unique segment of the early learning and care system worthy of district professional development and respect" (p. 399). For some, like Margie, this was a new-found understanding in terms of seeing herself as an educator. For others, like Vanessa, this sense of professionalism legitimized her early childhood education. Regardless, all echoed a similar desire for inspectors, as well as those involved in supporting the implementation of the curriculum framework, to recognize the uniqueness of their spaces that also served as their homes. Above all, despite the successes and struggles that were a part of each of their journeys, each educator viewed the importance of networking as key to being a home-based educator. Lanigan (2011) found that when providing professional development for home-based educators, of critical importance is the need for trust and the non-judgmental collaborative opportunities. The stories shared here reinforce this need for professional learning opportunities, recognizing the need for time and space to get to know one another, to give and receive feedback, and to place oneself in the role of learner.

In her ongoing leadership role, Megan has kept in touch with me, sharing goals on behalf of home-based educators to continue to find ways to network with one another. Ongoing constraints include distance (with educators spread across the province), time (especially as the sole educator in their spaces), and difficulty in securing online venues like the one used through UNB due to issues of access and confidentiality. Yet, their goal for networking persists and speaks to the very need for their stories to be shared. For, as Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) convey, "Story is an indispensable part of the educational dialogue. It encourages teachers to talk, to exchange beliefs, to share experiences with colleagues, and to wrestle with the dilemmas associated with teaching" (p. 152). As more than babysitters, home-based educators share a similar need for educational dialogue to further the work they do. Through this dialogue, tensions and successes may resonate, but more importantly there is the opportunity to make insightful observations of one's practice, becoming "professionally aware" of the work they do (p. 153). In light of changes, such as a new curricular framework requiring home-based educators to take on new understandings of emergent curriculum and documentation, central

questions revolved around professionalism, legitimacy, and networking. Through their collaborations, these four educators sought mentorship from one another as they also began to take on mentorship roles within a growing community of practice (Wenger, 1998), a goal also set forth by Nason and Whitty (2007).

Looking ahead, many possibilities remain that might be supported by local and provincial governments or considered as areas for future research. These include:

- Continuing to forge a place for home educators to be recognized, appreciated and valued for the work they do;
- Creating spaces for dialogue, learning and mentorship;
- Sharing of ongoing stories to create conversations and sense of belonging.

As I conclude, I am reminded of Freeman and Vakil's (2007) phrasing about the power of story to convey understandings and prompt reflections about the work of educators in home-based settings. As we continue forward in our considerations of ways to support home-based educators, let us consider: *In the stories of Margie, Pat, Vanessa, and Megan, each has travelled a different path but seeks a similar valuing of the work they do as home educators, along with a need to connect, share, and learn alongside others as they continue their journey.*

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Learning to Attend to Children's Familial Curriculum-Making Worlds[1]

Cindy Swanson, University of Alberta

ABSTRACT

Using autobiographical narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I inquire into my experiences as a teacher, beginning with an inquiry into my early experiences on home and school landscapes. I explore my teacher stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and inquire into how my stories have shifted and changed, over time and place. As I explore the bumping places and tensions I experience as teacher, my purpose is to show the ways I learned to attend to children's familial curriculum-making worlds (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). In doing so I offer a possible counter narrative of curriculum making in schools, which honors and validates children's stories of experiences lived and told in homes and communities.

Bringing School Curriculum Making Home: Beginning a Teacher Story to Live By

I began to compose my stories to live by[2] as a teacher when I entered grade two and met my teacher, Ms. Z. She was different from my grade one teacher; she was warm, friendly, and caring. She spoke in soft tones and was gentle in her teaching manner. I admired her because of how she treated me, often allowing me to visit the classroom prize box, which contained pencils, erasers, smelly stickers, and extra photocopied worksheets. I always took the worksheets home. It was at the same time that I began creating my own classroom space at home when my dad bought two wooden student desks, the ones with a drawer just beneath the seat. He placed them in the basement and I began to play out stories of teacher, using worksheets as my

main teaching tool. I began to compose myself through "imaginative play" (Steeves, 2006) of teacher by becoming teacher. Steeves (2006) shares stories of "imaginative play" as she played with her sister where they were "authoring or co-authoring our 'stories to live by', keeping our lives moving through trying out diverse ways of being in response to the landscapes we were living on" (p. 107). Through play and imagination I became teacher by mimicking the school landscape I was living in and creating, for myself, a place of belonging. In this school curriculum-making world that I was trying to re-create at home in the basement, I was beginning to compose stories I would later live as teacher. Being with Ms. Z in her classroom, that is, the school curriculum-making world, and becoming like her outside of it, that is, in the familial curriculum-making world I was creating in the basement, allowed me to create a stronger sense of belonging. Ms. Z created this sense of belonging in the classroom as she built a relationship with me and lived what Noddings (1986) refers to as "an ethic of caring" and "fidelity to persons" (p. 497).

As I reflect now, I believe I was creating a classroom in my basement where I could become somebody else, the teacher, and begin to compose a story of teacher while creating a place of belonging for myself. It was in this space I began to develop my personal practical knowledge, as teacher, by being a teacher through my imaginative play. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe personal practical knowledge as, "that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person's practices" (p. 7). In other words, personal practical knowledge is the stories teachers' "live and tell of who they are and what they know" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7).

Now, years later as I inquire into my experiences, I wonder how I adapted to the school and classroom environments, and how this has shaped me as teacher, and how I shape the children I now teach. Paley (1986) reminds me "real change comes about only through the painful recognition of one's own vulnerability" (p. 123). In this paper, I share my personal practical knowledge, my experiences on my professional knowledge landscapes, and my "stories to live by," allowing myself to become vulnerable as I return to my earlier experiences of curriculum making in an effort to imagine new possibilities.

Not the teacher I imagined.

During my Advanced Practicum, I taught in a grade six classroom in a newly created urban school, where approximately 95% of students were Aboriginal.[3] The school was designed for Aboriginal learners from years four to nine with the story[4] of having innovative teaching practices, a balance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, and teacher professional development, that was specifically designed for Aboriginal

learners. Children in years four through six travelled by yellow school buses from various neighborhoods, while children in years seven through nine took public transportation, with few from nearby communities. The school was storied as an inner-city school and a "bad place," full of academically challenged children with behavior problems. The school was well known as a challenging place: staff turnover was high with teachers leaving their assignments during the school year; student assaults on teachers and leaders occurred with few consequences for children; leadership changed frequently and, alongside that, came new expectations and directives from the district on ways to improve the academic achievements of Aboriginal children. I, too, hoped to find new ways to improve the educational experiences of Aboriginal children as I prepared and delivered the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993), the "planned curriculum" (Clandinin et al, 2006), or the mandated curriculum. I also held the hope of creating places of belonging in my classroom, yet there did not seem to be any space for this within the mandated curriculum.

I felt tension between the dominant curriculum and the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) or the curriculum of lives (Clandinin et al., 2006) as I was preparing the children to write the Provincial Achievement Tests[5] (PATs). During my practicum, children shared aspects of their lives and were curious about mine, yet these reciprocal wonderings occurred mainly in out-of-classroom places such as the schoolyard, playground, or hallways. In the classroom I felt as though I needed to be someone who "gave" knowledge to children as I hoped to improve their academic lives, preparing them for the *real* world, as though the world we were living inside the school was somehow irrelevant in their preparation in who they were becoming outside of it. While I wanted to share more about myself and learn more about the children, I was uncertain and uneasy whenever we moved away from the mandated curriculum or when children were "off task." On the last day of my practicum, I raced home to retrieve my dog, bringing her back to show the children. I realize now this was one my earliest attempts to share with the children a bit of my life from outside of school, free of the mandated curriculum, and the expectations of the co-operating teacher and university facilitator. My co-operating teacher recommended me for one of many positions for the upcoming year. I was offered, and accepted a probationary position[6] in a combined grade 4/5 classroom.

Broken Dreams: Living a story of "good" teacher.

I remember returning home after the second day of my first teaching position, questioning and wondering whether I wanted to continue teaching. Something did not feel right. I cried that night and for most of the weekend trying to convince myself things would get better. Things did not get better, instead I just adapted to the environment over time. (Narrative Inquiry course, written response, May 12, 2011)

I was now the teacher in my classroom. Most of what I had imagined about creating a classroom that included the lives of all children and myself were put aside. School stories of effective classroom management took precedence; older teachers encouraged me *not to smile until Christmas*.[7] I had few relevant teaching resources. I photocopied anything I could use, hoping it would be engaging, creative and, most importantly, directly link to the mandated curriculum. I needed to keep the children on task and the only way I knew how was to have them learn what was required. I now recognize that I was silencing the voices of children, as I was determined to follow the mandated curriculum where children completed curricular learning that I thought they needed to know in order to be successful. There was no time for interruption in the classroom; there were curricular objectives to be met, especially since I was on a probationary contract and being evaluated by my principal. Researchers (Clandinin et al., 2012) found early teachers would "*do anything* in order to obtain contracts and teaching assignments" and "frequently took on extra responsibilities at the expense of personal well-being and familial needs in order to try to receive contracts and continuing assignments" (p. 6). I, too, was silent about the struggles and challenges I faced in the classroom and school landscape.

I usually returned home around 8 p.m., ate dinner, and then retreated into my office to plan the next day's lessons, making sure to link my planned curriculum to mandated curricular objectives. Saturdays and Sundays were often spent at the school, marking, changing bulletin boards, searching for resources, creating resources, and photocopying student booklets. Immediately, tensions between my imagined stories to live by as teacher and school stories as teacher began to surface. I did not speak of them anywhere. I received my continuous contract and was told I was doing a great job as teacher. Whispered words among the staff were that once you received your continuous contract, it was important to stay one year and then move to a more desirable school. I began to feel the dis/ease with the stories I was living inside and outside of the classroom and school as teacher, and my body began to make these lived tensions visible. I developed severe eczema on my hands. Along with deteriorating health, personal and familial relationships were suffering. I was exhausted physically and mentally, and felt drained emotionally and spiritually. I was merely surviving. My earlier imagined story of teaching as "creating a classroom environment of belonging for everyone" seemed far out of reach. There were no places of belonging in the school landscape among staff or in my classroom. Other teachers seemed just as exhausted; teacher talk focused on teachers' lives rather than on children's lives. Was this the life I had dreamed of as a little girl in my basement as I imagined myself as a teacher who created a place of belonging as teacher? One story remained: worksheets seemed to dominate the classroom environment, becoming both my tool of reliance and survival.

The following year I stayed with the same children in a combined grade 5/6 classroom. I continued living the same pattern from the previous year, personally and professionally. I began searching for relevant teaching materials for the new grade, which was a PAT year. I also began intensive teacher training in a district-wide language arts program. I lived at the school, spending most evenings and weekends preparing myself with mandated curriculum-related work for the children.

Because I had stronger relationships with the returning children, I began to see glimmers of the teacher I had imagined, as my relationships with the children grew stronger. They began sharing more of their lives inside their homes and communities with me. Even though there were common threads among the stories children told, these stories were often told to me privately, inside and outside of the classroom during supervision. However, my confidence as a teacher grew less, as I was encouraged to focus on preparing the children for the standardized tests.

I accepted a teaching assignment in another public school designated as an Aboriginal elementary school the next year. I taught grade two in the morning and in a grades 3-6 special needs classroom in the afternoon. The special needs classroom was filled with children labeled behavior disordered and/or academically challenged. I was offered this position because I was storied as a teacher who had *effective classroom management* and was told *I would be able to handle it*, even though I had no specific training in special education. I was a "good" teacher. I continued in this assignment for two years, until a new administrator accepted my request to teach in a grade two classroom. Very little seemed to have changed in my stories of teaching. I imposed the mandated curriculum on the children and continued to feel discouraged that I had chosen to become a teacher. I wrote the following reflection about a time I began not liking who I had become as teacher, and as I awakened to knowing I could no longer live the same stories.

> *Staring out my classroom window, while the children worked silently, I thought to myself, "what the hell am I doing here?" I was trying to imagine a different life, a different way to be. I had become completely disengaged from learning and teaching and I had hit a low point in my career. I was still spending countless hours in the classroom. Personal relationships were ending, I was physically exhausted, and I was unable to see teaching getting better. This was not the dream I had imagined or planned. I knew I wanted to work alongside Aboriginal children, but not in this way…not in the way I was taught (except in grade two). Efforts to change my methods of teaching were met with criticism from those I relied on to give me support in the school. I felt an enormous weight of guilt and shame that I wasn't being true to myself in how I imagined teaching and I wasn't*

being fair to these young children. Why was my classroom so quiet? Where were the lives in the classroom…where was the joy? I felt as though I was repeating a traditional form of teaching. There were glimmers and times where I was able to become that imagined teacher, having conversations with children, baking birthday cakes for every child, creating a belonging place in the classroom. However, these were fleeting moments, unable to sustain me. I returned to a way of teaching that was supported by the school landscape by having a quiet, compliant, well-run classroom. (Life in Elementary Classrooms course, written response, November 2010)

I knew the story of school very well and the markers that defined good and bad teachers. Good teachers were seen as having quiet working classrooms. Children were expected to be silent as we walked about the school. The expectation was that children would meet specific academic goals, produce good grades and results "*better than the year before*." Improved standardized test scores were the markers of success. Teachers who had loud, busy classrooms were seen as ineffective, unable to manage children and, most likely, would not last. I remember using a strategy I had once seen other teachers use to keep children quiet as we moved about the school. It fell into the school plotline of good teacher and good children. At one time, I remember instructing my young grade two children to place their fingers on their mouths as they walked in line formation down the school halls. This was to remind them, and others, that talking was not permitted in the school hallways. I comfortably accepted praise from others, teachers and administration, about how quiet and *good* my class was and the children would each receive an entry slip for the weekly Friday school-wide draw.[8] Two slips would be entered if they received a compliment. In actuality, I received the compliment for being a *good* teacher.

Beginning to retell and relive earlier stories to live by.

Year after year, children in my grade two classroom shared their desires about becoming a teacher. Instantly, I was caught up in the nostalgia of my grade two experiences of practicing being a teacher at home. I enjoyed hearing these stories, reminding me of my stories of Ms. Z, confirming the wonderful job I was doing as teacher. However, over time, I began to feel tensions as children continued telling me of their dreams to become a teacher. I wondered how the children were coming to know they wanted to become a teacher. What part was I playing in their dreams of becoming? I wondered if they, too, imagined a story of belonging in the classroom? I began to question: Would they, like me, follow the same traditional path of becoming a good teacher laid out by the "grand narrative" (Bateson, 1989) of schooling? I secretly wished they would imagine becoming something different.

Their stories of becoming teachers provided a bumping place, an interruption, for me to begin to imagine otherwise, imagining a new way of being teacher. I awakened (Greene, 1995) to how I was teaching young children who adored me and wanted to become like me even as I was growing bored and detached from teaching…and from the children. I knew, if they were grounding their dreams of becoming a teacher on their stories of me, it would come at a *cost*[9] of broken relationships, declining health, and growing tensions between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived or "living" curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Aoki, 1993). Change, however, came slowly as Bateson (1989) reminds me of the powerful hold of continuity and the fear of change when she writes,

> We hold on to the continuity we have, however profoundly it is flawed. If change were less frightening, if the risks did not seem so great, far more could be lived. One of the striking facts of most lives is the recurrence of threads of continuity, the re-echoing of earlier themes, even across deep rifts of change, but when you watch people damaged by their dependence on continuity, you wonder about the nature of commitment, about the need for a new and more fluid way to imagine the future. (Bateson, 1989, p. 8)

I continued to hold tightly to continuity for several years before I returned part-time to graduate school in 2009, hoping to change the teacher stories I was living. One story I told others of why I returned to graduate school was that I needed a challenge. The other story that I kept silent was I had grown bored with the mandated curriculum and with the quiet, predictable, planned rhythm in my classroom. Every year of teaching I was reminded, in some small way, that the mandated curriculum I was delivering was silencing the voices of children. I knew the way I was being teacher was not the ways I imagined. Carr (1986) reminded me that,

> Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of the self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. (p. 97)

Things in my life and in my teaching no longer made sense. I had grown tired of not being able to live the story of teacher I had long ago imagined. I needed to find new ways to be alongside children. I desperately wanted to remember why I had become a teacher in the first place, not as a marker of success or becoming *somebody*, but as a way

of living alongside children and creating a place of belonging. I was seeking coherence in my stories to live by as I tried to make sense of what I was living in the school and classroom landscape that contradicted what I had so long ago imagined as belonging places. I realized I was not alone in following the grand narrative of teaching and I recognized myself in Paley (1986) when she wrote,

> In my haste to supply the children with my own bits and pieces of neatly labeled reality, the appearance of a correct answer gave me the surest feeling that I was teaching. Curriculum guides replaced the lists of questions, but I still wanted most of all to keep things moving with a minimum of distraction. It did not occur to me that the distractions might be the sounds of children thinking. (p. 122)

Looking for answers: Struggling for narrative coherence.

I entered the masters program at the University of Alberta, Department of Elementary Education in the Technology Integration in Elementary Education program in 2009. I chose this program because I had found success with school curriculum making and the products children were producing for me, using technology as a teaching and learning tool. However, after my second course I realized the program was not helping alleviate tensions between the way I imagined teaching and the way I was living alongside children. This path in the masters program was not helping my search to make sense of teaching and learning in the classroom. I needed to remember why I wanted to become a teacher, working alongside Aboriginal children. It was my hope that by undertaking my graduate degree someone would tell me how to be a better teacher to Aboriginal children. I was looking for the “magic teaching method” that would make me a better teacher and desperately wished someone would tell me what that was.

Slowing putting the story pieces back together.

In fall of 2010, I began a course titled, *Life in Elementary Classrooms*, in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development[10] (CRTED), alongside Dr. D. Jean Clandinin and others, and began revisiting my stories to live by. I began to inquire narratively into my stories of experience as granddaughter, student, and teacher, becoming aware my stories to live by are always *in the midst*, always in the making, and not fixed. I began to think narratively when I was asked to write a story of my early school experiences. I was surprised someone was genuinely curious to hear my stories of experience lived in both school and home places. The course became a belonging place for me, a place missing for me inside the schools and classrooms where I had lived. It became a place I wanted to create in my classroom. In this course I found I was not alone. There were other teachers feeling as I was. I remembered the sense of belonging I lived in, and created, as a little girl who

imagined *teacher* and *learner*, in both school and home places. Like Paley (1990), I began to recognize that, "in my early teaching years I was in the wrong forest. I paid scant attention to the play and did not hear the stories, though once upon a time I must have imagined such wondrous events" (p. 5). Through telling and listening to stories of experience with others, I began to imagine wondrous events and imagine a counter narrative or counterstory[11] (Lindeman Nelson, 1995) to what I lived as deliverer of curriculum. I began "shaking up my addiction to harmony" (Greene, 1990, p. 69).

Listening with the heart.

A Cree Elder stands up in class and asks, "Are you being truthful? Are you being honest?" He is talking to the participants in the course about our learning and teaching selves. He continues, "There needs to be a holistic approach to learning, you have to have balance with the body, mind, and spirit. Wake up that spirit of knowledge, it does not only exist in the mind, but in the heart as well. The hardest journey one can take is traveling from the mind to the heart." (Indigenous philosophy and curriculum course, May 12, 2011)

His words pierced and lingered, as though he was speaking directly to me. I scribbled his words down fast and wondered silently, *had I been truthful and honest with myself and with the children I taught, as well as with those I was currently teaching?* I thought of the tensions I felt since entering the classrooms 11 years ago, as I was trying to live alongside the children and their families, with the mandated curriculum firmly in hand. I began to wonder, where were the voices of the parents? Where were the voices of the children? Was I really "listening" to the experiences children and their families were telling me in my efforts to be "good" teacher? Through the years these tensions were unidentifiable, I just knew they had been present from the beginning of my teaching career. I now knew, like Paley (1986), that "the rules of teaching had changed; I now wanted to hear the answers I could not myself invent" (p. 125).

I now understood I needed to create a space of belonging where children could share their lived experiences. By inquiring into children's stories to live by alongside my stories to live by in our curriculum making, I awakened to my stories of experience, both in the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. I wanted to focus on the children's stories of experiences and the familial curriculum-making world they were creating at home and in their communities. I wondered what we could learn about one another as we listened to each others' stories of becoming, while allowing ourselves to imagine new possibilities as we co-composed our school curriculum-making world together.

Creating Spaces: Imagining and living out a counter narrative

> *I arrived early on the first day of school to prepare the area for our first peace candle gathering.[12] I carefully laid out the Pendleton wool blanket in the centre of the room with an unlit candle, a basket of rocks and smudge[13] material resting in the middle. I wanted to start our circle in a good way and an Elder was joining us to speak about coming together in a circle and about protocol. With the lights dimmed, Kokum[14] and I sat visiting around the blanket and waited for the children to trickle in. As they arrived, I could tell some children were unfamiliar with entering a room this way and were unsure of what was about to happen. I asked the children to join us around the blanket once they hung up their heavy, overstuffed backpacks on the coat hook. Other children quickly made their way over to the circle, with backpacks still strapped on, and were told by other children to put their backpacks away. Some children sat quietly waiting for us to begin, some gave small waves to friends they recognized from grade one. Some were whispering about the smudge, telling us they too smudged at home with their families. Kokum shared lessons about respect for one another when coming together in a circle, and the importance of listening to what one another is saying, without interrupting. I introduced students to the basket of rocks and to the smooth wooden stick I had lying in the centre of the blanket. The items served two different methods of sharing. With the passing of the basket of rocks, each child would choose a rock and hold it until they were ready to share by placing their rock in the centre of the blanket, back into the basket. The other method was the use of a stick. The stick moved in a clockwise direction around the circle and whoever held the stick was the only one talking. Students were unsure and not used to sharing their ideas in a group setting and many struggled at the beginning. My goal was to create a comfortable space where children could share their stories of experiences.*

It was in this space, in our classroom, that I began to create a safe place of belonging where we would be able to share daily stories of experiences and a place where students were in control of their learning. Paley (1986) calls me to think about the importance of having curiosity in creating a space for the stories children tell when she writes:

> The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers, that we model. As we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected. (p. 127)

Most of all, I wanted to stop silencing children and to awaken them, and me, to what they were really telling me about themselves and who they were becoming in both worlds, the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world.

I wanted to "be there to listen, respond, and add a dab of glue to the important words that burst forth…[where] children who know others are listening may begin to listen to themselves" (Paley, 1986, p. 127).

In the beginning, some children resisted coming together in this way by "passing" their turn. Others cautiously spoke about their experiences, saying one or two sentences, and others struggled to find their words. Some welcomed the experience and began to share about their lives. In the beginning, circle often lasted only 15-20 minutes. I began to wonder, were these children afraid to tell stories of themselves, alongside others in the class? Were they afraid of how I, or others, would respond to their stories? Did they even see themselves as having valuable knowledge worth sharing? Perhaps they didn't want to speak because they knew very little about me. I shared more about who I was, and the many roles I played in my own familial stories as granddaughter, daughter, auntie, as well as a graduate student, and teacher. I wondered about the ways children saw themselves in the classroom, and I asked if any of them saw themselves as teacher. Very few had. The conversation began with the traditional narrative of teacher and moved into new possibilities where the children began to recognize themselves as teachers. They shared their experiences of teaching younger siblings, cousins, friends, and older adults in their families. Looking back, I wonder if this practice of sharing experiences in a safe place was unfamiliar to them in their earlier experiences in classroom spaces? As I was trying to disrupt the stories of teacher I had been living so long, I also sensed the dis/ease in the children's adherence to the restrictive practices of the dominant school narratives.

As relationships grew over time, stories began to develop and in my efforts not to silence their stories of experiences, our peace candle gathering circle often lasted 90 minutes. Children began to see themselves as holding knowledge and being knowledgeable by sharing experiences of their familial curriculum-making worlds. They were eager to tell stories of communities they were from, who they lived with, and how, for some, this frequently shifted. Often children shared stories of having many home places and belonging to multiple communities. They spoke about those who were important and less important to them in their families and told stories of being alongside their siblings and/or pets. They spoke about the addition of new siblings, as well as the loss of loved ones. Others shared the tensions of traveling great distances and spending up to three hours a day on the bus to attend school.

The children quickly learned the daily routine of circle and were eager to start. Together, we began to welcome the start of a new day as we met in our peace candle circle gathering. Stories of experience were already being shared as I walked up to my

classroom portable, as children asked if we were having circle. Some children excitedly "bounced" their way to class, ready to share some new experience that happened the night before or on the weekend. Soon children began offering to help set up the space by grabbing the blanket, smudge, candle, and matches and laying them in a spot they reserved for me. The children began to preplan their seating space with those who were eager to share finding spaces on the left side of where I sat, knowing we sometimes moved in the clockwise direction with the stick. They began to see themselves as knowledge holders and began seeing our peace candle gathering space as a safe place to tell of their experiences in story form. Bruner (2012) writes, "we never have to explain to kids what a story is…you start one…and they understand it" (p. 30). Children were sharing stories, sometimes with a beginning, middle, and ending, and sometimes not. It did not matter in our circle and students were respectful to one another as they listened, often triggering their own stories in relation to the stories told by others. Most days I allowed circle to continue without concern for time, however there were times I began to feel tension around the length of time we spent in circle, even though we were creating our own lived curriculum alongside each other. It was a curriculum of lives in the making. It was during these times I began to worry and wondered if I would have enough time to "do" or "cover" the mandated curriculum. Tensions became more noticeable around reporting time and during the evaluation and writing of report cards, as I was reminded to check off the curricular objectives the children could or could not do. Around reporting time, I began limiting the time children were able to share, even sometimes canceling circle. It was during these times when I would cancel the circle that tensions grew, especially as the children expressed their disappointment. I struggled deeply with this tension, once again feeling as though I was silencing the children in my efforts to teach the mandated curriculum. As tensions developed, it became increasingly difficult to continue to privilege the mandated curriculum in the report cards, as there were no spaces to share the other ways I had come to learn alongside the children. There seemed to be little space in the reporting process to share how the children began to know themselves differently and where they began to envision themselves in newly imagined ways.

What matters most: Attending to children's lives in familial and school curriculum-making worlds.

Greene (1993) speaks to the importance of giving children time and space to begin telling stories of "what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something [self] into being that is in between" (p. 218). The "in between" Greene (1993) speaks about is the meeting place that allows us to unfold who we are and who we are becoming, but do not yet know, alongside others in our interwoven "webs

of relationships" (Arendt, 1958; Chung, 2008). By creating the in-between spaces of belonging and honoring children's worlds of familial curriculum-making within school curriculum-making worlds, I have become open to the endless shaping possibilities, both as learner and teacher.

I have come to understand through creating a space for children and myself while paying attention to our own familial curriculum-making worlds that I now could see "otherwise" (Greene, 1995). I was able to imagine a new way of being alongside children, within our stories of experiences in the school and in the familial curriculum-making worlds. As we moved forward in this process of coming together and sharing our stories of who we are and who we were becoming, I noticed the children began to imagine and see themselves and others in new ways. Children began to see their knowledge and the familial curriculum making they were engaged in at home as belonging within the school curriculum-making world. While many classrooms today continue to privilege school curriculum making, as I had, it is my hope that by sharing my stories to live by through my experiences in our classroom peace candle gatherings, I offer a counter narrative or "counterstory" (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) to the dominant curriculum making. As children travel daily between both worlds, there needs to be safe conversational spaces in the school curriculum-making world where children are able to come together to imagine new possibilities. Greene (1993) attends to the importance of conversation and dialogue in classrooms:

> There can only be – there ought to be – a wider and deeper sharing of beliefs, and enhanced capacity to articulate them, to justify them, to persuade others as the heteroglossic conversation moves on, never reaching a final conclusion, always incomplete, but richer and more densely woven, even as it moves through time. (p. 213)

The peace candle gathering circles provided opportunities for the children to envision new possibilities in their lives, alongside others, as they developed their own counter narrative. I imagine as these children move forward with confidence and strength, they will be able to recognize the value in the stories they live and tell. I hope they find safe spaces to continue to share their experiences as they move forward. Through this process of curriculum making alongside children, I too am able to envision a counter narrative as I have returned to live out my earlier imagined stories of teaching. Greene (1995) reminds me of the importance of creating spaces in the classroom for stories to be heard and shared, always in a state of incompleteness when she writes

> Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They

ought to resound with the voices of articulate young in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to a renewed consciousness of possibility. (p. 43)

In creating belonging spaces for the children and myself in the classroom, I return to my earlier stories of becoming teacher. Together, we co-composed curriculum as we listened to, honored, and validated the stories of experiences lived and told by each other, beginning with our familial worlds of curriculum making. I was reminded in this way of coming together, we are all in the process of becoming, who we are, not yet (Greene, 1995).

Notes

1. Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) outline two worlds of curriculum-making, the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. Children live in both worlds on a daily basis.
2. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the term "stories to live by" (p. 4) as a narrative conception of identity, shaped by the narrative telling and retelling of secret and cover stories in various contexts.
3. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act*, 1982, Section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.
4. As a way to describe teachers' experiences and dilemmas faced in the professional knowledge landscape, as they move in and out of classroom places, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) developed the terms, "teacher stories – stories of teachers – school stories – stories of school" (p. 25).
5. In Alberta, children in grades 3, 6, and 9 are required to write a standardized Provincial achievement exam. In grade 3, children are required to write the Language Arts & Math exams. In grades 6 and 9, children are required to write the exams in the four core subjects known as Language Arts, Math, Social, and Science. According to Alberta Education (2013), the purpose of the Achievement Testing Program is to determine if children are learning what they are expected to learn, in order to report to Albertans how well children have achieved provincial standards at given points in their schooling, and assist schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning (Alberta Education, 2013).

6. Within the Public School Board where I worked, teachers are granted various types of teaching contacts: supply, temporary, probationary, and continuous contracts.

7. The saying, "Don't smile until Christmas," is a term I heard a lot during my beginning years as teacher. The message behind this saying is that children will take the teacher more seriously if she/he never smiles. The message implies smiling and having fun with children will create disorder and noise in the classroom, preventing any learning from occurring.

8. A school-wide incentive program encourages children to collect as many entry forms as they can throughout the week and place them into their classroom draw bins, where one winner is chosen every Friday for a prize, to be collected from the school office. At one time it was a box of *Smarties*, now it is a dried fruit package, in response to the Apple school project. Children earn entry stubs of paper for showing "good" behavior and following school/classroom rules.

9. Thoreau (1854/2008) helps me to frame the use of the term cost when he wrote, "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it" (p. 20). Clandinin et al. (2012) also wonder of the cost of becoming a teacher when they write, "The cost of becoming a teacher is paid from the 'life' of the teacher, much of which takes place off the school landscape" (p. 72).

10. Since 1991, the mandate for the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development is to foster and produce high quality research for teacher education; to provide a scholarly community for graduate children and post graduate children and faculty; and to collaborate on theacher education with agencies, researchers at other universities in Canada and abroad.

11. Lindemann Nelson (1995) defines counterstory as "a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions" (p. 23).

12. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003) write of peace candle gatherings "as a way to move forward, to talk about how children were making sense of their experiences, a space for children to speak their stories, to listen to others' stories" (p. 344).

13. Smudge material includes a "smudge pan" (tiny cast-iron pan), smudge such as sweetgrass or sage. Smudging is an act of cleansing and prayer. The smoke that rises from the burning smudge is wafted over one's body to cleanse the body, mind, and spirit. As you smudge yourself, it is believed that the rising smoke carries your prayers to the Creator.

14. Kokum means "your" grandmother in Cree. Nokum means "my" grandmother.

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Regulating Early Childhood Mathematical Provision: An Exploration Across the Sectors

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ABSTRACT

Effective mathematics provision is a central goal within Early Childhood Education. However, the choices that teachers make within Centers and new entrant classrooms are influenced by deeper understandings about the kinds of arrangements that allow young students to enhance their learning. This paper explores similarities and differences with respect to the practices and processes in Early Childhood Centers and in new entrant classrooms. Drawing on Foucauldian concepts, the analysis reports that practices and processes were at odds across the two sectors. The challenge is to offer young learners a more seamless mathematical experience.

Introduction

Effective mathematics provision that produces desirable student outcomes is the ultimate aim for every mathematics teacher. Whether based in a Center or in a school, teachers work towards understanding what students "need to learn and then challenging and supporting them to learn it well" (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics [NCTM], 2000, p. 16). However, in understanding what needs to be learnt and how that might be achieved, the ideological, structural, and organizational dimensions of mathematical provision come into play. These dimensions are all part of the large matrix of practice that involves wider systemic and policy support for teaching and learning. That is to say, the choices that a Center and school make include the negotiation of relevant mathematics curriculum policy and carry over to decisions about the human and material infrastructural arrangements that allow young students to achieve desirable outcomes.

Decisions made at the Center level that are at odds with those made in new entrant (reception) classrooms have been shown to have a long-term impact on adjustment (Kienig, 2002) and on school achievement (Perry & Dockett, 2004; Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, & Robinson, 2003). If, as Neuman (2002) has suggested, impediments to smooth transitions between sectors are generated by different visions and cultures, then we want to have a clear idea about how Center and school personnel talk about their own and the other sector's practices. At a time when the policy machinery in New Zealand is focused on enhancing communication between sectors, we wanted to explore how the practices and processes at the Center, in relation to mathematics provision, correspond to the practices and processes in new entrant mathematics classrooms. Identifying school and Center patterns that contribute to seamless practice is important if we are to enhance our understanding of the relations between mathematical provision and the creation of young learners' mathematical identities.

The theoretical underpinning for this exploration on how teachers enhance young students' mathematical understanding can be found in the work of Foucault (e.g., 1977, 1984). The work proposes that what people may say and do is made available within discourses that are imbued with power. In relation to this study, the kind of mathematical provision that might be constructed in a Center or in a school is developed from situated, localized practices that, in turn, determine the spectrum of speech acts and actions that can be taken seriously at any given time. It is these practices and activities that contribute to how young students "think about themselves in relation to mathematics and the extent to which they have developed a commitment to, and have come to see value in, mathematics" (Cobb, Gresalfi, & Hodge, 2009, pp. 40–41). Thus, such practices and activities and the visions, commitments, motivations, and capacities that underwrite them, are deeply implicated in the development of a quality mathematical experience.

In accounting for those practices that are operationalized by Center and school personnel, insights are offered in relation to the mathematical provision at four Centers and two schools. The discussion explores the mathematics pedagogy and the assessment practice privileged at the sites and includes parental perceptions. In utilizing concepts from Foucault's toolkit, the analysis draws particular attention to the differential enactment of practices, in the hope that conclusions about mathematical provision might be made. Since there are high costs in the perpetuation of differential practice between sectors (Kagan & Neuman, 1998), the challenge is to find a way to negotiate those differences.

Conceptual Tools From Foucault

The exploration into early childhood settings and new entrant classrooms begins with Foucault's theory of language and social power. Foucault (e.g., 1977, 1984) provides a framework that allows us to respond to the complex interplay between social structures and the processes of mathematical provision between two different sector levels that might be at work for young mathematics learners. These tools allow us to respond to the complex interplay between social structures and the processes of mathematical provision between two different sector levels that might be at work for young mathematics learners.

In Foucault's poststructuralism (e.g., 1977), discourses are of key interest. Rather than focusing on communication and speech, Foucault's understanding of discourse is centered on the taken-for-granted "rules" that specify what is possible to speak, do, and even think, at a particular time. Discourses, for him, refer to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. Institutions, like early childhood settings and schools, demonstrate forms of social organization and social practices that may not be similar from one setting to another. They have particular approaches to mathematics pedagogy, parental expectations, assessment, and so forth. All these discursive practices have their place in creating mathematical provision for the teacher and the learner. That is to say, discourses surrounding the category "mathematical provision" provide teachers, learners, parents, and others with an understanding of how mathematics should be provided for and recognized. Because there are often different discourses at play between settings, the ways in which we understand mathematical provision in one educational site might be quite different from another site.

These discursive practices are immensely powerful, precisely because inherent within them is an implicit set of rules that governs beliefs about the ways in which mathematics provision might be understood and operationalized. The important point is that discourses do not merely *reflect* or represent mathematical provision; rather, they actively construct them. Power, then, is constituted in discursive practice. It is this Foucauldian idea that has far-reaching implications for understanding practices and processes in education. In relation to this study, power systematically creates versions of the mathematical world within early childhood education and school settings. It governs and regulates social interaction and infuses our understanding of "mathematical reality" in these particular sites. In Foucault's understanding, power not only produces the meanings that people make of mathematical provision, but it also sustains those meanings. Power normalizes thinking and acting to the extent that people in settings such as Centers and schools, tend to match their behavior against the taken-for-granted

standards and established covert controls. Given that power is local, continuous, and present in the most apparently trivial details of life, then it will be useful to look at the micro-level of practice within the Center and the classroom to trace how mathematical provision is created and maintained in subtle and diffuse ways.

Methodological Matters

In applying Foucault's ideas to mathematical provision, I draw on data from a two-year study that explored transition practices between four early childhood centers (ECC) and two new entrant (reception) classrooms in primary schools into which those four Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings feed. The four centers comprised two kindergartens and two early childhood education and care centers. Both kindergartens employed three teachers and 45 children aged from three years and nine months to five years (five years being the school entry age in New Zealand). Children attended the kindergartens each weekday from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. In the two privately owned centers, both with three teachers/caregivers, 12-15 children were enrolled for a full day. The two schools in the study were similar in size and decile rating[1]: School 1 was a decile-4 school consisting of 480 students. School 2 was a decile-3 school with a roll of 440 students. Both schools catered for new entrants in two classrooms and all four classrooms were involved in the study.

Data sources included observations within the ECE, teacher interviews, parent questionnaire, and documentation including teaching policies and student assessments at the ECC during the first year of the research. Similar data sources were collected at the school sites during the second year of the research. Questionnaire responses from 62 parents of children at the four Early Childhood Education settings and 46 parents of children at the two schools also contributed to the dataset. From the full dataset, and putting to use Foucault's concepts of discourse, power, and surveillance, conclusions were drawn about similarities and differences regarding mathematical provision at the respective educational sites. Thus, underwriting the research was a central question: What does mathematical provision look like in early childhood settings and new entrant school classrooms? Since the investigation was undertaken in specific localized sites, situated within a small town in New Zealand, generalization to other ECC and school environments is limited. However, the analysis points to some initial speculations about how mathematical provision might be offered in other ECC and new entrant settings. From the findings, inferences could then be made about the transition experience and the identities created in relation to mathematics for young students.

The Discursive Production of Mathematical Provision

The ECE Setting

At the Early Childhood Centers, teachers position children in relation to the official policy statement *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), and to the Center's interpretation of that policy, with respect to the teaching and learning of early childhood. At the school within the new entrant classroom, other discourses come to play which in some ways confirm and in other ways contradict the discourses promoted by the Center. I explored mathematics provision at the ECE settings by exploring the philosophies that underpin, and the infrastructural arrangements in place for, mathematics teaching and learning. In the following, words have been taken from teachers' and parents' responses:

> "Children need to have autonomy of their learning and to be able to make some choices for themselves."

> "The whole Te Whāriki is more of a holistic approach to children's learning. They will learn all those things in due course through stages of development, through their own interest-driven activities."

> "It happens throughout the whole engaged curriculum. It doesn't stand as a solitary stand-alone exercise unless it is extending a child's interest. "

Within the learning environment of the ECE setting the teacher was required to observe, interact, challenge, scaffold, and co-construct mathematical knowledge. Children worked alone, in solitary play or in parallel play, or played together (see also Perry & Dockett, 2011). Center teachers were watchful for opportunities to "step in" in order to progress children's understanding and interest. If a child showed a particular interest the teacher was expected to build on and nurture that interest, whilst maintaining a responsive and reciprocal relationship. On those occasions the teacher remained at the activity, encouraging and extending the learning through conversations and challenges. As some teachers remarked:

> "Often it just kind of happens in that moment in the water trough or the sandpit or you use what is there at the time."

> "So it is based around a child's interest and we can seize an opportunity and teachable moment and extend it.

"Working with other children never just by themselves either. There would be a group of children invariably come along. You might start with one but you would end up inviting other children to participate and all the turn taking and the sharing."

The provision of opportunities for rich mathematical learning and language development was provided at the Center in areas such as the sand pit, block corner, family corner, water play, with farm animals, toy cars, carpentry, and computer games. More formal activities, such as shape matching, bead threading, puzzles, and jigsaws, were also available to enhance mathematical learning. One parent said,

"The first thing that came into my mind was the mathematical language that is used all around the centre in lots of different areas... you know the measuring, longer, shorter, longer…with the carpentry, water, sandpit. All of those words, classifying and sorting words."

Discourses operating within the Center relating to "rich mathematical learning" and "language development" are ways of giving meaning to the world. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) explains that power operates within discourses, like these, not overtly but, rather through its invisibility. These discourses are effective as normalizing forces because they are relatively invisible in their operation. That is, mathematical learning and language development are regulated through a set of standards and value systems which is created and maintained in subtle and diffuse ways. Of the 62 parents in the ECE component of the study, some believed that mathematics occurs "often" as children play with puzzles and games (43%, n=27), during mat time (45%, n=28), at construction (30%, n=19), in water play (29%, n=18) and on the computer (32%, n=20). Another teacher stated,

"We have a lot of parents that will come in and work with their children at the puzzles, at the play dough table, at one of our tables that we might have a game set up."

According to parents, mathematics teaching and learning takes place "sometimes" in the writing area (34%, n=21), with play dough (29%, n=18), and in the family corner (32%, n=20). Parents believed that the ECE teachers work with children on aspects to do with mathematics "all the time" through conversations (32%, n=20), and "often" during mat time [whole group time] (49%, n=30), and with inside equipment (43%, n=27). Through implicit discourses, in relation to the level of mathematics offered in the ECE setting, they had come to expect that mathematics would be "very basic."

"At [the ECE setting] children can wander from activity to activity."

"At [the ECE setting] you are kind of aware of it [mathematics] in the background and notes are made in the children's profiles—that they [the children] had been seen to be counting."

Displays of children's work, routines such as roll taking utilizing category data and information-sharing charts for parents on learning and curriculum, also provided a mathematical focus within the early childhood setting. At the same time the routines also regulated minute details of space and time. Mat time [whole group time] often provided an opportunity for a mathematics focus. These occasions were initiated by the teacher or sparked by the teacher's observation of a child. As two of the ECE teachers noted:

"We definitely bring it [mathematics] out in planned times like that."

"I was working with a little boy who was going 1 2 3 and I thought there is a whole heap of stuff there…So that is why I thought of bringing in [at mat time] the actual 1 2 3…It's not giving him the knowledge; it's like developing an awareness."

Thus planning, aimed to enhance either individual or group mathematical understanding, was often informed by anecdotal assessments, made on the basis of teachers' observations of children's interests. The planned activities were offered to meet the needs and interests of the children. However, children were not required to carry out these activities.

"Planning for us can come from when we see an interest and then we bring in the resources. That would be in our session evaluation we would look at that and how we would extend it."

If the ECE context defined its own borders for teaching and learning, it also constructed its own understanding of assessment. Narrative assessments were the most common form of assessment within the ECC. These tended to document, in written and photographic form, the dispositions exhibited by the child rather than focus on a specific content area. The intent was to illustrate the ways in which a child was actively engaged in the learning environment rather than merely to report on the achievement of a skill (see Jordan, 2004). The narratives, describing the whole experience to ensure that the complexity of the learning was preserved (Carr, 2001), were set within a background that provided evidence of specific mathematical concepts being developed, practised, or achieved. Aimed at a broader audience, and inclusive of a range of voices, the narratives were typically stored in an individual child's portfolio as a Learning Story

and were available at any time to teachers, children, and family. They offered a rounded view of the young student's mathematical engagement. For example:

> "You enjoyed your time in the water, filling bottles, using jugs and small containers. You had really good concentration and showed awesome control when pouring the water into the bottles. You lined the new cylinders up from smallest to largest and filled these too. You were not only developing your fine motor control but discovering all about volume." (Learning Story)

> "She just thrives on painting activities and creates wonderful pieces of artwork. It has been observed that J. is very interested in painting circles. … Mum explained to us that in the weekend J. was learning about the different shapes. This could link to why she has really enjoyed creating circles." (Learning Story)

> "H. may have a strength with the number system. We will offer more resources to stimulate his interest." (Learning Story)

Teaching and learning mathematics in the ECE setting was mapped onto a complex grid of formal and informal educational discourses and practices. Teachers constructed their notions of mathematics teaching and learning through familiarity with policies and through their personal experiences of teaching. Working from an understanding that the child's informal mathematical knowledge was a building block for teaching and for learning, teachers were expected to build on the "child's current needs, strengths, and interests by allowing children choices and by encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 20). The view was that numerical knowledge should be guided by the understanding that "to be numerate is to have the ability and inclination to use mathematics effectively in our lives, at home, at work, and in the community" (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 1). Assessment should "[f]eedback to children on their learning and development [and] should enhance their sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 30).

Theoretical decisions about teaching, learning, and assessment like these have important implications for the ways in which mathematics provision can be conceptualized and enacted (see Perry & Dockett, 2011). In privileging the use of *material resources*, in recognizing *prior knowledge and difference*, in validating *individual* and *group activities*, *integrated learning, play-based pedagogies*, and *narratives* for assessment (Davies & Walker, 2008), a notion was formed of young children as steeped in the early-development phase of mathematics learning. Teachers were to assist that development by

co-constructing knowledge with "as they engage[d]in meaning making" (Cullen, 2004, p. 70). By naming these categories, ECE teachers had established their own personal classificatory grid for the development of young learners within the setting.

In Foucauldian understanding, the ECE settings produced their own truths about mathematics provision. They operated with an established set of rules of formation, through a network of material and embodied relations. By advancing a specific ideological construction of mathematics teaching, learning, and assessment, and by producing mechanisms to shape the knowledges, modes of operating, and positionings of the teacher and the children, the ECE settings created the conditions for certain discourses and not others, about mathematics provision to be recognized. Foucault put it like this: "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them" (Foucault, 1972, p. 46).

New Entrant Classrooms

Within the new entrant classroom, new aspects of the mathematical world were laid bare and new relationships with teachers and others in the learning community were made available. This new context also organized and strategized for time and space differently from the ECE setting. The approach to learning changed from a focus on personal, social, and emotional development to the formal beginning of mathematical content prescribed in the form of "achievement objectives" within the national curriculum (Stephenson & Parsons, 2007). Typically, children were placed in ability grouping from their first day at school and experienced formal whole-class mat time, followed by group rotations. Similar to findings provided by Belcher (2006), mathematics was presented in a structured lesson format. Such lessons occurred at a regular time of the school day, and contrasted with the mathematical experience offered in the early childhood setting.

> "I think there is an expectation of when they come, well, how they behave when they are at school and numeracy time is a set time."

> "We have ability groups. We have two rotations. One rotation they see me and two they do an independent activity. That goes for four days a week and on the fifth day we have a maths circuit."

Like many educational practices, the typical lesson structures pedagogical arrangements for mathematical work, establishing a set of practices and social relations for the

teacher and learner in the classroom. While the new entrant teachers expressed a belief in the importance of children learning through play, they did not reflect this in practice. As evidenced by classroom observations, in most classrooms, on the basis of ability grouping, the teacher introduced new concepts for the lesson to one group each day; provided explanations; modeled; posed questions for the children; supplied work and activities to enable practice of those mathematical ideas; and finally reflected on the work. In this logic the teacher moved reflexively from talk, to writing on the board, to observing, to talk and questioning, all the while grounding understanding through the process of children's activity and written work.

Practices of administration like these induce the mathematics learner in the new entrant classroom into a particular cyclic order in which specific tasks and functions, by turn, are to be performed. In Foucault's (1972) understanding, they "…lay down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized" (p. 74). Because these institutional practices fix limits, controlling the "time" around which mathematical reality might take place, they foster the development and control of what is to count as the mathematical provision. Such organizational procedures sanction what Foucault (1977) calls "normalization."

It was through the rotations that opportunities for learning with others in a less structured teacher-driven learning setting were made possible. During non-contact teacher time within a lesson, a group of similar-ability children was provided with teacher-selected focused games or resources to stimulate self-generated activities.

> "They [non-contact groups] will either be activities to reinforce previous learning or to help with current learning or a sheet [photocopied worksheet]. More formal type activity for counting. Something where they have got to record."

> "That is where I have developmental type activities so they have a little bit of structure on the mat. Then they have freedom of other activities at the same time they are learning that rotation process."

> "Yes, they are allowed to have free choice but not so much in maths time because I do prefer them to use more appropriate activities that tie in with what they have been learning."

However, similar to the findings made by Belcher (2006), children in the non-contact group tended to spend their time practising social and organizational skills, rather

than developing mathematical knowledge. Although they had some control over their learning with respect to the selection of predetermined equipment, the children in the non-contact group had little opportunity to interact with the teacher.

Davies (2011) and Peters (2010) have argued that connections between the practices in place within the new entrant classroom and those found in the early childhood context are, at best, tenuous. Parents were mindful of this, believing that "maths learning" changed once the child started school. One third of the 46 parents involved in the study responded consistently across all options that they "did not know" where mathematics occurred within a new entrant classroom. Of the remaining parents, mathematics occurred "all the time" in the mathematics corner (33%, n=15) and in structured mathematics lessons (33%, n=15) and "often" in puzzles and games (36%, n=17). Construction, play dough, and the writing area were places were mathematics "sometimes" occurred. When asked how the teacher helped their child learn mathematics around 50%, or approximately 230 parents "did not know," 21% (n=10) responded that teachers used a formal maths lesson "all the time" and "often used" conversation (25%, n=12), mat time (25%, n=12), and formal lessons (18%, n=8). These findings supported those of Belcher (2006) in that parents "were unaware of the extent of their children's shift as they moved from the holistic learning environment of the early childhood to the constructivist school environment where learning focused on achievement of prescribed objectives within separate curricula" (p. 114).

Although it has been suggested (e.g., Margetts, 2007) that new entrant teachers should be responsive in the early weeks of schooling to children's prior knowledge, little evidence of this was found. Parents, on the other hand, were well aware of the importance of informal knowledge and how they might help their children learn mathematics in everyday settings. However, only 25% of the parents could confirm that the new entrant teacher had acknowledged their child's prior mathematical understanding. Conversations at home (68%, n=31) and daily routines (46%, n=21) were "often used" together with play (53%, n=24), computer games (50%, n=23), conversations away from home (46%, n=21), and published maths materials (46%, n=21) "sometimes" to enhance their child's understanding.

From observations and planning documents, it is evident that mathematical provision in the classroom was teacher initiated with predetermined learning intentions. Lessons were planned by the teacher, rather than initiated through a child's needs or interests. Since teachers were preoccupied with "getting through" their planned instruction and sometimes distracted by issues of classroom management, they were unable (or unwilling) to scaffold or respond interactively to children's initiations.

"Most of the mathematics we do will be from the numeracy project or activities off the NZ [New Zealand] website."

Like the findings provided by Young-Loveridge (2011), assessment practices at the school level were markedly different from those undertaken in the ECE setting. Indeed, both new entrant teachers and teachers within ECE settings had limited understanding of mathematics assessment as it was understood in the other environment (see also Sherley, Clark, & Higgins, 2008). Often within the first few days of arrival at school, a young learner was assessed using official checklists or tools.

"We do observation assessment for the first six weeks and then in the sixth week we do the NUMPa Form A … and after that we carry on with a tick chart, one from the numeracy project stage that they are at."

"I put this in the child's profile book with a link about the learning involved and I thought wouldn't this be great if I could hand it on to the teachers, so they had a knowledge of where they were at. But I don't know, maybe they have their own assessment." (Teacher ECE)

The new entrant teachers invested in their own particular discursive codes of mathematics pedagogy, which, in turn foregrounded particular processes and practices for assessment in the classroom. These were at odds with the discursive codes for pedagogy found in the early childhood setting and supported wider findings offered by Anthony and Walshaw (2009). However, it is not simply the classroom teacher who performs the normalizing function by stamping her own mode of practice upon the classroom: beyond the classroom, and as part of the wider educational process, the teacher, herself, is an object of what Foucault (1984) has named as surveillance from, among others, the school, from educational "inspectors," from curriculum policy makers, and from the wider community. In Foucauldian terms, assessing others is "a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (p. 184). The schools, "inspectors," and so forth, all perform the tasks of controlling, policing, and normalizing forms of classroom behavior. By way of example, in interview the new entrant teachers clarified that they relied heavily on a national student diagnostic interview as a means of determining a classification of children's achievement levels. The new entrant teachers often referred to "filling the gaps" of mathematical knowledge. These perceptions appeared to be formed from assessments that overlooked the competencies documented earlier within the narratives in the ECE settings.

"So they come out at 0 [Stage 0 of Number framework]. So they don't know any of these things." (New entrant teacher)

Reporting practices on children's progress were consistent in both schools. Both schools completed an oral and written report at six weeks in relation to how the child had settled and the progress the child was making. Parents reported they sometimes the spoke to the teacher informally regarding their child's progress or more formally through parent-teacher interviews.

"Probably mostly how she's fitting in…there was a little bit of discussion as to, you know, sort of whereabouts she's at with her learning and what not." (Parent)

"If I had concerns I just speak to the parent. Yes I would do that outside of the normal school interview." (Teacher)

Parents tended to know less about their child's mathematical progress than they knew about their child's ability and progress in reading.

"The whole focus seems to be on reading and learning the letters and the sounds and I suddenly realised that, yeah, obviously they do some maths and counting and puzzles and things like that but you are not really aware of it and it doesn't seem to be anywhere near the emphasis on it that there is on the reading side of things."

"I guess we were sort of waiting for the school. I didn't want to push it … I think there is not a lot of feedback between the teachers so to be honest with you I don't really know where she is at there."

"We had an initial report to say how well she had settled in and things, but we haven't had specifics, apart from reading. I always find this. You know how good your child is at reading but you never quite know how good they are at maths."

From the teacher interviews and from classroom observations, it became evident that within the classroom the teacher authorizes particularities relating to activities in time and space, and, importantly, regulating what is to count as mathematical provision. In creating particular modes of activity, ways of being and interpersonal relationships, such decision making makes possible both what can be said and what can be done within the new entrant classroom in relation to mathematics.

Conclusion

Structural processes and practices make a significant contribution to the ways in which mathematics is understood in the two different sites. In Foucault's understanding, teachers and children think of mathematics in relation to the discourses of teaching and learning available within a specific context. What mathematics means within a Center is understood differently from within the setting of a new entrant classroom. Both settings have their own particular *regime of truth* which legitimizes and sanctions a discursive space for certain practices and social arrangements for mathematics provision. Each classroom produces its own truths about mathematical provision—truths which are not often shared between the two sectors (Anthony & Walshaw, 2009). Thus mathematics provision in the two different settings becomes intelligible through its reliance on certain strategies that are accepted, sanctioned, and made to function as true with the different settings.

The ECE setting, through the knowledges and modes of operating that it advocated and promoted, had established a baseline understanding of mathematics provision. Through explicit engagements with the official curriculum statement for young learners, and its theoretical representations of development, pedagogy, assessment, and the learner, teachers understood what counted as evidence of mathematical provision. The teacher's role was to create a supportive learning environment, facilitating and empowering. Since all these "knowings" became the coordinates through which mathematics provision could be mapped, children came to know what particular mathematical knowledge was legitimated and the types of arrangements that were deemed central to facilitate that knowledge.

Practices that are at odds with each other across different educational sectors create a different sense of self and are most keenly felt by young learners as they transition across one educational setting to another. Transitioning from the ECE setting to the new entrant classroom, the young mathematics learner moves towards a different network of political and social practices. New discourses come into play and the positions and politics which these discourses offer, provide learners with access to a differential engagement and positioning in relation to mathematical knowledge. These discursive codes, and how they are to be taken up, are not always made explicit to the young learner. To the new entrant teacher, however, mathematics teaching and learning constituted a tight script that established how learning is to be enacted in the classroom.

Thus, through a covert set of standards and value systems associated with mathematics provision, a different construction of the learner was naturalized and made inevitable. To that end, not only is the new entrant classroom a site for the regulation of mathematical provision, it is also a site of production and regulation of young learners in the mathematics classroom. Those practices are not necessarily the kind that the early childhood setting would wish to promote. The challenge is for more open communication channels between the early childhood and school settings. Bridging the early-years divide through cross-sector discussion and understanding might lead to more consistency and coherence in relation to the "regime of truth" about mathematics provision and lead to the construction of harmonious mathematical practices amongst young learners.

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the technique and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1984, p. 73)

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Note

1. The decile rating of a school is based on a Government assessment of the school in terms of the nature of the school community, particularly regarding the predominant socioeconomic constitution of that community. A decile rating of 10 is the highest socioeconomically enriched.

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