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WE KNOW THAT QUALITY experiences in the early years (in the home and in all other environments in which young children participate) lay the neuro-physiological foundations for positive child outcomes (Meaney, 2010; Sims, 2009; Waldegrave & Waldegrave, 2009). This means the provision of high-quality, culturally appropriate and accessible early childhood programs is essential for national wellbeing. A high-quality service is one which ensures that the rights of all children and families in the program community are met. The particulars of how these rights are met differs across different constituencies. For example, a quality program in a remote area of Australia will look very different from one operating in the centre of Singapore and different again from a Te K hunga Reo operating in Auckland. Are there universal principles underpinning all these services? I believe so and maintain that these universal underpinnings are linked to children's rights. Using Maslow’s framework as a guide, I argue that we must ensure that children's rights to (Level 1) food, warmth, nutrition, (Level 2) safety, (Level 3) love, (Level 4) being valued, (Level 5) and achieving one’s potential are met. HOW we go about meeting those rights varies, and as early childhood professionals, we need to open our minds to many different pathways we can tread to reach our goals. This edition of AJEC offers us suggestions as to some pathways we can explore.

Kitson and Bowes share with us Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing which are essential for us to understand if we are to provide culturally appropriate care for Indigenous children in Australia. Kitson and Bowes, two non-Indigenous researchers in partnership with Indigenous colleagues, have been part of a research team investigating the experiences of Indigenous families and their attitudes in relation to their childcare choices. Targowska, Sagger and Frances share their insights gained from a national consultation with Indigenous communities about Indigenous child care. For many Indigenous communities, child care is seen as inseparable from family support. They argue that regulations often act as a barrier for culturally appropriate Indigenous child care and suggest a form of developmental licensing.

The transition to school of children from diverse cultural backgrounds is discussed by Fluckiger using a sociocultural framework. She contends that the transition to school can be viewed as a process of culture switching and world building. Such a process is undertaken by Bangladeshi children transitioning to school as illustrated by Sanagavarapu. Part of new world building for new migrants is connecting to community and developing a sense of place in the new community. This process is discussed by Riggs who illustrates the experiences of migrant and refugee children in developing friendships in a new school community. Becoming part of any community requires an understanding of community rules and modes of behaviour. Developing this understanding is not easy for many children and we have a role to play in supporting children in achieving this. Boyd Bialas and Boon discuss the experimental approach they used (involving checklists with picture prompts) to support children develop self-monitoring skills in relation to classroom behaviours. In contrast to developing skills to feel part of the human community, Lewis claims that children are losing connections to the natural world and that early childhood professionals must take up the challenge of reconnecting children to this world. This has become a key component in the education for sustainability movement. Children who are disadvantaged provide many challenges to early childhood services. Whilst children in poverty are traditionally thought to be less ready to learn than children from more advantaged backgrounds, Hilferty suggests that we need to consider not only the child, but the intersection of child, process and context to understand readiness. In other words, readiness is not a component of the child alone but an interaction of multiple factors on which poverty impacts. Our approach needs to take into account these multiple impacts in order to ensure children’s rights are met.

Our children now live in a highly technical world, and we cannot begin to imagine the technology that will be available to them as adults. Certainly in my family it is my grandchildren on whom I call to program my video or digital alarm clock! Terreni discusses how the use of new technology (such as interactive whiteboards) can support children’s creativity in the visual arts. Technology can also be used in the education of early childhood workers. Farrell and Walsh share some strategies used with early childhood pre-service teachers. They found that students studying online gained more knowledge and confidence in relation to a case study of a child who was physically abused than did on-campus students. In contrast, the face-to-face experience of mentoring was important in Graves’ study of cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers. Children’s agency is a key component of the children’s rights focus. Hardwood argues that we need to move our vision of children away from one where children are
seen as objects of research, dependent and vulnerable, towards a vision that positions children as partners in our research. In other words, we need to undertake research WITH children rather than research ON children.

I commend this edition to AJEC to you and hope that you enjoy exploring the different pathways these articles open up for us.

Margaret Sims
University of New England

References


The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program

The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program (EYLF PLP) provides ongoing professional support to services as they engage in the EYLF implementation process. The program is a national initiative and will take place in 2010–11.

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The EYLF Professional Learning Project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
Introduction

Documenting the possibilities and choices for individual doctoral candidates regarding involving children as researchers is an important step in illuminating the specific roles, responsibilities, research orientations and methodologies inherent in these inquiry-based decisions. In the literature, there are four generally-acknowledged perspectives on seeing children and childhood within research: child as object, child as subject, child as social actor, and child as participant or co-participant (Alderson, 2008; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Christensen & James, 2008).

Notwithstanding the perspective, most significant is the clear methodological implications aligned with each of the four orientations. For example, the traditional perspective (child as object) is aligned with methodological design that ‘reflects a genuine, if often paternalistic, desire to protect children as essentially incompetent or vulnerable beings’ (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480). Conversely, the child as social actor perspective positions children as equal and active participants within the methodological design and research process (Thorne, 1993). Although these four perspectives often coexist alongside each other, there is generally an alignment between the perspective adopted and the research traditions of specific paradigms. Certainly, developmental psychology (and child developmental discourse in particular in which the field of early childhood education is rooted) have most commonly ‘interpreted children’s situations, behaviour, feelings and thoughts in terms of theories and hypothesis’ (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008, p. 11) with methodological designs and processes controlled...
by the researcher and not the children themselves. And despite trends of ‘deconstructing’ and ‘reconstructing’ the image of the child and childhood within early childhood education (Cannella, 2002a; Cannella 2002b; Taguchi, 2007) and the affirmation of child agency within research processes (James & Prout, 1990), I would argue that the doctoral researcher adherence to the paradigm and culture of a research institution often undermines the flexibility of the individual to challenge the status quo and pursue a perspective on seeing children and childhood that is contextually meaningful and holistic (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007). Thus, negotiating any role for the child’s voice within doctoral research can be daunting.

In this paper, I will revisit the discursive approaches that are possible when engaging in research with and alongside young children, exploring the value of including the child participant as well as several considerations and provisions that should be carefully deliberated. This discussion is framed by a description of some of the methodological decisions I made as a doctoral student, as well as the institutional constraints which impacted on the research project that sought young siblings’ perceptions and experiences with teasing within their relationship. In brief, the context of the naturalistic study involved home visits with three dyads of preschool-age siblings and their mothers over a five-month period in a city in eastern Canada. Through observations and conversations with the participants, I sought the ‘lived’ perspective of sibling teasing (for a complete discussion of the research and findings see Harwood, 2008a and Harwood, 2008b).

**Continuum of orientations for including children as researchers**

In research, who should speak for children? The answer to this question is complex and dependent on one’s view of the child. The perception of the child as vulnerable and in need of protection aligns with a traditional ‘child as object’ orientation to research (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Here, research is conducted on children and tends to be focused on gathering data on the experiences of children as it relates to pre-existing adult-defined categories, theories or constructs (Grover, 2004). Research from this perspective contains an adult-centric bias (Scott, 2008), as the child’s role in the process is limited and research questions are investigated from adult orientations, often parents or teachers.

Alongside the child as object orientation is the perspective of children as subjects (Christensen & Prout, 2002). This child-centred research approach recognises the ‘child as a person with subjectivity and takes this as a starting point’ (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 480). However, children’s level of involvement in the research process is assessed in accordance with judgements based on their cognitive abilities and social competencies. Thus, children will be included or excluded based on age-based criteria. Consequently, the child becomes a semi-participant and augments the researcher’s original focus of study (Evans & Fuller, 1998; Wiltz & Klein, 2001; Wing, 1995).

Emanating from the child-centred approach are research trends which recognise children as social actors (Christensen & Prout, 2002). From this orientation, the child participant has equal status to the adult participant and is considered a co-constructor of knowledge and change (Thorne, 1993). Advancing this child as social actor orientation is what Christensen and Prout (2002) consider the fourth approach, children as active participants. Here, children are an integral part of each step of the research process including, defining the research question, method, analysis, and dissemination, and acting as co-researchers (Kendrick, 2003; Paley, 1984). The very nature of the traditional doctoral preparatory process may restrict the feasibility of choice of utilising a child-centered approach as typically the research question emanates from an established paradigm, and more pragmatic, inquiry-based, child-originated approaches are often less welcome (Capraro & Thompson, 2008).

However, in my doctoral research, I sought to answer the question of how young preschool-age siblings experienced teasing within their relationship. Thus, the child participant was essential in gaining an insider’s perspective of the dynamics and intricacy of this form of sibling interaction. Yet, the question of how to include the children’s voices and the special considerations preoccupied my early research decisions. At times, I felt constrained by the traditional mode of the doctoral dissertation and orientation toward the final product (thesis).

Accessing the child participant is tightly controlled within academia and requires the doctoral student to negotiate through a ‘hierarchy of gatekeepers’ (Hood, Kelley, & Mayall, 1996, p. 120), starting with the dissertation supervisor (and committee), the institution’s ethics committee, various research officers, school boards, community organisations, parents, caregivers and teachers, and ending with the child (Powell & Smith, 2009). The several levels of this hierarchy are in place to minimise the risks of research on children. And, although I support the view that children’s rights must be protected within research practice, all but the last level of this process are controlled by adults, thus disempowering the child from the outset. Thus, the hierarchy can have a limiting effect on the research decisions regarding the involvement of children and potentially impact on the value and utility of the child participant.
Value and utility of the child participant

The research participant is the expert on their own life and should not be excluded from the research process. However, participants, especially children, are rarely given the opportunity to act as full participants within educational research and traditionally have been relegated as ‘victims of educational discourse’ (Cannella, 1999, p. 42).

As Grover (2004) agrees, children can be an integral part of the research process and contribute to all aspects, such as:

1. ‘formulate or suggest research problems or discuss ethical implications
2. conduct social research on questions of concern to them with or without the assistance of adult experts on research process
3. contribute to the shape of data interpretations formulated by adults about children
4. provide data regarding personal reflections on the topic studied or their experience as a research participant;
5. provide input on what should be the policy implications, if any, of the [research] work’ (p. 82).

And, although within the past two decades children’s rights discourse and the sociology of childhood have forged new theoretical perspectives and fostered an upsurge of participatory approaches in research with children (Clark, 2005), the exclusion of the child’s voice within educational research is still pervasive (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

The value and utility of the child ‘informant’ appears to be polarised within the research literature, and disagreement tends to centre on issues of power and voice. Informed by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the promotion of child’s rights and subjecthood in society because they are deemed vulnerable and incompetent’ (p. 12). Conversely, research that aims to foster an understanding of the child’s world, such as phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry, is at times more accepting of the child as a valued participant, capable of illuminating the insider’s perspective (Grover, 2004). In this context, a participant is anyone with knowledge about the group, society, or phenomenon under study (Cohen, Monion, & Morrison, 2000). Here, the participant is granted a voice within the research process as their subjective experience is validated, and ultimately power in determining how data will be used (Grover, 2004). Children are given voice and agency, as well as equality in the research process (Komulainen, 2007).

Thus, the challenge becomes finding ways of engaging children in decisions on the research focus, methods, planning, negotiating, and analysis to achieve a level of participation that moves the child’s role beyond one of ‘research imposition’ (Hill et al., 1996) while remaining aware of the potential of subverting the child’s voice in favour of the adult’s agenda (Fielding, 2004). In practical terms, what does this mean for children’s participation in research, and how does the doctoral researcher achieve this in light of the institutional constraints influencing the process?

Methodological considerations for including child informants

When conducting research with or alongside children, special considerations in the methodological designs should be highlighted and well thought-out (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000; Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Lewis & Porter, 2004; Lewis, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). There are several methodological considerations in the design, establishment of roles and relationships, consent procedures and the researcher’s responsibilities that require careful scrutiny and thoughtfulness (Belanger & Connelly, 2007; Flewitt, 2005). By considering how and why the child’s ‘voice’ is operationalised within methodological decisions and making those choices explicit, researchers can add to the ongoing procedural conversations about research with and alongside children.

Design decisions

The inclusion of multiple methods typically adds to the validity of research, and may be of utmost importance when children act as informants (Garbarino, Stott,
& Erikson Institute, 1989). My doctoral research on sibling teasing was a naturalistic study within the children’s home environment, and included various forms of documentation, observations, and interviews as the sources of converging evidence (Harwood, 2008a). The multiple sources of evidence provided different bearings (Gillham, 2000) on the issue of sibling teasing with one of those points of reference being the children’s thoughts and perceptions of teasing within their relationship (children were interviewed conversationally on an ongoing basis throughout the observation phase of the study). The siblings were also given the opportunity to validate summaries of the information collected through the interviewing and observation process, ensuring that their voice was represented in the inductive process.

Research with children must adopt a variety of flexible means to allow children to communicate their ideas and perceptions (Dockett & Perry, 2005a; Thomas & O’Kane, 2000). Research of children’s experiences will be informative and trustworthy if research and methodological decisions are made explicit throughout the entire process, and a wide net is cast to capture the complexities and nuances of young informants. Ultimately, the researcher’s role involves providing supports and diverse mediums necessary for child informants to share their views. Gaining an insider’s perspective on aspects of the child’s world is possible through dynamic processes that foster dialogue, listening, voice, and collaboration with child informants (Clark, 2005; Clark 2007; Formosinho & Barros Araujo, 2006; James, 1993).

**Addressing the power differential in research with children**

Positioning oneself in relation to the participants of a study is an initial methodological step that requires careful consideration, especially when those participants are young children. Resulting from the inherent power differential between the adult and the child participant, specific challenges of gaining access, consent, and addressing the researcher’s role are present within the research process (Mauthner, 1997).

Accessing a research setting involves issues of understanding the language and culture of participants, deciding how to present oneself, gaining trust and establishing rapport (Fontana & Frey, 1988). Because of the sensitive nature of my study (how members of a family related to each other) and the possible emotions inherent within the study, I paid special attention to how I positioned myself and accessed the family setting. In research within the family setting or context, the presence of the researcher must be negotiated as you are a guest of that family (Mayall, 2008). Thus, it was essential to meet families interested in participating in a venue familiar and comfortable to them (i.e. a local parent-child playgroup program). After informal conversations with the mothers and time spent playing alongside the children, I provided a more formal explanation of the aims of the research study and what participation would entail. There were opportunities to exchange information, ask questions, and become acquainted with both the mothers and the children at these initial meetings. Adult and child consent forms were left with the parent with instructions to contact me should they wish to continue. Subsequently, three families (out of 10) contacted me and agreed to participate in the study. The children ranged in age from 27 to 51 months.

I also made a preliminary home visit with each family and sibling pair before formally beginning any observations or interviews. During this visit, the mother and children were given the opportunity to accustom themselves to my presence, play and examine the features of the audio equipment I intended to use throughout the visits, and to ask questions before the formal observations commenced (similar to procedures adopted by Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Telsa, & Youngridge, 1991). I also became familiar with each of the family’s settings, customs, and normal routines. I acted more in the capacity of a ‘guest’ than an ‘expert’, accepting both the parent’s and child’s lead in conversations and interactions.

Deciding on how to present oneself is an important aspect in research with children. Graue and Walsh (1998) suggested presenting oneself as a learner alongside children in the research field, and answering the important question of “Who will I be in my relationship to these kids and these adults?” as essential elements (Graue & Walsh, p. 101). The challenge was to demonstrate a ‘persona’ that was accessible to the families and children while maintaining the role of learner in that context. Thus, to defuse any implicit power differential between myself and the children and mothers, I closely approximated the participants’ mannerisms, tone of voice, and dress and deportment. For example, like the participating mothers, I opted for casual jeans and a t-shirt and limiting my jewelry. From these decisions, I was able to blend into the social world of the children and mothers. As Greig and Taylor (1999) highlighted, the fundamentals of gaining trust with the parents of the child participants are honesty, reliability and effective communication. And, although equal social positioning is difficult to achieve and maintain (Thorne, 1993), I would argue that in research with children and mothers the ‘power issues between children and [researchers] can be diluted or diffused to the point where children [and mothers] accept the adult as one of themselves’ (Mayall, 2008, p. 110).
Consent procedures

The issue of informed consent also presents special challenges in research with children, and I remained attentive to this issue throughout the process. Children's participation must be voluntary, and they were given the opportunity to opt out of the study, specific observations, or interviews. Children's consent was sought both orally and in written form at the start of each visit. In this sense, consent was 'provisional' and ongoing approval was dependent on the establishment of trust, collaboration, and the relationships that developed (Flewitt, 2005).

Children were presented with a clean copy of the children's portion of the consent form at the start of each home visit. I would then read the text of the consent form and the verbal assent, and invite children to sign. Most often, the children enjoyed the ritual of signing the consent form, and even the youngest was capable of making his scribble on the page and proudly indicating his willingness to participate (Hill et al., 1996). Children also indicated their willingness to participate through physical gestures such as greeting me upon arrival, providing access to the home setting (e.g. unlocking the door), carrying my personal items into the play areas, and holding my hand and leading me into various parts of the home. In research with children, I would argue that the method of obtaining consent relies both on the more formal procedural aspects (signed consent and verbal assent processes) as well as children's behavioural indicators, and great flexibility is required in an orientation toward child assent that embraces a form of an ongoing consenting process.

Conversely, the children of this study indicated their wish to opt out of participating (in observations and conversational interviews of specific home visits) through physical gestures, such as leaving the room, appearing bored, or asking for another activity, such as going outside. Difficulties arose when, on two occasions in two different family settings, one sibling offered consent while the other refused. In both of these instances, I conferred with the mother and the consenting child on rescheduling the session. One mother and child (Family A) opted to reschedule while the second mother and child (Family B) chose for me to converse and interact with the consenting child. Interestingly, after play and conversations were underway with the one sibling of Family B, the second sibling joined us and indicated her consent verbally.

In the consenting process children were offered the maximum freedom of choice (Evans & Fuller, 1996, p. 17) regarding participation, as I attended to their physical cues as well as their verbal and written consent. Young children must be provided with multiple means of indicating their willingness to participate in any aspect of the research process, and I negotiated this ‘minute-by-minute’ consent (Simons & Usher, 2000) by closely observing the siblings for any signs of discomfort as well as responding to their explicit statements. Thus, the choice of conducting a research visit, the length of each home visit, the researcher’s roles and the data collection procedures varied, based on the requests and interests of the children.

Researcher’s role

I adopted a flexible role with the child participants of the teasing study. At times I acted in the capacity of ‘least-adult’ (Mandell, 1988) and participated with children in their play, while at other times I adopted a more detached role. The ‘least-adult’ role allowed me to gain greater access to the children's perceptions and required a ‘suspension of adult notions of cognitive, social and intellectual superiority and minimization (sic) [of] physical differences by advocating that adult researchers follow children’s ways and interact with children within their perspective’ (Mandell, p. 464).

To limit the obvious adult-child role differential, I adopted Corsaro’s (1981) approach and cast myself as an ‘eager participant’ alongside the children, crawling around on the floor with the children, playing the role of a cat (and other roles), participating in games such as hide-and-seek, building train track sets, and laughing at deviant behaviour (such as jumping on furniture or throwing toys). Additionally, I allowed my actions to be directed by the children and adopted more of a role as a follower during the home visits. In keeping with my ‘least-adult’ role I did not intervene in children’s conflicts (or minor deviant behaviour) and only reluctantly separated or distracted children if extreme aggression (e.g. biting) was taking place and the parent was not present (Mandell, 1988). As the siblings tested my role with both rule-stretching (e.g. not sharing toys) and rule violations (e.g. hitting), it was important to remain neutral and not judge the children’s actions or intervene. In this way, I was able to become involved in the children’s activities without directly impacting on the nature and flow of their interactions. And, although it is impossible to achieve complete elimination of the adult-child inequalities that are inherently a part of the dissimilar ages, status and power dynamics of the relationship, acting as a co-player and granting children agency in the process are effective means of equalising ‘power relations’ between researcher and child (Mauthner, 1997).

I also bridged my entry into the children’s world of play by bringing toys of interest to each sibling pair in a large orange canvas bag. As Mandell (1988) stressed, by engaging in joint action with children, mutual understanding can develop and researchers can fit into the children’s world (p. 437). This orange canvas bag became synonymous with ‘play time’ as
Young children frequently change their play roles, positions and activities. For a researcher, it is often difficult to capture the entirety and complexity of children's contexts through the sole use of any one methodology, thus flexibility and adaptability on the researcher's part is essential.

Despite the challenges associated with interviewing children (Clark, 2005), soliciting children's views through conversations are another means of engaging children in the research process.

The most obvious advantage of interviewing a child is that the child is the expert (the only expert) on his feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Thus, if knowing the child’s point of view is important, the interview is unsurpassed as a technique for obtaining information. If an adult wants to know what or how the child is feeling or thinking, the adult must ask the child (Hughes, 1988 cited in Gollop, 2000, p. 18).

In interviewing children, the familiarity of the context for the interview, the proximity of trusted adults, maintaining rapport, and ongoing consent procedures are important considerations. The specific content, relevance and balance of the questions as well as the language used, require careful thought and planning (Clark, 2005; Mauthner, 1997). The young siblings were interviewed informally through an open-ended guided conversation. The informal conversational interview approach was more beneficial in allowing questions to emerge from the contexts of what had been observed. Additionally, questions asked during the natural course of events as they unfolded, increased the salience and relevance of those questions. Questions such as, ‘What are you playing?’ or ‘How did that feel when your sister was just bugging you?’ generated more responses from the children and provided more contextual and situated information. Children were more willing to answer, and provided more information in response to conversational-oriented questions when asked during the course of their play. A conversational approach gave the siblings the opportunity to set the pace and ask questions of me, which they did enthusiastically, often controlling much of the agenda (Mayall, 2008).

Similar to the interview techniques employed by Evans and Fuller (1996) and Holmes (1998), I engaged the children in conversations as they played. In the role of participant-observer, I was afforded greater insights of when to engage children in such conversations and often followed their lead of interest in conversing. Additionally, some play opportunities naturally lent themselves to conversing about teasing. For example, the twins of one family were often engrossed in sociodramatic activities where teasing episodes were revisited and acted out during the play. During these play episodes I was able to entice the children into

Some methods to consider in researching with and alongside children

The specific data collection methods used in research with and alongside children also requires examination. In early childhood education, observation is often used as a valid measure of gaining an understanding of children's developmental needs, abilities and interests (Wortham, 2005). Thus, observation was an essential step in the research conducted with the sibling pairs. Observations afforded a window into the 'here-and-now' experience of sibling teasing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273). Teasing is often inconspicuous and conducted outside of adult awareness. Qualitative observation was therefore a valuable tool, in that ‘it enjoys the advantage of drawing the observer into the phenomenological complexity of the world, where connections, correlations, and causes can be witnessed as and how they unfold’ (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 81).

By remaining flexible throughout the observation process I was able to alternate between participating with the children in their play and acting as a detached observer of their interactions. Typically on any given home visit, children became so engrossed in their play that either my presence went unnoticed or I was not invited or assigned a role in the play. I took these five- to 10-minute opportunities to observe the children more objectively, write notes in my field journal, or administer semi-structured checklists of the children's behaviour. I also used a digital mini-audiotape recorder to allow myself greater flexibility in attending to the observations or participating with the children in their play. The audiotape recorder was placed near the play and at times, I was able to leave the general play area and rely solely on the audiotape to capture children's behaviours. For safety and ethical reasons I remained close to the children's play while maintaining the appearance of leaving the room.
conversations about teasing. By engaging children while they took part in activities of their day, I reduced the artificial nature of formal interviews and elicited more natural and valid responses (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 184).

Typically, the siblings were together during these conversations and similar to the experiences of previous researchers (Brooker, 2001; Mauthner, 1997), this approach seemed to provide a sense of comfort for the children and afford a counter-balance to the traditional one-to-one interviews. And, although an interview guideline helped frame my general inquiry, not all questions from this guideline were used during any one conversation.

Role-play was another means of eliciting the children's views of teasing. Role-play should be added to the growing list of effective research methods used in listening to children (Clark, 2005; Clark, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2005a). Aligned with previous researchers who have incorporated playing with telephones, puppets, and toys in various projects with young children (Armstrong & Sugawara, 1989; O’Kane, 2008; Tolfree & Woodhead, 1999), I exploited opportunities embedded within various role-playing scenarios to capture children's insights on teasing. At times, teasing between the siblings occurred spontaneously during play and I was afforded a window to the dynamics of the phenomenon. Equally valuable were enactments of teasing that the siblings dramatised through various role-plays between themselves or involving me. For example, the pair of twins often enjoyed playing ‘house’ and dramatised several instances of a mother (or father) teasing their child in a game of give-and-withdrawal or using name-calling. Additionally, on two occasions the three of us were involved in an office play scenario where each twin had a turn interviewing me on my thoughts about teasing. And although some of the questions mirrored my own earlier inquiries (e.g. what does the word teasing mean to you?), others were original and demonstrated the young siblings’ divergent thinking skills and unique contribution to the data collection process (e.g. what does your dad tease you about?). Yet, despite children’s unique competencies in contributing to research processes (Dockett & Perry, 2005b), institutional constraints and the traditional doctoral route tend to impact on the researcher’s ability to recognise children as experts on their own lives.

Institutional constraints impacting the research process

Often, a doctoral student must walk a tightrope between their own research desires and the culture of research within their institution. The rigid processes and requirements of an institution at times constrain the process (e.g. ethics procedures and faculty supervisor and associated committee approval) and limit the possibilities of researching with children. In my experience, doctoral students were encouraged to utilise standard consent form templates and homogeneous scripts for obtaining children's assent. And as Greig, Taylor, and MacKay (2007) noted, ‘it can appear sometimes in student dissertations that the same rather repetitive statements are made about informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality’ (p. 179). Although, the consent procedures required of my research study followed these institutionally-prescribed templates, I also utilised measures of ‘ongoing’ consent to assure the child’s willingness to participate.

The paradigm of research tradition within an institution can also impact on doctoral research. Traditional approaches to research involving children are rooted in developmental psychology with few challenges to this hegemonic approach (Hood et al., 1996; Komulainen, 2007). The criticism of this ‘developmentalist supremacy’ centres on the lack of recognition of children as social actors, active constructors of their own lives (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Hood et al., 1996). Perhaps, like the criticism of doctoral programs in general, I too see the danger of orientations to research and knowledge based on transmission models of the status quo (Mullen, 2007). Thus, the idea of a research agenda defined and determined by children seemed radical within the traditional perspective of both my institution and educational paradigm. And, despite the recent plethora of literature attesting to the merits and theoretical rationale of transformative and participatory approaches to research with children (for example see Belanger & Connelly, 2007; Christensen & James, 2008; Fielding, 2004; Powell & Smith, 2009), much of this literature was not readily available when I first embarked upon my doctoral pursuit. Thus, resisting the dominant discourses within the institution was exigent and both the child’s voice as well as my own were somewhat marginalised in the process.

Clearly, the use of pre-determined checklists and a formal interview approach were two processes that constrained the data collection process and exemplify my acquiescence to the dominant institutional discourse. The checklists were based on adult-defined categories of play or sibling interaction and narrowly defined descriptors of behaviour that often failed to capture the complexity or intensity of the children’s actions (for a complete description of the instruments used see Harwood, 2008a). Portraying the essence of the children’s behaviours could have been more fully represented through observations or including children’s interpretations. Checklists could not be solely relied upon to portray the intricate and complex behaviours inherent within young children’s teasing.
As well, a formal interview approach was not a successful strategy with the children of this study. The young children responded more favourably to a relaxed conversational approach. Particularly significant and fruitful were conversations about teasing that occurred during the context of their play. Here, as opposed to a scripted interview, I was better able to explore the children’s perspectives. Interviewing young children requires flexibility and adaptability; at times, it necessitates incorporating a variety of strategies and tools, such as interviewing children together, using hypothetical questions or third-party questions, adapting the questions to the context, use of visuals, children-as-interviewer technique, play, and the use of multi-sensorial approaches (Clark, 2005; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Lewis & Porter, 2004). The stringent requirements of institutional practice inhibited the flexibility of the interview process and minimised the siblings’ agency. As Clark (2007) emphasised there are a hundred ways of listening to children, clearly a monolithic challenge to traditional orientations and research protocols within doctoral programs.

**Concluding remarks**

The most illuminating aspect of this research process was the study of children in context and using children’s interests, insights, and conversations as procedural tools in gathering data. By thinking of children as living in specific settings, with specific experiences and life situations (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 5), the complexity of the siblings’ lives can be further explored. Young children are enmeshed in a variety of contexts, yet little research attention is given to the day-to-day experiences of these varied settings. Children enter formal schooling (or early childhood education programs) with a multitude of experiences, perceptions, thoughts and behaviours, and much can be gained from studies that focus on and attempt to do justice to the many aspects of children’s lives.

As a participant-observer in this research, I was afforded a small window to the siblings’ interests, insights and conversations, ultimately enabling me to use this information to shape the data collection process. I was able to adopt some of the flexibility needed to follow young children’s leads, making use of such strategies as the orange canvas bag to bridge my entrance into the children’s play, and using specific play frames as a tool for interviewing (e.g. office play theme). However, the children were not fully empowered through the journey nor did they act as participatory collaborators in the research process. For example, the children could have been involved in setting the research question, interpreting the observational data, devising meaningful checklists, conducting interviews, and disseminating the results. As a doctoral student I adhered to both the conventions and procedural expectations of my institution, while at times resisting others. My methodological choices were often constrained by time, protocols, and the prescriptive approaches to ethics. And, although I desired the goal of ‘listening to children’, the interpretation of the transcripts and observational data was often conducted in terms of my priorities and not those of the children.

Yet children can make informed decisions on research directions, agendas, and methodological tools on topics of interest to them. In support of Alderson’s (2008) view that ‘children are the primary sources of knowledge about their own views and experiences’ (p. 287), some consultation with children is necessary in exploring a topic such as sibling teasing. However, I am not suggesting that the procedures used throughout this study provide a recipe for future researchers to follow (Graue & Walsh, 1998). What is recommended is that doctoral candidates and researchers alike consider the context and their role within that milieu, remaining flexible in both data-gathering and in their interactions with children. What is significant is the consideration of the child as a complex being, an actor and constructor of their environment and deserving of a holistic approach to research of their lives (Greig et al., 2007).

In general, little is known of the doctoral experience (Jazvac-Martek, 2009). Doctoral researchers are encouraged to find ways of resisting institutional or paradigm constraints and explore the multitude of possibilities of including children beyond a role of mere spectators. By carefully considering the roles, responsibilities and relationships established between researchers and children, numerous avenues can be capitalised on to grant children greater agency in research processes. Researchers and research practices that are flexible, varied, and respective of children’s needs and interests will foster the use of practices that are flexible, varied, and respective of children’s needs and interests will foster the use of the child participant’s role within that research and children will be given a greater voice to participate in the construction of childhood.

**References**


Introduction

If [a teacher] supports what she does as an occupation, if she supports education in general, if she supports essentially all students beyond the ones she has to care for, then I feel that she would have an obligation to help teachers in training understand the classroom and understand what it means to be a teacher (David, pre-service teacher). This statement provides a glimpse into one pre-service teacher’s idea of teacher preparation and the role of cooperating teachers. David, like so many pre-service teachers, is eager to engage in the process of learning to teach. This process is not an easy one; in fact, it can be daunting at times. As such, it is imperative that pre-service teachers receive the support, guidance and nurturing necessary to facilitate their professional growth and development. Practicum experiences—also referred to in the literature as early field experiences—are vital in most teacher education programs because pre-service teachers gain experiential knowledge (from being inside real classrooms), which builds upon their conceptual knowledge gained through university courses (Ediger, 1994). More importantly, practicum experiences are thought to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to: (1) explore teaching as a career choice early in the college experience; (2) to bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice; and (3) to refine basic teaching skills (Aiken & Day, 1999; Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Bischoff, Farris, & Henniger, 1988; Boner, 1985; Moore, 2003; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2008).

While the benefits of practicum experiences have been well documented (Aiken & Day, 1999; Bischoff, Farris, & Henniger, 1988; Boner, 1985; Ediger, 1994; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2008; Recchia, Beck, Esposito, & Tarrant, 2009), the guidance and support pre-service teachers receive during those experiences (particularly from their cooperating teachers, or mentors) has received less attention. The majority of research on mentoring focuses on beginning teachers, usually as part of induction programs (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O’Brien, 1995; Martin & Trueax, 1997). The studies that do focus on mentoring focuses on beginning teachers, usually as part of induction programs (Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O’Brien, 1995; Martin & Trueax, 1997).
Mentoring

The relationship

The relationship between the cooperating teacher and the pre-service teacher is at the heart of the practicum experience (Caruso, 2000). In many situations pre-service teachers’ views about teaching—and also their ideas regarding their own teaching abilities—are highly dependent upon their cooperating teachers. However, many factors can affect cooperating teachers’ mentoring abilities, including unclear or unrealistic expectations of their roles and responsibilities (Hall, Draper, Smith, & Bullough, 2008; Simpson, Hastings, & Hill, 2007), little or no guidance on how to support pre-service teachers (Schneider, 2008), and a diminished value placed on mentoring by school district administrators (Bullough, 2005). Cooperating teachers who are committed to mentoring pre-service teachers are often motivated by professional commitments to themselves, pre-service teachers, and the teaching profession (Bullough, 2005; Sinclair, Dowson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006) and therefore are more likely to provide their mentees with authentic, nurturing and positive experiences.

Qualities of good mentors

While there may be little, if any, empirical research on the kinds of teachers who volunteer to mentor pre-service teachers, many articles have highlighted key qualities good mentors should possess. Rowley (1999), for example, identified six essential qualities of a good mentor: (1) committed to the role of mentoring; (2) accepting of the beginning teacher; (3) skilled at providing instructional support; (4) effective in different interpersonal contexts; (5) a model of a continuous learner; and (6) communicates hope and optimism. Also, Johnson (2003) developed a triangular model of mentor competence, which includes three essential components: mentor character virtues (integrity, caring, prudence); mentor abilities (cognitive, emotional, relational); and mentor competencies (knowledge and skills). In order to provide optimal learning experiences for pre-service teachers, mentors must not only exhibit such qualities and competencies, they must be aware of how to use their knowledge and skills to help socialise pre-service teachers into the field.

Theoretical framework: Social constructivism

Three major tenets of social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) can be applied to mentoring relationships in teacher education: (1) knowledge is constructed by learners; (2) learning involves social interaction; and (3) learning is situated. First, social constructivism posits that learners construct knowledge based on their prior experiences. Research suggests that pre-service teachers bring their own set of beliefs, values, and attitudes—thought to be influenced by their personal backgrounds and experiences—to teacher education programs (Aldrich & Thomas, 2005; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). These beliefs, values, and attitudes serve as filters for subsequent learning.

Second, social constructivism is based on the principle that learning is social (Beck & Kosnik, 2002). The construction of knowledge is viewed as a highly interactive process which is socially mediated or influenced by others in social interaction (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998). The interactions that occur between pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers during mentoring relationships are vital to pre-service teachers’ learning. Ideally, these interactions involve some form of dialogue, which is considered a catalyst for knowledge acquisition (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000/2001; Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Tatoto, 1998). Furthermore, social constructivism underscores the ‘supportive guidance of mentors as they enable the apprentice learner to achieve successively more complex skill, understanding, and ultimately independent competence’ (Applefield et al., 2000/2001, p. 38).

Third, according to social constructivism, learning is situated within specific contexts. Knowledge is context-bound; it is embedded in and connected to the situation where learning occurs (Applefield et al., 2000/2001). For pre-service teachers during practicum experiences, learning occurs within the context of a real classroom. This is critical to pre-service teachers’ learning experience as they are able to see first-hand how to develop classroom management strategies, rapport with students, skills in dealing with families from different backgrounds, and effective pedagogical approaches.

The theory of social constructivism relates specifically to this case study because the social interaction between the pre-service teachers and their mentors is the main focus here. The researcher was interested in uncovering the different elements that might characterise positive mentoring relationships. Additionally, because learning is viewed as contextual, the pre-service teachers were observed in their mentor teachers’ classrooms.
Method

A collective case study was utilised to explore the mentoring relationships between four pre-service teachers and seven cooperating teachers. Data was collected over one semester (five months) during an early childhood practicum. Four child development centres were utilised as the main sites for the practicum. The centres were either located on campus or within a five-mile radius. They were chosen for this research study because of the partnerships already established between the centres and the teacher education program at the university. Pre-service teachers were regularly placed at these centres for their early childhood practicum experiences. The pre-service teachers were randomly assigned to their mentor teachers. The mentors’ teaching experience varied from less than five years to more than 20 years. None of the mentors received any formal training to become mentors for this practicum.

The data was derived from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, reflective journals and dialogue journals. A standardised open-ended interview format was utilised for each of the participants. The mentees were interviewed twice—once before and once after the practicum. The mentor teachers were interviewed once during the beginning of the practicum. The researcher also spoke informally with all of the participants throughout the practicum. During field observations, the researcher recorded extensive, descriptive notes on the interactions between the mentees and their mentors.

The mentees’ reflective journals and dialogue journals were collected at the end of the eight weeks. The reflective journals included the mentees’ observations and reflections of their mentors, and the mentoring relationship in general. The dialogue journals were written correspondence between the mentees and their mentors. The mentees would begin the dialogue by posing a question or a comment about anything related to teaching in early childhood, or more specifically about their observations of their mentors. The mentors would then respond to the questions and/or comments before the following week when the mentees returned. In most cases, the dialogues continued each week for the duration of the practicum.

Results

Upon conducting a cross-case analysis of the four case studies, three major themes were established: (1) Expectations; (2) Communication; and (3) Time.

Expectations

Expectations were one of the most salient themes to emerge from the data. The mentees admittedly entered the practicum with some anticipation of either an ideal relationship or an opportunity to learn specific teaching skills. Curriculum planning and classroom management were the most important skills the mentees expected to gain during the short duration of the practicum. Paul stated:

I’d like to learn what kind of tone the teacher uses for the kids because I know I’m a bit of a pushover at the day care centre which doesn’t bother me too much, but when I’m in a classroom with 20 kids I think there’s probably a fine line. So I’d like to try to pick up on that kind of stuff … classroom management is probably a good thing [to] learn.

Most of the mentor teachers had rather realistic expectations of their mentees. While prior experience in early childhood or the knowledge of specific teaching skills were not reported as expectations, the mentors expected their mentees to be responsible, respectful, cognisant of child development, able to communicate and develop relationships with children, fond of working with children, and involved in their classrooms. For example, Marla stated:

I don’t even care if they don’t have prior experience, but I want them to be a people person. I want them to be able to communicate, to show some type of relationship with the children, whether it’s just talking with them or interacting with them through play … they need to know that if you’re gonna be in this field, you’ve got to be able to communicate and to build a relationship.

When expectations were met, the mentoring relationships were viewed as supportive and positive. However, when expectations were not met, the mentoring relationships were more often viewed as distant and unsupportive. In one of the negative relationships, both the mentor and mentee reported that their expectations were not met. For example, David did not feel as though he gained a deep understanding of Jodi’s decision-making processes—owing, in part, to their lack of communication. At the same time, Jodi felt that David was deficient in his understanding of young children’s needs and interests; therefore she believed he was not suitable for a career in early childhood education. Jodi also felt that David did not interact well with the children and the other teachers. Jodi and David seemed indifferent towards each other and never reached the level of comfort that would have allowed their mentoring relationship to flourish.

In one of the more positive relationships, Natalie and Marla felt that their expectations of each other were not only met but also exceeded. Natalie considered Marla an ideal role model as she learned a great deal about planning and classroom management. Although Natalie had not expected to assume any major responsibilities in Marla’s classroom, she felt included and reported that she was treated ‘just like another teacher’. Natalie went on to say:
Communication

Communication was also one of the most significant themes to emerge from the data. The mentoring relationship appeared to be largely affected by the communication—or the lack thereof—between the mentees and mentors. Three of the four mentees experienced problems in communicating with their mentors at some point during the practicum. The breakdown in communication, in many cases, was fuelled by a lack of initiative on the part of both the mentees and the mentors. It appeared that the responsibility for opening the line of communication remained unclear. The mentees expected their mentors to take the initiative and vice-versa. According to Amber:

I had to approach them with questions about what I should be doing or how they handle certain situations. Once I started asking questions then the communication line opened up... in order for me to understand the system I had to step up and begin the communication.

Although the dialogue journals were incorporated as a means to enhance face-to-face communication, the journals essentially replaced verbal communication in some instances. For example, the communication between David and Jodi was extremely limited. When I spoke with Jodi, she informed me that she often tried to facilitate more verbal communication, but David was unresponsive to her attempts. Jodi reported that the dialogue journal was useful as an additional communication tool, but she did not believe that it should have replaced their weekly one-on-one conversations. Jodi tried to encourage more communication in person by making comments in the dialogue journal such as ‘I would like to talk personally about this’.

In one of the cases, the dialogue journal neither replaced nor enhanced communication. According to Amber:

Certain times the teachers were really busy and I didn’t want to bother them... I could write in the dialogue journal. The only thing was that they really didn’t respond. Even though I was there on Fridays, they had a whole week and I don’t know if they forgot about it... I would kind of ask them, ‘Oh, I wrote some questions in the dialogue journal’ and they would be like, ‘Oh yeah, well we didn’t get to it, we’ve been really busy.’ But then the more I thought about it, I was like well there’s nap time in the afternoon... I mean there were four of them... I don’t know if they were just busy or if they forgot about it or it wasn’t one of their main priorities.

In one of the more positive relationships, Natalie and Marla regularly communicated with each other. On Natalie’s first day, Marla met with her outside of the classroom to discuss the practicum and any issues or concerns the two may have had. Their initial meeting set the tone for the remainder of the practicum. During one of the interviews, Natalie spoke about the impact of the ongoing communication between herself and her mentor. She said:

I liked the one-on-one communication with my mentor. Just being able to discuss my activities with her and having her feedback and just the way she interacted with me in the classroom... I could sit behind the glass and observe all day long, but not get that conversation that makes you think and makes you realise things you didn’t notice.

Time

The short duration of the practicum (eight weeks) affected most of the mentees’ overall experiences with the practicum and with their mentors. They agreed that more time in the practicum could have led to better relationships and more learning opportunities. David acknowledged that time was a factor in his comfort in new situations. David was certain that he would suffer the same fate during his student teaching. He said:

I’m probably gonna be uneasy about it even the first couple of days of my student teaching... or weeks of my student teaching. I can tell you that’s gonna be difficult for me anyway just ’cause I like to think of myself as confident but I know very well I’m pretty nervous in new situations like that... I just feel like I’m ready to go into a classroom, but I’m not ready to be a leader.

Natalie stated that she enjoyed her experience in the practicum and valued her relationship with her mentor, but that she could see how time could be an issue in mentoring relationships. She said:

In the classroom, you don’t have much time to communicate, but there were a lot of times, like at the beginning of the practicum and before or after our parent-teacher meeting, when she’d take me for like 10 minutes and we’d just talk about how things were going and if I had questions about the journal or whatever it happened to be. I feel like... instead
of making the practicum longer, if there was a way to just have a couple of times where you have to have like a 45 minute chat with your mentor, even if you met somewhere like downtown. Just to get to know the teacher better and have that connection.

Another mentee, Paul, acknowledged that a lack of time could be a challenge even though he reported a positive relationship with his mentor. He said, ‘If I could change it somehow, maybe there would be rearranged times where you do just set something aside just to talk for a minute.’ In his reflection journal, Paul stated:

I felt that I spent pretty much all of my time with the children while Tracy was busy working with other children. On some days, we hardly had the opportunity to exchange more than a hello and goodbye! Certainly this was no fault of Tracy’s; I just wish we could have had more time to discuss the issues in the classroom. Perhaps if we were supposed to have a longer stay, we could have had more opportunities to talk to one another … Fortunately, [the] dialogue journal provided me some supplementary advice from Tracy.

## Discussion

Natalie and Paul were the only mentees to receive positive mentoring on all levels. Perhaps their experiences can be attributed, in part, to their mentors’ motivation for working with pre-service teachers. For example, Marla (Natalie’s mentor) openly spoke about her altruistic desire to help the teaching profession. In her interview, she stated:

I think [pre-service teachers] really look to us for some support and some suggestions on how to handle things … after I got my Master’s, I saw the importance of having somebody in the field, not that I feel like I know it all because we’re all learners all the time, but I felt that we really need our people out there to kind of help guide these … younger students that are just getting into the field and I love working with them. I’m not afraid to, well I don’t want to say criticise, but to critique them and show them, ‘These are your strengths, these are your weaknesses’ … I think that in the overall picture these guys are gonna be teaching the next generation here so I want them to have a handle on what they’re doing and what I feel is important.

In contrast, David did not receive positive mentoring on all levels. David and Jodi interacted, albeit on a very limited basis as they communicated primarily through the dialogue journal. Although Jodi viewed herself as a role model, David did not seem to perceive her as such. The mismatch in David’s and Jodi’s personalities may have led to the negative mentoring relationship, but it also appeared that it was related to Jodi’s neglect of David. When David spoke about Jodi, he said that she was not very supportive of him in general. He felt somewhat disconnected from her, saying she was ‘very out of what I was doing’.

Amber’s mentoring relationship was similar to David’s. According to Amber, the mentor teachers did not support or nurture her growth and development as a teacher. Furthermore, even though Amber reported that she regularly observed her mentors, she did not perceive them to be role models. Amber’s negative experience, like David’s, appeared to be mostly related to her mentor teachers’ neglect. Amber felt that the teachers neglected her as they provided little or no assistance. When Amber sought advice and support through the dialogue journal, the teachers failed to respond to her in a timely manner, causing her to feel ignored and disregarded.

Based on the results of this study, it is not possible to determine any specific factors that affect the quality of mentoring support provided to pre-service teachers. The mentors’ teaching experience varied from less than five years to more than 20 years; however, the mentor in one of the negative mentoring relationships had more than 20 years of experience teaching young children. On the other hand, the mentor in one of the positive mentoring relationships had less than 10 years of teaching experience. Perhaps in a larger study with more mentor–mentee dyads, the connection between teaching experience and the quality of mentoring support given would be more apparent. Also, none of the mentor teachers received any formal training in mentoring. As such, the researcher was unable to make a connection between mentor training and positive mentoring relationships.

## Implications for practice

The results of this study have a number of implications for practice. First, mentor training seems necessary when recruiting cooperating teachers to participate in practicum experiences. Cooperating teachers need to understand their roles as mentors and they must be willing and able to perform the mentoring functions that can assist in the development of pre-service teachers. In a study conducted by Hall et al. (2008), 55 per cent of mentor teachers revealed that they received some form of training; however, 42 per cent of those respondents received only a ‘brief orientation on how to complete evaluation form and/or procedures’ (p. 339). Teacher education programs, in collaboration with school districts, should develop mentoring programs in which veteran teachers would receive formal mentor training. Obviously, this type of training should be formal and certainly go beyond evaluation forms. According to Schneider (2008):
preparation. As this study reveals, dialogue journals and support as they navigate through their teacher experiences are common; there is a tradition of silence in these experiences (Albers & Goodman, 1999). Unfortunately, problems in communication during practicum experiences are common; there is a tradition of silence in these experiences (Albers & Goodman, 1999).

Given the fact that mentor teachers are the more experienced teachers and, in a sense, gatekeepers to the teaching profession, they are the ones who can help pre-service teachers avoid many of the pitfalls they encountered themselves as beginning teachers. Pre-service teachers are in a vulnerable position as they navigate through their teacher preparation. As this study reveals, dialogue journals serve as an additional resource in which cooperating teachers can provide the necessary guidance and support in areas unfamiliar to novices. Moreover, beyond the practicum this journal can serve as a reference guide for pre-service teachers as they continue through their teacher preparation. The researcher recommends incorporating dialogue journals in all field experiences.

Finally, expectations are central to the mentoring relationship. Therefore, university personnel need to ensure that pre-service and cooperating teachers openly articulate their expectations of each other. One way to achieve this would be to require pre-practicum meetings between university supervisors, pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers. This strategy would ensure that all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities, and any conflicts would be addressed before the practicum begins. According to Hall and colleagues (2008):

Developing a shared understanding of the mentor’s roles/responsibilities can bring greater clarity to the mentor’s work with pre-service teachers and additionally can open the door for greater collaboration between universities and public schools as they work together to prepare better and more skilled teachers. (p. 330)

Although, in this study, the mentor teachers’ own experiences in being mentored were not revealed, gaining insight into this kind of information could prove useful when seeking mentors to pair with mentees. For example, in Simpson et al’s (2007) study, cooperating teachers discussed how they reflected on their own experiences as pre-service teachers in order to understand their roles as mentors. Mentoring can be a rewarding experience for novice and expert teachers. It is important to note, however, that the mentoring experience is a learning process for both the pre-service teacher as well as the cooperating teacher. As teacher educators, we must work hard to ensure that pre-service teachers, as well as cooperating teachers, receive the necessary support and guidance to develop positive, meaningful relationships.

References


Introduction

Transition to school is a major event in the lives of children and their families. It is one of the life-changing experiences for children, with significant implications for their identity development (Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2010; Woods, Boyle & Hubbard, 1999, as cited in Brooker, 2002). Further, children’s first experiences with formal schooling have implications for their wellbeing, lifelong learning and educational achievements (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Brooker, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000; West, Sweeting & Young, 2008). Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the transitional experiences of children and their families if we are to provide for their present and future wellbeing.

Transition to school involves many adjustments on the part of children and their families (Briggs & Potter, 1999). These are emphasised in the literature on transition to school (for example, Chun, 2003; Ecclestone et al., 2010; Margetts, 2007). The foremost adjustments that children need to make relate to separation from parents and adaptations to school and classroom programs (Woods et al., 1999, cited in Brooker, 2002). Children also need to get to know people and places at school, such as classrooms and teachers, peers and playground, and school facilities like the canteen, library and so on. An awareness and understanding of people and places is needed to settle into school and to engage in learning—in other words, to become ‘pupils’ in classrooms (Brooker, 2002). The other adjustments that children need to make upon beginning school involve learning how to operate as individuals in group contexts, communicating their needs and requirements in socially appropriate ways, understanding rules and making new friendships with peers (Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000).

The contextual model of transition to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999) emphasises the role of various contexts in children’s transition to school. According to this model, children’s and families’ adjustments to school are contingent upon the situational and cultural factors of home, community and school. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory suggests the need for continuity between home and school settings as children make educational transitions. A lack of continuity between homes and schools can impact on children’s adjustment to school (Vidali & Adams, 2007).

Transition to school is a very complex process for children in general. It can be even more complex for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children as,
in most cases, it involves ‘adopting the role of a student based on an anglicized model which fails to take their own background cultures fully into account’ (Woods et al., 1999, p. 11, cited in Brooker, 2002). Children can face difficulties in adjusting to school if they do not have the ‘knowledge of language, others’ cultures and communication codes’ needed to operate in microsystems or early childhood contexts (Vidali & Adams, 2007, p. 124). They can also be anxious and confused if they perceive school to be different from their home cultural context (Perry, Dockett & Nicholson, 2002). In brief, language or cultural differences between home and educational settings can compound children’s difficulties with adjusting to school (for example, Woods et al., 1999, cited in Vidali & Adams, 2007). Gaining an insight into CALD children’s and their families’ experiences with transition to school may help us provide better support for children in this situation.

Home and cultural contexts of children attending Australian schools are varied, with nearly 25 per cent of school children representing a language other than English (Hoddinott, 2006). CALD children and their families have added cultural and linguistic concerns and needs, including those related to transition to school (Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005). As school children become more diverse, educators need to devise individualised and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition programs for promoting academic success in all students. To this end, it is believed that this study on Bangladeshi children’s transition to school, a selected CALD group, provides valuable insights into CALD children’s and their families’ experiences with transition to school.

Attendance in formal childcare settings, such as long day care or preschool, is believed to prepare children adequately for school by providing them with knowledge relating to discourses, rules and expectations in school contexts (Brooker, 2002; Brooker, 2008). The importance of childcare attendance in children’s transition to school is also documented in the literature on transition to school (for example, Kreider, 2002). For this reason, I was interested in exploring the transitional experiences and adjustments of Bangladeshi children and their families who attended formal care settings before starting school. The focus in this study on understanding parents’ perceptions of children’s transitions to school is justified, as parents tend to influence children’s attitudes to school and their transitions (Vidali & Adams, 2007).

Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi families and their children living in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia, were selected for this study. Bengali is one of the languages spoken in India and the Indian sub-continent, such as Bangladesh. Bengali-speaking families are a newly emerging minority group, with 0.2 per cent of population in New South Wales (NSW) representing people of Bangladeshi descent (Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 2006). The cultural or language needs of this group of families and their children in relation to transition to school have not been extensively studied in Australia (Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005).

The specific questions that were addressed in the research were:

1. What are the views of Bangladeshi parents on their children’s adjustments to beginning school? Specifically, what factors do they perceive have contributed to or hindered their children’s adjustments to school?
2. What do Bangladeshi parents believe is the role of adult stakeholders (for example, parents, school teachers, and educators in formal care settings) in children’s transition to school?

This paper reports on the data obtained from interviews with Bangladeshi parents on their children’s experiences and adjustments to beginning school. Given the importance of including children’s voices in studies on school transition (for example, Dockett & Perry, 2004), this study also attempted to collect children’s perspectives of transition to school. However, the data collected on children’s transitional experiences was limited. Hence, the data from children was not considered for analysis.

**Methodology**

The study utilised a phenomenological (qualitative) approach, with a focus on exploring parents’ experiences and perspectives of their children’s transition to school (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Interviews with parents were used as the main data collection method for this study. The benefit of interviews is they enable the researcher to get an insight into participants’ personal views and experiences on any chosen topic (Cohen et al., 2000; Freebody, 2003; Willis, 2008).

**Sample description**

The sample for this study comprised 10 Bangladeshi parents. All of their children were born in Sydney, Australia, and attended formal child care settings before starting school. The children’s age at the time of starting school ranged between four-and-a-half to six years. Seven mothers and three fathers participated in the interviews. The majority of the selected parents had been living in Sydney as permanent residents for more than five years.

Bangladeshi parents and their children were recruited in the study using purposive and ‘snowball’ (word-of-mouth) sampling techniques (Cohen et al., 2000). The families were recruited initially through a selected Migrant Resource Centre (MRC—in NSW, MRCs offer advice, support and referral services relating to education, employment and so on to CALD and
Factors that facilitated children’s transition to school

Children’s adjustment to school is contingent upon a number of factors. Bangladeshi parents were asked to indicate the factors that they perceived to be helpful in their children’s adjustment to school and they are charted in Figure 1. Most parents in this study (6/10) defined their children’s adjustment in terms of their ability to express personal needs, being cooperative and there being no complaints from teachers or children (refer to Figure 1). A few parents (4/10) also considered positive dispositions towards school and willingness to go to school in defining children’s adjustments. Most parents (6/10) felt that their children had a positive start to school. This finding is surprising, given that children from ethnic minority backgrounds were generally reported to face difficulties in adjusting to beginning school (Margetts, 2003; 2007).

According to parents, friendships with peers (6/10) who share the same language or cultural background were significant in their children’s adjustment to school. This finding is similar to many other studies that reported friendships have a positive impact on children’s perceptions of school, their school attendance, and social and emotional adjustments in a school (for example, Berndt & Thomas, 2005; Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996; Ladd & Price, 1987). The positive and cooperative behaviours of children and the ability to form positive relationships with peers also emerged as predictors of school adjustment in other studies (see Dockett & Perry, 1999; Ladd, 2003; Margetts, 1999). As Fisher (2009, p. 142) states, ‘friendship and being with a friend was more important to a child’s feelings about transition than any other positive factor’.

The finding in this study on the importance of friendships is, however, inconsistent with the findings of other studies on immigrant parents’ perceptions of the importance of friendships. For example, parents in Vidali and Adam’s (2007) study valued neighborhood and school as being significant in children’s adjustment to school, rather than peer friendships.
The literature on children's friendships does not suggest children's ethnic or cultural background as a parameter in the development of friendships in the early years of school. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that friendships formed on the basis of shared linguistic or cultural backgrounds may be helpful in easing CALD children's transitions. The evidence from adolescent research also suggests the benefits of intra-racial friendships for children (Kao & Joyner, 2004). Intra-racial friendships perhaps can promote shared cultural or linguistic activities, intimate relationships, as well as play essential for peer friendships (Kao & Joyner, 2004; Lee, Md-Yunus, Son & Meadows, 2008). They will also be less challenging for children with limited or no English proficiency, as some CALD children were reported to face difficulties in playing or interacting with English-speaking children (Lee et al., 2008). While this study suggests the benefits of friendships with children of similar linguistic background in children's transition to school, it is essential that educators encourage CALD children to form friendships with all classroom peers to promote tolerance and positive attitudes towards diversity.

It is obvious that most children cannot adjust to school on their own. Rather, in the complex process of transition to school, children need support from adults (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988). Most importantly, the support provided by teachers in easing children into the school environment is crucial (Graue, 1998). Some parents in this study (4/10) mentioned that teachers played an important role in their children's transition to school. They also said that meetings with teachers to discuss specific problems of children in the beginning, upon children starting school were quite helpful in facilitating children's adjustment. Research also suggested an association between teachers' warmth and supportive nature and children's positive attitudes towards school (Harrison, 2004).

Next to friendships and teachers, proficiency in English language was considered to be a factor in children's adjustment by a small number of parents (3/10). English language is vital to operate in school contexts for children and families in Australia. As Green (2000, p. 3) points out, 'a classroom is a kind of club with insiders— those who understand the rules of the game because they come from clubs/homes that have similar beliefs, values, rituals, rules and ways of using language—and outsiders'. The children without proficiency in English language can feel marginalised and lack agency in cultural contexts predominated by English. The literature also correlates children's positive adjustments to school with proficiency in English, and for children coming from homes where English was spoken (Margetts, 2007).

Only a small number of parents in this study emphasised the role of play (2/10) in enabling CALD children's transition to school. This finding on the role of play is not consistent with the literature on transition to school that emphasises its importance in children's adjustments to school (for example, Dockett & Perry, 1999; Fisher, 2009). However, the finding is not surprising, given that many Bangladeshi parents in this study (6/10) did not consider play as being important for children's learning or development. Similar findings were reported in other studies involving Bangladeshi families in which parents did not perceive play as beneficial in children's education. Some Bangladeshi parents were also noted to have instructed their children not to play but to engage more in reading and writing activities when they went to school (Brooker, 2002).

While the literature highlights the benefits of transition and or orientation programs for children's adjustment in a school (Margetts, 2007), only two of the 10 parents mentioned a buddy system and orientation as helpful in their children's transition to school. Interestingly, none of the Bangladeshi parents mentioned the role of transition programs in their children's adjustments to school.
Factors that hampered children’s adjustments

In this study, a few children (4/10) adjusted poorly to school. According to their parents (3/4), children’s poor adjustment to school was related to their children’s limited English conversational skills. This finding is similar to the findings obtained from groups of non-English-speaking background parents who also suggested that children with limited proficiency in English will have difficulties in adjusting to school (Howard, Dockett & Perry, 1999, cited in Dockett & Perry, 2002a; Margetts, 2003). Recent studies (for example, Margetts, 2007) also indicated that children whose home language is not English will be vulnerable to problem behaviours and adjustments in a school. The following example typifies the effects of limited or no English conversational skills on Bangladeshi children’s adjustment.

I was very much worried as they were not talking in English and how they will adjust in school. My son did not understand anything and my daughter did not use toilet at all as she did not know how to ask for permission in English. Two days she did not use the toilet at school. On the third day, she had stomach pain. Then I went to the school and told the teacher as to what was going on. The teacher said to my child, ‘Why didn’t you say that you needed to go to the toilet?’ Although my son could not speak to others in English, he followed the other boys. But my daughter did not speak to anyone and when I realised that it is not good, I taught my daughter to say simple words such as ‘toilet’ in English (Participant no: 10).

In Australia, a lack of proficiency in English conversational skills can inhibit children from participating in learning or play activities with peers. It can also lead to social exclusion from peers in classrooms and play contexts (Fabian, 2002). Furthermore, language problems can lead to emotional or disciplinary problems when children struggle to understand the teacher’s instructions or classroom rules (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). For children with limited or no English, learning can be highly challenging as they may not be able to comprehend many of the teachers’ and peers’ conversations (Vidali & Adams, 2007). On the whole, language problems can be distressing for CALD children, especially during the transition to school.

Results of the current study raise questions on the role of English proficiency in CALD children’s transition to school. This question is worth pursuing in future studies on transition to school involving CALD children. Further, these results also raise questions on the nature of additional linguistic support that CALD children need and that can be provided to them during transitional periods.

Stakeholders in children’s transition to school

According to the contextual model of transition to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999), children’s transition to school is dependent on their resources and abilities and support provided by families, school teachers and other community members. The available data on children’s transitions indicates clear differences between teachers’ and parents’ roles in both preparing children for school and for easing their transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2002a; Dockett, Perry & Howard, 2000, cited in Dockett & Perry, 2002b). Accordingly, this study explored parents’ views on the role of adult stakeholders in preparing children for school and in facilitating children’s transition to school. Those findings are presented and discussed below.

Parents

All parents (10/10) in this study believed that they have a major role in preparing children for school and in facilitating their children’s transition to school. They started preparing their children for school in many ways, long before children started school. Teaching English language at home and reading books to children in English before they start school were suggested as vital to enabling transitions (6/10), apart from preparing them academically for school (4/10). These strategies are consistent with the parental concerns raised about the lack of proficiency in English for Bangladeshi children at the time of starting school and its concomitant impact on their social or emotional adjustments, learning at school, and relationships with teachers and peers (Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005). Parents in this study were concerned about losing cultural traditions through the loss of home language in an English-dominated cultural environment at school. Yet, they were prepared to teach their children English as part of the ‘school knowledge’ (Brooker, 2002) needed for learning and comprehending the requirements and expectations of school. As pointed out by Brooker (2002), English language would give these children entry into the dominant culture.

Parents (3/10) also expressed the need to enthuse and prepare their children positively for school by buying a colourful lunch box, new clothes and/or uniform and a schoolbag, as well as talking to them positively about their new school. Visits to school were also considered as important in the transition process by some parents (4/10), as these would help to ease children’s anxiety and to get them acquainted with the school.

The knowledge about school and what is valued in school settings enables children to adjust easily to school and to achieve academic success in a school (Brooker, 2002). Families try to impart such knowledge to children, termed as ‘official knowledge’ by Bernstein (1975, cited in Brooker, 2002, p. 44). It may be different
from learning and knowledge that is valued at home, but the knowledge about school is important for children’s positive experiences and adjustment in a school (Brooker, 2002).

The present study revealed that many parents (6/10) did not know the school’s expectations and curriculum. Parents also stated that they did not understand the information given to them at the time of starting school. As stated by Brooker (2002), parents’ knowledge of the school that their children attend provides the social and cultural capital needed for children’s academic success. Bangladeshi children will not be prepared adequately for school if their parents have insufficient knowledge about the school and feel that they are not equipped with the school knowledge necessary for children’s preparation for school. As argued by Bernstein (1975, as cited in Brooker, 2002, p. 63), ‘the domestic transmission of school knowledge is more influential in children’s subsequent school careers than what is taught and learned’.

Teachers
As stated by Jackson (1987, cited in Peters, 1999), teachers have ultimate power in the classroom and also have a major responsibility in enabling children’s successful transition to school. Similar to this view, all parents (10/10) in this study believed that teachers play a significant role in children’s adjustment to school and expected teachers to support their children with transition. This finding is consistent with Vidal and Adam’s (2007) and Adams and Shambleau’s (2007) findings that documented immigrant parents’ high expectations of school teachers to assist their children with transition to school.

Many parents in this study mentioned the need for teachers to respect children’s diversity in backgrounds, abilities, and experiences (7/10), and to provide individualised attention to CALD children (3/10). Parents in this study wanted teachers to accept CALD children as individuals with diverse abilities and be non-judgemental about their coping and learning abilities. As suggested by Osterman (2000, p. 359, cited in Perry et al., 2002), ‘students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school’.

Parents (4/10) in this study also mentioned the need for teachers to meet with CALD parents at the beginning in the first year of school to discuss issues surrounding their children’s adjustments and to suggest strategies to facilitate their adjustments. But they also admitted that they were hesitant to approach teachers or take the initiative in opening up a conversation when needed, due to language barriers. Bangladeshi parents’ participation in their children’s school activities or education thus is inhibited by language barriers. This finding on the lack of parental collaboration with school because of language barriers is similar to the findings reported in other studies of immigrant families (Adams & Shambleau, 2007; Vidali & Adams, 2007).

In addition to meetings with parents, a few parents (2/10) also suggested the idea of parents staying with their children in the school in the first few days of starting school; similar to what happens in some schools in their native country. To quote a parent:

In Bangladesh, mums can wait outside the school—all day if needed—and even help children during lunchtime. But while lessons are going, mums wait outside the classrooms, sometimes they peek through the window to feel reassured and to reassure the child that mum is around! There is no such scope here. It helps mums if schools here encourage mothers to stay with their child or visit the child during the lunch or tea breaks. I am not sure if I can do that here (Participant 7).

Teachers in Griebel and Niesel’s 1997 study (as cited in Griebel & Niesel, 2002), recommended that parents should be allowed to stay with their child in the classroom in the first few days of beginning school. However, they did not suggest that all parents come in large groups at the same time. Teachers’ perspectives also indicated that they needed information about the child and family to assist children with their adjustment during the transition to school (Griebel & Niesel, 1997, as cited in Griebel & Niesel, 2002).

Teachers have a significant role in knowing CALD children and families individually and in assisting children in forming positive and sustaining relationships with classroom peers. Further to the strategies recommended by Bangladeshi parents in this study, it is also vital that teachers accommodate and adjust their teaching strategies so that every transaction is not in English. Effective instructional practices are significant, particularly for students coming from homes where English is not the primary language of communication (Adams & Shambleau, 2007; Garcia, 1991). The functional communication among the teacher, CALD children and peers is also essential in school contexts to address children’s CALD language problems (Garcia, 1991).

The benefits of collaboration between parents and teachers for children’s transition to school are well documented in the literature (Griebel & Niesel, 2009). It was concerning to note in this study that language barriers precluded Bangladeshi parents from accessing information on how to prepare their children adequately for school or to facilitate their smooth transition to school.

Educators in formal care settings
Prior-to-school settings, such as long day care and preschool, can offer information on structural and organisational matters relating to transitions (Fabian,
with friendships with children of the same linguistic or parents attributed children's adjustments to school related to linguistic or cultural factors. For instance, children's transitional experiences to school are This study suggests that Bangladeshi families' and facilitating their smooth transition to school.

Implications

The present study on Bangladeshi families' views of child care indicated that 'child care is "a place to play and socialise"' and that 'real learning occurs only in schools' (Participant 9). They also thought that 'they don't teach anything. Children just play in childcare centres’ (Participant 2). They did not consider child care as highly helpful in terms of preparing them academically for school (8/10). These findings on parents’ perceptions of child care are in congruence with the cultural variations in parents’ views of early childhood services (for example, Wise & Sanson, 2000). A few parents (2/10) admitted to preparing their children by teaching the alphabet at home before their children started school. Yet, most of the parents perceived childcare attendance to be useful in promoting children's social and self-help skills (6/10). A few parents (2/10) also recommended that educators in long day care or preschool should promote academic learning and formal teaching of English to supplement the cultural training and academic learning that is provided to CALD children at home.

Limitations

The present study on Bangladeshi families’ views of children's transition to school is a small-scale qualitative study. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to other CALD populations in Sydney or Australia or across the globe. Interviews with school teachers and children, along with a large sample of participants, would have helped to strengthen the current findings. Despite these limitations, this study provided valuable insights into Bangladeshi children's and families’ transition to school which need to be taken into account in facilitating their smooth transition to school.

Implications

This study suggests that Bangladeshi families’ and children's transitional experiences to school are related to linguistic or cultural factors. For instance, parents attributed children's adjustments to school with friendships with children of the same linguistic or similar cultural backgrounds. The study also indicated that language barriers precluded many Bangladeshi parents from accessing information on school needed to prepare their children adequately for school. For this reason, Bangladeshi parents need to be empowered with culturally and linguistically appropriate information on school and school curriculum so that they can prepare children for and facilitate their children's adjustments to beginning school.

The language barriers also hampered some children's smooth transition to school. The implication that can be drawn from this finding is that schools need to have additional bilingual provisions and support systems for children and parents who are at risk of poor adjustment arising from limited or no proficiency in English. Further, the study's findings also suggest a need to investigate the specific role of English proficiency in enabling a smooth start to school for children in future studies on transition to school involving CALD children and their families.

The other implications that can be drawn from the present findings are that teachers need to take the initiative in communicating or collaborating with CALD families as they face cultural or linguistic barriers in forming relationships with teachers in school settings. Schools, childcare centres, and preschools also need to provide CALD parents with culturally and linguistically appropriate information on school, curriculum, expectations, and transition to school.

Teachers also need to acknowledge, as requested by Bangladeshi parents, the distinctive linguistic or cultural needs of CALD children and the individual variations in CALD children's preparations and adjustments to beginning school. Further, they need to support children's adjustment by minimising the language barriers through interpreters or a buddy system or bilingual teachers (Adams & Shambleau, 2007). Other strategies for meeting children's social and emotional needs, promoting friendships and peer interactions, and ensuring that children feel welcomed into the school are also invaluable (Adams & Shambleau, 2007). As suggested by a few parents, educators in long day care or preschool can also support CALD children's learning and English conversational skills to supplement the cultural training and academic learning that is provided to CALD children at home.

Conclusion

Starting school is a complex process for children and families, and more so for families and children that represent linguistic or cultural diversity. The present study on Bangladeshi parents’ perceptions of children's transition to school revealed that friendships with peers who share a similar cultural or linguistic background and support from school teachers facilitated Bangladeshi
children's positive adjustment to school. On the other hand, limited or lack of proficiency in English conversational skills was seen as an impediment to children's adjustment to school. Further to these findings, the multiple influences of parents, school teachers and educators in formal care settings in preparing children for school and in facilitating children's transition to school were also highlighted in this study.

As Stephen and Cope (2003, p. 263) suggest, 'transition to school is not a one-way process' and school teachers cannot expect families and children to simply adapt to school. Teachers need to be sensitive to the diversity in children's adjustments to school and to the multitude of contextual factors that impinge on their adjustments to beginning school.

In conclusion, for Bangladeshi families and children, language and culture are significant aspects of their transition to school. Yet, with English becoming a globalised and powerful language and a means to gain social and economic power (Singh, 2002), it is not surprising that they will be concerned about their children's transition into English-dominated school contexts. By responding to the diversity in classrooms, educators can support Bangladeshi and other CALD children's transition to school and provide for their present and future wellbeing.

References


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Licensing and regulation of Indigenous childcare services

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THE FOCUS IN THIS ARTICLE is on licensing and regulation requirements of Indigenous childcare services and the impact they may have on the provision of quality child care for the children, families and communities being served. Specifically, it focuses on key factors that both contribute towards, and serve as barriers to, the provision of quality care through licensing and regulation requirements. The paper draws upon a national consultation funded by the Australian Government and conducted throughout 2005 and 2006 to respond to this issue. In recognition of the heterogeneous nature of Indigenous communities and families, the research methods included focus groups, community consultations and interviews with other stakeholders in the childcare sector nationally in order to identify these key factors. An analysis of national and international literature on the research theme was conducted. The research findings highlight a number of key factors in the licensing and regulation requirements that serve as barriers to the provision of quality care for Indigenous children. These include the lack of culturally appropriate child care that capitalises on Indigenous knowledges (including the contextual nature of ‘quality’) and community capacity building, the lack of flexibility required to address some of the unique needs of different communities in Australia, and the lack of adequate support and resources.

Introduction

National and international evidence points to the positive impact of high-quality early education and care programs on young children’s social, emotional and cognitive wellbeing; their transition to school; their future life chances and social mobility; and on society generally (Karoly, Kilburn & Cannon, 2006; Lynch, 2005; OECD, 2006; Pocock & Hill, 2007; Press, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Thorpe et al., 2004). Summarising some of the literature, the OECD (2006) notes: ‘A basic principle is that learning in one life stage begets learning in the next. Investment in the foundation stage of early childhood increases the productivity of the next stage and so on ... The early childhood or foundation stage of learning is of major importance’ (p. 37). For these reasons, among others, early childhood is high on the political agenda of many countries, with attention being paid to the issue of quality and the processes for improving and maintaining high standards in all services for young children, including the early childhood education and care sector (OECD, 2006).

In the Australian context, the overarching aim of the regulatory and operational childcare frameworks is to safeguard the achievement and maintenance of quality care (NCAC, 2009). However, their contribution to meeting the diverse, often special, needs of all communities in Australia should be considered with caution. The following review of the current literature on licensing and regulation requirements reports on the findings from broad-based national consultations with Indigenous communities and service providers. This was funded by the Australian Government in 2005. The purpose of the consultations was to identify the existing barriers to the provision of quality Indigenous child care and to make recommendations for possible models which would better address the needs of Indigenous communities across a range of indicators and measures. Results from that larger research project have been published separately (Hutchins, Saggers & Frances, 2009a, 2009b; Sims, Saggers, Hutchins, Guilfoyle, Targowska & Jackiewicz, 2008), but one aspect of the brief for the consultations included
attention to Indigenous perspectives on licensing and regulation requirements in childcare services, and it is this we address in this paper.

**Contribution of regulations to the achievement of quality**

In terms of regulatory requirements, the concept of quality is largely determined by the outcomes sought by government policy and the corresponding available resources for supporting care and education services for young children (Press and Hayes, 2000, p. 30). However, understandings of quality care reflect ‘particular social and cultural contexts [which] may not be considered universally applicable’ (Press & Hayes, 2000, p. 28); thus there can be no consensus about what quality care really is and how it can be measured. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), for example, argue for the existence of multiple understandings of quality, at the same time as highlighting the hegemonic way quality is used to define a generalisable standard against which a service may be judged (p. 107). In the Australian context it has been argued that this standard reflects ‘white, middle-class’ values rather than the diversity of cultural contexts and needs which exist across the country (Bown, Fenech, Giugni & Millei, 2008; Tayler, Wills, Hayden & Wilson 2006). Press (2006), among others, refers to the multidimensional aspect of quality within early childhood education and care services, both in manifestation and in outcomes. Press notes how quality can exist across a continuum from poor to excellent with concomitant outcomes which, at one end, place children at risk, and, at the other, provides them with ‘a dynamic space … with caring and nurturing learning programs’ (p. 30). Overall, however, there is a general expectation that early childhood institutions will protect children's wellbeing and contribute to their optimal development (Press and Hayes, 2000; Press, 2006).

The literature highlights different aspects of quality that need to be addressed when setting standards and administering quality assurance processes if successful outcomes are to be achieved. These include: issues related to the structure of the care system, such as child–staff ratio, group size, staff qualifications, staff development and training. They also include issues related to the processes of care, such as the promotion of positive, nurturing and healthy environments; supply of professional development and support to services; monitoring processes including inspection; and issues related to contextual sensitivity, which would include attention to local needs and context; and service provision for and access by special groups (Bown et al., 2008; Colbert, 2005; OECD, 2006; Press, 2007; Tayler et al., 2006). For these standards to be robust—rather than merely serving as minimum requirements—it has been argued that they need to be in line with current research and changing practice that identifies indicators of quality (Bown et al., 2008; Colbert, 2005; NCAC, 2009; OECD, 2006). Otherwise, as Colbert (2002) has stated, ‘policies keeping regulations at a minimum and exempting [certain] categories of providers from licensing encourage the use of lower quality informal and unregulated care’ (p. xiv).

Owing to the highly regulated nature of Australian child care, it can be argued that its quality is being monitored. How well the existing licensing requirements contribute to the quality of Indigenous child care, however, needs to be considered, given the contextual nature of quality and the diversity of childcare needs within Australian populations.

**The Australian childcare licensing and regulation frameworks**

Australia's current approach to quality assurance in child care involves regulatory and operational frameworks at three levels of government—the Australian Government, state and territory governments and, to a lesser extent, local government. This system spans minimum quality standards—based on children's services regulations developed by each of the states and territories—through to a national quality assurance system promoting continuous quality improvement (OECD, 2006; Tayler et al., 2006). National Childcare Standards, which aimed at achieving Australia-wide consistency in the provision of childcare services, were endorsed in 1993 for centre-based day care, and in 1995 for family day care and outside school hours care. These standards were incorporated into regulations of all states and territories, with their respective regulatory requirements set at or above the standards (Tayler et al., 2006). State and territory regulations establish the minimum conditions services must comply with in order to obtain a licence to operate. Licensing provides a legal base below which no centre is permitted to function, and monitors the most readily measured indicators, such as health and safety, the amount and arrangement of space, the range of equipment, number and ages of children, child–staff ratio, staff qualifications, and record-keeping (Tayler et al., 2008). In addition, different sets of regulations have been developed within the states and territories to provide for the various types of childcare services. For example, in Western Australia there are five sets of separate regulations, legislated by the Child Care Services Act 2007, which apply to the following services: Child Care (centre based); Outside School Hours Care; Family Day Care; and Outside School Hours Family Day Care. Similar sets of regulations operate in other Australian jurisdictions. Owing to this multilayered approach, no one unified system of ensuring quality of care nationwide exists.
This situation is due to change, however, with the commitment by the current Australian Government and state and territory governments to the development of a new national system to ensure consistent quality of early childhood care and education across childcare services and preschools. The National Quality Framework, which will replace the current licensing and accreditation processes, has been agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and is expected to be implemented progressively from July 2010 and become mandatory from January 2012 (COAG, 2009).

**Regulatory barriers to the provision of Indigenous child care**

The proposal to develop a new national system of quality childcare standards provides an opportunity to reconsider the needs and aspirations of Indigenous families and service providers and to ensure that these are adequately reflected in the development of future licensing and regulation requirements. During the submissions phase of the development of the National Quality Framework, however, concerns were raised at the lack of reference to the diversity of the Australian population and the danger that this could discriminate against particular types of services and populations (for example, Bown et al., 2008; NCAC, 2009). This continues to be an important issue, as it has been noted how the diverse needs of communities in different states and territories, and in particular of the communities living in extremely remote and isolated areas, are not necessarily being reflected in the current regulatory and licensing standards. Indeed, one of the most frequently recurring themes throughout the consultations for this study was that current regulations lack the flexibility required to address some of the unique needs of different communities in Australia, in particular as they apply to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Examples of barriers that legislation and licensing standards can create for Indigenous child care have been reported in the literature and relate to issues ranging from differences in understandings and conceptualisations of quality care; the shortage of qualified Indigenous childcare staff; the general lack of workplace flexibility; to a lack of adequate resources (Meeting of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childcare workers, Sydney, 26–27 May, 1994, cited in the Law Reform Commission Interim Report, 1994; Productivity Commission, 2005; Tayler et al., 2006; Trigwell, 2000).

**Adaptation of licensing standards to address Indigenous childcare needs**

There are examples of state and territory government attempts to meet the diverse childcare needs of Indigenous populations. In the mid-1990s, for example, the Northern Territory Government introduced the ‘innovative’ funding for Indigenous remote area childcare services which resulted in the Australian Government's Innovative Child Care Scheme. This initiative, having grown out of the 1992–1996 National Childcare Strategy, reflected the recognition at state/territory and national levels that a new approach to service development was required in order to facilitate the unique needs of the Aboriginal communities in remote areas. Emphasising the need for change in many areas, ‘particularly with regard to funding, service development and appropriate licensing expectations’ (Fasoli et al., 2004, p. 25), a different type of service emerged. Such services were designed to meet the ‘local needs and conditions and to reflect community cultural expectations’ (Fasoli et al., 2004, p. 12).

A 2004 study of the innovative children's services in the remote areas of the Northern Territory describes how, with intensive and integrated departmental support and training which lasted for more than a year, four targeted innovative services reached ‘their fully operational and licensed status. The standard “conditions of license” for childcare services were adapted to enable these … services to develop in a more locally appropriate way’ (Fasoli et al., 2004, p. 26). The study shows that the adapted ‘licensing requirements have had a strong effect on practices in centres where they apply’ (Fasoli et al., 2004, p. 189). This includes, for example, improved hygiene standards, development of written programs, provision of some child-focused activities and to the improvement of the general quality of staff–child interactions. Although some of the innovative services in the remote areas of the Northern Territory, such as Jobs, Education and Training (JET) crèches, are not required to comply with the Northern Territory standards for childcare centres, they need to meet certain very basic requirements, and some of these services have been able to transform into licensed childcare centres (Fasoli et al., 2004, p. 217).

There are also examples of how the licensing process and related documentation can be made more appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One such example is that developed by the Northern Territory Health Services, Family and Children Services in 2001 (Territory Health Services, 2001), the Workbook for child care centres. The workbook is written in simple, user-friendly language and explains the purpose of licensing from the perspective of quality care for children, making the process of obtaining a licence more relevant to Indigenous parents, staff and community members.

In 2002, the federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced that Community Link Australia would undertake national consultations to inform the redevelopment of what was then known as the Child...
Care Support Broadband. Community Link Australia’s final report identified a number of gaps in childcare provision, including the unequal access to child care for Indigenous children, and gave a high priority to improving and extending the provision of child care for Indigenous children, families and communities. Subsequently, in 2004, the Minister launched the new Child Care Support Program, which included the development of an Indigenous Child Care Plan (of which this research was a part). Drivers for the development of the Indigenous Child Care Plan included:

- a request by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to the Child Care Reference Group for the development of an Indigenous Child Care Plan
- the stated commitment by the Australian Government through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to explore the development of the Quality Assurance System for Indigenous childcare services
- the Department for Family and Community Services’ (now known as the Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Department of Family and Community Services, 2005).

Methodology

Semi-structured questions were used to obtain qualitative data from focus group discussions and individual consultations with relevant childcare and Indigenous networks, service providers, community members and government representatives. The purpose was to identify the key issues regarding licensing and regulation requirements for young children’s services for Indigenous families and the service providers. A review of national and international literature regarding licensing and regulation requirements for the childcare industry, with a particular focus on the Indigenous perspective, was also undertaken and provided a context for the evidence presented from the focus groups and consultations. The data was analysed using a comparative thematic approach which enabled common themes and issues to be identified.

The sample comprised Indigenous childcare providers (202), Indigenous community members (210), and state and territory government representatives (66) from across Australia. In each state and territory a minimum of one capital city consultation and one rural/regional/remote consultation of service providers and community members was included. Metropolitan consultations were held during the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care’s (SNAICC) state conferences where possible. Rural/regional/remote sites were nominated by SNAICC, the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (now the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) and state and territory government representatives.

The research was conducted with attention to ethical guidelines for research with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, as articulated by the National Health and Medical Research Council’s 2003 Guidelines for ethical research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. These guidelines require all researchers to conduct their work according to Indigenous priorities and processes, and with respect for Indigenous values. Ethical approval to undertake the research was granted by Edith Cowan University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Importantly, the research team included Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with many years’ experience working with Indigenous communities.

Limitations of the research included time constraints, the limited sample, and the contested role of government at the consultations. Many participants raised their objection to the presence of government staff, and may have been less able to voice their opinions as a result. Nevertheless, most consultations generated robust and exhaustive deliberations.

Common standards but local interpretations

The consultations demonstrate that Indigenous populations acknowledge the importance of regulations in maintaining the quality of Indigenous services, and many people told us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations want the same standards in their childcare services as other mainstream services:

Community does not accept sub-standard care; our community doesn’t want their children in an unsafe place (Service provider, metropolitan).

You get offered run-down, older buildings; because you’re Indigenous, you won’t feel comfortable… there is this assumption, you know, that these ladies won’t feel comfortable in those new buildings. These ladies, they said No! We want that one [pointing to a brand new building]. They all went, Oh why they should not have that? You only get what you are offered. You know you only get offered the old buildings and people think they don’t have a choice. Stereotypical stuff (Government, metropolitan consultation, comment in relation to a remote area).

At the same time, however, they told us how difficult it was sometimes to comply with regulations because of
inadequate support and resources, and they asked for discretion and flexibility in the interpretation of licensing requirements:

In centre-based care they did not want to have different standards. They wanted the same standards to be applicable, but they wanted a better understanding of the ways that might be applied. Example: water excursions. Our regs, some parts are flexible e.g.: appropriate programs, cultural appropriateness, individual children’s needs etc., etc. That’s quite flexible; things like square inches per child is not. At present that’s a challenge to some services. .... they did not want some different set of standards that only applied to Indigenous children’s services. They see that as not appropriate. It is more about the model being able to show that if you have a particular standard in place that’s about guarantee of safety, then there might be a number of ways to achieve that safety (Government representative, metropolitan).

Thus the need to maintain high standards, while having the flexibility to make them applicable to local needs, especially in remote areas of Australia, was often emphasised. This issue also magnified the importance of consulting local communities in relation to licensing standards:

They built a centre at X. They built it to ‘normal’ specs, but X children are short and skinny so you have little kids going through the fence. … the gap they left under the fence will let the dogs go under there and the toilet seats are too high (Government, remote).

Licensing requirements also made staff more aware of what aspects of the service they had to improve:

We are having visit at the Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) program. There are some things that we need to have in order, like the noticeboard for the menu, program, staff files, first aid certificates, blue cards and policies and procedures (Service provider, remote).

Regulations were sometimes perceived as a restriction, in that they relate to minimum standards of care rather than any guarantees of best practice:

Licensing/regulations are restricting but they are only a minimum standard, not best practice. We want best practice for our kids not the minimum you can get away with, such as regs. They [children] deserve best practice (Service provider, metropolitan).

Comments were also made in relation to the lack of flexibility of the licensing process:

Authorised officers sometimes can be quite pedantic about what they are looking for and not always cognisant about cultural issues (Government, metropolitan consultation).

The need to simplify the process was also noted:

There should be less reporting, less administration, auditing, so we can focus on supporting children, families and communities. Different emphasis is needed. We focus too much on accountability that we lose the real picture of what we are for (Service provider, metropolitan).

Some of the licensing requirements were perceived by one Indigenous service provider as being too restrictive for Indigenous childcare services. These restrictions, however, are sometimes misunderstood as licensing requirements when they are, in fact, centre policies. The following comment on nappies, for example, is a centre policy rather than a licensing requirement:

Issues related to compliance with licensing requirements

Cultural obligations

Cultural obligations, for example the strong community and family ties within Aboriginal and Torres Strait populations, often conflict with issues of compliance with licensing requirements: Looking after additional children whose parents had to attend certain cultural events or had important appointments was accepted by staff as a breach of regulations and funding requirements, but they saw this as part of their cultural obligations:

Regulations say that you can’t look after your own nephews and nieces, but we often look after our relatives’ children who are not registered, especially during special occasions, such as funerals (Service provider, remote).

It was also noted that departmental rules are sometimes too hard for parents to understand and it was emphasised that there is a need to educate the community about the role of child care and licensing requirements:
We are licensed for 14 places so we have to knock kids back. Families don’t understand the rule about only being able to have 14 kids (Service provider, remote).

The role of regulations in safeguarding children’s safety, health and nutrition

Issues related to health, safety and nutrition were often raised in many rural and remote areas. Although the community consultation participants from one of the JET crèches in the remote area did not speak directly about licensing, they raised issues of the importance of children’s safety, as well as good nutrition and health in general. They talked about the need for adequate outdoor space and good food. They also expressed their desire to have more outdoor space for children to play, a sandpit and adequate covered outdoor areas. The JET crèche coordinator expressed her wish to have:

Everything up to standard—bathrooms, kitchens and cupboards (Service provider, remote).

An Indigenous caregiver from an outer regional area emphasised the importance of the structural features, such as good-quality rest rooms, change rooms and the whole building in general; she also stated her concern in relation to children’s safety. Community members, users of a childcare service in another area, stated that:

Rules are needed so people know that children are safe (Community member, remote).

Some caregivers commented on certain rules they have at the centre (as a result of childcare regulations) which contribute to the maintenance of children’s good health:

They are not allowed to share plates or cups, or take food from other plates—as they get sick from each other that way. Instead we tell children to get a second helping, not to take others’ food (Service provider, very remote).

One service provider in a regional area emphasised the importance of having trained staff as well as an appropriate child–staff ratio. Although some mandatory requirements were acknowledged during many consultations as being important to the maintenance of children’s health, safety and wellbeing, they were also sometimes noted as contributors to the additional pressure on services to meet these standards. This was especially noted in relation to services in the remote areas:

Nutrition—this is very important; especially education about Type 2 diabetes. We provide breakfast, lunch, and afternoon tea. Some services will provide four meals. The Start Right, Eat Right program is going to be mandatory in X from 2006.

This is an extra expense, need for safe food-handling practices and to serve multicultural food. Centres need to send staff to training (over $1000). It is good, with the formula, as it gives you the recommended daily intake. This could help with menu planning. But for some remote centres, they are in the process of seeking donations of food to be able to prepare and serve the required meals (Service manager, remote).

As the health standards of the Indigenous children attending child care are often quite low, some services found meeting the required standards almost impossible:

Children come for a short period, when parents do their training. Children come to the centre with constant diarrhoea, if the staff followed the rules, they would have no children (Childcare worker, regional).

Differences in understanding the role of child care

An understanding of the role of child care within some Indigenous communities is different from that found within mainstream services. These differences reside within the concept of mainstream child care as a place for healthy children, with regulations preventing sick children from attending owing to the risk of cross-infection. For Indigenous communities, however, child care is seen as the:

place where you can bring little sick kids, feed them, make them healthy (Community member, very remote).

For Indigenous communities, the role of child care is also to provide support to families:

Some kids come with diarrhoea, if it’s bad we ask them to take the child to the hospital. Sometimes we get underweight kids here—we feed them and help make them better. We give them healthy food to make them strong … In the morning with the parents, we wash hands, have breakfast—staff have breakfast too—and we give the leftovers to the mothers, children brush their teeth, we check their ears, get [them to] blow their noses (Service provider, very remote).

Qualifications

One of the barriers to meeting licensing standards right across Australia is the shortage of qualified Indigenous staff, and there are a number of inter-related factors inherent in the requirement for qualified Indigenous staff. These include:
the level of understanding of the regulation requirements and the ability to complete the relevant paperwork

- the number of trained childcare staff required by the service

- the necessity for trained staff being on the premises at all times.

Although problems about the level of responsibility that newly trained Indigenous staff face were acknowledged, because of their general shortage there was a feeling that:

If there were more qualified staff available a lot of the issues to do with service compliance and inconsistencies might be reduced (Government, metropolitan).

The importance of training received from one of the training institution lecturers in helping staff of one childcare centre to comply with regulation requirements was noted:

We are writing rules for policy, such as keeping kids out of the office and kitchen (Service provider, very remote).

A lack of qualified relief staff was another of the problems identified during a number of consultations:

When childcare staff had to attend training or go on leave, we might have to close the centre (Service provider, regional).

Flexible approaches to training and licensing were seen as providing solutions to the shortage of trained staff:

MACS [Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Centres] began with exemptions for non-qualified, then five staff, in partnership with X University, did their training off-campus to qualify. … in 2000, 25 graduated from Y Uni—[this was done through] on-site training and staff back-up; [relief staff provided] cover while staff was away on training (Community members and service providers, metropolitan).

A need for the regulations to address the overall quality of staff, not just staff qualifications, was also raised:

… we realised we would have to walk out if we did not get qualified; we are licensed and had to follow reg's and that would have gone horribly wrong [if staff did not obtain formal qualifications]; that's [what is] not recognised in the licensing is who is the best person for our kids to have spend time with … we all realise that training is important, but fostering of those right people—get the right person first, then provide the training … (Service provider, metropolitan).

A further barrier to the provision of qualified Indigenous childcare workers in some remote communities was attributed to the lack of opportunities to obtain qualifications required by regulations:

You speak to people [training providers] and they say, well they are not going to stay out at X or Y for a week to do a block training, or no, they [trainees] will have to come down to Z (a bigger town); but there is no-one there to mind the children. There is a childcare centre at X, but no one to work in it. An actual building [is there], but no one to work in it. They have advertised for a qualified worker, but nobody [applied]; and it's a circular thing; no training … (Government, metropolitan consultation).

**Government support**

More government support for childcare services to help them comply with the requirements was noted:

Currently we don't give enough support and training for Indigenous people and the paperwork is too much (Support service provider, metropolitan).

Owing to the lack of childcare training and problems with English literacy, even using documents which provide step-by-step instructions (such as the NT childcare workbook cited above) was presented as a problem. One government worker suggested that, in order to succeed, centres need a lot of help from support agencies. She also stated that some centres receive intensive support, but it is not equally spread amongst services:

Some places receive intensive support, sometimes a week every fortnight, dealt with licensing, Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU). Provided an extra project person (Government, remote).

**Funding**

Funding, or lack of, is a further barrier to Indigenous services complying with the regulations. In particular, adequate funding is required to address the qualified staff shortage and to develop pools of qualified relief staff, to provide training to staff in relation to licensing requirements, and to provide for structural improvements to existing buildings:

When budgets are tight, the first thing that goes is the training budget. But this is hard where you have mandatory training requirements to train staff about new policy i.e. occupational health and safety, first aid etc. We are always on the lookout for training opportunities being delivered by the Department (Child Care Manager, statewide consultation with service providers).

Better models of funding, for example budget-based funding, were noted as a preferable option and a way to ameliorate some of the above disadvantages:

We should be giving the services funding that lets them meet requirements under licensing and quality (Government, metropolitan).
We run professional development for the centres—varies because of the budget—we had money especially for OSHC, so we ran these. In 2003, the new licensing standards [came in] … so we had regional groups to have a look at the new standards and for people to ask questions and us to explain differences with new requirements; we ran this right around the State. It’s budget really … we would like to do more. … we do provide capital upgrade where we can for licensing issues. For X we gave money to replace glass with safety glass. We have to prioritise. It is usually safety-type licensing issues—no formal application process; we look at when we license or re-license (Government, metropolitan).

Concerns were expressed in relation to the compliance of OSHC services in X (remote area) required from 2008. These concerns revolved around insufficient flexibility in the legislation and the issue of compliance with building requirements [in remote areas] because of the high cost of materials and shortage of labour:

We have been waiting months to have the broken window fixed. There is only one builder so we have to wait our turn. Then if there is lots of break-ins we have to wait longer. Now we just put furniture in front of it so the kids cannot go near it. That wall over there used to be a window, but we got broken into so many times we replaced it with a solid wall (Service provider, very remote).

Regulations as a barrier to flexible service delivery

Becoming a licensed childcare service provider was, in itself, perceived as an obstacle to a flexible delivery of Indigenous services:

The issue with Indigenous child care is how broad it can be. Once you build a building and the Department licenses it, suddenly the flexibility is lost ’cause you can only do what you can do (Government, metropolitan).

They feel safe; they have always come here from playgroup [age]. I am their Aunty and now to some I am Nana. We are working up a program for the teenagers with the centre next door. So the teenage girls go there, the boys go out in the bush and pick up … [wild plums]. They love it. But it is too rigid with the Child Care Benefit rules [implying that regulations would not allow these children to be included in the program owing to their age] (Service provider, remote).

The provision of Indigenous family day care was raised as an issue in some states. These issues were linked to the state regulations requirements of house ownership and, as fewer Indigenous people own their houses compared to the general population, this becomes a barrier for the provision of such care in such locations. The possibility of licensing a person in a public building as a family day care worker was mentioned:

That is venue care. And that’s all well, except [there is a problem with] state licensing; the regulations in this state, won’t allow it. There is no way you can go to a public building and run Family Day Care. I think other states do that, you can run venue care. Other than X … Yes … Y or Z. The minister is really big about that. They are trialing them in Z. We looked at that … and in venue arrangement we would bypass all the problems of licensing. It might give parents a little bit more choice. Have been changing the regulations for years, and still have not done [this]. It’s been a lot of discussion in the state government (Government, metropolitan).

Developmental licenses

A gradual licensing process, during which Indigenous services could work on meeting regulation requirements (as currently exists in the Northern Territory), was seen to be a beneficial approach. Such a process would allow for gradual growth and development into a form of service that meets the needs of the local community and capitalises on its strengths:

Centres want quality child care, but they do not want to be rushed. In the NT new legislation is being developed in relation to developmental licences. This legislation will allow services to work their way towards a goal [obtaining a licence] (Government, metropolitan).

One service provider with extensive childcare experience stated:

Getting staff is a big issue and there needs to be incentives to bring staff in. [To develop a licensed service] you need to start with playgroup, educate the staff through playgroup, educate community about child care before you bring in the building, because the building is the easy bit (Service provider, remote).

Some possibilities of developmental licensing were explored:

How can you fund an unlicensed service? As with JET crèches it would be about not charging fees. Wherever care is provided for fee-for-service basis, it has to be licensed. Which is the building will be built to quality standards, so you create that seamless approach [when the centre expands and is ready to be licensed, the building meets the required standards].

... I think that this developmental work, that capacity-building work is really critical and we are going to try to do this simultaneously, because
Gradual service development not necessarily linked to the JET crèche model was emphasised in some consultations:

**JET crèches are tied to particular events, when those events finish they close down. They are time-linked. Should be developmental, work to get them [services] through [licensing]; they need to understand what is entailed, so they can make real choices about how they want to develop. We were talking to wheatbelt communities recently; they need hands-on help to know where to go to get advice, so they know (Government, metropolitan).**

**Discussion**

Both the literature and the data from the consultations indicate that regulation requirements and licensing standards are important contributors to the provision of quality child care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Child Care Regulations Consultative Committee, 2008; Fasoli et al., 2004). Consultation participants stressed that they wanted the same standards as the mainstream services and did not want to settle for sub-standard care.

There are important factors that need to be taken into account, however, if universal standards of care are to be achieved. This would include the need for multiple understandings of quality (Dahlberg et al., 1999), as understood by Australia’s diverse populations, to be incorporated into policy and practice (Fasoli et al., 2004; Trigwell, 2000). It has been noted how a lack of reference to diversity underpins a ‘white middle-class’ interpretation of the concept of quality, contributing towards increased inequalities between children “as families reject programs that fail to recognise the merits of their views and values” (Bown et al., 2008, p. 5). To address this, attention would have to be paid to issues such as:

- the design of services to meet local needs and conditions, reflecting community cultural obligations and expectations
- rules and limits which would allow for flexibility but at the same time would not compromise children’s safety and health in general
- workforce issues, with innovative training models and flexible employment conditions.

All these factors have been identified during the consultations for this study and are consistent with other research findings (Child Care Regulations Consultative Committee, 2008; Fasoli et al., 2004; Meeting of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childcare workers, Sydney, 26–27 May, 1994, cited in the Law Reform Commission Interim Report, 1994).

A further difficulty in achieving universal standards of care, particularly as they relate to compliance with regulations, has been noted, both in the literature and in the consultations, as a consequence of inadequate support and resources. This ranges from the shortage of qualified Indigenous childcare staff and the lack of adequate and appropriate structural features such as good-quality buildings, to the general lack of workplace flexibility (Meeting of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care workers, Sydney, 26–27 May, 1994, cited in the Law Reform Commission Interim Report, 1994; Trigwell, 2000). All these issues need to be contextualised to the diverse needs of communities in different states and territories and, in particular, to the communities living in extremely remote and isolated areas (Fasoli et al., 2004).

Thus, to meet locally diverse needs, more flexibility in the licensing process is needed (Fasoli et al., 2004; Meeting of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care workers, Sydney, 26–27 May, 1994, cited in the Law Reform Commission Interim Report, 1994; Trigwell, 2000). This would mean allowing Indigenous childcare services to gradually build their capacity to meet the regulation requirements and develop a service that meets the needs of local communities. Fasoli et al. (2004) have reported on some of the ways this has been achieved in the Northern Territory, through a model of developmental licensing. This is a process which involves gradual growth and development of the service into a form that meets the needs of the local community and capitalises on its strengths (Fasoli et al., 2004). As the consultations emphasised, such a model would enable Indigenous service providers to offer the quality care considered essential.

The achievement of quality childcare services for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities, depends upon licensing and regulation standards being made relevant to them, with appropriate supports and infrastructure provided to ensure their progress through the system.
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Introduction

Self-monitoring is a self-management procedure whereby a person systematically observes his or her own behaviour and then records the occurrence or non-occurrence of a target behaviour (Ganz, 2008; Gulchak, 2008). It can include an evaluation component where the student actively obtains feedback and records progress towards a standard (Cooper, Heron & Heward, 2007). The procedures for self-monitoring are most effective when they are simple, efficient and acceptable to the student, minimally obtrusive or laborious and relevant to the student’s needs and goals (Harris, Friedlander, Saddler, Frizzelle & Graham, 2005). Self-monitoring can be a valuable component of an intervention package that might also include consequence-based contingencies such as reinforcement. Self-monitoring is important as a student-directed strategy that can promote independence, motivation, engagement, self-reliance and self-determination to increase learning (Agran et al., 2005).

Self-monitoring is practical since it encourages more self-regulation and less teacher-directed support for behaviours that interfere with learning. A potential classroom benefit of using a self-monitoring procedure is that teachers can spend more time on instruction and less time managing students’ off-task and inappropriate behaviours (Ganz & Sigafoos, 2005). Self-monitoring interventions have been used in a variety of settings including resource, inclusion and general education classrooms for students with and without disabilities (Hughes & Boyle, 1991; Hughes et al., 2002) and have shown positive outcomes for students with a wide variety of disabilities, such as learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, mild-to-moderate intellectual disabilities, emotional and/or behavioural disorders and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (for reviews, see Reid, 1996; Reid, Trout & Schartz, 2005; Webber, Scheuermann, McCall & Coleman, 1993). In addition, self-monitoring has been studied across a variety of diverse behaviours. For instance, it has been shown to be an effective intervention to address a wide range of adaptive behavioural deficits including distractibility, impulsivity, non-compliance and aggression (Levendoski & Cartledge, 2000), as well as for organisational and academic problems with classroom preparedness (Creel, Fore, Boon & Bender, 2006; Gureasko-Moore, DuPaul & White, 2006; Gureasko-Moore, DuPaul & White, 2007), engagement (Amato-Zech, Hoff & Doepke, 2006; Brooks, Todd, Tofflemoyer & Horner, 2003; Crawley, Lynch & Vannest, 2006; Harris et al., 2005; Rock, 2005; Rock & Thead, 2007; Stahr, Cushing, Lane & Fox, 2006), task completion and...
academic performance (Brooks et al., 2003; Gureasko-Moore et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2005; Rock, 2005; Rock & Thead, 2007). Academic success and self-regulation behaviours are linked. While teachers expect students of all ages to exhibit classroom-preparedness skills, these types of organisational behaviours are seldom directly taught in the classroom. Teachers expect students to self-regulate organisational behaviours; however, many students with disabilities often struggle to perform basic classroom survival skills (Snyder & Bambara, 1997).

It is important to recognise how classroom-preparedness skills include and are closely related to on-task behaviour, academic engagement, academic productivity and performance as these behaviours are described conceptually and measured in the self-monitoring research. Classroom-preparedness skills are organisational behaviours that enable students to meet academic demands which can include preparing materials, listening, following directions, attending to instruction, staying seated, completing tasks, and finishing work on time (Gureasko-Moore et al., 2006). On-task behaviour can be viewed as a component of classroom preparedness and is often defined as focusing eyes on the material or teacher, holding a pencil, active execution of any step in the academic task, asking for help and remaining seated to complete assigned work (Crawley et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2005; Stahr et al., 2006). Similarly, academic engagement is used to measure if the student is attending and on task (Brooks et al., 2003). The end result of academic engagement or on-task behaviour can be academic productivity or work completion, as well as academic performance which can include accuracy measures. Self-monitoring of classroom preparedness can therefore be related to self-monitoring of attention, on-task behaviours, engagement, academic productivity, work completion, performance and accuracy.

**Review of the literature**

Recently, five studies have shown that self-monitoring procedures have the potential to increase elementary and middle school students’ on-task behaviours, academic skills and compliance to classroom-preparedness skills. In the first study, Rock (2005) examined the effects of a self-monitoring procedure on the academic engagement and problem behaviours of elementary students with and without disabilities. Participants included nine elementary school students with and without disabilities. All students were referred by teachers for active or passive disengagement in the classroom on a daily basis. A multiple-baseline-across-subjects design with an embedded reversal was used to evaluate the effects of the intervention, which included monitoring engagement and problem behaviours during independent mathematics and reading seatwork. Productivity and accuracy were assessed during independent mathematics seatwork on individualised new and previously learned material. Dependent variables included academic engagement, productivity and accuracy on the students’ seatwork, while the independent variable employed a combined self-monitoring of attention (SMA) and self-monitoring of performance (SMP) intervention (ACT–REACT strategy) using six-steps: (1) articulate your goal, (2) create a work plan, (3) take pictures (self-modelling), (4) reflect using self-talk, (5) evaluate your progress, and (6) ACT again. Results indicated the strategy was effective for increasing academic engagement and decreasing problem behaviours. However, there were some inconsistencies with students’ productivity and accuracy, as in most cases productivity increased but accuracy rates were variable.

In the second study, Rock and Thead (2007) replicated a previous study (Rock, 2005) to explore the effects of a self-monitoring intervention on the academic engagement, productivity and accuracy of elementary students with and without disabilities. Participants included five elementary school students with problematic behaviours and disengagement during independent seatwork. Similar to the previous study, a multiple-treatment reversal design (ABAB) was used to examine the effects of the intervention and use of gradual fading in a multi-age inclusion classroom on the students’ independent mathematics seatwork on new and previously learned material. Dependent and independent variables were identical to those employed in the Rock (2005) study. Results revealed that students’ academic engagement and productivity increased from baseline to the intervention phases. However, as in the previous study, engagement, productivity and accuracy levels varied during the second intervention phase and within the fading procedures.

In the third study, Harris et al. (2005) examined the effects of SMA and SMP on the on-task and spelling behaviour of elementary students with ADHD. Participants included six third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students with ADHD who had difficulty sustaining attention and performance in the inclusion classroom, even with their medication. A counterbalanced, multiple-baseline-across-subjects design was implemented to assess students’ self-monitoring of attention and academic performance in spelling during language arts instruction in an inclusion classroom. Dependent variables included students’ on-task behaviour and academic performance in spelling instruction, while the independent variable employed was the SMA where students self-recorded ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question, ‘Was I paying attention and on task?’, and the SMP in which the student counted and graphed the number of correctly spelled practice words at the end of each spelling period. Results indicated that the SMA and
SMP procedures had a positive effect on the student’s on-task behaviour and on their academic performance, as the SMA, for example, resulted in more correct practices for each student.

In the fourth study, Amato-Zech et al. (2006) investigated the effects of a tactile self-monitoring prompt (MotivAider) to increase the on-task behaviour of elementary students with disabilities. Participants included three fifth-grade students with low levels of on-task behaviours. A reversal design (ABAB) was used for each participant with an extended baseline for the third participant. Intervention data was collected in a self-contained special-education classroom during writing instruction. Generalisation probes were conducted in a second academic setting (mathematics) without the use of the self-monitoring procedures. In addition, a classroom token economy system was in place for personal behavioural goals throughout all conditions, including the baseline phase of the project. Dependent variables included the on-task behaviour defined as sit up, look at the person talking, activate thinking, note key information and track the talker (SLANT), while the independent variable was the self-monitoring with the MotivAider using the SLANT strategy to identify on-task behaviours followed by recording behaviour as, ‘Yes, I was paying attention,’ or ‘No, I was not paying attention’. The MotivAider was an electronic beeper attached to the student’s waistband or belt that vibrated on a programmed schedule to provide a tactile cue to self-monitor. Results indicated the self-monitoring procedure increased levels of on-task behaviour. Generalisation data was limited but did suggest that the intervention benefited students in other classroom settings without the use of prompts.

Lastly, in the fifth study, Creel and colleagues (2006) investigated the effects of a self-monitoring procedure on the classroom-preparedness skills of middle school students with ADHD. Participants included four sixth-grade students with ADHD who exhibited a lack of classroom-preparedness skills. A multiple-baseline-across-participants design was used to examine baseline, intervention and maintenance data in a language arts resource classroom. After mastery was achieved for all participants, two maintenance probes were taken for each student once a week for two weeks. During this time, baseline procedures were followed without the use of checklists or prompts. Dependent variables included the classroom-preparedness skills, such as entering the classroom appropriately, going to their seat immediately, beginning classroom procedures without prompting, having classroom materials and completing work without reminders, while the independent variable was the use of the self-monitoring checklist to measure compliance (‘yes’ or ‘no’) for seven targeted classroom-preparedness behaviours. Results indicated that the use of the self-monitoring procedures was effective for increasing classroom-preparedness skills for all four students in the classroom. In addition, students maintained the targeted skills for two weeks after completion of the intervention.

In summary, the use of the self-monitoring procedures improved students’ classroom behaviours related to academic preparedness and is supported in the literature for students with mild disabilities who struggle with self-regulation behaviours. The research represents self-monitoring as a flexible, adaptable intervention that can assist students in successfully managing their own behaviour, organisation and academic learning (Maag, 2004). The most recent studies have revealed the value of self-monitoring to improve classroom preparedness (Creel et al., 2006; Gureasko-Moore et al., 2006; Gureasko-Moore et al., 2007), on-task behaviour or engagement (Amato-Zech et al., 2006; Brooks et al., 2003; Crawley et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2005; Rock, 2005; Rock & Thead, 2007; Stahr et al., 2006) and academic productivity and performance (Brooks et al., 2003; Gureasko-Moore et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2005; Rock, 2005; Rock & Thead, 2007). Self-monitoring has also been shown to generalise to other content-area settings. There is some interest as to whether SMA or SMP is more effective; however, both types of self-monitoring have shown positive results (Harris, Graham, Reid, McElroy & Hamby, 1994; Harris et al., 2005). There is also some discussion as to whether student accuracy in self-recording has any effect on the outcome—however, most studies suggest it does not. Social validity data suggests that the interventions are acceptable, practical for teachers and can be individualised to accommodate student preferences.

However, a noticeable gap in the research literature provided a new direction for this study. To date, there is limited published research on self-monitoring interventions for very young students with developmental delays, who may be having difficulty with self-regulation of behaviours as is expected in the primary school classroom environment (Reinecke, Newman & Meinberg, 1999; Strain, Kohler, Storey & Danko, 1994). Teachers strive to provide opportunities for independent behaviours to develop and a self-monitoring intervention can provide students increased responsibility for their own behaviour regulation and achievements. This type of intervention can be individualised to teach young students how to recruit appropriate attention and help while also providing the opportunity for self-directed feedback and greater independence.

**Self-monitoring and students at risk**

Developmental delays in young children can affect their ability to achieve success when they first enter the school environment in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. Significant developmental
delay (SDD) is a disability category with eligibility that is currently determined on a state level in the United States of America (USA). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2010) in the USA, a significant developmental delay is defined as a ‘delay in a child's development in adaptive behaviour, cognition, communication, motor development or social development to the extent that, if not provided with special intervention, it may adversely affect his/her educational performance in age-appropriate activities’. It is important to note that students eligible for SDD are often later identified with a mild disability such as a learning disability, mild intellectual disability, emotional and/or behavioural disorder or ADHD and many are identified with a secondary disability of speech and language impairment (SI).

The intervention procedures and experimental design in this study replicated a recent self-monitoring intervention in the aforementioned literature review (Creel et al., 2006). The intervention was expected, similar to the previous study, to increase students’ classroom-preparedness skills by using a simple classroom behavioural checklist. However, the self-monitoring intervention extended previous research by Creel et al. (2006) in several significant ways. First, the participants were kindergarten students and not middle school students with ADHD. Also, the participants received interventions in an inclusive classroom compared to a resource classroom setting, which is a placement option for students with disabilities to receive direct, specialised instruction in an individualised and/or small group environment. A few elements to strengthen the findings were similar to the study by Gureasko-Moore et al. (2006). For example, procedural integrity checklists were used to make sure all condition procedures were followed. Also, the only reinforcements provided were related to the students seeing their progress and receiving some assistance from the researcher as they charted their progress for the self-evaluation component.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of a self-monitoring procedure to increase the classroom-preparedness skills of kindergarten students at risk for developmental disabilities who were identified by teachers to have difficulties in self-regulation of behaviour as it applies to academic preparedness. The self-monitoring intervention required each participant to systematically observe their own behaviour and then record the occurrence or non-occurrence of the target behaviour. It included an evaluation component where the student actively obtained visual feedback of progress towards a standard. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Will a self-monitoring intervention increase the percentage of compliance behaviours of kindergarten students at risk for developmental disabilities?
2. Will the compliance behaviours be maintained when the intervention has faded?
3. Will the compliance skills generalise across different content areas?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included three male kindergarten students with deficits in academic-preparedness behaviours. The first participant, Jake, was a 5.7-year-old Caucasian student identified with SDD and SI. He was receiving one hour per week of speech and language therapy and 11.25 hours per week of inclusion services for reading and social skills. Jake also had difficulty attending to whole group and small group activities. He rarely focused on the teacher during instruction and he almost always seemed distracted and detached from the lesson. In addition, Jake also had mild behavioural tics (pressing on his hands or objects) which interfered with his ability to focus and complete tasks. Jake’s articulation was in the mild severity range and he had difficulty with social interactions and was very shy. Jake was on grade level academically, but required constant teacher support for listening to directions and remaining on task during the teacher presentation.

The second participant, Jonas, was a 5.5-year-old Caucasian student identified as at risk for learning and behavioural problems. Jonas displayed behavioural symptoms of ADHD and had difficulty remaining seated, quiet and attentive. He was receiving academic support via the early intervention program and was below grade level in reading.

The third participant, Kareem, was a 5.7-year-old African-American student who had been diagnosed with SI for mild-to-moderate difficulties in articulation and language. He was receiving two hours per week of speech and language therapy and 22.5 hours per week of inclusion services in reading, language arts and mathematics. Kareem had difficulty listening and responding to teacher-directed questioning. Kareem needed instructions repeated two or three times and would always observe other students to see what they were doing before he started an activity. He had difficulty focusing and completing his work. He needed intensive teacher support to be successful with written work as he was weak in motor-planning skills and handwriting. At the time of the study, he was in the referral process for additional testing to rule out a diagnosis of SDD or a learning disability. He was below grade level in reading and mathematics. No students
were receiving medication at the time of this study. All three participants were in the same inclusion classroom in a rural school district. Characteristics of the students are summarised in Table 1.

The three students were selected for the study by the general education teacher and the researcher to be functionally similar for having difficulty with classroom-preparedness behaviours that had been taught to the class for two months since the beginning of the school year. A pre-intervention survey was given to the general education teacher to rate the targeted classroom-preparedness behaviours identified as most important to classroom survival and academic preparation in her classroom (see Table 2). The participants in this study had the highest scores on this rating scale and, with agreement from the observations of the researcher, were selected as the most appropriate students to receive the intervention. None of the students had previous experience with a self-monitoring intervention.

Written parental consent and student assent for participation was obtained for each student before the study. Before the study, all students had the physical ability to sit in a seat, write with a pencil, and raise their hand for teacher attention. They were all able to follow one-step directions. All three students were included in the study due to their previously high attendance levels, which was important to prevent inconsistencies of data collection throughout the study.

Setting
The baseline, intervention, and maintenance data was gathered in a kindergarten inclusion classroom, which begins for most students by the age of five years. Data from reading, language arts and mathematics sessions

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Table 1. Student demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Adaptive</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Motor</th>
<th>Speech errors</th>
<th>Receptive</th>
<th>Expressive</th>
<th>Total language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>5.7 years</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>5.5 years</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareem</td>
<td>5.7 years</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Battelle developmental inventory, Second edn (Newborg, 2004)
2 Hodson assessment of phonological patterns, Third edn (Hodson, 2004)
3 Goldman–Fristoe test of articulation, Second edn (Goldman & Fristoe, 2000)
4 Preschool language scale, Fourth edn (Zimmerman, Steiner & Pond, 2002)

Note. BDI-2 test scores for Jake reflect improvement from initial SDD eligibility testing completed in 2007 before entering special-needs preschool. The current cognitive and adaptive scores are still considered below average and he is still receiving SDD services.

Table 2. Classroom-preparedness rating scale: Pre-intervention survey

Teachers: Please fill out the following rating scale to the best of your ability for the student below. This information will be important for assisting us to evaluate student strengths and weaknesses to help us determine ways to assist each student succeed.

Student Name: ______________________________________

For the student above, rate the following behaviors on a scale from 1 to 5.

A score of 1 indicates that no help is needed in this area and a score of 5 indicates the student needs a great deal of help in this area.

<table>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listens to directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows directions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has necessary materials ready for assignment</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Begins work right away</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works quietly without talking</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
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Note: Adapted from Creel et al., 2006.
were assessed for generalisation across content areas. The general education inclusion classroom contained a total of 17 students with five receiving special education services. A general education teacher and a special education paraprofessional were present in the classroom during the study. They received specific instructions on how to interact consistently with the participants during all conditions. The special education teacher was the researcher and provided guidelines for the general education teacher. All teachers were responsible for teaching small group lessons. The lessons in reading and language arts involved learning about letters and letter sounds, with activities including writing, tracing, drawing, colouring, matching items, cutting and pasting. The mathematics lessons included learning about shapes and numbers zero to 10, with activities including writing, tracing, colouring, counting, matching items, cutting and pasting.

The classroom was set up with all 17 inclusion students seated at three mixed-ability level tables with approximately four to five students per table. Each student had their own designated seat, chair and materials. Small groups were then ability-grouped and instruction occurred at teacher tables so that reading, language arts and mathematics instruction could be differentiated for students. The participants for this study were in the same group for this type of targeted instruction. The table used for the study was a kidney-shaped table which allowed the researcher to easily observe all the students as they were seated. During the study, participants were separated from each other, with a student who was not participating seated next to them, to minimise the chance for observational learning of the self-monitoring procedures. Non-participants were completing the same tasks as the participants but they were not using the self-monitoring procedures and materials.

**Materials**

The researcher utilised the weekly teacher observation checklist during baseline, intervention and maintenance to mark the classroom-preparedness behaviours she observed for the participating students during the session. The teacher checklist was printed on a 21.6 × 27.9 cm (8 ½ × 11 inch) sheet of paper with one page per week. The teacher checklists were stored in a folder inside the researcher’s filing cabinet so that she could keep them secure and access them each day. The folders were stored in a box behind the special education teacher’s table.

Classroom reinforcers were not specific to this study and were implemented by the teachers as part of their everyday routine and class discipline system. Specifically, the teachers provided all students with the opportunity to earn stickers and other incentives for good behaviour during small group activities. Each student had three Unifix® cubes at the start of each session. If students did not behave appropriately, a cube was taken away and a reward was then unavailable. If they lost all three cubes, a consequence was given according to the classroom discipline system. The classroom discipline system consisted of a multicoloured board with an indicator clip for each student to use to monitor their classroom behaviours during instruction. For example, if a student exhibited an inappropriate and/or off-task behaviour, the teacher asked the student to move their clip on the board from green, which represented the student was on-task and engaged in instruction and the student could receive an incentive to purple (a warning); to yellow (a five-minute time-out in the room); to orange (a five-minute time-out in another room); and finally to red, which resulted in a referral to the office each time they broke a classroom rule. All special education students were provided with rule reminders and redirection in accordance to their individualised education plan so they would not be disciplined unfairly due to their disability.

**Dependent variable and recording procedures**

The individual percentage of compliance to classroom-preparedness skills for each student served as the dependent variable in the study. The researcher used a teacher observation checklist to measure the behaviours for all participants for each session. The checklist measured two target behaviours that were identified by the general education teacher as being essential to demonstrating classroom preparedness. The behaviours were operationally defined before baseline conditions with input provided from the general education teacher. They included ‘listening to directions’—defined as the student seated with eyes on the teacher and quietly listening (not talking or making noises)—and ‘repeating directions’ to the teacher—defined as the student verbally describing a set of two-step directions. If there was more than one set of two-step directions then a successful target behaviour was calculated if more than 50% of the directions were repeated correctly. Prompting was
defined to mean that the teacher should provide no more than two verbal prompts to the student for target behaviours in baseline or intervention procedures. The teacher may use visual prompts or explain a picture on the checklist as needed to ensure that the student was following the self-monitoring procedures correctly.

A percentage score was used for the dependent variable. Percentage of compliance provided an appropriate measure to compare classroom-preparedness behaviours. The percentage of compliance was calculated by dividing the total number of displayed behaviours by the total number of possible target behaviours and then multiplying by 100.

All items on the checklist were recorded during small group instruction sessions immediately following a whole group skill instruction in reading, language arts or mathematics instruction. In the small groups, the teacher reviewed a topic, taught and modelled a skill, provided an opportunity for group practice and then assigned an independent practice activity. For every baseline, intervention and maintenance session, the researcher recorded the student’s behaviour by marking a ‘+’ or ‘–’ for each target behaviour and then recorded the percentage of compliance. Generalisation behaviours were recorded during maintenance conditions without student use of the checklist.

**Experimental design**

A multiple-baseline-across-participants design (Alberto & Troutman, 2009) was used to assess the effectiveness and maintenance of the self-monitoring procedure. The design evaluated experimental control by predicting that selected participants were functionally independent (to avoid co-variation) and functionally similar (to avoid inconsistent effects). This allowed for the demonstration of a replication of effect across the tiers. The multiple-baseline design evaluated threats to internal validity such as history, maturation and testing by staggering the introduction of the independent variable across tiers. Variability of data threats were addressed in this design by incorporating baseline and intervention criteria that must be met before beginning the next condition. Instrumentation threats were addressed by including inter-observer agreement (IOA) data. Adaptation threats were addressed before the study as students were familiar with the researcher who was also an inclusion teacher in the classroom. Procedural integrity was evaluated to increase the confidence of the results.

Internal validity was addressed in two ways. It was first demonstrated through direct inter-subject replication of the effects of the independent variable consistently in the data patterns (level and trend) across the participants in the study. The number of participants provided three demonstrations of effect each across three points in time. External validity was also demonstrated by the extent to which this study was an effective systematic replication of previous studies using the same independent variable to measure similar behaviours but with a different researcher, in a new setting, and with different participants.

**All conditions**

The number of sessions for all conditions including baseline, intervention and maintenance was determined by stable responding for at least three consecutive data points. There were one to two sessions per day and the researcher was able to observe each session. The sessions occurred after whole group instruction in either reading and language arts or mathematics in the general education classroom. There were some variations in length of the sessions, but each session was timed for a maximum of 30 minutes per student. A procedural integrity checklist was utilised by the researcher to maintain consistency in the steps required for all conditions.

During all conditions the participants were provided with the same prompts for preparedness behaviours as were provided to all other students in the classroom. Individualised education plan accommodations were addressed and any excessive prompting that occurred was required to be recorded by the researcher on the procedural integrity checklist. The standard classroom reinforcers and discipline system were in effect for all conditions.

**Generalisation assessment procedures**

The researcher used the same teacher checklist to observe the classroom-preparedness behaviours across all content areas (reading, language arts and mathematics instruction).

**Baseline procedures**

All the students had been taught the expected behaviours for preparing for class work before recording baseline conditions. After operational definitions for target behaviours were agreed upon and participants were selected, baseline for each participant began. The purpose of the baseline phase was to assess the initial level of classroom preparedness that each student demonstrated without excessive prompting from teachers. Stable baseline data was defined as three consecutive data points with a median below 50%. During baseline, the general education teacher, paraprofessional and researcher agreed not to excessively prompt any participant of the study for preparedness behaviours. Excessive prompting was defined as more than two reminders per behaviour. Teachers could intervene in a typical fashion during problematic situations (Gureasko-Moore
et al., 2007) according to the standard classroom discipline requirements. Participants did not use the self-monitoring checklist. They were not familiar with it or trained in its use. After stable baseline was assessed for one participant, the intervention began for that participant, while behaviours of other participants in baseline conditions continued to be measured. All participants had to meet stable baseline criteria to begin intervention according to procedures outlined below.

**Intervention procedures**

During intervention, each student was expected to meet an established criterion for mastery. Mastery was defined as meeting 100% of demonstrated target behaviours for three consecutive days. The first student began intervention after stable baseline data was demonstrated. Intervention for the second student whose pre-intervention data was stable began once the first student met the mastery criterion. Once the mastery criterion was met for student two, intervention began for the third student in the same manner. Intervention continued for all three participants until all met the mastery criterion.

Intervention for each student began with a training session on the first day following baseline. Data from this training session was not recorded. The participant was introduced to the self-monitoring checklist. An explanation was provided for why the student would be allowed to self-monitor his behaviour. The researcher let the student know that he could improve his good behaviour and earn rewards in small group activities. This was according to standard classroom reinforcement procedures and did not go above and beyond in rewarding the participants. The researcher explained that the student would use the checklist so that he could remember to use his good behaviour and keep all his Unifix® cubes. The participant was instructed to keep the checklist taped to his desk and encouraged not to share it with others. The notebook was given to the student and he was told where it would be stored each day. The self-evaluation graph and the purpose of self-evaluation were explained: ‘You can see your progress each day’. The student was taught how to record his success on the graph. All self-monitoring procedures including recording and evaluation were modelled for the student by the researcher. The student then completed a sample checklist and a sample evaluation graph on his own as a practice exercise.

The researcher checked for understanding after the session. The student was required to explain what each picture meant and to demonstrate the behaviour again. If the participant had questions about the picture prompts, he could be reminded by the researcher. If he was not actively recording, he could be reminded to record. The student completed his self-recording card and received help to record the evaluation graph after each session. The researcher also monitored the session and recorded each behaviour as it occurred on the teacher checklist. These intervention procedures continued over consecutive sessions until the criterion had been met for the intervention for each student.

**Maintenance procedures**

After the intervention phase was completed, two maintenance probes were taken for all of the students once a week for two weeks. The teacher followed baseline procedures during the maintenance probes (that is, no checklists were provided to the students).

**Social validity**

Social validity data was obtained using a survey completed by the general education teacher to assess how the participants compared to their peers before and after intervention for each student. The pre- and post-intervention survey allowed for a side-by-side comparison of rating scores for each participant. This social validity measure helped to assess treatment acceptability by the teachers and if they felt the intervention resulted in significant and important behaviour changes for their students. A second level of social validity was taken by assessing the participants’ attitudes towards self-monitoring of classroom-preparedness skills. After the intervention, the students were given a survey to complete orally which asked how they felt about the self-monitoring intervention.

**Reliability**

A special education paraprofessional trained by the researcher on the specific procedures observed the experimental conditions in order to obtain IOA data. The paraprofessional used a copy of the teacher checklist during her observations. She was trained to identify the target behaviours and to understand the operational definitions for each behaviour. IOA data was gathered by the paraprofessional for a minimum of 25% of the sessions and included at least one check during each condition: (a) baseline, (b) intervention and (c) maintenance for each participant. Point-by-point reliability data was collected by dividing the number of agreements by the number of agreements and disagreements combined.

Procedural integrity was measured by the researcher using a task analysis checklist incorporating all the steps of the condition completed for all sessions during baseline, intervention and maintenance. The number of steps that were followed correctly was totalled, and a
Results

Jake scored a mean of 0% on his baseline target behaviours for all three sessions. He experienced some variability in his scores for the first six sessions of intervention with a mean of 58% and a median score of 50% before stabilising at a 100% for each of the last six sessions and scored 100% on both maintenance checks.

Jonas scored a mean of 25% with some variability of scores (three sessions at 0% and three sessions at 50%) during baseline. He scored at 50% for the first two sessions of intervention before he levelled off at 100% for each of the remaining six sessions and scored 100% on both maintenance checks.

Kareem scored a mean of 12.5% and a median score of 0% for 12 sessions of baseline. He had consistent scores of 0% for the first six baseline sessions and then variability in scores (three sessions at 0% and three sessions at 50%) for the next six sessions. Kareem scored a 100% for each of his three intervention sessions and for both maintenance checks. Data from the mathematics sessions 3, 6, and 12 did not appear to vary from the data collected during the reading and language arts sessions. The graphs in Figure 1 demonstrate the percentage of compliance to classroom-preparedness skills for each session and condition for all three participants.

Visual analysis

Similar to the data analysis procedures used by Creel et al. (2006), data was visually analysed according to the guidelines described by Alberto and Troutman (2009) to determine if a functional relationship existed between

Figure 1. Percentage of compliance for classroom-preparedness behaviours across baseline, intervention and maintenance conditions for all three participants

Note: Sessions 3, 6, and 12 were mathematics, while all other sessions were reading and language arts.
the independent and dependent variables. Level and trend data was evaluated for this study within conditions (baseline, intervention, maintenance), between conditions (baseline to intervention, intervention to maintenance) and across similar conditions (baseline to maintenance).

Within conditions
Level stability was determined for each participant in baseline before beginning the intervention and then again before ending the intervention condition. The maintenance condition exhibited level stability at 100% for all participants.

Level change was calculated using absolute level change and relative level change methods. Absolute level change within a condition is the difference between the first and last data points of a condition. This provides a gross measure of level change. Relative level change within each condition was calculated by dividing the data path in half to find the difference between the median values. If data patterns were variable, trend direction was estimated within each condition using the split-middle method as referred to in Alberto and Troutman (2009). Level change calculations identified zero-celeration or stability of the data within the baseline condition for Jake. Jonas experienced some variability with his scores as compared to Jake during baseline. Kareem experienced an accelerating trend of data points at the end of his baseline which may have been due to observational learning since he was the last participant to begin intervention. Level change within the intervention condition indicated an accelerating trend for all participants in a therapeutic direction.

Between conditions
The immediacy of the effect from baseline to intervention was important to analysing the functional relationship of the independent variable as it affects the dependent variable. Level change was calculated using absolute and relative level change methods. Absolute level change between conditions was measured as the difference between the last data point of the first condition and the first data point of the adjacent condition. All participants experienced a 50% absolute level change from baseline to intervention. Relative level change was calculated by comparing the median values for the second half of the data in the first condition with the first half of the data in the adjacent condition. An abrupt level change from baseline to intervention is preferable. In this study, we expected we might see a more gradual change as the training period for intervention was short and students may have needed more time to adjust to the procedures. This adjustment period was seen with Jake and Jonas when they began intervention. Jake experienced improvement for three sessions followed by a regression in scores for two sessions and then another improvement before a steady period of success at 100%. Relative level change for Jake was calculated at 58%. Jonas experienced no clear level change for the first two sessions and then a jump to 100% for the remaining sessions. Relative level change for Jonas was calculated at 58%. Kareem experienced a more abrupt and immediate change from baseline to intervention. Relative level change for Kareem was calculated at 75%.

Percentage of overlap was an additional measure to analyse data between conditions to provide a sense of the magnitude of the change. Percentage of overlap was calculated by determining the range of the data in the first condition, counting the number of data points in the adjacent condition that fall within the range of the first condition, and dividing that number by the total number of data points in the adjacent condition and multiplying by 100 (Alberto & Troutman, 2009). The percentage of overlap between conditions for the participants in the current study was low (8% for Jake, 25% for Jonas, 0% for Kareem) which indicates a high magnitude of change.

Across similar conditions
The data in baseline and maintenance conditions were analysed for changes in level and trend. While the conditions were similar (no checklist), the magnitude of the level change was clearly high as the percentage of overlap was 0% for all three participants. All participants improved from 0–50% levels to 100% levels.

Social validity
Table 3 illustrates the scores for each student as well as teacher comments from the pre- and post-intervention survey. The data shows a decrease in scores for all students, which indicates an increase in classroom-preparedness skills. All three students indicated they liked the intervention and that the self-monitoring helped them improve their skills in listening as reported on Table 4.

Reliability
A total of eight reliability checks out of 17 sessions (47%) were recorded for Jake; seven reliability checks out of 16 sessions (44%) were recorded for Jonas; and seven reliability checks out of 17 sessions (41%) were recorded for Kareem. IOA for all sessions for all participants averaged 98% with only one behaviour disagreement recorded for the seventh session with Jake. Procedural integrity during the baseline, intervention and maintenance phases was very high (100% for all conditions).
Table 3. Pre- and post-Intervention preparedness scores by student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pre-intervention</th>
<th>Post-intervention</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Comments</th>
<th>Post-intervention Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>‘Has problems listening to and following directions’; ‘he often watches others, fidgets and plays’; ‘rarely begins work without several reminders’</td>
<td>‘Doing a great job repeating directions’; ‘he is beginning to look at the teacher when directions are given’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>‘A talker’, ‘often wanders around the room during independent work’; ‘needs several reminders for directions, starting, and finishing assignments’</td>
<td>‘Looks at the teacher when she is giving instructions’; ‘he is beginning to stay in his seat to finish his work’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareem</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>‘Often struggles to complete multi-step tasks’; ‘often sits and watches others first before beginning assignments’; ‘rarely asks for help’</td>
<td>‘He has started listening first before he begins an assignment’; ‘will ask questions when he doesn’t understand’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Creel et al., 2006. Maximum score is 25.

Table 4. Student responses to post-intervention survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Do you feel that your checklist helped you? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Yeah. Because you helped me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you learn by keeping your checklist?</td>
<td>Telling you the words back. Look at the teacher so you don’t just sit there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you remember to listen and follow directions now that you don’t use your checklist anymore?</td>
<td>Better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>You got to look at the pictures. Make checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What didn’t you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>Sometimes I forgot what’s on the checklist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>Do you feel that your checklist helped you? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Yes. Because I wanted to get the checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you learn by keeping your checklist?</td>
<td>To raise your hand to tell the teacher something. To look at the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you remember to listen and follow directions now that you don’t use your checklist anymore?</td>
<td>I remembered how to look at you because I learned on the checklist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>I like to look at you. The checklist helped me do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What didn’t you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>No, I just liked the whole thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareem</td>
<td>Do you feel that your checklist helped you? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Yes. (Nodded head to answer why.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you learn by keeping your checklist?</td>
<td>Looking at the teacher. Tell the teacher the directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you remember to listen and follow directions now that you don’t use your checklist anymore?</td>
<td>Good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What did you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>Pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What didn’t you like about the checklist?</td>
<td>Nothing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Creel et al., 2006.
Discussion

This study replicates and extends previous research that demonstrates the positive effects of self-monitoring for various behaviours exhibited by students with mild disabilities. Similar to previous research by Creel et al. (2006), the students showed an increase in their classroom-preparedness skills once the self-monitoring procedure was implemented in the classroom. The visual analysis of the data suggests that the self-monitoring intervention was effective for all three of the students at risk for developmental disabilities and a functional relationship can therefore be hypothesised between the use of self-monitoring and students’ compliance with the classroom-preparedness skills. The data analysis also revealed students were able to generalise the skill to more than one content area and maintain these skills after the self-monitoring intervention was removed.

The present study also bolsters the external validity for the self-monitoring procedure by systematically replicating the Creel et al. (2006) study and by demonstrating that the intervention can be successful for kindergarten students at risk for developmental disabilities. Social validity was confirmed by the teachers and students which added to the social and applied significance of the intervention. Procedural integrity data strengthened the level of experimental control exhibited in this study. Internal validity was further established with high IOA scores. While not a focus of this investigation, the accuracy of student recording could have easily been monitored and recorded, however student productivity was not measured in this study.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the lack of generalisation data which leads to some questions for future research. Did response generalisation occur for having materials ready, remaining on task and completing work? Can the skills be generalised to different classroom settings such as art, physical education and music? Can kindergarten students use self-monitoring to help them stay focused during whole group lessons? Can teachers provide, and will students benefit from, checklists with picture prompts to learn the behaviours involved in learning to read? Also, the study did not assess more than two classroom-preparedness behaviours. The two behaviours chosen to monitor were considered the starting point for student preparedness. The researcher felt that due to their young age the students may have been overwhelmed with more than two behaviours to track. Perhaps future research should monitor more behaviours at one time. Another limitation to the generality of this study is that it does not provide data for maintenance over long periods of time. Due to time constraints, maintenance checks were completed once a week for two weeks following intervention.

Future research

Future studies should assess for maintenance by collecting data over a longer period of time. Also, the students’ behaviours may have been reinforced by the teacher assisting them during the evaluation component. While the study does not intend to provide reinforcement for the self-monitoring activity, some students may find the attention from a teacher to be reinforcing when they complete the checklist or fill out the progress monitoring sheet. As a result, future research should explore if students can remember how they did without the progress sheet.

Finally, future research is warranted on the various types of learning styles of these students. It may be that self-monitoring interventions help students who are visual or kinesthetic learners more than students who are auditory learners. Future research should address this issue of learning-style assessments to select students for participation in future studies.

Conclusions

In sum, this study supports that the use of a self-monitoring procedure can be an effective intervention to implement in the classroom with very young students at risk for developmental disabilities that are first learning to regulate their own behaviours. Self-monitoring is an important skill to encourage as it can lead to greater levels of motivation and engagement in student learning. Classroom-preparedness skills such as listening, repeating directions, being organised and staying on task during instruction are necessary to succeed in any academic environment including primary school classrooms. With the use of a self-monitoring procedure, teachers can focus more on the academic lessons without spending as much time prompting students who are unsure of how to follow directions that have been explained but not memorised for completion. Students who use this type of intervention may benefit by experiencing a greater level of independence and pride in their own academic accomplishments.

References


Working together for Toby: Early childhood student teachers engaging in collaborative problem-based learning around child abuse and neglect

Ann Farrell
Kerryann Walsh
Queensland University of Technology

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION programs have a responsibility, amongst many, to prepare teachers for decision making on real world issues, such as child abuse and neglect. Their repertoire of skills can be enhanced by engaging with others, either face-to-face or online, in authentic problem-based learning. This paper draws on a study of early childhood student teachers who engaged in an authentic learning experience, which was to consider and to suggest how they would act upon a real-life case of child abuse encountered in an early childhood classroom in Queensland. This was the case of Toby (a pseudonym), who was suspected of being physically abused at home. Students drew upon relevant legislation, policy and resource materials to tackle Toby’s case. The paper provides evidence of students grappling with the complexity of a child abuse case and establishing, through collaboration with others, a proactive course of action. The paper has a dual focus. First, it discusses the pedagogical context in which early childhood student teachers deal with issues of child abuse and neglect in the course of their teacher education program. Second, it examines evidence of students engaging in collaborative problem solving around issues of child abuse and neglect and teachers’ responsibilities, both legal and professional, to the children and families they work with. Early childhood policy-makers, practitioners and teacher educators are challenged to consider how early childhood teachers are best equipped to deal with child protection and early intervention.

Background

Child abuse and neglect is an area of serious concern for many Australians, not least of all for early childhood teachers whose work involves close and daily interaction with children who may present with signs of abuse. The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2009) noted 317,526 reports of child abuse and neglect for the period 2007–08, an 8 per cent increase in the number of finalised investigations since the previous reporting period (2005–06). Queensland contributed 14 per cent to the nation’s 55,120 substantiations, second only to New South Wales at 61 per cent (AIHW, 2009).

A growing body of research is demonstrating the importance of teachers in dealing with child abuse and neglect (see Baginsky, 2007; Laskey, 2009; Mathews & Kenny, 2008; Mathews, Walsh, Rassafiani, Butler & Farrell, 2009; Walsh, Bridgstock, Farrell, Rassafiani & Schweitzer, 2008; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001). There is also a small but expanding literature on preservice and neophyte teachers and their knowledge needs in dealing with the issues (Baginsky, 2003; Baginsky & McPherson, 2005; Goldman, 2007; Laskey, 2005). Such evidence points to the urgent need for teacher education programs that address teachers’ knowledge needs and, thus, better prepare them for work in this area.

In light of the seriousness of the problem of child abuse and neglect and the important role of teachers in dealing with it, a study was conducted within the School of Early Childhood at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to provide student teachers with an authentic real-world case relevant to the teacher’s work of detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect. It drew upon contemporary approaches to problem-centred, collaborative learning, using online and face-to-face activities as vehicles for promoting students’ knowledge and confidence in dealing with a real-world issue (cf. Jonassen, Howland, Morre & Marra, 2003; Rosenberg, 2001; Svetcov, 2000). The study was located...
in the first year of a four-year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) program within a foundation unit of study, Families and Childhods (EAB002). We invited students into either an online space or a face-to-face space to (voluntarily) collaborate, grapple with and reflect upon an authentic problem—the case of Toby—a hypothetical yet typical case of a child suspected of being physically abused at home.

The Toby study was part of a larger university-wide project, Collaborative Online Problem Solving (COPS) that combined problem-centred and collaborative aspects of learning in higher education (Edwards, Watson, Farrell & Nash, 2008). The broader project provided opportunities for undergraduate learners to collaborate as they engaged with and made sense of authentic problems within an online environment in order to bridge the gap between the classroom and real-world experience.

The importance of teachers and teacher training in child abuse and neglect

The clear message from research and from conventional wisdom is that teachers and teacher training are critically important in responding to child abuse and neglect. Despite the message, there has been considerable confusion, on the ground, as to how, when and under what circumstances teachers should act. The confusion around the responsibilities of teachers, in law and policy, has been exacerbated by the range of legislative and policy contexts in which teachers work. Australia, as a federated system, has a wide range of jurisdiction-based legislative and policy frameworks (see Table 1 for a summary of child protection acts in Australia). (See also the 2008 review conducted by Mathews and Kenny in relation to mandatory reporting legislation in Australia, Canada and the United States.)

Table I: Principal child protection acts in each Australian state and territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Principal Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services)</td>
<td>• Children and Young People Act 1999 (ACT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relevant Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption Act 1993 (ACT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Principal Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Department of Community Services)</td>
<td>• Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relevant Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Amendment (Parental Responsibility Contracts) Act 2006 (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998 (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Principal Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Family and Children's Services, Department of Health and Community Services)</td>
<td>• Community Welfare Act 1983 (NT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relevant Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Care and Protection of Children Draft Act (NT) (currently before Cabinet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Principal Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Children's and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000 (Qld)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other relevant Acts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption of Children Act 1964 (Qld)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public Health Act 2005 (Qld)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption of Children Act 1964 (Qld)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(See also the 2008 review conducted by Mathews and Kenny in relation to mandatory reporting legislation in Australia, Canada and the United States.)
In turn, different reporting laws in different jurisdictions usually mean that teachers have different legislative duties regarding child abuse (Mathews et al., 2006). By way of example, for the period 2000 to 2006, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) recorded marked jurisdictional differences relating to the rates of notification, investigation and substantiation likely emanating from different legislative frameworks. Moreover, sometimes confusing, if not conflicting, legislative and policy frameworks, even within the one jurisdiction, may also exacerbate the difficulties faced by teachers in identifying and responding appropriately to child abuse within the orbit of their professional practice.

Within this legislative and policy context, a few Australian studies have begun to investigate the knowledge base of teachers in respect of children who may be at risk or who have experienced child abuse and neglect (cf. Mathews et al., 2009; Walsh & Farrell, 2008; Walsh et al., 2008). In Australia, teachers spend more time daily with children who may be abused than any other adult, apart from those in the child’s family. It stands, therefore, that teachers have remained, for the period 2004–2008, among the most common sources of notifications for investigation of child abuse cases (AIHW, 2006; AIHW, 2009).

Given that the presence and work of teachers are salient in child protection, what knowledge, skills and strategies do teachers need in order to do their work? What part does teacher education play and what do preservice teachers need to know as they begin to exercise their professional responsibilities regarding child abuse and neglect? These questions helped to inform our study of early childhood student teachers, as they grappled with the case of Toby and with the relevant legislation and policy requirements.

Evaluative studies of the training of teachers in child protection show that teachers need reliable knowledge of child abuse (and its indicators) and they need interaction with their colleagues (Baginsky, 2000; Baginsky, 2003; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). The importance of professionals collaborating in the face of suspected abuse is highlighted also by the premier international child protection body, the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (2008) in its International Training Project. Thus the dual aspects of knowledge of child abuse and collaboration with others were used as pivotal features of the Toby study.

### The importance of collaborative learning for early childhood student teachers

A research review conducted by Edwards et al. (2008) (spanning the past 30 years) shows that university students learn better by collaboration and problem solving than by passive reception and acceptance.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Australia</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principal Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Families SA; Department for</td>
<td>• Children’s Protection Act 1993 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families and Communities)</td>
<td><strong>Other relevant Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Young Offenders Act 1994 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption Act 1988 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s Protection Regulations 2006 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family and Community Services Act 1972 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasmania</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principal Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Department of Health and Human</td>
<td>• Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (Tas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services)</td>
<td><strong>Other relevant Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principal Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Children Protection and</td>
<td>• Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Justice Branch;</td>
<td><strong>Other relevant Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Human Services)</td>
<td>• Working with Children Act (Vic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Australia</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principal Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Department for Community</td>
<td>• Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development, now the Department</td>
<td><strong>Other relevant Acts:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Child Protection)</td>
<td>• Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Court Act 1997 (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adoption Act 1994 (WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Government/AIFS (2008)
of information (cf. Chen, Chung & Crane, 2001; Jonassen, 1995; Savery & Duffy, 1995). Indeed, a sociocultural framework (cf. Rust, O’Donovan & Price, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) used to underpin numerous pedagogical initiatives in this area, highlights the importance of social interaction in authentic learning contexts, thus affording participants the opportunity to see the value of working together to participate in society (O’Neil, Chuang & Chung, 2003) and to pursue the common good (Slavin, 1995).

Laurillard (2002) describes the process of learning as a ‘conversation’ (p. 87) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Laurillard’s (2002) learning framework

This conversational framework is seen to operate as an iterative dialogue, which is discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective. The study’s findings, discussed later in the paper, demonstrate that students valued the opportunity for in-depth dialogue, interaction and collaboration in tackling, working through and reflecting upon a real-world scenario of child abuse.

Coupled with the upsurge of collaborative problem-based learning has been the onset of the digital age and e-learning in higher education (cf. Rosenberg, 2001; Svetcov, 2000; Vrasidas, 2004; Yam 2004). Within the global e-learning environment, tertiary students are encouraged to engage in meaningful learning relevant to their lived experience. Further, such learning is seen to be most effective when it is co-constructed, authentic and collaborative (Jonassen et al., 2003).

The digital age has afforded students opportunities, hitherto unknown, to engage with others online. Cox and Cox (2008) identified the importance of students’ cooperation and connectedness in online learning. Further research on both face-to-face and online learning highlighted the merit of well-defined protocols, expectations and parameters for collaboration (Saritas, 2008), and clear specification of the problem to be solved (Tutty & Klein, 2007). Furthermore, there has been a significant uptake of scenario-based interactive learning such as that investigated in the Toby study in both school and university contexts (cf. SBL® Interactive, 2008).

Conceptual understandings drawn from this small yet growing body of literature dealing with collaborative learning coalesced to inform the design of the work undertaken within the Toby study (cf. Edwards & Hammer, 2006; Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser & O’Hara, 2006).

The Toby study

The Toby study was a multi-method, quasi-experimental study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) conducted with early childhood students enrolled in the first year unit of a four-year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) teacher education program. We used a two-group, pre-test–post-test comparison to ascertain their learning in the case of Toby. Throughout the study we undertook to adhere to the ethical principles agreed upon in the approval issued by the University Human Research Ethics Committee, with particular attention to respect for persons, confidentiality, honesty and integrity (NHMRC, 2007).

Participants

All students \((n = 157)\) enrolled in a first-year families and childhoods studies unit in the four-year course were invited to participate in a problem-based tutorial focusing on the case of Toby, a boy suspected of being physically abused at home. Eighty-one students volunteered to participate in the tutorial and complete the pre-test evaluation (response rate of 52%). Forty-four students completed the post-test evaluation (response rate of 28%). Reasons for this discrepancy may relate to the use and user-friendliness of the technology rather than to patterns of natural attrition.

The first-year cohort was a relatively homogenous group of predominantly female students (96.8%) who were under 24 years of age (86.6%). More than half of the first-year cohort (53.5%) had previous experience of post-secondary education, comprising study at university (33.8%) and TAFE (19.7%). Almost four in every 10 students were school-leavers (38.2%) and, although seemingly low, this figure is higher than our faculty first-year enrolments overall, constituting only 20.6 per cent school-leavers. This was the students’ first unit to deal specifically with child abuse.
The 81 participating students were randomly allocated to one of four groups: Online 1 (13 students), Online 2 (13 students), Online 3 (14 students), and the face-to-face group (41 students) (see Figure 2). Groups were not matched on extraneous variables such as ability, grade-point average or previous experience with child abuse and neglect cases (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2005).

A tutorial was conducted synchronously with all students, irrespective of their group, working on the tutorial at the same time, either in parallel computer laboratories for the online groups or in a media-equipped classroom for the face-to-face group. The tutorial was conducted over two weeks in two-hour sessions (four hours in total) and a tutor was present with each group for the duration.

Measures

Measures were designed to address the key questions:

1. Was there a significant difference between students’ self-rated confidence and knowledge scores before and after the tutorial?
2. Was there a significant difference between online and face-to-face groups’ self-rated confidence and knowledge scores before and after the tutorial?
3. What were the positives and negatives of the tutorial experience for the students?
4. What did the students learn?

Participants completed a 10-minute, 12-item pre- and post-test questionnaire before and after the tutorial. Items included open-ended and Likert-type rating scale questions to generate student views about their:

- previous experience collaborating online and in problem-based learning
- estimation of difficulty for collaborating
- proficiency in the use of technology at university
- preference for online or face-to-face learning modes
- positives and negatives of the learning task
- confidence in identifying indicators of child abuse
- confidence in ability to report child abuse
- knowledge of indicators of child abuse
- knowledge about the process for reporting child abuse
- recall of warning signs of child abuse, reporting duty and processes for reporting.

By way of example, to evaluate students’ preparedness to engage online and to collaborate to solve problems, we asked them, in the pre-test, how proficient they were with technology (on a scale of 1 very non-proficient to 5 very proficient) and to predict how easy they thought it would be to collaborate with others on this task (on a scale of 1 very easy to 5 very hard). In the post-test we asked them to reassess their ‘ease-of-collaboration’ rating. To evaluate their collaborative learning, groups of students submitted a final report outlining their collective response to the problem. Finally, students were asked an open-ended question about the positives and negatives of their respective online and face-to-face modes.

A description of the learning task

The learning task was framed for use within either the face-to-face tutorial or the online tutorial in consultation with the university’s teaching specialist and online learning advisors. Students in the face-to-face group were guided through the tutorial with a series of PowerPoint slides that paralleled the ground covered by their online counterparts. The tutorial was
set to be released to the students only at the time of its presentation. For the online groups, the tutorial comprised a sequential series of screens containing information and instructions as follows:

Figure 3: Screen capture of learning task

Screen 1: Welcome and information about the learning task

Screen 2: Link to online pre-test

Screen 3: The case of Toby

Screen 4: Self-allocation to online/face-to-face collaborative groups

Screen 5: Information customised for groups

Screen 6: Final report submission

Screen 7: Link to online post-test.

A welcome message and a pre-test evaluation on Screens 1 and 2 preceded Screen 3, which featured the case of Toby and outlined the learning task:

On various occasions, a seven-year old boy has come to school with noticeable bruises on his face, arms and/or legs. The facial bruises are usually around the eye or cheek area. The bruises on the arm/or leg are rectangular and oblong. Although the boy sometimes gets into fights at school, each fight has quickly ended without visible injury. You have met the parents at parent–teacher conferences and they usually seem interested and cooperative. The boy often gets very upset, particularly when disciplined by an adult. When other students get upset or angry, this boy seems oddly fascinated and concerned, particularly when an adult needs to intervene. You are the teacher and you are trying to establish if the child has been abused and what, if anything, you and/or your school should do about it.

After reading about Toby, online students self-allocated to collaborative groups on Screen 4. These groups comprised three students, one from each computer laboratory, such that the members of the group were physically separated. Their allocation to different computer rooms meant that communication occurred via electronic means only.

Students in the face-to-face classroom divided into collaborative groups with three–four members, as would occur in a typical discussion or activity-based tutorial.

On Screen 5, each group member was presented with a customised set of electronic resources with access restricted to those in the group. As well, each group member was allocated an initial task to focus their attention and facilitate interaction.

**Student 1** had access to Toby’s hypothetical school records and artefacts, information about indicators of child abuse and details about the short and long-term consequences of child abuse. Their task was to:

Write a summary of the material you have here. In doing so, answer the question: What type of abuse could Toby be exposed to, what are the signs, and what are the possible consequences for him? Justify your answer.

**Student 2** had access to relevant school-based child protection policy and legislation, and a key reading to place these documents in context. Their task was to:

Write a summary of your impressions of the material you have here. In doing so, answer the question: How prevalent is child abuse in Australia and how is it managed? Justify your answer.

**Student 3** had access to public domain newspaper articles featuring stories about child abuse cases, government statistics about the incidence of child abuse and details about services available to assist families experiencing child abuse. Their task was to:

Write a summary of the information you have here. In doing so, answer the question: What are Queensland teachers’ reporting obligations in cases such as Toby’s? Justify your answer.

The face-to-face groups were organised in the same way, with identical resources and tasks in hard copy.

Online students communicated their responses to each other online (and from different computer rooms) in their attempt to piece together the puzzle. At Screen 6 each online collaborative group lodged a final report ‘establishing if they thought Toby had been abused and what, if anything, they and their school should do about it’. Students in the face-to-face groups submitted a handwritten hard copy report. In the final step, all participants completed a post-test evaluation.
Data analysis

Pre- and post-test data was analysed by calculating and aggregating student responses on an Excel spreadsheet. An independent samples t-test was utilised having two groups (face-to-face and online) and within groups measures (pre- and post-test) for confidence and knowledge. Final reports were analysed using assessment of learning and content analysis techniques. Qualitative content analysis was used to ascertain patterns in the students’ decision-making and action.

Findings

Pre- and post-test findings are examined now in relation to the key questions identified earlier in the paper.

1. Was there a significant difference between students’ self-rated confidence and knowledge scores before and after the tutorial?

Students’ self-rated knowledge and confidence increased as a result of participating in the problem-based tutorial. A series of t-tests for independent samples revealed that mean post-test scores were significantly higher than mean pre-test scores across all four self-rated confidence and knowledge scores: confidence in ability to identify indicators ($t_{124} = –6.744, p < 0.001$); confidence in ability to report ($t_{124} = –4.880, p < 0.001$); knowledge about indicators ($t_{124} = –5.822, p < 0.001$); and knowledge about reporting ($t_{124} = –8.716, p < 0.001$). This indicates that the collaborative problem-based tutorial was successful in increasing students’ self-rated confidence and knowledge.

It is noteworthy that the majority (79%) of students had previous experience collaborating online (64 out of a possible 81) for the purpose of university study, for social networking and, to a lesser extent, for paid employment. Students rated their proficiency with technology at university highly with 77.8% (63 out of 81) indicating they were proficient or very proficient. On average, students’ self-assessment of their skill level with technology was approaching proficient (mean of 3.98 on a five-point scale, SD 0.63). On average, students predicted that it would be relatively easy to collaborate in the tutorial (mean 2.43, SD 0.87).

2. Was there a significant difference between online and face-to-face groups’ self-rated confidence and knowledge scores before and after the tutorial?

To investigate the influence of group type and time of test, a new variable was created with four categories: i) face-to-face pre-test; ii) online pre-test; ii) face-to-face post-test; and iv) online post-test. Four separate one-way anova tests were used to identify differences between these groups in self-rated confidence and knowledge scores. Results illustrate that groups were significantly different in all confidence and knowledge domains ($p < 0.001$). The means for the online post-test group were the highest in all confidence and knowledge ratings.

3. What were the positives and negatives of the tutorial experience for the students?

As anticipated, students provided a plethora of qualitative responses regarding the positive and negatives of their tutorial experience, be it face to face or online.

The face-to-face students overwhelmingly agreed that their mode afforded them more efficient, instantaneous feedback and more in-depth personal interaction. One respondent identified the opportunity to ‘understand others in the group more easily, body language and sort out misunderstandings’ (F17). Picking up the notion of equity, another respondent saw the face-to-face mode as ‘an even playing field for those who are at different levels of computer/online technology’ (F38). As for the negatives of the face-to-face mode, there was a common view that there may be undue pressure to share ideas and there may be the possibility of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. As one student put it, ‘People can perceive what you are trying to say differently. You can’t “backspace” what you say’ (F41).

Table 2: Students’ self-rated confidence and knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in ability to identify indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.806</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>–6.744</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in ability to report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>–4.880</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.576</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>–5.822</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about reporting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>–8.716</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.520</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The online students identified key positives of the online mode, such as access to a broader range of views and people, and more freedom to share views on a sensitive topic than may be afforded by face-to-face collaboration. Online students noted, 'It gives people a voice—people who may be hesitant to speak in groups may feel more at ease to participate online' (O30); and 'Anonymity when discussing a sensitive issue than in a face-to-face situation' (O36). As for the negatives of their online collaboration, a quarter of the students identified skill levels as an inhibitor of effective online participation, with a small percentage noting the possibility that the technology may not necessarily work. For example, 'Technology is sometimes not kind to use and the activity does not work or the equipment malfunctions' (O31). Risk of misinterpretation was also identified: Certain expressions may be misinterpreted. I also prefer face to face, it allows more open conversation' (O19); along with it being less personal than face-to-face: ‘Team members can’t sit down and discuss ideas and issues—no socialisation’ (O8).

The range of responses reveals a range of issues, challenges and opportunities afforded by both face-to-face and online modes of collaboration. It may be that a combination of modes, rather than a singular mode, may afford a greater range of learning opportunities than might otherwise be the case.

Final report findings shed light on the fourth key question:

4. What did the students learn?

Student learning was ascertained through assessment of the collaboratively prepared final group reports according to criteria on a seven-point grading scale traditionally used by the university (1 = lowest failing grade, 7 = highest passing grade). The seven criteria were derived from the tutorial content (correctly identifying the type of abuse; nominating signs of abuse; identifying consequences of abuse; discussing prevalence; explaining how child abuse and neglect is managed; detailing reporting obligations; and accuracy of final decision). Fourteen online collaborative group reports were lodged on the tutorial website and eight face-to-face group reports were handed to the tutor. All the groups obtained at least a passing result (3.5 or higher on a seven-point scale), with the exception of one group who seemed to have experienced technological difficulties with part of the file corrupted.

Ranking the 22 final reports from highest grades to lowest grades enabled us to also examine the final reports quantitatively. This ranking revealed 10 online group reports in the highest 10 positions and seven face-to-face group reports among the 10 poorest reports. Face-to-face and online groups were compared using Mann-Whitney’s test. Although there was no statistical difference ($U = 21.500, Z = −2.365; p = 0.016$), the face-
to-face group had a lower mean rank (7.19) than the online group (13.96). In general, the online reports were longer and more comprehensive than those of the face-to-face group.

Table 4: Group reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
<th>Sum of ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>57.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>195.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The study provides evidence in favour of collaborative student learning and the relative merits of technology in learning, akin to those of the Italian higher education study of Francescato and colleagues (2007). Their study of supported collaborative learning using online and face-to-face approaches with psychology students showed the value of online learning for developing and sustaining professional skills and social ties.

The study’s first two questions addressed the students’ gains in confidence and knowledge as a result of their participation in the collaborative learning activity and sought evidence of differences between the online and face-to-face groups. First, the evident gains in knowledge and confidence point to the merit of students focusing on a real-world problem; having access to relevant information on the problem, its context and requirements; and having opportunity to talk with their peers about their decision making. As such, on the one hand it affirms the work of Edwards and Hammer (2006) on the efficacy of problem-based learning in teacher education, and on the other the work of McKee and Dillenburger (2010 in press) on the training needs of student teachers in child abuse and neglect.

Second, the knowledge gains and confidence were greatest in those from the online post-test group. This invites further investigation of the particular characteristics of the delivery mode, its specific processes and practices, and the fitness of learning task to delivery mode.

The study’s third question addressed the positive and negatives of the tutorial mode. While there was evidence that each mode had merit in terms of student experience and outcomes, the online option highlighted the importance of student skill with online technologies and of the technical reliability and efficacy of particular online resources and tools used in teaching and learning in higher education.

The study’s fourth and final question addressed student learning, as evidenced by collaboratively prepared final reports using a university-recognised scale. While it was gratifying that all qualifying groups obtained a passing result, the more detailed and comprehensive reports of the online groups may well lend weight to the notion that the online process provides great scope for detail and expansion than that afforded face to face.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provided evidence of students grappling with the complexity of the real-world case and establishing, with their peers, a course of action to deal with the problem. The study showed the importance of early childhood student teachers knowing:

- about child abuse and neglect
- how to recognise indicators of child abuse and neglect
- how to act in cases where they suspect child abuse and neglect
- where to turn for information and support in such cases
- how to work with peers in dealing with the issues.

As such, it demonstrates the importance of systematic training in sensitive issues so as to improve teacher confidence and knowledge in dealing with an issue of legislative, professional and social importance.

References


The implications of poverty on children’s readiness to learn

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Professor Ilan Katz

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THIS PAPER REVIEWS AUSTRALIAN and international literature to examine the effect of poverty on children’s readiness to learn. It includes a discussion of how children’s readiness and ability to learn can be nurtured from birth, and how poverty places a child’s healthy developmental pathway at risk. The paper concludes with a discussion of the barriers to the introduction of successful early intervention programs in Australia.

Introduction

In Australia, about one in seven children (14.7 per cent) live in families with incomes more than 50 per cent below the equivalised median income level—one of the most commonly used poverty lines (UNICEF, 2005). This rate is higher than in most European nations (UNICEF, 2005), and is higher still among Indigenous children. According to estimates from the 1990s, nearly half of all Indigenous children live in families with incomes more than 50 per cent below the median income level (Ross & Mikalauskus, 1996). In contemporary Australia, poverty is not a marginal phenomenon but rather a lived experience that significantly affects early learning and developmental outcomes for a large number of children.

Multiple studies have documented the substantial negative consequences that growing up in poverty have on children’s cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural functioning, especially during the earliest years of life (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Ryan, Fauth & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). The list of adverse outcomes is expansive and indicates the broad range of effects that poverty can have. This paper examines the effect of poverty on children’s readiness to learn—a concept that emphasises the developmental and transactional nature of learning. Such a concept enables consideration of the ways in which all of us, but especially parents, early childhood professionals and teachers, can nurture or neglect children’s learning from birth.

This article focuses on children’s learning during early childhood, their transition to school, and their early learning at primary school. The paper is divided into eight core sections. Following the introduction, section two defines and examines the ‘readiness to learn’ concept. Section three outlines the paper’s theoretical framework, and section four reviews research related to childhood poverty and the implications for children’s capacity to learn. Section five examines the pathways through which poverty affects child development. Section six examines some exemplar programs that have had measurable success in minimising the impact of poverty on the development of young children. Section seven examines key challenges to the implementation of successful programs within Australia. This paper is intended as a stimulus to debate about the connections between child poverty and learning readiness in Australia and beyond.

What is ‘readiness to learn’?

Two distinct, yet interrelated models dominate the ‘readiness’ literature. These are ‘readiness to learn’ and
of the stress hormone, cortisol (UNICEF, 2008). Such experiences on children's brain functioning is now recognised and has resulted in accelerated interest and investment in the early childhood period (Heckman, 2006; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). McCain and Mustard (2002) demonstrated how the pathways through which brain development occurs are susceptible to sources of stimulation. They highlighted how connections in the developing brain are created through input from a child's interactions with people and objects in their social environment. McCain and Mustard's (2002) work corresponds well with other important advances in neuroscience, such as examination of the ‘serve and return’ process of reciprocity between child and carer (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). This area of research highlights the importance of warm interactions between carer and child for healthy brain development; the role of love as a foundation for intellectual and emotional development; and the ways in which the developing brain, even before birth, can be damaged by stress—specifically by persistent elevation of the stress hormone, cortisol (UNICEF, 2008). Such advances in neuroscience show that school readiness is not something that suddenly happens but rather an outcome of a child's life up to school entry.

Contemporary theorists have drawn upon this work to assert that readiness to learn does not reside in the individual child, but rather is a transactional construct—situated at the intersection of person, process and context (Vernon-Feagans, Odom, Pancsofar & Kainz, 2008). This definition incorporates a concept of learning as interactive and relational—learning comprises the ways children individually and collectively produce knowledge in interaction with their environment, particularly their family, early childcare setting, school and community. Within this paradigm, readiness to learn is a shared responsibility (Farrar, Goldfeld & Moore, 2007), with parents, teachers, carers and others all responsible for transmitting knowledge that will enable children to succeed in society. This new understanding applies an ecological framework to the concept, which maintains that readiness to learn reflects the characteristics and abilities of children as fostered by their parenting and early care experiences, and the multiple environments in which children live and grow (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). Within these multiple settings, child and family characteristics, such as parenting practices and the home environment, are more consistently and more strongly linked to child development outcomes than childcare and community characteristics (NICHD, 2000).

**Examining readiness to learn within an ecological framework**

A transactional concept of readiness to learn is largely informed by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1995). This theory emphasises multiple interacting systems of influence and the dynamic interactions between person, process and context. Different contexts such as family, school, and community are conceptualised as nested systems of influence, varying in proximity to the individual. According to this theory, the developing child is embedded within interrelated Microsystems—activities and contexts in which he or she directly participates. The most important microsystem for a young child is the family, with research confirming the predominant influence of family on a child’s cognitive and language functioning (NICHD, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystems comprise interconnections between microsystems, such as parents’ interactions with school and work. Exosystems include contextual factors such as community characteristics, and the fourth structure, the macrosystem, comprises societal features such as cultural values and government policies. Bronfenbrenner’s key point is that a child's
developmental outcomes are shaped by the interaction of genetic, biological, psychological and sociological factors in the context of environmental support.

An ecological conception of readiness has resulted in research highlighting the complexity of processes that foster a readiness to learn—how parenting practices, the quality of teaching, and the resources of a community, for example, interact and are implicated in the poor learning outcomes of disadvantaged children (Ryan et al., 2006). Such research is vitally important as it highlights how interactional processes in the home, early childhood setting, school and community produce developmental trajectories for children. Some theorists working within this paradigm have asserted that disadvantaged children are set on a trajectory of failure that becomes evident at school entry and remains fairly stable after first grade (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). These developmental trajectories begin before school entry, with poverty researchers identifying differences in developmental outcomes between children from low- and high-income families, particularly in the cognitive domain, beginning to appear at around two years of age (Ryan et al., 2006). Intervening early in the developmental trajectories of disadvantaged children by identifying factors within their families and communities that create problems, and strengthening those that promote resilience, can redirect trajectories. As has been shown by the success of many intervention programs, the future of disadvantaged children is not predetermined but is open to positive transformation.

The impact of poverty on child development

Much research has highlighted how children from low-income families often do not experience the supportive conditions that foster their readiness to learn, and how they are disproportionately exposed to harsh physical and social environments. Evans (2004) succinctly describes the context of disadvantage for low-income children:

[Low-income children] suffer greater family turmoil, violence, and separation from their parents. Their parents are more nonresponsive and harsh, and they live in more chaotic households, with fewer routines, less structure, and greater instability ... [They] have fewer cognitive enrichment opportunities both at home and in their neighbourhoods. They read less, have fewer books at home ... and spend considerably more time watching TV than their middle-income counterparts ... Poor children reside in more polluted, unhealthy environments. They breathe air and drink water that is more polluted. Their households are more crowded, noisier, more physically deteriorated and contain more safety hazards ... Poor children are more likely to attend schools and day-care facilities that are inadequate (Evans, 2004, p. 88).]

This description conveys a sense of how growing up in economic poverty significantly impacts on a child’s development—especially their ability to reach their full learning potential. It needs to be remembered, however, that poverty does not simply mean low income. As Susan Mayer argues, children can be poor ‘in all kinds of ways’ (1997, p. 15). Such a comment acknowledges the compounding nature of poverty and the impact of related factors, such as parental mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse and social isolation. The impact that these related factors can have on children’s readiness to learn is great, and indicates that programs to improve the developmental outcomes of children living in poverty should be accompanied by a range of community development, housing and health projects that simultaneously seek to address the causes of poverty.

Research conducted largely in the United States of America and the United Kingdom over the past 20 years has consistently linked childhood poverty with adverse cognitive, verbal and behavioural outcomes. As indicated above, differences between low- and middle-income children appear at around two years of age and either stabilise or increase by age five. Without significant intervention, the achievement gap between low- and middle-income children at the start of school generally remains, with poor children exhibiting lower school achievement, and higher rates of placement in special education programs, grade retention, and early school leaving (Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). This relationship between parental income and child outcomes is complex, however, and simple correlations between the two can overstate the impact of poverty and can miss important distinctions (Bradbury, 2003), such as the fact that families often move in and out of poverty. Particularly harmful for children is deep poverty experienced consistently over time and beginning in early childhood (Ryan et al., 2006; Wise, da Silva, Webster & Sanson, 2005).

Analysis of data produced by the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) shows that the pattern in Australia is consistent with international literature. Drawing on LSAC data to explore the relationship between measures of children’s competence and family socio-economic position (SEP—a measure that combines parent’s income, education and occupational prestige), Blakemore (2008) found that children from low SEP families were reported as having the least sociable temperaments, the lowest competence scores, and knowing fewer words than children from families in medium or high SEPs. Blakemore (2008) has used these findings to substantiate the presence of a socio-economic gradient for two- to three-year-old children (the cohort she examined).
In another recent study that used LSAC data to explore the relationship between financial disadvantage and school readiness, Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards and Hayes (2008) found clear links between a family’s financial position and their children's readiness for school. When age categories were examined, they found that children at four to five years of age from low-income families showed lower school readiness over all domains, but particularly in the area of language development. Two years later, at six to seven years of age, more children from low-income families were experiencing literacy and numeracy difficulties than were children from middle-income families. Teachers also reported that children from low-income families were more likely to show low engagement in school-based learning and more commonly displayed behavioural problems in class.

Pathways through which poverty affects children’s readiness to learn

The concept of pathways is often used to explain the mechanisms by which poverty exerts its effects on children. This concept acknowledges that poverty may not have a direct effect on children’s overall wellbeing or readiness to learn, but that the effects of poverty are mediated by the context in which the child is developing—in particular the family and community context. Elaboration of these pathways may lead to the identification of what Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2000) refer to as ‘leverage points’ that may be open to policy and program intervention. Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (2000) identify a number of potential pathways through which income might influence a child’s readiness to learn. These pathways include the quality of the home environment; the quality of parent–child interactions; the quality of early learning and care received outside the home; parental health; and community conditions. According to Ryan and colleagues (2006), most pathways posited in the poverty literature can be grouped under two theories: the Family Stress Model and the Investment Model.

The Family Stress Model

The ‘family stress model’ (Conger & Elder, 1994) focuses on the impact of poverty on relationships and interactions within families. Within this theory, parental stress, brought on by financial pressure and material deprivation, can lead to emotional distress in parents, such as increased levels of depression and anxiety. These states, it is argued, can hinder a parent’s ability to be responsive and can result in less consistent and more hostile parenting. Parenting characterised by hostility, arbitrary discipline or emotional detachment has been linked with a negative effect on children’s socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The family stress model hinges on parenting and parent–child relationships—one of the most influential pathways that can mediate the impact of poverty on children’s development (NICHD, 2000). Warm, supportive parenting that incorporates positive learning experiences can significantly protect children against the harmful effects of poverty (Ryan et al., 2006). A key role that parents can play to foster child development is reading to their children regularly, in ways that require them to think and provide information about the story (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Rich language experiences in the home promote cognitive readiness for children. Children from low-income families, however, are the least likely to experience rich language input.

The Investment Model

The ‘investment model’ (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994), on the other hand, emphasises the links between poverty and resources. According to this theory, children living in poverty have fewer opportunities to extend their learning because their parents cannot afford to purchase the materials, experiences and services that facilitate positive development. These goods and services include stimulating learning materials, nutritious food, safe living conditions, and quality child care and schooling.

The family stress and investment models are not the only theories concerned with the association of poverty and developmental outcomes, nor are they without limitations. These two models fail to address two further aspects of child development which have been highlighted in recent research: first, the interactive nature of parenting, that is children influence their parents’ behaviour as well as parents’ influencing children’s outcomes (O’Connor & Scott, 2007); and second, the differential effects of parenting on different children (Brazelton & Cramer, 1991). The models are helpful, however, as they detail pathways through which low income may influence developmental outcomes. The pathways are not mutually exclusive but rather act as mechanisms that may operate simultaneously in children’s lives—with dimensions that change as children grow older. Intervention programs can play a role in moderating the pathways through which poverty affects child development.

Programs that attempt to mediate the effect of poverty on the development of children and their readiness to learn

Exploration of the causal pathways through which poverty influences developmental outcomes has assisted researchers and policy-makers in formulating intervention programs aimed at mitigating the effects of poverty on children. A broad range of programs exist. Programs differ on a number of dimensions, including form (universal or targeted); location of service (home, childcare centre,
programs highlights the importance of four features:

A comparative review of successful and unsuccessful program evaluations, asserts that:

Brooks-Gunn (2003), who undertook a review of several that target both child and parent (Watson & Tully, 2008). disadvantaged families and have used combined strategies early intervention programs have been aimed at socially to learn (Anderson et al., 2003). The most successful programs can have on enhancing children's readiness body of evidence that attests to the positive effect these programs can have on enhancing children's readiness to learn (Anderson et al., 2003). The most successful early intervention programs have been aimed at socially disadvantaged families and have used combined strategies that target both child and parent (Watson & Tully, 2008). Brooks-Gunn (2003), who undertook a review of several program evaluations, asserts that:

- High-quality, centre-based programs enhance vulnerable children's school-related achievement and behaviour
- The positive effects are strongest for poor children, and for children whose parents have little education
- The benefits of early intervention on school achievement are greatest at the beginning of primary school
- Programs that continue into primary school and are intensive in nature often have the most sustained long-term effects.

Despite these positive findings, the early intervention literature shows that some well-intentioned programs have been unable to demonstrate measurable benefits. Jane Waldfogel says of such programs:

Parental care and preschool care and education (both) play a role in facilitating or hindering children's development in the early years, [but] what parents do matters more than what preschools do … however … interventions that provide high quality care and education for children are more effective in changing outcomes … than interventions aimed at improving home environments and parental behaviour. Thus although parenting may be more important, interventions to improve non-parental care and education may be more effective (Waldfogel, 2005, p. 32).

A comparative review of successful and unsuccessful programs highlights the importance of four features:

- Programs need to provide pre-service and/or in-service training for practitioners and teachers to ensure that children receive a consistently high-quality learning and language environment.
- Programs need to be intensive in nature.
- Programs need to have a preventive rather than a remedial focus.
- Programs that target vulnerable families need to include direct intervention for the child, such as the explicit teaching of important cognitive and language concepts (Ramey & Ramey, 2004).

The most commonly used early intervention strategies are home visiting, child care, and parenting education (Watson, White, Taplin & Huntsman, 2005). The most promising home visiting results reported have been from the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) program (Olds & Kitzman, 1993). The participants of this program were low-income first-time mothers, who received home visiting by registered nurses which began as pre-natal support and concluded when the child was two years old. Improved prenatal health, especially by helping mothers reduce their use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs—and therefore the incidence of related disorders such as foetal alcohol syndrome—and improved school readiness for children are some consistent program effects. Olds and Kitzman (1993) assert that maternal participation early in pregnancy is essential to the success of the NFP program. There is some evidence that engaging mothers before the birth of their child is an effective intervention recruitment strategy as it gives the mother the clear message that the visitor is there to provide support rather than to monitor whether the baby needs protection (Watson & Tully, 2008).

High-quality child care is argued to be the most successful and cost effective single early intervention strategy to improve children's developmental outcomes (Watson & Tully, 2008). The link between high-quality child care and positive child outcomes is especially strong for children from disadvantaged families. More recently designed early intervention programs comprise multiple strategies that offer a range of supports and services to children and parents. These types of programs have been shown to be more effective than interventions which focus on only one outcome or dimension (Feldman, 2004). Watson and Tully (2008) argue that programs that are easily accessible within a community and include high-quality child care, and a strategy that simultaneously targets the parents, are those most likely to change the developmental pathways of disadvantaged children towards more positive outcomes. Multi-component interventions such as these fit well with a conception of children's readiness to learn as a transactional process that begins before birth, is ongoing and undertaken within overlapping contexts of influence.

A large variety and number of early intervention programs, targeting vulnerable children and their families, now operate throughout Australia. Examples include Let's Read, an early literacy program developed...
School-based programs

Research indicates that early intervention programs cannot achieve long-term success alone, and that extended programs that continue into the primary school years, as well as specific school-based programs, are the essential next step in addressing disparities in children's readiness to learn (Ramey et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 2006).

Governments, teachers and others throughout Australia have attempted to improve the learning outcomes of children from low-income families through two types of school-based programs. These are equity programs and teaching and curriculum-based programs. Equity programs comprise a range of supplementary educational and funding provisions for disadvantaged students and/or schools. Funding is distributed differently within each state and territory, with NSW, for example, providing funding directly to schools located within disadvantaged communities and SA providing discounts to low-income parents on necessary educational purchases such as school uniforms.

NSW's Priority Schools Funding Program is one of the few equity programs that has been evaluated. This program has been in operation for more than 30 years and it provides additional funding to identified schools, located within disadvantaged communities. The aim is to reduce the achievement gap in student learning and improve the literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes of students adversely affected by their socio-economic circumstances. Identified schools may use the supplementary funding to employ extra teachers; enable teachers to undertake professional development; purchase additional resources; and design and implement community-based intensive learning and behaviour management programs. Funding may be used by schools flexibly, as the learning needs of Indigenous students in a remote school are vastly different from those of culturally and linguistically diverse students in an inner city school. Research conducted by Lamb and Teese (2005) shows that, despite the long-term existence of this program, significant and persistent gaps in students' achievement and outcomes remain—particularly in the most disadvantaged schools.

Equity programs draw on deficit models of learning; however, teaching and curriculum-based programs offer an alternative approach. These programs seek to address the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, through curriculum-based programs that aim to engage students in meaningful learning through successful pedagogy. Research indicates that the learning difficulties of students from disadvantaged backgrounds—often defined by low income as well as limited opportunities to learn and lack of support from home—are often exacerbated by students' emotional reactions, where learning failure undermines a learner's self-esteem and confidence (Westwood, 2008). Quality teaching that can provide students with a taste of academic success therefore has the potential to transform the learning outcomes of disadvantaged students.

Integrated programs

Integrated programs offer support within a community setting (usually school or childcare centre) and the home, and research indicates that these can enhance and sustain the efficacy of early intervention and school-based programs (Ramey et al., 2004). The successful Abecedarian K-2 Educational Support Program is an illustrative example. This program was designed to aid children's transition into school, as well as to test whether cognitive and achievement benefits were proportional to the duration of the intervention. The program provided additional support to children and their families who had participated in their early intervention program. The program was designed to improve the child's home learning support, and to provide additional learning over the summer holidays, as this was identified as a period when vulnerable children can lose ground academically (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). Classroom teachers were given continuing assistance to ensure that children's school experiences were developmentally appropriate, and parents were shown how to enhance schoolwork by engaging in supplemental educational activities. Results from the Abecedarian project showed that the advantages gained by children from the early intervention program were enhanced by the specific and intensive school program that provided specialised support for early school learning (Ramey et al., 2004).

The ecological theory of development suggests that the success of this program is related to the multiple contexts (home, school, childcare centre, community) and targets (child, student and parent) that received and benefited from program supports and services.
Successful intervention programs in Australia: Barriers to implementation

A number of systemic issues hinder the implementation of intensive, multi-component interventions that target both child and family within Australia. These barriers include:

- multi-sector coordination
- high cost and limited funding
- workforce issues

An effective program requires greater collaboration and coordination between multiple sectors (especially early childhood and primary school education, state- and territory-based education, and family and community service authorities). Recent studies have highlighted collaboration difficulties between childcare centres and primary schools within Australia (Curtis & Simons, 2008; Firlik, 2003). Currently these sectors are not well integrated (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008), starkly differ in terms of industrial conditions and accreditation systems, and do not share a unified conception of learning in childhood. This has significant implications for continuity of care during the transition of children into school. Greater collaboration is needed to ensure a smooth transition from childcare settings to school.

An intensive, long-term program that provides direct intervention to children and support for parents and teachers is expensive to implement. While some research has demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of early intervention in providing long-term savings within the health, justice and education systems (Schweinhart et al., 2004), there have been no cost-benefit analyses of Australian programs (Wise et al., 2005).

Given the high cost of effective programs, substantial, long-term funding from government agencies is required.

- workforce issues

There are also structural workforce issues that seriously limit the potential impact of early intervention, school-based and integrated programs within Australia. The research indicates that quality teaching is required for programs to be successful, and that the essence of quality is embodied in the expertise and skills of staff in their capacity to build positive relationships with children and engage them in the learning process (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). It is often difficult, however, to secure qualified, experienced and stable teaching staff within disadvantaged communities—especially in remote and regional areas. A national shortage of university-trained early childhood teachers means that childcare centres often rely upon under-qualified staff who are less likely to provide a consistent, high-quality educational environment. The situation is similarly disheartening in the school sector, with staff turnover significantly higher in identified disadvantaged schools than those in more socio-economically advantaged locations (Lamb & Teese, 2005). High staff turnover means that the benefits of professional development and capacity building, particularly delivered through new and innovative programs designed for disadvantaged students, do not stay with the school. This issue seriously undermines the implementation of equity programs, and is detrimental to a quality learning environment.

- targeting strategy

Within Australia there is no clear and consistent targeting strategy for early intervention and school-based programs aimed at mitigating the effects of poverty on children's readiness to learn. Not all children need supplementary education or enrichment in the form of intervention and educational support programs, yet the research consistently indicates that, of children and families who need additional support, those most vulnerable are the most likely to refuse to engage from the start or to drop out early (Watson & Tully, 2008). Research suggests that providing services that target disadvantaged children and their families is a more cost-beneficial strategy than universal service delivery, however, stigmatisation of the service and service users can result from this strategy. Watson & Tully (2008) therefore propose an approach that targets vulnerable subgroups (such as disadvantaged children) on a universal basis by location—the method adopted by NSW Priority Schools Funding Program.

Conclusion

Children who live in poverty, especially for an extended period, have limited learning opportunities, and this can affect their ability and readiness to learn, and result in significant developmental delays. Research indicates that early intervention programs can redirect children's developmental pathways towards improved learning outcomes. Such programs include those that extend into primary school, and integrated programs that draw upon schools and childcare centres as a community base for the delivery of a wide range of services that impact on a variety of contexts (home, school and community). Ecological theory suggests that the success of these programs lies in their capacity to reach multiple targets (child, student, parent and family) within multiple contexts—and reinforce the learning that takes place within each. This model of intervention draws upon a transactional conception of learning that acknowledges the multiple influences on a child's readiness to learn, as well as the prevailing influence of the family context. Finally, an ecological conception is especially relevant to an examination of inequality in children's readiness to learn because this conception shifts the focus towards
an examination of the readiness of families, teachers, communities and governments to provide conditions that support children's ability and readiness to learn. Such a focus is helpful as it is a child's environmental conditions, rather than genetic endowment, that are open to transformation and policy intervention.

References


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Friendship, exclusion and power: A study of two South Australian schools with new arrivals programs

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YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE RECENTLY arrived in Australia face considerable challenges in making connections to their new community. While starting school can provide opportunities to make such connections, it may in reality also serve to reinforce perceptions or experiences of social exclusion perpetuated within the broader Australian society. Drawing upon focus group data collected from two South Australian primary schools that have a New Arrivals Programme, this paper outlines the relative infrequency with which friendships between Australian-born and refugee or migrant children occurred, and explores some of the reasons behind this. The findings also highlight the different attributions the two groups of students made for forming friendships, and explores the implications of this for social inclusion. The paper concludes by suggesting the need for ongoing examinations of how newly arrived students are engaged within primary schools, and how terms for inclusion are framed.

Introduction

For young children who arrive in Australia seeking asylum (either with their families or alone), the task of becoming part of a new community may seem almost insurmountable. Not only will children who arrive as refugees (and indeed those who arrive as part of a planned migration) likely have faced considerable hardship in their birth country (which may be accompanied by significant trauma), but this hardship will likely not end upon their arrival in Australia. Children who arrive through channels deemed ‘illegal’ (that is, not via humanitarian visas) face long periods of uncertainty about their future, and most who arrive in this way will experience mandatory detention for at least some time. Such a ‘welcome’ to Australia does little to begin the work of supporting them in connecting to a new community. For those who hold humanitarian visas or who arrive as part of planned migration, the process of establishing a place in a new community (with values and practices different to those of their birth country) is equally likely to be experienced as challenging.

One key opportunity for most young people to develop connections to their community occurs when they start attending school. Yet, while school for many Australian-born children presents such opportunities to grow and develop friendships, school can be a site of further exclusion for children who arrive in Australia seeking asylum or through planned migration (and who do not speak English). For example, Australian research on refugee children suggests that the ongoing effects of trauma can significantly undermine their trust in other people, which can prohibit the formation of meaningful relationships (Sims, Hayden, Palmer & Hutchins, 2000). Furthermore, friendships are often formed via shared interests or histories, and are often reliant upon the ability to share one’s home with friends or to invite another into one’s own space. Children who have recently arrived in Australia may have little sense of ‘home’ within Australia, and may struggle to understand the rules for engagement that shape friendship patterns in this country (Anderson, 2001).

Of course, any difficulties in forming friendships in Australia for children who have recently arrived are not simply the product of such children’s ‘lack’ of cultural skills. Ongoing debates within Australia over our treatment of refugees, in addition to ongoing incidences of xenophobia against all migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), means that Australian-born children will potentially hold a range...
of views or stereotypes that will inhibit the formation of friendships with children who have recently arrived in the country. Yet, despite the fact that difficulties in developing friendships across cultural backgrounds is always the product of all parties involved, it is often the case that attribution of fault is placed primarily with children from NESB. Closs, Stead, Arshad and Norris (2001) found this to be the case in their research on the experiences of refugee children in Scotland, where they suggest that ‘most reasons given for difficulties in peer relationships—by teachers, parents and even by some children themselves—still cited in-child differences in the minority groups. Difference was thus perceived as one-sided, rather than two-sided’ (p. 145).

Exclusionary practices, both at the level of individuals and as a part of the wider Australian society, thus function to undermine any attempts that refugee or migrant children make in forming friendships with Australian-born children. In their Australian research on the successful practices of one kindergarten with a high population of Indigenous children, Imtoual, Kameniar and Bradley (2009) suggest that, when hospitality is offered to marginalised groups solely on terms set by the dominant group, this perpetuates unequal power relations. Their findings suggest it is typically the case that those in positions of power will determine whether or not marginalised groups are made welcome. For refugee or migrant children, the potential lack of genuine hospitality (as evidenced by mandatory detention or xenophobia, for example) will likely impact upon their willingness to attempt to build friendships with Australian-born children. Certainly Anderson (2001) suggests this to be the case for refugee children in Germany, who may choose friendships with other refugee children (even if from other countries) on the basis of a shared sense of exclusion. Mosselman (2006) suggests that refugee children in the United States of America (USA) may display ‘masks of achievement’, whereby they succeed in their studies at school but experience a high level of social isolation. We would further suggest that the physical and emotional effort required to learn a new language and new routines (in addition to ongoing familial responsibilities) may leave little energy to build friendships. This begs the question as to what is the purpose of children from NESB being pushed to learn English if this is not adequately accompanied by social inclusion or connection to the wider community.

This point about the gap between forms of integration as traditionally understood (through ‘hard work’ and English language acquisition) and the actual sense of community that refugee and migrant children feel welcomed into (or not), brings us to our own research on the experiences of such children in Australian primary schools that have a New Arrivals Programme (NAP). As we report in the remainder of this paper, and drawing upon data collected in two South Australian schools, friendships between NAP and non-NAP students appeared to be very rare. We suggest that the reasons for this extend beyond language barriers, and incorporate very concrete practices of exclusion that occurred in the two schools. After reporting our findings, we conclude this paper by exploring how schools with NAPs could better work to support all students in forming friendships in ways that challenge, rather than perpetuate, exclusionary practices.

Method

Data collection

The first stage of the project involved ethnographic observations of the use of space by students in two South Australian primary schools, referred to here as Hills Primary School (HPS) and Plains Primary School (PPS). Ethics approval was granted for the project by the University of Adelaide and the Department of Education and Children’s Services. Ethnographic observations were conducted within the schoolyards by the second author. The second aspect of this first stage of the research involved questionnaires on which teachers at both schools reported their perceptions of space use and inclusion within their school. Findings from these two aspects of the first stage of the project are reported elsewhere (Riggs & Due, in press; Due & Riggs, 2009), but in general the findings indicate that NAP students experience considerable exclusion within schoolyards, and that power dynamics between NAP and non-NAP students are often legitimated through a discourse of ‘lack’ on the part of NAP students (that is, it is their responsibility to bridge differences between groups as they ‘lack’ English language skills).

The second stage of the research involved photo elicitation and focus groups, held with small numbers of students from each school. These were held once the ethnographic observation stage of the research was complete and it was felt that the second author had built a rapport with staff and students at the primary schools. Photo elicitation is a research method which involves incorporating photographs taken by participants into a focus group or interview, meaning that the discussion is centred upon the photographs (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). NAP vice principals at each school were asked to work with classroom teachers to identify a representative sample of NAP and non-NAP students from all year levels to participate in the photo elicitation and focus groups. These students were not randomly chosen, owing to the need for them to have adequate English language skills to participate in a focus group.

Once the sample of students was chosen, information sheets and consent forms were sent home to parents. As with the ethnographic stage of the research, this
meant that consent was not gained from the students themselves, although it was assumed that parents would not ask their children to participate in the project if the child expressed a wish not to do so. Indeed, in several instances parents did not sign forms, stating that their child did not wish to be involved.

After receiving signed consent forms, the second author worked with NAP vice principals to conduct the photo elicitation stage. As Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005) write, this means that research involving children is able to be child-driven, and to revolve around issues identified by children through their photos as important to them. The existing body of research conducted with children using photo elicitation (Burke, 2005; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Darbyshire et. al., 2005; Newman, Woodcock & Dunham, 2006) suggests that using photography together with other research methods adds an extra dimension and flexibility to research conducted with children.

In conjunction with the second author, each school had its own protocols for running the photo elicitation period. At HPS, photo elicitation was conducted over three different sessions, with NAP junior primary students, NAP middle and upper primary students, and non-NAP students taking their photos on separate occasions. At PPS, however, the photo elicitation was conducted on only one occasion. All photo-taking sessions were held at lunchtime, meaning that students had around 45 minutes at each school to take photos. Students were given a disposable 12-exposure camera and were instructed on how to use it. All students were then told to take photos of things in the school which were important to them, and that these could be either people or spaces. They were told they did not have to take all 12 photos if they did not wish to.

Once the photos were developed, the second author conducted focus groups with students in order to discuss them. These were held as soon as possible after the photo elicitation so that the photos were fresh in participants’ minds. Again, the second author worked with the schools in order to ensure that focus groups were conducted in a manner deemed appropriate to the site. At each school, NAP and non-NAP focus groups were held separately and students were split into groups of junior, middle and upper primary school students. In general, these groups contained between four and six students from a similar year level. During these sessions, the second author began a general conversation by asking students to choose the photos they liked the most, and to think about why they took each photo. The second author then spoke individually to students, asking probe questions, such as why the photo was taken and what students liked or disliked about it. As such, focus groups contained a mixture of both group discussion and individuals speaking about their photos to the second author. The focus groups were tape recorded, and data was then transcribed to allow for analysis.

**Participants**

At each school, consent forms were sent home to 40 students (20 NAP and 20 non-NAP students) who were selected to participate in the research. At HPS, forms were received back from 12 NAP students (six boys and six girls) and 13 non-NAP students (six boys and seven girls). One of the non-NAP boys was away on the day the focus groups were held, meaning that the groups were held with 24 students at HPS. Students were evenly spread across year levels, with around four students from both NAP and non-NAP from each of the junior, middle and upper primary groups. At PPS, forms were received back from 19 NAP students (eight boys and 11 girls) and 18 non-NAP students (10 boys and eight girls). One NAP boy and one NAP girl, and one non-NAP boy were away the day the focus groups were held, meaning that the groups were held with 34 students at PPS. Again, students were evenly represented from all primary school year levels. The findings reported in this paper focus upon junior primary students from both schools, though the patterns reported were virtually identical across all year levels.

**Analysis**

Through thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts, the topic of friendship was identified as a key theme spoken about across all groups. While this obviously was a trigger word introduced at times by the second author as interviewer, it was also a topic that students frequently introduced when explaining the images they chose to focus on. In the analysis that follows we focus on two main areas that were evident within all of the extracts focusing on friendship: interactions between NAP and non-NAP students, and the attributions that members of each group made for forming friendships. These two areas of focus in relation to friendships have important implications for how NAP students, in particular, make friends, and how exclusion may continue to occur within the schools.

**Cross-group friendship patterns**

Findings from the focus groups suggest interesting parallels with findings from our analyses of the ethnographic and teacher questionnaire data, as well as some important differences. In regards to the latter, we were interested to note that some non-NAP students reported playing with other students across classes. In our previous findings (Due & Riggs, 2009; Riggs & Due, in press) we noted that, while NAP students tended to play across NAP classes (primarily due to cultural
similarities with students in other classes), non-NAP students tended to stick with their classmates during break times. In the focus group data, however, some non-NAP students spoke of having friends from across many classes, such as in the following extract from a student at HPS:

Interviewer: And how did you become friends with her?
HPSNN1: Ummm we play together.
Interviewer: And what classroom is she in?
HPSNN1: Ummm X classroom.
Interviewer: And what classroom did you say you were in?
HPSNN1: Y classroom.
Interviewer: And in this photo? Is this the same girl?
HPSNN1: Yes.
Interviewer: Is she in your class or a different class?
HPSNN1: Different class.
Interviewer: Different class—you’ve got friends from all the classes!
HPSNN2: I do as well.

Here a non-NAP student identifies friends from across a range of classes, and when this is remarked upon by the second author, another student comments that he too has friends from across classes. It is important to note, however, that only a relative minority of non-NAP students reported such cross-class friendships, and, as we discuss in the following section, there were specific attributions for such cross-class friendships amongst non-NAP students that differed from cross-class friendships amongst NAP students.

In regard to similarities with our previous data, there were almost no reports by either NAP or non-NAP students of friendships between the groups. One non-NAP student from HPS included an older NAP student in some of her photos, but upon discussion it became evident that this was largely because they had been paired as part of the school’s buddy system:

Interviewer: OK—and what else was I going to ask you? Do you play with NAP kids much?
PPSN1: Mmmm—just handball—and soccer.

PPSN1: Umm she was first the little buddy then I was the little buddy.
Interviewer: Little buddy? So [the student is] your buddy?
HPSNN3: Yeah.

Here, when the second author orients the conversation to the topic of friendship, the student accepts the category ‘friend’ in relation to the NAP student but makes it clear that there are reasons for the friendship: that they were paired as part of the buddy system, that this pairing happened upon the instigation of the NAP student (‘this year the student just wanted to be with me’), and that there are benefits from being friends with the student (‘yesterday she gave me a present’). Whilst the non-NAP student speaking in the extract does state that she ‘likes following’ the NAP student, it is nonetheless important to note that this relationship between a NAP and non-NAP student was largely the product of the school buddy system, rather than NAP and non-NAP students seeking out friendships with one another. Across all of the interviews from both schools this was only one of two instances where any student reported any form of ongoing NAP/non-NAP relationship.

Also mirroring our ethnographic and questionnaire data was the finding from the focus groups and photo elicitation that very little cross-play occurred between NAP and non-NAP students. This was the case at both schools; however, NAP students at PPS photographed non-NAP and vice versa more often than at HPS. Out of the 17 NAP and 17 non-NAP students at PPS, two non-NAP students and five NAP students took photos of students from across this division. Interestingly, all except one of these students stated that they either didn’t like the student in the photo or that they had previously been in a class with the student. Only one of the students at PPS (a non-NAP student) said they were friends with a Norwegian NAP student simply because ‘they were cool’.

Similarly, our earlier findings suggested that whilst the two groups sometimes played in the same areas, there were rarely interactions between the groups in which they actually played together. This was echoed in photos that both groups took which rarely contained images of NAP and non-NAP students playing together. When this did appear, non-NAP students clearly marked this as ‘just’ play, rather than the play signifying friendship, such as in the following extract from a male student at PPS:

Interviewer: OK—and what else was I going to ask you? Do you play with NAP kids much?
PPSN1: Mmmm—just handball—and soccer.
This type of statement was often made by the few non-NAP students whose photos contained pictures of NAP students—that they ‘just’ played in the same area. Notably, it was typically boys who took such photos and made these comments, which again reiterates our previous findings that sporting activities can result in NAP and non-NAP boys playing together, but that this play rarely if ever extended beyond the sport into friendships. This is shown by the fact that NAP and non-NAP boys appeared to play sports together at lunchtimes even when they stated that they did not like each other and were not friends.

Figure 1. Photo of NAP and non-NAP students at PPS taken by a non-NAP student

Figure 1 shows a photo taken by a non-NAP student at HPS. The image shows a group of boys playing 4-square, one of whom is a NAP student. The non-NAP student who took the photo said he was friends with all the boys except the NAP student:

Interviewer: Let’s have a look—these are all your friends?

HPSNN4: He’s not.

Interviewer: This one here? Who’s he?

HPSNN4: Ummm [name] who’s in [a NAP class].

Interviewer: OK but he’s playing handball with your friends? Why are you playing together?

HPSNN4: Huh?

Interviewer: Why are you playing if you’re not his friend?

HPSNN4: I don’t know, ’cos me and that boy that’s on the other side of him …

Interviewer: Behind him?

HPSNN4: … yeah because we were playing and then we went to them and they were playing with him.

Unlike boys, however, girls were much less likely to photograph across the NAP/non-NAP boundary, and in some instances spoke explicitly about divisions between NAP and non-NAP students. This can be seen in the extract below which is taken from a focus group discussion with a group of non-NAP girls from PPS:

Interviewer: So what about NAP students, do they hang out there [the oval]?

PPSNN2: No they usually play handball or basketball or soccer.

Interviewer: The boys do?

PPSNN2: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about the girls?

PPSNN2: They play skipping and stuff.

PPSNN3: Yeah they usually hang out between their units—green unit and yellow unit.

Interviewer: Like around their classroom?

PPSNN2: Yeah ’cos there’s a bit of grass area.

Interviewer: So how come—is there a reason you don’t play with them or just ’cos you stay in your class or?

PPSNN4: Umm stay in class …

PPSNN2: Sometimes you just come up and say hello and yeah …

PPSNN3: … and the others that are next to us they usually play handball near where we sit.

Interviewer: OK—cool.

PPSNN4: They don’t really like us.

PPSNN2: Yeah we don’t usually talk to them the NAP kids ’cos they aren’t used to like …

PPSNN3: … we can’t talk to them …

PPSNN2: … they seem like …

PPSNN3: They do like stuff that we don’t like to do …

PPSNN2: Yeah they—when we come up to them they stare so, it’s like we ruin their game.

Interviewer: Like it ruins their game for you guys to turn up?

PPSNN2: Yeah.

This extract illustrates the fact that the ‘blame’ for divisions and lack of interaction between NAP and non-NAP students is frequently apportioned to NAP students, despite the relative lack of power these students may have to join the play of non-NAP students. However, the extract also suggests a possible resistance on the part of the NAP students to non-NAP students who may be encroaching on their play, a point we return to in our conclusion.
It is important to note that these few examples of NAP and non-NAP students interacting (and in the case of the ‘buddy’ extract potentially being in some sort of relationship, even if the non-NAP student did not label it a friendship) were reported by non-NAP students from their photos. None of the NAP students in either school reported friendships with non-NAP students. As we discuss in the following section, there may be particular reasons for this that relate primarily to issues of power as it pertains to language.

**Reasons for friendships within groups**

In another paper reporting our findings (Riggs & Due, in press), we suggest that the perception that English language acquisition will solve issues of exclusion that NAP students face fails to consider the power dynamics that exist within schools. More specifically, we suggested that NAP students, at least in some instances, may view English language as a tool used in their oppression, and may resist it in preference for their own language. Discussions amongst NAP students in the focus groups suggested that this may well be the case, such as in the following extract from a student at HPS:

**Interviewer:** So you would play with other students [besides your friend] if you have to?

**HPSN1:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** But you would prefer not to? Is that kind of how it is?

**HPSN1:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** OK—any reason or just ‘cos she is your friend?

**HPSN1:** Mmmm just ‘cos I never really get to talk [my language] much—like I can with my friend and stuff …

**Interviewer:** And you girls can talk [your language] together?

**HPSN1:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** OK—you miss talking [your language]?

**HPSN1:** Yes.

For this student, having friendships that allow her to speak her own language is considered very important, in no small part because she misses talking her language. Of course this student’s desire to have friendships with other students who speak the same language could potentially be read through the lens of the dominant understanding of English language acquisition, which would depict this student’s motivations to friendship with other students who speak her language as a ‘failure’ to integrate or do the work required to be included. Yet we would suggest, in contrast, that being supported in speaking her language may be an important experience for this student, and that the context of the school in general (where the majority of people speak English) could well be experienced as exclusionary.

While many NAP students spoke of being friends with other NAP students because of a shared language (a finding that mirrors our other data), non-NAP students spoke of the reasons for their friendships in quite different ways, as is exemplified in the following extract from a student at PPS:

**Interviewer:** So these are friends from your class? Why do you play with them?

**PPSN5:** Because I like them—they are my best friends.

This attribution of ‘best friends’ was made repeatedly by students in non-NAP classes, but only very rarely by students in NAP classes. As indicated in the previous extract, there was normally a pragmatic reason for NAP students forming friendships with other NAP students (that is, language or cultural similarities). For non-NAP students, however, none mentioned any form of cultural matching in their reasons for friendships. Our point here is not that friendships amongst NAP students are any less genuine on the basis of their motivations for friendship with other students from similar backgrounds. Rather, our point is that, in a school where the majority of people speak English, and where the customs and practices of the school are orientated to the culture of the dominant group, those who do not speak English or identify with the dominant culture will have fewer options to form friendships on the basis of a wide range of factors. Non-NAP students have the relative privilege of being able to presume that most other students will understand their speech, have similar experiences in life, and will likely not have experiences of forced migration. NAP students, by contrast, will on the whole be unable to make such presumptions, a fact that will clearly shape the friendships they form. Finally, we would note that in the few instances that NAP students did make an attribution of ‘best friends’, this was still closely connected to a shared background, as can be seen in the following extract from a student at PPS:

**Interviewer:** Oh OK! And who’s that?

**PPSN1:** That’s my friend.

**Interviewer:** Your friend?

**PPSN1:** My best friend.

**Interviewer:** Your best friend! How come?

**PPSN1:** Because she comes from [the same country as me]!

Here the attribution ‘best friend’ is clearly connected to a shared background. While it would be fair to state
that non-NAP students make friends with students from similar backgrounds (but that they don’t need to state this as they live in their birth country and are thus so immersed in it that they don’t see it as a point to comment on), the salience of this reason for friendship for NAP students is, we think, significant. Particularly if we are to think about friendships as closely related to the ways students move in school spaces, then for NAP students who feel only able to connect with a small number of others, their sense of freedom to move throughout the school may be severely curtailed. Indeed, this was found to be a common theme in the photographs students took, where NAP students frequently photographed spaces around the edges of the school rather than those spaces which could be considered ‘main’ (such as playgrounds or ovals). A typical example of such a photo can be seen in Figure 2, which shows two groups of NAP students at PPS playing around a tree in an area located close to their classrooms, but away from the main play areas.

Figure 2. Photo by a NAP student at PPS of a group of NAP students

For non-NAP students, by comparison, the implicit presumption that they can easily be friends with most students significantly increases their ability to consider the entire school as their space. Such perceptions on the part of non-NAP students will be shaped by the norms of the school and the in-group/out-group exclusions in all friendship groups. Nonetheless, when compared to NAP students, non-NAP students are more likely to have a wider range of available options when forming friendships (as a result of fewer barriers). As we discuss in our conclusion, we would suggest that a simplistic response to this (that is, if NAP students spoke English then they too would be able to form friendships with a wider group of students) fails again to recognise how culturally based power dynamics within schools will likely continue to shape friendship groups unless issues of cultural privilege and the effects of social exclusion are addressed.

Conclusion

The findings reported here indicate several key issues at stake in the two schools where our project was conducted. First, it appears that very few NAP/non-NAP friendships occurred. The data suggests that this may be partly because of language and cultural differences (which lead NAP students and non-NAP students to play with students from their own culture or language group, albeit for significantly different reasons), and partly because of a potentially active disinterest toward cross-group friendships on the part of both groups. Second, it is plausible that NAP and non-NAP students have different motivations to form friendships, though again it should be stated that we are not placing a value upon one type of motivation over another, nor do we make this statement without being mindful of how the culture of the schools may curtail the choices of some NAP students.

Of course this (relatively negative) description of the schools is only part of the picture. It is possible that some NAP students actively refuse to play with non-NAP students in order to develop their own communities or to ensure that they can play with people whom they feel understand their life experiences. Certainly Mosselson (2006), in her research on refugee students in the USA, found that such students felt that non-refugee students were not interested in hearing about their lives prior to being in the USA, and that this made them feel that their experiences were not valued. We do not have data on this topic from our project, but it is fair to suggest that some NAP students in South Australian schools may be unwilling to open themselves to friendships with non-NAP students if they perceive them to be uncaring about their experiences. At the same time, however, and drawing on our other findings from this project (Riggs & Due, in press), we would suggest that it is likely not always the case that NAP students play separately by choice. It is likely also the case that exclusion occurs within the schools on the part of non-NAP students, and that this hinders opportunities for NAP students to build relationships.

In regard to this latter point, Closs and colleagues (2001) suggest the importance of providing learning opportunities for refugee students that place them in direct working relationships with non-refugee students. In Australia, while the formation of NAPs in certain schools is an important initiative that recognises the unique needs of recently arrived children, it is important also to continually assess how this may or may not provide adequate opportunities for NAP and non-NAP students to interact, and, importantly, how it may at times serve to perpetuate xenophobia or at least a perception amongst non-NAP students that segregation is always the best response to cultural differences. To combat this type of possible perception, it is thus important that schools work with non-NAP students.
to understand the relationship between privilege and disadvantage, and that all students are encouraged to place themselves in a relationship to global inequities that are often productive of forced migration (Matthews, 2008). Recognising the cultural practices of non-NAP students as cultural practices may help to facilitate an understanding of culture as something held by all groups, thus refusing an approach that would exoticise NAP students as sole holders of culture through a well-meaning ‘focus on the other’.

Relatedly, it is important that NAP students are seen as embodied subjects, rather than simply as objects of enforced change. While global power inequities mean that certain groups of people are displaced or forced to seek asylum outside their birth country because of war or other threats of violence, such groups are not solely objects of power; they also have the capacity to act as agents in their own lives. Moving away from an approach to understanding migration that emphasises either pity or benevolence, and towards one that recognises the capacity of all children to make positive change in their lives given the opportunity, may help to counter both xenophobia amongst non-NAP students and also to accord value to the experiences and knowledge that NAP students bring to schools as active subjects.

The claims that we have made in this paper about the experiences of junior primary students across two South Australian primary schools are not generalisable to all schools with NAPs. In this regard it is important to note that the project was unable to gain insight into the experiences of NAP students who had only very recently arrived in the country and were very new to the school, as we did not have access to interpreter services. Nonetheless, we believe that the findings presented from this project offer important insights into how power operates in school settings to shape the friendships that NAP and non-NAP students form.

References


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Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in early education for Indigenous children

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THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT’S PROMISE of preschool education for every four-year-old child, in particular for every Indigenous four-year-old, brings an opportunity to reconsider early childhood education for Indigenous children. This article suggests that incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing is required to make early learning attractive and accessible to Indigenous families. The numbers of Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood services are much lower than for non-Indigenous Australian children. ‘Closing the gap’ has the potential to bring educational advantages to Indigenous children. Part of the solution lies in an approach guided by Indigenous ways of knowing and preferably delivered by qualified Indigenous early childhood teachers.

Introduction

Education, in particular, early childhood education, is a key element in improving the future for Indigenous children (Cassady, Fleet, Hughes & Kitson-Charleston, 2005; Priest, 2005). Internationally there is growing recognition of the significance of Indigenous knowledge to improve educational provision for Indigenous children. Education of young children has become increasingly important in many countries, including the members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007; Moss, 2007; Priest, 2005). Prochner’s (2004) study of early childhood programs for Indigenous children in Canada, Australia and New Zealand indicated that, while increasing attention has been given to the importance of early childhood education, less has been given to Indigenous programs.

As two non-Indigenous researchers who, in partnership with Indigenous colleagues, have been part of a research team investigating the experiences of Indigenous families and their attitudes in relation to their childcare choices (Bowes & Burns, 2009; Kitson & Burns, 2009), we begin with an account of the changing agenda for Indigenous children in Australia and explore some historical and cultural reasons for the relatively low level of participation. The heart of the article is a review of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing (Colbung, Glover, Rau & Ritchie, 2007; Martin, 2008a) and how they can be incorporated into early childhood programs. The commentary takes the opportunity of increased national and international interest in early childhood education for Indigenous children to argue for pedagogical change to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing in early years education. The discourse ‘of children’s rights to educational provision’ (Moss, 2007; Nakata, 2002; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007, p. 10) is crucial in supporting equality of access that promotes diversity and fosters connections for all children (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss 2007).

While there is no large-scale, rigorous research available, an indication of the current situation can be gleaned from diverse writing and research, and it is for this reason that literature is reviewed from a range of sources pertaining to Indigenous children’s learning with a focus on prominent Australian Indigenous researchers such as Martin (2007; 2008a; 2008b), Nakata (2002); Sarra (2007) and Townsend-Cross (2004).

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) National Reform Agenda has a focus on the significance of early childhood education for all Australian children.
The Australian Government’s introduction of The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia Belonging, Being and Becoming (DEEWR 2009) and provision of 15 hours a week of preschool education for all four-year-olds has a strong focus on Indigenous children.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Taskforce (MCEEYTA, 2001) and Nakata (2002) acknowledge that, while in recent years work has been done to make programs more inclusive, much remains to be done. Inclusive practice is a matter of social justice and equity (Moss 2007) and MacNaughton (2003, p. 290) warns against a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Many early childhood services do not reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society (MCEETYA, 2001, p. 4). An inclusive environment is one that welcomes diversity, enhances children’s feelings of confidence and security and makes children and families feel valued (Moss, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford 2004).

The provision of culturally appropriate, accessible and affordable education and care is a serious issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (Brennan, 1998, p. 5; Bamblett, 2007; QDETA nd). There has been international recognition of the importance of early childhood programs based on local knowledge and culture that include relevant ideas from mainstream programs. (Biddle, 2007; Cassady et al., 2005; Nakata, 2002; Prochner, 2004; Sims, Saggars, Hutchins, Guilfoyle, Targowska & Jackiewicz, 2008; Windisch, Jenvey & Drysdale, 2003). As suggested by Prochner (2004), ‘post-colonial programs may be poised to take a lead role in preserving Indigenous culture’ (p. 14). Canada and New Zealand, for example, are among countries re-examining programs to provide for Indigenous ways of knowing (Ball & Pence, 2000; Colbung et al., 2007; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Nuttall & Edwards 2007).

Constraints to participation identified in the literature

In Australia, Indigenous children are under-represented in programs, and reliable statistics of enrolment and attendance are difficult to obtain (Cassady et al., 2005; Hutchins, Frances & Saggars, 2009; Hutchins, Martin, Saggars & Sims, 2007; Pocock, 2003, Priest, 2005).

The shared history of ‘neglect, deprivation and unequal treatment’ (Nakata 2002, p. 9) and of Indigenous children being systematically removed from their families has had an enduring impact on families and communities across generations (Bamblett, 2007; D’Souza, 1999; Fasoli et al., 2007; Hampton & Roy, 2002; Prochner 2004) and this has led to suspicion and distrust of authorities (Brennan, 1998, p. 6). Indigenous ‘knowledge, skills and culture … have been overlooked, excluded and denigrated’ throughout the history of education (Williams-Kennedy, 2004, p. 81).

Reid and Santoro (2006a, p. 147), Prochner (2004) and Colbung et al. (2007) argue that the ‘mono-cultural discourse’ of the ‘white dominant majority’ privileges whiteness and accepts their practices as normal, excluding other cultures and races. Education that does not recognise the diversity of Indigenous cultures, lifestyles and language has been used to ‘subjugate Aboriginal peoples’ all over the world (Ball & Pence, 2000, p. 21; MacNaughton, Cruz & Hughes, 2003).

Culture is used selectively to maintain prevailing power relations. This is true in early childhood education, ‘a site of cultural transmission, within which discourses of racism and colonisation are inadvertently perpetuated’ (Cannella 1997; 1999; 2001, cited in Colbung et al., 2007, p. 141). In Australia, tensions exist between whiteness and ways in which Indigenous culture is addressed and, unlike the USA and the UK, little scholarly research has been done on constructs of ‘whiteness’ (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Early childhood services where families are confronted with a contemporary western world view of childhood (QDETA, nd, p. 5) are seen as ‘white fella’ places and regarded as unsafe by many Indigenous families (Bourke, Rigby & Burden, 2000; Butterworth & Candy, 1998). Despite their own negative educational experiences, many Indigenous parents value education highly (Butterworth & Candy, 1998; Cassady et al., 2005; Colbung et al., 2007; NSW AECG/DET, 2004; Priest, 2005).

Towards a new pedagogy: Incorporating culture and building bridges

Honouring cultures is critical in education, as constructs of childhood are framed by shared values (Perry et al., 2007; Kitson-Charleston 2005; Priest, 2005). There is growing awareness of constructs that are respectful of Indigenous ways and honour Indigenous perspectives (Colbung et al., 2007). The New Zealand Curriculum Te Whāriki (NZMoE, 1996) and the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (QDETA, nd) provide supportive frameworks that reflect sociocultural contexts and honour Indigenous culture. Davis (2005) advocates an inclusive pedagogy of practice of ‘black and non-white cultures and people’ (pp. 27–28). At the very least, this should include a culturally supportive environment with educators who understand Aboriginal perspectives and provide an inclusive curriculum (Ball & Pence, 2000; MacNaughton 2003; MacNaughton, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Wilson & Matthews, 2001). Priest (2005), Reid and Santoro (2006a, p. 148), Nakata (2002) and Williams-Kennedy (2004, p. 80) discuss the
diversity and complexity of the Indigenous cultures of ‘the many different nations’ that exist in Australia and acknowledge the importance of building bridges between Indigenous ways of knowing and western perspectives. In many Indigenous cultures, education is based on sharing stories as part of everyday life (Bamblett, 2007; Irtoual, Kameniar & Bradley, 2009; Martin, 2008a; Martin, 2008b; Priest, 2005; Townsend-Cross, 2004; Williams-Kennedy, 2004). The core principles of Indigenous educational philosophies are ‘the Dreaming (Law), life skills, relationships and notions of community informed by physical and spiritual realities’ (Townsend-Cross, 2004, p. 3; Hutchins et al. 2007; Warri Jarrinaku ARCS Project Team, 2002). Land, identity and culture are connected and interrelated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and are central to learning. Identity is nurtured through relatedness to family, community and land. This highlights the significance of Indigenous ways of knowing in the discourse of early education (D’Souza, 1999; Priest, 2005; Townsend-Cross, 2004). Martin (2008a, p. 72) discusses Aboriginal knowledge in the context of three knowledge bands, ‘Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing’. Culture affects the ways children respond when entering early childhood settings. From their earliest years, children reproduce the culture of their primary caregivers, peers and the media’ (Ball & Pence, 2000, p. 21). As suggested by Martin, 2007; Martin, 2008b; Priest, 2005; QDETA nd., acknowledgement of the diversity of languages and belief systems amongst Aboriginal people is essential to understanding that Aboriginal people are the custodians of their knowledge’ (DEST, 2001, p. 2).

Valued learning in Indigenous communities includes respect for elders and learning about kinship, culture and language (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1987; Wilson & Matthews, 2001). Indigenous children generally develop attributes of independence, persistence, initiative, cooperation not competition, observation, and highly developed senses and physical skills through imitation and repetition (Butterworth & Candy, 1998; DEST 2001; QDETA nd., Townsend-Cross, 2004). In some families there is a feeling that children are better to stay at home to learn what is valued by their families and develop Indigenous ways of knowing that currently appear to clash with learning that is considered valid in many early childhood settings (Howey, 2005). When teachers only reproduce and perpetuate their own culture they are not honouring the cultures of children they teach (Ball & Pence, 2000).

Towards a new pedagogy: Incorporating a sense of place

Many Indigenous Australians have a strong relationship and connectedness with the land and a sense of knowing one’s place in the community/one’s place identity (Power & Roberts, 1998, p. 2). For many, this forms a strong sense of self and personal power (Bamblett, 2007; Hutchins et al. 2007; Martin, 2007; Martin, 2008a; Townsend-Cross, 2004). ‘Growing up children strong’ describes the importance of teaching children the law—rules about their relationship to the land, people, animals and plants (Hutchins et al., 2007, p. 14).

Elders have an important role in teaching children about their connection to ‘country’ (NSW AECG/DET, 2004) and teaching children ‘an increasing sense of relatedness to family, community and environmental resonance’ (Townsend-Cross, 2004, p. 3). For example, children are taught specific categories for organising and labelling the natural world which reinforces children’s sense of identity and place (Butterworth & Candy, 1998; Priest, 2005).


Towards a new pedagogy: Incorporating Indigenous views of literacy

This article does not have space to explore fully the extensive literature on the topic of literacy and the education of young Indigenous children, but a short summary is included to indicate the importance of this aspect of an early childhood curriculum. Nakata (2002) discusses the complexity of the issues concerning literacy and Indigenous cultures and states that ‘it is about having a specialized (sic) understanding of how children give expression to the world they see themselves in’ (p. 13). He defines the significant issues as being ‘first language maintenance, around the oral/literate duality, around conceptual learning, around the absence of “Standard Australian English” outside the school environment.’ He clearly states that strategies need to meet Indigenous goals (Nakata, 2002, pp. 21–22).

Indigenous cultures are circular in nature (Hanlen, 2002) and have a holistic view of literacy as a social practice that includes songs, poems, stories, dance and music. Hanlen (2002), Power (2004) and Williams-Kennedy (2004) argue for a broad concept of literacy that acknowledges Indigenous cultural literacy. Visual modes of representation, they argue, can be more powerful than print. When literacy is viewed only as written language, difference is erased rather than...
embaced, and a valuable source of learning denied. As suggested by Nakata (2002) in the context of his home culture, the Torres Strait Islands, there is no ‘one-way’.

Many writers have stressed the importance of understanding the link between identity, self-esteem and literacy in Indigenous culture, and building upon what children already know is essential knowledge (Martin, 2008b; Pender, 1998; Williams-Kennedy, 2004). Language, both verbal and non-verbal, gives identity and is the medium through which values, beliefs and knowledge are transmitted (Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, 2001; Hanlen, 2002; Kitson, 2002; QDETA nd). When children are expected to interact and learn only in the language of the educational setting, usually ‘the language of the dominant culture’ (Kitson, 2002, p. 77), many may struggle and be disinclined to learn. Children are more successful when they have a strong sense of identity and come from a place of pride (De Gioia, Hayden & Hadley, 2003; DEST, 2001; DEST, 2005; Power, 2004). Since cultural pride and language are strongly linked, young Indigenous children have the right to have what remains of their traditional languages and Aboriginal English valued in their learning environment as well as Standard Australian English, to provide a supportive learning framework (Colbung et al., 2007; Purdie et al. 2000; QDETA nd). Power (2004) cites an example of a preschool where the children represented nine language groups, and acknowledges that ‘it is important for the children to know and recognise some words from their own original language groups [for their] developing self-esteem and sense of belonging’ (Power, 2004 p. 7).

Towards a new pedagogy: Families communities and Indigenous child-rearing

Most Indigenous children grow up with a strong sense of extended family including their kin or clan network (D’Souza, 1999, p. 28). They learn culture, language and history from their family and community (Hutchins et al., 2007). While parents have a key role in parenting, members of the extended family are the children’s first teachers (MCEETYA Taskforce 2001; NSW AECG/ DET, 2004; QDETA nd). Differences exist between a non-Indigenous family structure based on ‘relatives and non-relatives’ and Indigenous family structures where ‘kinship systems are boundless and inclusive of the whole universe’ (Townsend-Cross, 2004, p. 2). The central role of family and community was clear in a study by Purdie et al. (2000) where Indigenous students reported that their parents and extended families were the most important people in their lives, and discussed at length their connection to community. Hampton and Roy (2002) found a similar focus on the significance of relationships in a Canadian Indigenous study.

There are several features of child rearing in Indigenous families that differ from non-Indigenous families. Relationships, responsibility and independence are at the basis of Indigenous parenting practices (Hutchins et al., 2007). Education programs for Aboriginal children will be most effective when programs reflect the reality of children’s lives and provide continuity of experience between home and the early childhood centre (Butterworth & Candy, 1998; Kitson-Charleston, 2005; Wilson & Matthews, 2001). As suggested by QDETA (nd), concepts of time may be very different in Indigenous cultures from western experience and this can affect attendance patterns of children and families.

It is important that educators understand the influences of children’s life experiences and are aware of the impact these may have on children when they are in educational environments (Wilson & Matthews, 2001). Indigenous children are generally expected to be self-sufficient (Warrkki Jarrinjaku ARCS, 2002; Butterworth & Candy, 1998; Wilson & Matthews, 2001), to share everything, to tolerate teasing as the major form of adult discipline and to sleep when they are tired (Townsend-Cross, 2004; QDETA, nd). These practices may not fit with routines in early childhood services such as set times for sleeping or teachers’ interpretation of teasing as ‘mean’. Sharing is strongly developed and children may become confused when expected to ask permission before they use someone else’s things, as often occurs in early childhood settings.

Australian Indigenous society is one of oral traditions. Children learn and form their identity as they watch, listen and imitate people older than themselves and listen to family stories and songs (Bamblett, 2007; D’Souza, 1999; Williams-Kennedy, 2004). Older children look after younger ones and adults are often less involved (Butterworth & Candy, 1998). A threat to this multiple support system is that Indigenous families are often highly mobile (D’Souza, 1999; Ross, 1998). This mobility has implications for children’s connection to community and continuity of educational experiences.

Access to early education for Indigenous children

It might appear easier to achieve a pedagogical perspective that incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing in Indigenous services where the power differentials of the majority culture are not an issue to overcome. One Australian model, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS), has been very effective. MACS incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing (Priest, 2005) and is widely recognised in Indigenous communities as a preferred model for early learning centres (Bamblett, 2007; Sims et al., 2008). MACS centres offer preschool programs, long day
care and a range of services including family support and cultural programs (ABS, 2005; Brennan, 1998; Department of Families, Communities and Indigenous Affairs, 2006; D’Souza, 1999; Hutchins et al., 2007; Prochner, 2004). Indigenous organisations have argued that, to provide adequate programs that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, this model needs to be expanded across the country (Pocock, 2002; Pocock, 2003; SNAICC, 2002; 2004; 2007).

There is continuing debate concerning the advantages of Indigenous programs over mainstream settings. Despite widespread support for Indigenous services by Indigenous families (Hutchins et al., 2007) there is continuing discussion about the advantages of this separate system. Nakata, (2002, p. 25) indicated that in relation to mainstream culture, many Indigenous people are operating ‘at the interface of two different cultures’. Priest (2005, p. 37) has stated that there is currently no recognition of the specialist Indigenous knowledge available from MACS and other Indigenous services. A way forward needs to be found to provide preschool education to Indigenous children based on specialist knowledge that allows them to become ‘two-way strong’ and move across cultures while retaining their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity (QDETA, nd, p. 1). Imtoual and colleagues (2009) discuss the potential of a highly successful multi-racial setting, in South Australia, based on relationships, a ‘high level of parental engagement and positive management of racial tensions’ (p. 24). There are mainstream services that offer inclusive programs, although these tend to have low Indigenous participation rates (MCEETYA, 2001). Hutchins et al. (2007) suggest that research on mainstream and Indigenous services is required to provide evidence of their relative efficacy (p. 5). Indigenous children need exposure to mainstream settings to equip them to deal with the dominant educational discourse (Hutchins et al., 2007; Imtoual et al. 2009; Nakata, 2002). Because of insufficient qualified Indigenous early childhood teachers (Hutchins et al., 2009), a way forward could involve mainstream and multi-racial services and Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, incorporating significant aspects of the MACS centres.

Roberts, a respected Indigenous director of an Indigenous early childhood service, has been successful through not attempting to separate Aboriginal and white domains (Power & Roberts, 1998). According to Roberts, the key is to focus on developing of children’s ability to step in and out of the mainstream system and take advantage of its resources (Power & Roberts, 1998; Hutchins et al., 2007; Prochner, 2004; Windisch et al., 2003). A tribal elder of the First Nations of Canada, Louis Opekekew (cited in Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p. 167) described this as learning ‘to walk in both worlds’. Power and Roberts (1998) argue for a ‘double

vision model’ where Aboriginal people take every opportunity to open doors to the mainstream but still claim leadership and full membership of their culture. Ball and Pence (2000) discuss developing culturally relevant practice through dialogue with communities and cite an example of a partnership based on a ‘talking circle’ where all come together to discuss issues (p. 24). Working with the local community allows programs to connect with community experiences.

Te Whāriki from New Zealand (NZMoE, 1996) is widely recognised as an innovative and successful bicultural sociocultural curriculum for early learning reflecting a consultative approach with the Maori & Pasifica people. However, it is acknowledged that there are complexities where staff members are not well-qualified or where there is a shortage of Maori educators (Farquar & Fleer, 2007). In centres with few Maori children, the bicultural aspect is seen as difficult to implement and may be ignored (Farquar & Fleer, 2007, p. 32).

**What should happen in early childhood services for Indigenous children?**

In reconceptualising Indigenous early childhood education, Martin (2007) emphasises embedding Aboriginal values with relatedness as central to the discourse. She reflects on the Indigenous belief that ‘childhood is a part of lifehood’ (p. 18) and not a separate stage, and states that reconceptualisation should be informed by the scholarship of Aboriginal, Indigenous and First Nations peoples (p. 17).

Many Indigenous families believe that community-initiated programs, with Indigenous staff and community participation, are more responsive to families and communities (Pocock, 2002; Pocock, 2003). By providing an environment where parents feel welcome, early childhood centres will contribute to parent involvement in the setting (Imtoual et al., 2009). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 167) report that some First Nation communities of Canada are working towards a ‘construction with multiple roots and traditions’ where they have agency and control. Working with the community allows programs to be based on local culture and social conditions, including connections with community experiences (Ball & Pence, 2000; De Gioia et al., 2003). However, placing expectations on families to contribute to a service can inhibit participation, as not all families may want this degree of involvement. Wilson and Matthews (2001) and Imtoual et al. (2009) discuss the necessity of being open and honest and communicating in a supportive way that encourages relatedness.

Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku (ACRS), a partnership that provided a collaborative structure, empowered Indigenous women and supported...
community ownership of early childhood centres in remote communities, is an example of a successful initiative that gave control to Indigenous communities (Colbung et al., 2007; Priest 2005). The community elders believed that it is children's cultural knowledge and identity that will keep them strong and identified child-rearing practices that were integral to the community (Priest, 2005 p. 19).

Significance of Indigenous educators

Community consultations by Hutchins et al. (2009) highlighted the importance of Indigenous staff who are able to help children feel welcome and valued. Indigenous staff teach children about specific cultural practices and provide culturally desirable comfort and educated role models, and communicate effectively with Indigenous families (Cassady et al., 2005; Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Hutchins et al., 2007; Kronemann, 2007). Owing to the small number of Indigenous teachers currently available, Indigenous children are mainly taught by non-Indigenous people (Cassady et al., 2005; Farquar & Fleer, 2006; Hutchins et al., 2009; Reid & Santoro, 2006b). Non-Indigenous educators often assume that all Indigenous Australians have the same beliefs and customs, regardless of community (Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Reid & Santoro, 2006a). This disregards the complexity and diversity of Indigenous groups and nations (Nakata, 2002). As a result, Aboriginal perspectives are often taught in superficial ways, lacking sensitivity and understanding (Hutchins et al., 2009, p. 4).

As suggested by Nakata (2002), effective, experienced teachers with an understanding of community are essential to success for Indigenous children, and all early childhood teachers need to be prepared for educating these children (Bourke et al., 2000; Cassady et al., 2005; Hutchins et al., 2007; Kronemann, 2007; Sarra, 2007). Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing should be validated and incorporated into mainstream early childhood programs (Colbung et al., 2007). However, as Priest (2005) has suggested, it will be some time before Indigenous cultural knowledge will be given equivalent status with western knowledge. Cultural awareness programs for all non-Indigenous staff need to be an essential part of every program involving Indigenous children (Burns, 2005; Butterworth & Candy, 1998). This would support the provision of culturally safe environments (Hutchins et al., 2009). Teachers should reflect on their own values, attitudes, biases and expectations (Delpit, 1995) and understand and value the rich traditions of Indigenous culture rather than imposing an Anglo-Australian approach and making assumptions about Indigenous home circumstances and family values based on stereotypes (Reid & Santoro, 2006b, p. 295; Sarra, 2007).

Relatedness and inclusivity

Respectful relationships are central to services for Indigenous children (DEST, 2001; DEST, 2005; Hutchins et al. 2007). Indigenous early childhood staff emphasise relatedness and inclusion in their interactions with children (Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Imtoual et al., 2009; Martin, 2007). Fasoli and Ford (2001) found that, when Indigenous practitioners discussed interactions with children, they consistently talked about relationships. One teacher described herself as being ‘like a grandmother’ while another discussed the significance of status embedded in the title of ‘Aunty’ (p. 18). Another example of relatedness occurs when a mother hands her child over to a carer. She is showing great trust and she expects the carer to love, care for and protect her child. By receiving the child, the carer is accepting this trust. This includes the carer staying with children if they become distressed or allowing children to follow the carer until they feel comfortable. Children will rely on the person they were handed to, assuming that this person will give them care and attention because of their mother’s trust (Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Imtoual et al., 2009; Martin, 2007).

The place of relatedness in the role of an Indigenous educator is central (Martin, 2007). For example, Fasoli and Ford (2001) describe one teacher who emphasised talking calmly and gently to children because only certain family members have the right to ‘growl’ at them. Indigenous children understand their roles in caring for siblings or cousins, and even young children offer them protection, assistance and comfort. These relationships need to be respected. A centre is culturally relevant when staff members understand cultural expectations, relationships and the subtleties of communication, including non-verbal communication. It may be that this is only possible for teachers who are members of or accepted by the local communities (Mundine & Giugni, 2006). Wilson and Matthews (2001, pp. 3–4) discuss the importance of considering the child’s perspective and the necessity of allowing time to build trusting relationships to support a child’s sense of place.

Summary and conclusion

Research suggests the early years of life are significant in setting children’s life trajectories. While families and communities are central, early childhood settings have a powerful impact on children. Educators can support success by valuing children’s identity and culture and providing opportunities for children to discover and explore cultural connections, keeping in mind that ‘being proud and strong is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s success in learning’ (QDETA, nd, p. 13).
Indigenous children are under-represented in early childhood programs. Barriers to participation have been found to include lack of accessibility and awareness of services, mistrust based on the recent history, racism in services, non-inclusion of Indigenous families and limited knowledge of Indigenous cultures among non-Indigenous staff.

While the literature provides some information about children’s learning experiences within their families, communities and early childhood programs, much of the focus has been on the providers’ experiences and on statistics concerning the numbers of Indigenous children using services. There has been little research on community and family patterns of child care in Indigenous communities or parents’ expectations and feelings. There is a need to hear and respond to the voices of the Indigenous Australians as they ‘are the custodians of their knowledge’ (DEST, 2001, p. 2) and have a lot to tell us about their children’s education.

Everyone in children’s services must be aware of constructs grounded in knowledge, respectful relationships and understanding of Indigenous history and culture and current issues for Indigenous people (Colbung et al., 2007; Hampton & Roy, 2002). This is essential to understand local culture, racism and how Indigenous children are raised (D’Souza, 1999; Prochner, 2004; Sarra, 2007). It provides a context for a framework for culturally relevant pedagogy for Indigenous children that reflects the principles and practices of Indigenous community life (Colbung et al., 2007, p. 155) in services staffed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous early childhood teachers in partnership with local communities.

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Adding new possibilities for visual art education in early childhood settings: The potential of interactive whiteboards and ICT

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS, in New Zealand and internationally, are increasingly using information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning opportunities for young children in their care. The types of ICTs being used in early childhood settings often include computers, digital cameras, video cameras, and DVD players. The Internet is also being accessed by teachers to assist inquiry-based learning or to find information that builds on children’s learning interests. Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs), a relatively new type of ICT, are now being used in some early childhood programs in New Zealand, and this new technology has the potential to add a new dimension to children’s visual art learning experiences. This article explores how ICTs, such as IWBs, can add new possibilities for both teaching and learning in the visual arts in early childhood settings.

Introduction

The New Zealand early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) encourages early childhood teachers to provide traditional art learning experiences that foster children’s ‘skill and confidence with the processes of art and craft, such as cutting, drawing, collage, painting, print-making, weaving, stitching, carving and constructing’ (p. 80). While teachers are also required to help children ‘develop familiarity with the properties and character of materials and technology [italics added] used in the creative and expressive arts’ (p. 80), I have observed that using information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the visual arts with young children has not yet been given a high degree of consideration by early childhood teachers in New Zealand. This is owing in part, I believe, to the lack of literature and current research suggesting that ICTs, such as Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs), can be useful learning tools for young children in the visual arts (Terreni, 2009a).

Having research interests in both visual arts education and the use of ICTs in early childhood settings, I undertook a case study (Terreni, 2009a) which examined how an IWB was used in a New Zealand kindergarten to support young children’s visual art learning experiences. IWBs revolutionise traditional computer practice by enabling users to manipulate objects on a large touch-sensitive screen (sizes range between 127cm and 241cm diagonally) directly with their hands, fingers or a special pen, rather than using a mouse. This ability, I believe, has important implications for early childhood contexts where the provision of kinesthetic opportunities (Gardner, 1993; Haldane & Somekah, 2005) is seen as fundamental to enhancing young children’s learning.

This article presents a synthesis of the international research and literature I examined as part of my research. The literature review explores the current use and creative potential of IWBs and other ICTs for visual art learning in early childhood education contexts. I have included some of my own findings in the review. An overview of visual art education commonly found in New Zealand early childhood settings is also provided.

Visual art education in early childhood settings in New Zealand: An overview

Visual art is a domain of knowledge and learning which is generally integrated into all early childhood programs in New Zealand. However, unlike prescriptive curricula that highlight subject content knowledge that needs to be ‘taught’ (Haggerty, 2003), visual art exploration...
by young children in early childhood in New Zealand is usually done in the context of holistic, play-based programs. In this context teachers encourage children to freely use a range of traditional core art media. These generally include painting, drawing, clay, construction, collage and printmaking. Richards (2007, p. 22) has noted that, ‘common practice in [New Zealand] early childhood art has varied little from its traditional stance on natural art development, adult non-intervention [italics added], and the sacrosanct nature of creativity and artistic expression’. Despite the shift towards a sociocultural orientation in New Zealand—early childhood pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2005a) which recognises that learning takes place through interactions with people, places and things—this type of practice has also been observed by other New Zealand art educators (Terreni, 2005; Clark & de Lautour, 2007; Gunn, 2000; Lewis, 1998; Richards, 2007; Visser, 2004).

Although the use of ICT as an integral part of the provision of visual arts learning experiences in early childhood education (ECE) has not been researched, there has been research demonstrating a significant increase in the effective use of ICT in New Zealand early childhood centres to support young children’s learning (Cherrington, Oldridge & Green, 2009). This has been largely as a result of the implementation of the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s (2005b) ICT strategy Foundations of Discovery, and the roll-out of professional development for teachers in this area. The types of commonly used ICTs that assist with teaching and learning in early childhood centres include computers, digital cameras, video cameras and DVD players. Teachers are increasingly using the Internet to assist children’s inquiry-based learning or to find information that builds on their interests.

Basic visual arts software is sometimes provided for children to create simple art works on a computer1, but I have observed that, as yet, the provision of more sophisticated art-making software2, using Internet-based art-making programs, or using ICTs to investigate and talk about the children’s art and the art of others (Terreni, 2008), occurs less frequently3. This may be because of teachers’ reluctance to be too engaged with children’s art processes, as suggested by Richards (2007), but also because teachers have not yet developed a full awareness of the potential of including ICT as part of the visual art program. IWBs, which are particularly suited for use with visual art-making software and for Internet visual art investigations because of their interactive attributes (Terreni, 2009a), are also relatively rare in early childhood settings, owing in part to their high cost. Nonetheless, there is a small (but growing) number of New Zealand early childhood centres now integrating IWBs into their programs. For instance, in 2009 an early childhood IWB network with eight ECE centres was established in the Wellington region, and this provided teachers with opportunities to discuss and share ideas about how to use IWBs effectively with young children.

What the literature says about IWBs, ICT, visual art and creativity

There is currently very little research or literature about the use of IWBs in early childhood settings, both internationally and in New Zealand (Terreni, 2009a). Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) found that systematic research studies in early years settings are virtually non-existent, but have noted that ‘some particularly positive practices [with IWBs] have been observed’ (p. 45). There has, however, been a low level of research interest in the use of IWBs in New Zealand early childhood settings. For instance, two early childhood e-Fellows4 were able to undertake small trials of the technology in their kindergartens during their research investigations. Research by an e-Fellow in 2005, Jo Colbert, investigated whether ICT could enhance the complexity, connections and continuity of young children’s storytelling. During this investigation she explored children’s use of KidPix, an art software package, and found that it worked well on the IWB. Carol Marks, an e-Fellow in 2006, looked at children’s use of ICT, including an IWB, to see if it would enhance imaginary play and storytelling.

Like Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, Colbert’s and Marks’s observations of children using an IWB in these settings were positive. Colbert, for instance, reported:

The smart board [a type of IWB] as an art activity enables the children to use full body movements; they are able to use their whole arm when they draw on the screen rather than just fine motor control, although this is also required when children extend their artwork to include more detail. The smart board enabled children to use Kidpix in a way that I think it is designed for, as a drawing/art programme (sic), without the frustrations associated with using it on the laptop. It also made it a far more interactive experience for the children, as they were able to fully involve themselves in their artwork, by using their finger as a drawing tool. (J. Colbert, personal communication, 3 October, 2005)

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1 Paint and Kidpix appear to be some of the most commonly used programs.
2 ArtRage is an example of a program that offers a range of art-making options and can add complexity to children’s digital art making.
3 The Tate Gallery offers excellent on-line art-making activities for young children at http://kids.tate.org.uk/.
4 The e-Fellow initiative is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education http://www.tki.org.nz/r/ict/efellows/index_e.php.
Despite the lack of research in early childhood settings, there have been some large-scale investigations into the use of IWBs in school settings. This is because of a higher uptake of IWB technology in primary and secondary schools, both in New Zealand and internationally (Terreni, 2009a). Project ACTIVate, a large New Zealand study, included several research projects which examined and analysed the effects of teaching and learning with IWBs in the compulsory education context (Duncan, Dysart, Ryba & Edwards, 2005). Gilroy (2005) examined the effects of using an IWB with 10-year-old children in a Year 6 New Zealand classroom. An Australian study by Lee and Boyle (2003) investigated the use of IWBs with primary school children aged five to 10 years. All these studies found that there are positive affordances offered by the IWB technology for assisting children's learning.

Key factors identified by Gilroy (2005) and Lee and Boyle (2003) demonstrated how an IWB could support children's learning. There were similar findings by the Project ACTIVate researchers (Terreni, 2009a). The researchers found that IWBs could support children's learning in numerous ways. These included:

- The provision of tactile ‘hands-on’ experiences suitable for kinesthetic learners.
- Encouraging group learning activities by quickly capturing children's joint attention.
- The ability to immediately respond to children's interests by accessing information relating to these from a variety of sources.
- Assisting teachers to model exploration and research skills.
- Giving children easy physical access to the large screen.
- Encouraging children to engage in peer tutoring on how to use the board and the applications.
- Attracting shy and/or reluctant learners to the technology.
- Providing an effective vehicle for storing and then reviewing students’ work.

This research provides useful insights into the use of IWB technology in a school classroom setting. While there can be differences in pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in primary school and early childhood settings, I believe the positive attributes of IWBs that supported children's learning have relevance to the use of IWBs in early childhood contexts.

There is very limited research that specifically investigates the use of IWBs for facilitating children's visual art learning experiences in an early childhood educational setting. Kuzminska (2008), however, conducted a study into her own use of an IWB for teaching visual art to five- and six-year-olds in an American kindergarten classroom. She was particularly interested in how the IWB could be effectively used for the study of visual art history and criticism, and for developing visual thinking strategies in children; for example, using art to teach thinking, communication skills and visual literacy. Kuzminska concluded that an IWB was an appropriate technology for integration into the study of visual art. She identified several attributes of the IWB that assisted with teaching in this domain. These included: the way the IWB interfaced easily with other digital tools (such as digital cameras, scanners, video cameras and VCRs) that are useful in visual art education, the ease with which students could view information about visual art from the internet on the IWB, and how the interactivity of the IWB captured the students’ attention. She was particularly impressed by the way the IWB helped facilitate students’ own investigations which assisted the construction of their visual art knowledge.

Findings from my own study of an IWB used with two-, three- and four-year-old children in a New Zealand kindergarten (a government-funded early childhood centre catering for children aged two to four years) also revealed many positive attributes of the technology that supported children's visual art learning experiences (Terreni, 2009a). The findings revealed that:

- The large size of the IWB and the interactive digital drawing tools of the software were very attractive to children and gave them new art-making opportunities. For instance, children could draw images on the IWB and, after reflecting on their work, unsatisfactory parts could be easily erased and the image refined. Background ‘fill’ colours could be added to their drawings, drawn images could be broken apart and then put back together in new ways, text could be added easily to drawings and photographs, and symbols from the image library could be imported onto the screen and then manipulated to created new images or shapes.
- Collaborative engagement and peer support in visual art learning experiences using the IWB were evident as children discussed and exchanged ideas and shared skills with each other at the IWB.
- The technical complexity of the IWB created more opportunities for teachers to scaffold children's learning with the technology and discuss with them their drawings or art-related activities on the IWB.
- Children sometimes used the IWB for developing ideas that were later transferred into other visual arts mediums and vice versa.

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5 Project ACTIVate was a collaborative project involving two school clusters located in Auckland and Southland. There were 14 different schools involved and these were a mix of state and integrated primary and secondary schools. The majority of the schools were mainstream schools but there were also two Kaupapa Māori schools involved.

The IWB attracted children with special learning needs and was a tool for generating feelings of confidence and competence in them as they mastered the technical skills for visual art making on the board.

Two-year-old Infants confidently and competently engaged in visual art making on the IWB.

While there is limited research that specifically investigates the relationship between IWBs and visual art education, there is some research and literature that discusses ICT and the development of children’s creativity. This research has significant implications for visual art education for young children. Loveless (2003), for instance, has written about the creative potential of ICT in primary school classrooms in which the visual arts were an integral part of the curriculum. She has suggested the creative subjects such as visual art, drama, music, and design and technology, poetry, creative writing, and storytelling ‘offer authentic and relevant contexts’ (p. 6) for ICT to be used. She believes creative activities with new technologies in areas such as the visual arts can include using ICT to assist with the “developing ideas, making connections, creating and making, collaboration, communication and evaluation” (p. 12).

Loveless (2007) has also suggested that ‘creative processes are supported by opportunities for play, exploration, reflection and focused engagement with ideas, and digital technologies have played a role in these activities’ (p. 9). Nonetheless, she offered a cautionary note that has particular relevance for those using ICT to support visual art education in early childhood settings, stating ‘free play with digital technologies, however, does not guarantee effective or creative engagement or development, and there is still need to support and guide children’s interactions in informed ways’ (italics added) (p. 9).

Long (2001), commenting on ICT and visual art education for older secondary school students, highlights the need for such education to accommodate new ideas as well as the technologies that children are increasingly exposed to. He argues that:

… by engaging in the making of digital images which incorporate the full range of visual elements, children will develop a much more universal and inclusive set of visual understandings … visual art education will be able to make powerful links to cultural forms that surround children and enable them to bring in those references. (p. 204)

This view is supported by Dunmill and Arslanagic (2006) who add that ‘the ever-developing range of sophisticated hardware, software, and multimedia digital tools allow (sic) new ways to manipulate and create new arts practices and transdiscipline or intermedia art works’ (p. 60). They believe that when ICTs are used for arts practice they can create ‘opportunities for new, dynamic ways of thinking and knowing about the arts and culture of the world’s peoples …’ (p. 61), and these practices are relevant to education in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century ICT is likely to bring changes and new possibilities to young children’s visual art explorations and, in so doing, enhances and widens their visual arts learning experiences. My research into the use of an IWB in a New Zealand kindergarten setting demonstrated that the technology has the potential to offer children new and exciting opportunities in this area of learning. Research literature also suggests that ICTs can be powerful and useful tools for teaching and learning in the creative subjects, such as visual art. As Vecchi and Guidici (2004) suggest, ‘New technologies have … introduced new and different elements that are bringing changes to the environment of art and artists as well as that of children. We are dealing with a new landscape of possible mental images and technical and inventive action …’ (p. 141). Early childhood teachers, while continuing to provide children with traditional visual art learning experiences, now need to consider how they can best use ICTs, such as IWBs, to enrich young children’s learning in the visual arts.

References


**Introduction**

Interest and commitment to Early Childhood (EC) Education for Sustainability (EfS) is growing rapidly in Australia (Environmental Education in Early Childhood, 2010; Hughes, 2007). EC is a critical time for establishing EfS understandings and behaviours (Environmental Education in Early Childhood, 2010; NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network 2010). This position informed the current study and justified need for the research.

Outcomes for EC students after engagement in an EfS program are presented. The research was conducted at an independent school located in the Perth metropolitan area of Western Australia (WA). Three student-driven EfS projects, located at the school and in the nearby wetlands, are examined: biological survey, reed planting and turtle nest-watch. The research investigated student outcomes in terms of attitudes, understandings and behaviours, after involvement in the EfS program.

Understandings about EfS and the importance of attachment to the local ‘place’ are discussed first, then background information about the study is outlined, followed by the research findings.

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**Education for sustainability**

Over the past 40 years in Australia, Environmental Education (EE) has evolved into Education for Sustainability (EfS). EE has been discussed in the Australian education context since the 1970s (Evans & Boyden, 1970; Fien & Gough, 1996), with reference to education in, about and for the environment (Linke, 1980; Lucas, 1979). Simplistically, the evolution of EE to EfS may be presented as: about the environment in the 1970s, in the environment in the 1980s, for the environment in the 1990s, and sustainability in the 2000s (Tilbury, Coleman, & Garlick, 2005).

Since the 1990s there has been an emphasis in EE on the clarification of understandings related to the for approach. However, it wasn’t until the 2000s that the for approach started to make an impact in practice (Heck, 2003). Education for ‘promotes critical reflection … It seeks to build capacity for active participation’ (Tilbury et al., 2005, p. 17). Education for the environment empowers, providing learners with skills to take positive action so that current and future generations have a critical understanding of how complex systems work, such as ecosystems, economic and sociopolitical systems (Tilbury et al., 2005). The for approach also stresses the cultivation of environmental values (Gralton, Sinclair, & Purnell, 2004).
The recent National Action Plan for EFs in Australia acknowledged the need for ‘individuals and organisations [to] have the knowledge, skills, values, capacity and motivation to respond to the complex sustainability issues they encounter’ (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts, 2009, p. 8). The Action Plan recognised that EFs had changed from the 1970s focus ‘on awareness of natural ecosystems and their degradation to equipping all people with the knowledge, skills and understandings necessary to make decisions based upon a consideration of their full environmental, social and economic implications’ (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage, and the Arts, 2009, p. 3).

The WA Sustainable Schools Initiative identified key elements for effective EFs. One was ‘student voice and engagement’ (Department of Education and Training, 2010). This element is important because talking with and listening to students enables them to be active participants and it facilitates more powerful learning and school processes (Cook-Sather, 2006; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Enhanced student voice is critical for engagement and deep learning in EC (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). This element, associated with development in students’ EFs understandings, may impact on EC education and student engagement in the present study.

Attachment to place

The ‘Nature Deficit Disorder’ refers to the observation that children have become so plugged into TV, video and computer games that they have lost/are losing their connection with the natural world (Louv, 2005). Various authors argue that it is vital to restore meaningful connections with nature, by fostering strong, close relationships with the local environment (Miles, 2008; Miller, 2005). The present study therefore attempted to respond to issues raised by young children to enhance attachment to their local ‘place’.

This research is significant as it links current understandings in EFs, specifically the vital role of student voice and the importance of attachment to place, with an increasing focus on EC education. EC is the time to begin to have a critical impact on how future Australians view and respond to EFs issues. Furthermore, the research is timely because it is a sphere of investigation that has been highlighted in recent national and international literature (Environmental Education in Early Childhood, 2010; NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network 2010; Tilbury, Coleman et al., 2005).

Educational context

The school was situated adjacent to wetlands, which influenced the children’s interests and consequently the EFs projects undertaken. The researcher was a staff member at the school and conducted the study as a component of doctoral research. The research was conducted between 2006 and 2008. The objective, methodology and findings of the study, followed by conclusions, are outlined below.

Objective

The research aimed to investigate the impact of the school’s EFs program by addressing the question: What are the outcomes, in terms of EC student attitudes, understandings and behaviours, resulting from involvement in an EFs program?

Method

Participants in the program included the whole school population: students, teachers and other staff. Parents also participated by providing additional support during lessons. Evidence was obtained from 36 EC students who provided signed permission forms to participate in the research: 15 pre-primaries (PP) and 21 lower primaries (LP).

A qualitative approach to gathering information was adopted in order to address the research question. The approach was phenomenological, in that it set out to determine students’ attitudes, understandings and behaviours about the EFs program and how the program influenced those characteristics.

Data gathering involved questionnaires, observation and collection of work samples. Students were surveyed in order to determine attitudinal, knowledge and behavioural outcomes. Randomly selected students were observed both in class and during outside EFs activities. Student work samples were analysed to provide additional evidence.

Data analysis involved the collection of data from different sources with a view to determining possible overarching themes. All sources of data were analysed by discourse analysis, using specialised computer software, QSR NUD*IST, Non-numeric, Unstructured Data - Indexing Searching Theorising (Bazeley, 2007; Richards, 2005). Word counts and semantic network analysis of student mind maps and drawings provided further depth of analysis.

Findings

Findings from three EFs projects are presented in the following sections: biological survey, reed planting and turtle nest-watch. These projects occurred in the local context: the school grounds and adjacent wetlands. They arose as a result of the children’s interests and concerns.
**Biological survey**

Students at the school were interested in fauna and flora in their local area and some expressed concern about the lack of biodiversity. A research project was subsequently developed with the students. They wanted to investigate the extent of biodiversity around the school and wetlands.

A biological survey was conducted in 2006. LP students actively participated in all stages of the project, while PP children engaged in observations and discussions focusing on the pit trap specimens that the older children caught. Frogs and lizards were most commonly captured in the pit traps. Students graphed their findings. Figure 1 shows, for example, the number of frogs caught during the different seasons. Furthermore, only two species of frog were caught, seven Motorbike frogs and 75 Western Banjo frogs, whereas 12 frog species had previously been found in the locality (Greening Australia, 2010). In addition, more frogs were caught in the native garden area than any other area. As a result of these findings the students wanted to take action for the environment. They planted native flora to improve local habitat, with the goal of enhancing biodiversity of local native fauna and flora.

![Figure 1. LP student work sample showing the number of frogs caught in pit traps by season](image)

Figure 2. PP student drawing ‘caring for the worms’

![Figure 2](image)

The 2007 PP questionnaire invited students to draw themselves doing something good for the environment. A representative drawing is shown in Figure 2. One of the questions in the 2007 LP questionnaire asked students about their favourite EfS lessons during the previous year. Table 1 presents the frequency of responses in terms of topics. Biodiversity topics were students’ favourite EfS lessons, with nine of the 16 responses specifically referring to pit trapping in the biological survey (Lewis & Baudains, 2007).

**Table 1. LP students’ favourite EfS lessons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Waste</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Biodiversity</th>
<th>Energy</th>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical responses (some students identified more than one favourite lesson)</td>
<td>Recycling. Worms.</td>
<td>Water testing – you got to see all the animals you won’t see.</td>
<td>Pit traps - frogs wher in them. Garden - I lickt plating (liked planting). Pit traps becor you get to see nater (because see nature). Bird watching beacos it was fan. Pet tra - it was fun (pit trap). Pit tras - cachc annals (pit traps - catch animals). Pit traps because we cached bugs &amp; insects.</td>
<td>Solar panels Sun fear - it was fun (Sun fair).</td>
<td>All (referred to mind map that included caring &amp; respect).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2008 LP questionnaire invited students to create mind maps of everything they knew about sustainability. A typical mind map, identifying pit traps from the biological survey, is shown in Figure 3. Drawn by a Year 3 child, it identified four aspects of ‘sustainability’. Two aspects are reported here: the biological survey and water testing/reed planting; while the remaining two referred to other projects (worm farming and health).
In summary, students were extremely engaged in all aspects of the biological survey, from project design to the early morning ritual of checking traps, weighing and identifying specimens, and later collating data and preparing posters to present findings. Clearly, the children's hands-on experience in this project enhanced their interest in and commitment to local fauna, as they requested follow-up surveys in subsequent years.

Reed planting

In 2006 students conducted water quality testing of the local lake. Their results revealed concerns about pollution of the lake environs. For instance, students found the macroinvertebrate count showed a predominance of species that were very tolerant or moderately tolerant to polluted water conditions. Figure 4 shows a PP student’s work sample documenting the macroinvertebrate investigations. Students also learned that the presence of weed species at the lake edge contributed to poor water quality. These results led to student questions about what could be done to improve the situation. Students wanted to participate in action that was for the environment.

Based on the students’ concerns and desire to improve the water quality, a school/community based project was developed. This involved the removal of weed species and re-planting with native reeds and sedges. Throughout the project (2007), there was close collaboration between the school, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), the local catchment council and other industry representatives. Students, staff and community members contributed hands-on support by making site observations, documenting developments and re-planting the site with native reeds and sedges.

Student actions showed commitment to the project. For example, after school on the re-planting day, one student reported that birds had pulled up some of the newly planted reeds. Students re-planted disturbed reeds in their own time. Students were also able to explain that planting native reeds and sedges could improve the water quality of the lake, which could positively impact on the diversity of lake species found. For instance, during an interview about attitudes to the environment, conducted in 2007 as part of an Environmental Learning Outcomes Survey (ELOS) Interview Schedule (Ballantyne, Packer, & Everett, 2005), students were asked what the particular part of their visit to the project site made them change how they felt. One LP student replied ‘... remembering how dirty the water was last year and how clean it is this year ... I found more creatures in the lake and saw the water was cleaner’. The behavioural intentions of this student were ‘I will clean up rubbish from around the lake, I have been going for walks with Mum. We take a plastic bag and pick up rubbish as we go.’ Clearly, these students displayed behaviours indicating empowerment and commitment to the project.

The ELOS Student Observation Schedule (Ballantyne et al., 2005) was employed in 2007. PP and LP classes were observed participating in the project. Observations were undertaken during lessons incorporating whole class and small group discussions, walking to and from the lake site, observing surroundings and conducting water quality assessments. Overall, students displayed positive engagement in learning behaviours. Students shared their learning with their peers and experts, and were actively involved in learning all the time. See Table 2.
Table 2. PP and LP student engagement in learning behaviours during lake lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Frequency of engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PP 1</td>
<td>PP 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing learning with peers and experts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making links and transferring ideas and skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating/showing responsibility for their own learning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully manipulating objects and ideas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing confidence in personal learning abilities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively involved in learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to new information or evidence</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency codes: 1 = rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = most of the time; 4 = all of the time.

The 2008 PP questionnaire invited students to draw themselves doing something good for the environment. A representative drawing is shown in Figure 5. LP students were requested to create a mind map showing everything they knew about sustainability. The mind map in Figure 3 showed the student recalled the water quality testing/planting native reeds project from previous years.

In brief, the native reed planting project engaged children in practical, hands-on activities that could contribute to an improvement in the lake water. Evidence was provided indicating these young students felt empowered through participation in the project. Another wetlands investigation, the turtle nest-watch project, is discussed in the following section.

**Turtle nest-watch**

EC students expressed concern about turtles in the local wetland. Road deaths and a lack of suitable nesting sites were identified as key issues that impacted on turtles. In response to student concern, the school developed a turtle nest-watch project, which was implemented over a two-year period, 2006–2007. It aimed to provide a suitable, safe nesting site in the wetland for the oblong turtle, *Chelodina oblonga*.

The project involved close cooperation between the school, Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and other groups. The trial nesting site was located in a comparatively flat, open, rectangular area about 30 metres from the water, and a 10-minute walk from the school. Students, staff and community members contributed hands-on support for the project by making observations at the site, collecting litter and documenting developments.

Students displayed environmental responsibility by taking appropriate action when they observed the amount of rubbish at the site. They volunteered to collect litter each time they visited the site. During an ELOS (Ballantyne et al., 2005) interview in 2007, a LP student reported ‘My attitude to this environment has changed seeing the impact of predation, of rubbish, and weeds, at the site ... It is sad to see how much rubbish is about; I'm more conscientious about walking to the bin.’

Students recognised the importance of preserving native habitats and expressed ecosystem understandings. For instance, one LP student stated ‘turtles are at the top of the underwater food chain and can show how good the environment is’. Students conducted turtle nest-watch expeditions to determine if the site had been used for nesting. They found it had, but it was unsafe as all 31 nests were predated. This finding was reported to DEC for follow-up action.

In summary, the review of the outcomes of the turtle nest-watch project suggested participation provided an effective means of responding to student concerns and engaging them in EFS action to make a difference in their local environment. As with the biological survey, LP questionnaire respondents in both 2007 and 2008 were so engaged in the project they requested further ‘turtle egg hunt’ experiences.

**Conclusions**

The three projects discussed in this paper illustrate how one school attempted to engage in EFS with EC students from a perspective that recognised the importance of responding to topics of interest and concern to the children. The issue about who created the suitable learning context was important. In each project it was students who initially raised the topic and drove the creation of the environmental contexts in the local setting. Student participation in the whole learning process, from conception of learning context to its fruition, was considered crucial for achieving powerful, meaningful, long-term EFS experiences. Clearly, EC children have the capacity and energy to make changes in the environment, but the support role played by the school and parents/community is critical.

The results support the proposition that this EFS program...
was an effective, meaningful approach to engaging young children in sustainability learning experiences. Students were able to verbalise their developing environmental knowledge, express attitudes toward local environmental issues, and outline their behavioural intentions and actions to improve the environment. This evidence suggests young students can learn about sustainability in real-life, local environmental contexts by actively participating in tasks that empower them. Student outcomes were illustrated in potent, enjoyable, hands-on, real-life contexts. Students demonstrated improved care of and action for the local environment, as well as enhanced understandings of the healthy functioning of natural ecosystems.

EFS in the present study moved beyond the familiar school kitchen garden experience for EC students. The three projects: biological survey, reed planting and turtle nest-watch, allowed us to view EFS with a re-framed perspective, utilising the opportunity to provide students with a powerful voice by responding to their interests and concerns. Indeed, sound pedagogy called for making strong links between student voice and the real world in the local, long-term context (Miles, 2008; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Evidence indicated enhanced attachment to students’ local ‘place’.

In conclusion, EC EFS can facilitate deeper futures thinking and engagement with ‘real’ local environment issues. The challenge to the participating school now, and to other schools, is to determine ways to respond to student interests and deeply embed EFS practices within other site plans and curricula. There are broader implications too. What is the nature of the staff professional development required to achieve these outcomes? What do teachers, students and the school community need in order to engage in similar learning experiences? What are the implications of the issues identified in this paper for pre-service and in-service teacher education? Finally, how can other projects be confidently translated into examples of quality teaching that facilitate the transformation change outlined in Australia’s Action Plan for EFS? Clearly, there are many research questions about the relationship between EC education and EFS that warrant further study. Only some of these questions will be addressed in the current doctoral research; future researchers are therefore challenged to consider the questions raised here as a platform for further discovery.

References


Sincere thanks to the children, staff and partners who participated in the program.
Culture-switching in different worlds: Young children’s transition experiences

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THE CONSTRUCTS OF ‘THREE WORLDS’ and culture-switching were developed during a longitudinal study of the literacy experiences of a small group of culturally diverse children in Australia who encountered differing social and cultural contexts as they were transitioning from preschool to Year 1. Drawing on sociocultural perspectives and using a case study design, the report examines the ways in which five children negotiated culture, literacy, and schooling at home and in the classroom. The study establishes sufficient evidential warrant for further investigation into the nature and dimensions of world-building and culture-switching that seemingly characterise such literacy experiences. It may also provide insights for teachers of young, culturally diverse children starting school.

Introduction

The importance of early childhood education in preparing children for their future is broadly acknowledged. This means early childhood has a place on political, academic and community agendas and in state and Federal Government plans to ‘bridge gaps’ and enhance success in the early years of school (Simpson, 2009). Accordingly, assumptions about the dynamic and diverse mix of linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds represented in Australian classrooms need to be challenged.

Ashton, Woodrow, Johnston, Wangmann, Singh and James (2008) attributed children’s success at school to the congruence between the practices of home and school, while identifying differences in values, skills and learning styles—described as cultural dissonance—as inhibiting success. These claims are supported by studies that reveal children from minority cultures generally do not achieve the same success in literacy learning as children from dominant cultures (Purcell-Gates, 1993). Freeman and Bochner (2008) attempted to explain the difference by maintaining that teachers expect minority children to have already developed literacy skills and knowledge similar to children of the dominant culture and through similar experiences. As a result, minority children are left to cope with linguistic and cultural differences on their own, struggling to negotiate between home and school without sufficient assistance (Heath, 1982). A second explanation is that teachers, in attempts to take account of the cultural diversity in their classrooms, may make unhelpful assumptions about children’s knowledge, experiences and practices, based on stereotypical perceptions of cultural traits (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002).

However, some minority children, despite cultural and linguistic differences, do adapt successfully to school environments and develop literacy knowledge and skills apace with their peers. An attempt to explain the successful adaptation of such children could be made in terms of their skills of border-crossing.

Border-crossing is a metaphor first used by Anzaldúa (1987) to describe the difficulties encountered by those traversing the divides between societal groups. While the notion of cultural borders may seem authentic and real from a societal perspective that views a culture as a bounded system, separable and distinguishable from others, the power of the cultural border rhetoric seems to lose its potency when the focus switches from a society (or group) to individuals (Chang, 1999). As outlined in the present study, individuals build a unique and personal cultural identity through a process of assimilation and accommodation of aspects of the diverse cultures that form their experiences. The metaphor of border-crossing is inadequate to describe this process. Therefore,
alternative ways of describing the cultural identity building of individuals are needed.

In the present study, a construct of three worlds was used to describe the very different experiences the five children encountered at home, preschool and in Year 1. World-building was the term used to describe the process the children engaged in to construct their individual cultural identities, and culture-switching was coined to describe the purposeful actions of mixing, transferring and borrowing that children appeared to have undertaken, in order to have their needs met and to achieve success.

Background and methodology

The study examines the literacy experiences of a small, culturally diverse group of children (five girls), and the environments in which these experiences occurred. The study aimed to assist in clarifying how young children negotiate culture, literacy, and schooling. The results of the study were intended to assist teachers in developing an understanding of the rich cultural diversity present within classrooms and the benefits of acknowledging this as a resource that can help support children's literacy learning.

The fine-grained study took place during the last three months of the preschool year and during the first six months of some of the children's first year of formal schooling. It originally involved detailed case studies of five girls who attended the same preschool: Grace, Jeva, Lia, Kari and Zara (these names are pseudonyms). Their families came from Korea, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan and Australia respectively.

Using multiple strategies, the data was collected in the children's homes, at a state-run preschool, and then in a Year 1 state school classroom that three of the children later attended. The strategies employed included continuous observation of writing activities in three settings (videotaped in preschool and the Year 1 classroom), interviews with parents and teachers, regular audiotaped telephone conversations with parents about writing experiences that occurred in the home, and the collection of writing samples.

Researchers attempting to describe and understand aspects of early childhood often favour qualitative approaches that accommodate the complexity and diversity of the experiences of others (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). The value of a qualitative approach was clearly relevant to the present study, in which enhanced understandings were sought about the relationships between literacy experiences at home, at school, and across cultures. Approaches used in this study are consistent with contemporary, qualitative research whose strength lies in the production of fine-grained data (Merriam, 1988). Data in this study was analysed using grounded theory, and reported using multiple and diverse confirmatory strategies.

The study consisted of five qualitative case studies used to explore the processes and dynamics of minority children's literacy experiences and to gain an in-depth understanding of their contexts and meanings. Qualitative case studies do not seek to make generalisations, but rather to honour the specificities of the cases reported. Case studies are characterised by the engagement of empathy and the discovery of new relationships, concepts and understandings, rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Merriam (1988) explained: 'the interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation' (p. xii).

Analysis

The data was analysed using a constant-comparison process as employed in the grounded theory method. This method has been widely accepted and adapted among qualitative researchers since its inception and, despite internal debate, continues to be used extensively (Greckhamer & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). It provides a set of procedures and analytical steps to analyse data that is grounded in the context of the study and seeks to generate theory. The steps taken in this study were similar to descriptions by Charmaz (2002) that included: (a) simultaneous data collection and analysis; (b) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis; (c) discovery of basic social processes within the data; (d) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesise these processes; (e) sampling to refine the categories through comparative processes; and (f) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the processes studied.

First, the audiotapes of telephone conversations conducted fortnightly with parents were transcribed and read repeatedly in conjunction with the observation field notes to identify features of the home writing experiences. Writing samples or products of the home writing experiences were studied, in conjunction with the transcripts and field notes, in order that the skills and knowledge described by the parents could be examined. Background information provided by the parents during the initial interview was also considered when identifying crucially important features.

Second, the videotapes of the children's preschool writing experiences were analysed in a similar way to the audiotaped conversations. These tapes were transcribed and viewed repeatedly and demonstrably salient features of experiences were identified, using the raw data as examples to illustrate them. Writing samples or products of preschool activities were studied in conjunction with these transcripts. Background information provided by the preschool teacher during the initial interview was also considered when identifying their features. These features
were compared, contrasted and grouped together to form categories (later referred to as characteristics). Children’s individual experiences were compared, and then comparisons made amongst the children. Then the process was repeated with the data gathered on writing experiences in Year 1. The coding process was explained to a co-rater who replicated the coding process to establish the reliability of the categorisation. The co-rater undertook independent coding of 10 per cent of the transcripts of data from the three settings (home, preschool and Year 1) and an inter-reliability of 98.4 per cent was achieved. The coding process was determined to be extremely reliable.

Finally, with reference to accompanying features and examples, categories were compared and contrasted amongst children and between settings, and further categorised to form the dimensions of writing experiences. Throughout the process of analysis, concepts and relationships were deduced from the data. The final theory that emerged was derived from the data experiences in Year 1. The coding process was explained to a co-rater who replicated the coding process to establish the reliability of the categorisation. The co-rater undertook independent coding of 10 per cent of the transcripts of data from the three settings (home, preschool and Year 1) and an inter-reliability of 98.4 per cent was achieved. The coding process was determined to be extremely reliable.


eexperiences were negotiated with her mother, while Kari and Lia’s parents undertook literacy activities frequently. Zara’s experiences were negotiated with her mother, while Lia’s parents undertook literacy activities frequently. Zara’s experiences were negotiated with her mother, while

Participants: The children and their families

The five girls who were the focus of the study attended the same preschool in an inner suburb of a large Australian city. The children were chosen for the study because: a) their parents were willing to participate in the study; b) their parents planned to remain in Australia for the duration of the study; c) they spoke their heritage language at home; and d) their families represented a variety of cultural backgrounds. Five girls and their families from the 25 children in the class met these criteria and all were included in the study.

The backgrounds of the five families, seen as middle-class because of their tertiary education and socioeconomic status, varied markedly. Jeva’s family were immigrants from Bangladesh. Despite limited English, they had left family and friends to provide a brighter future for Jeva and her older sister in Australia. Jeva’s mother experienced constant homesickness in Australia, exacerbated when the father returned to Bangladesh for months at a time to work as a scientist. This meant Jeva’s mother, with limited English, cared for the family alone during the father’s absences.

Grace was the youngest of three children in her Korean family. Her mother worked at night, washing up in restaurants to support the family while the father studied to become a minister of religion. Strict study routines had been established for Grace and her brothers. When the boys did their homework, Grace completed literacy activities in workbooks purchased from the local newsagent and Sunday School homework activities. She was not praised for her efforts as her mother believed that praise inhibited a child’s diligence and willingness to work hard.

Kari was the daughter of a Japanese government representative living in Australia. She lived in a large, luxurious home on acreage and participated in many organised after-school activities with her older brother. At home, Kari was reluctant to stay in her bedroom, which was distant from other living areas in the house. When she commenced Year 1, a tutor was engaged to give her English lessons and assist with her homework.

Lia was the middle child of a large Indonesian family who lived in a small two-bedroom flat. Her family planned to return to Indonesia when the father completed his studies to become a town planner. Lia and her older siblings spent their free time playing on the street, as their mother was busy caring for the younger children and there was limited space inside. Her parents believed that Lia would just become literate when she started formal schooling and that accordingly, as parents, they had no role in this process.

Zara was the Australian child in the study. She lived with her mother and brother for several days each week and with her father for the remaining days. Her mother embedded literacy activities in many of the experiences she planned and engaged in with Zara.

Three worlds

The home world

The home literacy experiences were embedded within the social fabric of family life. They incorporated cultural values, attitudes and beliefs that were strenuously maintained so as to ensure continued understanding and preservation of family ties and cultural heritage. These included maintaining heritage language at home, religious rituals, correspondence with relatives overseas, and participation in cultural celebrations.

Nature of home literacy activities

The nature and frequency of planned activities and parent participation varied. For example, Grace, Zara and Jeva’s parents undertook literacy activities frequently. Zara’s experiences were negotiated with her mother, while Grace and Jeva’s experiences were highly structured and didactic or transmissive in nature. For example, Grace was set written tasks in workbooks to complete, which her mother supervised and then corrected.

Kari and Lia’s parents nor did not plan or engage with their children in literacy activities, as they did not believe they had any role to play in teaching their children to be literate. Instead, they believed their children should and would learn literacy at school. As Taylor (1983) also found, memories of their own unsupported literacy experiences likely led to the minimal ways these parents interacted with their children.

The nature and frequency of literacy conversations and interactions conformed to social conventions inherent in
traditional family practices. For example, in Jeva's family, the father initiated literacy activities each evening after dinner. The family gathered in the living room, where Jeva sat on the floor and recited and recorded the Bangla alphabet and numbers to 100, before repeating the process in English. This was reminiscent of the way her parents had rote-learned the Koran. Her father also mediated conversations that followed established patterns and rules of respect and authority. For example, Jeva always obeyed her father's instructions without question and demonstrated respect in her demeanour. She observed and listened to her parents' conversations but did not participate as a conversational partner unless invited. When she did participate, her role was not an equal one.

Lia and Kari initiated conversations with their parents, but opportunities to do so were limited owing to physical arrangements. In Kari's home, children were not permitted into the study. This was where the father worked, and the mother frequently conversed with him there. Lia spent most of her time outside playing with siblings because of limited space inside, and therefore few opportunities arose for conversations with parents. In contrast, Zara initiated frequent conversations with her parents, often directing conversations and even dominating interactions, at times interrupting and disagreeing with her mother.

The materials available to the children for literacy activities at home varied markedly. Grace, Kari and Zara were provided with a plethora of resources while Jeva and Lia had few. However, the provision of materials did not appear to impact on the engagement of children in literacy experiences. Lia, for example, constructed opportunities for literacy and utilised environmental resources in creative ways, demonstrating agency in her own self-directed literacy learning and her ability to shape her environment. This may be attributed to the literacy practices and environmental print she encountered both within and beyond her home. Her father was often studying in the bedroom, and Lia interrupted his work frequently by climbing on his knee to demand his attention. She questioned him about his work, and named and typed the letters that she knew on the computer keyboard.

**Home literacy values and beliefs**

Despite the differences outlined above, families had some values, attitudes and beliefs in common. These shared values, expressed by parents, included recognition of the importance of education, the need for children to achieve highly and be happy at school, and the importance of hard work. These beliefs and values are consistent with those identified by Goldenberg (1987), who suggests that members of differing cultural groups may have more shared than different values and are also typical of middle-classes anywhere in the world.

Laosa (1980) suggested, along with others (Lareau, 2002; Lareau, 2003), that parents’ social class and educational backgrounds are dimensions of culture that carry more influence than others in relation to children's early learning opportunities. The shared values of the families in this study are typical of educated middle-classes and are recognised as values that have a positive influence on children's adaptation to school (Goldenberg, 1987). Apart from the value attributed to learning and education, and the expectation that their children would be successful, parents’ openness to acknowledge others’ ways of doing things fostered in the children a willingness to learn from others. For example, Grace's parents had accepted that the main activity of preschool was play, despite their belief that learning was a serious and disciplined activity.

Similarly, the practices the children and their families engaged in at home reflected and promoted a system of definitions of themselves and their worlds (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, Grace identified as Korean despite having been born in Australia. The Korean language, food, games, and ways of doing things that comprised her world at home reinforced that heritage identity.

**Active participation at home**

Children were identified in this study as being active participants in their home world. Their actions and interactions with people, objects and symbols contributed to the shaping of their own experiences and that of their home environment. For example, as Jeva's confidence with writing grew at school, she rejected instruction and assistance from her mother. Instead, she directed her mother to find or draw pictures with the letter sounds she was practising. Rogoff (2003) described the relationship between an individual and their culture as one of mutual constitution, which suggests dynamic interactions rather than causal influence and which promotes a view of culture as undergoing continual change, rather than being static. Thus Jeva's increasing confidence and independence resulted in a shift in the roles and nature of the literacy experiences at home.

The dynamic nature of children's actions and interactions that contributed to shaping their experiences and home world was evident in roles they adopted and their interactions and behaviour. For example, the paucity of literacy materials in Lia's home did not limit her, but led to inventiveness in engaging in literacy experiences. She utilised a variety of surfaces to write on, including scraps of paper and, much to her parents' dismay, the walls of the apartment. Similarly, she created activities for herself, using print on packets and tins, calendars, and advertising that came in the junk mail, and demanded answers to her literacy-related questions. All five children displayed a range of actions and behaviours that demonstrated values and interests of their own, and an ability to make decisions and act on their own behalf.

The decisions the children made and actions they took shaped their own experiences and also shaped their home world. Some parents depended on their children's knowledge of Australian culture to assist them. For
example, in the absence of her father, Jeva became a translator for her mother when shopping, a negotiator in business transactions, and a mediator explaining the nuances and differences in practices between cultures. Jeva interacted with a range of adults in the community and adopted roles not usually expected of Australian children. Some children became, in effect, cultural brokers or go-betweens, advocating for their family and negotiating between various cultures on a regular basis. These experiences provided such children with opportunities for conversational practice and to adopt roles outside the constraints of social conventions of their culture.

The literacy knowledge and skills, cultural practices and dispositions that the children acquired and used to operate in their home environment constituted conceptual resources they could draw on. These resources were acquired through dynamic interactions with their home environment that shaped both their literacy experiences and cultural environment. In the following section, children's acquisitions of resources in the preschool environment are examined.

The world of preschool

Preschool was very different from children's home worlds. The teacher encouraged ways of operating that reflected mainstream Australian culture. For example, parents and their children were encouraged to speak English in the classroom and adopt Australian social conventions and practices exclusively. Some social practices emphasised were greeting people, looking at people when speaking to them, and waiting to speak without interrupting. The teacher believed that children needed English language and customs for success at school and therefore adopted a single cultural narrative. As Bourdieu's (1990) theory of social reproduction and cultural capital suggests, and as her practice confirmed, only the culture of the dominant class is valued and rewarded in monocultural educational systems. As a passive functionary of the system, the teacher shaped the world of preschool to reflect the dominant monoculture and its system values and rewarded only those who acted in accordance with the norms of this world, not the three worlds.

Nature of literacy activities in preschool

Culturally diverse families acknowledged aspects of the dominant culture (while preserving their own) and encouraged their children to adopt preschool practices. These included speaking English at preschool, negotiating their participation in activities, and demonstrating independence. In this way the children acquired the cultural capital perceived as requisite for educational success at preschool while maintaining the practices and beliefs of their heritage culture at home. A second benefit was that parents developed knowledge of Australian culture through their children's experiences, and this shaped their home world.

The preschool teacher believed that children developed literacy knowledge in the early years by engaging with literacy resources in play. Therefore, she included calendars and diaries, eye charts and other literacy-related props to be incorporated into their play in the 'hospital' set up in the home corner. Her children were encouraged to interact socially with one another at preschool, but opportunities for engaging in extended conversations and interacting as conversational partners with adults, as some did at home, were limited. Instead, children observed, initiated and participated in conversations and interactions with one another during play. The parents did not value play as an educative process in the way the teacher did. While most parents viewed play as a social activity unrelated to the formal literacy learning of their children, they commented on its value for the development of language and friendships with peers.

Preschool literacy values and beliefs

Many of the preschool teacher’s values, attitudes and beliefs differed from those of the parents, especially in relation to how children learn to be literate, the educative role of teachers in the literacy process, and what constituted accepted language practices and social conventions. Despite this, the children acquired resources requisite for successful participation in learning at preschool. These included the independent use of materials and resources, accepted social practices, and the ability to negotiate activities. The acquisition of appropriate resources was seen as a process that children went through, motivated by the need for effective behaviour and involving the use of a variety of strategies and tactics to achieve objectives.

Active participation in preschool

In coming to terms with appropriate preschool practices and using them effectively to achieve such objectives, the children employed a variety of strategies. They mixed ways of doing things at home with preschool ways of doing things. For example, role-play in home corner was a blend of culturally appropriate practices and preschool ways of doing things. At times, children transferred home expectations to preschool. For example, Jeva and Grace expected that writing would be a priority at preschool as it was at home, and continued to incorporate writing into their activities and showed the adult what they had done. At other times, the children tried out behaviours and adjusted or discarded them in response to the reactions of others. For example, many of Lia’s first attempts to negotiate membership of a group were unsuccessful, particularly when she criticised participants or seized the resources being used in the activity. Other tactics she tried were standing at the edge of an activity area and then insinuating herself into the activity. For example, she tried to join several children completing a jigsaw puzzle by looking over their shoulders and smiling and laughing with them and then reaching out to choose a puzzle piece.
The container was quickly moved away by another child so that Lia could not reach. Over time, Lia developed a variety of successful strategies to gain access to activities. One was to ask questions or seek help from others. For example, when playing ‘school’, she assumed a seat and asked the child who was playing teacher: Is this where you write your name? By recognising the child in the teaching role and asking a question, she had ensconced herself successfully in the game.

On other occasions, the children experimented with known preschool practices and adopted tactics that led to the achievement of their objectives. For example, in order to limit or reject participants, they often applied the preschool rule that only four children could participate in an activity. Similarly, children invoked the rule to gain entry when there were fewer than four in an activity.

The roles and behaviours the children adopted contributed to the shaping of experiences and the preschool environment in similar ways that actions and interactions shaped experiences and the environment at home. The examples outlined above demonstrate the active way that children engaged in acquiring knowledge and skills about literary and cultural practices valued at preschool. The dynamic nature of their actions and interactions in mixing, transferring, trying out and adapting practices from others contributed to the shaping of the preschool environment. For example, Grace tried on a number of occasions to get the teacher to respond to her attempts at writing. On one of these occasions, she asked if the teacher was able to read her writing, thus inviting the teacher to collaborate in her writing attempt. The active nature of children in making decisions and applying appropriate behaviours to suit the environment in which they found themselves, and in shaping the school environment through these actions, is examined further in the following section.

The other world of the Year 1 classroom

In the Year 1 classroom, the teacher regarded diversity as an asset rather than a liability. She viewed the differences between home and school practices as alternate beliefs and legitimate forms of practice. For example, when this teacher discussed the use of pictures to assist reading, Grace revealed that her mother covered up the pictures in her take-home reader to ensure she read the words. The teacher responded that she had noticed Grace knew many words.

Nature of literacy activities in Year 1

The experiences each child brought to the class were recognised as unique and shared and discussed. Jeva’s participation in cultural celebrations of Bangla Independence Day, for example, provoked wider discussion of special celebrations. These opportunities for listening, responding and valuing the experiences, thoughts and ideas of others created a learning community where children actively learned from others.

The children established themselves as competent community members and demonstrated independent decision making. For example, they used writing sessions to provide information and share their knowledge with others, both verbally and through their writing. As knowledge of the writing process increased, they used it to help others. They pointed out when words were spelt incorrectly, or where spaces between words were forgotten. Over time, the children developed confidence about their skills and abilities, together with a robust sense of self-esteem and responsibility. They demonstrated a willingness to share their knowledge and ideas, especially in relation to writing.

Literacy values and beliefs in Year 1

The teacher attempted to build on the rich diversity of resources the children brought to school and to appreciate the complex cultural and social history revealed through their pictures and stories. These stories provided an insight into the lives of the children and the things that were important to them. Through conversations around children’s pictures and text, the teacher demonstrated interest, acceptance and valuing of their experiences and their writing attempts and supported children’s identification and manipulation of the dynamic relationships among worlds. For example, when Jeva wrote … and when I always sleep I have one picture of Dad or else I cry, the teacher encouraged her to talk about her feelings, to draw pictures, and write letters to her father in his absence.

The teacher interacted with children during writing sessions, scaffolding their writing attempts and creating potential for learning appropriate to their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). She encouraged and facilitated opportunities for dialogue amongst the children when writing, as she valued the learning they gleaned from one another. Children actively learned from, or assisted, others as acknowledged experts. Zara, for example, relied heavily on Jeva and Grace to help her to write the words in the sentences she had composed. Dialogue, in which children engaged before and as they wrote, helped them to plan and review their writing. For example, when Jeva declared at the start of a writing session, I’m going to write about Easter, Zara responded, Me too, I don’t know yet what I’m going to say, I’m going to think about it. The children verbally planned and rehearsed what they were going to write in discussions with others, and were prompted by the picture they had drawn. The reviewing of writing served to cue them into where they were up to in transferring verbal text to written form, and was seen as a tactic to assist working memory. As they reviewed their progress, matching spoken word to written word, the children made changes...
or corrections to their writing that served as early editing. For example, Zara wrote: \textit{I went in my gudn}. She paused and read her writing, erased the word gudn and re-wrote as \textit{garden} before adding \textit{I gro sm trees}.

The knowledge and skills some children brought to the writing group gave them status. For example, Jeva's knowledge of individual letters and sounds and the automatic recall that she had developed prior to school gave her status in the writing group when others sought her assistance to help them to write words. This alphabetic knowledge, and her willingness to assist others, gained her entry and acceptance into the group. Bourdieu (1990) refers to the knowledge and the qualifications by which an individual gains entry to a particular setting as cultural capital.

The children's deference to Jeva's knowledge in relation to writing tasks and their actively seeking her assistance also gave her confidence when writing. The teacher may have established what was valued, but it was the children's decisions that conferred status to Jeva's knowledge. They measured established values against Jeva's demonstrated knowledge and took action to use it to achieve their own objectives.

**Active participation in Year 1**

The children's interactive behaviour contributed to the shaping of experiences and the classroom community in similar ways that actions and interactions shaped experiences and the environment at home and preschool, with one exception. Children's metacognitive awareness of their own thinking and learning processes displayed in Year 1, but not noted at preschool and at home, demonstrated the empowered way children engaged in acquiring knowledge and skills about literate and cultural practices valued at school. For example, when children declared the sounds they could identify in a word and the sounds they needed assistance with, they were displaying an awareness of their ability and the level of support required. Furthermore, children's ability to draw on knowledge, develop strategies and use tactics to make decisions that led to the application of behaviours appropriate to the environment in which they found themselves, contributed to the shaping of those environments.

**Discussion**

There is evidence throughout the study that children were actively acquiring the practices required to operate successfully in three worlds. Such a view does not present children as possessing a static repertoire of practices derived exclusively from home, nor does it portray children as passive recipients of culture passed on through school. Instead, children are seen as acquiring resources (knowledge, skills and dispositions) through active engagement and participation in activities at home, in preschool and in Year 1. It is this process of actively acquiring resources that is described in this study as world-building and contributes to the construction of a personal cultural identity.

The knowledge, skills and dispositions the children acquired in each of the three worlds combined to create conceptual and cultural resources that they utilised when operating in, and making sense of their worlds. The array of resources was constantly changing in size, shape, form and nature over time. For example, the knowledge of letters and sounds that Jeva had developed through recitation and writing at home, then practised in play at preschool, were refined and extended in her collaborative writing sessions in Year 1. In similar ways, the array of cultural knowledge and skills, and dispositional resources were expanded. The cultural diversity of environments meant a rich and increasing fund of resources that assisted children in negotiating encounters in all worlds.

In today's society, children's formative experiences are not limited to home. They interact socially, and spend extended periods in many cultural environments that influence their formative development. These may include child care, kindergarten, activity clubs, church and school. The sociocultural perspective taken in this study is that children's dispositional development (for example attitudes, values, interests and motivation) are derived from culture and socialisation beyond home and encompasses experiences in other environments. As a result, the system of dispositions that children developed was not constrained by their home environments. Instead, a rich system of dispositional resources was accrued in the three environments.

In this study, contextual change provoked in the children a search for effective behaviour. They recognised that a new context may need new ways of operating which sharpened their ability to read and respond to contextual cues, and they used strategies and tactics to identify accepted practices and achieve objectives. For example, as outlined earlier, it took Lia many weeks to determine how to successfully gain entry into group activities at preschool. She tried many tactics and strategies and brought the accumulated knowledge and awareness from each attempt to achieve success.

In attempting to make known their strong desire to belong and readiness to participate appropriately in activities, the children exhibited assimilation and accommodation adaptations akin to the mixing, transferring and borrowing that takes place in code-switching, a feature of cross-linguistic interaction (Palmer, 2009). These adaptations are worthy of more detailed research to determine their characteristics and whether they reflect a broader construct of cross-culture interaction that has been referred to as culture-switching, a term coined in this study. It represents the mixing, transferring, trying out,
adapting, and experimenting with different worlds that children in this study undertook to determine appropriate practices at home and in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study described what literacy learning was like for five culturally diverse children. Within the constraints associated with the number of children studied and the gender, cultural backgrounds and school settings represented, it provides a rich description of literacy experiences in individual cases and identifies similarities and differences across experiences and between worlds. The interpretation of these situations using a sociocultural perspective may strike a chord in other researchers and teachers looking for patterns that help explain their own experiences, as well as events in their worlds. It may challenge former views of cultural learning styles as static, culturally different practices as deficient, children as passive, and adults as the only active agents capable of transmitting culture. In addition, the study establishes a sufficient evidential warrant for further investigation into the nature and dimensions of the world-building and culture-switching that seemingly underpins such experiences.

These findings, together with a consideration of the different beliefs and practices of the preschool and the Year 1 teacher, may provide direction for educators in determining how effective literacy teaching can take account of, and build on, family and community literacies. In particular, the three worlds’ framework has direct implications for teachers when taking account of the cultural diversity in their classrooms. Teachers who use the framework may find it a useful instrument. By ‘learning to ask and getting out of the way’ (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004, p. 8), they may encourage children to have their voices heard and to enact agency.

References


