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Attitudes of preschool teachers in Northern Greece on children and TV viewing
Looking back and looking forward: Exploring distributed leadership with Queensland Prep teachers
Pedagogies of inclusive transition to school
and more …
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Online Annex
AJEC Vol. 38 No. 3 includes an Online Annex component. Access and further information can be found at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ajec
IN LOOKING THROUGH THE articles offered for this issue of the AJEC, I am struck by the diversity of papers presented. Diversity exists in the topics and also in the theoretical approaches and methods adopted towards the research conducted and the frameworks used to discuss issues. These include participatory research, using the concept of strategic alignment as a model, cultural/historical theory and post-structural feminist and critical pedagogical theories. The data also has been collected and analysed in diverse ways. There is text analysis from website entries, cultural-institutional analysis of interviews and those choosing narrative styles are as varied as using Photostories, listening to oral history interviews and teachers’ telling their stories as a professional development initiative. Topics covered comprise education reforms in a number of guises, teacher preparation and in-service, ICT in early childhood and education policy.

This volume is characterised by diversity and that is most appropriate for an early childhood education and care journal that represents many voices and opinions across the sector. The breadth of discussion in this issue is to be celebrated as a sign of our maturity and willingness to engage with different ideas and approaches. Stover is an example of reaching across boundaries to listen to the voices of older members of the early childhood community. As we strive for reforms and recognition, she reminds us that there are sometimes ‘unintended consequences’ in some of the directions we travel. She identifies contradictions that many of us are grappling with, that the voices in her research bring to the fore: free play versus learning outcomes, safety versus exploration and childhood versus human capital development are three examples. Another paper that has a focus on stories is that of Taylor who is interested in the potential of teacher story telling as a method of professional learning. She argues for the possibilities that are contained in the teacher story telling research whilst acknowledging that in these days of the ‘audited society’ the results of present research cannot be linked to outcomes.

A number of papers address issues related to the use of ICT in early childhood. This is a growing field of research and the three papers presented here have very different approaches. Shuker and Terreni are interested in the relationship between ICT and reading. The children in this study were able to produce their own e-books, with the help of PowerPoint™. The research focused on the potential for children to gain skills using digital media purposively, being able to work across languages and to distribute their ideas on a wider stage. Oakley, Howitt, Garwood and Durack combined a number of areas of interest to design two case studies that involved students studying in a Master of Early Childhood program. The studies involved the use of ICT in the classroom with children diagnosed as autistic. ICT was utilised to enhance the children’s literacy experiences. The Photostory (Skrzypiece, Harvey-Murray and Krieg) paper reported on research that employed digital images to illustrate social and emotional learning during an intervention that focused on children’s mental health. These images were an important tool in the evaluation stage of the intervention. Another exploration of digital media consisted of the research carried out in Greece (Theodosiadou and Markos) that examined teachers’ perceptions of the impact of television on children’s learning and children’s behaviour. As debates about ‘screen time’ intensify studying attitudes and experiences with everyday devices, like television, has the potential to increase the capacity for teachers to engage with media at levels where they are comfortable about its pedagogical and developmental usefulness.

Three of the papers referred to above could have also been included in an inclusive education category. Petriwskyj has identified the tensions that influence the relationship between outcome standards and individual learning patterns. She is examining the transition process of transitioning to the formal school setting and is seeking pedagogies that will support inclusive transition. The paper makes links between transition and inclusion by exploring shared pedagogical themes that support transition and allow for diversity.

A number of papers can be related to policy development. Bown has investigated the campaign for improved ratios for babies and staff in NSW. This was a long and complex story and it is interesting to read the voices ‘presented here and also interesting to note the politicians who chose not to be included. This story has resonance for others in this issue of AJEC who comment on the political nature of much of the policy making that occurs in the early childhood field. Garvis and Pendergast discuss the, now, federal opposition leaders promise of rebates for nannies. Increasingly such issues are debated in blogs and internet feedback sites so it was innovative to explore the question of rebates for nannies through a text analysis of readers responding to a newspaper article. Dobozy questions the present state of early childhood education policy in Australia and how it is generated. The concern of supporting mothers’ decisions to continue to breastfeed after returning to study or work is taken up by Monk, Gilmour and Hall.
The relationship between family, early childhood centre and the workplace is paramount here.

Four more papers present a variety of ideas. Leung, Wong and Wong research the impact of teacher experience on early childhood teachers. The context is a decade after teacher training reforms were introduced into Hong Kong. Learning experiences for pre-service teachers and teachers attending in-service in Hong Kong and Macau are discussed. Fleer and Hammer present a discussion on emotional regulation and relate this to the use of fairy stories to unpack complex social relationships. Fairy stories, to support emotional regulation in group settings, they suggest, can be part of the ‘pedagogical toolkit’. Harris and Manatakis present us with a government project where children’s voices were actively sought. During the development of a strategic plan children were consulted, treated with respect and accorded citizenship rights. Gorman and Hard examine the topic of distributed leadership experiences of a group of 13 teachers during the introduction of a Preparatory year of school in Queensland. The teachers’ opportunities to engage in activities where philosophy sharing and curriculum discussions took place is reported.

The variety of articles presented here should have something to appeal to everyone. The interests, ideas and approaches differ in ways that make the journal valuable at a time when it is important to hear voices that often appear dissimilar. Debate and the sharing of philosophies, theory and stories of practice are an important phenomenon of the early childhood field.

Berenice Nyland
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Odd alliances:
Working theories on ‘unintended consequences’ of early childhood education in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Sue Stover
AUT University, New Zealand

WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN’S free play when learning outcomes are required? What happens when safety is foregrounded over exploration? When does accountability become surveillance? When does visualising children as an investment opportunity make children ‘too precious’?

Based on the analysis of oral history interviews with historic leaders of Aotearoa, New Zealand’s early childhood sector, this paper examines some unintended consequences of the sector’s professionalisation. It draws on contemporary, feminist and classical sociological theory (Bunkle, 1995; Foucault, 1970/2001; Merton, 1934; Moss, 2010) to support a discursive model that focuses on how ‘odd’ alliances can push the sector in unanticipated directions.

Introduction
Sitting with an elderly person and asking them about children and play is likely to prompt a storyline about adventure, risk taking, and friendships; at least that is what I found when I undertook oral history interviews with 23 historic leaders of the early childhood sector in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Talking about play also brought up concerns that very young children were being institutionalised in order to meet social, political and economic agendas. Many spoke strongly and with a sense of loss.

This article focuses on this sense of loss; that what was imagined and advocated for children and their families was not necessarily achieved. In other words, there have been ‘unintended consequences’. Given a research base which relies on individual elderly informants, this article takes these reflections at face value: as personal observations from people of significant historic mana. It would be difficult to prove (or disprove), for example, that university qualifications can’t make teachers more sensitive to children, as one interviewee maintained. The focus in this paper is on working theories which could explain unexpected outcomes, and central to this is the effect of ‘odd alliances’.

The research
As part of this author’s PhD research (Stover, 2011), interviews occurred in 2005–2006 with 22 women and one man who can be understood as pioneers, as campaigners, as innovators and as activists. They all spent decades in leadership roles prior to the creation in 1989 of a unified early childhood education (ECE) sector in Aotearoa, New Zealand. However, for all but a few kindergarten teachers who were part of the research sample, the entry point into ECE was through voluntary activity as parents or even grandparents. Most of those interviewed were in their seventies and eighties; several have now passed away.

The style of the interviews was conversational and reflected the feminist approach to oral history methodology (Leavy, 2007). All the interviews focused on how ideas about play, learning through play and especially ‘free play’ had been understood, enacted in practice and changed over time. The research data also included reflections on family life and working theories about their enormous social changes within their lifetimes. What follows illustrates this.

Everyone interviewed expressed concerns about very young children being kept too safe. Accidents were seen as particularly problematic. As one interviewee with 40
years’ ECE teaching experience mused, ‘No matter how careful you are, you can’t totally avoid accidents. So how hard should we try?’ Several spoke with concern that children were under continuous ‘surveillance’, while many described parents as overly anxious. Several offered the same working theory: that with fewer children in a family, parents had ‘all their eggs in one basket’. According to several interviewees, this perhaps explained why very young children could be seen as ‘too precious’; that is, as vulnerable and easily damaged. One interviewee suggested that there is more emphasis on parental responsibility, and suggested that this could be tilting the ‘dance between nature and nurture’ towards ‘nurture’. Several suggested that the visualisation of children as ‘human capital’ (Goffin, Wilson, Hill & McAninch, 1997) was fast-tracking children into early education in order to best develop that capital. Several interviewees pointed to the alignment between such thinking and the logic that mothers were better off in the workforce; better off emotionally, socially and financially.

One of the interviewees spoke particularly strongly. Querying whether any institutional setting could replicate a family, Marie Bell, a feminist, teacher-educator and leader in early childhood policy development in the 1970s and 1980s (see Dalli, 2013) was concerned about very young children, especially babies, being in early childhood settings for long hours. ‘You know, woman having to go into the toilet and express their breast milk in the tea break for god’s sake—it just made it so jolly difficult. That’s not what we wanted.’ She rhetorically asked me, ‘What have we done to motherhood?’ She then answered her own question by suggesting that the feminist goals had been co-opted by economic forces. While she maintained that feminist ‘stuff’ had been achieved, especially in terms of working women, the goals of feminism also included ‘methods and processes’ which were not necessarily aligned with economic arguments. She somewhat ruefully explained why very young children could be seen as ‘too precious’; that is, as vulnerable and easily damaged. According to several interviewees, this perhaps explained why very young children could be seen as ‘too precious’; that is, as vulnerable and easily damaged.

Such rich data pushed the boundaries of the ‘play’ research into the politics of who decides where children and their parents spend their daylight hours, as well as questions about what very young children are guided to know and to do. A brief history of ‘free play’ in Aotearoa, New Zealand helps to illustrate how these questions have been answered in different ways at different times.

‘Free play’, Progressive Education and feminism

As New Zealand struggled to emerge from the Great Depression of the 1930s, the idea that children learn through play gained momentum. It was an idea embedded in Progressive Education, whose advocates were well placed in government and educational institutions to advocate for ‘free play’ as the proper way for very young children to learn (May, 2009).

As it was understood by Progressive Educators, ‘free play’ embodied the hope of a democratic childhood: if children played fulsomely and creatively, their sense of self within a community would enable them to grow to be mentally healthy adults. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, ‘free play’ travelled in the company of public kindergartens (May, 2009) and especially with Playcentre—the national movement of parent co-operatives that started in 1948 (Stover, 2003). ‘Free play’ also travelled with part-day provision.

From the 1960s and more strongly from the 1970s, it was against this part-time provision that a complex layering of political and social drives focused on what was offered by preschool services, not just in terms of play, but also as part of a well-planned society supporting the economic aspirations of parents (McDonald, 1980). Particularly important was the influence of childcare advocates who also identified as feminists (May, 2003). From the 1970s, their work helped galvanise a movement towards a unified sector regulated by government. Although the other national early childhood services (kindergarten, playcentre and te kohanga reo) were less than enthusiastic about being unified (see for example Tawhiwhirangi, 2003), a point of ‘unity’ was their relevance to the lives of women.

As I was told by Geraldine McDonald, a feminist researcher into the sociology of preschools, none of the ‘early childhood movements’ in the 1970s identified as feminist; ‘… so, if you simply pointed out a few facts to them that their fate actually depended on what women were going to do in the future … that opinion would tend to be interpreted as a boldly feminist move’. As Noreen Moorhouse, a life member of the Childcare Association, recalled, women in the 1970s wanted choices: ‘… that was the whole thing— they wanted choices.’

A highly regulated unified early childhood education sector was created in 1989 (Department of Education, 1988). A national curriculum for early childhood, Te Whāriki, was gazetted in 1996, and two years later, quality assurance systems were mandatory for centres receiving government funding (Ministry of Education, 1996, 1998). Then came an ambitious 10-year strategic plan to professionalise the sector and to expand participation including provision of 20 hours ‘free’ ECE for children aged three and four years (Ministry of Education, 2002). With quality ECE, women would be free, according to Prime Minister Helen Clark, from ‘dawn til dusk’ to contribute to the workforce (Clark, 2005).

While in recent years the unity of the early childhood sector has been challenged and the professionalisation of the teaching workforce has stalled amidst shifting government priorities and a global economic recession
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(ECE Taskforce, 2011), it was within the context of rapid professionalisation and expanding expectations of ECE that the interviews occurred.

**Unintended consequences: Theoretical aspects**

That intentional social reform does not fully produce the social outcomes intended has long intrigued sociologists. A seminal work on the topic appeared in one of the first issues of the *American Sociological Review* when Robert Merton (1934) suggested that human activity—even purposeful human activity—involved variables which shared values with other unforeseen or underconsidered variables.

What Merton referred to as ‘values’ shared across human variables, I visualised (more politically) as ‘odd alliances’. This is something that has intrigued me especially as I pondered whether the creation of the early childhood sector in the late 1980s was the result of an alliance between feminists and the neoliberal reformers, particularly evident in the government’s Treasury Department (Jesson, 2001). As an advisor in the late 1980s to the Prime Minister, Anne Meade described the political will to create a unified early childhood sector as reflecting a short-term alliance between childcare advocates, feminists and politicians. This alliance stood in contrast to the usual alliance between politicians and captains of industry (Meade, 1990). She pointed out that key enablers of this political alliance were the economic arguments supporting government involvement in shaping and governing the new sector. However, the economic drivers which enable political progress of a social campaign also distort its purpose (Bunkle, 1995).

A different angle is to see the professionalisation of the early childhood sector as an aspect of ‘educationalisation’; a broad sociological and historic construct which proposes that education expands to address societal issues and to build professional status of teachers (Depaepe, Herman, Surmont, van Gorp & Simon, 2008). Further, according to Depaepe and Smeyers (2008), educationalisation reflects modernist thinking, which in educational settings is evident in a quest for certainty, a ‘zest for order and mastery’ (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. 87) and a focus on progress towards goals. In focusing on the individual child, the modernist goal is the creation of an adult whose ‘foundations’ support reproduction ‘of the dominant value of today’s capitalism, including individualism, competitiveness, flexibility and the importance of paid work and consumption’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 45). This logic parallels the neoliberal logic which underpins the requirements laid on early childhood centres by government (Duhn, 2010; Farquhar, 2008).

Considering how language changes over time can also illustrate shifting ideas and politics. ‘Play’ is one example of this. As it was understood and promoted through Progressive Educators, play’s definition swelled with meaning to accommodate the new agendas of mental health and democratic capacities (Isaacs, 1929/1968; May, 2009), setting the scene for Jo Ailwood (2003) to describe play as a site where ideas ‘coagulate and collide’ (p. 186). Such collisions can cause what Thomas Popekowitz (2008) described as the ‘leakage’ of ideas (p. 188). Meanings change.

In the next section, a simple discursive model is considered which offers schematically how some of that ‘leakage’ may produce new meanings and unintended outcomes.

**A model to explore shifting meanings of key words**

In the 1980s when the creation of an early childhood sector was a hot political issue, two major forces were emphasising ‘choice’. Choice embodied key ideas both for feminists lobbying for women’s rights to have greater control over their lives, and for neoliberal reformers who positioned education as a service to be shaped through consumer choices (see Figure 1). This helped build momentum towards a government-regulated unified early childhood sector. It also foregrounds parents’ importance in the purpose of early childhood education—in contrast to what existed prior to the 1980s (McDonald, 1970, 1980).

The interviewees were all concerned for children who they felt were being kept ‘overly safe’. Increasing limitations on children’s physical play had been observed and some working theories have already been highlighted, such as the significance of smaller families and a heightened sense of parental responsibility. Within the context of early childhood settings, children’s safety was also seen to be overly emphasised. Again the discursive model of colliding ideas helps to generate working theories. While observation has long been an adult’s role in a free play environment, its purpose changes considerably when positioned alongside accountability and the expectations of parents in the workforce (see Figure 2). Accidents can become evidence of neglect; they can be very disruptive for working parents. Within the overlapping discourses of the economy and of the workplace, words like safety indicate stability and predictability.
In addition, observation can be framed as surveillance, and available technology extends on this potential.

**Figure 2.**

That children can be seen as ‘too precious’ can be considered as the outcome from two overlapping ideas: ‘children as social capital’ is at the core of public investment in ECE as children are understood to embody potentials beyond what can be realised by their families alone (see Figure 3). Alongside this (and perhaps because of this), parents were seen as feeling overly responsible for their children’s successes or failures. The result is parental anxiety, which could explain why ‘children are too precious’, which several interviewees proposed.

**Figure 3.**

**Conclusions and future directions**

In focusing in on the regrets and questions of a group of elderly early childhood historic leaders, this paper has several purposes. One is to raise the visibility of what is unintended. Analysing their areas of regret or concern can provide models for reflecting on political changes in contemporary settings.

Looking historically can also provide some trajectories for further reflection. One is how the politics of one era can continue to guide future directions. What could appear in the 1980s as an ‘odd’ alliance between feminists and neoliberal reformers is no longer odd; the neoliberal logic is deeply embedded in the logic of the professional sector in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere (Farquhar, 2008; Scrivens, 2002).

However, this neoliberal logic raises major concerns for British commentator Peter Moss (2010) when envisaging the future. Moss proposes that as a technological tool of the same neoliberal and economic drivers, ECE becomes aligned with anti-democratic and environmentally unsustainable forces. While the future calls for ‘reduced consumption and global collaboration’ (p. 12), Moss maintains that neoliberalism continues to deplete the environment and produces ‘ever more troubled populations’ and ‘intensification of competition at all levels’ (p. 12); a far cry from the aspiration of Progressive Educators and the aspirations of many of those interviewed in this study.

So listening closely to the voices of those who pioneered the early childhood sector can disrupt the status quo.

I just don’t think you can tread with heavy boots on early childhood. And you can call it what you damn well like, but a lot of what they’re doing now is just that. It’s not respecting the importance of that time. It’s imposing adult values on what is so precious …

**Dedication**

To those who asked hard questions and who have passed on, especially those who shared their stories in this research: Lex Grey, Ailsa Densen and Marie Bell.

**References**


**Lived childhood experiences: Collective storytelling for teacher professional learning and social change**

Louise Taylor
Extend Education

**THIS IS THE STORY OF KIDS’ DOMAIN**, an early childhood centre in New Zealand. It traces their journey through a four-year action research project shaped around collective storytelling, where the purpose was to understand the self, others and teaching differently. The research was situated within poststructuralist feminist and critical pedagogical theories because these celebrate the multiple and contradictory; value subjectivity; and challenge social inequities, which this project aimed to do. The sharing of stories challenged teachers’ perspectives and impacted on both relationships and teaching. Teachers were challenged as they listened to complex and sometimes contradictory storylines, and at times these confronted and disrupted what had previously been taken for granted. This encouraged teachers to reconsider how they might be teachers, and how they might contribute to a more socially just world each day in their own setting.

**Background**

Kids’ Domain is a large not-for-profit early childhood centre in New Zealand (NZ). The centre employs 35 staff and provides education and care for the children of Auckland Hospital employees. In 2005 the centre began to change the focus of its professional learning, shifting the emphasis from technical training towards a more in-depth critical analysis of teaching and learning. The objective was to encourage teachers to think more deeply about their practice by scrutinising some of the common and dominant discourses influencing this practice. As a result teachers became increasingly interested in the professional experiences of each other, particularly as many had been raised outside of NZ. This shift coincided with a conversation the centre director had with a teacher raised and trained in Romania.

*She told me about what it meant to see her name on a list. Any list! Having grown up under a communist regime—the fear associated with your name appearing on a list of any kind was immense … A name on a list could lead to imprisonment, torture, death, and disappearance, which meant when her name appeared on a list in our centre, she became traumatised. This saddened me, and added to my resolve to create a space that gave voice to the stories of our community (Con1/12).*

To most New Zealanders lists are just one small part of a busy schedule—blended into the background of life, and given very little thought. For this teacher however, they were a significant part of her life-story and they had a profound and ongoing impact on her daily life, even though colleagues around her were unaware of this. Stories like this give life to our being and connect us with others; they are part of what it means to be human (Ife, 2009). Even so, teachers can work together for years without understanding just how much these life-stories are shaping perceptions and beliefs, nor how they are grounding practice (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). The full impact of life-stories on thinking, feelings and actions is mostly disregarded in the workplace and rarely considered in professional learning in any depth. Furthermore, there is very little opportunity to engage in ongoing reflection and critical dialogue around these stories, with others. Throughout this project, Kids’ Domain opened up spaces for the teacher as a person to bring themselves and their stories into their work and professional learning. It was not just okay to share life-stories and critically examine them, but rather doing so was actively encouraged. This was viewed as essential for innovation and equity, while supporting a community of care throughout the whole organisation.
Theoretical contexts

This research project builds on previous research, by the author, on teacher professional learning as a means to achieving progressive social change (Taylor, 2007). It has been framed using poststructuralist feminist and critical pedagogical theories and built around the lived experiences of teachers. Unlike modernist approaches to storytelling, the objective has not been to interpret life or achieve conclusive answers, but rather to deliberately challenge and disrupt the taken-for-granted.

Professional learning: A technical approach

Traditionally, the most widespread professional learning for teachers has been seminars and workshops; one-off events with universal content, targeted at a generic audience and focused on the technical or practical aspects of teaching (Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2010; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). While approaches may vary, the emphasis is improving teaching practice by supporting teachers to implement the latest knowledge and research of experts (Moss, 2006; Parker, 1997; Silin, 1996; Taylor, 2007, 2011). The rationale being, if teachers learn better ways to teach, and their practice is based on evidence of what works, there will be better outcomes for children (Meade, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2011; OECD, 2011; Stocker & Collins, 2012; Timperley et al., 2007).

One common approach to professional learning is to find gaps in teachers’ knowledge and practice and then up-skill teachers in order to fill these gaps. Sometimes called the ‘black box’ (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 7), these gaps guide the professional learning given to teachers. This, while valid in some instances, is essentially a deficit model of learning, which relies on an expert depositing knowledge into learners, who need to know. Known as the banking approach (Freire, 1996), learning occurs without much dialogue or critique. One of the main disadvantages is the passive reliance of teachers on others in the learning process (Taylor, 2007). Teachers sit in a binary opposite to the knowing expert and their tacit knowledge and experience is subjugated to that of the more qualified knower.

While up-skilling teachers in line with the latest research helps to build consistency in standards across providers, teacher energy is almost entirely directed towards doing it better and getting it right, even when what is right is really just a socially constructed discourse (MacNaughton, 2000; Taylor, 2007). Receiving from experts, and putting this expertise into practice with little critique, is fertile ground for the reproduction of dominant and oppressive discourses (Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2010; Moss, 2001, 2006).

A different kind of professional learning

An alternative view of professional learning is one taken by critical pedagogues and poststructuralist feminists who emphasise the contestability of knowledge and knowledge production. The learner is repositioned from receiver of knowledge to active participant in its creation. The aim is to confront inequities and bring about transformational change by challenging and resisting dominant discourses, and by opening up spaces for new understandings (Kincheloe, 1993, 2004; MacNaughton, 2003, 2005). Professional learning is less about answers and fixed transferrable knowledge, and more about posing problems, engaging in debate, and seeking multiple and marginalised perspectives. Storytelling, or narrative, is congruent with these aims (Freire, 1996; Gore, 1993; Hooks, 2010; Weedon, 1997).

Throughout history narrative has been used to retell historical events and pass on family stories, traditions and values (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007). It has also become a valid method of inquiry, providing an alternative to more positivist research methodologies where the researcher as expert/outsider observes and analyses the other from a distance. Narrative inquiry is collaborative, and requires dialogue and negotiation between researcher and participant/s along with ‘ongoing theoretical and conceptual reflection’ (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 26). Lived experiences are moved from the margins to centre as theoretical knowledge is challenged. As a research methodology, narrative is used across many disciplines to understand and interpret human experience, and to include and validate the voices of marginalised peoples (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2010).

In addition to research, narrative can be used as a pedagogical tool (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2010). Through the telling and retelling of stories connections are made, and new learning is supported as knowledge is constructed and reconstructed. Sharing stories builds greater awareness of the self and others and provides insights that can lead to change (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007; Macintyre Latta & Kim, 2010). In poststructuralist feminist work, storytelling is used deliberately to disrupt and resist discourses that marginalise and oppress. Instead of seeking to uncover and understand the true self, subjects are encouraged to embrace contradictory and multiple subject positions and employ critical thinking to challenge worldviews and taken-for-granted practices (Aveling, 2002; Jackson, 2001; Davies, 2002, 2006; Sharkey, 2004; Weedon, 1997). As a pedagogical tool, narrative can be employed to bring a critical new lens to teaching practice.

In this collective storytelling project narrative was used as a pedagogical tool and this article shows how this alternative approach to professional learning opened up critical dialogue and brought about progressive social change at a local level.
Methodology

The overall aim was to trouble identity by critically examining and re-defining how children and adults understand themselves and others. There were three phases, which were guided by the following:

1. Understanding ourselves and others differently: Broadening perspectives.
2. Challenging memories of childhood: Disrupting the taken for granted.
3. Reconceptualising teaching and learning: Bringing a fresh vision.

Research approach

Action research was chosen because of its critical theoretical origins, and its consistency with poststructuralist aims, resulting in a congruency between the methodology and the theoretical framework (Brown & Jones, 2001; Taylor, 2007, 2010). Both seek a more socially just world and are committed to problematising social practices and constructions in order to achieve transformative outcomes (Carr & Kemmis, 2002; Cherry, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009). Poststructuralist action research differs from traditional approaches however, in that its researchers do not believe their findings will provide certain, universal and reproducible outcomes. Knowledge is presented as partial and contingent and therefore validity of truth statements becomes problematic; the emphasis instead becomes rigour and trustworthiness (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McTaggart, 2005; Taylor, 2010). Findings highlight the multiple, contradictory and obscure, rather than provide definitive answers (Brown & Jones, 2001; Lather, 1991; Taylor, 2010).

As with all action research, this inquiry was organised around a continuous cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Data analysis occurred throughout, with each cycle informing the next.

Process, methods and techniques

Experimentation formed a large part of what was done. At times the cycles merged resulting in a period of uncertainty and seeming incoherence, but this was not unexpected (Taylor, 2007, 2010). Fluidity enabled the process to respond to social changes as they occurred. The work of Freire (1996, 2003) and in particular his ideas on epistemological curiosity (Freire, 2003) guided the storytelling process. Sometimes stories created curiosity, and sometimes it was curiosity that created stories.

Everyone in the centre was involved in some way over the period of the project, through:

- whole-centre conferences
- team professional learning sessions
- team leader planning and mentoring sessions
- small self-selected group meetings
- surveys.

Storytelling happened in a variety of ways through exploring:

- childhood memories
- recollections of people, places and events
- special relationships
- significant life influences
- values and beliefs
- thoughts, feelings and troublings around events, issues and ideas
- creative imagining.

Conversations were generated through:

- poetry
- images
- news items
- words
- YouTube clips
- extracts from novels
- journal articles
- personal stories.

In the first phase two whole-centre conferences were held, involving all teachers. These days were devoted to hearing the stories and experiences of others, which helped to build a sense of community and anticipation. However, this level of storytelling was difficult to maintain as teachers were committed to other professional learning throughout the year. As a result a different approach was taken in the second phase.

In phase two, the researcher worked with a small self-selected group, including three team leaders. At monthly meetings stories were shared and dialogue occurred around themes such as gender, categorisation, normalisation and social justice. There were very few boundaries placed around these discussions. At the conclusion of this phase, those involved shared their stories and learning with the rest of the centre at another whole-centre conference. This phase brought many shifts in teachers’ thinking and highlighted the positive effects of devoting intensive time to the storytelling project. As a result a decision was made to suspend all other professional learning for the following year so that everyone could be involved.

Throughout phase three, teachers shared together in three teaching teams. Sessions were modelled on what happened in phase two, with team leaders leading the process. In this phase teachers shared their memories of childhood and life experiences—orally, visually, and in writing using narrative and poetry. At the end of phase three there was another conference where every teacher contributed.
All of the material generated through this storytelling project became data, along with taped and transcribed sessions and staff feedback collected through questionnaires and evaluations. This author’s role throughout was threefold: to guide the research process; to generate the storytelling; and to build the capacity of team leaders to support sustainability in the future.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process and occurred during monthly meetings between the centre director, team leaders and researcher. Discussions focused on what had happened in the previous month and data was reviewed for emerging patterns and themes (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). The process was one of ‘interactive movement’ (Taylor, 2007, p. 102) between the data, the reflections of the leadership team and researcher, and the overall aims guiding the project. Analysis was a highly responsive process, which drew on a range of voices.

At the end of 2011, the leadership team and researcher went away for a retreat where all data was laid out and reviewed. The aim was to create the collective story of Kids’ Domain—told through the voices of its teachers and made possible by the willingness and openness of those who shared their stories and gave permission for these to be told.

**Findings**

**How did we understand ourselves and others differently?**

During the project teachers explored their identities—sometimes quietly in private, and sometimes collectively. Teachers were encouraged to share their thinking, troubling and celebrations, but were never required to do so. The aim was always to understand the self and others differently, which began by examining how one’s own life-story had unfolded and how backgrounds and histories had shaped identities and responses to life and others. For some this was an ‘eye opening’ experience (CF19, 2011), not only because of the attention devoted to oneself but also because being closely exposed to the perspectives of others prompted teachers to reflect more on their own thoughts, actions and beliefs (MGS2, 2010). Reflection of this kind is not the usual priority in professional learning; this was quite different.

Examining identity was not always a straightforward or easy process however; at times it was troubling and confusing, which was not totally unexpected (Jackson, 2001; Webber, 2008). While some were delighted to discover more about their identity, others became uncertain about themselves and their relationships. Shirlene, for example, said the following partway through the project:

I am troubled that I don’t know my identity anymore! I have realised that identity is so much more complex than what I thought it was. Who am I? What do I believe? Value? I can’t answer these questions confidently because I have realised that who I thought I was/am … is not really true. I see this as positive because it has forced me to be more honest with myself and I have identified things about myself that are contradictory (GS1, 2010).

Teachers did not find inside a unified subject but instead became more cognisant of the contradictory and shifting nature of their identity construction. As they worked with these contradictions and troublings they began to change some of their storylines.

Daphne, for instance, experienced this troubling after she read one of her stories aloud, and this began a chain reaction of change for her (GS1, 2010). Debbie also experienced profound change as a direct result of retelling her story to others. She said doing so changed how she saw her situation which helped her ‘listen differently’ to others (GS5, 2010). As teachers witnessed change in others they became more aware of how life-stories can be rewritten, and identities reshaped (Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1997; Davies, 2000, 2004, 2006). This not only supported self-change, but built greater understandings of otherness between teachers.

The change experienced by Debbie enabled her to view other people’s stories as partial and in progress, which she says made her less judgemental (GS5, 2010). As Debbie and her colleagues opened up themselves to others, they began to reflect on themselves and their relationships differently (CF10, 2011). This more open space provided the opportunity for some to share stories of prejudice, exclusion and redefinition. For example, Atsushi shared how he left his birthplace so he could reshape his identity.

I knew from the beginning of my life, Japan is not for me … My parents did not understand why I was who I am and struggled to accept who I am … When I started this job, my mom laughed at me … In NZ it is much more comfortable being who I am. However, stereotyping is still happening here in NZ. People seem surprised or fascinated by me … How I shape my personality is a constant battle—stereotyping has made me who I am … I could be different if the society of Japan was more accepting of who I am. I could be just like everyone. Who knows? (CF, 2011)

Stories like Atsushi’s made teachers more reluctant to position others or homogenise groups of people in ways they had previously done (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2011) and this prompted teachers to consider how much they categorise others based on their race, gender, age, background and associations (Davies, 2000, 2004). This was a reminder to make fewer assumptions about others before hearing their story (GS4, 2010).
There was a lot of discussion about the *accessories* people use and how these influence the ways people are perceived.

> I think we all tend to accessorise at some point in life. Do we cling to the accessories? Can we really get rid of them? Can we deaccessorise? … My accessories, what are they? Do I need them? What happens if I detach myself from them? Can people accept me as who I am? Can I accept people for who they are? (UGS6, 2010)

Realising that one was implicated in the categorisation and stereotyping of others was confronting (Jacobson, 2003; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Wise, 2008). Reflection focused on how often others are put into boxes (SS2, 2011) and how easy it is to become complacent towards issues such as racism (MM, 2011), particularly when not personally experienced. While much of the work helped to build empathy and compassion for others, the personal change that occurred as a result of examining life-stories, histories and attitudes also created disturbance (Jacobson, 2003; Taylor, 2007), which is evident in these teacher reflections.

> I found it difficult accepting that there is still prejudice going on towards different cultures even in civilized nations (SS6, 2011).

> I am shocked at the way some of my colleagues have been treated previously in their lives. It has made me so mad! I feel very defensive! Who gives anyone the right to discriminate, humiliate, and decide what is right and who is superior? (CF1, 2011)

Levels of tolerance were unsettled which presented a dichotomous challenge. On the one hand this project increased tolerance and acceptance but on the other it generated intolerance to what others said and did; there was growing discomfort towards things that had once been overlooked. Shirlene wrote a poem about this:

**Feeling Uncomfortable**

> I really like you as a person, but
> There are times when I don’t like what you say …
> These feelings of discomfort are starting to bother me
> This isn’t about you at all
> It’s about me
> When something feels wrong
> Why is it so hard to make it right?
> Is it because whatever you say or do
> I have said and done it too?

Teachers learnt to hold these tensions and to work with the contradictory ways they made sense of themselves and others. Doing so helped them to challenge their own behaviours and to risk changing these. As they opened themselves up to each other they discovered new ways of thinking and being in the world. Furthermore, teachers began to rethink their views on learning and teaching and how this might be reconceptualised.

**How did we understand learning and teaching differently?**

Collective storytelling for professional learning was a different way of learning for teachers. Having the space and time to focus on the self and other adults, without necessarily having to apply learning directly to practice, was a completely new approach—and it took some getting used to.

> My previous experiences of professional development had always been based around the more technical aspects of teaching such as program planning, learning stories or extending children’s learning. In the end I just had to trust the process and let go of my practical/teacher hat (SCEIEC, 2011).

> I soon found out that this was completely different from any other professional learning I had been involved in. Normally I would understand the purpose, the process and the outcomes … With this I had no idea of any of that, I had no sense of control and struggled with the notion of not having the right answer as an objective … (BCEIEC, 2011).

Professional learning in New Zealand is still largely a technical exercise aimed at improving practice against predetermined standards (Taylor, 2007, 2011). As a result it wasn’t easy to engage in learning that required such a high level of personal input and uncertainty and some found the personal sharing difficult (SS2, 2011). To become fully engaged in the process teachers needed to ‘let go’ and trust this new professional learning experience.

> For me the research was very intense, powerful and thought provoking. I would find myself pondering for days over the thoughts, viewpoints, words and stories that were shared. At times I felt quite puzzled as to what we were trying to accomplish. Then I decided to go with the flow … (ACF 2010).

> As soon as I decided to let go, things began to change for me. I began an amazing journey that I’ve never experienced before in professional learning and it was the end of the year before I understood the impact that it had had on me both personally and professionally (BCEIEC, 2011).

Everyone engaged in the same level of sharing including the leadership team and researcher. Hooks (2010) believes this is necessary, saying: ‘Critical thinking is an interactive process … one that demands participation on the part of teacher and students alike’ (p. 9). Learning together broke down traditional hierarchies such as the expert/learner and challenged dichotomies such as knower/known and researcher/researched. Everyone became ‘jointly responsible for a process in which all grow’ (Freire, 1996, p. 61) and as a result, all were simultaneously the changer and the changed (Lather, 1991, p. 56).
As the project progressed a further dichotomy was experienced. While teachers realised their storylines were fragile, open to interpretation, and less certain, they also began to trust their own knowing and to become more confident in this. They became less reliant on others to define best practice for them and more able to challenge what they had previously taken for granted as right.

I have learnt to question more. I don’t just accept the proposed right way or try and come up with the right answer as I did at the beginning of the project… (BCEIEC, 2011).

I am at a point now where I don’t accept everything that I am hearing from professional people … I have been in early childhood for 14 years and I have only really got to this point in the last two years… (STR5/3, 2010).

Once knowledge was disrupted, teachers began to explore other perspectives, becoming more critical and creative in the process. It was no longer so important to be right or to all agree (SS6, 2011; GS3, 2010).

Experiencing learning where it was okay to question and change storylines disrupted previous understandings about learning and provided a context for teachers to entertain a range of possibilities for understanding and teaching children differently. As a result they were less inclined to seek out quick answers to the dilemmas of teaching.

We understand that there is no right answer … there are different ways of approaching things. We ask whose interests do we hold as paramount? Who are we supporting? Whose rights? Before we would have tried to fix it at a surface level without thinking about the issues underneath. Whatever you do, it is not a right or wrong answer (RSU, 2011).

One of the key outcomes from this project in relation to understanding learning and teaching differently was the ability of teachers to engage in critical thinking. As a result of this project they are now more likely to question the taken-for-granted rather than seek right answers. They are taking the time to explore multiple perspectives on issues, even if these are contradictory, and they are seeking to hear the stories behind actions.

**Conclusions: How did we trouble identity?**

Centralising the voice of teachers through storytelling, and giving this priority, was a different kind of professional learning. It soon became evident that doing so was of great value. It gave teachers the opportunity to be heard and it raised awareness of the diverse and complex storylines of work colleagues. Collective storytelling changed the way teachers saw themselves and others.

The most interesting thing for me was to watch as others and my own assumptions about another were challenged. It has made me aware that so much of my own truth and position about a situation, issue, event, person, feeling or impression is transient. How can I hold someone to what they think is the truth, when it’s really a perception formed through many filters, veils and life experiences (JGS9, 2010).

As identity was troubled teachers began to rewrite the scripts of their own storylines and some experienced profound change both in their personal and professional lives. This reforming and reshaping encouraged teachers to think and act in ways other than those externally scripted, and this helped move the focus beyond just putting into practice the expertise of others. Finding new ways to think and be a teacher created energy and encouraged teachers to experiment more in their teaching practice. As teachers considered a wider range of possibilities for themselves, change and improvement became more intrinsic and therefore more sustainable.

When perceptions and assumptions were challenged, teachers became troubled about categorising and homogenising others, and as their discomfort about discriminatory behaviour grew—they began to confront this in themselves. Challenging bias in oneself is not a comfortable process and yet this is where the work for equity begins (Aveling, 2002; Jacobson, 2003; Wise, 2008). Equity in education requires ongoing commitment by teachers in their everyday practice and begins with teachers examining their own identity construction and how their biases have formed (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010). The research provided a context for this to occur and as a result teachers became more cognisant of the long-term impacts of their actions on others, and in particular children. One teacher came out of the project asking: ‘How will this story be told in the future?’ (SS14, 2011).

One of the greatest shifts for teachers was their ability to engage in critical thinking and dialogue. There was a huge leap from seeking the right way to teach, to thinking about issues from multiple perspectives. Teachers became more considered in their approach to teaching particularly when making decisions that had life-changing effects on others. Slowing down to ask questions and view situations from a range of possibilities added the critical to teacher thinking and practice (MacNaughton, 1999, 2005; Taylor, 2011). It is difficult to be critical and creative when energy is being invested in getting it right, but when the boundaries of acceptability can be challenged, stretched and reconfigured there is room for innovation. Positive social change happens when teachers are comfortable with uncertainty, multiplicity, tension and difference, and when they are willing to extend their boundaries beyond the familiar (MacNaughton, 2005; Moss, 2006; Taylor, 2007). As this research has shown, this takes time, determination and intentionality.

Choosing to focus on teacher storytelling rather than directly on outcomes for children is not the norm in early childhood.
and doing so was a risk in an educational climate that is increasingly about outcomes. In the long term the belief is that this research will indeed bring positive outcomes for children, their families and society, but at this stage it is too early to report on these; in fact to do so would be dishonest to the data. As Meiers and Ingvarson (2005) point out, evidence that links professional learning to outcomes for children is ‘hard to pin down’ (p. 8) because it can be years before the full implications of actions are evident. Even so, this does not detract from the potential this project has for generating innovative and socially just outcomes for children in the future.

MacNaughton (2005) stresses that ‘we need new ways to know the child, to think about the child and to work with and for the child’ (p. 203) and to do this she says we need to take a risk in thinking. As the researcher and author, I am grateful that Kids’ Domain took a risk, and I have faith that this will make a positive difference not only for children, but also for society in the years ahead. I also believe it is possible for other centres to achieve what Kids’ Domain has done—not in the same way, but by finding their own pathway towards hearing others and creating spaces for difference.

References


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Self-authored e-books: Expanding young children’s literacy experiences and skills

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THIS PAPER EXPLORES THE ROLE of self-authored e-books as a vehicle for helping early childhood professionals to engage young children in new literacy and language experiences. The rationale for using information and communication technology (ICT) in the early years is examined along with the changes that have occurred in written texts and textual practices. It is our opinion, as New Zealand early childhood teacher educators working in the area of multi-literacies, that self-authored books present an opportunity for early childhood professionals to develop a partnership between ICT and reading. The common software application PowerPoint is ideal for helping young children to make basic self-authored e-books. By helping children self-author and produce e-books, early childhood professionals can make the use of computers more interactive and personal. The potential ethical issues, cautions and constraints that need to be taken into consideration when developing self-authored e-books are examined.

Introduction

The provision of language and literacy experiences is essential in all early childhood education learning environments. Increasingly, information and communication technology (ICT) is being viewed as another tool for early childhood professionals and children to use in this domain of learning in a way that can complement the more traditional provision of literacy experiences (Hills, 2010; Paret, Quesenberry & Blum, 2010; Marks, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2003). Young children are more and more exposed to multiple information modalities (Luke, 1999). ICT can play a vital role in developing children’s oral language and literacy and has the potential to provide new and exciting possibilities for teaching and learning in this domain (Makin, Jones Diaz & McLachlan, 2007; Zevenbergen, 2007).

ICT and the early years

In New Zealand the government is committed to digital literacy. The Ministry of Economic Development (2008) asserts that connecting New Zealanders to each other and the wider world, and making available new and emerging digital technologies, is vital to our ability to be successful in this transformative future. New Zealand, like Australia, is investing funds in computer literacy, and connecting schools to the internet as the government perceives the advantages in positioning itself favorably within an increasingly global economy (Hill, 2007; Jewitt, 2006; Lloyd, 2005; Ward, Robinson & Parr, 2005). There is a strong social and economic rationale for nations to use ICT in the compulsory education system. As Brown and Murray (2006) put it, children need to be able to use ICT so that they are adequately prepared for the future, and the prospective wealth of New Zealand’s economy is dependent on embedding digital technologies in our education system. This trend has permeated down to the non-compulsory early childhood sector. In a government-sponsored literature review on the role and potential of ICT in early childhood settings, Bolstad (2004) argues that ICT use should foster a view of ICT as a tool for enriching the teaching and learning environment for young children. To support the improved use of ICT in early childhood education, the New Zealand Ministry of Education consequently launched the strategic plan Foundations for Discovery (Ministry of Education, 2005), with the implementation of targeted professional development. In a recent report on the impact of a three-year professional development project aimed at increasing early childhood professionals’ capability using ICT to support children’s learning, Hatherly, Ham and Evans (2010) maintain that an added
value of ICT was the multiplicity it offered in terms of learning opportunities. For a number of children it presented a voice or an opening to becoming more connected in the early childhood service for the first time, whereas for others it allowed them to transform their existing interests in a new way.

**Literacy and ICT**

Western society has invested print-based media with significant authority, but notions about literacy are changing. As society and technology evolve, there is a shift to an acceptance of digital forms of literacy (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Increasingly, young children are exposed to communication tools and circumstances that are multimodal instead of solely linguistic (Hill, 2007). These multi-media forms of literacy include traditional forms of print and numbers, but also hypertext, symbols, photographs, animations, movies, DVDs, video, CD-ROMs and website environments (Luke, 1999; Walsh, 2008). Jewitt and Kress (2003) argue that it is important for early childhood professionals to attend to the variety of different ways, described as ‘modes’, in which information and knowledge are communicated. They explain a mode as a ‘regularised organised set of resources for meaning-making, including image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound effect’ (p. 2). This has meant that changes have occurred in texts and textual practices, leading to a blurring of the previous demarcation between reading and visual literacy. As Healy (2000) points out:

> Terms such as ‘screening’ and ‘visual acuity’ are accepted as aspects of reading the media and texts on digital screen. Text now refers to multiple forms of communication including information on a digital screen, video, film and other media, oral speech, television, and works of art as well as print materials. Electronic texts in particular have become part of children’s everyday lives to the extent that before they commence school, a growing number of children have more experience with electronic texts than they do with books. It is important to recognise that print is now only one of several media which transmit messages in our culture (p. 156).

The reading of texts has traditionally focused on decoding–encoding print’s alphabetic codes. Texts children read today, however, might be a mixture of images and print, and the delivery might be interactive with mobile forms rather than just print fixed on a page (Walsh, 2008). Healy (2000) argues such textual conditions do make a noteworthy difference to reading at the level of text decoding.

An Australian research project, *Children of the New Millennium* (Hill, 2004), which explored the development of young children’s expertise with ICT, concluded that the long-established content of reading and writing needs to be expanded to incorporate the use of numerous sign systems that symbolise meaning. According to Hill (2010) the impetus for this research was due to the disparity between the texts used in schools and the multimodal texts used by children in their homes, a finding from the longitudinal research undertaken of children’s literacy development by Hill, Comber, and colleagues in 2002. In another small-scale study carried out by Marsh (2003) that explored the home literacy practices of three- and four-year-old children in the north of England, she also found that the literacy practices that occurred in the home were not reflected in the early years curriculum. As vital as effective reading and writing are, it is no longer appropriate to talk about reading and writing as distinct skills when children can now access texts in a range of modes (Walsh, 2008). This is reflected in Australia’s first national curriculum for the early childhood sector, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework*. In particular, Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators, has a section on how they can use ICTs to access information, explore ideas and represent their thinking (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009).

Studies of children’s interactions with digital texts in out-of-school settings have drawn attention to the playfulness, agency, and creativity with which they may engage with them (Burnett, 2010). For example, Marsh’s (2004) study of the literacy practices of 44 children in Britain aged two-and-a-half to four years of age at home found that children’s engagement with television, computer games and mobile phones provided them with a means of pleasure and self-expression. As Marsh puts it:

> Literacy as skills development was embedded within children’s techno-literacy practices, whether that related to learning grapheme/phoneme relationships from watching television or reading texts on the screens of computer games. In short, children’s home literacy events within this study could be mapped on to existing literature in the field, differing only in the extent to which techno-literacy practices were involved (p. 63).

Research undertaken with individual children also gives us specific examples of how children make sense and experiment with digital texts. By way of illustration, Smith (2005) examined how her daughter over a period of a year, from two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half years of age, developed and expressed her comprehension of hypertext by means of role play about computer games. More recently, O’Hara (2011) carried out a small-scale study of young children’s ICT experiences in the home and the role of their parents in presenting opportunities, acknowledgment, encouragement and models of ICT
practice for their four- to five-year-olds. O’Hara found differences in the occurrence and accessibility of ICT in the homes could be subtle at times and depended on a number of factors. Young children may have access to certain technologies as they were already present in their homes but this did not always mean that they were allowed and/or able to use these. O’Hara’s findings support the arguments made by Marsh (2004), Smith (2005) and others that young children already have an understanding of ICT knowledge and competences when they enter formal schooling as a consequence of differing levels of parental intervention and modelling along with being able to acquire their own new information, abilities and attitudes.

An important factor in comprehending how young children learn to conceive texts, particularly during the period before they enter formal schooling, is to acknowledge that where traditionally print has been the accepted means for delivering the message, multiple texts now convey their messages equally through image or through a mixture of print and image (Healy, 2000). While sitting at a computer, some children learn to read by animating text and by following audio cues, using iconic and directional references, and ordering their reading in a personalised way. Healy (2000) contends that children’s reading in this manner and their responses to the linear constructions of a two-dimensional page are considerably different. The media that children use and the construction of the text shows that different reading processes are needed.

Healy (2000) asserts the focus is now on the central role of the visual in various types of reading. The following terms, for instance, screening, visualisation, visual skill, and visual acuity are prevalent in the research regarding text and reading. Of interest, recently published CD-ROMs and narrative picture books are made so that the targeted audience cannot transform the text into meaning without substantial deliberation. In many cases, ‘left-to-right and top-to-bottom, or even rules of centrality do not apply’ (Healy, 2000, p. 157). On the other hand, an image may be the best way for children to receive the text’s message. In most cases, texts for children are structured so that they involve a complex set of processes, and the image may be as necessary to the message as print, with codes and symbols randomly placed on the text’s surface. The written language codes, at times, are given a secondary role. These types of texts were rare not too long ago and reading such texts is very different from reading pages of printed books. Healy (2000, p. 157) suggests that the ‘linear reading a printed text in a left-to-right and top-to-bottom organisation has little to do with reading a flexible digital text constructed of multimedia, or with viewing a moving film’.

Walsh (2008) points out, too, that to read and create multimodal texts, children do need to be able to combine traditional literacy practices with the comprehension, design and manipulation of various ‘modes of image, graphics, sound and movement with text’ (p. 108). In agreement with Walsh (2008) and Healy (2000), we are not suggesting abandoning practices centred on the traditions of print literacy but instead propose early childhood professionals include a range of texts for young children that expand beyond the current print traditions. Self-authored e-books are one way to accomplish this, as they can create a partnership between ICT and reading.

Creating self-authored e-books using the common software program PowerPoint™

PowerPoint is part of the ever-present Microsoft® Office suite. It is an easy application for early childhood professionals to master, and lends itself to the production of self-authored e-books that can feature a range of things in addition to text, such as photos, images, audio, animations, video, interactive buttons and links to the internet. The combination of these elements to support narrative or factual information represents significant creative potential in the creation of new literacy objects. Parette, Hourcade, Boeckmann and Blum (2008), who undertook a study examining the use of PowerPoint to foster literacy in ten American early childhood education settings, observed that this type of presentation software has features (for instance, animation, colour and sound), which can be used effectively to encourage and enhance young children’s literacy learning.

We assert that many early childhood professionals know how to use this software but that they do not necessarily exploit the program to its fullest creative potential or show children how to use it for creating their own self-authored e-books. However, professional development and/or independent self-tutoring (see, for instance, http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/powerpoint-help/getting-started-with-powerpoint-2010-HA010359435.aspx) can significantly enhance early childhood professionals’ confidence and competence with this simple software. An example of using PowerPoint to create successful self-authored e-books has been described by early childhood professionals working at The Pagoda, an early childhood setting in Cambridge, New Zealand. The early childhood professionals undertook professional development opportunities to broaden their knowledge and skills with a range of software so that they could assist children’s digital literacy. Through the use of PowerPoint and other programs, the early childhood professionals are now tapping into children’s understanding and familiarity as readers of digital texts and providing them with the opportunity to tell stories in ways that they have not been able to do previously (Ministry of Education, 2010).

As part of our early childhood education initial training course, we consider it important that our
students know how to use this program creatively to promote young children’s literacy. It has been our experience of working with student teachers that many of them find making and using self-authored e-books in PowerPoint and then using them with children on their teaching practicum is empowering and exciting. One early childhood student, Alex, for instance, wrote that she set her self-authored e-book within the context of her kindergarten community so that the children could make personal connections to the text. When creating her self-authored e-book Alex consciously focused on using the literacy devices of repeating rhythmic rhyme as she recognised these literacy techniques aid children’s early phonological awareness (see, for example, Goswami, 1999). While viewing the self-authored e-book for the first time with the children, which was about Alex taking her dog for a walk on the beach near the kindergarten, she reported that the children related what they saw to what they had seen at the beach. One child commented that he had seen a ‘crab shell like that with my Nana’. Another child told Alex ‘I make footprints in the beach’, while someone else said ‘my dog likes the beach’. The children were able to identify features and objects from the local beaches. (Stevens, personal correspondence, 29 March 2011).

Alex explained how she had shown her self-authored e-book three times with a small group of children. The first time the children were very excited and interested in the pictures and text but the simple words moved too quickly. Next time the children viewed the self-authored e-book they joined in reading the simple text and asked for it to be repeated. The third time the self-authored e-book was shared with the children, Alex led a discussion of how, why, where and when she had created it. One child, Cam, was very interested so they created a self-authored e-book, Cam the Bug Expert. Cam staged the photos he wanted Alex to take. As Cam was fascinated with the transition process for slides in PowerPoint, they created his self-authored e-book with a number of different transitions for each slide (Stevens, personal communication, 29 March 2011).

Next, Alex outlined how she watched Cam the Bug Expert with a group of children, which led to two more children, Emma and Louise, being interested in creating their own self-authored e-books. This provided the opportunity for collective work and problem solving as both children wanted to make their e-book first. After much negotiation and discussion, Emma took photos of Louise dancing. Then Louise and Emma chose the photos and suggested captions to include in their e-books, using principles of collaborative learning to produce their first self-authored e-book. This is highly motivating as the children were both the subjects and producers of the images used (see, for example, Hourcade, Parette Jr., Boeckmann & Blum, 2010). Later on that day, another child, Ben, told Alex that ‘there is an invisible lion in the sandpit. This is his print. That is his poo’. Ben took photos of the evidence then painted what the lion felt like, the paw print and its smile. He took photos of the different parts of his painting and they worked together to produce a self-authored e-book. Alex reported that she noticed and recognised the children’s interest in and the developing of storytelling and the use of ICT (Stevens, personal communication, 29 March 2011).

Research undertaken by Colbert (2006b) in a New Zealand kindergarten setting indicates that using ICT added sophistication, correlation and continuity to young children’s storytelling. When early childhood professionals in her research introduced digital microphones, digital video as well as digital cameras, they helped children to capture the ideas and images they needed to make their stories interesting and relevant. Colbert found that digital technology could be used to complement and capture children’s drawings that they had created for their stories. She observed that having these different mediums available for the children to use to develop their stories enabled them to tell more complex stories. Colbert (2006b) stated children’s desire to tell their stories, to communicate their thoughts separately from text conventions, led them into a greater experimentation and investigation in their storytelling, and also inspired a keenness for experimenting with a variety of other ICTs. The example of Cam the Bug Expert as discussed above illustrates aspects of Colbert’s observations.

We believe self-authored e-books made in PowerPoint can supplement traditional print-based books but offer extra affordances. One of the significant advantages of this type of e-book is that early childhood professionals can help put this authoring tool into the hands of children even though they are pre-literate in regard to written text. As Colbert (2006a, 2006b) suggests, young children are increasingly using digital technology by themselves, such as digital cameras, and they now have more choices about what images can go in their own stories, and can make their own decisions about which images to use in their books. PowerPoint provides a multimodal digital platform from which young children can successfully develop self-authored e-books to tell their stories successfully and with complexity.

Te Whāriki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, also emphasises the need for early childhood professionals to build on children’s strengths and interests, and allow them to make choices that encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning (Ministry of Education, 1996). This is where the development of self-authored e-books can create opportunities for children to work with each other and early childhood professionals to produce exciting literacy objects that build on their interests. This not only
enhances the literacy dimension of the early childhood setting but also provides another vehicle for making children’s ideas and learning visible. An example of this can be seen in a small self-authored e-book developed by Solway Kindergarten in Masterton, New Zealand, that the children and their early childhood professionals created together, which very simply captures the essence of a vegetable garden development project. To view Vegetable Gardens e-book see Shuker and Terreni’s (2010) web-based article written for the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s Early Childhood ECE Educate site, www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/exploringPractice/Literacy/EBooksPromotingYoungChildrensLiteracy.aspx.

E-books as interactive texts

Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2003) contend that there are several important aspects for computer use with young children. They argue that computer programs or activities should include: flexibility, the ability to change arrangements or representations, linking the concrete and the symbolic, providing feedback, and dynamic linking of multiple representations. This, they suggest, can focus the children’s attention and increase motivation.

We argue self-authored e-books made in PowerPoint support these contentions because they can be made to be dynamic and interactive. For instance, early childhood professionals can set up interactive buttons so that children can do elementary things such as turn the pages of the e-book themselves. The ability to set up more complex options such as inserting video clips, sound files, and animations that children can activate also add to the interactivity of an e-book. Another useful feature of this type of electronic book is that, unlike traditional books, they can be modified and expanded over time, capturing new ideas and activities that emerge.

Whilst the PowerPoint program is not particularly difficult for adults to negotiate, young children are likely to need assistance to be able to use some of the tools to create their e-books (for example, inserting images or videos), or to create text or symbols on a page if required. Early childhood professionals therefore need to work alongside children to assist them with the technical aspects, but still allow children to self-author by letting them determine content. Max’s Tool Box (see www.maxstoolbox.com/En-Au/Pages/ProductCatalog.aspx) is a child-friendly version of PowerPoint that can make navigating this software easier, and regular use and familiarity can lead to mastery of the program.

Korat and Shamir (2008) point out that educators and researchers consider that the lively and attractive features of electronic books may provide a useful means for promoting young children’s literacy and language development. Such an assumption is based on the idea that the type of software used can provide children with a more authentic reading experience instead of the more traditional drill or exercise way of promoting literacy. Research carried out thus far on the effectiveness and value of commercial e-books for literacy development has provided some positive results in different domains (Shamir, Korat & Barbi, 2008). For instance, substantive gains have been identified in the area of word recognition and children’s use of e-books (Blum, Parette & Watts, 2009). E-books have also been found to be a factor in fostering children’s phonological awareness (Korat & Shamir, 2008).

However, limitations of some e-books for fostering children’s literacy development have been identified (de Jong & Bus, 2003; Korat & Shamir, 2008). The researchers highlighted that most e-books targeted at children aged three to eight years are not entirely satisfactory as a tool to support their emergent literacy. Korat and Shamir (2008) assert that more needs to be done in creating appropriate e-books for young children. They consider that educational e-books need to take into consideration the attractive features of the available electronic and interactive media but concurrently they should provide support for children’s story comprehension and their investigation of the written text. We agree, and believe that self-authored e-books using PowerPoint are one way to accomplish this.

Self-authored e-books have bilingual and multilingual potential

The diversity evident amongst children and families enrolled in New Zealand early childhood settings has grown dramatically in recent years. In terms of ethnicity, the New Zealand Ministry of Education statistics for 2011 show increases in enrolments of 21 per cent for Māori children, seven per cent for Pasifika and Asian children, and three per cent for other ethnic groups. During the period from 2007 to 2011 the largest increase in enrolments occurred in the Asian group (www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/ese2/annual-ese-summary-reports). Linguistic diversity is also evident, with 71 different languages spoken by children and adults in early childhood education settings (Rosewarne & Shuker, 2010). Early childhood professionals who are not able to speak additional languages can draw on the expertise of those who can, such as parents and older siblings.

Families are very useful resources for developing self-authored e-books that can be used with children with additional languages (Barratt-Pugh, 1997). By giving attention to a child’s additional language this elevates it to a position of dignity and respect as well as allowing parents to demonstrate their reading and writing skills in the language they are most comfortable using (Ordoñez-Jasis & Oritiz, 2006). Along with assisting with the making
of self-authored e-books, this may also generate interest in this type of text and may encourage participation in the early childhood setting by parents and other members of the family (Shuker & Terreni, 2010). The importance of parents being involved in their children’s education has been well documented (see, for instance, Ordoñez-Jasis & Oritiz, 2006). In regards to their participation in early literacy development, studies have shown early reading experiences supported by parents help benefit children’s formal literacy instruction and build a base for later reading successes (Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999).

We have found that our student teachers soon realise they are able to tailor digital texts in self-authored e-books to meet the needs of children from diverse backgrounds. For example, print-based resources from different countries and cultures may not be readily available to early childhood professionals but these can be accessed through the internet and used to produce self-authored e-books that are relevant for the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of children. According to Ordoñez-Jasis and Oritiz (2006) it is important to have appropriate authentic multicultural material in early childhood settings, which reflect the rich, diverse realities of families who attend to promote a culturally sensitive literacy program. (See, for example, Leonardo’s Story, Shuker & Terreni, 2010 www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/exploringPractice/Literacy/EBooksPromotingYoungChildrensLiteracy.aspx.)

Drawing is an important activity for children who speak additional languages as it offers them another way to tell their stories, avoiding the deficit position that they may be put in due to their differences such as language and culture (McArdle & Spina, 2007). Many children use drawing as a means for expressing their thoughts, emotions and comprehensions of their world. Through drawing early childhood professionals can often acquire insight into children’s thinking processes (Hall, 2010). Self-authored e-books can be an effective way of capturing children’s drawings and a valuable resource for documenting their stories or thoughts about what they have drawn. A good example to illustrate this is Penelope’s Story (see Shuker & Terreni, 2010, www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/exploringPractice/Literacy/EBooksPromotingYoungChildrensLiteracy.aspx).

**Sharing and distribution**

Self-authored e-books can be created, stored and distributed easily. An e-book can also be printed out to make a traditional type of book (but using only text and images) that can be incorporated into the early childhood education setting’s book collection or sent home with children. We have noticed that sometimes early childhood professionals laminate these printed-out versions to add to their durability. A key advantage is that self-authored e-books can be stored on a computer, storage media or a network hard drive. E-books stored on media such as CD-ROMs, DVDs or memory sticks can be shared with children’s families to be viewed at home (Hourcade et al., 2010). Additionally, there is potential for e-books to be stored on the internet, and with broadband larger files can be downloaded quite quickly. Providing the user has PowerPoint or the free PowerPoint player, the downloaded e-book can be played.

**Ethical issues, cautions and constraints**

While copyright law in other countries is generally similar to New Zealand there may be major differences, especially in the duration of copyright and in regards to exceptions (www.copyright.org.nz). Copyright laws legitimately protect intellectual property so it is not possible to use material that is not your own. For instance, it would breach copyright to photograph a traditional book and use the images in an e-book. If you reproduced music you would also need to obtain the relevant license from the copyright owners. Under international law (the Berne Convention) copyright is automatically given to the person who created the work. In the United States it is possible to register the copyright of your work so if you would like permission to use another person’s music you will need to approach, for example, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). For a list of copyright collection societies, including ASCAP, use the following link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_copyright_collection_societies.

This would seem to limit what can be used but there is a considerable amount of copyright-free material available on the internet. There are sites which state that images are for free use. (See, for example, www.pics4learning.com/index.php and www.findsounds.com/) However, the material still may be subject to conditions (such as acknowledgment) and to limits (for example, the image or sound can be used in a teaching environment but not for commercial use). It is important to read the terms and conditions so that your use is within the scope of the license. If a broader license is required you will need to contact the copyright owner (www.copyright.org.au).

There is also good potential for the use of Clip-Art libraries. Clip-Art images can also be used freely. Though free images and Clip-Art might be a starting point we feel that the e-book medium is best used when early childhood education settings make their own original material using the learning contexts of the children. With the support of early childhood professionals children can take photographs of their own artwork, take their own photographs of things that interest them, record their own songs and music, or make their own videos. All these can be used for making self-authored e-books.
Conclusion

We argue that early childhood professionals and children can actively take ownership of authoring digital texts by creating e-books and that this adds a number of new literacy possibilities, while retaining many desirable features of traditional books. E-books have great potential to make computer use more interactive through the creation of these interactive texts. They can provide opportunities for the development of bilingual and multilingual stories. One of the most useful features of e-books is the ability for children to share and distribute their work widely and easily with their friends and families. As the children of the 21st century move into an increasingly digital world they are likely to encounter more literacy objects in digital form than they encounter as traditional book forms. The development of e-books allows children important creative learning opportunities with digital technologies.

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The PhotoStory method as a legitimate research tool in evaluations:
More than a nice story

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THE INTENT OF THIS REPORT is to examine the use of the PhotoStory method as a qualitative component of the KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC) mixed-method evaluation. One hundred family and staff photographers, at 10 early childhood education and care (ECEC) services across Australia, participated in the PhotoStory study by taking 162 photographs to illustrate children’s social and emotional learning. Educators provided photographs to show how KMEC had affected them and their work practices. Analysis of the photos and stories underscores the importance of social cultural aspects of children’s social and emotional learning. Findings provided evidence of the personal as well as professional changes that staff attributed to KMEC. The PhotoStory method used was an effective and powerful research tool providing unique rich and informative qualitative data as part of an evaluation study. This study suggests that the PhotoStory methodology deserves its place among the suite of qualitative data collection approaches available to researchers undertaking mixed-method evaluation studies.

Introduction
This paper examines the use of a PhotoStory methodology, an adaptation of the photovoice approach (Wang & Burris, 1997), as a method of qualitative data collection in an evaluation of the KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC) mental health intervention (Slee et al., 2012). It seeks to establish whether the use of photos to elicit participant stories is a useful and effective manner in which to gather rich and informative data for evaluative purposes.

Background
A recent survey by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that over 200 000 children (5 per cent) were affected by long-term mental or behavioural problems (AIHW, 2010) before they reached their fifteenth birthday. Another earlier study undertaken by Sawyer et al. (2000) found that children with emotional and behavioural problems were more likely to have low self-esteem, experience difficulties with school and social activities, and have a poorer quality of life than their peers. In that research, Sawyer et al. stressed the need for broadly-based mental health promoting interventions for children and families. One response to this petition has been the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative. Developed by a collaborating group from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society, and Early Childhood Australia, the KMEC initiative was trialled in 111 Australian early childhood care services during 2010–11.

KidsMatter Early Childhood
KMEC is an Australian national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative specifically developed for early childhood services, based on the KidsMatter Primary risk and protective factor framework (Slee et al., 2009). The KMEC framework enables preschool and long day care services to implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies that improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age. In this paper mental health is defined as the ‘developing capacity of the infant and young child to experience, express, and regulate emotions; form close and secure relationships; and explore the environment and learn …’ (Osofsky & Thomas, 2012, p. 9).
Similar to the KidsMatter framework used in primary schools, the core content of KMEC is structured around four components. Component 1 focuses on creating a sense of community within the early childhood education and care service; promoting feelings of belonging, connectedness and inclusion for all children and families. Component 2 is centred on developing children’s social and emotional skills, and is based on research which shows that the development of social and emotional skills is fundamental to children’s mental health, ability to learn, moral development and motivation to achieve. Component 3 involves services working more closely with parents and families in order to share important information about the child’s life, experiences, preferences, and activities, while Component 4 aims to help children who are experiencing mental health difficulties so that mental health issues may be resolved before they become worse or entrenched. As the intervention was a new approach it was imperative that all staff in the KMEC pilot ECEC services were provided with professional learning about each of the components during the two-year implementation. This was undertaken by trained facilitators located in each Australian state and territory, who also provided support and advice to services throughout the intervention.

**Evaluation of KidsMatter Early Childhood**

Like all well-implemented interventions the KMEC proposal included an independent evaluation process comprising several parts. As shown in Figure 1, staff, parents and facilitators provided quantitative and qualitative information. The qualitative PhotoStory study component is the focus of this paper.

In undertaking the evaluation the research team sought a mixed-method study design that would provide rigorous empirical quantitative data as well as rich and in-depth qualitative data. To evaluate and learn what worked well and how KMEC could be improved, the team followed Ellis and Hogard’s (2006) three-pronged approach, which recommends the use of multiple methods (such as using both qualitative and quantitative approaches), multiple participants (e.g. staff and parents), on multiple occasions (e.g. two or more data collection times). This three-pronged approach formed the basis of the evaluation design which was planned to include surveys (quantitative approach) involving parents’ as well as teachers’ assessments of children’s social and emotional wellbeing, and four data collection points across the two-year trial. A qualitative approach to provide in-depth data was also planned, and the process and rationale underlying the method selected is the subject of this paper.

Figure 1 shows that the conceptual elements of interest that would inform the quantitative part of the evaluation would be primarily assessed by a purpose-built questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure the implementation process, the effectiveness of the KMEC components, and children’s mental health and temperament at four time points during the trial (see Slee et al., 2012). The findings from this process would provide statistically tested data and empirical evidence for policy-makers interested in substantiating policy and funding decisions.

The evaluation team was aware, however, as Keremane and McKay (2011) have noted, that questionnaires with fixed, closed questions offer little in understanding individuals’ personal experiences, and generally involve a non-participatory method. With this in mind, the research team sought a qualitative methodology that would encompass a participatory approach and
afford KMEC participants greater involvement with the evaluation, as well as provide insight of their personal KMEC experiences. For this purpose, the qualitative methodology chosen and reported here was one that would involve the blending of both images and words. The value of images and photographs in research, while generally under-used (Bolton, Pole, & Mizen, 2001), is recognised by researchers as an effective means for exploring phenomena alongside other methods of data collection (Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2006). Photographic data provided by participants are more likely to reflect their world (Wang & Burris, 1994). They ‘have the unique ability to help individuals convey inner thoughts’ (Bessell, Deese & Medina, 2007, p. 558), and offer insight into a reality that cannot otherwise be easily captured by words and language-centred approaches (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock & Havelock, 2009), or which may be difficult to discuss (Kubicek, Beyer, Weiss & Kipke, 2012). Several research designs that incorporate photographs, such as Photo-Novella (Wang & Burris, 1994), photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), PhotoStory (Keremane & McKay, 2011), Photo Elicitation (Harper, 1984), Photo-Talks (Serriere, 2010) and Photolanguage (Burton & Cooney, 1986) are used by researchers in a diverse range of communities and fields of research.

In photo-driven studies the pictures used in the research may be produced by researchers or by participants. In the Photolanguage and Photo Elicitation methods, for example, carefully selected images are provided by researchers to evoke participant responses (Burton & Cooney, 1986), and while these methods are successful in eliciting stories, for the purposes of the KMEC evaluation the research team sought a more participatory approach where participants would themselves generate the photos for discussion. With this in mind the KMEC evaluation team considered using the photovoice methodology that was first devised by Wang and Burris (1997).

**Photovoice methodology**

Framed in feminist theory (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010) the photovoice approach utilises a methodology that is consistent with the principles of participatory research (Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker, 1998) and is regarded as an effective way to bridge the power gap between researcher and participant (Keremane & McKay, 2011). The photovoice method has been defined by Wang, Cash and Powers (2000) as ‘a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique’ (p. 82). In a photovoice study the photographs taken by participants are used to highlight issues and to promote change (Drew, Duncan & Sawyer, 2010) so an important facet of photovoice is that it can facilitate individual empowerment as well as processes for change (Catalani & Minkler, 2010). For these reasons the research team was drawn to the advantages suggested by Hurworth (2003) of using the photovoice approach. According to Hurworth (2003), studies such as photovoice ‘can challenge participants, provide nuances, trigger memories, lead to new perspectives and explanations, and help to avoid researcher misinterpretation’ (p. 3).
Palibroda et al. (2009) outlined the nine steps that typically characterise the photovoice approach. The steps begin with researchers connecting and consulting with the community and developing trusting relationships, and then move on to a plan of the photovoice project and the recruitment of participants and target audience members (individuals who have the power to make decisions for change such as politicians and policy-makers). The photo taking then commences and the project continues along the course of several meetings with participants as they visually represent and reflect their issues through the photographs they have taken. Selected photos are then gathered up in the data collection process and analysed through a group discussion with participants. Finally, the photos are prepared and organised for showing in an exhibition, a book publication or some other visual display, in a manner that involves the target audience and lobbies them for change. This photovoice process can be quite time consuming and it involves close participatory work with participants.

While the time and resources available for a photovoice study can limit the level of involvement of researchers with participants, research by Catalani and Minkler (2010) found little evidence to suggest that study outcomes were related to participatory levels. Catalani and Minkler found that while participation increased with the duration of the project, and project quality increased with participation, low participation projects ‘still reported a unique ability to gather in-depth descriptive information from hard-to-access groups’ (p. 445). This feature of the photovoice approach was particularly appealing since there would only be a small window of opportunity to instigate this part of the research and the team did not want the relatively short time frame available (three months) to compromise the findings.

Another important benefit of the photovoice approach is that it engages participants whose voices are not typically heard (Strack, Lovelace, Jordan & Holmes, 2010). This was of particular relevance as the KMEC research team wished to encourage participation of parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people who might be reluctant to offer their opinions and experiences because they felt intimidated or lacked confidence, and whose voices are sometimes missed when using other qualitative approaches. Cohen (2012) noted that the use of photographs eases any reticence due to inhibitions associated with speaking, so the research team felt this approach would be ideal for some of the parents and families that the team wished to include in the evaluation.

The photovoice approach has also been described as flexible in its application (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). According to Catalani and Minkler (2010) ‘the majority of photovoice efforts alter Wang’s methodology to suit the needs and constraints of researchers’ unique projects. As a result of this tailoring, the manifestations of partnership and of photovoice methodology vary broadly across the participatory spectrum’ (p. 447). For example, Kermane and McKay (2011) altered the photovoice approach in their study of sustainable water management in rural Australia and called it PhotoStory. They provided participants with ‘PhotoStory packs’, including a camera and a diary in which participants were asked to record their thoughts about each photograph taken, gave them 14 weeks to undertake the task and then met with them to discuss the findings, agree on final themes, and organise an exhibition. The malleability of the photovoice approach was considered advantageous by the research team.

In summary, based on the advantages associated with the photovoice approach outlined previously, the research team sought to employ a method similar to photovoice in the KMEC qualitative evaluation. Perceived benefits included the ability to elicit rich descriptors from the intermingling of photos and stories; the empowering features of working collaboratively with participants; the methodological flexibility; and the ability to involve people who would not otherwise become involved in research. Therefore, as part of the evaluation plan the research team designed a method that was an adaptation of photovoice and which resembled Kermane and McKay’s (2011) PhotoStory approach. This involved participants taking photographs that would be used to illustrate their KMEC story.

The PhotoStory method

The research team agreed that it was important to involve ECEC educators and parents/carers in the evaluation, as they would be best placed to notice any changes in the children attending the KMEC services and to reflect on how KMEC may have affected them personally. In order to examine how KMEC had impacted on staff working in ECEC services and on parents/carers whose children attended those services, the research team designed a qualitative study of two different groups of respondents involved in the KMEC implementation: families and ECEC staff.

The key objectives of this qualitative component of the evaluation involving parents/carers were to provide evidence of young children’s mental health outcomes, capture diverse perspectives of mental health and wellbeing of young children, and to enable the researchers to examine parent knowledge, competence and confidence in working towards improved child mental health. The key objectives of the study involving ECEC educators were to provide qualitative evidence of their perspectives on the implementation, impact and experiences of the KMEC components as well as KMEC generally. A primary objective was to involve families and ECEC staff in a collaborative and participatory approach to data gathering.

In Australia ECEC services employ educators with an array of qualifications, ranging from secondary and
tertiary certificates to university degrees. The research team reasoned that this diversity might act to deter educators with basic qualifications from participating in the evaluation. Similarly the research team reasoned that parents/carer with limited English literacy skills might likewise be intimidated by other qualitative methods, such as interviews or the use of diaries, and would avoid participating in this kind of research. It was hypothesised that the task of taking photographs as part of the evaluation would be less daunting to hesitant participants, particularly since services regularly use photographs as a communication tool with families as a matter of course and parents/carers are generally known to enjoy photographing their children. The research team anticipated that using this medium in this study would not be perceived as a burden or strange request. The research team expected that this approach would offer an opportunity for generally unengaged parents/carers and reserved educators to contribute to the evaluation and provide access to information that would otherwise not be accessible.

Since participation involved taking photographs of children that required parental consent and release documentation not included in the original KMEC Evaluation application, a separate ethics application was submitted to the University’s Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) to conduct this component of the evaluation. Ethics approval was granted in August 2011.

Method

Selection of early childhood education and care services

Australia has wide and varied early childhood programs and settings. In order to capture this diversity in this PhotoStory study the research team consulted with KMEC facilitators and selected a range of services around Australia; states and territories; private and government; small and large, metropolitan, regional and remote areas; preschool and long day care and combined; with specific provision for children identified as having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background; with a proportionally high representation of culturally and linguistically diverse families, and with a range of socioeconomic groups. KMEC facilitators were consulted about whether they thought each service would be able to successfully involve parents and staff in the photographing activity. The sample of 10 ECEC services selected included services from two sites in South Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory and one site from each of Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. While no service from Queensland participated in the PhotoStory study, the maximum heterogeneity sampling method involving a diverse range of services provided sufficient representation of KMEC services.

The PhotoStory included three ECEC services with more than 25 per cent of their enrolled children being nominated as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; one service with a high proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse children; and two services that were located in a remote area, three that were metropolitan and five that were regional. Most of the ECEC sites were preschool centres, while two were long day care centres, and one was an integrated long day care/preschool centre. The majority of participating services were not for profit, while two were being run for profit. PhotoStory participants included staff and parents who were self-selected (as discussed below) by these ECEC services.

Procedure

In developing materials for the study the first step involved trialling these with a KMEC-participating ECEC service that was not one of the selected PhotoStory services. Materials were refined based on feedback from this service.

To begin the PhotoStory study the research team communicated with an identified contact person (generally the ECEC Director) at each service, and organised two convenient times to visit. One of the purposes of the first visit was to deliver a personalised PhotoStory pack of materials which included a digital camera, study flyers and consent forms. Parents were invited to participate via information that was distributed by the service:

… to take photos that show how your child relates to other people and is developing new ways of interacting with other children and adults … [and then] select one that you think tells a story about your child’s social and emotional learning … Write a caption for this photo, or indicate that you would like to tell your story to a researcher.

Staff were invited via a flyer to provide a depiction of their KMEC journey:

As a staff member who has participated in professional development about KidsMatter and children’s mental health, take some photos that help tell us a story about your journey … that show how KidsMatter has changed the way you think, work with children or interact with adults … [and then] select one that illustrates your story the best, and write down your story, or indicate that you would like to tell your story to a researcher when she visits the Centre.

The information package also provided space for staff to write a caption for their photo.
PhotoStory Study visits

Once collated, the PhotoStory packs were personally delivered to ECEC services by two researchers, who visited each of the services on two occasions over a 10-week period at the end of the KMEC two-year trial. Members of the research team went to all services twice. The first visits were important for explaining the aims of the research and for initiating relationships with staff. The second visits occurred four to six weeks later and involved talking with participants about their photos, as well as collecting consent forms, and electronic and hard copies of photos and stories.

At the first visit the members of the team met with the service director and explained the PhotoStory process. The research team ensured that someone from the service would be able to download photos, recharge the camera and oversee the sharing of the camera amongst parents and staff. Visits across sites varied in length. In some services the research team left within two hours, while in other services a four- to six-hour visit was more common as the director showed researchers around the centre and provided the opportunity to meet staff, children and families.

The second visit involved audio-recording conversations about the photos and associated stories. The research team found that they needed to be responsive to the idiosyncratic ways that different services worked, and adapted the process of gathering stories and photos to accommodate them. This meant that a standard method of interaction was not possible. In most services staff had approached particular parents to talk to the researchers, and of those parents who opted to do so, most chose to speak individually rather than in a group setting with the researchers. Thus, at most services the potential of a shared experience, which is a characteristic of the PhotoStory approach (Catalani & Minkler, 2005), was not realised. For example, at some services the photos had been uploaded on the USB the research team provided; ready to access when the research team arrived at that service. At other centres there were staff and/or parents willing to talk to the researchers but they had not yet taken photos. Most of these participants had an ‘image’ in mind and talked about the imagined photo before they then went and actually photographed it.

It was the case at many services that parents and staff provided more than one photo, despite the instruction to select only one photo. In most cases where there were duplications, an indicative photo was selected in consultation with photographers. In cases where the photographer provided a series of connected photos as part of their story, all photos in that series were included in the analysis. Transcriptions were made of all recorded parent and staff stories.

At the end of the data collection period three copies of all photos were printed; the researchers kept one and two were sent to the services (one for the photographer and one for the service). Copies of photos and captions were sent back to services in the hope they would be used to trigger the sharing of stories, by parents about their children’s social emotional learning, and by staff about the personal impact of their KidsMatter journey. Most of the photos and stories were incorporated into the final evaluation report (see Slee et al., 2012; www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/).

Photographers

One hundred photographers participated in the PhotoStory study. This included 36 parents, 53 staff and 11 parents who were also staff at the KMEC service. In total 162 photos were collected and these photos formed the central point of discussion with parents and educators who opted to tell their story to the researchers. A total of 19.1 hours of audio recordings were obtained from 66 people who spoke to the researchers.

Conversations with PhotoStory study participants

The researchers began discussions by allowing participants to speak freely about their pictures. This was to enable issues that were important to participants to emerge naturally, without prompting. It was found that many important aspects of the KMEC components, as well as the process of KMEC implementation, emerged in the course of general conversation with the ECEC educators. However, when that open discussion faded researchers purposefully steered the conversation to matters relating to children’s social and emotional development or, as was the case with staff, a discussion about the enablers and impediments to KMEC implementation, including their experience of the professional learning. It was also possible during discussions to address issues that were relevant to the evaluation but which might have been taken for granted or overlooked by participants. For example, researchers varied the prompts to talk about professional learning in a way that would maintain flow in the discussion. Examples of prompts that were used were: ‘So, you’ve done all the professional learning for KidsMatter—how did you experience that?’ and ‘Through the personal journey that you’ve had, the professional learning has been part of that, is there anything that you would like to tell us?’ Examples of questions with an evaluation focus which were used included: ‘In your view, what do you see as being the difference between Component 1, which is building communities, and Component 3, which is working collaboratively with parents?’ and ‘Have you seen any differences since KidsMatter has been implemented in the Centre?’

Methods of data analysis

In the first phase of the analysis the research team independently inspected a selection of approximately half the parent and half the staff photos. This process
enabled independent identification of emerging themes which were then moderated through joint discussion. This process led to an agreed-upon procedure for coding. The photos and stories were thematically analysed using NVivo v9.1 by following an iterative coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved distinguishing and coding the main message of the story associated with a photo, based upon our knowledge of literature in the fields of early childhood, human development, and children’s social and emotional wellbeing using a KidsMatter lens. From the stories (and photo captions) it was possible to provide descriptors (terms and concepts) related to social and emotional wellbeing and their relation to KMEC information and materials.

Staff perspectives provided comment on the four previously specified components and the implementation of KMEC and factors associated with barriers and facilitators of implementation. These formed some of the coded patterns, which were finally grouped into the small set of themes that are discussed in the section that follows.

Results and discussion
The original expectation of the two groups of photographers (families and staff) expanded to include a third parent/staff group. This is because some parents were also staff either at the service that their child attended or at another service and had undergone training about KMEC. The combined parent/staff perspective brought with it a working knowledge of KMEC. Parents who were not staff generally did not reveal any in-depth knowledge or understanding about KMEC other than from the information disseminated by the service.

When examining the pool of photos the researchers noted (as shown in Table 1) that there were many more photos that depicted children interacting with other children rather than adults. The message this conveys about photographers’ perceptions of social and emotional learning is that interaction with other children is recognised and valued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo Content</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only adults</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults and children</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only children</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects only</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A series of photos</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the PhotoStory analysis of the photos, four themes emerged that were labelled: Relationships;
Feelings; Learning and Playing; and Working Together. These themes, shown in Figure 3, formed the basis of a publication of PhotoStories in a 24 page book, which was distributed to all KMEC pilot ECEC services (Skrzypiec et al., 2012). Relationships were depicted through pictures and stories of children with other people. These included children working together in the playground, children hugging, children helping each other and children interacting with family members. Other pictures depicted children’s feelings, such as feeling safe, feeling strong, feeling calm and feeling that they belonged. Learning and playing, a theme which was quite diverse in content, included pictures of children’s learning experiences (e.g. preparing dinner; swimming at the pool; learning to be patient through fishing), new experiences (e.g. first experience in the snow); general play with family members (e.g. kicking a football with dad; playing a game with siblings) and with peers (e.g. children playing in the playground); and helping others learn (e.g. helping a sister ride a bike). The Working Together theme included photos that showed children working together as a cohesive group with other children (e.g. in the sandpit building rivers and pretending to cook) and with other adults (e.g. with adults at a working bee).

KMEC appears to have been experienced in many different ways. Its impact as described by staff indeed revealed a variety of perceptions. Importantly those perceptions included voicing KMEC’s effects on their personal lives as well as in their professional work. One staff member explained how the KMEC professional training had helped her: ‘It’s been good for me too—even at home I’m doing it. Not reacting straight away. I sit back and try and work it out. The knowledge that KidsMatter gave me, it has really been helpful.’

Some photos provided by parents were posed pictures of their children and family, which were taken to highlight the message that kids matter. Others the research team considered to be representations of children interacting in their physical, social, and cultural environments (Figure 4). The significance of social relationships with peers, siblings and relatives (Figure 5) was highlighted by parents and carers as important indicators of their children’s social and emotional learning.

Use of PhotoStories in the evaluation report

The findings of children’s social and emotional learning and of KMEC’s impact on staff, were interspersed throughout the final KMEC evaluation report, which focused mainly on the quantitative results (compare Slee et al., 2012). Pictures, quotes and stories provided a human context and supported or added to the statistical findings and numeric data. Ten of the 12 chapters in the report began with an illustrative photostory of the chapter theme (see Figure 6 for an example) and were followed by other relevant photo stories. These were captioned as a numbered ‘PhotoStory’ and listed at the beginning of the report in a similar manner to the figures and tables. In total 15 photostories from parents and ECEC educators, and over 80 quotes were included in the final evaluation of KMEC report.

Although the research team had collected and analysed rich qualitative data that reflected the perceptions of KMEC participants, comments made by stakeholders that the PhotoStory study provided ‘a nice story’ suggested that this qualitative component of the KMEC merely served a decorative function in the evaluation. Our findings and the strengths of the PhotoStory approach run contrary to this view.
The community vegetable garden was a community-building project bringing children and families together. We were supported by Rotary who provided materials and helped with the hard work. Many families from the Preschool and the [other] groups came together to instill the raised beds, move the soil and plant the seedlings. This was a day for families to work alongside each other and to form friendships as we established the new garden. We finished up with a sausage sizzle. The children have enjoyed tasting some of the vegetables we have grown and have helped with watering and pest control (collecting the caterpillars). (Staff, ST5S1)

Strengths of the PhotoStory study

The research team found, as Cohen (2012) had noted, that participants were relaxed and willing to talk to them about their photos. This was particularly the case for some ECEC staff working in services with a high proportion of children from diverse linguistic backgrounds, for whom English was a second language. From these respondents the research team learnt that the KidsMatter training modules were delivered by facilitators in a manner that assisted their understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing of young children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in some centres, who were under-represented in other (quantitative) aspects of the evaluation, were also ready to talk with the researchers. At one service where administration of the questionnaire had been abandoned because questionnaire items were assessed as ‘tricky’, staff willingly wrote stories about the photos they had taken.

It was a common occurrence that the conversation about the photo taken by the participant often led on to a discussion about a related issue that was important to the photographer. For example, while the staff story related below was at one level indicative of the ‘Feelings’ theme with its focus on the child’s emotional development, the male Indigenous staff member who photographed the toddler interacting with other children (Figure 7) extended his story as discussion progressed to the importance of Indigenous male ECEC educators as role models in services with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Such a discussion may not have come about had the research team used only semi-structured interview techniques with standard questions. This participant felt comfortable raising questions and expressing his ideas and he was, as the photovoice method engenders, empowered to speak his mind about matters associated with the social and emotional wellbeing of children that were important to him:

He was a child ... put into care ... when he first came in he couldn’t sit near children and he used to be really scared and he just didn’t like being around a lot of children ... So I’ve just taken a photo of him there showing that ... we’ve helped him along his emotional state to see now that he can interact with other children and he’s sitting quite closely, he doesn’t have a big personal space, there’s no bubble to say ‘no don’t come near me’ and it’s just showing me that he’s feeling really comfortable ... And I’ve been told by other staff members that he’s come out of his shell and he’s more active; just those things that you can interact with a male like kicking a football. It’s just a different thing for the kids. I think they’re used to seeing females in the room, then when a male comes in the room there’s a change, you know, almost straight away. There’s not enough males in this industry to help these children with stuff. It would be really good though to see more males, more Indigenous males trained up, to all sorts of programs to get into the industry.
Time constraints

Data collected from the PhotoStory approach was useful in highlighting important aspects of the KMEC initiative not captured in the quantitative part of the evaluation. However, participant recruitment at each ECEC service did not always eventuate as planned. Poorly informed parents and the smallest number of participants occurred in ECEC services where the first visit was restricted by time, and where there was limited opportunity to develop rapport with ECEC staff and families. The researchers did not anticipate the amount of time that would be needed during this first step of the research. The research team had been concerned about our imposition at participating ECEC services and of them taking time out from an already busy end-of-year schedule, so no indication was provided of a time commitment in this planning, relying instead on services to set aside time as best they could during the first visit. This proved ineffective on a number of levels. Short first visits not only impeded the development of rapport, but also limited the amount of time spent discussing the study to ECEC staff and therefore restricted the information they could pass on to others. Future studies using this approach would be well served by planning for the time commitment required to develop relationships and a connection with participants. Similarly, a sufficient amount of time should be spent with participants who are asked to recruit others, to ensure they fully understand the study.

While it was generally the case that parents knew little about KidsMatter, the PhotoStory process enabled important aspects of their children’s social and emotional wellbeing to emerge naturally. Moreover, parental participation in the PhotoStory study was not significantly thwarted by parents’ lack of KMEC knowledge, providing further evidence of the appeal of a PhotoStory approach; that parents generally knew little about KMEC highlighted the need for KMEC to be more effective in educating families about the initiative.

The research team found the PhotoStory approach effective and the use of photos enabled staff to talk freely about a salient feature of their involvement with the KMEC initiative. However, since study findings are dependent on the photos taken (Palibroda et al., 2009), it may be necessary to direct discussions after this initial conversation to other topics pertinent to evaluation questions such as the impact and perceived success of the intervention.

A limitation of this research process was that photos of children taken by staff were restricted, due to ethical requirements. However, the research team found that participants found ways to overcome this limitation. For example, in some services staff photographed symbolic objects and photographed children to ensure that children could not be identified (see Figure 8).

Conclusion

The PhotoStory study, used in the mixed-method research design of the KidsMatter evaluation proved to be a powerful component alongside the quantitative evaluation, as it provided a picture of the impact of the four KMEC components and of KMEC generally. The results of the PhotoStory study provide evidence of the strength of the PhotoStory approach. This methodology provides the opportunity for participants and researchers to engage in mutually informative dialogue that adds to the depth, understanding and accuracy of researchers’ interpretations of data. More generally, as a research methodology, its flexibility lends itself to adaptation to suit

**Figure 8. Children interacting in their physical and socio-cultural environments**

*Hold my hand and you’ll be OK. A blank page and crayon. Like a blank page, we used the KMEC Pilot Program as an opportunity to start our journey with a fresh slate. A new approach to mental health and what it means to our children, families, staff and our centre.*

A criticism of the PhotoStory approach is that the representativeness of participants’ experiences of others in the community cannot be determined (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). While generalisations are not possible for this reason, the PhotoStory method did provide further insight on the impact of KMEC on participants and their experiences with it. The research team aimed for diversity in the selection of ECEC services and did not seek to generalise findings. Rather the research team sought to allow the experiences of staff and families involved in KMEC to manifest in a manner that would provide richness and depth to an evaluation of the initiative.
the particular context of an evaluation and its participants. We suggest that the PhotoStory methodology deserves its place among the suite of qualitative data collection approaches available to researchers undertaking mixed-method evaluation studies.

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References


Effects of TV viewing on preschool children’s learning and development

A considerable body of research argues that television (TV) viewing has both a positive and a negative impact on children’s learning. It has also been widely recognised that TV viewing has primarily negative effects on very young and preschool children as far as cognitive and behavioural development is concerned. However, numerous studies (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009; Holman & Braithwaite, 1982; Salomon, 1984; Wilson, 2008) have demonstrated that for preschool children appropriate viewing of high-quality content can improve cognitive and behavioural development. It has been argued that more important than how much children watch is what they watch and how they watch it, in other words under what circumstances children watch television, for example, joined by their parents, as background noise, and so on (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009; Hayes & Casey, 1992; Wilson, 2008). A series of socio-scientific concepts related to media utilisation, such as the style of education, the level of aspiration, curiosity, behaviour, gender, race and home life, interact with the experience of TV viewing (Boeckmann & Hipfl, 1987; Wilson, 2008).

Strong age-related differences are also present in the way children respond to different television programs, such as the news, due to developmental differences in how children process television. Attention to TV, in other words, and the way they focus on TV, increases with age. That is to say, older elementary school children possess more complex strategies for making sense of television than do preschoolers and younger elementary schoolers (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Smith & Wilson, 2002). It has been asserted that attention to TV by very young children varies according to the complexity of the TV program. The simpler the program, the more attention very young children pay. Moreover, attention is highest for content that remains within the child’s level of comprehensibility (Anderson & Pempek, 2005).

According to Langham and Stewart (1981), several studies have found that exposure to news increases children’s fear and anxiety. It has been noted that young children perceive televised violence as ‘lifelike’ and that ‘real-life’ perceptions of, and high exposure to,
televised violence are associated with greater approval and willingness to use such methods (Langham & Stewart, 1981). Furthermore, Bandura (1968) showed that violence on TV or in the movies reduced inhibitions against violence among preschool children, by increasing aggressive behaviour, and by teaching them through modelling how to be aggressive or attack others. Numerous studies (Jantarakolica, Rosechongporn & Speece, 2002) demonstrate that viewing televised aggression is related to aggressive behaviour and this relationship is stronger among children. It is also worth noting though that a number of correlational studies indicate that children showing a preference for violent shows are also judged as being more aggressive (Langham & Stewart, 1981). According to Buckingham (2008), TV deconstructs childhood as it is the ‘ultimate medium of disclosures’, meaning that through TV, and in particular through certain TV programs, children experience, in a way, adult life—sex, drugs and violence.

Another negative effect of TV viewing for young children, as Wilson (2008) notes, is that it diminishes social interaction. More specifically, preschoolers and their parents spend less time talking with and looking at each other when the television set is turned on than when it is off. On the positive side, families engage in more physical contact and cuddling when they watch TV together than when they are doing other activities (Wilson, 2008). A recent study by Gülay (2011) showed a negatively significant relationship between the children’s duration of TV viewing and their number of friends and pro-social behaviour levels. A decrease was observed in the children’s number of friends and pro-social behaviour levels as their duration of TV viewing increased. Similarly, their number of friends and pro-social behaviour levels showed an increase with the decrease in their duration of TV viewing. Other results from the same study revealed differences in peer relation variables depending on who the children watched TV with. Children who watched TV with their siblings or friends had more friends compared to those who watched TV alone or with their parents. The variables of peer relations showed differences also in terms of the type of program preferred by the children. Children who mostly watched cartoons on television had more friends and higher pro-social behaviour levels than their peers who mostly watched children’s programs and programs for adults (Gülay, 2011).

Moreover, another negative effect of TV is that TV sees children as ‘consumers’. This relationship is established through TV advertisements that tempt children to want a number of the advertised products. Young children are attracted to TV advertisements even if the products are of no interest to them. Children below the age of six appear to be immature about their purchase requests to their parents. These children seem to like the advertised product due to its catchy music, jingle or celebrity endorsement (Kapoor & Verma, 2004). TV certainly has the power to influence children. Children positively evaluate products they see advertised and the more they watch commercials, the more likely they are to request commercial products (Wartella, 1984).

**TV viewing and education**

Television as a mass medium does not have entirely positive or negative effects on education and school achievement. Moreover, the negative effects of television depend on the way television is used and also on the content of the television program, the duration of watching and the age of the child. As far as the relationship between TV viewing and school achievement is concerned, researchers have found modest negative links, or none at all, between the total time children spend viewing television and their school achievement. In a review of 23 studies varying across several measures, Schmidt and Vandewater (2008) found an overall weak negative association between television viewing and achievement. Moderate TV viewing—one to 10 hours a week—was positively associated with achievement (compared with no television at all), whereas longer viewing—more than 11 hours a week—was negatively linked with achievement.

Detailed analyses of the relationship between television exposure and academic achievement suggest that this relationship is not straightforward. For example, as Kirkorian, Wartella and Anderson (2008) argue, in a meta-analysis of 23 studies, the average correlation between total viewing time and academic achievement was only −.05, an extremely small association. More accurately described, the relationship was what social scientists call curvilinear. That is, in moderate—one to two hours a day—television viewing was positively associated with academic achievement, but higher rates of television viewing were associated with decreasing achievement. In one study, however, viewing before age three was negatively related to later academic achievement, whereas viewing at three years old and beyond was positively related to subsequent achievement (Kirkorian, Wartella & Anderson, 2008).

Several more recent studies found that achievement is linked to early exposure to specifically educational television programming. It should be noted though that the role of parents has been regarded as extremely important in maximising the positive consequences and minimising the negative ones as far as TV influence on children is concerned (Holman & Braithwaite, 1982). As a result, it is likely that when the home environment is educationally focused, children would be exposed to educational TV programs early and would benefit from that in their school achievement.

One of the most extensive studies of this kind, that of Kirkorian, Wartella and Anderson (2008), reported that
viewing educational programs at age five was positively associated with better school grades in English, maths, and science. Early exposure to educational programs was also positively linked with a host of other factors such as leisure-time reading and involvement in extracurricular activities. Although watching educational programs can have academic and social benefits, watching other types of content can have drastically different results. For instance, longitudinal correlational research has demonstrated a negative association between early exposure to violent video content and academic achievement (Kirkorian, Wartella & Anderson, 2008), provided parental influence is taken into consideration as well as mentioned previously. In summary, high-quality educational television programs are reported to have positive effects on children’s learning, academic skills, and academic engagement, so long as these programs are viewed after age three.

The family as a mediator between television and children

There is a strong tie between family and television. Television plays a part in the configuration of family, of standard marital roles, or parental and child roles. Consequently, the television program has a ‘family character’ and this is obvious in the topics and titles of television programs. Television as a medium shapes family and family shapes television in that it actually builds the viewing habits of children and consequently sets the culture of TV viewing (Pleios, 2005; Spetsiotou & Davou, 2012). Research has shown that the important role of an open family communication system between parents and children in terms of quantity and quality of communication (Seon-Kyoung & Doohwang, 2010).

In their research findings, Seon-Kyoung and Doohwang (2010) suggest that family communication promotes children’s perceptions of the different realities of televised worlds and the actual world, and the effect becomes salient only when family communication directly encourages parents’ active participation in discussion with their children about specific television content. Without such instructive parental participation and guidance about television content, the degree of the perceived disparity between televised worlds and the actual world will not be diminished, even if parents and children share a lot of other things in their communication within the family. From an educational point of view, this result indicates the effects of the parents’ role in media education and media literacy on children’s critical thinking and viewing. The findings also highlight the important role of an open family communication system between parents and children in terms of quantity and quality of communication (Seon-Kyoung & Doohwang, 2010).

The Greek case

In Greece, research on children and television has been scarce, according to Kamarianos (2005), but there are still examples of focusing on a number of parameters. Paschalides (2000) argued that media and education are not rivals but have a close and special relationship. He believes in an alternative pedagogy in terms of media education, one that will stimulate expanded literacy and student’s creativity regarding mass media. Pleios (2005) added that television influences education and school children’s socialisation in a positive way. Television can enrich knowledge and help in the development of the reading ability of school children.

When studying the effects of TV viewing on preschoolers in Northern Greece, Natsiopoulou and Halikiopoulou (2009) found that the TV viewing time of preschoolers increases with age. In Greece, children aged five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half years old watch TV⁴, on average, approximately one-and-a-half hours a day, a figure which is less than that of school-going age. According to these researchers, parental restrictions and mediation can increase the positive effects of TV. In Northern Greece the majority of children aged two to six years watch TV either with their parents or with others (Natsiopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2009). However, there is concern for the increasing number of children from this age group who watch TV on their own. Parents report that, when preschoolers wish to watch TV, they frequently advise them on program selection, as well as discussing the

⁴ Official education in Greece starts with preschool at age four until age six.
selected programs with them. It must, however, be pointed out that findings of this research show this phenomenon to be true mainly for the upper socio-economic families (Natsiopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2009).

Spytsiotou and Davou (2012) also underline the parent-child relationship that is affected by TV viewing. They claim that, depending on the circumstances, TV viewing influences the interaction among parent and child, at times by making the dialogue easier and at other times by making it difficult. They believe that as far as parents are concerned media are being used as tools that fulfill the emotional gap that creates a negative attitude or conflict among parents and children. Media and especially television are being used as mediums of consistency regarding the relationship between parents and children or are used in order to cover the possible absence of the parent. It is evident, according to Spytsiotou and Davou (2012), that television is being used as companionship for children, or used in a difficult situation when the parent wants to take a rest from the constant care of the child. Moreover, media are an issue of negotiated discipline in the family or an issue that shows deficits in the quality of the relationships of members of the family (Spytsiotou & Davou, 2012).

Davou (2012) stresses the fact that TV viewing diminishes mental activity and children’s creativity and imagination. Research has shown that media limit the development of creativity of children before four years of age and stultify their inner world. Later when they reach the age of six, children consume TV pictures that are used as ‘examples’ of certain behaviours, and in that way media reflect the inner conflicts of this age, presenting children as ‘young adults’.

Vrizas (1997) thinks that a child’s personality is far too complicated to let somebody state that television on its own can influence behaviour directly. The way each child interprets TV violence varies according to age, personal life and socio-cultural characteristics. What is certain, and this is in line with Bandura’s (1968) findings, is that the constant viewing of TV violence leads to a compromise with violence. Violence becomes more and more a part of the child’s life and becomes a familiar entity. The child’s sensitivity to phenomena of violence in real life is diminished.

Even if the topic of children and television is a classic one and international research has been extensive, there is no research effort, at least in Greece, concentrating on the views and attitudes of preschool teachers towards the issue. Preschool teachers are both protagonists in the life of preschool children and shapers of preschool children’s attitudes towards TV. Similar to parents, teachers are likely to be imitated by children, who follow their behavioural patterns in all issues of everyday life, TV viewing included. Preschool teachers, in particular, spend almost half of the day with children and the way these teachers use TV—a powerful tool in the classroom—is a model for children’s use of TV at home, too. Furthermore, preschool teachers more likely than not co-watch TV programs with children and help shape children’s views on the quality of the TV programs. The way TV is used in preschool (whether as an entertainment medium, an educative medium, as a time filler between activities, etc.) is also a way that it may be used at home. During preschool years children are open to the stimuli and messages that teachers give them through play, everyday interaction and discussions. TV’s content is one of the top issues for discussion among children and teachers in preschool and teachers influence children’s TV viewing habits and preferences. Consequently, teachers play a very important role as far as the relationship between children and TV viewing is concerned and their views will be of great interest and value.

Thus, the aim of this research was to investigate the views and attitudes of preschool teachers on the effects of TV viewing on the behaviour of preschoolers, and the procedure of learning. Moreover, the scope of the research was to study the thoughts of preschool teachers on the role of family in the relationship between children and TV and to compare groups of teachers with different teaching experiences concerning their beliefs on the above matters. The hypotheses were as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Preschool teachers will have chiefly negative attitudes towards the effects of TV viewing on the behaviour and everyday life of preschool children.

**Hypothesis 2:** Preschool teachers will have neutral attitudes towards the influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning in children.

**Hypothesis 3:** Preschool teachers will think that children’s patterns of TV viewing will indicate a negative use of the medium.

**Hypothesis 4:** Attitudes and views of preschool teachers will vary among preschool teachers with different years of teaching experience.

### Methodology

This paper is part of a broader research project on the topic ‘The relation between preschool children and television’ that has been conducted for preschool teachers and parents in the Region of Central Macedonia.

The pilot questionnaire was initially compiled in autumn 2010 and was distributed and completed by 30 preschool teachers in the Region of Central Macedonia. The preschool teachers were asked to comment on whether they understood the pilot questionnaire and whether it thoroughly covered the issue. The reviewed questionnaire was again distributed to 20 preschool
teachers, who completed it and made new comments that were adopted in the last version of the questionnaire. The revised pilot questionnaire was tested and the results proved the validity and reliability of its questions.

The final version of the structured questionnaire consisted of 30 statements/questions, five open questions and four closed questions that referred to the demographic details of the participants. The 30 statements/questions examined the views of the preschool teachers regarding the topic of television and children. The 30 statements/questions were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (absolute disagreement) to 5 (absolute agreement). The 30 closed statements/questions included the following four key themes:

- Effects of TV viewing on the preschool children’s behaviour (violence, aggressive actions).
- The role of TV in children’s lives (social interaction, entertainment, health).
- TV and school achievement.
- Children’s patterns of TV viewing.

The five open questions aimed at studying the views of preschool teachers on children’s television programs.

The questionnaires were distributed by the Advisors of Preschool Education to preschool teachers of the public kindergartens of the Region of Central Macedonia, except for the public kindergartens for children with special needs. The total number of the kindergartens of East and West Macedonia is 439 (Information on Schools of Primary Education of Central Macedonia, n.d.), and 231 questionnaires were returned, a 53 per cent response rate. The distribution and collection of questionnaires started in September 2010 and was completed in June 2011.

Descriptive statistics and data analysis were performed with SPSS (version 18.0 for Windows, Chicago, IL, USA) as follows:

a. Exploratory factor analysis (principal component extraction with varimax rotation) and Item analysis were applied to assess construct validity and reliability of the measures; it was further assessed whether factor analysis was suitable for the sample, based on the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity.

b. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Scheffe’s post hoc test was applied to examine differences in attitudes and views of preschool teachers with different teaching experiences. Missing values were less than 10 per cent of all cases, thus considered negligible and were removed listwise. The significance level of the statistical tests was predetermined at a probability value of 0.05 or less.

Results

As a result of the Exploratory factor analysis, four meaningful dimensions emerged, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) and the interpretability of factors. The four factors explained 66.2 per cent of the total variance. The KMO index was equal to 0.813 (> 0.50) and Bartlett’s test was found statistically significant, \( x^2(435) = 1693, p < 0.001 \), indicating that the dataset is appropriate for factor analysis. The factors (subscales) were identified as:

a. Children’s patterns of TV viewing (five items, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.84).

b. Influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning (eight items, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.77).

c. Effects of TV viewing in the preschool children’s behaviour (eight items, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.69).

d. The role of TV in children’s lives (nine items, Cronbach’s alpha = 0.57).

Reliability analysis indicated moderate to high internal consistency for the first three subscales (alphas ranged from 0.69 to 0.84). The fourth subscale, however (‘The role of TV in children’s lives’), demonstrated poor internal consistency (alpha = 0.57) and was excluded from further analyses. Item descriptive statistics, eigenvalues, loadings and variance explained for the three remaining factors are presented in Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1. Teachers’ views on children’s patterns of TV viewing (n = 223)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Preschool children watch TV at home during breakfast, lunch, and dinner.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preschool children watch TV alone, at home.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preschool children watch TV besides children’s programs and adult programs.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Preschool children watch TV at home in the morning.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Preschool children watch TV after 10 at night.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (5 items, eigenvalue = 4.81, variance explained = 25.2%)</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means are based on a 5-point Likert scale.
Based on the results in Table 1, preschool teachers (n = 223) highly agree that preschool children watch TV at home mostly in the morning or during lunchtime. Apart from children’s programs, preschool children also watched TV programs for adults and it was not uncommon for them to watch TV alone, according to preschool teachers’ views.

Table 2 shows that preschool teachers (n = 208) have neutral attitudes, on average, towards the influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning. Thus, there is evidence to support Hypothesis 2. There was, however, a slight tendency to agree that the TV facilitates language learning and improves the general level of knowledge of children. The attitudes of preschool teachers (n = 207) towards the effects of TV viewing on the behaviour and everyday life of preschool children are mostly negative (Table 3); this is in line with Hypothesis 1. Specifically, preschool teachers expressed clear and strong opinions on the negative effects of violent scenes and programs on preschool children. Furthermore, they believe that TV has the power to influence children and consequently to treat children as ‘consumers’.

The patterns of correlation between the three factors are reported in Table 4. From this table, it is evident that there is no significant correlation between preschool teachers’ opinions on children’s patterns of TV viewing (1), their attitudes towards the influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning (2) and towards the effects of TV viewing on the behaviour and everyday life of children (3). In addition, a significant negative, but weak, correlation (r = −0.18, p < 0.05) was found between (2) and (3).
Differences in attitudes by teaching experience

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that the effect of teaching experience on teachers’ attitudes and views about TV viewing and children was not statistically significant. Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed—that is to say, preschool teachers with different years of teaching experience did not hold significantly different views and attitudes on children and TV viewing (Table 5).

Discussion

Preschool teachers chiefly have negative attitudes towards the effects of TV viewing on the behaviour and everyday life of preschool children. Viewing televised aggression is related to aggressive behaviour especially among children (Jantarakolica, Komolsevin & Speece, 2002; Langham & Stewart, 1981). Children who show aggressive behaviour also show a significantly greater preference for violent TV programs than non-aggressive children who prefer family shows. Children who display aggressive behaviour have a different behavioural pattern to non-aggressive youngsters, as the former go to bed later, their families are exposed to a wider variety of commercial TV and consequently have a higher tendency to behave violently (Langham & Stewart, 1981). More than 200 studies have concluded that TV viewers are more prone to imitating programs with justified violence than with unjustified violence and these viewers believe that violence is an effective medium of problem solving (Krcmar, 1998). There are many types of TV violence but the one that is most traumatic for children is the raw description of violence in the news (Vrizas, 1997). Preschool teachers significantly agree that children imitate TV behaviour standards and since children repeatedly watch violence on television, it is likely that these children will believe that aggression is a normal reaction and an accepted way of behaving in modern society (Kamarinos, 2005). When the child-viewer sees that the model hero feels satisfaction from his aggressive behaviour, then it is very probable that the child will also become aggressive in order to feel the same satisfaction. The degree of influence depends on the degree of identification with the model hero (Kamarinos, 2005).

Preschool teachers have neutral attitudes, on average, towards the influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning. More specifically, a relatively modest percentage of preschool teachers agree that TV improves the general level of knowledge of children and that it facilitates language learning. Similarly, many studies have found that TV viewing is sometimes positively and sometimes negatively correlated with children's language development and academic performance (Langham & Stewart, 1981). More than 200 studies have concluded that TV viewers are more prone to imitating programs with justified violence than with unjustified violence and these viewers believe that violence is an effective medium of problem solving (Krcmar, 1998). There are many types of TV violence but the one that is most traumatic for children is the raw description of violence in the news (Vrizas, 1997). Preschool teachers significantly agree that children imitate TV behaviour standards and since children repeatedly watch violence on television, it is likely that these children will believe that aggression is a normal reaction and an accepted way of behaving in modern society (Kamarinos, 2005). When the child-viewer sees that the model hero feels satisfaction from his aggressive behaviour, then it is very probable that the child will also become aggressive in order to feel the same satisfaction. The degree of influence depends on the degree of identification with the model hero (Kamarinos, 2005).

Table 4. Correlations between factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children's patterns of TV viewing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Effects of TV viewing on pre-school children’s behaviour</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Differences in attitudes by teaching experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>F (df1, df2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children’s patterns of TV viewing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>F(2, 221) = 0.145, n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;12</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Influence of TV viewing on the procedure of learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>F(2, 221) = 0.215, n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Effects of TV viewing in the preschool children’s behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>F(2, 221) = 0.183, n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;12</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.s. = non-significant
negatively related to school achievement. Hours of TV viewing, TV content, children’s IQ and socioeconomic background are some of the factors that determine the negative or positive influence on school achievement (Schmidt & Vandewater, 2008). On the one hand, television can put the classroom in touch with the world and vice-versa. On the other hand, television prevents interaction, which is so important to learning, and which may limit imagination and creativity (Eleftheriadis & Madouvalou, 1985). Consequently, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were confirmed. This confirmation of the first hypotheses is in line with Natsiopoulou and Halikiopoulou’s (2009) findings, which report that the vast majority of Greek preschoolers are influenced by TV as a large number of them request their parents to buy them the products advertised on TV.

Hypothesis 3 was confirmed because preschool teachers moderately agree with the hours of TV viewing of preschool children and the incorrect use of TV. Preschool teachers agree that preschool children watch TV during all hours of the day and especially during meal times, that they watch programs for adults and also watch TV alone. According to teachers’ views, all of these factors indicate how incorrectly TV is being used by children. For the most part, the preschool teachers believe that little stimulation in the house and lack of alternative activities for children can lead to extended hours of TV viewing. Many parents encourage their children to watch TV both because they believe in the educational value of TV but also in order to get things done or have some time for themselves (Rideout, Hame & Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). In other words, TV use suits parents’ needs more than children’s needs (Spetsiotou & Davou, 2012). In addition, the socioeconomic background of the family plays an important role in the way children use TV; children from a lower socioeconomic status spend more time in front of the TV than children from middle or upper classes (Kalabady, 2006).

It is striking to note that years of teaching experience did not affect the views of preschool teachers on all issues concerning TV and children. In all likelihood the issues of children and TV are interpreted in the same way and seen from the same perspective by all preschool teachers, regardless of the number of years of teaching experience. These issues are basic to the children’s development and thus teachers’ views are common. As a result Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed.

Conclusion

Preschool teachers consider TV to be a bad influence on preschool children, but also affirm that children learn from TV. They particularly stress the negative effects of TV on children’s development and behaviour such as televised violence and the treatment of the child viewer as a ‘consumer’. In addition, they recognised both negative and positive views on the influence of TV on the procedure of learning; sometimes TV works in favour of children’s cognitive development and sometimes it suppresses children’s overall progress. One of the most interesting findings of the present study is that, regardless of their years of teaching experience, preschool teachers share the same views on children and TV viewing.

It should be noted that the present study has a number of limitations that do not permit any generalisations: the composition of the sample and the focus of the study for example, but one key limitation was the fact that preschool teachers offer a subjective but valid view on TV viewing and children. Further research on the field of children and TV viewing should take place on a broader geographical scale and compare the views of the preschool teachers with the relevant curriculum of the university departments of early childhood education in Greece. It would be very fruitful to investigate the reasons for these attitudes and further explore attitudes of parents and children themselves on the issue.

Acknowledgement

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References


Pedagogies of inclusive transition to school

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Teachers in inclusive early education classrooms face competing pressures that are highlighted as children transition from play-based settings into formal school. Their challenge is to engage in pedagogical practice that caters for the complex range of school entrants. Yet the existing literature reports on transition challenges for separate groups of children rather than on shared needs or processes within diverse class populations. This study addressed this gap by investigating practices that supported transition in three Australian sites in which the populations represented different types of pedagogic challenge. Four themes regarding inclusion and transition were identified from a synthesis of the literature and applied to three cases. Results indicated that teachers adopted a range of approaches framed by the visibility of diversity, by classroom and school context and by the teachers’ professional transition in enacting changing policies. The results suggest that competing demands are balanced through dynamic, contextually framed strategies of relevance to both ECEC and schools.
This paper examines the pedagogic links between transition and inclusion, in order to identify more effective ways of addressing school transition for children with a range of abilities and backgrounds. Synthesis of the separate literatures on pedagogies of inclusion and of transition indicates four shared themes—(1) variation to teaching practices, (2) continuity of pedagogy, (3) relationships and (4) pedagogic reform. These are framed by differing theoretical perspectives and attention to diversity groups. In this paper these themes guide analysis of pedagogical practice.

**Variation to teaching practices**

Differentiated teaching programs and preparatory transition practices represent variations to typical practice aimed at improving outcomes for children with disabilities, gifted children and children deemed to be at risk (Braggett & Bailey, 2005; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Podmore, et al., 2003). Narrow differentiation of teaching practice to address difference and targeting of preparation programs towards specific groups indicate normative assumptions framed by developmental theory. Differentiated teaching and transition planning for gifted children and for children with limited English or disabilities may also involve categorisation to access modifications to standard provisions, despite criticism of such categorisation as stigmatising difference (Braggett & Bailey, 2005; Petriwskyj, 2010). More universal and non-stigmatising preparatory transition practices include school orientation visits, parent meetings, and transition plans or statements (Department of Early Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria [DEECD], 2010).

**Continuity of pedagogy**

Continuity of pedagogy encompasses both home–early years consistency and similarity between ECEC and school programs, framed by an appreciation of inter-connections between the ecological spheres in which children learn (Dockett & Perry, 2007). While some dissonance can positively challenge children as they move between settings, extreme discontinuity has a negative impact on children from social and cultural minorities, gifted children and children with disabilities (Braggett & Bailey, 2005; McTurk et al., 2008; Rietveld, 2008). Continuity between home and school is relevant to both inclusion and transition. It reduces the alienation that children from culturally and socially diverse backgrounds may feel in school, as it values their cultural resources and family contribution (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Sheets, 2005). ECEC–school continuity attends particularly to the shift from play-based to outcomes-based programs (Neuman, 2001) and incorporates alignment of curriculum. Similarity or graduated change in practices between ECEC and school programs to smooth transition has been addressed through increased formality in ECEC, incorporation of play pedagogies in the early phase of school and interactive experiential pedagogies across the early years of education (Brostrom, 2005; Neuman, 2001; Thorpe et al., 2004).

**Relationships-based pedagogies**

Pedagogies based on relationships have been identified as both inclusive and effective for transition (Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Nind, 2005). These relationships may include peer friendships, teacher–child relationships, family–school and community–school partnerships (Cahill & Freeman, 2007; DEECD, 2009; Dockett & Perry, 2007; McTurk et al., 2008). Children may be supported through familiarisation with teachers, buddy support, social learning programs and protection from playground bullying (Cahill & Freeman, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Guralnick, et al, 2008). While earlier approaches reflect assumptions of risk resulting in a focus on addressing vulnerability, recent approaches indicate recognition of competence in children and families and a focus on adult partnership and interactive pedagogies, framed by socio-cultural frames of reference (Carrington et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Regardless of the risk or competence frame, children who have effective relational support are more likely to transition well (Thorpe et al., 2004).

**Pedagogic reform**

Re-evaluation of deficit or vulnerability assumptions, and an awareness of disability, risk and cultural diversity as social constructions have prompted pedagogic reform framed by critical theoretical perspectives (Carrington et al., 2012; Nind, 2005). Inclusion reform includes multi-modal, universal design and productive pedagogies that challenge power inequalities, support positive recognition of difference and promote broader pedagogic changes considering all children, regardless of abilities and backgrounds (Carrington et al., 2012; Sheets, 2005; Van Kraayenoord, 2007). While a narrow focus on target groups has been criticised for encouraging isolated multiple additions to transition practice, broader pedagogic reform involves a more pro-active and holistic approach (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011). Transition reform incorporates attention to child and family agency, based on assumptions of the participation rights and empowerment of these key stakeholders (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011). It offers a positive way of attending to diversity during transition by building on transition capital or personal and social resources (Dunlop, 2007), yet limited evidence is available in transition practice.

Each of these themes is evident in literature on inclusion and transition, yet their application in practice does not yet indicate a coherent pedagogic direction across early education. Evidence is required of transition pedagogies reflective of contemporary definitions of inclusion in...
Australia. This study investigating transition pedagogies through listening to early years teachers’ explanations may illuminate inclusive pedagogies, contextual influences or areas for critical reflection.

Three case studies

Three case studies aimed to identify the pedagogies that teachers considered effective for inclusion during transition to school, and to examine the influences on their practice. Inclusive transition was defined as an on-going and non-stigmatising process of change as children move into and through early primary school. Pedagogy was investigated in preparatory/kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 at three Australian schools in which the populations presented different types of challenge for inclusive practice across the school transition. Pedagogy was examined at three levels: learning environments, inclusion and transition and results were considered in relation to the inclusive transition themes identified in the literature.

The questions framing this study were:

- How does learner diversity influence pedagogy for inclusive transition?
- How do teachers enact inclusion from Kindergarten through to Year 2?
- How do teachers support transition to school for the diversity of learners?
- How do teachers balance competing demands of adjusting for individuals and meeting external expectations as children transition into school?

Data collection

Case study sites

Three case studies were located in government school sites in Queensland, Australia that contained co-located, non-compulsory, play-based, full time preparatory classes referred to as kindergarten for this study in recognition of the varied titles for this class internationally. Study in schools with a focused play-based kindergarten curriculum and a Years 1 and 2 outcomes-based curriculum permitted examination of transition from play-based to outcomes-based programs without confounding variables such as auspice and location. The selection of schools was systematic, with school size held constant and sampling directed by location and socio-cultural characteristics of the population, to represent typical school sites in urban and regional areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The sites represented varied challenges in terms of complexity and diversity in their populations and the school environment. All teachers, however, were degree-qualified and experienced, and had access to a standard range of specialist teacher support services. All teachers from K–2 classrooms at these sites agreed to participate.

Classroom learner diversity

Because school data on categories of learner diversity were limited to those supported by government funding (e.g., disability), broader categories including cultural and social diversity, Indigenous background, giftedness, learning and behavioural issues were identified by teachers. Children could be identified in more than one category. The cultural and linguistic categories were those most commonly present in Queensland schools—Indigenous, Maori-Pasifika and South-East Asian, predominantly Vietnamese (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). These diversity data were coded to assure privacy and aggregated by year level and site.

Observation of pedagogic practice K–2

Non-participant observations were made in all K–2 classrooms (n = 22) to identify patterns of pedagogic provision and a continuum of practice across kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2. Observations were based on the standard protocol U.S. Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms APEEC (Hemmeter, Ault & Schuster, 2001) physical environment, social context and instructional environment sub-scales. Because of the content of the kindergarten curriculum and the broad definition of inclusion in Australia, gross motor items from the space and furnishings and interactions sub-scales of the associated U.S. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998) and the diversity sub-scale from the U.K. ECERS-E Extension (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003) were added. These scales had uniform scaling and were selected for their clarity of scoring and incorporation of diversity items. Observations were scored against descriptors scaled from 1(poor) to 7 (excellent), with a score of 5 representing sound practice. A single researcher experienced in use of these measures made all observations to maintain consistency of scoring across sites, although scoring and analysis were debated with a second researcher to enhance reliability.

Teacher interviews regarding pedagogies

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all K–1 classroom teachers (n = 11) to elicit their understandings of diversity and transition, and explanations of their pedagogies. Year 2 teachers were excluded as piloting of the interview protocols indicated that Year 2 teachers did not see transition as their role. Interviews of one hour with individual teachers were audiotaped and transcribed. Questions included:

a. What changes do you make to your teaching approach or learning environment to cater for a wide range of children?

b. What support systems in your school or community assist you in working with diverse children? How are they provided?
c. How do you assist varied children to transition to school?

d. What do other people contribute to transition processes and what communication do you use with these people?

Data analysis

Content analysis of teacher interviews derived themes that were organised into patterns of pedagogic practice. Reliability of analysis was addressed through comparison of coding with a second researcher. This analysis offered insights into teachers’ understandings of inclusion and transition and influences on classroom pedagogies. Transition approaches reported in interviews were categorised using the themes identified in the literature and were numerically coded according to the frequency of their nomination by teachers. Both coded data and observational scores were analysed using descriptive statistics to identify means at year levels within each site. Data from the three sites are presented separately as case studies to provide in-depth illustrations of pedagogies and to highlight the impact of contextual factors. For each case, learner diversity, learning environment, inclusive practices and transition approaches are reported then summarised against the themes of inclusive transition.

Results

Case 1—Regional school

This school, serving a town and rural community, had a stable group of teachers and large class groups (over 25) that included children of a geographically mobile labour force. The principal had instigated pedagogic reforms, including multi-age and multi-modal teaching and a whole-school social learning program. The regional location imposed limitations on access to in-service professional education and teachers reported no training in cultural diversity although they had attended seminars on multi-modal learning and disability.

Across K–2, mean teacher-identified class diversity was low (24 per cent), yet there were differences in categories identified at each year level (Table 1). Kindergarten teachers reported the presence of children from cultural and linguistic groups and low socioeconomic status backgrounds that was not reported in other grades, indicating differing awareness of family circumstances. Year 1 teachers’ nominations comprised mainly official categories recognised for allocation of additional support, while Year 2 teachers identified more children with learning or behavioural difficulties as support services were increasingly directed towards meeting statutory assessment pressures.

Learning environments

K–2 classrooms maintained sound instructional environment quality (APEEC mean 5.14, SD 0.89) and support for children with difficulties. Consistent attention to relationships was identified in teacher–child language (APEEC mean 5.17, SD 1.16) and support of children’s social skills (APEEC mean 5.83, SD 0.75) that included weekly multi-age social learning classes and a buddy program. Continuity was reported in multi-modal activities K–1 and increasing teacher-direction in the kindergarten program as the year progressed. Figure 1, however, shows some discontinuity K–1. Teacher report indicated a shift from individualised interactive play in kindergarten to structured ability-group learning and whole class didactic teaching from Year 1.

Inclusive practices

In kindergarten, structural provision for disability (APEEC mean 6.5, SD 0.43) was evident in ground floor locations, large floor space and extensive materials rather than in support service access. Pedagogic practices in kindergarten incorporated family involvement and individualised planning.

Table 1: Year level learner diversity at Regional School (R), Suburban School (S), and Multicultural School (M)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-identified diversity data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori/Pasifika</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning or behaviour</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disability provisions in Years 1 and 2 were constrained by limited room access (APEEC mean 4.74, SD 0.82) and teaching materials (APEEC mean 4.55, SD 0.58). Limited provision was identified for gender equity (ECERS-E mean 3.5, SD1.3), racial equity (ECERS-E mean 3.6, SD1.19) and social diversity (APEEC mean 3.7, SD1.06) (Figure 2).

In accordance with school policy, speech and occupational therapy was offered to whole classes from Year 1 onwards. However, specialist teachers often withdrew children from class for individual assistance, indicating tensions between practices and school policy linked to classroom feasibility pressures.

Transition approaches
While kindergarten commencement was reported to be gradual and involve family support, all four K–1 teachers’ explanations of transition focused on K–1 processes. School transition emphasised children’s preparedness for Year 1 and warm supportive relationships (Figure 3), although teachers identified grade retention as a solution to lack of readiness.

Kindergarten teachers reported transferring child records at the end of the year, although separate class timetables were identified as a barrier to consultation with Year 1 teachers. Transition processes were based on expectations of stability in both staffing and child enrolment. To prepare children for Year 1 entry, the school offered an orientation program near the end of the year, including having the kindergarten children share a playground with older children, take part in specialist subject classes (e.g., music), join the social learning program and visit the Year 1 classrooms.

In summary, at this site the visibility of diversity was low and it was less salient an issue than adjustment and meeting statutory assessment obligations. Inclusive transition focused on preparation, social inclusion through supportive school relationships and the introduction of pedagogic reform by the principal.
Case 2—Suburban school

Suburban School served an urban population characterised by economic, social and cultural diversity. Classes were small K–1 (up to 20), but larger by Year 2 (up to 25). The early years teachers had been at the school for several years and held early childhood teaching qualifications. Across K–2, mean teacher-identified diversity was moderate (38 per cent). Teacher-identified learning or behaviour difficulties increased markedly from kindergarten to Year 2 (Table 1), as increasing pressure to improve statutory assessment outcomes was placed on teachers. Teachers nominated statutory assessment as a constraint on inclusive practice.

Learning environments

Consistency in learning environment sub-scale means K–2 is shown in Figure 4. In addition, continuity within the teaching day was rated as high (APEEC horizontal transition item mean 6.54, SD 0.71) with consistent provision for flexible change between learning activities. The kindergarten program included whole class direct instruction and specialist subject lessons as well as play. In Years 1 and 2, while whole class direct instruction was gradually increased, teachers also provided small group experiential learning incorporating arts, dramatic play and perceptual motor activity. Continuity was also reported by Year 1 teachers beyond Year 2.

Inclusive practices

Attention to diverse abilities was evidenced in uniformly high scores for participation of children with disabilities (APEEC mean 5.88, SD 0.35) and in provision for learning difficulties. While awareness of socio-cultural variation was evident (Table 1), limited connection to cultural backgrounds was recorded, and scores for gender and racial equity were modest (ECERS means 4.1, 4.2) (Figure 5).

Teachers reported that the kindergarten had access to support services only for children with disabilities. In Years 1 and 2, support provisions for disabilities and learning difficulties included in-class assistance, ability group differentiation, in-class partial segregation and occasional withdrawal for interventions. K–1 teachers’
explanations presented differences between classroom and special education staff in enactment of inclusive policies, with special education staff reported to be more likely to withdraw children. Teachers reported that their capacity to cater for disability was constrained by physical facilities (e.g., distant toilets) and lack of teaching materials.

**Transition approaches**

Under the leadership of senior early years teachers, there was a shared focus on children’s preparedness and on K–3 continuity. Reported transition processes were multi-year and included attention to relationships (Figure 6).

Teachers reported differentiation in transition processes based on individual children’s characteristics. Class composition was planned collaboratively with respect to children’s friendships and personal responses. Teachers shared child progress files and participated in transition discussions, as staff communication was deemed vital. The program at commencement of Year 1 was designed with reference to both kindergarten child records and initial observations in Year 1. Relationships amongst the children in early years classes, and between teachers and children were fostered through timetabled involvement of Year 1 teachers in the kindergarten, a buddy system and a K–3 social learning program. Families were engaged in transition through information sessions, first day social events, or volunteer class involvement.

Three out of four K–1 teachers strongly endorsed the notion of transition as an ongoing change process requiring school provision, yet two teachers also reported that they occasionally used grade retention to support children’s emotional readiness.

In summary, at this moderately diverse site, there was acknowledgement of class complexity, and synergy between policy and practice framed by shared pedagogic understandings and teacher leadership. Inclusive transition pedagogies focused on continuity, early years relationships and differentiation for individuals.
Case 3—Multicultural school

This city school served a population with a high level of social and cultural complexity. The principal and half the early years teachers held early childhood qualifications incorporating studies in disability. Early years teachers were selected for small classes (20 children) that were supported by special education staff, bi-lingual cultural teaching assistants and visiting teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL). In order to reduce class complexity, classes were grouped according to diversity category, with one class comprising children with little English and a multi-age class containing several children with disabilities. Across K–2, mean teacher-identified learner diversity was high (83 per cent). High levels of cultural and linguistic diversity were recognised, in addition to learning and behavioural difficulties (Table 1). Children were identified in more than one category, indicating awareness of multiple variations within learners. Recognition of low socioeconomic status reduced K–2 as family contact declined.

Learning environments

Graduated changes K–2 (Figure 7) included reductions in teaching materials and in room accessibility (APECT item means of 7 to 5). There was a gradual shift from interactive play-based learning to experiential outcomes-based learning, although direct instruction in oral English was observed across K–2. Year 1 teachers enhanced continuity by incorporating perceptual-motor activities and kindergarten health practices such as eating and resting in the classroom.

Inclusive practices

Continuity was observed K–2 in small group learning, English language instruction, differentiated learning tasks and multi-modal teaching and assessment practices. Consistency was evident in participation of children with disabilities (Figure 8) yet there was graduated change in other diversity provision and gender equity scores were low by Year 2 (ECERS mean 2.3, SD 1.22) indicating that gender was less salient than other diversity pressures.

The kindergarten program incorporated connection to home cultures in resources, displays and learning experiences. In Years 1 and 2, cultural events were celebrated, although connection to children’s backgrounds was less embedded. Modification of teaching strategies to suit cultural preferences, learning modes and varied abilities was observed K–2, yet Year 1 teachers cited the pressure of statutory assessment as a barrier to differentiation. K–1 teachers commented on the value of in-service education on disability, leadership from a principal with an early education background, and advice from specialised staff (e.g., ESL teacher; cultural assistant) yet expressed a need for in-service education in cultural diversity.

Learning support was offered in-class following school policy, yet special education staff withdrew some children for interventions, indicating variations in policy implementation.

Transition approaches

Teachers’ explanations of transition were multi-faceted, emphasising continuity and relationships as well as preparatory practices and individual variations to transition processes and class allocation. Kindergarten staff criticised readiness as a construct. Year 1 teachers reported valuing orientation practices such as kindergarten visits to Year 1 classrooms and the separate school playground (Figure 9).

Transition pedagogies focused more on within-school relationships than external families and community relationships. Links between classroom teachers were established through timetabled inter-class visits and K–3 teacher meetings framed by a shared philosophy, yet specialist teachers were not involved. Peer support was offered through a buddy system and shared use of an early years playground. Cultural teaching assistants linked communities and schools as well as assisting teachers with culturally competency. Teachers interacted respectfully with parents and invited them to observe teaching, but parents were not engaged in classroom volunteer roles as culturally diverse families with a sense of communal responsibility for children found the school expectations of classroom confidentiality challenging.

In summary, at this site high levels of complexity prompted multi-faceted transition processes that supported school-wide inclusion strategies. Synergy between policy and practice suggested shared staff understandings, although differences between early years and specialist staff were evident. Inclusion feasibility tensions were managed by both structural and pedagogic changes.

Discussion

Inclusive transitions to school incorporate children’s participation and sense of being valued as well as a positive disposition to learning and long-term positive trajectories (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011; Rietveld, 2008). Such definitions consider both children’s ongoing progress and non-stigmatising provision for diversity. The pedagogies in these case studies were framed not only by the visibility of learner diversity, but also by classroom and school contextual factors. Pedagogic decision making reflected the competing demands to meet diversity needs and outcome standards in each context.

Learner diversity and classroom context factors

Classroom approaches may reflect teacher capacity or contextual pressures (Neuman, 2001; Rietveld, 2008). In
this study, pedagogies were responsive to the demands of class complexity and teachers’ awareness of diversity. They were influenced by factors such as professional knowledge, theoretical positioning, collaborative processes, physical facilities and access to professional support.

The preparatory approach to transition at the site with low diversity focused on orientation, secure relationships and support for difficulties. It was impacted by restricted access to professional learning, and discontinuities in structural provision. The emphasis on continuity at the site characterised by moderate diversity levels was framed by teacher awareness of individuals, shared professional knowledge, and staff communication. Multi-faceted approaches at the most complex site emphasised the school’s preparedness for diversity aligned with Graue’s (2006) notion of the ready school although feasibility concerns were partially managed through structural changes. Contextual complexity, workforce cultural diversity, and staff collaboration based on a shared philosophy framed this approach. Reforms were emerging at all sites as a result of whole-school policies and teachers’ changing understanding, but accountability pressures and professional education gaps limited pedagogic reforms.

**Inclusion, transition and whole-of-school contextual factors**

Inclusive processes supporting transition are framed by whole-school factors such as leadership, policy and relationships amongst stakeholders (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Niesel & Griebel, 2007). This study indicated a leadership role for both principals and experienced teachers. Pedagogies attended to child difficulties and internal school relationships more than child strengths and family and community partnerships, yet such partnerships have been identified previously as a key transition factor that would help optimise future outcomes (Thorpe, et al, 2004; Walker at al., 2012).

While teachers at the least diverse site were engaged in pedagogic change under the leadership of the principal, teachers’ knowledge of inclusive practice and transition impacted on the enactment of policy. Emphasis on school preparation in a co-located kindergarten may not adequately address the requirements of children from geographically mobile families or those who attended other programs. Distributed teacher leadership at the moderately diverse site promoted consistent enactment of policy and supportive relationships amongst staff and children. However, the uni-directional nature of interactions with families suggested respect for their involvement, rather than family empowerment. This may impact on children from socially diverse backgrounds as suggested by Raban and Ure (2000). Consistent pedagogic reform at the most complex site was supported by leadership from the principal and by a shared K–3 philosophy. This school addressed challenges through structural and pedagogic provisions, yet narrow engagement with families and communities influenced the scope of responses to cultural diversity as Thorpe and colleagues (2004) have noted previously.

**Teachers’ professional transition**

Effective enactment of transition changes through revised pedagogies is an ongoing process that reflects not only curriculum requirements and school expectations, but also teachers’ theoretical positioning as Carrington and colleagues (2012) have also argued with respect to inclusion. In this study, professional education, statutory assessment pressures, school policies and changes in teachers’ understanding influenced pedagogies and responses to policy change.

Within-site tensions indicated teachers’ own transition towards meeting changing policy expectations around inclusion and transition. At the least diverse site, variations in approach suggested that teachers were in transition towards reform ideals encouraged by the principal. The consistent professional preparation of teachers at the moderately diverse site was reflected in the shared emphasis on continuity and on individualised transitions. However, readiness views were also expressed, indicating teacher transitions between normative developmental assumptions and emerging recognition of competence in children. It may also reflect tensions between statutory assessment pressures and ideals of accommodating individual learning. While a shared emphasis on continuity was evident at the most complex site, strategies such as the categorical grouping of children and restriction of family involvement were inconsistent with reform views. Across the cases, tensions between the strategies of classroom teachers and special education staff were evident, probably arising from contrasts in professional preparation. This represents another area of staff transition towards development of a coherent approach to inclusive transition to school.

**Balancing competing demands**

This study indicates that teachers employed both personal and site-related strategies to balance competing demands as children transition to school. The pressure for children to achieve minimum academic and social conduct standards was juxtaposed with expectations of catering for diversity.

In assessing the reasons for different approaches by teachers, two questions emerged:

1. Do the themes in the literature represent a hierarchy of complexity?
2. Are the approaches to inclusive transition separate or overlapping?

The literature on inclusion and transition pedagogies suggested a hierarchy of complexity, with pedagogic
reform representing the most sophisticated approach framed by recent critical theoretical perspectives (Carrington et al., 2012; Dunlop, 2007). Van Kraayenoord (2007), however, argues that both pedagogic reform and differentiated practices may be needed to enact inclusion, while a range of approaches to transition have been found to be effective (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dunlop, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2010). This study indicated that differing approaches to inclusive transition represent either a proportional response to varying levels of diversity in the learner population, or an array of potential, overlapping provisions for specific contextual demands and resources.

**Implications for practice**

Each site addressed the competing demands on teachers’ time and attention through strategies that reflected the complexity of their classrooms and the knowledge base of their teachers. Improved structural provisions, leadership strategies and support relationships influenced the ways in which teachers were able to enact changing policies and to cater for diversity during transition. Variations in pedagogic responses indicated the value of changes to both pre-service and in-service teacher education across all staff groups to enhance coherence of practice.

Although the study was based in schools, the pedagogic examples of inclusive transition from play-based to outcomes-based programs have relevance across early education. Appreciation by ECEC educators of inclusive transition pedagogies within schools offers a basis for professional debate and shared understandings. As the new Australian school curriculum includes kindergarten/preparatory, transition from play-based to outcomes-based pedagogy could be expected to demand negotiation between staff in ECEC and the early years of school. These case studies raise shared issues for consideration across early years education.

Preparation includes not only practices prior to compulsory education, but also efforts to develop a ready school as suggested by Graue (2006). In inclusive transition, preparedness differs from normative readiness and incorporates differentiation for individual progress.

Continuity between play-based and outcomes-based programs means enacting gradual change that respects the roles, curricular focus and pedagogies of both programs. Continuity between programs and homes/communities may require revised professional learning.

Adult collaboration and relationships building amongst children offer support and encouragement to children and families, including those beyond target groups. Partnerships that extend beyond early years teachers to include families, communities and other staff require consideration.

Critical reflection on the theoretical perspectives that frame practice may prompt deeper debate. Broader pedagogic reforms need to take into account the critical perspectives identified in recent literature on inclusion (Carrington et al., 2012) and transition (Petriwskyj & Grieshaber, 2011) and in the Australian *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009).

Attention to separate target groups rather than recognition of broader and more complex understandings of diversity may be inhibiting more extensive transition reform. The varied ways in which teachers responded to competing pressures suggest that these complex professional decisions entail a shifting balance between ideals and pragmatic considerations that are contextually grounded, yet offer opportunities for shared understandings and critical reflection across early education.

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ANNUAL CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST:
AJEC reviewers in specific areas of interest

Early Childhood Australia (ECA), a non-profit advocacy organisation for children from birth to eight years, is seeking to expand their reviewer list for the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC).

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All articles published in AJEC undergo a blind, peer-review process. This process is crucial in maintaining quality within the journal as well as informed debate in the wider field.

This year we are specifically seeking reviewers in the following areas:

- Early Years Learning Framework
- National Quality Standard/ National Quality Framework
- Pedagogy
- Professionalism
- Leadership
- Cultural diversity.

However, we are always interested in reviewers across the broad range of early childhood including (but not restricted to) the following:

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- Child management
- Children’s play
- Children’s thinking
- Curriculum
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Conceptions of learning in pre-service and in-service early childhood education students and the impact of teaching experience

Chi-hung Leung
Betty Kit-Mei Wong
Judith Wong
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

A DUAL ANALYSIS WAS USED to examine the conceptions of learning of both pre-service and in-service early childhood teaching students. Four hundred and sixty-one students were asked to rank six statements about conceptions of learning. The samples of both pre-service student teachers in Hong Kong and in-service teachers in Macau are said to be highly representative. The results showed that while pre-service students have no clear patterns with regard to ranking the important conceptions of learning, they indicated ‘memorising and reproducing important facts’ as the least important. This is said to be a traditional conception of learning. In-service students make a connection between the qualitative and quantitative conceptions of learning being an integral part of understanding and applying what one has learned, suggesting that teaching experience influences a student's conception of learning, and leads to a more child-centered approach. Compared with other Hong Kong studies on pre-service teachers—which indicate that student teachers’ conceptions of learning can adjust to students’ natures and abilities and the impact of teaching experience and professional knowledge on the conceptions of learning—the Macau samples showed a higher tendency toward qualitative than quantitative conceptions of learning. Finally, suggestions have been made about embedding the practicum early and setting up a mentor teacher scheme and a professional development program in the existing early childhood education (ECE) program.

Early childhood education

Since the introduction of educational reforms in the early 2000s, ongoing measures have been taken to improve the quality of teacher training in Hong Kong, especially in early childhood education. There has been a general shift in the focus of teaching towards a qualitative view, from a quantitative view, and curriculum objectives now increasingly emphasise self-regulated learning and independent and critical thinking in students (Curriculum Development Council, 2001; Education and Manpower Branch, 2006).

A decade after the proposed reforms, researchers now aim to investigate and summarise student teachers’ learning and teaching experiences throughout their course of study. Student teachers’ conceptions of learning have long been a popular research topic due to the influence such views and beliefs have on students’ motivation, learning strategies and learning outcomes (e.g. Pillay et al., 2000; Purdie & Hattie, 2002; Purdie et al., 1996). These conceptions also account for the quality of such learning outcomes (e.g. Purdie & Hattie, 2002; Vermunt & Vermutett, 2004), hence the need to explore these concepts to better understand the quality of student teachers’ learning and teaching.

Conceptions of learning have been researched both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative studies include questionnaires and checklists such as the Conceptions of Learning Inventory (COLI), the Individualized Classroom Environment Questionnaire and the Learning Process Questionnaire (Dart, Burnett, Purdie & Boulton-Lewis, 2000). Biggs and Watkins (1993) highlight that more qualitative data from the learners’ perspective is essential. Biggs and his research team
(Biggs, Kember & Leung, 2001; Kember, Biggs & Leung, 2004) point out that Biggs’ student approaches to learning (SAL) theory emerged from the approach to learning derived from Marton and Säljö (1976).

One of the defining studies in this area, by Marton et al. (1993), identifies six conceptions of learning that students have:

A. Increasing one’s knowledge
B. Memorising and reproduction
C. Applying
D. Understanding
E. Seeing something in a different way
F. Changing as a person.

The study involved 29 university students and was designed using phenomenographic research methods. These conceptions of learning have been the foundation of a number of research studies, which are briefly introduced in the following paragraphs.

The six statements themselves can be classified into two general categories: quantitative learning, referring to the accumulation and production of knowledge; and qualitative learning, referring to the linking of information learnt through personal experiences. This is also used in the study of Brownlee et al. (2009), who used semi-structured interviews with 35 Australian students which categorised the conceptions of learning into three categories: qualitative, indicating an intention to derive meaning and connect information with personal experiences; quantitative, accumulating knowledge about producing meaning; and transitional, indicating intention to understand and make sense of a task in order to process information, rather than derive meaning at a deeper conceptual level. The students who described learning using various conceptions predominantly mentioned qualitative conceptions of learning, while the students who described learning in practical terms tended to view learning as transitional or quantitative in nature. Students’ perceptions of learning were highly related to their learning strategies, and were reflected in the learning outcomes.

In 2009, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) result showed that the performance of students in Shanghai, China, rated the highest in all three areas (reading, mathematics and science). Hong Kong students’ performance is significantly above the OEDC average, with reading at rank 4, and rank 2 and 3 for mathematics and science respectively. In Macau, which has a similar political background as Hong Kong, students’ performance varies, above OEDC average in mathematics and science but below the OEDC average in reading in 2009. Conceptions and approaches of learning in Chinese learners has been of interest to a number of researchers around the world. There are a number of cross-cultural studies on conceptions of learning, as well as on Chinese learners (e.g. Marton, Dall’Alba & Tse, 1996; Marton, Watkins & Tang, 1997; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001; Wong & Wen, 2001). Dahlin and Watkins (2000) further extended this work by locating cultural differences in the surface and deep learning approaches employed by German and Chinese students. According to Watkins and Biggs (2001), a particular view on the relationship between memorising and understanding is held by students in countries with a Confucian heritage, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea. Chinese students show the ability to interweave memorisation and understanding (Marton et al., 1996). Sachs and Chan (2003) further developed a dual scaling analysis on Chinese student teachers’ conceptions of learning based on the findings of Marton et al. (1993). In this study, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) students were invited to rank the six conceptions of learning according to importance. Dual scaling was used to test the conjectures between ‘mechanical memorisation’ and ‘meaningful memorisation’ (Marton et al., 1993). Three sets of contrasting conceptions were identified that helped to define the three solutions: Solution 1, seeing something in a different way versus memorising; Solution 2, changing as a person versus increasing one’s knowledge; and Solution 3, increasing one’s knowledge and seeing something in different ways. These findings indicate that for the Chinese learner there seem to be some contrasting notions between memorising and increasing one’s knowledge versus seeing something in a different way and changing as a person.

This added dimension between learning conceptions is also highlighted in Chan’s (2011) study on pre-service B.Ed students using the Conception of Learning Inventory developed by Purdie and Hattie (2002). He found that Hong Kong students have a strong tendency to believe that knowledge acquisition or learning requires, and is therefore a direct consequence of, effort and understanding, a pattern evident in traditional Chinese culture, which emphasises hard work over innate ability. For the conceptions of learning, the Hong Kong pre-service teaching students showed a higher tendency toward qualitative views or conceptions. This also reflects the educational reforms taking place, as students are taught and encouraged to inquire and reflect on their learning—indicating that Hong Kong students are using a deep learning strategy rather than a surface approach.

Apart from the plethora of research on higher education, few studies focus on early childhood teachers. Pramling and her team (2000) are noted researchers on the conceptions of early childhood teachers and student teachers, especially with regard to the impact of teaching experience. Although these studies were not focused on the conceptions of learning, the findings indicated that teachers’ and student teachers’ conceptions changed with more experience of working with young children, and that teachers could prepare better for their teaching and children’s learning if they came to understand how children perceived their surrounding world (Pramling & Johansson, 1995; Pramling, Samuelsson et al., 2000).
This is supported by Recchia and Shin’s (2010) study on US students, which analysed students’ weekly journals written during a practicum teaching infants. The researchers found that the experiences with the infants were a powerful influence on the students’ sense of themselves as teachers, and that opportunities were created for the students to rethink their values and expectations of themselves and their existing beliefs about their capacities and capabilities. Hence, Recchia claimed, it is essential for students to have good practical experiences to be able to challenge existing notions on early childhood teaching and learning, and as a teacher to shift between being an authority and controlling figure, and the role of a learner led by children.

Learning in secondary schools and universities in Hong Kong is very different from early childhood education, so students have to adopt a different approach to studying in order to be successful (Marton, Watkins & Tang, 1997). Cheng et al. (2008) studied Hong Kong student teachers’ epistemological beliefs and conceptions of teaching using a questionnaire survey of final-year students in B.Ed. (Primary), B.Ed. (Secondary) and B.Ed. (Language) programs. Student teachers in early childhood education were not included in the study. Brownlee and Chak (2007) studied the beliefs about children’s learning of 21 Hong Kong early childhood pre-service student teachers before and after a two-week practicum in Australia. However, there are few studies focusing on early childhood teachers’ and student teachers’ conceptions of learning internationally and locally, and none on local in-service early childhood teachers.

As the longest serving and only provider of a full-time Bachelor program in early childhood education training in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) has trained over 80 per cent of the ECE teachers currently in service. Previous local studies on conceptions of learning have not included both pre-service and in-service ECE students or examined the impact of teaching experience on our students’ conceptions of learning. Related studies, both local and international, often have small sample sizes and therefore are not representative. Two special administrative regions of the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and Macau, were once European colonies in China. However, their development has been different in many ways, including education system (Vong & Wong, 2009). Currently, Macau is the first region in Mainland China providing 15-year free education, including three-year kindergarten education. The policy was launched in the school year of 2007/2008 in Macau, whereas the Hong Kong early childhood education field is still fighting for it.

This research investigation, consequently, entails two major goals: (1) to investigate the conceptions of learning in pre-service and in-service early childhood student teachers; and (2) to explore whether professional knowledge and teaching experience have an impact on student teachers’ conceptions of learning.

### Method

#### Participants

In total, 461 students were invited to participate in the study, 316 students from Hong Kong, including 123 in-service students (all females aged from 25 to 38 years) and 193 pre-service students (191 females and two males aged from 19 to 22 years, from a total of 320 pre-service students), and 145 in-service students (all females aged from 24 to 36 years) from Macau. All of the participants were clearly informed about the research and asked to sign the research consent form for the study.

Macau students are included in this study because educational reforms in 1997 required all ECE teachers to attain degree-standard training, as prior to this date most pre-primary teachers in private kindergartens were junior secondary school graduates. Private kindergartens make up 90 per cent of Macau’s early childhood schools. Even with the subsidising of early childhood education in Macau since 2007, it will be useful to examine current in-service teachers’ beliefs about learning. In the present study, 145 in-service pre-school teachers were selected from a total of 648 pre-school teachers in Macau.

#### Instruments

The approach to research adopted in this study was phenomenographic in nature (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). That is, the emphasis was on discovering the qualitatively different ways in which these teachers experience (or, in other words, conceptualise) learning, and their perceptions of their students’ views of this phenomenon. The research method utilised was a type of clinical interview that probes, at depth, into how each teacher interviewed perceives these phenomena. The original statements were translated into Chinese in complex sentences (Sachs & Chan, 2003). Students took about 10 minutes to complete the rank ordering of six statements and found some statements hard to understand in the pilot study. In order to make their meaning clearer to the students, the statements from Marton et al. (1996) have been modified from the complex sentences.

The modified statements are:

- A. Increasing one’s knowledge
- B. Memorising and reproducing important facts
- C. Applying what one has learned
- D. Understanding what one has learned
- E. Seeing something in a different way
- F. Changing as a person.
Procedure
At the end of the lecture for the unit ‘Human Development’ the students were asked to perform simple rank ordering of the six conceptions of learning listed above. They were instructed to rank the statements that they considered to be the most important in describing learning in descending order, 1 for most important, 2 for second most important, and so on, up to 6 for least important. The six statements were presented to students in a randomised order. Most students completed the ranking of the statements within five minutes. The study was conducted in Chinese in Hong Kong and Macau.

Data analysis
The data were analysed using multi-dimensional scaling, which is sometimes referred to as exploratory data analysis (Ding, 2006). This method of analysis is a descriptive/exploratory technique designed to analyse simple two-way and multi-way tables containing some measures of correspondence between the rows and columns. The result allows us to explore the structure of categorical or ordinal variables included in the table. In the present study the two-way frequency cross-tabulation table was used to show the rank order relationship among the six statements. The one-dimension and two-dimension figures provided us with the graphical presentation of the rank order relationship of the six statements. This can also be considered as an alternative to factor analysis. The variables are grouped together in terms of derived weights.

Results
Part I. Comparison of multi-dimensional scaling analysis of Hong Kong and Macau samples
The multi-dimensional scaling analysis of this data using the SPSS multi-dimensional scale has extracted three solutions for both the Hong Kong and Macau samples which accounted for 35.5 per cent, 13.4 per cent and 11.2 per cent; and 34.6 per cent, 12.3 per cent and 10.6 per cent of the variance respectively. A total of almost 60 per cent and 58 per cent of the variances for the Hong Kong samples and Macau samples were drawn, respectively. Only Solution 1 of both the Hong Kong samples and the Macau samples made sense according to the literature. The weights of both samples for the six statements about the conceptions of learning are shown in Table 1 and plotted in Figure 1 for the Hong Kong samples, and Figure 2 for the Macau samples.

Hong Kong samples
The solution is B (Memorising and reproducing important facts) with a large negative value at the bottom, C (Applying what one has learned), D (Understanding what one has learned), and E (Seeing something in a different way), presented to be close to positive 1. Both A (Increasing one’s knowledge) and F (Changing as a person) had a small negative value.

Macau samples
For the Macau samples the pattern of distribution of the six statements was similar to that of the Hong Kong samples. The only difference was E (Seeing something in a different way) having a more indicatively positive value than in the Hong Kong samples. Both A (Increasing one’s knowledge) and F (Changing as a person) had a larger negative value than in the Hong Kong samples, while C (Applying what one has learned) had a positive value close to 1 and D (Understanding what one has learned) was rated as neutral in the Macau samples.

Table 1. One-dimensional scaling of Hong Kong and Macau samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hong Kong sample (N = 316)</th>
<th>Macau sample (N = 145)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E  Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F  Changing as a person</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Means and modes of Hong Kong and Macau samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Hong Kong samples (N = 316)</th>
<th>Macau samples (N = 145)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E  Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F  Changing as a person</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Increasing one’s knowledge
B. Memorising and reproducing important facts
C. Applying what one has learned
D. Understanding what one has learned
E. Seeing something in a different way
F. Changing as a person
Table 3. Frequency of ranking order of Hong Kong and Macau samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency of Ranking Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hong Kong samples</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Changing as a person</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macau samples</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Changing as a person</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II

Comparison of multi-dimensional scaling analysis of pre-service and in-service samples

A solution has been extracted for both the pre-service and the in-service samples, which accounted for 27.3 per cent, 14.5 per cent and 12.6 per cent; and 26.7 per cent, 13.4 per cent and 11.5 per cent of the variance respectively. Totals of almost 54 per cent and 52 per cent of the variances for the pre-service samples and in-service samples were drawn respectively. Again, only Solution 1 made sense according to the literature. The weights of the samples for the six statements about the conceptions of learning are shown in Table 5 and plotted in Figure 3 for the pre-service samples, and in Figure 4 for the in-service samples.

Pre-service samples

The result is very indicative in showing the least important conception of learning in the pre-service samples. B (Memorising and reproducing important facts), with a large negative value, was the bottom, while all of the other statements, A, C, D, E and F, were located between 0 and 1. E (Seeing something in a different way) had the largest value of the five other statements and was close to 1.

Table 4. One-dimensional scaling of pre-service and in-service samples (Hong Kong)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Pre-service Sample</th>
<th>In-service Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
<td>-1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Changing as a person</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. One-dimensional scaling analysis of pre-service samples

Figure 4. One-dimensional scaling analysis of in-service samples
In-service samples

There were two statements exceeding +1: C (Applying what one has learned) and D (Understanding what one has learned). The in-service students considered B (Memorising and reproducing important facts) as the least important statement in the conception of learning. This was similar to both the pre-service students’ and the Macau students’ rankings of the six statements about the conceptions of learning. However, two positive statements, C and D, in the in-service samples, were more indicative statements than those in the pre-service samples. Statement A (Increasing one’s knowledge), with a moderate negative value close to zero, was treated as neutral.

In the above analyses, in the pre-service samples and the in-service samples from Hong Kong and Macau it was found that B (Memorising and reproducing important facts) always yielded high negative values. On the other hand, E (Seeing something in a different way) only obtained high positive values in the Macau samples. It is worth looking in more detail at the tables for the mean and mode of each of the six statements (see Table 2 and Table 5) and the tables for the frequency of ranking order (see Table 3 and Table 6) of the six statements.

Table 5. Means and modes of pre-service and in-service samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Pre-service samples (N = 193)</th>
<th>In-service samples (N = 123)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
<td>Mean 3.91</td>
<td>Mean 3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 5.00</td>
<td>Mode 5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
<td>Mean 5.61</td>
<td>Mean 5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 6.00</td>
<td>Mode 6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Applying what one has learned</td>
<td>Mean 3.45</td>
<td>Mean 2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 3.00</td>
<td>Mode 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Understanding what one has learned</td>
<td>Mean 3.50</td>
<td>Mean 2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 4.00</td>
<td>Mode 2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Seeing something in a different way</td>
<td>Mean 3.05</td>
<td>Mean 2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 1.00</td>
<td>Mode 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Changing as a person</td>
<td>Mean 3.96</td>
<td>Mean 4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode 1.00</td>
<td>Mode 2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Frequency of ranking order of pre-service and in-service samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of ranking order (1=most important to 6=least important)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service samples (N = 193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Seeing something in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Changing as a person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service samples (N = 123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Increasing one’s knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorising and reproducing important facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Applying what one has learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Understanding what one has learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Seeing something in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Changing as a person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Implications

Impact of teaching experience

Both the pre-service students and the in-service students thought that B (Memorising and reproducing important facts) was least important to the conceptions of learning. However, the in-service students indicated that C (Applying what one has learned) and D (Understanding what one has learned) were important conceptions of learning. While the pre-service students did not clearly show the importance of the conceptions of learning, no items in the weighted rating were greater than 1 (see Figure 3 and Table 4) and the means of the rating were not indicative, with the scores around 3 (see Table 5). In the present study the in-service students seem to show contrasting notions between memorising and reproducing important facts and applying and understanding what one has learned. This may be due to the impact of the teaching experience—the in-service students had learnt the deep learning approach (Booth, 1997; Marton & Booth, 1996), and that applying and understanding what one has learned are important to children’s learning, from their daily teaching. Teaching experience may lead to child-centered teaching.

Adjusting to students’ abilities and natures

The results of this study are different from those of Sachs and Chan (2003), which is contrasting notions between memorising and increasing one’s knowledge versus seeing something in a different way and changing as a person. A similar result was found in Chan’s (2009) study—the pre-service student teachers showed a higher tendency toward the qualitative than the quantitative conception of learning. The samples in the studies of Sachs et. al. (2003) and Chan (2009) were B.Ed. students majoring in high school teaching. They thought that ‘seeing something in a different way’ and ‘changing as a person’ were important to their teenage students compared with B.Ed. ECE in-service students who thought that ‘applying and understanding what one has learned’ was important to their early childhood students. This implies that teachers’ conceptions of learning can be adjusted to students’ abilities and natures.

Qualitative, quantitative and traditional views on conceptions of learning

In the study, the in-service students made a contrast between memorising and reproducing important facts and applying and understanding what one has learned. This means that the in-service students consider both the qualitative view (Understanding what one has learned) and the quantitative view (Applying what one has learned) as important to the conceptions of learning. The pre-service students thought that the quantitative conception of learning (Memorising and reproducing important facts) is not important to the conception of learning due to such a conception of learning not being encouraged in the ECE curriculum design. Their views of conceptions of learning are also treated as the traditional perspective, which is qualitative learning conceptions not clearly expressed but meaning in practical contexts considered important (practical understanding); or wanting to understand the meaning of a task/text in order to process information (sense making) (Brownlee et al., 2009).

Intra-cultural differences between Hong Kong and Macau

For both the Hong Kong samples and the Macau samples, ‘memorising and reproducing important facts’ is seen as not important to the conceptions of learning. However, the Macau samples showed a higher tendency toward qualitative than quantitative conceptions, for example, they thought that ‘seeing something in a different way’ was important to the conceptions of learning. This may be due to the Hong Kong samples being mixed up with pre-service samples, since the pre-service samples did not show clear indications toward the importance of conceptions of learning. If we compare the results of the Hong Kong in-service samples with the Macau samples, the Hong Kong in-service students also considered the qualitative view, ‘understanding what one has learned’, as important to the conception of learning. This once again confirmed the impact of teaching experience and professional knowledge on student teachers’ conception of learning.

Future directions for consideration

Design

A cross-sectional design may not fully reflect student teachers’ conceptions of learning and the impact of teaching experience on teachers’ conception of learning, since the conception of learning may be changed with more training or practicum in early childhood. Using a cross-sequential design is suggested to examine both in-service and pre-school student teachers’ conceptions of learning from the first year to the final year of the B.Ed. ECE programs. This will provide a clear and complete picture of the impact of teaching experience and professional knowledge. One notable recommendation is the use of longitudinal data to gauge the possible change that could take place over time.

To understand exactly what factors influence their conceptions of learning during teaching, using focus group interviews is advised, such as student responses, reflection on their own teaching, and feedback/comments from senior teaching staff or parents.
Embedding the practicum early in the program

Being a professional early childhood teacher involves more than the mastery of knowledge and skills. It also involves the ability to understand students' learning in the classroom. Working with children can give you opportunities to review your teaching skills, children's learning, and your relationship with the children in the classroom. All these experiences in the classroom can help you design a child-centered lesson for your children. In other words, child-centered teaching cannot be achieved without actual teaching experience. Embedding the practicum as early as in Year 2 of the Bachelor program (Early Childhood Education) is suggested, instead of in Year 3.

Mentor teachers scheme

‘Mentoring’ is the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. Pre-service student teachers will receive many valuable comments from and share actual teaching with in-service teachers. Setting up a mentor teachers scheme is also advised. Pre-service student teachers will be assigned an in-service teacher as their mentor throughout their four years of study. They will be encouraged to communicate with each other through electronic devices, such as Facebook, MSN, email, Skype, and so forth, and informal face-to-face gatherings, such as the two informal gatherings organised by the department to meet all mentor teachers and student teachers during an academic year.

Professional development program

The purpose of a professional development program is to provide the opportunity for in-service teachers to meet with other teachers to share their experience, to exchange any information about teaching in ECE, to refresh their knowledge, and to review their relationship with children, parents and schools.

Conclusion

A dual analysis was used to examine the conceptions of learning of both pre-service and in-service early childhood teaching students. The samples are said to be highly representative. The HKIED is the only provider of a full-time undergraduate degree program in Hong Kong. A total of 145 in-service pre-school teachers were selected from a total of 648 pre-school teachers in Macau. The results showed that while pre-service students have no clear patterns with regard to ranking the important conceptions of learning, they indicated ‘memorising and reproducing important facts’ as the least important conception of learning. This is said to be the traditional conception of learning. In-service students make a connection between the qualitative and the quantitative conceptions of learning as an integral part of understanding and applying what one has learned, suggesting that teaching experience influences the conception of learning to produce a more child-centered approach. Compared with other Hong Kong studies on pre-service teachers which indicate that student teachers’ conceptions of learning are adjustable to students’ natures and abilities and the impact of teaching experience and professional knowledge on the conceptions of learning, the Macau samples showed a higher tendency toward qualitative than quantitative conceptions, considering ‘seeing something in a different way’ as important to the conceptions of learning. Finally, suggestions have been made about embedding the practicum early and setting up a mentor teachers scheme and a professional development program in the existing ECE program.

References


Young children’s voices about their local communities

Pauline Harris
University of South Australia

Harry Manatakis
South Australia Department for Education and Child Development

THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY children were recently involved in statewide consultations to help inform the state government’s review of its State Strategic Plan. This government wished to ensure children’s views of their local communities were canvassed and their voices heard. These consultations were more than a tokenistic gesture—careful planning, implementation and documentation were carried out to ensure children’s meaningful and sustained engagement over time. This article shares what children said—‘said’, that is—through the many voices children have to express their meaning through art, dance, music, song, drama, storytelling, photography, as well as oral and written language. This is their story.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments launched its National Early Childhood Development Strategy, framed by a vision that ‘all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation’ (COAG, 2009, p. 13). Underscoring this vision is the simple but highly significant recognition that:

...[c]hildren are important. They bring their own value and influence to the world, as well as being shaped by the world around them ... Children are also important for their future contribution to society, as the next generation of leaders, workers, parents, consumers and members of communities ... in a global society (COAG, 2009, p. 7).

Framed by a similar vision, the South Australia government’s review of its State Strategic Plan in late 2010 involved consultations with communities. These consultations included children across the state under the ages of 12, with specific focus on children under the age of five to ensure their voices were heard. This paper reports on these consultations with young children aged between three and eight years, describing how the consultations were planned and implemented, and children’s themes that emerged in relation to children’s views of their local communities.

Background and context

The state’s Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) came together in collaboration with the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) to undertake these consultations. The consultations were motivated by the state government’s strengthened public commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Framework (2001). As it was felt that children’s views have not always been valued across society, the consultations also became a symbolic undertaking in demonstrating to those not working directly with children the importance and insightfulness of children’s views in a democratic society.

One of the nine key building blocks of the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Framework is ‘children’s participation’, honouring among other rights the right of every young citizen to influence decisions about their city, express their opinion on the city they want, participate in family, community and social life, and be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.

The consultations were supported by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) that states:

Experiences of relationships and participation in communities contribute to children’s belonging, being and becoming. From birth children experience living
and learning with others in a range of communities. These might include families, local communities or early childhood settings. Having a positive sense of identity and experiencing respectful, responsive relationships strengthens children’s interest and skills in being and becoming active contributors to their world (DEEWR, 2009, p. 25).

These consultations particularly resonated with Outcome 1 in the EYLF:

Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation. This is evident ... when children express an opinion in matters that affect them (DEEWR, 2009, p. 26).

In these consultations, children were valued as active citizens with contributions to make to policy directions that would affect their lives. Children’s rights and responsibilities to so engage are recognised in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and ratified by Australia in 1991:

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

The government’s desire to consult with young children in order to develop a child-friendly state and inform its review of the State Strategic Plan resonates with the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (Nobel-Carr, 2006, p. 4) in which children are viewed as competent humans who have the right and capability to contribute to decisions that affect their lives. Children are seen to be key informants and experts on their own lives (MacNaughton et al., 2006; Dockett, Perry & Heinrich, 2006; Stephenson, 2007). These consultations were distinguished by their geographic scope; the engagement of participant partnerships across early childhood research, policy and practice, with early childhood educators having a central agency in implementing the consultations; and the desire to use children’s perspectives to inform significant policy directions and priorities at a high level of government.

Methodology

The consultations were framed by a participatory research approach (MacNaughton et al., 2008; Harcourt et al., 2011; Noble-Carr, 2006) that openly invited children’s perspectives. In this approach, children are seen as competent participants to whom the researcher respectfully listens and responds as children share their views, recognising children’s capacity to express their views with wisdom and insight (Osborn & Bromfield, 2007; Moloney, 2005). Such an approach is deeply resonant with the intent of the consultations and UNICEF’s Child-Friendly Framework and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child that framed these consultations.

This participatory approach engages children as valued citizens in their everyday settings. In so doing, this approach contributes to children’s understanding of what it means to be an active citizen, through the actions and contributions they make and are taken up (Percy-Smith, 2010; Taylor, Smith & Gollop, 2008).

The key question formulated by DECD staff to focus the consultations was ‘What is important to children in their communities and what do children wish for in their lives?’ This broad focus was designed to give scope for children to bring to the conversations matters of interest and concern to them. The question was deliberately open-ended so as not to pre-empt children’s interests in some aspects of their communities and not others.

Participants and settings

In total, 350 children between the ages of three and eight years engaged in the consultations across 11 state government regions. These consultations were facilitated by early childhood educators in their children’s services sites. DECD chose one service in each region of the state in order to be geographically inclusive. These services included:

- two integrated children’s centres that provide integrated education, care and health services to children and their families
- one long day care centre
- two preschools
- three out-of-school-hours services
- one special needs early learning centre
- one family learning partnership program in children’s homes
- one family day care service
- one program geared specifically for children in remote and isolated locations.

These services were selected by virtue of their strong leadership and experienced staff. The sites ranged across urban, suburban, rural and remote localities, with high to low socioeconomic circumstances, and diverse
cultural backgrounds in which approximately one-quarter of the children were Aboriginal children; approximately one-fifth of children with additional needs; and approximately one-fifth from rural, remote or isolated communities.

Children’s participation occurred on a voluntary basis, with their identities kept anonymous and the right to withdraw at any time honoured without penalty. In each site, children’s parents or legal guardians were given an information sheet about the project and a written consent form. Care was taken to ensure children understood how and why they were being invited to take part in these consultations.

After the consultations were finished, ethical considerations extended to providing feedback to children, in terms of explaining to children what would happen after their participation in the consultations, how their views have been important, and sharing what other children expressed. This feedback was valued in terms of recognising, acknowledging and validating children’s contributions, thereby enhancing their sense of self-worth, place and community.

Procedure

Educators working with children planned, implemented and documented the consultations in their children’s services sites, in cooperation with the project’s advisor and researcher (this paper’s first author) and the principal policy officer who coordinated the consultations (this paper’s second author).

DECD and DPC staff came together with a senior researcher (this paper’s first author) and early childhood educators to plan the consultations. There was strong consensus that children’s ‘authentic’ voices would be engaged—that is, consultations were not to be ‘tokenistic’ but instead involved children in important decision-making processes, based on the understanding that children are valued citizens now, not citizens of the future, who deserve the right to be heard.

In collaboration with the participating early childhood educators who would be implementing the consultations with their children, the research question of ‘What is important to children in their communities and what do they wish for in their lives?’ was broken down into various topics explored with children, such as places children go in their everyday lives; activities, experiences and the people children enjoy; places and activities children would like to experience; and places and experiences children do not enjoy.

Developing consultation strategies drew on current understandings about the multiple modes of language and literacy through which young children express themselves through many and varied ways—such as portrayed in Malaguzzi’s *One hundred languages* (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). Using this frame, each participating children’s service chose one of the focal strategies described in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Focal strategies that educators developed to implement children’s consultations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through movement and role play</strong>, which involved performing artists working with children’s services educators in order to develop short performances that demonstrate through movement and role play children’s views about a child-friendly community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through photography and information technology</strong>, which provided opportunities for children to express views about things they like and don’t like in their house and/or community through the use of digital cameras and information technology. This strategy was intended to encourage participation of children in remote and rural locations and promote the role of parents/grandparents and guardians in encouraging children to have an active voice in their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through art</strong>, to encourage children to express their views through a visual artistic medium. A range of options included the painting of a mural, a sculpture, woodcarving or other means (dependent on the interests of the children).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through music, dance and song</strong>, to encourage children to express views through song and/or dance with the option of the assistance of a music or dance teacher working with children to develop a musical and/or dance performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through themed drawing and painting</strong>, which focused on children expressing their views through diagrams, pictures, drawings and paintings about a specific theme. Educators included written descriptions, provided by the children on the drawing or painting of what the picture represented, capturing the children’s explanation of their drawing in their own words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging children through storytelling</strong>, which focused on children’s participation through storytelling and the role of adults in encouraging children to have an active voice and be active participants in their communities.</td>
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</table>

Children explored and expressed their views of their local communities through song and dance, music and movement, story and drama, art and photography, speech and the written word—the many languages of children.

A preparatory workshop held with educators, implementing the consultation strategies, clarified ethical considerations in terms of children’s voluntary participation and informed consent, and assurance of the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. Of equal importance was the assurance that the experiences in which children would be engaged would be worthwhile and appropriate.
Projection techniques were explored for handing the floor to the child, such as, ‘Tell me, what do you think about … ?’—with the understanding that handing the floor to the child does not diminish adult responsibilities to the child (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). This respect went hand in hand with ensuring the consultations were conducted in the context of safe and secure relationships with children (Jorgenson, 1991) in which adults showed genuine interest in children’s points of view (Coleborne, 2009). Developing shared understandings between children and educators was also highlighted, with a focus on scaffolding children to express their ideas as fully as possible, following from the work of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). Strategies for clarifying, extending, re-formulating and prompting children to elaborate upon their ideas, were emphasised, in the context of continuing to check for shared understanding as the conversations unfolded.

Being mindful of power difference between adults and children was also important in the consultations—are the children expressing what they think or what they think adults want to hear? Key considerations concerned whose interpretation of what a child says counts and how do we know that this is a fair and accurate representation. These considerations were addressed by the ongoing process of checking back with children about what they mean.

Germane to these consultations is the notion of ‘visible listening’ (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 35), that is, ‘listening which includes documentation and interpretation’ (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 35). It would not be enough that these consultations engage children’s voices—it would be a matter of how these voices were accurately documented, authentically interpreted and meaningfully acted upon that would be critical to the success of the consultations and genuinely respecting and enacting children’s rights.

The consultations were carefully documented through observations, interviews, artefact collection and document analyses, as shown in Table 2.

Educators documented the consultations through running and anecdotal records, and also took photographs and made audio- and video-recordings of children’s engagement and creations. Educators worked to authentically document children’s views through a variety of strategies such as helping children to express themselves through further questioning, paraphrasing what children might have meant, and checking educators’ interpretations with children throughout the process. Clarification with children and breaking down questions for ease of understanding all contributed to educators’ attempts to maintain children’s voices without imposing their own interpretations on what was seen or observed.

Triangulation across data collection methods contributed to the study’s trustworthiness, as did triangulation across different participants and sites in the study and the use of digital recordings (audio, video and still photography).

There was agreement among educators that they would present their final reports in ways that best suited their own situations—be it as a written or a DVD report, for example. Whatever the medium, the reports contained information about the site’s context and children; descriptions of how they went about the consultations; recounts, duplicates and photographs of children’s works; and records of what children expressed, including extracts of what children said during their engagement and the educators’ own reflections on the process.

Educators’ final reports were provided to the state education and child development agency. The next step was for staff in this agency, along with the project’s key researcher, to analyse and synthesise this information and report it to the head of government agency. Key to this work was being true to children’s messages and not imposing adult interpretations onto what children expressed.

A matrix was developed with the emergent themes (Glesne, 2006) going across the table, with sub-themes clustered beneath each broader theme where required. Key ideas associated with each theme or sub-themes

Table 2. Overview of data collection methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Educators’ observational records, still photographs and video recordings that documented the consultations in each site.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Transcripts of audio-recorded interviews with each of the six educators participating in the study who implemented the consultations with young children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artefacts</td>
<td>Works produced by children in each of the six sites and photographed or photocopied for this study. These include children’s drawings, paintings, collage, photographs, posters with children’s photos and captions, dioramas, videos of children’s dramatic performances, storytelling, animations and music and song.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Reports of the consultations, written by each educator and provided to the state government’s education and child development agency, containing: a comprehensive written account of the site’s approach to and implementation of the consultations; key messages from children in their own words and further interpreted by the site’s educators; and illustrative material including children’s work samples and scribed text, photographs and video-recordings of their engagement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were entered into the table’s cells, colour-coded so each idea could be tracked to the service from whence it came and provide a sense of distribution of and consensus among children’s ideas within and across regions. Counts of comments represented a count by consultation, not by child. A count by child was not included due to the different data collection methods of each consultation. In the final report, children’s themes were included as well as the matrix of information to highlight individual issues and ensure that adult interpretations of issues into themes did not detract from the value of each child’s contributions.

In consulting with young children, it is important to ensure that both the process of consulting itself and the outcomes resulting from the children’s participation are equally valued. Taking action based on these views demonstrates to children that their views are important and taken seriously.

Feedback was provided to children at their early childhood sites, to help them understand the changes they helped to influence. This feedback included: a summary report of the views of children from across the state; a summary of the aspects of children’s views that were incorporated into the update of the State Strategic Plan; and a gallery display of children’s artworks, photos, captions and film from the consultations across the state, which children were encouraged to attend.

In addition to the feedback to children, action was taken to ensure their views were included in policy and decision making. This action included advice to the Community Engagement Board with responsibility for advising the government on views of the community from across the state; an education and training program to local government advising of the views of children in their communities and strategies for undertaking similar consultations; work with a local council to adopt similar consultation strategies with children in the development of a ‘social plan’ for the community; and the development of research and tools to inform best practice in order to facilitate further consultations in early childhood education and other kinds of settings across the state.

Findings

These findings focus on what children expressed about what was important to them and what they wish for in their lives, in relation to their local communities. Nine themes emerged from the thematisation process (Glesne, 2006), as previously explained. These themes are:

- the environment
- family, friends and people
- activities and playing
- animals and creatures
- food
- emotions and feelings
- transport
- the future
- participation.

Each of these themes is explored below.

The environment

One of the strongest themes identified by young children was the environment. This theme included aspects of both natural and built environments, with a strong sense of connection to nature within this theme. Young children identified the importance of being outdoors and in touch with nature, enjoying and discovering their surrounds and appreciating the environment. One child expressed it this way:

I look at the sky and I see shapes in the clouds. Babies and horses and dragons and seesaws. It makes me want to climb up trees. I love to get to the clouds so I can see them properly.

Children’s sense of responsibility in looking after the environment emerged. One child, for example, drew a picture of a rocketship and dictated these words to his educator:

I wish everybody, I wish everyone, a healthy and happy community, that is a community that is eco friendly, an environment that is well looked after where we protect all animals and endangered species. I will be happy, helpful and healthy when looking after my community. My space station will be able to view all the planets in the solar system to make sure they are eco friendly.

Children also frequently expressed a desire for less noise and litter. As one child was at lengths to explain:

It’s not good to litter because it’s always mean. You might slip over and fall down and hurt your head … Sometimes all the other people try to throw their rubbish in the bin but it doesn’t go in. Not me, I don’t do that. I’m the only one that goes up to the bin and drops the rubbish in. Sometimes when the rubbish is empty it doesn’t go in the bin because it doesn’t fly very well when it doesn’t have anything in it. But a paper plane can fly better without anything in it.

Children also identified a dislike of busy locations. Large open spaces were identified as being very important and the visual beauty of nature was also a key aspect of this theme. As one child described when talking about her painting of the local environs, ‘The flowers are important because we’ve got flowers growing on our road and in our yard and our driveway.’

Within the built environment child-specific infrastructure such as playgrounds and preschools were identified by children as valued spaces. Also important to children
were local landmarks such as a jetty or a lighthouse that were not necessarily built with children in mind. For example, a child commented, ‘I like the jetty because there is water to play. There’s lots of seaweed … It’s yucky, it smells yucky.’

**Family, friends and people**

An equally strong theme from all of the consultations related to family, friends, and people. Children placed importance on spending time together, going places together and undertaking activities with children’s loved ones. One child, for example, shared this experience:

> I like going to the garbage dump with Daddy because I like throwing stuff off the ute into the garbage dump. Sometimes we see our friends across from us. Sometimes we see old trucks and old cars and stuff and we see old beach chairs that go out. I like climbing up the garbage with my friend … I like spending time with Daddy at home, like cool stuff, like doing work at home.

Grandparents were often identified as key people in children’s lives, with accounts of grandparents often woven into the places and activities children enjoyed. For example, a child spoke about his grandmother’s place and a ‘little pumpkin’ he has growing in her garden, ‘I share my pumpkin with my Nan and Dad and Mum and Tony.’ Another child spoke of her grandparents bird feeders:

> Nanny Bridget has a bird eater too. She has a pet bird called Bird. Poppy makes the eaters. He sticks peanut butter on the pinecone and gets birdseed on it. He puts it in the cage, that’s where birds live.

Another child also spoke of his grandmother’s garden:

> Nanna’s garden is big and its fluffy and white … Flowers are beautiful and shiny in Grandma’s garden. The yellow is Grandma’s favourite, they are way down the back, they grow on the tree actually.

Visiting and sleeping over at family and friends’ houses were identified as highly popular, as was spending time with parents at work. The importance of friendly neighbours within a child’s community was identified as important to some children, also. Others, particularly the 20 per cent of children with additional needs participating in the project, highly valued the professional staff they spend time with regularly, such as physiotherapists, as people with whom they had a connection.

**Activities and play**

Activities and playing were also identified in all of the consultations as being very important. The activities and play that children identified were widely varied, ranging from all types of sports, to music, dancing, crafts, attending public events and playing on playgrounds and in parks. For example, a child commented, ‘I love to ride my bike at home and I love to ride it down the street but sometimes my Mum says “no”. It feels like I’m happy.’

The most noticeable aspect of this is how strongly the theme of activities and playing linked back to the themes of the environment and family, friends and people. Activities and playing were highly important not only because of the enjoyment/new experiences they provide but also because of the time spent undertaking these activities with family and friends.

Most of the activities and play that children identified related back to the environment and, in most cases, the natural environment—as we saw with children’s previous comments about gardens. Only a very small number of young children identified television, computer games or toys as important, with preference instead for being outdoors in nature, being active (for example, running, climbing, jumping) and being with other people.

**Animals and creatures**

The fourth most frequent theme emerging from children’s views was animals and creatures. Children talked about animals in the natural environment and also their pets, and the nurturing relationship that involved them being their caregivers, wanting to look after their pets and spend time with them. For example, a child talked about animals on the family farm: ‘I like to go to my farm and get the animals back into their fences and feed them.’ Another child talked about being intrigued by watching smaller creatures: ‘I saw some bees up in Grandma’s greenhouse. They were doing bad stuff. They were making honey for us.’

Activities that involved animals and creatures related to children spending time with their families and visiting places such as the zoo, and exploring the natural environment where the appreciation of nature was evident.

**Food**

The fifth theme that children regularly talked about was food. In most instances, however, the importance placed on food was not about the food itself but about spending time with family or going somewhere special to eat—not only what children eat, but where and with whom they eat. Children associated eating with being with loved ones and doing special things for them. As one child said:

> I love to cook for other people. I wish there was a cooking school where children can learn to cook and make yummy things for their mums and dads. We need a kids’ kitchen where all the benches, ovens and sinks are smaller for the children.

Other children were more entrepreneurially minded—as one child projected, she would like ‘a kids only cake shop where we can go and cook our own cakes. We can do them for parties and sell them to our friends and teachers’.
Children identified unhealthy food as a treat. For example, one child fancied:

… the whole world made out of candy. It would be sweet and yummy. Everyone would have food to eat. Sweet things make me happy, just like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Another child wished for ‘a cake place we could all cook our own candy and cupcakes’. In contrast, other children spoke about healthy food places—for example, a child wanted to have

a Moo yoghurt store near my area … I really love to eat the healthy foods and Moo yoghurt is really yummy for lunch. We don’t eat many sweet things so this Moo is very nice.

Emotions and feelings

Emotions and feelings emerged as a theme when children attached an emotion to talking about what was important to them. For example, a child remarked, ‘I feel happy and safe at the shack. My Nanna keeps me comfortable. Nanna tucks the blanket.’

Comments like this reflected the way in which children’s views were well considered—they reflected on how they felt about something rather than talking about the first thing that came into their head or what they thought the adults wanted to hear. Children considered, ‘What does this mean to me?’ and ‘How do I feel about it?’ which showed people that what they were saying was really meaningful.

Interestingly, it became clear from the consultations that emotions adults would generally like to protect children from can sometimes be emotions children enjoy experiencing. A large number of children identified that being scared within a controlled situation in which they felt safe (such as through play and imagination) is a highly enjoyable and sought out feeling. As one child put it, ‘I like scary.’

Transport

Transport was another theme and children often saw travelling on the bus or in a car as a bit of an adventure. When children talked about going somewhere special, going on a train, a bus or in the car meant an enjoyable activity or experience. For example, one child provided this account:

A bus can drop us off going all the way around our corner. Sometimes we have to go home on the bus and train. I like it … My Mum takes me to the beach house and the beach, the aqua dome when we ask to do something.

Some children saw distance as a barrier to going to places they liked. Comments like ‘I don’t get to go there often because it is too far away’ indicated that children in the project often did not have access to transport to get them to places they may want to go. Thus, most of these children’s time was spent in their local community with services or spaces close to home. As the age ranges of the children consulted suggests they are too young to travel without adults present, it could be that accessibility to transport by their parents and carers may be a factor in the frequency of accessing places that young children enjoy, so this could have implications for planning and better access to transport.

The future

The future was identified as another theme, as children often talked about what they would like to do when they grow up. For example, one child commented:

Music is fun and makes me happy. I would like to be a hip-hop dance teacher making up my own dance routines. My special place I feel happy is my bedroom where I can sing and dance. My wish is for a dance school for teenagers that is free and it could be everyone’s favourite place.

Sometimes children referred to activities they saw their older siblings doing or knew about from other places. One child, for example, had a vision of a ‘technology centre where there are lots of tools to build transformers, machines and inventions. We could all go there to make our own inventions and stuff’.

Some children talked about liking to do grown-up activities but there were no child-sized facilities or opportunities to do so—such as the child who wished for a child-sized kitchen.

Participation

The importance of communication was only directly identified by young children a small number of times in the context of wanting to be able to participate and contribute their views. Although not explicitly identified by a large number of children, from the educators’ observational perspectives, the children who volunteered to participate appeared to really enjoy expressing their views. In many cases, the way children framed their comments showed a conscious awareness that adults were listening to their views and would take notice of children’s suggestions. Indeed, our data from educators’ interviews revealed the high frequency of words like ‘excited’, ‘enthusiastic’, ‘fully engaged’, and ‘lost and absorbed’ to describe children’s participation. As one educator put it, ‘We could hear the children’s voices. We could hear their passion.’

This level of participation extended to children who were seen by some as being not able to engage—such as children labelled as having behavioural disorders or developmental delays. As an educator working with such
children explained, there were some initial misgivings about these children’s ability to ‘cope’ with using the digital cameras with which they were provided—many of these children living in low socioeconomic circumstances had not seen or used a camera before—to photograph their local environs:

A lot of the children who I actually work with have disabilities in varying ranges and severities and all that sort of thing, so their understandings would not be as perhaps a normal average child. Some of the children have speech issues, that sort of thing, limited language ... At first the children held the cameras back to front or upside down. They were very curious wanting to see how it worked, what went in, where the batteries go ... Children wanted to find out how the camera worked ... What does the button do? Push this or press that or do I turn this? And so they asked lots and lots of questions.

Children expressed their delight as they took photos—comments like, ‘Oh, look what I did, that’s me!’, ‘That’s my photo!’ and ‘Oh, that’s my dog!’ were frequent. One child took a photograph of himself in front of the mirror. According to the educator, photographs revealed ‘what the children really like and are passionate about because the photos were the children’s own choices and taken by the children themselves’. The educator observed that the children were ‘just in awe’ of the experience and what they achieved. Equally ‘amazed’ and ‘excited’ by all accounts were the staff and parents observing the children’s engagement—‘there was no stopping them’:

The very fact that the children were taking photographs was, gosh, it was just amazing. All of us, parents and myself, we were just amazed with what the children did with them. It was incredible just watching them.

Discussion

In this paper, we have provided an overview of key themes that emerged from children’s consultations about their local communities. We have included some examples along the way, in keeping with space constraints.

Children’s themes find resonance in the literature. The prevalence of the environment, for example, connects with what Greenman (2008) has written about ‘nature-based outdoor spaces [providing] a perfect setting for meeting each child’s unique sensory needs’, and finds resonance elsewhere in the call for re-thinking by a return to nature for young children, away from prefabricated plastic and sanitised environments (e.g., Gill, 2012).

This theme also resonates with children’s comments about risk and exhilaration. It has been argued that taking risks and being challenged are important to children’s development. Sandester (2009), for example, refers to fear as exhilaration when it applies to secure contexts, and is part and parcel of ‘becoming at home in the world’.

The other prominent theme of being with family, friends and other people resonates strongly with the Early Years Learning Framework and its theme of belonging. As has been well written, ‘wellbeing comes from being connected and engaged, from being enmeshed in a web of relationships and interests. These give meaning to our lives. We are deeply social beings. The intimacy, belonging and support provided by close personal relationships seem to matter most; and isolation exacts the highest price’ (Hamilton, Eckersley & Denniss, 2006).

This paper has encapsulated what children expressed. How children expressed their views is another, very multi-modal matter. The snippets of comments included here were derived not from on-the-spot interviews with children, but from educators’ sustained engagement, interactions, observations and documentation as children explored, created and expressed their meanings. Such participation strikes at the heart of Article 13 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

Respecting the rights of young children to be heard necessitates a preparedness to create a space to listen to their views in ways appropriate to them—through music, movement, dance, sport, storytelling, role play, drawing, painting, photography, hobbies, community and family activities, as well as through more conventional dialogue. This requires the provision of time, adults willing to listen, and environments in which children feel safe and comfortable. Listening to children, hearing their voices and making their perspectives visible and heard is not a one-off event—it is a way of being with children.

That said, listening is not enough to honour children’s rights as active citizens. Feedback and uptake are integral to this process. Feedback to children at their early childhood sites included a summary report of the views of children from across the state, and a gallery display of children’s artworks, photos, captions and film from the consultations across the state that children were encouraged to attend. Children’s views were incorporated into the update of the State Strategic Plan, and continues to inform the progression of a child-friendly vision in South Australia—a vision that honours and encourages young citizens to influence decisions about their communities, express their opinions on the kind of community they want, participate in family, community and social life, and be an equal citizen of their community and broader society.
Acknowledgment

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References


Introduction

Leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is gaining increasing attention. Internationally the work of Aubrey (2007), Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) and Whalley (2006) have explored aspects of leadership in terms of characteristics and roles, leadership for learning and integrated services. In the Australian context the introduction of the *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF; Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline* (QSA, 2010) and the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For all children from birth to eight years* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2009) represent increasing expectations for teachers to lead curriculum and respond to accountability expectations. The new Australian curriculum (which is currently being implemented in early years settings, such as Queensland’s Preparatory year [Prep]), brings greater focus to the role of teachers and their implementation of curriculum. These curricular developments emanate from a political context in which calls for greater accountability, evidence of student achievement and standards are prominent. Such contextual factors are not inconsistent with international agendas such as those evident in England and the United States, where education systems are frequently driven by a ‘… narrow managerial science’ (Luke, 2011, p. 368). In Australia, curriculum change has resulted in varied perspectives and resulting tensions in regard to how pre-Year 1 programs such as Prep are constructed (Petrivskyy, O’Gorman & Turunen, 2013). A focus on pedagogical leadership in the early years appears necessary and timely but what do we know about the ability of ECEC practitioners to lead curriculum and sustain an early childhood pedagogical approach in this changing curriculum context?

This paper focuses on a 2010 project which investigated teachers’ experiences of the introduction of a Preparatory year of school in Queensland, Australia, and the resulting pedagogical leadership opportunities. In this paper, we define pedagogical leadership as the activity of leading, developing and implementing curriculum. The Victorian Blueprint for Education and
Early Childhood Development, Every child, every opportunity DEECD, 2008), which underpins the current Victorian ECEC curriculum, stresses that leadership is a central feature of professional learning and a contributor to excellence, with leadership capacity seen as ‘a major driver of improved performance’ (p. 17). Further, leadership deserves attention as ‘a priority for professional learning’ (p. 35). The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia Educators’ Guide DEEWR, 2010) encourages practitioners to model and reflect on their leadership. The Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (QSA, 2006), developed to support Queensland’s Preparatory year, lacks reference to leadership, yet teachers are urged to advocate for children and play-based approaches. The new Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guide (QSA, 2010) calls for collaboration and leadership in partnership with strong advocacy for ‘children, parents and quality learning and teaching practices’ (p. 5). Thus, it is evident that government documents increasingly refer to leadership with the implication that it is an ECEC teacher’s professional responsibility to lead. This paper draws upon the reflections of teachers involved in the Queensland Prep Trial from 2003 and analyses their distributive leadership behaviours in terms of their adaptive abilities and their capacity to lead others in curriculum change.

**Context of the current study**

The original Prep initiative was announced in 2002, flagging a significant reform to pre-compulsory education in Queensland. This reform would see part-time preschool education for four- to six-year-old children replaced with full-time, non-compulsory Preparatory education in every school by 2007. Concomitant with this change was the raising of the school starting age by six months, and an introduction of a new curriculum. These changes more closely aligned early education in Queensland with provisions in other Australian states. Thirty-nine schools were recruited for a 2003 trial of the Prep year. These schools provided extensive data evaluating the schools were recruited for a 2003 trial of the Prep year. The Prep Year Trial in 2003 provided a distributed leadership opportunity as the new program was touted as a major reform to early education in Queensland and significant attention and resources were clearly focused towards the reform.

**Distributed leadership**

Defining distributed leadership is challenging. However, in a systematic review of literature relevant to distributed leadership, Woods et al. (2004) suggest that there are three distinct elements to the concept which include:

- leadership as an emergent property of a group
- leadership as openness of boundaries
- leadership as effective use of various expertise, distributed across many.

It is on the basis of these three elements of distributed leadership that we contend that the Prep Year Trial was a distributed leadership opportunity for the trial teachers. The introduction of the Prep Trial was an emergent property of the group (as Prep teachers met with each other and were a defined group with opportunities to work and learn about the new program together), was certainly an expansion beyond traditional leadership boundaries; and made use of the expertise of many (as the trial teachers collaborated). Woods et al. clearly link agency to leadership, a connection important for the conceptual framework articulated in this paper.

Drawing on the work of Archer (2000), Woods et al. highlight the relationship between structure and agency (‘analytical dualism’) within the distributed leadership literature. Analytical dualism ‘… expresses the idea that both structure and agency have distinct effects. They each have properties and powers and continuously interact’ (Woods et al., 2004, p. 448). Structures can be both constraining and/or enabling and may include such things as material and social resources, ideas and values, patterns of social life and attitudes which are all in existence before any agency is enacted. Agency involves capacities such as self-consciousness ‘… that enable people to evaluate their social context, envisage alternatives creatively and collaborate with others to bring about change’ (Woods et al., 2004, p. 449). In this paper we argue that notions of structure and agency affect the ways in which teachers think about and enact leadership. The following section outlines the methodology and analysis that enabled us to explore these ideas.

**Methodology and analysis**

Having obtained the necessary ethical approval, we sought out teachers who had worked in Prep classes during 2003–04 and asked them to reflect on the leadership opportunities they had experienced during and subsequent to the trial. Our primary mode of recruitment was through an advertisement posted on an early years discussion list, and through word of mouth. The 13 participants averaged over 20 years teaching experience, with several over 30 years and the least experienced with 10 years. Twelve participants had early childhood qualifications. Twelve of our participants had taught Prep in the first year of the trial,
while one began in 2004. Participants were distributed throughout urban (5), regional/rural (7) and remote areas (1) with several still teaching in the schools where they had worked during the trial. A number had moved on to positions outside Prep classrooms, and others were interviewed whilst on leave.

During 2010 the 13 interviews were conducted either by phone or in person. All were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted, on average, 55 minutes. Our questions prompted teachers to consider a range of aspects relating to the Prep trial, including their philosophy of teaching, their definition of leadership, and opportunities and impediments to leadership they had experienced during and since that time. Although guided by semi-structured questions, the interviews were wide-ranging and rich as these teachers reflected on their diverse experiences since the Prep trial.

The conceptual framework for this project (which subsequently formed the basis for our analysis) draws upon the notion of distributed leadership and the three elements defined by Woods et al. (2004): leadership as an emergent property of a group, characterised by open boundaries and featuring various expertise distributed across many. Our data analysis explored the tensions of analytical dualism and leadership enactment and we coded the data according to two main themes. The first of these identified the structural elements of leadership enactment and the second explored individual agential capacities impeding and enabling leadership activity (Woods et al., 2004). Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Findings

The teachers looked back on the Prep trial as a period rich in formal opportunities to share their philosophies and, for some, to enact leadership in curriculum. During that time, the participants actively engaged in information sessions, workshops, official visits and media events to inform communities about Prep. The teachers described the trial’s heady days in which the program stood centre stage, enabling them to speak of their hopes for early education in Queensland and the ways in which they were making a success of Prep in their classrooms and beyond. In establishing the context for our leadership discussion, we asked participants to share with us their teaching philosophy. The following quote is emblematic of a number of participant responses, in its focus on play and the pivotal role of the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (QSA, 2006):

[C]hildren … learn best when they are negotiators and collaborators within the planning process of the classroom … Play-based classrooms … are the happiest classrooms where the children do progress at their own rates … I am an absolute devotee of the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines, I take it on as my philosophy, because it does speak to my soul, as a teacher … (Amy)

These words demonstrate the leadership challenge that lay ahead in reconciling a play-based approach in a school context.

The challenge, then, for these Prep trial teachers was to effectively articulate and reconcile their philosophy and take a pedagogical leadership role in the school context. We now explore the structural and agential aspects of their leadership experiences.

Structural aspects

In analysing data we identified in the teachers’ reflections, the resources, materials, values and ideas as structural elements which enabled or constrained their enactment of distributed leadership (Woods et al., 2004). We asked participants to define their notion of leadership and to describe their personal leadership skills. Leadership was described in the following ways: informed expertise, positional leadership, mentoring and encouragement, listening and dialogue.

Some teachers described their own leadership experiences, while some described the leadership of others. Participants acknowledged the different ways of being a leader:

[L]eadership for different people is different things. Some people like to get up and say, right OK, this is what we have to do and this is how we’re going to do it. So that’s basically from the front. Others are more from within, like helping others to learn new things and new ideas and informing them; then probably trying to guide them in a direction. I’m not a person that likes to get up the front and … say, right OK, this is what’s happening. I’ll share my ideas and what I know about things and then together we’ll work things out. (Mary)

This quote illustrates the first element of distributed leadership as defined by Woods et al. (2004) earlier in this paper, where attention is focused on a group or network of interacting individuals.

Teachers also nominated informed expertise as an aspect of leadership, similar to Woods et al.’s third element of distributed leadership, whereby varieties of expertise are distributed across many, not the few. For example, Carmel made the following comment:

I would … define leadership as someone who is sharing their knowledge with others and has some sort of knowledge in a particular area. (Carmel)

The teachers frequently referred to others when defining leadership. The authority of the institutional positional leader was significant for a number of teachers as they provided anecdotes about the Principal they worked with during the Prep trial. This is further illustrated by the following quote:
... I don’t see myself as a leader. I feel that the leaders are those with more power. I ... feel as though I’m just bumbling along in my little classroom. I don’t know that I can lead others. I certainly feel as though I’m an advocate and very happy to be out there and advocate for the early years. But I don’t know, apart from my advocacy, I have any actual power ... I do spend a lot of time with my Principals, I keep them up to date with any changes or any concerns that I have. (Amy)

Amy’s reluctance to identify herself as a leader was typical of several participants, who preferred to describe themselves as classroom teachers advocating for their philosophies through relationships. Her association of leadership with power and position is also noteworthy. Teachers ‘bumbling along’ in their classrooms lack power, a point illustrated by another who felt her powerlessness left her as ‘a floating fish in a big sea’, incapable of taking a stand. Whilst the Prep trial presented an opportunity for distributed leadership action, our data illustrate that the positional leadership role, particularly in relation to the Principal, continues to be pivotal in contributing to effective distributed leadership enactment.

Mentoring and encouragement were frequently cited as leadership skills. These were qualities participants seemed comfortable applying to themselves, for example:

I’ve probably been given more opportunity this year with having a first year and mentoring and being told, well basically we want them [the other teachers] to do what you’re doing. (Carmel)

The teachers described listening, dialogue and relationship building as characteristics of their personal leadership style.

I think for me, it’s influencing others and for me, I influence others by building a strong relationship with them ... For them to realise that I’m genuine, for them to realise that I care ... (Anita)

Some teachers listed passion, confidence, presentation, communication and management skills as leadership qualities they possessed. Amy’s passion enabled her to get over her initial shyness:

[When I reflected on what was happening for me in the early days and saw others doing the same sort of thing, the passion really rose in me. I thought, no, you’ve got to get out, you’ve got to advocate. If you’re invited to speak then shelve the shyness and get out there and tell them how this should be implemented. (Amy)

Teachers also identified confidence as a leadership attribute. Referring to the support she had received from curriculum advisors and school administration, Mary explains:

I ... gained a little bit more confidence because of the trust that others have put in me and ... said you can do that job, in that way. (Mary)

With the trial providing opportunities for them to speak publicly about the program, teachers identified organisation, flexibility, and communication skills and interpersonal skills as important leadership qualities. Jackie described these attributes as ‘leadership competence’.

You’ve got to have leadership competence, being able to adapt in different situations with different responses ... You’ve got to be up to date ... credible ... good at communicating ... I was always very organised ... and I was always fairly good at communicating. (Jackie)

Curiously, when asked about personal leadership skills, several teachers listed the skills they felt they didn’t have. One teacher described herself as ‘too blunt’, while others described themselves as overly sensitive, insecure and shy—perceiving these as obstacles to leadership.

This section has outlined a number of pre-existing structural aspects which participants identified as part of their notions of leadership. Structures such as informed expertise, positional leadership, mentoring and encouragement, listening and dialogue were invoked as participants described their own leadership experiences and the leadership of others.

Agential aspects

In line with Wood et al.’s (2004) framework our data analysis then focused on the agential aspects such as self-consciousnesses, the ability to evaluate, consider alternatives and act creatively and collaboratively with others. Our participants described agential behaviours that we then coded as impediments or enablers to distributed leadership enactment.

Impediments

Some teachers described the frustration they experienced given the expectations for them to lead the reform while they maintained a full teaching load. This led to exhaustion and missed opportunities. A number of the participants also reported resistance to their ideas as they introduced the new program to their school communities. For some, this resistance was a continuation of history.

All my life as a preschool teacher, I feel as though it’s always been a fight to try to convince people that what children are doing is actually learning and that it is appropriate. (Wanda)

While the first Prep teachers were usually required to work closely with primary teachers to share their knowledge, some described an attitude of ambivalence
by their colleagues. The Prep teachers may have had a vision for the ways in which the new curriculum might influence practices in the early years of school, yet opportunities to lead this reform were sometimes stunted by unwillingness of the primary staff to consider changing their approaches. This was despite the promotion of the new curriculum as relevant for Prep to Year 3.

...They didn’t take it on board really. They weren’t really interested, they just said, ‘No, we can’t. We’ve got to do all this other stuff … We’re bound by all this curriculum that we have to do, all this assessment.’ (Cathy)

The following teacher suggested she’d made small progress influencing the practices of her primary colleagues:

I think it’s very difficult to get people to change. They’ve got to take little bites … and trial it and test it out. Because I was so well supported and [Principal]’s philosophy was very similar to mine the staff knew that this was the way we were moving and that is the types of the things that we wanted to see and they were very well supported too in making those moves. So we were able to shift but everybody had their own learning journey … if somebody had asked me to chalk and talk I couldn’t do it. So it’s the same with the chalk and talk teacher … If we could see them shifting slightly with some of their lessons and some of their ways, well, that’s great and then success builds, doesn’t it? (Fran)

This illustrates the successful interplay of positional and distributed leadership and also highlights the strategy of being aware of expectations—to move people slowly, not to have unreasonable expectations. In this quote, Fran describes a successful partnership between Prep teacher and Principal, enhancing the possibilities for leadership in her case. However, a lack of Principal continuity and some Principals’ lack of knowledge about the early years were cited as impediments to the teachers’ leadership. Cathy suggested that her current Principal’s lack of personal respect is a barrier to her leadership.

I think … I’m outspoken and I probably don’t sound like a normal old everyday teacher. I don’t put on the teacher voice, I don’t put on the airs and graces … what you see is what you get, and I tell it like it is. He is all about show, and we just have a different approach as far as that’s concerned … I personally don’t feel valued … He has his favourites and I’m not one of them and that’s just the reality of it. (Cathy)

In some cases, participants described resistance from peers who were still teaching preschool classes, before the universal rollout of Prep. Jackie reported metaphorical ‘tomatoes’ being thrown at her by preschool colleagues.

She was accused of going to the ‘dark side’ as a result of adapting her pedagogical approach to fit the new context:

I got a lot of tomatoes thrown at me through this … I’d say, ‘Look, I can see some people don’t really like what I’m saying or can’t appreciate what I’m saying. You think I’ve gone over to the dark side.’ (Jackie)

Despite the hostility Jackie experienced from her colleagues, she considered her own leadership to involve compromise and adaptation, strategies we will discuss later in this paper.

Wanda implied that the bullying attitude of her colleagues prevented her from taking up leadership roles at her school.

[Sometimes other adults can be incredibly bullying, nasty, horrible … I wouldn’t accept a leadership role in a staff meeting because I don’t want to be bullied by somebody else … They don’t necessarily totally understand what I might be saying, and the context from which I’m giving the opinion, and they may feel threatened by my understanding and knowledge. (Wanda)]

This is consistent with findings by Hard (2006), where aspects of peer to peer antagonism thwart leadership aspirations.

In pondering the question of their own leadership, some teachers nominated personal traits that impeded their leadership. Indeed, one participant described herself as ‘not a leader’s backside’. Some described themselves as naturally shy people, nervous when speaking to large audiences and uncomfortable in the spotlight. For example:

I am … a very, very shy person, so I didn’t take that role on very easily at all. It was always quite difficult for me to get up in front of a group … (Amy)

Fear of retribution may also impede leadership enactment. One teacher expressed apprehension about criticising the implementation of Prep because of the possibility of ‘a transfer to Bamaga’. Another resisted speaking freely on a discussion forum:

[You’ve got to be very careful because [the email list] is owned by Education Queensland and … you’ve just got to be very mindful of, as a teacher, what you say … (Debbie)

We might question the capacity of teachers to take a stand for issues in a context viewed by many as punitive. In reality, how much is leadership valued, especially when strong advocacy may cause discomfort and potential alienation from peers?

Enablers

Some teachers in our study articulated strategies enabling them to operate effectively in the new context.
of the Prep year. These enablers included learning to speak and write the language of schools, negotiating compromise, creatively deconstructing aspects of their philosophy for others, being proactive with parents and focusing on the how rather than the what. In this section, we unpack these enablers.

In the interviews, several teachers negotiated resistance by changing the way they used terminology. Several spoke of their decision to drop the term ‘play’ altogether, validating their practices by using terminology such as ‘active learning’.

You know, that ‘play-based’ sounds wonderful but … we really need to change that terminology to something like ‘activity-based’ or ‘inquiry-based’ learning, something that sounds a little bit more intelligent than ‘play’. (Cathy)

‘The word ‘play’ probably scares quite a lot of people that perhaps don’t have a huge definition of what it is and its value …’ (Debbie)

… We were still pushing that it was ‘investigative’ and it was ‘hands-on active learning’. I suppose, all you’re doing is just changing ‘play’, isn’t it? … When you’re getting into Year 3 you’re just giving it a different name, really. (Fran)

For these teachers, it was important for them to become fluent in the language of primary schools. This is similar to the challenges highlighted by Bennett (2005) who uses the term ‘social pedagogic approach’ to define a play-based philosophy (p. 11). In contrast he defines a focus on teaching and child outputs as a ‘pre-primary approach’ to pedagogy (p. 11). One teacher in our project spoke of adjusting to the new school context by duplicating her planning so that the language of both primary schools and Prep was included. Dealing in an additional planning and linguistic currency in this way enabled her to maintain her philosophical authenticity while traversing the curriculum expectations of the school context.

I can talk the talk … I’ve set out the planning for them to understand. So there’s words in the planning which I’ve also put on one side the Prep, and another column with the primary, what they say. (Vera)

‘Talking the talk’ for another teacher meant finding her own definition of what constitutes Prep ‘homework’:

Our kids are doing homework and we might do little cards and it might be go and … draw pictures of everything around your house that’s blue … because I am not going to be one of the resisters of change. I think you’ve got to be clever at how you join in the journey. (Jackie)

While Jackie’s application of language is strategic, she is negotiating difficult terrain, having been accused of ‘moving to the dark side’. These findings may be illustrative of the wider problem with language described by Woodrow (2007) who suggests we ought to adapt early years terminology if we are to more accurately inform policy debate. Perhaps these teachers have found ways to use language as a tool for power and advocacy.

The Prep trial provided scope for primary teachers to observe Prep classes first-hand. One teacher took a creative approach and used this opportunity to help others experience and potentially understand her philosophy. She described how she did this in the following quote.

It’s very hard to articulate the type of play that I believe is so valued. So I thought, oh gosh, what’s the best way for them to actually do it? So we used to have play sessions where I’d pose problems for the staff. Then they’d have to get up and play it. (Vera)

Leadership enablers may also include revisiting long-debated notions of process and content. In reflecting on the national curriculum, Fran illustrates this:

I actually think the national curriculum is a good thing … It’s not telling you how to do it, it’s telling you what. (Fran)

Krieg (2011) uses the introduction of the EYLF as an opportunity for educators to interrogate the relationship between process and content, ideas expressed in the above quote regarding the how and the what. This is most pertinent in a context of curriculum change, which provides opportunities to consider the implications for teacher identities around the process and content dichotomy. Teachers may define themselves and each other according to their allegiance to either process or content but Krieg urges us to reconsider such simplistic definitions.

Finally, we recall Jackie’s earlier comments about ‘moving to the dark side’. This teacher continued with a call to compromise:

… If you really want the dark side to pick up what you’re doing and you value it, you’re going to meet them at least halfway. (Jackie)

This section has outlined a number of agential strategies used by Queensland’s first Prep teachers, enabling them to negotiate the new context and to take distributed leadership opportunities. These enablers (learning and using the language of primary schools; negotiating compromise; deconstructing their philosophy for others; and focusing on the how rather than the what) provided powerful opportunities for these teachers to advocate for their philosophy in the new context of Prep. These strategies illustrate interpersonal skills, creativity, sensitivity and advocacy on the part of the participants as they sought ways to enact their leadership; agential enablers that represent distributed leadership in the context of the introduction of Prep.
Implications

As suggested by Woods et al. (2004) distributed leadership should be understood both in relation to structural indicators and evidence of agency, given ‘their interplay requires them to be understood in combination’ (p. 450). In this project, we have identified some structural aspects participants noted to articulate their understanding of leadership during the introduction of Queensland’s Prep year. Participants discussed both their agency, in relation to impediments to their leadership and strategic enablers they had developed to negotiate their pedagogical position in the new school context.

The findings of this study suggest that the distributed leadership of curriculum in this context was fraught with complexities and challenges. For example, it was not systematic, featured a range of impediments, and resulted in limited evidence of systemic change. That said, the findings shed light on aspects of distributed leadership and highlight strategies that may enable the early childhood field to respond meaningfully to tensions inherent in the current context. For example, the structural elements illustrate the need for particular skills and attitudes to enhance distributed leadership. The identification of skills such as informed expertise, mentoring, encouragement, listening and dialogue illustrate particular skills that can be developed or enhanced in leaders. So too, attitudes such as passion and confidence can be fostered to enhance leadership activity. Particular management skills such as organisational ability, flexibility and interpersonal communication skills represent specific teachable and learnable leadership skills. In combination, these aspects suggest a need for leadership education much like those identified by Bennett et al. (2003). These authors note how important it is for staff involved in distributed leadership (but not those traditionally targeted, such as middle and senior managers), to have access to specific leadership professional development.

The identification of impediments highlights a range of structural elements which appear to frustrate the enactment of curriculum leadership. Our participants experienced problematic interpersonal relations which made leading curriculum difficult. Perhaps even more of a challenge was some primary school teachers’ ambivalence or open opposition to the Prep teachers’ ideas for curriculum reform. Further, and even more complex, was the peer-to-peer resistance which implied that some Prep teachers were abdicating traditional early childhood curriculum values in the eyes of their preschool teaching colleagues. However, some of our participants described strategies that enabled them to negotiate the new context of the Preparatory year, as outlined in the previous section. Such strategies demonstrate a level of agency within a distributed leadership context. Our findings also suggest that leadership aspirations and preparation are not highly or overtly developed in the ECEC field. None of the teachers described formal leadership preparation and most did not identify as leaders. So, how is it possible for teachers to enact their leadership in a changing and challenging context? ‘Competing discourses’ such as those described by McArdle (2006, p. 58) are colliding, problematising the work of teachers as they attempt to remain responsive to children whilst education is reduced to outcomes and results. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) suggest that the current leadership and advocacy in ECEC is ‘… proving inadequate to resist the regime of standardised tests, the measurement of performance, and the publication of these measures for the purpose of comparison’ (p. 110).

Many of our participants did not recognise themselves as leaders because they did not hold positional leadership roles. How can we expect teachers to lead the field in a time of change and tension when they describe themselves as ‘floating fish’ or ‘invisible’? When a participant identified as ‘just a teacher’ it was as though the implication was ‘… therefore, not a leader’. While the role of distributed leadership is highlighted in the literature (Aubrey, 2007; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Harris, 2008) our findings suggest there is considerable scope for enhancing the abilities and opportunities of early years teachers to lead in non-positional roles.

Some teachers in this study identified new strategies for enacting their leadership in the context of Queensland’s Prep year. For them, this required creativity, determination and intelligence: skills described by Woodrow (2007) as requirements for Australia’s early years teachers to negotiate the complexities of the current policy landscape. These teachers demonstrate clarity of purpose, the ability to compromise without sacrificing their philosophy and the capacity to adapt to a new context; to ‘reject the siege mentality’ (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010) and to engage with the challenge.

Conclusion

This paper explores the ways in which 13 of Queensland’s original Prep teachers considered their roles as leaders during a period of educational reform. While Australian early childhood curriculum documents promote the idea of early childhood teachers as pedagogical leaders, this may be a problematic assumption. The reflections of the teachers in this study bring into sharp focus the tensions, both structural and agential, which made distributed leadership challenging during the introduction of Prep in Queensland. At the same time, those reflections highlight valuable strategic enablers for negotiating tensions, not the least of which is the challenge to rethink and re-apply fundamental aspects of ECEC philosophy in the current curricular environment. Since the trial and introduction of Prep in Queensland, Australia has moved towards the implementation of a
national curriculum, with further implications for pre-Year 1 programs across the country. This has seen new tensions emerge, as expectations for increasingly school-based ideologies become evident (Petriwskyj et al., 2013). The changing curriculum landscape in Australia and beyond demands ECEC teachers reflect on their values and philosophy such that they determine what to relinquish, what to retain and what to revise. Such ‘collaborative dialogue’ as described by Ashton et al. (2008) may afford opportunities for new conversations and revision of ECEC curriculum into a shifting future.

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References


Becoming multimodal authors: Pre-service teachers’ interventions to support young children with autism

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to describe two case studies of classroom-based teaching interventions, conducted by final-year pre-service teachers, which were successful in assisting young children with autism engage in and learn literacy through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The 10-day interventions were carried out as part of a two-year Master of Teaching course at an Australian university, and were designed to identify specific learning needs in young children, and then implement targeted interventions. The two cases described here show how ICTs were successfully used to create multimodal texts to support the literacy learning and engagement of young children with autism. The first case involved an intervention that employed two iPad apps—which were not intended specifically for children with autism—to support the literacy learning and engagement of a five-year-old. The second case involved the use of Microsoft PowerPoint on a laptop to develop multimodal non-fiction texts to improve an eight-year-old's attitude to, and engagement with, reading. Each intervention was found to be effective in improving the participating child's literacy achievement and engagement. Each used multisensory and student-centred approaches that acknowledged the children's strengths and interests, with ICTs being used to transform teaching and learning tasks. This article illustrates the successful drawing together of pre-service teachers’ technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK), as well as their knowledge of the children concerned, to devise evidence-based interventions using ICTs to assist young children with autism to engage in, and learn, literacy.

Introduction
Young children with autism bring specific strengths and challenges to the classroom, which will be outlined in the literature review below. Teachers are required to find effective mechanisms to engage such children in an inclusive way and, in Australia, this requirement is being articulated more cogently than ever with the introduction of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, which demands that all teachers should be able to differentiate teaching to meet the learning needs of students across the full range of abilities, and should implement inclusive strategies to engage and support all students (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2012). Furthermore, the Australian Professional Standards for Teaching and the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2012) state that teachers should use ICTs in the classroom to support children’s learning and to enable children to learn about ICTs. This article presents two case studies of interventions that demonstrate how literacy in young children with autism can be supported through an ICT-enabled multimodal approach. The interventions were carried out by pre-service teachers as part of an ‘Interventions for Learning’ professional practice/research unit, under the guidance of classroom teachers and university lecturers. The pre-service teachers drew on their TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), or their technological, pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as specific knowledge of the students concerned, which was gathered through diagnostic assessment, to design appropriate interventions.
Literature review

A number of areas of literature are relevant to this research: learners with autism; multimodal literacy and engagement; ICTs in early childhood; and ICTs and young children with autism. This review signposts the rationales for the two interventions.

Autism is one of five disorders in the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (Taylor, Smiley & Richards, 2009), being characterised by difficulties in communication and social interaction. Repetitive or restrictive behaviours are common and the flexible regulation of behaviour, self and interests are impaired (Goodman & Williams, 2007). Engaging in imaginative and symbolic play and environmental changes or changes to daily routines can present difficulties (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 361). In addition, children with autism have difficulties in paying attention for sustained periods, especially when listening tasks are involved. These issues can seriously impact on learning (Goodman & Williams, 2007).

In terms of literacy, children with autism often experience delayed phonological, morphological, and syntactic development (Diehl, Bennett & Young, 2006) and, because of their difficulties in communication and comprehension of social situations, they face challenges in comprehending texts. For example, children with autism may have difficulty interpreting characters’ emotions and motives, since this often involves making inferences. They tend to comprehend texts literally (Gately, 2008), and may have limited vocabulary (Carnahan, Williamson & Christman, 2011). Further, children with autism can find writing challenging (Griffin, Griffin, Fitch, Albera & Gingras, 2006; Myles et al., 2003), particularly in taking audience and purpose into account. Because of such difficulties, they are often excluded from opportunities to engage in rich and meaningful literacy activities like storytelling (Vacca, 2007), further reducing their motivation to engage.

Effective teaching of children with ASD involves teaching to their strengths and interests (Lanou, Hough & Powell, 2012). As these interests can be intense and change rapidly, teachers should carry out regular diagnostic and formative assessments to identify strengths and needs, and plan appropriate learning activities (Smith Myles, Grossman, Aspy & Henry, 2009). Smith Myles and colleagues also note that early intervention is advantageous for children with autism. Although children with autism are individuals with characteristics that vary, pedagogical and classroom management strategies that can help them include: predictable daily routines and verbal reminders; visual and tactile aids; careful reinforcement of learning; restriction of distractions in the environment and controlled sensory input (such as a quiet corner); as well as inclusion of their interests in learning activities (Smith Myles et al., 2009; Willis, 2009). As will be seen, the two interventions reported in this article take into account these strategies.

Some of the difficulties that children with autism face in literacy learning have been outlined above. However, it must be noted that definitions of literacy have expanded in recent years and now include the comprehension and composition of a range of oral, visual, written and multimodal texts in digital forms (Bearne, 2009; Fellowes & Oakley, 2010; Jewitt, 2008). Although this redefinition adds complexity, reading and composing multimodal texts can lead to enhanced levels of motivation and engagement (Ciampa, 2012), not least because the composition of such texts can enable types of creativity and interaction not possible in the context of traditional literacy practices (Edwards-Groves, 2012; Marsh, 2010).

Increased motivation and engagement is worthwhile in itself, yet such increases may also lead to increased achievement. It should be noted that the relationship between affective factors and achievement is complex; however, there is evidence that positive attitudes and motivation have a moderate positive effect on achievement, particularly in the early years (De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste & Rosseel, 2012; Petscher, 2010). Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between reading frequency and attainment (Clark & Douglas, 2011). As well, the development of a positive attitude towards literacy in the early years of schooling can create lifelong enthusiastic readers (Smith, 1990). For children who have autism, engagement, motivation and positive attitudes in literacy can be particularly problematic, partly due to their difficulties in social interaction and social understanding, as well as in self-regulation of behaviour and interests (Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010).

Engagement, motivation and attitude are separate constructs, although sometimes overlapping, and are inconsistently differentiated in the literature. For the purposes of this article, engagement is defined as ‘time on-task, time on-schedule, and appropriate interaction with learning materials’ (Carnahan, Basham & Musti-Rao, 2009, p. 76). Although the construct has not been consistently conceptualised in the literacy research literature (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller & Wigfield, 2012), motivation can be seen as a drive, desire or intention to act or engage. Schiefele et al. (2012, p. 429) suggests: ‘A person’s current motivation to read can be defined as the extent of his or her intention to read a specific text in a given situation.’ Attitude towards literacy is a construct that focuses on a person’s feelings and beliefs about literacy (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995) which, in turn, can influence and be influenced by engagement and motivation.

There is evidence that the use of ICTs can improve engagement and learning. However, for some early childhood educators, the incorporation of ICTs into early childhood classrooms is almost the antithesis of play-based education (Wohlwend, 2009), although others see it as another opportunity for play, discovery and engagement (Banister, 2010). These contrasting perspectives may to
some extent be attributed to the pedagogical approaches adopted—whether ICTs are used as developmentally appropriate tools in student-centred, play-based learning or to implement drill and practice activities only. Such contrasting perspectives and approaches may also be seen as reflections of teachers’ technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), and their understanding of how to use these three sets of teacher knowledge to best implement ICTs in teaching. Mishra and Koehler’s TPACK builds on Shulman’s (1986) construct of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which is conceptualised as the area where a teacher’s pedagogical and content knowledge bases overlap, enabling a good ‘fit’ between content and the pedagogical approaches adopted. A teacher’s knowledge of technology (T) must also, in today’s world, be added to PCK, which means that three overlapping areas of teacher knowledge must be brought to bear when planning lessons and learning activities in schools. See Figure 1 for a graphic representation of the TPACK framework.

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006)

With reference to the overlapping technology and content area (TCK), Koehler and Mishra (2008) noted that teachers not only need to know their subject matter but ‘also have a deep understanding of the manner in which the subject matter … can be changed by the application of technology’ (p. 16). The overlapping technology and pedagogical knowledge area (TPK) represents ‘an understanding of how teaching and learning changes when particular technologies are used, which includes knowing pedagogical affordances and constraints of a range of technological tools as they relate to disciplinarily and developmentally appropriate pedagogical designs and strategies’ (Koehler & Mishra, 2008, p. 16). The area where pedagogical, content and technological knowledge overlaps is referred to as a teacher’s TPACK, and this overlap is deemed to be necessary so that appropriate and innovative use of ICTs for learning can be designed. Also informing the two interventions reported here was the SAMR model (Puentadura, 2010), which proposes that ICTs can be used for substitution, augmentation, modification or redefinition of tasks or learning activities. Substitution is when technology acts as a substitute for traditional tasks, where there is essentially no change in function; augmentation is when technology acts as a substitute but does provide a functional improvement. Together, substitution and augmentation are referred to by Puentadura as ‘enhancement’. Modification and redefinition, however, allow for the ‘transformation’ of tasks, with modification entailing significant task redesign, and redefinition allowing new tasks to be created that were previously not possible or inconceivable.

In recent years, mobile technologies (such as iPads) have assisted children with autism, although limited research has been published to date. Various apps have been created specifically for children with special needs: Playpad, for example, supports the role of a therapist for children with ASD who are on a therapy waiting list and needing early intervention (Venkatesh, Greenhill, Phung, Adams & Duong, 2012), while Picca allows teachers to customise learning activities to suit individuals with special needs (Fernández-López, Rodríguez-Fortiz, Rodríguez-Almendros & Martínez-Segura, 2013). Fernandez-Lopez and colleagues found Picca to be effective in enhancing students’ achievement in a variety of areas, including reading and writing. Many apps specifically designed for children with special needs are expensive, however, and may to some extent conflict with principles of inclusivity if other children in the class do not use the same apps.

Just as technology not specifically designed for children with special needs can be used to assist children with autism and other special needs (Shane et al., 2012), iPad (and Android) apps not specifically designed for these children can be beneficial to them. In a recent review of 15 studies on the use of mobile devices in educational programs for students with a diverse range of developmental disabilities, Kagohara et al. (2012) found largely positive results. These researchers concluded that, under certain teaching conditions, mobile technologies can be ‘viable technological aids for individuals with developmental disabilities’ (Kagohara et al., 2012, p. 155). The touch input and mobility of the devices, as well as auditory and visual features, appear to be major factors in their usefulness and appeal for children with special needs (Campigotto, McEwan & Demmans Epp, 2013).
Methodology

This article describes two case studies of classroom-based teaching interventions conducted by early childhood pre-service teachers at an Australian university as part of the requirements of an academic unit called ‘Interventions for Learning’, during Semester 2, 2012. The purpose of the unit was to provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to conduct their own interventions with young children to address specific learning needs. Case studies provide an holistic means of describing and interpreting phenomena in context within a bounded system (Merriam, 1998). This research utilised intrinsic case studies (Stake, 2005) as the pre-service teachers assisted specific young children with autism to engage in and learn literacy through the use of ICT.

The pre-service teachers are identified through their initials: RG and AD. While both pre-service teachers were investigating the usefulness of ICTs to assist young children with autism engage in multimodal literacy, different interventions were performed utilising different ICTs. In both situations, multiple sources of data were collected to capture an holistic and contextual picture of the intervention (Merriam, 1998). Diagnostic and summative assessments were employed to quantitatively assess the effect of the intervention, while observations and anecdotal notes recorded the children’s engagement, behaviour, and/or use of ICTs. Each case study is presented in the Findings section. Both case studies are presented in terms of their context, procedure and results. Similarities and differences across the two cases in relation to supporting literacy learning are presented in the Discussion.

Ethical issues complied with institutional ethics requirements. Parents provided written consent after being presented with detailed information on the project. Principals, teachers and education assistants were also provided with information, as required by the school. Verbal assent was obtained from each child. The project was explained to them in terms of working with a pre-service teacher to assist their literacy learning. Because the project involved young children with autism, both pre-service teachers paid particular attention to verbal and non-verbal cues used to indicate dissent during the intervention (Skanfors, 2009). For example, rather than timetabling working times, RG was guided by Cam’s needs—starting when he was ready and comfortable, or needing an alternative to mat time (sitting on the mat with other children while the teacher presented a lesson to them), and finishing when he wanted to. Similarly, AD continually monitored Alex’s emotions and anxiety levels, being prepared to modify or stop if required. Permission was obtained from the parents and children to include their work in this article.

Findings

Case Study 1. ‘Look, I’m a comic maker—look at my comic!’

Context

Case Study 1 involved an intervention to ascertain how the introduction of an iPad® could support the literacy learning and engagement of a pre-primary child with ASD. The intervention took place in the Pre-primary/Year 1 classroom of a Western Australian independent school. Within the classroom were 26 children, two teachers and an education assistant. The focus of the intervention was Cam (a pseudonym), a five-year-old boy with High Functioning Autism. Cam had been identified by his teacher as needing literacy support, requiring assistance with: letter and sound knowledge, namely blending and segmenting of simple Consonant Vowel Consonant (CVC) words; reinforcement of concepts of print; and oral language learning. Cam had difficulty during mat time, which involved sitting and listening to the teacher,
and during transitions—or changing from one activity to another, especially when movement and noise were involved. His coping mechanisms involved withdrawal and/or wrapping himself in a blanket whenever he felt upset, disengaged or frustrated. Additionally, he required assistance staying on task and completing assigned tasks. While an iPad® had been purchased by the school, it had only been used the week before the intervention. Cam had access to three games apps as a reward/incentive for work completed: Angry Birds, Temple Run and Toca’s Hair Salon.

**Procedure**

The intervention comprised four stages:

**Stage 1: Diagnostic assessment**

Diagnostic assessment of Cam’s alphabetic and phonics knowledge involved use of the Diana Rigg Early Literacy Screening Test (Rigg, 2008) and *Intro to Letters (Montessorium)*, a flashcard app on the iPad®. The Diana Rigg assessment provides a range of spelling and phonics screening tools to identify students’ developmental progress and inform instruction. It was selected because it was routinely used in the classroom. The *Intro to Letters* app was selected because of its simplicity, the provision of letters of the alphabet without the support of pictures. Cam was shown a letter (not in alphabetical order) and asked to identify the name and sound.

Due to Cam’s inconsistent use of and limited engagement with literacy, his phonics knowledge was assessed with two instruments across two different days: the Diana Rigg assessment on the first day and the *Intro to Letters* app on the second day. The process was broken into two-minute intervals: Cam would complete two minutes of assessment followed by two minutes of free time on the iPad®. Throughout the assessments, Cam watched the two-minute hourglass timer. During his two-minute free time periods he played *Temple Run* and *Angry Birds*. The assessments took place in a quiet space outside the classroom.

**Stage 2: Selection of apps**

A range of apps were researched to address Cam’s literacy needs. This was guided by the SAMR model, presented in the literature review, and Walker’s Evaluation Rubric for iPod®/iPad® Apps, which evaluates apps based on curriculum links, cognitive opportunities, level of technology integration, authenticity, interactivity, differentiation, student use and student motivation (Walker, 2010). Two apps were selected: *Twinkl* and *ComicBook!*. *Twinkl* fell within the ‘enhancement’ section of Puentadura’s SAMR model, allowing Cam to hear, repeat, and practise letters and sounds. *ComicBook!* sat within the ‘transformation’ section of the SAMR model, allowing Cam to experience literacy learning in an engaging and non-traditional manner.

The *Twinkl* app is based on *Letters and Sounds* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2007), with Cam’s intervention involving blending sounds to make CVC words. It provided Cam with repeated opportunities to hear phonemes and to practise blending them. *ComicBook!* reinforced this phonics work and enabled him to apply his new knowledge of letters and sounds and sight words meaningfully.

**Stage 3: Incorporating apps**

The intervention occurred over five distributed days (one day per week over five weeks) and then one full week in the classroom, totalling 10 days. The daily intervention lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on Cam’s engagement. This entailed a combination of one-on-one teaching and Cam self-motivating and being given time to access the apps independently. While two apps were used for the majority of the intervention, they were staggered in their use. The *Twinkl* app was introduced on Day 1 as the primary means of literacy work, allowing Cam to become familiar with both the app and RG. *ComicBook!* was introduced on Day 4 as a means to support *Twinkl*; however, it became the major component of the intervention due to Cam’s engagement and enthusiasm for the app. Cam’s engagement, as measured by the time he spent using games and learning apps, was observed and documented over the 10-day intervention. He was absent from school on Day 5 due to illness and Day 10 because of an excursion.

**Stage 4: Summative assessment**

Summative assessment was a repeat of the diagnostic assessment. Due to Cam’s absence on Day 10, this was performed the following day.

**Results**

The Diana Rigg assessment revealed that Cam knew 5 out of 26 letter sounds at the start of the intervention and 20 out of 26 at the end. The *Intro to Letters* app demonstrated that he knew 6 out of 26 letter sounds at the start of the intervention and 21 out of 26 at the end. At the beginning of the intervention, Cam was unable to provide any letter names, although he was able to say some words that started with the sounds he knew (such as tennis for ‘t’, cat for ‘c’, and angry birds for ‘a’). By the end of the intervention, Cam was confident with many of his letters, moving through them quickly. While initially unsure of letter sounds, the *Twinkl* app allowed Cam to hear individual letter sounds, blend them together to make CVC words, and connect words with pictures. During the initial stages of the intervention, he was reluctant to engage. An hourglass timer was used to negotiate learning time and game time: for every five minutes of literacy learning, Cam earned five minutes free-choice game play on the iPad. His preferred choices were *Angry Birds*, *Temple Run*, *Toca’s Hair Salon* and the iPad filming function.
On the fourth day of the intervention, Cam was disengaged and anxious. He remained in his Spiderman suit, including the mask, for much of the day and declined to engage with any literacy apps. In an effort to reduce his anxiety and re-engage him, RG introduced him to the ComicBook! app.

Photos were taken of Cam in his costume, a filter within the app applied to create comic styling. Cam selected a speech bubble and his words were inserted—his name, followed by ‘I am Spiderman’. The comic book image was saved as a pdf file, printed out and glued onto the front of an A4 scrapbook. Cam immediately wanted to make another comic. It was suggested by RG that if he could do five minutes of Twinkl, he could then create another comic. Cam agreed, sat down and completed five minutes of blending CVC words. For the first time he did not refer to the timer. When he had completed his Twinkl work, he created his second comic. Figure 2 shows one of these comics.

Figure 2. Comic created by Cam using ComicBook!

Over the course of the intervention a routine was created involving the two learning apps, Twinkl and ComicBook!. Each comic book was created using a different sentence starter that contained some of his sight words. For example, ‘Look at ... ’, ‘I am ... ’, ‘I can ... ’, ‘We are ... ’ and, ‘He can ... ’.

ComicBook! proved to be an effective motivator for Cam. As each new page was created it was printed out and glued into his scrapbook. Each day the comic book was read together by RG and Cam before a new one was created. Cam began bringing characters to school to feature in his comics and started to experiment with some of the ComicBook! tools: colour selection and graphics filters.

Figure 3 shows the change in Cam’s iPad choices over the 10-day intervention. Throughout the intervention, he became more engaged in his literacy learning and requested more time on the learning apps. Additionally, he relied less on the timer and spent less time on the games. Cam was proud of his comic books, frequently saying, ‘I’m a comic maker, look at my comic!’

Figure 3. Time Cam spent using games apps or learning apps

Comic making engaged Cam in his literacy learning. Working with his interests through the use of innovative and creative tools enabled his role as an active creator of texts to be highlighted.

Case Study 2. ‘I read them to Mum.’

Context

Case Study 2 investigated how multimodal texts could be used to improve the attitudes towards reading of an eight-year-old boy with autism. The intervention took place in a Year 2 classroom of a Western Australian independent school for boys. Within the classroom were 25 children, one teacher, and two education assistants. The primary focus of the intervention was Alex (pseudonym), who displayed anxiety towards schoolwork; he was argumentative with staff and his peers, particularly when asked to read or engage in literacy. A similar situation occurred at home, chiefly in regards to reading. Alex expressed concern that he was not at the same reading level as his peers and stated that the only reading he did was when his mother, teacher or assistant read to him. Further, he stated that he would never choose to read at home or at school. Alex showed intense interest in a range of science topics and enjoyed learning new facts through Google, YouTube videos and a range of television channels. He was capable of retaining and recalling many facts. The purpose of the intervention was to draw upon these interests and strengths and create multimodal texts with him to improve his motivation to read and his engagement in reading.
Procedure

The intervention comprised three stages:

Stage 1. Diagnostic assessment

Alex’s attitude to reading was gauged through the use of the Attitude to Reading Assessment, a modified version of the McKenna and Kear Elementary Attitude to Reading Test (1990). This was selected because it assesses primary children’s academic and recreational attitudes to reading. Due to his age and disability, Alex was given a modified version of the assessment that contained only nine questions directed at the reading he did at school and at home. Each question response was modified to include the option to circle a sad face, neutral face or happy face. AD discussed these different emotions with Alex and asked him to explain different situations where he felt happy, sad or neutral, to check his understanding.

Stage 2. Making multimodal books

The intervention occurred across 10 consecutive school days. Alex worked with AD for approximately 30 minutes per day, generally in the mornings, to research and create a set of five non-fiction books. Each book was produced over two days, and was between five and seven pages long. Alex chose the topic of each book. Together with AD, he used Google to find information and images. Alex chose the facts he wanted to include and then, with assistance from AD, wrote one sentence per page and included one image per page that related to the text.

Soft and hard copies of the books were produced. Soft copies were created as an e-book using PowerPoint™ on a Macbook Pro® and included information, images and audio (Alex’s voice reading the text). Hard copies were printed and bound to make A5 books. These were presented in a tin labelled ‘Alex’s Books’, as a boxed set of five ‘readers’. The tin also contained a USB containing all five e-books, allowing Alex to watch and listen to his stories at home.

Discussions with Alex and the teacher about his attitude to reading, and observations of his enthusiasm and engagement throughout the intervention, were documented.

Stage 3. Summative assessment

Summative assessment was a repeat of the diagnostic assessment, occurring on Day 10 of the intervention. However, the assessment was modified in order to measure Alex’s attitude to reading as a consequence of the books he had produced. Thus, the original question, ‘How do you feel about reading books for fun at home on the weekend?’ was changed to, ‘How do you feel about reading the books you made for fun at home on the weekend?’ The diagnostic and summative assessments were scored, allocating a 1, 2 or 3 to a sad, neutral or happy face respectively and then tallying the nine questions. This enabled a comparison between assessments.

Results

The results are presented in the form of observations and discussions as Alex completed each of the five books, followed by the numerical data from the Attitude to Reading Assessment.

Book One—The Hawaiian Islands

Alex was initially disinterested in making the book, preferring to view images on the websites. His excitement increased mildly as he continued. When asked to read aloud and record himself he became concerned and said, ‘No, I think you should because I am not a very good reader and will probably have to make big pauses.’ Alex then suggested to AD, ‘Why don’t you read it and we can record you?’ AD read the book with him and provided encouragement. Alex eventually decided to record his own voice.

Book Two—The Bermuda Triangle

Alex was interested in researching the Bermuda Triangle, this time paying more attention to the text than the images. On one occasion when AD was reading and paused momentarily, Alex interrupted and said, ‘Come on, come on! Keep reading—I’m finding this really interesting.’ AD noted this to be an improvement in Alex’s attitude to reading, because he was so keen to continue reading. Alex was excited to learn new information from the websites, as well as to audio record the text. He constantly asked, ‘When are we going to record?’ When listening back to his recording, Alex realised he had made some mistakes. Rather than re-recording those sentences he requested to change the written text to match the audio recording. However, after some positive encouragement, he chose to re-record.

Alex was excited and proud of the first two books. He showed no reluctance to take them home, as he did towards the class readers. He commented that he was going to show his mother and read them to her. The following day he reported that his mother had enjoyed them. When asked who had read the books, Alex replied, ‘I read them to Mum.’

Book Three—The World’s Largest Fruit and Vegetables

Alex was enthusiastic about the prospect of researching the world’s largest fruit and vegetables and couldn’t wait to start. When making this book, he was very engaged and expressed excitement about the facts he researched. Figure 4 presents a page from this book. While recording the book, Alex struggled to read some of the words; however, in contrast to Book Two, he persevered and was eager to read accurately. Despite getting a little frustrated about his errors, he continued to say, ‘I have to do it again, I have to get it right.’
While reading the information on the black holes websites, Alex asked several times how to read unknown words. In response, AD suggested that he ‘sound them out’, a strategy familiar to him. Alex was keen to record this book. After finishing the fourth book, he suggested that he show the rest of the class and the teacher his work. This was a significant step for Alex, as he had never volunteered to share his writing with the class before.

**Book Five—Silkworms**

Alex was very disappointed when told that this would be the final book, suggesting more possible topics.

**Attitude to reading assessment**

In the diagnostic assessment, Alex scored 12 out of 27. Seven of his nine responses circled the sad face, confirming his poor attitude to reading. When completing the assessment, he made several negative comments about reading, such as, ‘Well, I would never really choose to read.’ In the post-intervention assessment, he scored 26 out of 27. The only question where he did not circle a smiley face was in response to him reading aloud to his class. However, Alex asked AD to approach the classroom teacher to play his e-books to the class. Alex’s classmates also viewed the completed hardcopy books and were extremely complimentary.

Throughout the intervention, Alex’s confidence and enjoyment of reading appeared to increase. He exhibited pride in the books he made and increased self-esteem after his peers complimented his work. Although this study did not attempt to measure his motivation to write, Alex became engaged in writing multimodal texts when topics that were of interest to him were used.

**Discussion and implications for practice**

The two case studies demonstrated how the creation of multimodal texts using ICTs assisted in supporting the literacy learning and engagement of young children with autism. In Case Study 1, a multi-sensory approach was used that built on Cam’s strong visual skills, linked with concrete materials, and connected and built on his interests and life experiences. Cam’s alphabetic and phonics knowledge and engagement were found to increase over the period of the intervention. In Case Study 2, a multi-sensory approach was used that connected with Alex’s strengths and interests, leading to improved attitudes towards reading and greater engagement with reading and writing.

Both case studies highlighted the use of ICTs to assist children with autism learn literacy; namely, iPad apps not intended specifically for children with autism and the use of PowerPoint on a conventional laptop. The use of ICTs in both interventions was pedagogically driven, with the pre-service teachers drawing on their understanding of TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006); appropriate content, pedagogy and technology were drawn together to meet the needs of the children concerned. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers took Puentadura’s SAMR model (2010) into account and attempted to improve on traditional tasks to enhance or transform learning.

Both interventions drew on research on best practices for teaching children with autism. Grandin (1995) identified children with autism as visual thinkers and both interventions employed a visual approach; Cam developed comic book strips using photos of himself and his toys, while Alex developed PowerPoints around different topics, with an emphasis on pictures being linked with printed text and audio.

Further, both interventions highlighted a student-centred approach. Cam’s interest was Spiderman, with Cam dressing and acting like Spiderman, and this was further supported with him bringing in objects from home to support the storytelling. Over time, Cam took ownership of the process, deciding what photos and words to use for his comics, and selecting colours and filters. Alex had a strong interest in science, and chose five different areas of interest to research. He selected the information and images to include in his PowerPoint. With assistance, he also developed and produced the accompanying audio.

The children’s engagement in producing, and ownership of, the multimodal texts supports the comments of Lanou et al. (2012) that effective teaching of children with autism involves teaching to their strengths and interests.

This article illustrates the successful drawing together of pre-service teachers’ technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK), as well as their knowledge of the children concerned, to devise evidence-based interventions using ICTs to assist young children with
autism to engage in, and learn, literacy. Because ICTs and literacy are constantly shifting domains, and because the learning needs, interests and capabilities of children who have autism are dynamic, ‘what works’ may be situational, meaning that teachers need to continually reflect on their TPACK to plan learning activities that are most applicable to the particular situation. Nevertheless, it is clear that ICTs, when used to create multimodal texts, have the capacity to engage young children who have autism. This article has also illustrated that ICTs can be used in conjunction with fundamental early childhood practices such as dramatic play (as in the case of Cam as Spiderman). As well, they can accommodate a high degree of free choice (as in the case of Alex). Careful diagnostic assessment was an important element of the two interventions reported here, suggesting that the needs, interests and abilities of children must be prominently highlighted in the TPACK model. Indeed, Oakley (2011) has suggested a TPA(S)CK model to ensure that students (S) and their needs are considered to be central at all times.

Limitations and further research

While both of the case studies indicated positive results in terms of increased knowledge and engagement in literacy, there are limitations associated with the research. Each case consisted of only one child, each with specific autism characteristics. Further research is required to confirm whether such results would apply in the wider context of ASD with children of different ages and gender. A second limitation is the short timeframe of the interventions (approximately one hour per day for 10 days), although some of these days were distributed over several weeks. The short and intense time working one-on-one with the children could be a factor contributing to their increased positive outcomes. Additional research is required to confirm if similar results would be obtained over an extended period of time with less intensive sessions. Another limitation is that some of the tools for measuring student improvement were limited in their psychometric properties. Furthermore, the assessment of young children with special needs is complex and the pre-service teachers involved had limited experience in this area, although they were under the supervision of university lecturers and teachers.

Conclusion

We have presented research that shows how ICTs, including iPad apps not intended specifically for children with autism, can be used within an inclusive classroom context to create multimodal texts to support the literacy learning and engagement of young children with autism. Both interventions provided opportunities for the children to engage in rich and meaningful literacy activities, such as the storytelling Cam did through creating comic strips. This research suggests that a student-centred approach based around developing multimodal texts using ICTs can improve literacy learning and engagement when educators effectively bring together their technological, pedagogical and content knowledge, along with detailed knowledge of individual children’s interests and needs.

References


Influences on politicians’ decisions

Kathryn Bown
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THIS ARTICLE PRESENTS FINDINGS from a case study investigation of a longstanding campaign in one Australian state to change the minimum regulated staff–child ratios for babies from one staff member for every five babies (1:5) to one staff member for every four (1:4). Using interviews with early childhood professionals and politicians, and document analysis of key policy texts, an ‘eventalization’ (Foucault, 1991) is generated to argue multiple ‘contingent events’ (Mills, 2003, p. 115) at the state, national and international level, enabled ratio campaign activists to intensively promote the 1:4 ratio. Simultaneously New South Wales politicians strategically aligned themselves with national early childhood education and care policy by approving 1:4. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for ECEC activists agitating for policy change in the future.

Introduction

‘I think the challenges were always going to be that it was about babies, and in society, that’s not necessarily high on everybody’s agenda.’ (ECR5 Cassandra, interview transcript)

Politicians play a key role in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy landscape. Their decisions directly affect the way ECEC is experienced by children, educators and families. While politicians are key to shaping ECEC policy, research on politicians’ decision making in ECEC, and particularly research involving politicians as participants, is still relatively new (Bown, Sumsion & Press, 2009; Bradley, 2011). This paper contributes to this small but growing literature by reporting on a study investigating influences on politicians’ decision making in ECEC, and particularly research involving politicians as participants, is still relatively new (Bown, Sumsion & Press, 2009; Bradley, 2011). This paper contributes to this small but growing literature by reporting on a study investigating influences on politicians’ decision making in ECEC policy in Australia. Specifically, the article reports a case study investigation of a longstanding campaign by parts of the early childhood profession in one Australian state to change the minimum regulated staff–child ratios for children aged birth to two years (hereafter referred to as ‘babies’) from 1:5 to 1:4. In New South Wales (NSW) at the time this study was conducted, staff–child ratios were mandated in the Children’s Services Regulation 2004, administered by the Department of Community Services (DoCS). In presenting the findings of the case study, this article generates an ‘eventalization’ (Foucault, 1991) to understand the role of influence in ECEC policy.

The ratios campaign (hereafter referred to as ‘the campaign’) was marked by extensive debate within the sector and with politicians in the years 2002–2009. The campaign was characterised by activism from predominantly community-based organisations and service providers to reduce the staff–child ratio for centre-based ECEC from 1:5 to 1:4 for children under two years; these efforts were countered by an equally strong resistance to the proposed change from predominantly for-profit organisations and service providers. In 2008, the ‘One to four, make it law’ campaign realised its goal when the then NSW Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney, announced that the minimum adult to child ratio for children birth to two years in centre-based early childhood settings would be reduced to 1:4, commencing January 2011 (Burney, 2008, 23 October), some eight years after the campaign was initiated.

Yet, as the participant whose quote began this article articulated, babies have rarely been high on political agendas. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere (Bown, Sumsion & Press, 2011) that community service portfolios, which have often encompassed the ECEC portfolio, are not often high political priorities. How is it then that the 1:4 ratio was finally promised by Minister Burney? What happened that paved the way for such a choice to be made possible? How can the notion of ‘influence’ be analysed in the
ratio campaign? What can be learned by early childhood activists to inform future policy activism efforts?

To respond to these questions, I analysed data collected from interviews with politicians and key ECEC stakeholders involved in the ratio campaign, and relevant policy texts. The analysis uses the Foucaultian method of ‘eventalizing’ which involves ‘analysing an event according to the multiple processes which constitute it’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 76). I argue that during the years of the campaign, national and international events generated an opportunity for early childhood activists that had not previously been available. The movement of power relations enabled a new discourse to be taken up by politicians that had long been advocated by ECEC activists. Taking up a new discourse to some extent brought issues of equity and quality to the fore in ECEC policy.

The article begins by outlining the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the case study investigation. An explanation of the methodology, including initial processes of data analysis, follows. The main section of the article ‘eventalizes’ the data into three interrelated threads. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings, implications for future ECEC policy, and recommendations for ECEC activists agitating for politicians to consider more seriously issues of quality and equity in ECEC settings.

**The theoretical framework**

The research reported in this paper explores the notion of ‘influence’ in politicians’ policy decision making for ECEC, in a particular case study in NSW. The methodology and data analysis is framed by a Foucaultian conceptualisation of power-knowledge-discourse (Foucault, 1994). This framing asserts that power is not sovereign to a ruling institution or person; rather power is productive and non-subjective; that is, it can be accessed but not possessed (Heller, 1996). Therefore, while the question guiding this research focuses on politicians’ decision making, the emphasis is not on politicians as wielders of power and authority, but as agents in a complex web of power relations.

The Foucaultian frame, then, conceptualises the mode of power in the form of discourse. Discourses are specific ways of thinking and acting that frame practice. With regard to the research reported in this article, influence can be understood as the interplay of discourses and power relations in the modern policy landscape. Like Rizvi and Lingard (2010), I am interested in the collections and patterns of policy decisions, rather than individual decisions in isolation.

Therefore, knowledge is not a universal truth, but an effect of discourse. Knowledge is relational and bound by discourse. When considering particular ‘knowledge’ sets that might be at play in politicians’ decision making for ECEC, such as ‘knowledge’ derived from a personal experience with an ECEC setting, or reading an ECEC research report, this article seeks to explore the discourses operating to form these sites of ‘knowledge’ and their subsequent relation to each other, rather than the influence of each of these rudimentary sources of ‘knowledge’ in isolation.

Foucault’s concept of eventalizing (Foucault, 1991) is used to analyse the case study. Foucault describes eventalizing as a procedure of analysis that seeks to rediscover ‘the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies’ at a given moment or point in time, that might otherwise be described as ‘self-evident, universal and necessary’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 76). This Foucaultian analysis views events as contingencies in a field of possibilities. Foucault (1991) explains that the process of ‘eventalizing’ evolves into a ‘polymorphism of intelligibility’ where processes are broken down into smaller and smaller units of analysis, implicating an increasing number of external relations. In an analysis of the Victorian government’s significant ECEC reform agenda between 2006 and 2010, Flottman and Page (2012) argue that the reform agenda was not a result of a single event, but rather ‘a series of interconnected events that took place over a couple of years that served as the catalyst’ (p. 18) for the reform agenda. While they did not use ‘eventalizing’ in their analysis, Flottman and Page’s conclusion illuminates how ‘eventalizing’ can be a worthwhile method of analysis for understanding the contingencies on which policy events occur.

Eventalizing generates an understanding of the complexity of the ratio case study, instead of a linear process leading to an inevitable conclusion (Giugni, 2010). While the ratio case study is a relatively localised issue, eventalizing is a form of analysis that connects the local to the macro; it illuminates the multiplicities from which singularities are connected (Foucault, 1991). The singular event of Minister Burney announcing the approval of 1:4 in 2008 can be connected to multiple other events. Eventalizing lightens the ‘weight of causality’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 77) and generates the polyhedron of intelligibility by constructing around a singularity, the ‘multiple processes which constitute it’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 76). Influence on politicians, therefore, is a complex web of power relations that shift and change, and is contingent on multiple forces. The notion of ‘influence’, particularly in terms of activists’ influence (which is the particular focus of this case study), is conceptualised within a Foucaultian power-knowledge-discourse frame and understood through the enactment of eventalizing.

**Methodology**

An instrumental case study (Stake, 2006) was used to explore influences on politicians’ policy decision making in ECEC in relation to the NSW ratio issue. The case study design was pertinent given Fitz and Halpin’s (1994) warning...
that the political elite may ‘simply end up reproducing the discourse of the powerful’ leading to ‘the problem of uncritically accepting elite narratives as the authentic, valid account of how policy was formulated and why’ (p. 48). The case study offered a range of angles and perspectives on the influences and processes of political policy making and the role of government in ECEC.

**Interviews with case study participants**

The University Human Ethics Committee approved the study and all participants gave informed consent. Two groups were invited to participate in the study: representatives from the early childhood field, and politicians. The early childhood representatives were invited to participate in the ratio case study only, while the politicians were invited to participate in both the ratio case study (where relevant) and other aspects of the study not reported here. All the interviews were conducted by the author between March 2008 and July 2009.

Early childhood representatives were identified using insider knowledge, recommendations from participants, and information gathered from key documents. They were chosen if they had been significantly involved in the ratio case study at any point in the eight years. Ten key early childhood representatives were contacted by letter/email to participate in the research. Of the ten, one person formally declined and three people did not respond. In total, six interviews with early childhood representatives were held. Participant codes and pseudonyms are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Early Childhood Ratio (ECR) participants’ codes and pseudonyms**

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The recruitment of politicians was restricted to those who held either a current seat in Parliament or had formerly held a seat in Parliament within the previous five years. All invited politicians had experience with early childhood policy areas. For logistical reasons, only NSW and federal parliamentarians were invited to participate. A total of 49 politicians—25 federal politicians and 24 NSW state politicians—were contacted by letter to participate in the research. Of the 49, 14 politicians declined and 26 politicians did not respond to the invitation letter. In total, 12 interviews with political figures were held. At the time the interviews were conducted, eight of the politicians held non-government positions in the NSW State and Federal Parliaments: three politicians were members of major parties; four were members of minor parties; and one was an independent member of Parliament. One of the politicians interviewed was a Government Minister. Additionally, interviews were conducted with three public servants, each of whom had been heavily involved in federal ECEC policy. Recruitment of two of the public servants was serendipitous due to a networking opportunity and a Minister requesting that the public servant participate on his behalf. The third public servant was invited to participate due to their senior position in federal social policy development.

**Table 2. Politician participants’ demographic information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Level of politics</th>
<th>Response to ratio case study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Maree</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Asked; No knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Provided comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Provided comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Provided comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Provided comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Provided comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six federal politicians were not questioned on the ratio case study in NSW as the researcher was aware they had not been directly involved. Of the remaining six NSW state politicians, five of them spoke about ratios in NSW and one of the NSW state politicians was asked about the ratio issue but had no knowledge of it. Therefore, five politician interviews (P3, P4, P5, P9 and P10) were included in the analysis for this case study. Four of these interviews were conducted between March and May in 2008, when the ‘One to four, make it law’ campaign was in full swing, and the fifth interview was held a year later in May 2009, after the 1:4 ratio had been approved by Minister Burney. Table 2 indicates politician participants’ pseudonyms, demographic information and whether the ratio case study was discussed.

**Data analysis**

As previously described, a Foucaultian power-knowledge-discourse positioning framed the data analysis process. Initially, interview transcripts were coded into themes; participants’ responses to standard questions were compared; and, implicit and explicit content was identified (Fairclough, 1995). Various language functions were identified such as metaphors, quotes, humour/sarcasm, contradiction and ambiguity (Tobin, 2008). Interview transcripts were also analysed to consider ‘the “unsaid”
or the “unspoken” to illuminate participants: being constrained or silenced by discourse’ (Foucault, 1994 as cited in Bown et al., 2011, p. 271).

This process of analysis identified multiple storylines and themes, and allowed me to view the case study as a web of interrelated actors, events and texts at an international, national, state and local level. Foucault’s tool of eventalizing seemed an appropriate vehicle for further analysis of the web of relations.

**Eventalizing the ratio campaign**

In this section, I ‘trace the way that certain events happened and examine the contingent events which may, or may not, have played a role’ (Mills, 2003, p. 115) in the ratio campaign. This section is organised into three interrelated threads. Each thread begins with an analysis of the broader national/international events or practices, and then connects these events to effects produced at the state/local level, specifically in relation to the ratio campaign.

**Economic, consumer and market discourses**

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) describe the influence of global economic trends on Australian education policy as an ‘almost universal shift from social democratic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance’ (p. 3). In ECEC in Australia, these global trends can be observed in the federal government policy decisions of the 1980s and 1990s. First, the extension of fee relief to users of for-profit ECEC settings in the 1980s opened the field to market forces more directly (Brennan, 1998). The extension of fee relief to for-profit ECEC settings was followed by the federal government’s decision in 1997 to withdraw operational subsidies from centre-based and outside-school-hours care services (Brennan, 1998). These policy decisions saw the proliferation of private for-profit ECEC settings into the new millennium.

The ECEC policies of the 1980s and 1990s that largely positioned ECEC in a consumer market culture directly affected policy at the state level. The ratio campaign is an example at the micro level of how the competition between the interests of children, families, business and government maintained pedagogical conditions that were widely considered suboptimal and low quality. After advocacy and activism efforts at the beginning of the millennium agitating for a change in the staff–child ratio for birth to two-year-olds, in November 2002 the draft regulation was released which included a proposal to change the existing staff–child ratio of 1:5 for children birth to two years to 1:4. At the time, media reports revealed the NSW Minister for Community Services Carmel Tebbutt supported the proposed change in ratio (for example, see Wood, 2003), which was confirmed during interviews with ECEC participants in the case study reported here.

However, the ensuing government-commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Regulatory Impact Statement report in December 2002 concluded that:

*Reduced staff–child ratios will result in a direct increase in the cost of service provision in what is already a high cost component of children’s services … The resulting impact could be a reduction in access to services, rather than an increase in the quality of care* (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002, p. 67).

Despite her indications of supporting the change in ratio, Minister Tebbutt eventually rejected the proposed change citing the conclusions of the PWC report. The first official rejection of the proposed ratio change reflected an interest in the birth to two-year-old staff–child ratio that ran deeper than just the Minister responsible for the portfolio. As one participant reflected, '[Minister Tebbutt] wasn’t part of the inner circle around Bob Carr [NSW Premier at the time] and his ministry … all men from treasury and various influential departments like that who basically vetoed the one to four as costing parents too much money and potentially an election loser’ (ECR6 Joanne, interview transcript). Minister Tebbutt’s speech to Parliament reflected the continued influence of business and consumer discourses in Australian ECEC policy. Data from the case study suggested these discourses were driven by a core circle of politicians from finance and treasury, indicative of the ‘highly competitive funding environment’ (Sumsion, 2006, p. 6) characteristic of economic rationalist politics.

Despite the announcement that the 1:4 ratio would not go ahead, proponents continued to rally support by commissioning the Social Policy Research Centre to investigate the plausibility of the 1:4 ratio and by convening a meeting with representatives from both community-based and privately run organisations to discuss the ratio issue. At this meeting, an in-principle agreement was reached by all attendees that a 1:4 ratio was viable, which was subsequently communicated to Minister Tebbutt’s advisor. Joanne reflected that ‘even though we didn’t get the outcome we want, I actually think we were quite influential in getting to people and starting them thinking about the issues’ (ECR6 Joanne, interview transcript).

In response to the sector’s collaborative efforts, in May 2004, Minister Tebbutt established the Cross-sectoral Taskforce, which consisted of six ECEC sector representatives (of both community-based and privately operated organisations) plus one representative from the DoCS. The priority of economic impact over quality was again reflected in the brief of the Cross-sectoral Taskforce: to investigate and report on possible strategies to enable a 1:4 ratio ‘without adverse impact on the number (and cost) of places available to children 0–2’ (Cross-sectoral Taskforce, 2006, p. 4). Establishing the Taskforce nevertheless reflected Minister Tebbutt’s continued support for a change in ratio but more importantly, reflected the ongoing activist work of campaigners to keep the issue on the political agenda.
Two years later, in May 2006, the final Cross-sectoral Taskforce majority report was released. The majority report, authored by four Taskforce members, supported the change to the 1:4 ratio. It was accompanied by a dissenting report, authored by the remaining two members of the Taskforce, who opposed the findings of the majority report (the DoCS representative was not listed as author of either report). By the time these reports were released, Minister Tebbutt had been replaced by Minister Reba Meagher, who rejected the majority report. The continued success of dissenters in keeping the ratio at 1:5 reflected the wider sentiment that ECEC was a service to working families rejected the majority report. The continued success of dissenters in keeping the ratio at 1:5 reflected the wider perception that ECEC was a service to working families and a business sector to be protected. This sentiment was evident in the comments of one politician participant, Penny (P5):

There’s purists here who say ‘well of course we have to have—that’s terrible that babies aren’t almost one to one’. But in some cases it would mean a business would close up … there’s a set of parents with nowhere to put their nought to two-year-old, there’s a set of early childhood teachers who don’t have a job—there’s a business that just went out of business because of a requirement on the business (P5 Penny, interview transcript).

Proponents of a 1:4 ratio remained aware of how different discourses appealed to and influenced various people. The ECEC participants discussed ways to strategically use the more normalised discourses of economics, health/medicine and science to influence some politicians. At the same time, participants also drew on alternate discourses, such as discourses of quality and children’s rights, to ensure the rhetoric about ratios was not solely focused on economic impact. In contrast to Penny’s comments above, politician participant Kathy described her view of the impact of ratios on children and educators’ experiences:

… [W]hat made me particularly conscious, in the under twos, just how as far as I can see, how extraordinarily difficult for one person to cater for a very young child, a full-on job. So to have a ratio of one to five, or even one to four I think is asking a lot of staff (P3 Kathy, interview transcript).

Kathy’s remarks indicate that quality and equity discourses resonated with her views and political position. Penny and Kathy’s comments are examples of how various discourses penetrated politicians’ beliefs about ratios for babies. Recognising a range of discursive influences, Joanne (ECR6) spoke about the importance of using different communicative strategies in order to appeal to various politicians. She explained the value in ‘… delivering the same message but in different words so people are hearing what they want to hear’ (ECR6 Joanne, interview transcript). This seemed particularly important given the competitive funding environment (Sumison, 2006, p. 6) and the power of Treasury to veto policy decisions.

Alternatively, James (ECR1) argued that economic and quality arguments for a change in ratio were at odds:

I don’t think quality and affordability actually sit together. I don’t see how they work together. Quality costs. And if we constantly go down the affordability argument, we’re going to find it extremely difficult to progress quality (ECR1 James, interview transcript).

James argued that high-quality ECEC requires substantial financial investment, challenging the assertion that ECEC can be high quality and low cost. However, this argument is predicated on the assumption ECEC is paid for by the consumer and partially subsidised by the government. A high-quality, fully subsidised ECEC system could potentially assert affordability (for families) and quality.

Yet curiously, it was widely acknowledged many ‘major employing bodies’ in NSW had already implemented a 1:4 ratio before it was made mandatory, as far back as the first Regulatory Impact Statement (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002, p. 66). As implementation of the 1:4 ratio had already proved possible, dissenting groups presumably had a particularly strong influence. The Dissenting Minority Report, written by two members of the Cross-sectoral Taskforce who represented the peak organisation Child Care NSW, insisted a 1:4 ratio would ‘result in the loss of many hundreds of places for children under two’ (Cross-sectoral Taskforce, 2006, p. 18). But perhaps the more persuasive element of their argument was their belief that 1:4 would have ‘serious affordability impacts for families at all centres, at a time when quality of services is not an immediate concern’ (Cross-sectoral Taskforce, 2006, p. 18, emphasis added). The discourse of quality was contested throughout the campaign. On the one hand, proponents of 1:4 were asserting a ratio of 1:5 could not support quality ECEC, while on the other hand dissenters were insisting quality already existed with a 1:5 ratio.

**Globalising education policy**

In the previous section I argued the globalisation of neo-liberal economic policy generated business and consumerist discourses within ECEC policy in Australia that directly impacted on politicians’ decisions for ratios in NSW. Specifically I have shown how these discourses regularly overshadowed discussions of quality and equity. Despite this blockage to activists’ efforts, a Foucaultian analysis illustrates the productive power of globalisation. International organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperative Development (OECD) and UNICEF have produced reports on ECEC provision that compare countries within their remit, of which Australia is part.

In particular, the Starting Strong II Report (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006) highlighted Australia’s relative poor performance in the provision of ECEC in comparison to other OECD countries. Specifically, Starting Strong II illuminated a low GDP expenditure in ECEC; a mismatch between the policy direction being taken by policy-makers and the perspectives of those in the...
ECEC field; a fragmented system of multiple jurisdictions and responsibilities; a poorly remunerated and minimally qualified ECEC workforce; and a high rate of child poverty experienced predominantly by Indigenous children.

The globalisation of ECEC policy through these reports produced the effects of: highlighting under-performing and high-performing countries; disseminating knowledge of innovative practices; promoting universal indicators of quality such as qualifications, group size and staff–child ratios; and highlighting ECEC as an essential provision in many countries. While not directly related to the ratios issue at this time, the Starting Strong II report appeared to influence a shift in national ECEC policy that eventually generated an opportunity for 1:4 campaigners and politicians alike.

At the time of the release of Starting Strong II in 2006, the then Howard-led coalition government gave it little attention. Mal Brough, the Minister for Families and Community Services, did not make any public comment on the findings of Starting Strong II, verbally or textually. Indeed, in 2007 Minister Brough declared himself the ‘Minister for Child Care’ and rejected the argument that ECEC was part of the education sector (Brough, 2007). Minister Brough’s address exemplified the view of the coalition government that ECEC was merely a service to working parents and a viable business venture. The impact of Starting Strong II was observed later, at the end of 2007, prior to the federal election, when the Australian Labor Party, led by Kevin Rudd, cited the findings of the report in three of their four ECEC pre-election policies.

One participant, Madeline, drew the connection between the eventual approval of 1:4 and the influence of international reports on ECEC provision on politicians:

‘There’s been research showing [staff–child ratios are] important, there have been the OECD reports and other things pointing out to government it’s something they should do. I mean even the research around brain research … I think all those things are pressure points … they’d also realised that it’s not a nice place to work in, in a one to five ratio. So you know, I actually believe all those things, if you like, join together to put pressure on the government and it just depends what other big things are on the agenda and with national standards and other things being talked about the research being fairly clear, something that you can actually cost, it just, you know, became it’s time’ (ECR3 Madeline, interview transcript).

Madeline’s insight is reflected in the argument of this paper; that the ratio event was ‘overdetermined’ by ‘a multiplicity of possible causes, the conjunction of which brought the event [government approval of 1:4] to occur’ (Mills, 2003, p. 114). In particular, Madeline asserted OECD reports played a role in bringing ECEC into focus at the national level, which inevitably filtered to state ECEC policy. When the OECD report was encountered by Kevin Rudd in the lead-up to the election, the ratio campaign had already created a place for itself on the NSW political radar through the persistence of ECEC activists. It resulted in a political opportunity for the NSW government to align itself with national policy by approving an issue already in its sight, a view shared by other ECEC case study participants.

The global financial crisis and a new federal Government

Less than five months before the Australian federal election, in August 2007, the USA subprime lending market collapsed, generating the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Despite the enormous ramifications of this global event, the Australian Labor Party released four ECEC pre-election policies (for the anticipated election in November 2007) as part of their Education Revolution, which drew positive interest from the early childhood sector. Of particular note was the proposal to increase the Child Care Tax rebate, which perhaps provided much needed financial incentive at the state level to mandate the 1:4 ratio.

While nationally the Labor party was devising ambitious ECEC policy prior to the federal election, the ratio campaign was simultaneously rallying support. In June 2007, the campaign organised a roundtable to discuss activism strategies with over 40 invited organisations and individuals. The meeting intended to reinvigorate the ‘One to four, make it law’ campaign. Regular meetings of this consortium were held over the following year with an official launch of the renewed campaign held in October 2007 involving a live television broadcast and an opening ceremony at a Sydney university. The reinvigoration of the campaign occurred concurrently with the ambitious but widely welcomed policy momentum at the federal level. Yet at this particularly energetic policy moment in ECEC, in NSW the Minister responsible for ECEC, Kevin Greene, was perceived to be disinterested in the campaign by four of the participants in this study, who recalled being ‘fobbed off’ during a meeting with him. Joanne concluded: ‘I suspect it wasn’t even on his radar’ (ECR6 Joanne, interview transcript). Nevertheless, it was during Minister Greene’s term that Booz and Company was commissioned by DoCS to produce the second Regulatory Impact Statement, which was submitted to the government in September 2008, a month before Minister Greene was replaced by Minister Burney. The Booz and Company report found that implementing a 1:4 ratio would result in: 34 per cent of centres with no cost increase; a majority of centres facing a cost increase (but who would likely increase staff and maintain the number of birth to two-year-old places); and an estimated average daily increase of $7.59 per birth to two year child for most centres, which could be spread across all age groups to reduce the impact (Booz & Company, 2008, p. i). The Booz and Company Report provided modest economic impact estimates, countering dissenters’ claims that 1:4 would result in ‘loss of many hundreds of places’ and ‘serious affordability impacts for families at all centres’ (Cross-sectoral Taskforce, 2006, p. 18).
After the Rudd Labor Government was elected in November 2007, work on the policy promises began quickly as the Education Revolution began, which included significant ECEC policy reforms. At the time the Rudd Labor Government was elected, each state and territory government was also being led by a Labor government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). It was a particularly opportune time for the Commonwealth to implement the National Reform Agenda through the Council of Australian Governments, given the heads of states/territories and Commonwealth all belonged to the same political party. Amidst the renewed focus on ECEC policy, Australia’s largest for-profit, publicly listed provider of ECEC, ABC Learning Centres, began to unravel, and trade was suspended in March 2008. A month after ABC Learning Centres entered receivership, UNICEF released the Report Card 8, which showed Australia meeting only two of the ten benchmarks in ECEC provisions of the countries examined. Australia was ranked 23 out of 25 OECD countries by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2008). This report, combined with the collapse of ABC Learning, painted a grim picture, but not without opportunities.

In August 2008, the Rudd Government, through COAG, expanded its ECEC pre-election policies with the release of the National Quality Framework (NQF) discussion paper. The NQF discussion paper was a comprehensive document outlining the government’s intentions to implement the National Reform Agenda in ECEC, with a focus on quality and improvement. It seems likely that reports such as Starting Strong II and UNICEF Report Card 8 provided some impetus for the Rudd Government to reform the ECEC sector using the mechanisms of COAG. Notably, the NQF recognised the importance of structural components of quality stating ‘[r]esearch also shows that prime structural indicators of the quality of formal care, sometimes referred to as the “iron triangle”, are staff qualifications, child-to-staff ratios and group size’. (Productivity Agenda Working Group, 2008, p. 14).

While the research supporting lower staff–child ratios has been long known to political figures (for example, see PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002), the ‘play of forces’ (Foucault, 1991) at this time in the political arena created an opportunity to reposition the purpose of ECEC in Australia. The NQF, acknowledging the recommendations in the Starting Strong II report, stated ‘at the heart of the reforms is the need to put the child at the centre of policy development and the delivery of services’ (Productivity Agenda Working Group, 2008, p. 12). The sentiments evident in federal policy were reflected in one NSW politician participant’s rhetoric: ‘... the real issue at the end of the day, the real discussion and what led us to this position on changing the ratio was in fact the benefits for children.’ (P9 Naomi, interview transcript).

Was this new interest and investment in ECEC partly attributable to the GFC? The then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, provided an insight into the government’s views on the GFC in an essay published in February 2009, arguing that the GFC was a result of ‘that particular brand of free-market fundamentalism, extreme capitalism and excessive greed’ (Rudd, 2009). This description could easily apply to the executive of ABC Learning, a company whose liquidation was closely overseen by the government. The subsequent take-over of 570 ABC Learning Centres by the government-approved GoodStart consortium of non-profit organisations (Gillard, 2010), provides additional evidence that the government was committed to changing the ECEC landscape in Australia, and perhaps, was another incentive for the NSW government to demonstrate support for federal ECEC policies by approving the 1:4 ratio.

Discussion and conclusion

I mean there’s probably a lot of people out there sitting there and thinking that would never have happened, you know. And so if it’s happened, what else is possible? (ECR5 Cassandra, interview transcript).

Eventalizing the ratio campaign generated a ‘picture’ of events with crystal-like refractions (Giugni, 2010) of a broad, complex set of relations between people and events. Through eventalizing, the paper has argued market and consumer discourses, driven by global trends in neo-liberal politics, unrelentingly influenced the NSW government to maintain the 1:5 ratio for more than six years. Even though market and consumerist discourses were highly influential and difficult to penetrate, activists continued to promote 1:4 through a range of strategies. In doing so, activists were able to seize an opportune moment when several events caused the neo-liberal agenda to momentarily waver. These events—the GFC; the release of international reports on ECEC highlighting Australia’s poor performance; the change in federal government; and the Labor party in power in all states and territories (and subsequent full Labor representation at COAG)—enabled ECEC activists to, once again, generate political attention on this longstanding issue. Simultaneously, these macro events also allowed an alternative discourse to seep into NSW politicians’ talk of ECEC policy.

The article began with participant Cassandra’s provocation to question the political agenda behind ratios for babies, and it closes with her invitation to imagine the possibilities for future ECEC policy. Critical imagination, according to Sumson (2006), is the ‘capacity to envisage a more equitable and just world’ (p. 4). It invites different ways of thinking about existing problems in order to act differently and believe in the possibility of change (Sumson, 2006). Importantly, critical action involves a refusal to accept that the status quo ‘is beyond interrogation and eventual transformation’ (Sumson, 2007, p. 319). The ratio campaign case study highlights the importance of continually pushing back at neo-liberal agendas that work so effectively in policy contexts. But the ratio campaign is also a longstanding example of how the critical imaginations of the broader ECEC sector, and some politicians, were sustained to eventually witness a hopeful change in ECEC policy.
Acknowledgements

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References


Perceptions of rebates for nanny care: An analysis of an online discussion

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CHILDCRE SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA have experienced a rapid growth in demand over the last 30 years. This has paralleled a number of shifts in society, including: the changing roles and expectations of women; the structuring of an economy that relies on dual income as the norm; the assigning of responsibility to the wider community for the adequate provision of child care; and more recently, an expectation that early years child care also performs an educative role. The current Australian context features a mini baby boom (Bryant, 2011) resulting in a strong demand for child care but with an unmatched supply of services. As a potential election promise, the federal opposition leader in 2012 suggested that the Australian childcare rebate for families should be extended to nannies to increase supply and to help with out-of-hours care. This would be a new initiative for the childcare industry. This paper reports on the text analysis of a self-selected group of 113 respondents who posted comments to a website in response to this proposal. Key themes emerged in the posts relating to: the role of women; middle-class welfare; the role of nannies; and the pressures of modern living. Findings from this investigation are important as they provide a moment in time snapshot of perceptions about early childhood education and care. Policy initiatives are explored with a view to address the shortfall in childcare provision; findings are important to provide initial glimpses of community perceptions.

Context

Changing landscape

The 1970s and 1980s saw changes to the role of child care in Australian society. During this period, the role of child care in providing ‘welfare for children and families in need’ faded and it ‘increasingly came to be seen as a universal service which facilitated mothers’ participation in the workforce’ (Katz & Valentine, 2009, p. 9). In the past few years, rapid change has occurred in early childhood education policy in Australia and in Queensland, where this study was undertaken. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) noted the importance for all children of having a good start in life and acknowledged that skill development was important from early childhood through to school. A shift in purpose from facilitating workforce participation of carers to improving educational standards thus is driving this agenda.

In December 2009, all Australian governments through COAG agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to establish a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care (COAG, 2009). The framework forms part of a broader COAG agenda to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development, to deliver significant improvements in human capital outcomes for all Australians. The framework has also established a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia. The National Quality Standard is expected to improve quality through:

- improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention
- new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop
- a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services.

The new improved staff-to-child ratios are presented below in Table 1, for Australian child care providers greater demands on child care for qualified staff.
In 2009 there were over 871,000 children attending an early years service in Australia for an average of 26 hours a week (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2010). Children were enrolled in early years services from six weeks of age. In 2009, 530,028 children were enrolled in long day care, 106,638 in family day care and 8,117 were enrolled in limited hours care (ABS, 2010). In 2011, over 800,000 children were expected to use government-subsidised child care (Bryant, 2011). The industry is estimated to be worth $7.8 billion annually (Bryant, 2011). This has created a significant area of focus for the government in relation to access, cost and quality of early childhood education and care. As more mothers return to the workforce, greater provision for early childhood services has arisen and demand for early child services is expected to grow over the next five years with a mini baby boom (Bryant, 2011).

Yet, regardless of what appears to be a burgeoning industry, parents may find it difficult to find adequate child care to meet their needs in certain locations in Australia. This issue is often reported in the media, where the challenges associated with the provision of child care receive considerable attention in local and national news, including in newspapers. This media focus reflects community interest in the topic, with newsworthy stories important for selling the news to the community. There are many examples of newspaper articles connecting the financial aspects of child care and the ability for mothers to return to the workforce. For example, in 2011 the Sydney Morning Herald published an article entitled Lack of affordable child care keeps 70,000 mothers at home (Burke, 2011). The article reported that women were locked out of the workforce because they could not secure affordable child care. In 2012, the national newspaper The Australian published the article Mums trapped by lack of options (Ley, 2012) in which it was reported that mothers felt that current provisions for child care were inappropriate and out of touch with Australian families. Childcare places were scarce, expensive and did not cater for parents who worked after 6 pm (Ley, 2012). The article highlighted the complex issue of child care in Australia and the lack of services to cater for out-of-hours care. Even though parents have access to a 50 per cent childcare rebate (capped at $7500 per annum), there remain problems with demand and supply, both through scarcity and timing of the child care available to working families. The provision of child care to reflect the needs of the community has been such a political issue that in March 2012, the federal political opposition leader Mr Tony Abbott proposed the idea that if his political party were elected to power, he would extend the current childcare rebate to nannies to help ease current problems with the childcare sector. The use of a nanny could alleviate the pressure on out-of-hours care and allow children to remain in their own home. It has the potential to provide parents with the opportunity to match care provision with real working time.

### Parent perceptions of early child services

As yet, few studies have explored parental perception of the quality and utilisation of early childhood in Australia. An analysis of United States research conducted by Rose and Elicker (2008) however reveals that several variables are typically associated with parental childcare decisions, including: cost; income; age of the child (a general preference for parental, in-home, or relative care for infants and toddlers and for centre-based care for older children, possibly because of parental perceptions of differing developmental needs); and maternal characteristics (including educational level, ethnicity, and family role ideology). In their study of 365 employed mothers, Rose and Elicker (2008) further reveal that the most important factors influencing parental decision making about child care, in order of importance, were warmth of caregivers, followed by the presence of a play-based curriculum, and thirdly the educational level of caregivers.

In the most recent study in Queensland in 2010, Weaven and Grace (2011) explored parental perceptions of quality in early years long day care by interviewing parents. Findings suggest parents tend to associate quality with observable childcare experiences such as interactions between child and carer, rather than structured elements, such as staff–child ratios, group size, and caregiver qualifications. The study also revealed that parents viewed independent-private centres as marginally superior to community-managed childcare centres and that parents suggested that private centres also offered the highest levels of care in promoting hygienic and safe learning environments for children; providing nutritious food, and stimulating toys and equipment; developing appropriate developmental activities; and administering group activities. All of these factors contribute to the participation rate, and this is ultimately of interest to those aiming to increase engagement and participation with the services, in order to gain benefits of participation. The study revealed that parents wanted choice in where they could send their children.

### Perceptions of nannies in Australia

According to reporter Symons (2012), the problem of early childhood services can be fixed if we look at how nannies are perceived in other countries. She argued in the Financial Review (2 April 2012) that early childhood education and the professional care of infants adds up to pedagogical and societal market failure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s age group</th>
<th>Ratio of staff to child</th>
<th>Compliance date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth–24 months</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1 January 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–35 months</td>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>1 Jan 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 months to school age</td>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>1 Jan 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it comes to early childhood education and the professional care of infants, Australia is, according to study after study, bottom of the rich-world heap. Our pre-school system is a ‘glorified playgroup’ at best, and we have woefully inadequate quality daycare for children under the age of two. Australia has a nanny problem that is both one of mentality—nannies are for rich, lazy, neglectful mothers—and lack of availability. Anyone who has travelled to or worked in New York, Paris or any Asian capital can tell you why: Australia has a comparatively small supply of reasonably qualified workers prepared to do full-time nannying on wages most middle and upper-income professional couples can afford to pay them.

As yet, there has been limited data that has explored the perceptions of nannies on the Australian landscape for families. This paper contributes in some way to help fill that void.

The study

In 2012, the article Rebate for nanny care will reduce baby blues (Michael, 2012) appeared on the Sydney Morning Herald website. The article was a critique of federal opposition leader Tony Abbott’s suggestion that his political party would consider a nanny rebate if elected to help ease current problems resulting from inadequate numbers of childcare places. Most articles on the Sydney Morning Herald website have an anonymous blog post attached where readers can post their comments. This particular forum recorded 113 posts from anonymous contributors. Comments for the story were open from 27 March 2012, 8:19 am, to 27 March 2012, 4:34 pm, which is a duration of just over eight hours. This study analyses the 113 comments related to the online website.

Respondents were a self-selecting, anonymous convenience sample. On average, most contributors wrote three to four sentences. All posts were downloaded and screened for use in this study. All 113 posts were considered suitable for inclusion and they were all either explicitly or implicitly presented as ‘parents’. Because of the small number of comments, the narrow time period to post comments and the convenience sampling of respondents, the findings of this study are reported in the context of the sample only, and there is no attempt to extrapolate findings to the wider community.

All comments were subjected to analysis by Leximancer (Version 3). Leximancer is text analysis software that uses Bayesian algorithms to visually represent the underlying conceptual structure of the text. Leximancer analyses the conditional probability of the relatedness of concepts (represented as dots) and places more closely related concepts closer in proximity than concepts that are distantly related. This is in opposition to other automated text analysis software packages that aim to determine meaning by word count alone. Leximancer aims to determine the underlying meaning of the words by analysing which words (concepts) ‘travel’ together in the text. Lines connecting concepts are also used to indicate the strength of the relationships between concepts.

Leximancer also interrogates the concepts to identify underlying themes. Our analysis revealed that the comments related to four main areas: definition and role of nannies; the role of women in society; pressures of modern living; and community perception of middle-class welfare. Connectivity is a measure of the salience or strength of the theme and represents the degree to which the concepts within a particular theme are related to other concepts. It is referenced to 100 per cent for the theme with the highest number of responses. The strength of the relationship between the themes is expressed in percentage, with the higher the percentage the greater the connection to the dominant theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Connectivity</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition and role of the nanny</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>work, pay, child, care, people, childcare, cost, centre, support, rebate, population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressures of modern living</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>live, parents, afford, society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class welfare</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>tax, welfare, government, class, middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of women</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>home, look, families, women, career, rich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

In this study the dominant theme is ‘Definition and role of the nanny’ theme. This means that there were more comments related to this theme. It is a reference point for the degree of connection between this and the other three themes. Table 2 shows the themes, their connectivity and the concepts identified within each theme. Leximancer generates a theme label based upon the concept with the highest connectivity in each theme. In this study, the initial theme labels were ‘nanny’, ‘tax’, and ‘people’ and ‘children’. After a reading of the comments identified by Leximancer as evidence for the themes, the automatically generated theme labels were replaced by the researchers with more descriptive theme headings, these being: ‘definition and role of the nanny’, ‘middle-class welfare’, ‘pressures of modern living’ and ‘role of women’, respectively, to better reflect the comments within each theme. Each key theme, along with examples of comments, is presented after Table 2.

Table 2. Four key themes and their related concepts

[Table 2 details the connectivity scores and associated concepts for each theme.]

[The table is not included in the natural text representation as it is not necessary for the flow of the narrative.]
Definition of and role of the nanny

Predictably, given the content of the stimulus news article, the majority of responses were related to understandings of the role of ‘nanny’ with contributors presenting arguments from their particular conception of ‘nanny’. Many of the comments which were negatively disposed to the subsidising of nannies held what could be described as a traditional definition of a nanny, which is an employee, most likely a young female, of a rich family. For example:

... we’re talking about nannies. Staff employed by families, and wealthy families at that. (Respondent, James from Brisbane)

The majority of my friends and former colleagues who employ nannies use barely out of school children with no early childhood education qualifications and pay cash in hand at below minimum wage rates ... (Respondent, shaking my head)

Other respondents chose less flattering characterisations of the nanny, equating them with being ‘stupid’ and relabelled as ‘domestic staff’, as evident in the following texts:

[The problem with nannies is, why can’t they get better work? Do you want your child reared by someone who is too stupid to get a better job, what sort of rubbish will they fill your kids’ heads full of?] (Respondent, baby boomer)

... It would be a good way for well-off families to get a subsidised cleaner. Just rebadge them ‘the nanny’. An absurd idea open to all sorts of misuse. (Respondent, in reality)

Having ‘nannies’ is yet another form of sexism. Is not a nanny female? Low pay, young kids, or career single women looking after other people’s children, or women whose children have grown up and looking for extra income when they have no skills? (Respondent, CCB)

Some respondents who appeared to be in favour of the proposed scheme pointed out that nannies were not necessarily employed by ‘rich’ families but were simply an option selected by a group of working-class families, when child care that would be able to meet their particular needs was not provided, as evident in the following comments:

I hope that employing nannies doesn’t fit into your category of middle and upper class welfare? I live in the inner west and there are many of us who don’t earn enough on one income so we pool together our monies to employ a nanny to take care of our kids as there are no child care alternatives for children these ages. This way both parents can work to pay for our living expenses and those taxes which keep the government going. This is hardly middle or upper class welfare. (Respondent, Bennopnia)

I worked as a nanny in both London and Paris ... It is not always the rich that have nannies—some families were able to pool together and have one nanny look after three children ... (Respondent, MB)

Middle-class welfare

This theme had a 24 per cent connectivity to the main theme, which means that quite often the postings contained comments about both the definition and role of nanny and how this connected to the idea of middle-class welfare. Sub-themes identified within the larger theme of ‘middle-class welfare’ in order of salience were: attacks on the perceived welfare mentality; arguments that such a scheme would not be economically viable for the government; and the perception of ‘vote buying’ by the political party suggesting the scheme.

Many respondents were against the proposed scheme as they identified it as ‘middle-class welfare’, and that it is not the role of welfare nor the government to support what they perceived to be lifestyle choices made by the potential recipients of the benefit. The issue of having children as a lifestyle choice will be discussed further in the section on ‘pressures of modern living’.

I too am happy to pay my taxes for things that benefit all Australians such as roads, defence, pensions, infrastructure etc. What I am not happy to pay taxes for is for subsidised wealth redistribution from singles and childless couples to pay for lifestyle choices. (Respondent, Shane from Melbourne)

Wasting money on welfare is not the answer. Welfare should be used only as an automatic stabiliser. It is not a right nor even is it a privilege. It’s a waste. I just wish there was a party that doesn’t seem to support the persistent welfare state. (Respondent, Bender)

Other respondents not supportive of the proposed scheme saw this as a cynical move by the proposing political party of vote buying, in particular the targeting of families. The following comments reflected the politicisation of the proposal:

... It’s just spin to bolster Abbott’s standing with the female voter. (Respondent, Swifty)

Oh well, the Liberal party is buying votes again and I’m going to get a nanny, child benefits and the baby bonus! (Respondent, Anthony)

A third argument against the proposed scheme identified potential problems with funding of the scheme, with respondents labelling it as uneconomical, as evident in the following quotes:

There is a big flaw in logic here. You say the child care system is not working, as the govt is insisting on a 1:4 ratio. Now you pretty much want a govt subsidy to make it 1:1. Where are all these nannies supposed to come from? My guess is that only a small proportion
could afford it (people who it is out of reach for now, but not by much). While I understand your aims, I just cannot agree with taxpayer funds going to a small number of better-off parents. (Respondent, Lazy guy)

So a nanny subsidy would probably average out to paying one adult’s wages for caring for about 1.5 kids (compared to the 1 to 4 ratio in care). (Respondent, Peter)

**Pressures of modern living**

Many of the sub-themes within the two remaining themes, ‘pressures of modern living’ and ‘role of women in modern society’, were related in some aspect to the two most salient themes of the ‘definition and role of the nanny’ and the labelling of the proposed measure as ‘middle-class welfare’. The theme ‘pressure of modern living’ had a 47 per cent connectivity to the main theme, which means that quite often the postings contained comments about both the definition and role of ‘nanny’ and how this connected to the idea of pressures of modern living.

In the theme ‘pressures of modern living’ the two sub-themes that emerged were: having children as a lifestyle choice, and couples living beyond their means. Hence, this theme was very negatively disposed to the idea of nanny funding support as a childcare initiative. Respondents who were in favour of the proposed scheme cited reasons such as the necessity to remain in the workforce in order to maintain their careers.

The majority of responses that could be characterised within the sub-theme of having children as a lifestyle choice identified that in previous decades families made a choice to have children, taking personal financial responsibility for the decision rather than relying upon government assistance. Comments in this sub-theme are closely related to the comments referring to the middle-class welfare mentality of some parents. The following comments are typical of this type of posting:

*Pay for your kids yourself. If you can’t or don’t want to take time off work that is your problem. Sick of whiny Australians sticking their hands out.* (Respondent, Tunnels Newman)

*You are sorely mistaken if you think your grandparents didn’t monitor what they spent when bringing up children. It didn’t just ‘happen’. They lived within their means. There was a time when a family of four could live in a three-bedroom house with one bathroom and one living room.* (Respondent, Bender)

Respondents in favour of the scheme used personal examples to illustrate how they took financial responsibility for their decisions and highlighted the added benefit of remaining within the workforce to allow their careers to advance.

When I returned to work after having two children I employed a full-time nanny because I wanted my children to be in their own home, playing with their own toys and having special care if they were not well. I never expected any government handouts for what was a personal choice on my part. Almost all of my salary went to pay the nanny, which I thought was a fair investment, given that it allowed my career to continue without too long a break. (Respondent, em)

Other respondents in favour of the scheme pointed to their understanding that childcare centres operate on the model that parents work the standard 9 am to 5 pm. These respondents saw the nanny initiative as an option for workers who did not work these standard hours, as indicated in the following comments:

*We need childcare facilities that are flexible enough to accommodate different working hours ... This is about recognising that there are quite a few of us that have different work schedules from the standard hours, and having equal access to child care ...* (Respondent, Queanbeyanite)

*Nannies are a good solution for women in well-paid jobs who can’t drop their kids off after 8 am and collect them before 6 pm.* (Respondent, baby boomer)

The reality is daycare doesn’t suit all families, as I work by a calendar month; my work days aren’t set days of the week and most day care centres can’t accommodate changing days. A nanny is a great solution. If society accepts the subsidising of centre-based childcare, why not a nanny? The implication nannies are only for high-income earners is untrue. (Respondent, JJS)

**The role of women in modern society**

The theme ‘role of women in modern society’ had a 29 per cent connectivity to the main theme, which means that quite often the postings contained comments about both the definition and role of nanny and how this connected to the role of women in modern society. Many of the comments within the theme were targeted at the author of the stimulus article, and in particular criticising the line, ‘Some social conservatives would say women should really stay at home. Only that’s not a solution for anyone in the modern world, except those who are not really part of it anyway—hippies, heiresses, wives of the super rich and the catatonically unambitious.’ Some respondents labelled this line as ‘offensive’, ‘insulting’ and degrading to women who choose this as an option, as evident in the following comment:

*Offensive nonsense. If it suits your selfish worldview to paint stay at home mothers into four narrow boxes, go right ahead. Whatever helps you reconcile your decision to leave your children to be raised by other people. Staying home with your children is a valid
solution in the ‘modern world’ if you have a lifestyle that can be comfortably supported on one average income, different families have different priorities and if being with your children is your priority it is certainly possible. (Respondent, Mtns mama)

However, the sentiment of the line in the newspaper article—the traditional roles of men and women—were echoed in some comments, such as the following:

'It was never needed as the man would work, the women would look after the children. Nowadays things have changed. (Respondent, Jen)

'I’d rather the mother think about the costs of having a child prior to getting pregnant and not expect taxpayer support for what is a very personal decision. (Respondent, Anthony)

Discussion

The key themes that emerged from this analysis were: the role of women in Australian society; middle-class welfare; the role of nannies; and the pressures of modern living. Connections between the themes were evident.

The ‘definition and role of the nanny’ presented a snapshot understanding of the conception and characteristics of a nanny. The majority of respondents suggested that a nanny was only for a wealthy family and held limited educational qualifications. Some respondents also reported that nannies were ‘stupid’ as they could not find employment elsewhere. These comments suggest that the community may have a limited understanding of the role of the nanny, and the diversity in functions such a role may bring.

A small majority of respondents tried to challenge the traditional notions of a nanny. One particular respondent suggested she and others pooled money together for a nanny (family) and not a collective concern. From the opinions discussed nannies, it is interesting to note that three of the government on issues of child care.

While the article that stimulated this online discussion discussed nannies, it is interesting to note that three of the emergent themes were raised as issues by the office of Hon Kate Ellis MP , Minister for Employment Participation and Early Childhood and Child Care, who on 17 March 2013, announced flexible childcare options for modern families (Ellis, 2013). The three-point trial aims to provide overnight and weekend care for police, nurses and paramedics who are shift workers, a trial of flexible extended-hours weekday care and more out-of-school-hours care. These initiatives deal directly with the ‘pressures on modern families’, and the ‘role of women in modern society’, both themes identified in the analysis. It is also interesting to note that the issue of ‘middle-class welfare’ was addressed in the press release, ‘[Abbott] will not rule out cutting the Child Care Rebate, something that is deeply unsettling for working parents who rely on the Rebate to meet their child care costs’ (Ellis, 2013, p. 1). It bodes well for this
methodology of gaining public perceptions on a topic using internet discussion forums when the analysis reveals a high similarity with the issues that ministerial offices try to address in the policy formation.

Conclusion

This paper reveals the key messages in 113 comments posted to an online site in response to a newspaper article about a possible proposal by a politician to provide childcare rebate for nannies to assist working families in Australia. It has provided a snapshot in time insight into understandings of early childhood services, the role of women, middle-class welfare and the pressures of modern living. As policy initiatives are explored with a view to address the shortfall in childcare provision, it is important that policy-makers are aware of the issues surrounding raising children in Australia and the position from which members of the community respond to such proposals.

References


The leveraging influence of strategic alignment: What constitutes Early Childhood in current Australian policy debates?

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THIS PAPER ILLUSTRATES THE VALUE of strategic alignment as a model to navigate the current Australian education landscape, highlighting numerous changes to national overseeing bodies and their mandates. More importantly, it provides a critical review of recent government agency changes and policy agendas, making overt the existence of complex and incoherent ideas concerning the notion of early childhood. Based on the current analysis, it is concluded that no common conceptualisation exists at the national level of what constitutes early childhood and by default, early childhood education. This is a disturbing state of affairs, which makes the work of responsible statutory agencies, overseeing national bodies and state departments overseeing the implementation of new national policy directives very difficult.

Introduction

Sound policy is central to educational reform and the implementation of new directions. A major function of any government is to provide a vision and guidance for economic and social decision making. However, this process is hampered due to the complexity of factors influencing policy formulas, which range from unstable political ideologies to more pragmatic issues such as conceptual confusion or a lack of shared understandings. The issue of how education policy is generated in Australia and elsewhere remains largely unscrutinised and poorly understood among education professionals and the general public (Moses & Saenz, 2008). It can be expected that with the number of government and leadership changes that Australia has witnessed in recent times, ideological shifts and alliances occur that result in the alteration of their frames of reference with respect to policy goals and decisions. This paper is less concerned with reporting the impact of the ideological waves that have swept the national political landscape in recent years. Instead it is focused quite narrowly on the pertinent issue of the current conception of early childhood and early childhood education, taking a rather pragmatic stance. It is acknowledged, that, in an Australian context, the idea of education policy, practice and notably quality assurance is ‘arousing strong opinions and producing strongly contested empirical findings’ (OECD, 2012, p. 8). Hence, focusing on ‘hard facts’ concerning the conceptual underpinnings of recent education policy papers may provide a workable foundation for future theoretical and empirical work that will tie together ideological complexities, conceptual misalignment and resulting idiosyncratic implementation practices in various states and territories. To this end, the paper will focus on the issue of strategic alignment as a core concept.

Strategic alignment, although a widely used term in the business literature (Velcu, 2010) and increasingly also in the education literature (Jurse & Mulej, 2011; Kirkwood & Price, 2011), is still an elusive concept. Strategic alignment (SA) is often explained as constructive alignment (CA) in the education literature (Biggs, 2003). This concept of SA or CA seems to shape up to be one of the more important contemporary knowledge management concepts not only in business and industry, but also increasingly for the education sector. Here, both of these terms are used interchangeably. Nevertheless, the paper begins by exploring the meaning and connection of SA and CA. It seems that the ideas behind these two similar concepts are important and are particularly useful in exemplifying the current conceptual confusion concerning the notion of early childhood. The significance of SA as an important knowledge management tool will be demonstrated, using
in 2011, the national statutory agency responsible for early childhood education and care, the subsequent introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) and National Quality Standards (NQS), the development and nation-wide implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Australian Curriculum (AC), which is still ongoing (ACECQA, 2011). National innovative education policy directives require a deliberate plan, a common vision and language, but foremost conceptual clarity (Simpson & Flynn, 2007). The EYLF is a framework for early years learning targeting the education of children birth to age 5 and providing directions for child-centred pedagogy, focusing on children’s learning and development that is contextually relevant. The AC is a curriculum for Australian school children attending foundation year (typically from age 5) to Year 10 (typically age 15). Although, it is important to note the EYLF was the outcome of a first national attempt to harmonise education provisions in early childhood, it cannot be classed as a national curriculum. The AC will need, therefore, be acknowledged as the first national curriculum in Australian’s history, outlining subject areas and content to be learned by all Australian school children. It may appear that the arrangement is quite simple and straightforward and the integrated nature of the EYLF and the AC has been made explicit in numerous publications and presentations (ACARA, 2010, 2012; Connor, 2011). However, early childhood educators work across sectors and answer to a diverse number of governmental departments and agencies, making it extraordinarily difficult to understand political and policy relationships. One way to make overt, the complex nature of the latest initiatives for the Australian early childhood sector, is to acknowledge not only the antagonistic relationship between federal and state or territory governments, which is well documented (see Highfield & Bruns, 2012), but more importantly, to investigate the inconsistency of conceptions of what constitutes early childhood at a federal government level.

A short stroll down history lane

Over the past few years, various federal governments committed to pursuing an early childhood education and care agenda. For example, in 2000, Early Childhood Australia (ECA), the first national overseeing body was established by the Howard government under the auspice of the then Minister for Employment, Education and Youth Affairs, Hon. Dr. David Kemp. As an independent national organisation, ECA was charged ‘to act in the interest of young children aged birth to eight years of age [and] as a knowledge-broker linking quality-assured early childhood knowledge and information to those who need it’ (ECA, 2012, p. 1). This is not to deny the fact that a number of peak Australian early childhood bodies have existed for many decades. ECA was previously known as the Australian Early Childhood Association (AEC) and formerly the Australian Preschool Association (APA).

Strategic alignment and an ever changing political landscape

Knowledge is increasingly seen as an important national resource in today’s globalised, dynamic and technology-mediated world. Some scholars seem to imply that knowledge is becoming more important than other traditional assets, such as land and capital (Leydesdorff, 2011), because ‘knowledge is the most powerful engine of production’ (Kefela, 2010, p. 162). SA/CA is the idea of making possible a nation’s, sector’s or organisation’s success through the implementation of new directions. The way in which the new ideas are able to convey the arrangement of key concepts, principles and strategies that will result in successful renewal and change practices is often referred to as strategic or constructive alignment (Simon, Hatch & Youell, 2012). Writing a white paper on the importance of strategic alignment in business, Simon et al., (2012) explain:

One of the greatest management challenges of the 21st Century is guiding large and complex organisations towards their goals. Value creation … can only be assured if strategic intent flows uninterrupted from board room to shop floor. In this way individuals feel empowered to make decisions, confident in the knowledge that their actions are aligned with the overall goals of the organisation. Communication is at the heart of strategy delivery. A clearly articulated message, accompanied by succinct and relevant performance measures provides the baseline which nurtures and supports the desired management behaviours. (p. 12)

Similarly, Brabrand & Dahl (2007) note that CA in an education context is concerned with understanding ‘the system’ and what is needed is an in-depth investigation and understanding of the parts of the system and how they interact and influence each other.

SA may seem an abstract and elusive concept, removed from everyday practice. However, it is a useful concept in the quest for successful change implementation and renewal. A recent major change in the Australian early childhood education landscape has seen the establishment of Australia’s first Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
Eight years later, the Labor Rudd government was in power. In 2008, under the leadership of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), state and territory education ministers in collaboration with their federal counterparts released a landmark document, namely the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians*, which supersedes the 1999 Adelaide Declaration and the 1989 Hobart Declaration. This document makes explicit Australia’s current education goals and includes planned ‘commitment to action’ (MCEETYA, 2008), which ‘sets the directions for Australian schooling for the next ten years’ (Connor, 2011, p. 12) or until 2018.

Unsurprisingly, the Melbourne Declaration is named as a key document for the development and implementation of the EYLF and the AC. However, it was crafted by a ministerial council, which no longer exists. Now, this begs the question: ‘Why is this important?’ The answer is as simple as it is disturbing: Each new council has a new or updated portfolio, a new or renewed vision, a new frame of reference and new members. It is imperative that stakeholders are aware of and commit to the new direction the council is taking. In other words, SA is vital for successful planning and implementation of the vision and mission of any new council, department or agency. Conceptual clarity and communication are key ingredients for this work, facilitating the process along the communication continuum described by the State of Queensland (2011).

As shown in Figure 1, the first step in any reform is the provision of clear and unambiguous facts. However, as will be illustrated below, proclamation by various ministerial councils of what constitutes early childhood and early childhood education and care are quite unclear. A key problem of the inconsistent ideas outlined in various policy documents over the past few years seems to be the continuous ‘changing of the guards’ at national ministerial council level.

In January 2012, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announced the establishment of a new overseeing body, the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). This council, which replaced another council, namely the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA) was established on the 1 July 2009. Hence, this ministerial council survived for 30 months and was installed as a replacement for yet another council, namely MCEETYA, which was established in 1994 (MECCEDYA, 2009). As noted above, this round-about of ‘standing’ or ‘ministerial’ councils is not helpful in providing clear policy directions for early childhood education providers and teacher training institutions.

**Step one of the communication continuum: Awareness of facts**

In a 2009 companion document to the Melbourne Declaration, outlining MCEETYA’s four-year plan, it is stated that Australian state and territory governments have a key role in strengthening early childhood education.

*Governments have important roles to play in ensuring that children receive quality early childhood education and care. The period from birth through to eight years, especially the first three years, sets the foundation for every child’s social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. Early childhood education and care provides the basis for life and learning ... children who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue to further education and fully participate in employment and community life as adults.* (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 9)

It is a fact that close collaboration between state, territory and federal education ministers and agencies is imperative for success of any new Australian initiative. However, it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss this issue of federal and state relationships further. A simple fact is that commitment to, or buy-in for new policy directions on all levels of government, such as the successful implementation of the EYLF and the AC, is not possible unless there is conceptual clarity. Hence, it may be argued that the first step of the communication continuum outlined in Figure 1, may be the most critical for success. The extract from the 2009 companion document, to the Melbourne Declaration provided above seems to indicate that conceptual alignment concerning the idea of what constitutes early childhood education has not been achieved. For example, the statement ‘children who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school’ (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 9) undoubtedly implies that early childhood education (ECE) is different from ‘school education’ (SE). There is a stated boundary between ECE and SE, noting that ECE precedes SE (see Figure 2).
A key element in understanding the significance of the problem that this conceptual misalignment can cause is the delineation of boundaries between what constitutes early childhood and/or middle childhood and the importance attributed to different stages of childhood (i.e. school-aged child) and the education provision for each period. The conceptual confusion exemplified in the above quote (MCEETYA, 2009, p. 9) and illustrated in Figures 2–3 has the potential to have significant implications for the successful implementation of recent national early childhood education policy initiatives in general, such as the NQF and the NQS and the EYLF and the AC in particular.

Yet, MCEETYA no longer exists; hence, there is a need to clarify if the conflicting views concerning the definition of ECE expressed in the above document have been rectified by the ministerial council, which superseded it. The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) was specifically tasked, until early 2012, when the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEE) was launched, to provide guidance for Australian education, early childhood development and youth affairs.

In one of the commonly developed four-year plans, MCEECDYA (2010) outlines its portfolio responsibilities as follows:

Members of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) have policy responsibilities associated with early childhood development and schooling and for services to assist students to make successful transitions to training, further studies or employment. MCEECDYA wants all Australian children to have a high-quality, world-standard education to equip them for life in the 21st century. (p. 3)

A key report released by MCEECDYA (2010) which ‘highlights for policy-makers the key findings of a national survey of parents with children birth to age eight’ (p. 7) as part of COAG’s National Early Childhood Development Strategy provides interesting insights concerning employed conceptual models of early childhood and early childhood education and care. First, there is a clear shift in language from early childhood education by MCEECDYA to early childhood development by MCEECDYA. Second, despite the substitution of education with development there is a stated view that ECE is the period from birth to age eight. Hence, MCEECDYA seems to subscribe to an integrated model of early childhood belonging to non-formal, non-compulsory, and formal and compulsory schooling provisions (see Figure 3).

However, now that MCEECDYA has been scrapped in favour of Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEE), which met the first time on 20 April 2012 in Perth (SCSEE, 2012), it is important to understand this council’s frame of reference and view of early childhood and education provisions for this group of children. An extract from the terms of reference document (SCSEE, 2012) provides some possible insight into how the members of the council view early childhood and the relationship between ECE and SE:

The Council provides a forum through which strategic policy on school education and early childhood development can be coordinated at the national level, and through which information can be shared and resources used collaboratively towards the achievement of agreed objectives and priorities. By connecting early childhood development and child care with school education, the Council aims to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life. (SCSEE, 2012, p. 1)

The conception expressed by SCSEE of what constitutes early childhood seems to align more with Model 1 than Model 2 (see Figures 2 and 3). This view is reinforced by the change in terminology from ‘early childhood education and care’ by MEETYA (2009) to early childhood development (ECD) by the former and current councils. Hence, ECD and SE are perceived in a relationship of linear succession in which only SE has been granted the symbolic role of formal education in its title.

The problems of misalignment of conceptions of what constitutes a young child, education, and/or development may become even more prominent when it comes to questions of implementation of key policy documents, such as the NQF, NQS, the EYLF and the AC, and issues of accountability and assessment of young children’s learning.
Implications for practice

Referring back to the communication continuum (see Figure 1), it is imperative to commence with facts prior to speculating about possible implications. Hence, commonly known facts and those established in this paper concerning the conception of Australian early childhood and early childhood education are:

Fact 1.
Through COAG, all Australian governments have established early childhood education and development as a priority, committing in 2009 to a five-year National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education.

Fact 2.
Each new ministerial or standing council responsible for early childhood will have revised and/or new visions, values and frames of reference, which impact conceptualisations of what constitutes early childhood and early childhood education, development and care.

Fact 3.
There has been a clear shift in language from early childhood education as expressed by MEETYA in 2008 to early childhood development by MCEECDYA in 2010 and SCSEEC in 2012.

Fact 4.
Children from birth to eight years of age fit into pre-compulsory and compulsory education provisions, resulting in a mix of education offerings that cross political jurisdictions and government departments on the national and state levels.

Fact 5.
Implementation of the EYLF and the AC in early childhood settings will, most likely, be hampered not necessarily because of the fiscal tension between Australian federal and state or territory governments, but because of conceptual misalignment of what constitutes early childhood and early childhood education.

This paper has traced the birth and death of various ministerial councils over the years and documented their frames of reference. More importantly, it presented two competing conceptual models that have surfaced in the recent national policy documents released by these councils concerning early childhood education. Conceptual model 1 depicts early childhood as a period of life that precedes formal and compulsory education and conceptual model 2, which depicts early childhood as a period of life that ranges from ‘birth to age eight’ and spans both non-formal, pre-compulsory and formal and compulsory education provisions.

Future research

Future research will need to pick up the important issue of political ideology and its often destructive influence on policy-formulation and implementation. To this effect, a historical outline of how national and local early childhood education policy debates have been framed and rerouted over time, based on ideological positions and struggles, is needed to complement the current debate concerning conceptualisation and communication problems. Furthermore, future work should also pay close attention to current state-based curriculum frameworks and policy documents that underpin the work of the early childhood education and care sector in Australia to further highlight the complexity of the issues raised.

Conclusion

Based on the current analysis, it can be concluded that no common conceptualisation exists at the national level of what constitutes early childhood and by default, early childhood education. This is a disturbing state of affairs, which will make the work of the responsible statutory agencies (ACECQA and AITSL), overseeing national bodies (ECA) and state government departments overseeing the implementation of new national policy directives very difficult indeed. Too often there is the view that practitioners are unwilling to embrace new and innovative policy initiatives. However, buy-in and ownership of change is, so this paper has argued, virtually impossible in a policy environment that lacks conceptual clarity and thus strategic alignment.

References


Introduction

Over the last decade worldwide attention has been drawn to the health benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and infant (Australian Breastfeeding Association [ABA], 2011; Farquhar & Galtry, 2004; World Health Organization [WHO], 2009). However with increased numbers of women returning to work or study during the first 12 months of the infants’ life, the issue of how to best support breastfeeding becomes paramount. This qualitative study explored early childhood educators’ experiences of supporting breastfeeding mothers returning to work or study at a multi-campus Australian university. Five educators from two university-based workplace early childhood centres were interviewed. The findings from the educator interviews were analysed using Rogoff’s (2003) cultural-institutional focus of analysis. We found that promotion and support of breastfeeding for working mothers depends upon the inter-related factors of workplace/early childhood centre proximity, flexibility and communication. We argue that the development of mutual trust and confidence between the mother, early childhood centre and workplace are essential for enabling working women to breastfeed for longer.

Australia has followed guidelines from the World Health Organization, which recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed up to six months of age, and continue with mixed feeding to 12 months and beyond (Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy [ANBFS], 2009). Statistically, approximately 90 per cent of Australian women initiate breastfeeding immediately after the child’s birth but this number steadily decreases as the child grows older (ABA, 2001; ANBFS, 2009). By six months of age only 14 per cent are exclusively breastfed although a further 42 per cent receive some breastmilk (ANBFS, 2009). For many mothers, returning to work impacts their decision to continue to breastfeed (AIFS, 2010). To increase the numbers of women breastfeeding their babies after returning to work employers must take the needs of breastfeeding mothers seriously. There is a need for ‘family-friendly’ workplace policies including opportunities to retain attachment to the workplace through the provision of paid parental leave, flexible working hours, facilities for expressing milk, and easy access to quality early childhood settings (Baxter, 2008; Boyd, Thorpe & Taylor, 2010; Renda, Baxter & Alexander, 2009; Russell & Banks, 2011). This paper accentuates the need for supportive

Supporting breastfeeding through workplace, early childhood centre and family relations: Educators’ experiences

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BREASTFEEDING IS OF BENEFIT to both infants and mothers (World Health Organization [WHO], 2009). WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to the age of six months and continued breastfeeding up to two years of age. For mothers returning to work or study during the first 12 months of the infants’ life, the issue of how to best support breastfeeding becomes paramount. This qualitative study explored early childhood educators’ experiences of supporting breastfeeding mothers returning to work or study at a multi-campus Australian university. Five educators from two university-based workplace early childhood centres were interviewed. The findings from the educator interviews were analysed using Rogoff’s (2003) cultural-institutional focus of analysis. We found that promotion and support of breastfeeding for working mothers depends upon the inter-related factors of workplace/early childhood centre proximity, flexibility and communication. We argue that the development of mutual trust and confidence between the mother, early childhood centre and workplace are essential for enabling working women to breastfeed for longer.
and flexible work/study environments alongside quality early childhood centres to enable mothers and babies to benefit from breastfeeding continuing up to and beyond six months of age.

The importance of breastfeeding for mothers and their babies

Some of the most effective interventions to improve child health are optimal infant and child feeding practices (WHO, 2009). The critical window for optimum health throughout life is the child’s first two years. World attention has been drawn to the importance of breastfeeding, especially over the last decade. In 2002 WHO and UNICEF adopted the ‘Global strategy for infant and young child feeding’, which has had a profound effect on global awareness of the issues associated with infant nutrition (WHO, 2009).

Infants can be at risk of poor health and development if they are not breastfed, and breastfeeding also provides mothers with increased health benefits (Farquhar & Galtry, 2004; WHO, 2009). The Australian Breastfeeding Association endorses the joint WHO/UNICEF statement that ‘breastfeeding is an integral part of the reproductive process, the natural and ideal way of feeding the infant and a unique biological and emotional basis for child development’ (ABA Position Statement, 2009, p. 2). In a recent media release ABA stated that:

*More than 90 per cent of [Australian] mothers initiate breastfeeding yet the rates drop significantly, to just over 50 per cent when babies are six months old, compared to 80 per cent at six months in Norway—the goal set for Australia by the National Health and Medical Research Council Infant Feeding Guidelines. This large reduction in breastfeeding rates indicates that further laws are needed to support breastfeeding babies whether their mothers have returned to work or not (ABA, 2011, p. 1).*

Many mothers successfully combine breastfeeding with their return to work or study. In Australia as in many other industrialised nations, the numbers of women of childbearing age have increased in the workforce. With changes in the workplace more and more mothers return to work or study within the first 12 to 24 months after the birth of their baby. Data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) showed that 23 per cent of mothers of three- to five-month-old children in the study were employed (19 per cent were on paid or unpaid maternity or parental leave, and 3 per cent were on some other form of leave), and the remaining 55 per cent were not employed (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS], 2010). Employment rates rose significantly during the first year of a child’s life to 31 per cent with a six- to eight-month-old child; 40 per cent with a nine- to 11-month-old child and 45 per cent with a 12- to 14-month-old child (AIFS, 2010). A large proportion of the working mothers with very young children in the study were employed up to or less than 15 hours per week with few working full time (35 hours or more) per week (AIFS, 2010). The Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy (2009), in an effort to improve breastfeeding rates to six months and beyond, recommended increased access to parental leave and increased breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. In January 2011 Australia implemented federal statutory provision of 18 weeks of paid parental leave (Australian Government Family Assistance Office, 2011) which was not available at the time of the AIFS data gathering. This provision is likely to provide mothers with the ability to retain attachment to the workforce especially as many Australian women delay having children or decide not to have children at all because of the perceived limitations children place on women’s career opportunities (Boyd, 2011).

Breastfeeding mothers returning to work

Although many workplaces have ‘family-friendly entitlements’ such as flexible work hours, job sharing, and working from home (Baxter & Chesters, 2011) these are not guaranteed (Baxter, 2008) and the decision to continue breastfeeding when returning to work or study can be an issue. The need to consider breastfeeding requirements, including work hours, breaks, privacy for feeding or expressing milk, storage of breastmilk and the care of a young infant away from the mother, can be stressful. In the Australian work environment, these issues are commonly left for the individual employee to discuss and negotiate with an employer. For older infants it is often possible to fit breastfeeding times around work times as they have been introduced to other milk or food substitutes (Baxter, 2008) but this is more difficult for younger infants. The ABA has initiated a Breastfeeding-friendly Workplace consultancy service which aims to remove the workplace as a barrier to breastfeeding by providing a system of accreditation for supportive workplace environments. However, Cooklin, Donath and Amir (2008) argue that ‘further research is needed to understand which policy and workplace initiatives … have a measurable, positive effect’ (p. 623) on the ideal provision of breastfeeding an infant for the first six months. In addition, mothers are likely to engage in paid work more securely if they feel the care, wellbeing and development of their child is occurring in a high-quality childcare environment (Boyd, Thorpe & Taylor, 2010). Accessing high-quality child care can be challenging especially when accessibility and affordability are considered (Renda, Baxter & Alexander, 2009).

Workplace early childhood centres

Workplace-based early childhood centres are often viewed as an ideal provision of a family-friendly employer. Renda, Baxter and Alexander (2009) found access to workplace child care and thoughts about breastfeeding were often brought together. Mothers participating in their study
commented that they would have been willing to work longer hours and return to work earlier if workplace child care had been an option. However few employers are able to provide such services and the majority of mothers returning to work or study while their infants are under 12 months of age need to source their own form of formal or informal child care. Some mothers turn to family members for support, with relatives such as the child’s grandparents acting as caregivers during the day; others opt for more formal arrangements and face the dilemma of choosing between child care close to home or close to work. Previous relations with centre staff as well as particular centre policies and practices are other factors considered by families when choosing care for their infants (Renda, Baxter & Alexander, 2009).

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Belonging, Being and Becoming (DEEWR, 2009), emphasises the significant effect that educators’ practices, including the relationships they form with children and families, have on the successful involvement and learning of young children. For the infant and his or her family this includes respecting the family’s decisions around infant feeding practices and providing flexible environments so that these choices can be enacted. The foci of this article are educators’ perceptions and experiences of providing support for breastfeeding mothers with infants attending workplace-based early childhood centres.

Theoretical framework

Breastfeeding is a cultural practice, and it is also a social practice. Like all cultural practices, breastfeeding does not stand alone but rather fits together with other social practices such as ways of child rearing, the privacy of the body, beauty, approaches to health and wellbeing, as well as work/study commitments. All of these factors influence the visibility or invisibility, as well as the length of time, infants are breastfed. Rogoff (2011, p. 20) uses the term ‘constellations of cultural practices’ when describing the way in which cultural practices such as infant feeding and employment form a coherent yet changing and shifting approach to life.

This study was framed within sociocultural theory. Originating with the work of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues (Vygotsky, 1987, 1997, 1999), sociocultural theory affords a way to investigate the cultural, social and historical aspects of phenomena, not as separate entities but as an interrelated unity where ‘the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 50). Culture is not static and Vygotsky’s dialectical methodology allows for phenomena to be studied in process, motion, struggle and change within relational contexts. It recognises that ‘individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other’ (original emphasis, Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). Rogoff’s conceptualisation of people’s development occurring through their changing participation in sociocultural activities is of particular relevance in this study. She developed a series of analytical lenses whereby ‘personal, interpersonal, and cultural aspects of human activity are conceived as different analytic views of ongoing, mutually constituted processes’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51).

The individual as the focus of analysis

This first analytical lens has the individual foregrounded although not separated from the interpersonal and cultural-institutional aspects of the activity. Information about the individual and their participation in the activity under investigation is of prime interest here. The interpersonal and cultural-institutional aspects of the activity are not attended to in detail when using this analytical lens, but remain available in the background. For example, the baby involved in the activity of feeding becomes the focus of analysis with the baby’s mother and the cultural-institutional surroundings and practices of the home or early childhood centre in the background.

The interpersonal focus of analysis

An interpersonal focus of analysis involves attending to the relations between the individual and other people involved in the activity. The focus is on what the people are doing together, how they are participating with, and relating to, each other. An example related to this study would be that the baby’s mother and the other adults and children in the early childhood centre become the focus of the analysis as they relate to the baby and as the baby relates to them. A general sense of the baby as an individual and the cultural-institutional aspects of the activity are important to assist in the framing of the activity, but they remain in the background.

The cultural-institutional focus of analysis

A cultural-institutional focus of analysis centres on the particular processes, practices and activities that occur in particular institutions. In this approach the workplace, early childhood centre and the family can all be understood as cultural institutions. Each institution has developed particular cultural practices over time and it is possible to investigate the history, transformation, and present application of them. However a problem occurs if the researcher neglects to recognise the role of the people involved in the institutional practice, therefore a general sense of the individual and interpersonal aspects of the cultural-institutional practice are also needed. For the purposes of this article the cultural-institutional focus of analysis has been foregrounded, in particular the institution of the early childhood centre.
Research method and design

This cross-disciplinary interpretive case study was undertaken by researchers from the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the Faculty of Education. Cross-disciplinary studies bring richness and depth to the field of research as researchers share their knowledge and perspectives throughout the various phases of the study (Larson, Landers & Begg, 2011). The focus on more holistic cross-disciplinary views of the world have been seen to advance knowledge and move away from what might be termed ‘reductionist’ methods of single scientific disciplines. Cross-disciplinary research has the potential to address complex challenges in dynamic ways and is increasingly becoming ‘standard’ within the fields of health care and health policy (Aboelela et al., 2007). In this study the researchers’ experience and knowledge in midwifery and education were found to bring richness to the research through the various phases of the study from planning, data generation, analysis and writing for publication. It was the interweaving of perspectives and skills through the development of a study design and methodology that was not limited to any one field that made this study interdisciplinary in nature (Aboelela et al., 2007).

Aim

The study sought to investigate how mothers returning to work or study were supported in their decisions regarding infant feeding, particularly breastfeeding during the first 12 months of their child’s life. Of particular interest were the support systems (for example, family, community, workplace and early childhood centre) that were available and what individual, institutional and societal factors influence mothers’ decisions regarding infant feeding practices.

Sample

Participants in the larger research of which this study is a part were mothers who had returned to work or study at a multi-campus university within the first 12 months of the birth of their baby, and early childhood educators working in long day care early childhood centres associated with the university. The focus of this article is data generated by the five early childhood educators; the data generated by the mothers is reported separately. Our sample is limited to one university and two associated early childhood centres, therefore it is not possible to generalise our findings to other organisations or industries.

Data generation

Five early childhood educators from two campus-based early childhood centres participated in individual one-hour interviews. After approval had been granted by the centre managers all educators working with infants and their families were provided with explanatory statements and consent forms. Educators then self-selected to become involved in the research by returning the forms to the researchers. The semi-structured interviews took place on campus at or near the early childhood facility during staff non-contact hours. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Before the study commenced ethical approval was received from the University Human Ethics Committee. To protect the participants’ identities, pseudonyms have been used throughout this article.

Data analysis

After the recorded interviews with the educators were transcribed members of the research team undertook initial analysis of the data individually. Each researcher read the transcripts, undertaking a ‘common sense’ approach to analysis (Hedegaard, 2008) where they noted initial impressions. The next phase of analysis began with the researchers coming together to discuss these initial findings, and to undertake a theoretical analysis focusing on the cultural-institutional practices, processes and activities (Rogoff, 2003) enacted by the early childhood educators and their relations with the practices of the family and the mother’s place of employment. It was during this phase of data analysis that rich conversations developed between the researchers as they brought their knowledge and experience of midwifery and education together. A number of categories and subcategories emerged which were then compared across data sets, checking for patterns, similarities and differences, and this iterative process led to the themes discussed in this article. It was during this process that Figure 1 (presented in the next section of this paper) was developed.

Findings and discussion

Findings from this study highlighted three interconnected characteristics of ‘breastfeeding-friendly’ workplace early childhood centres. First the proximity of the centre to the workplace; second the flexibility of the centre and workplace in allowing mothers to transit between the two environments as necessary to feed their children; and third the regular, open communication that occurred between the mother and the centre staff. These three characteristics are discussed in this section, however it is important to note that although each are foregrounded one at a time it is not possible to isolate any one characteristic as they are all interrelated (see Figure 1, right-hand box). In addition the three institutions or settings (workplace, early childhood centre and family) discussed in this paper are also interrelated as illustrated in Figure 1, left-hand box. The arrows at the top and bottom of the figure indicate the dynamic holistic relations occurring between the ‘breastfeeding-friendly’ characteristics and the institutions.
Successful relations between the workplace, centre and family characterised by proximity, flexibility and communication were found to provide environments that supported breastfeeding mothers returning to work during the first 12 months of the infant’s life. Other studies of breastfeeding practices in early childhood centres have found general support for breastfeeding, however this was often found to be more passive than active (Javanparast et al., 2012) with authors suggesting that breastfeeding promotion should be an ‘integral part of childcare centre training’ (p. 1276). In addition participants in these studies have mostly been situated in ‘stand-alone’ centres (Cameron et al., 2012; Javanparast et al., 2012). This study provides a snapshot of educators’ experiences in workplace-based centres which provide a further perspective on these important issues.

**Proximity**

As with other studies (for example Javanparast et al., 2012) the physical proximity of the early childhood centre to the workplace was found to be of importance to both the early childhood educators and the mothers. The two university workplace early childhood centres at the focus of this study (Banksia Drive and Wattle Place) were located immediately adjacent to their respective university campuses. The Banksia Drive Centre was a large purpose-built facility with a car park area immediately across the road from the main university campus. The Wattle Place Centre was a business property that had been renovated to accommodate the needs of an early childhood centre. It was located in a shopping precinct immediately behind a smaller campus of the same university; there were a few car park spaces available outside the entrance to the centre. Both centres were within walking distance of their respective campuses; however the campus associated with the Banksia Drive Centre covered a very wide area and parents often preferred to use a car to move between the campus and the early childhood centre. Parents tended to walk between the university and the Wattle Place Centre.

An educator at Banksia Drive mentioned, ‘It’s easy [for mothers] to get here by car, just around the roundabout and into the car park.’ The Banksia Drive Centre had recently relocated from another part of the campus and the educators expressed the value of having a large car park with easy access, as previously limited access had sometimes hindered mothers who were coming to the centre to feed an infant during a break from work. However at the new building there was no problem parking at the centre, but at times educators knew that mothers had problems returning to work since parking spaces back on campus were at a premium, especially in the middle of the day—and mothers were not able to return to the same parking spot.

Lunch breaks were a popular time for mothers to visit the centres to feed their infants and play with the children. A Wattle Place educator explained that:

… some of the mothers are breastfeeding, so they come and breastfeed their children, they come at their lunchtime, play with them and interact … we have one mother that comes in every day and spends time with her son, she’s still breastfeeding.
While mothers with infants attending Wattle Place would normally arrange specific times to return to the centre to feed their infants, such as breaks and lunchtimes, the staff at Banksia Drive would often phone the mothers when infants were showing signs of hunger. One educator at Banksia Drive mentioned that this arrangement worked really well:

... most of our parents who are breastfeeding tend to work at the university so they are only half a street away. They are usually here within five to ten minutes ... I prefer them to be breastfed to be honest because I want mum to come and spend time with her child.

The strategies of planned breaktime visits and ‘demand’ phone-call visits supported the breastfeeding mothers at the different centres and were found to be effective. The staff at both centres encouraged mothers to visit the centre during the day and interact with their infants and young children when possible and stay for as long as they chose. Although it might appear that this would be disruptive to the centre routines (having parents entering and leaving the centre during the day), because it was a regular practice parents, children, and staff accepted the practice as a normal routine. At Wattle Place educators commented that:

... we have got lots of regular parents who come in on their lunchbreak because they work so close by ... the children are used to it and it’s been a consistent routine, they don’t get confused about going home with the parents when they see them, they know that they are there for the rest of the afternoon because it’s become such a regular habit or pattern ... it’s a culture we have created.

These daily interactions between the parents and the children often began when a mother was breastfeeding her infant and continued as the child grew older and was no longer breastfed.

**Flexibility**

The flexibility of centre staff provided a relaxed and unhurried environment for the mothers and their infants. Staff were aware that at times breastfeeding a child may take some time and on other occasions the feed could be quite fast. An educator at Banksia Drive made the comment that she did not mind ‘however long it takes, it doesn’t worry us, it doesn’t matter if it takes three minutes or half an hour ... the child is with mum and she will let us know when she is ready to leave’.

The layout of both centres provides a place for mothers to feed their infants. Both centres were flexible with their arrangements allowing mothers to make choices about the levels of comfort and privacy they preferred. An educator at Wattle Place explained:

I[The mums usually go into the sleep-room, and we’ve got an armchair in there and then the mums can pop them right into the cots which are right there in the sleep room.

Whereas an educator at Banksia Drive shared that mothers would often feed in the more public space of the playroom:

[We] have a big red couch and sometimes there will be two mums feeding there in the playroom.

Sometimes educators at Banksia Drive would sit and chat with the mums and infants, and at other times the mothers would:

... talk to the children [saying for example] ‘yes I am here feeding my baby, my baby’s name is George, this is my breast, this is where the milk comes from’ sometimes you hear them talking like that.

An educator at Banksia Drive also told of the situation where one mother would visit to feed her infant and her older child who also attended the centre, but in a different room, would come and sit on the couch next to her and read a book while she was feeding. Other families might not choose to do that but for this family group, breastfeeding at the centre was a special family time. Respecting the choices of different families and allowing for flexibility was seen by staff at both centres as creating low-stress environments that allowed families to make choices about their infant feeding practices. Other studies in both Australia and the United States expressed similar findings suggesting educators genuinely supported parental choice regarding infant feeding methods (Cameron et al., 2012).

Providing time for both the infant and the mother to settle at the centre was one of the fundamental principles of the orientation programs run by the centres. Here again flexibility was an important consideration with some parents choosing to make two or three centre visits before their children began attending regularly, and other parents choosing to visit for much longer periods. An educator at Wattle Place told of one mother with a five-month-old child:

... they had a really long orientation program and he had little visits and spent short periods of time here before he became full-time and before she went back to work full-time as well ... in the beginning she would spend all day here with him ... the dad would drop them off on his way to work and then pick them up as he was on his way home at the end of the day ... that went on for about a month.

However, the usual length of orientation for both centres was two or three quite short visits as explained by an educator at Banksia Drive:

... usually two hours each session. We usually allow three sessions but it can go for longer if the parents feel they need to or we find the child is not settling and then slowly increase the hours the children are here.

For some mothers breastfeeding at the centre was not something they chose to do. There might have been a range of reasons for this, including their particular work schedule. Instead they would provide bottles of expressed milk so
that it was available for their children while in care. This arrangement was explained by an educator at Banksia Drive:

[Sometimes they have the bottle [of expressed milk], sometimes it comes in frozen and it’s kept in the freezer … sometimes it comes in fresh from the morning or the night before and when the child shows signs of being hungry we then warm it up in the bottle warmer.

Similar flexible arrangements were available for mothers at Wattle Place.

Communication

Staff at both centres emphasised the importance of clear two-way communication between the mothers and the staff. Knowing the daily needs of the infants and mothers was paramount and provided a framework that reduced stress for the infant, family, and staff. An educator at Banksia Drive commented on how ‘the mums usually tell us the signs that she is aware of that the child is starting to feel hungry’. Once an infant showed that they were getting hungry, a staff member would phone the child’s mother to come over to the centre to breastfeed. This system worked well when mothers were able to be flexible and leave the workplace with little notice. Being able to quickly notify the mother and for her to be able to leave work relieved feelings of stress for the infant (as the child’s needs were quickly met), the mother (who was confident that she would be contacted when needed), and the educator (knowing the child would not be distressed). However, at times work commitments and changes in the daily routine made it difficult or impossible for the mothers to come immediately.

When changes occurred in a mother’s daily routine, daily communication with the centre staff provided a way of negotiating what would be best for the mother and the infant. On these occasions mothers might:

… supply a bottle in the morning or say to us ‘sorry I am not available to breastfeed today because of something’, they are going somewhere, a meeting, ‘here’s a bottle, just feed the bottle … or … I know my child usually feeds at 12.30 I will come then, if it’s earlier unfortunately I’m not available try and stretch it out’ … or they say ‘just give me a call and leave a message and I’ll try and come as soon as I can’ (Educator, Banksia Drive).

Reciprocal flexibility on the part of the centre staff and the mothers was important when providing for the child’s health and wellbeing, particularly when negotiating the ever-changing workplace and centre environments.

Frequently, deep relations developed between mothers and centre staff, especially with those mothers who regularly attended the centre to breastfeed their children.

Often the mothers would just come in and it would be quiet, sleep time or whatever and then the mums would come and they’d sit on the big couches and talk … it was such a good opportunity to develop a deeper relationship with those parents and those children when they came in to feed their children (Educator, Wattle Place).

The close relations formed between the centre staff and families were of benefit to all and often the close relations formed during a period of breastfeeding would continue to develop as the child grew older. An educator from Wattle Place explained that the centre had a culture of parents visiting during the day to interact with their children, and the age of the child was not important, as the practice continued with children until they left the centre.

Promoting the fact that an early childhood centre is ‘breastfeeding friendly’ is suggested by Akitt (2007) as being helpful when mothers are making choices about enrolling infants in early childhood centres. Discussion with mothers on enrolment as well as visiting a centre and observing other mothers feeding their children are further ways of establishing that a centre is ‘breastfeeding friendly’. An example of how Wattle Place promotes their ‘breastfeeding friendly’ policy was explained by an educator:

[W]e would always say ‘you can come and feed your child and parents will be surprised and go ‘oh really, can I oh that’s a bonus’, that’s how it all began … now it is just normal practice and yeah we mention it but they see another parent doing it, that’s the best way, and they can see all the benefits.

Educators from Wattle Place explained that it took time for their message of the centre being ‘breastfeeding friendly’ to become known in the local community. Initially, it took staff and children time to adjust to mothers coming in and out of the centre during the day to feed their children, but over time this became a normal part of centre practice.

A written centre policy that is available for prospective parents and educators, that authenticates the ‘breastfeeding friendly’ message as well as provides a framework for collaboration between mothers and centre staff, can be helpful (Akitt, 2007). Farquhar and Galtry (2003) emphasise the importance of creating a centre culture where breastfeeding is a normal and usual part of centre practice rather than something unusual or strange. There is a wealth of literature available about the benefits of breastfeeding that can be made available to mothers and centre staff, placing this type of information in common areas of the centre is another way to express that the centre is ‘breastfeeding friendly’.
Conclusion

There is strong evidence of the health benefits for women and infants when breastfeeding continues beyond six months, however for many mothers returning to work or study during the first year of their infant’s life makes the choice to continue to breastfeed challenging. The current study highlighted the inter-relations of workplace and centre proximity, flexibility and communication as ways of supporting working mothers to breastfeed their infants for longer. Particularly noticeable in the current study was the effort early childhood educators made to ensure their centres were breastfeeding friendly by creating centre cultures, practices, policies, and supportive environments that attempted to remove or reduce barriers that might inhibit a mother’s choice to breastfeed her infant. Educators positively supported the choices mothers made, assisting them to succeed at both working and breastfeeding.

Thoughts about breastfeeding and workplace-based child care have been highlighted in other studies, however this option is not always readily available and mothers in other studies have commented that they would have been willing to work longer hours and return to work earlier if workplace child care had been an option (Renda, Baxter & Alexander, 2009). Mothers having access to their infants during the working day are much more likely to continue breastfeeding for longer than those without access (Fein, Mandal & Roe, 2008). With the strong emphasis on health, wellbeing, secure relationships and family pedagogy evident in the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) opportunities exist for educators and centres to assess and develop policies and practices to support working mothers who choose to breastfeed their infants. By working together towards family-centred practices early childhood settings and workplaces can support working mothers to breastfeed infants for longer, leading to positive outcomes for the infant and the mother, in the workplace, the early childhood centre and the family.

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References


‘Perezhivanie’ in group settings: A cultural-historical reading of emotion regulation

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THERE IS AN OVERWHELMING AMOUNT of research on emotion regulation (e.g. Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Koole, 2010). Much of this work has centred on experimental studies rather than group settings such as childcare centres and kindergartens. In drawing upon cultural-historical concepts, this paper presents a theoretical discussion on how fairytales help children to collectively develop emotion regulation. We specifically explore emotions and cognition during the telling, re-telling, and role-playing of fairytales. It is argued that fairytales can act as a pedagogical framework for helping children become more conscious of emotions as they role play. Cultural-historical theory is used to give a new perspective on both fairytales and emotion regulation.

Introduction

It is well understood in practice that when children are emotionally competent and have emotion regulation, a harmonious kindergarten environment results because children work more effectively together in these group settings. Denham, Bassett and Zinsser (2012) point out that young children’s emotional competence ‘is crucial for social and academic (i.e. school) success’ (p. 1). But this is also true of children in playgroups, kindergartens and childcare centres. Despite the avalanche of research into emotion regulation (e.g. Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011; Holodynski, 2009; Koole, 2010), little has been directed towards group settings and the role of educators and how they frame experiences to support children’s development of emotions (Ahn, 2005; Davies et al., 2010; Galyer and Evans, 2001). According to Denham, Bassett and Zinsser (2012) most research examines individual resilience, with ‘next to nothing published about how early childhood educators promote such emotional competence’ (original emphasis; p. 2). Yet most international curricula focus on emotional development. For instance, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) in Australia (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) explicitly addresses emotional development. Consequently, more needs to be understood about supporting emotion regulation in group settings.

Within the scope of this paper, we limit ourselves to emotion regulation because central to a sociocultural or cultural-historical reading of emotions is how children with the support of their social and material environment come to understand their emotions as particular feeling states. That is, how an emotion becomes named and expressed is directly shaped by the particular cultural communities from within which the child lives and develops (Cole et al., 2002; Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011). Emotions can only be understood in the context of social others who shape and are shaped by the social situation of children’s development. This perspective of emotions is counter-intuitive to a developmental view of emotions where the focus is on examining the child socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically (sometimes spiritually) as discretely conceptualised areas of development. We see this in documents, such as the Developmental Milestones and the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards (Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd, NSW, n.d.).

A cultural-historical reading cannot separate how a child thinks about their feeling state or how thinking is refracted

1 The term ‘cultural-historical’ is foregrounded in this paper rather than the more commonly known term of ‘sociocultural’ because this more accurately reflects the theoretical work as named by Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskians in Russia.
through emotional lenses (Vygotsky, 1994). That is, how I feel about my learning, influences how I learn; how my learning is emotionally charged influences how I think. It is this **dialectical reading** of emotions that underpins a cultural-historical view of emotions (see also Warren, Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2011), and it is this view of emotion regulation that we discuss in this paper.

We begin this paper with a brief overview of how we define emotion regulation in the context of curricula, followed by a cultural-historical theoretical discussion of this area, concluding with a pedagogical framework for supporting emotion regulation in group settings where educators use fairytales as a cultural device for supporting emotion regulation.

### Curriculum and the development of emotion regulation

Most early childhood frameworks or curricula around the world focus on some form of emotional development (McLachlan, Fleer & Edwards, 2013). For example, all of the outcomes outlined in the EYLF allude to the importance of emotion regulation as a key to successful interactions and learning. The introduction makes reference to Goal 2 of the **Melbourne Declaration of Education Goals for Young Australians**, emphasising the importance of success in learning; confidence in self and citizenship, all of which are underpinned by the skills and competence of emotional regulation. The EYLF specifically details the outcomes and goals as:

- **Children have a strong sense of identity:** Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect (Outcome 1).
- **Children are connected with and contribute to their world:** Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation (Outcome 2).
- **Children have a strong sense of wellbeing:** Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing (Outcome 3).
- **Children are effective communicators:** Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes (Outcome 5) (DEEWR, 2009).

Emotional competence has been conceptualised by Denham, Bassett and Zinsser (2012) as the ‘regulation of emotional expressiveness and experience when necessary, and knowledge of their own and other’s emotions’ (p. 1), and this view sits comfortably with the outcomes of the EYLF and many international curricula (see McLachlan, Fleer & Edwards, 2013). Despite the huge body of literature discussing and researching emotional competence, particularly emotion regulation, we note that emotion regulation in group settings is still an under-theorised and researched area:

> *What the field needs is coordinated efforts to move from understanding parental socialisation of emotion to teachers’ contributions [and through this] to move toward a theory of action that could inform early childhood* (Denham, Bassett & Zinsser, 2012, p. 2).

Cultural-historical theory moves the lens from individual emotion regulation to considering the broader social and cultural context of children in group settings.

### A cultural-historical theorisation of emotion regulation and pedagogy

Although a great deal has been written on the social and emotional competence of children in the early years (see Barblett & Maloney, 2010), and traditionally emotional competence has included a range of elements, such as academic competence, emotion regulation, self-esteem, social interaction or pro-social behaviour, and cooperation (Amato, 1987), there is no standard definition. In research on emotions we find that happiness, sadness, and anger are usually the focus and therefore prevalent in the literature (see Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). In more recent times, cross-cultural studies have expanded our understandings to include shame, empathy, and culturally-specific concepts, such as interdependence, dependence, autonomy, and self-control (Holodynski & Friedlmeier, 2006). These latter studies suggest that there are culturally specific ways of not just naming raw emotions expressed by children, but social contexts which mediate emotions differently, suggesting that the interplay between emotions and context realise very different ways for children to learn to self-regulate. In conceptualising emotions as a social and cultural construction, rather than as a universal construct, we are more aligned with the central principles in many international curricula, such as Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2007) and the EYLF, where there is a strong acknowledgment of a diversity of cultural and social contexts for giving meaning to emotions for children. A cultural-historical reading of emotions actively positions adults as having a central role in children’s development of emotions.

In group settings, emotion regulation is likely to be experienced and supported differently to that which takes place in the home (Cole et al., 2009; Denham, Bassett & Zinsser, 2012; Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2005). But how this diversity plays out in group settings, such as childcare centres, playgroups and kindergartens, really matters for early childhood educators who seek to create harmonious and productive learning contexts in their centres. We believe the use of fairytales in these group settings offers a way forward for teachers to be able to bring together the potential range of ways that children have learned to express themselves at home, so that emotion regulation is further developed in productive and positive...
ways. That is, rather than concentrating on emotional expressions as they arise in group settings as teachable moments (for example, when some children are upset or have experienced trauma), fairytales can be used to collectively, and in a sustained way, explore emotions with children (Bozhovich, 2009; Kravtsova, 2006, 2008). This is supportive of the concept of intentional teaching where the educator thoughtfully plans for shared and sustained conversations with children within play-based programs (see Siraj-Blatchford, 2007).

In a cultural-historical reading of emotion regulation we see that emotions regulate actions and actions regulate emotions (Holodynski, 2009, p. 146). Holodynski (2009) has suggested that:

*Emotion regulation is the ability to modify emotions in terms of their quality, intensity, frequency, course, and expression. In this case, it is not actions that are being regulated by emotions, but the individual (or another person) is performing an action with the goal of modifying the emotion* (Holodynski, 2009, p. 145).

This cultural-historical perspective invites us to consider the relations between emotions (Vygotsky, 1925/1971, 1933/1999) and cognition (Vygotsky, 1934/1987), but also to look at the place of imagination (Vygotsky, 1933/1966, 1930/2004), in order to better understand emotion regulation. Research from Russia has shown that fairytales offer a way of making visible the unity of emotions and cognition (i.e. Zaporozhets, 1986/2002) within imaginary situations. In this context, emotion regulation has been theorised differently to that found in the Western literature (i.e. Bettelheim, 1976).

But these relations between imagination, cognition and emotions are complex. Vygotsky (1933/1999) suggested that it is a mistake to think that ‘intellect’ gradually replaces ‘feelings as intellectual development progresses’ (p. 152), or as ‘gradually fading away to almost complete demise’ (p. 152), as though emotions were a ‘dying breed that is gradually being displaced on the stage of history as civilisation and culture grow’ (p. 152). Rather, emotions always exist in all cognitive and imaginative contexts. We see this in early childhood education programs that use fairytales where children role-play fairytale characters, such as when they act out being the wolf or Little Red Riding Hood. With the support of the educator, children enter into the imaginary situation of the fairytale, imagining the characters and acting out the plot, with all the drama and emotional tension that is experienced and eventually resolved.

It is through the social relations between the players that emotions are expressed, named and interpreted as feelings—particularly when an early childhood educator works together with the children to realise the roles and to overcome the problems the characters experience in the fairytale plot. That is, emotions become conscious through these social relations. This plays out strongly during the role play of fairytales and fantasy play when early childhood educators are involved. We begin with an example of an imaginary situation in order to discuss how emotions become conscious as feeling states. Brendan, aged four years and five months, was very popular as a playmate in the kindergarten group but would often lash out at his peers during play for no obvious reason. In discussion with Brendan it became clear that he felt tired and overwhelmed by the demands of the others and needed some space of his own. Rather than disciplining and withdrawing him from the play, staff created a ‘nest’ for Brendan in a more private area and furnished this with soft toys, books and small figures to support imaginative play. When Brendan showed signs of stress, staff would suggest that he might be feeling stressed and that he may wish to ‘fly’ into his nest. After some time with staff helping Brendan to name his emotions as feelings, staff were delighted to see Brendan run through the playroom at great speed to leap into his nest, rather than resort to violence. The nest was both a physical and imaginary space for Brendan to feel safe and to deal with his feelings, where emotion regulation was afforded through the support structures put in place. This strategy was continued by the school. Brendan attended the following year and Brendan’s level of emotion regulation also helped him to develop greater empathy towards others, and he quickly became a support person for new children arriving at the school. At the inter-psychological level (between people and situations) these kinds of social interactions and emotional expressions are not necessarily conscious. It is through the intentional pedagogical framing of the educator that we believe that the emotions are more likely to become conscious—that is, to be understood at the intra-psychological level (individual understanding of feeling state).

Holodynski (2009) argues that ‘emotional experiences are mediated by the interpretations of their caregivers’ (p. 149). We see this in group settings in the example of *Snow White and the seven dwarfs*, when the educator reads or tells the story and then invites the children to role-play the characters and the plot, supporting them in this process. It is through the repeated reading or retelling of the story that children experience the emotions prevalent in the story, such as jealousy and love. That is, children experience these emotions in the story initially at the inter-psychological level. It is through the intentional teaching of the educator that over time children come to name and conceptualise these emotions as feeling states, such as love and jealousy. When children can do this, they are thought to be interacting with feeling at the intra-psychological level (that is, with conscious understanding). A cultural-historical perspective suggests that emotions are learned through social context and are usually mediated by others (Baker, Fenning & Crnic, 2011; Geangu, Benga, Stahl & Striano, 2011; Holodynski, 2009) as noted in the example of Brendan (in an everyday fantasy situation in his centre) and in the example of using fairytales.
The dialectical relations between inter-psychological and intra-psychological functioning helps explain the consciousness of emotions that we see occurring within social settings where fairytales are being role-played (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, 1933/1999). Central here is the pedagogical practices of the early childhood educator. In Table 1 below we show examples of pedagogical practices that support emotion regulation in the context of fairytales. In Column 1 we give an example of common fairytales that could lend themselves to emotion regulation. Column 2 introduces the specific EYLF outcomes as a case example of how curricula can be aligned with, and supportive of, the imaginary and emotional situation of the particular fairytale introduced by the educator, and Column 3 focuses on the relations between the real situation and the imaginary situation where the child can consciously explore emotions. The emotional significance attached to aspects of the fairytale, or specifically created by the early childhood educator, is illustrated in Column 4, while Column 5 draws out elements of emotional reflection possible within the specific fairytale. Together, the five columns act as a pedagogical framework for developing emotion regulation in group settings.

We now draw upon these cultural-historical concepts to discuss the elements of the framework, examining each column and theorising the significance of fairytales for emotion regulation in group settings.

**Dynamic relations between real and imaginary worlds:** The genre of fairytales keeps in constant tension the real and imagined world through a unique rhythm that over repeated readings and performances becomes predictable. It is through repetition of storytelling and dramatisation that children create their own imaginary situation or ‘play world’, reliving story narratives with the support of their teachers (see Baumer, Ferholt & Lecusay, 2005; Hakkarainen, 2004; Lindqvist, 1995; Rainio, 2008). El’koninova (1999/2002) has stated that:

*As children listen to a story, they imitate the actions of the characters, repeat what they say, experience the various episodes as real, and cry. Sometimes they try to ‘switch off’ if they are empathising too strongly (they pinch themselves; they turn away from the storyteller; they ask that certain parts of the text be omitted, etc.) (p. 40).*

These experiences of fairytales linked with the formulation of a problem scenario to solve, such as trying out and then

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fairytale</th>
<th>EYLF</th>
<th>Dynamic relations between real and imaginary worlds</th>
<th>Emotional significance</th>
<th>Emotional reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Snow White and the seven dwarfs | Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity: Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect | 1. Joint adult–child dramatisation of fairytale  
2. General discussion of different emotions in the fairytale  
3. Drawings of the fairytale—as a storyboard  
4. Use of texts with teacher and child modelling of emotional expressions as particular feeling states | Educator perspective: Exaggerated facial and bodily expressions of emotions shown by teacher during dramatisation of fairytale  
Child perspective: Exploring different ways of expressing emotions in role play | Jealousy  
Love  
Sadness  
Grief |
| Hansel and Gretel              | Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world: Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation | 1. Discussion of feelings both positive and negative, such as fear, curiosity  
2. Problem solving ideas in dramatic play, ‘what if?’; ‘what else could you do?’  
3. Use of figurines or puppets  
4. Use of texts | Educator perspective: Creating a diorama of the fairytale, using figures which have different facial expressions  
Child perspective: Children create a storyboard which depicts the emotional expression of the different fairytale characters at different times in the story plot (emotional journey) | Curiosity  
Fear  
Triumph  
Security |
expanding upon the strategies for keeping Snow White safe from the wicked stepmother, allow children to move from the imaginary world to the real world, discussing both strategies and the emotions inherent in the story, such as fear, safety, and love. Through this children have the potential to learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect as discussed in most international curricula, but noted specifically in the EYLF (Outcome 1).

El’koninova (1999/2002) has captured the features of the fairytale genre as:

... cultural texts into external and internal, ascribing magic properties to the external. A border represented in a text by a river (bridge, forest, seashore, etc.) divides space into a place close to where the main character is usually situated (internal) and a place that is distant from it (external). But there is one more division that is active for both the narrator and the listener: a place close to them (internal)—it cannot be contiguous with the magical space—and a place far from them (a distant kingdom) that borders on the magical world. This place is internal for the text of the story, but for the listener it is a part of the external make-believe world. Thus, both models function at the same time (p. 475/pp. 39–40).

The use of figurines or small puppets offers children the opportunity to explore some of these emotions at arm’s length. By manipulating the figurines they can verbalise their feelings without taking on the emotions as they would if they were the actor. The figures position children at the border between the real world and the imaginary world. The children’s arms, acting as the mechanism for engagement or withdrawal from the emotionally charged play, give the child agency in the emotions that are being explored. In fantasy and fairytale play children flicker between the imaginary situation and the real world, but with the aid of the puppets or figurines, they have a greater distance or ‘yard stick’ for moving into and out of the imaginary situation they are playing out. That is, the child can physically flicker between the real world into the imaginary world with the puppet or figurines—controlling how long they stay within emotionally charged situations (for example, self-managing how long the figurines will interact with the wicked witch in Hansel and Gretel). We also see this flickering through the example of Marcus, aged five years, who was distressed by his parents’ separation and had begun soiling when visiting his father’s home. Marcus used the sand tray (the water trolley filled with sand, and a collection of natural and building materials with a range of non-descript figures) for play to act out his real feelings by entering the imaginary world of play, where he created a forest outside the town and took the ‘naughty father’ to be lost (as is also frequently noted in fairytale, such as Hansel and Gretel). Marcus repeatedly played this imaginary situation over several weeks, while his teacher encouraged him to talk about the feelings of the characters as he played in the sand tray. Eventually Marcus resolved the crisis by sending an imaginary taxi/cab to bring the father figure back. He also stopped soiling when on access visits.

*Emotional reflection:* Zaporozhets (1994/2005) states that ‘emotion is not itself an activation process, but a special form of reflection of reality used for the mental control of activation’ (p. 53). In fairytale the child experiences moral situations and ‘begins to evaluate his [sic] own actions, thus passing to the stage of self-regulating behavior’ (p. 53). Emotional reflection captures how children and educators together come to understand specific emotions as a feeling state, such as fear, while also drawing upon these feeling states to study everyday situations found within the fairytale event. We see this when the child is listening to the story, anticipating the pending problem (for example, the wicked stepmother presenting the poison apple to Snow White), where the emotional tension builds (e.g. anxiety) (see also, lakovleva, 1997/2003). Here we may find that the central character in the fairytale may be unconcerned (for example, Snow White accepting the apple), not suspecting anything: ‘[O]nly in part do we experience the effects as they are given to the characters in a drama; most of the time we experience them not with, but because of, the characters’ (Vygotsky, 1925/1971, p. 208). A level of emotional reflection emerges as a result of the telling and re-telling, or reading and re-reading, or role-playing of fairytale. The fairytale becomes well-known by the children and the emotions that are expressed through the characters in the plot can be uncovered through discussion and role play (Smagorinsky, 2011). Through this experience in group role play children also have the possibility to develop a sense of belonging and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active participation as found in most international curricula, but as specifically discussed in the EYLF (Outcome 2).

*Emotional significance:* In group settings, multiple perspectives and interaction sequences are brought to bear (Valotton & Ayoub, 2010) on the interpretation and role-playing of fairytale, such as *Snow White and the seven dwarfs*. Early childhood educators in the telling or reading of fairytale emotionally charge aspects of the storyline to make them come alive (see Baumer, Ferholt & Lecusay, 2005), and often the emotional response or expression is foregrounded, as seen when the educator tells the children about the prince seeing Snow White in the glass coffin and how he falls in love (for example, a hand on the heart gesture), or discussing the grief of the seven dwarfs, who decide to place Snow White in the glass coffin. Through exaggerated or explicit references to emotions, children notice emotions and begin to recognise their own raw emotions as particular feeling states that matter in their cultural communities. This is helpful for children in recognising the feeling state of others, thus supporting children in learning to interact in
relation to others with care, empathy and respect (see EYLF Outcome 1).

Fairytales always include feelings in the plot, which educators can give emotional significance—showing and naming them as particular feelings. Some emotions, such as jealousy, are far more difficult to show physically, while others are easier, such as feeling sad. In research with infants, Holodynski (2009) has found that adults can and do make links between the ‘emotional trigger, emotional expression, and the action that led to the construction of situation-dependent, emotion-specific appraisal’ (p. 150). Educators who explore fairytales within group settings can make conscious the emotions in the story, and in relation to how children might be feeling or have felt in the past. An awareness of one’s emotional state potentially supports children to successfully self-regulate, and hence interact more effectively with peers (see also Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the EYLF).

It is through educators using fairytales in their programs that children are provided with the possibilities for experiencing emotional tension, engagement, and self-awareness in emotionally imaginative situations. It is through the pedagogical framing of fairytales as planned by the early childhood educator that emotional competence is supported and emotion regulation becomes possible, thus actively supporting the outcomes of most international curricula, including the EYLF. Fairytales provide a rich and engaging context for young children to explore emotions, think more consciously about their emotions as particular feelings, and through this, to self-regulate.

Vygotsky (1994) introduced the term ‘perezhivanie’ to capture the idea of the unity of thinking and emotions. This term captures the dynamic system of the educator, the educator’s program as illustrated here through fairytales, and the children within group settings (rather than only the family). In a cultural-historical reading of emotions we go beyond a universal view of emotions, where emotions are one of the domains that teachers observe and plan for in children’s development. Rather, we conceptualise emotions in unity with thinking (Bell & Wolfe, 2004).

In a cultural-historical reading of emotions as ‘perezhivanie’, children come to think about their emotions as particular feeling states, such as fear or joy. How these emotions come to be expressed, named and understood by children as particular feeling states, is totally dependent upon the cultural community in which the child(ren) live. Fairytales provide educators with an intentionally planned genre and cultural tool (see Table 1) for affording a sustained interaction about emotions. It is this dynamic system, conceptualised and created by the educator, where we find the unity of emotions and thinking. These pedagogically created conditions lead to a conscious understanding of emotions.

It is acknowledged that emotion regulation is but one dimension of children’s emotional development (in unity with thinking). It is the dialectical relations between emotions and feelings (thinking about one’s expressed emotions) within a pedagogical system of human relations, captured as the Vygotskian concept of ‘perezhivanie’, that give new directions for educators. As shown in this section, fairytales create the dynamic conditions for the development of emotions in unity with thinking in group settings.

Conclusion

With more children attending child care than ever before (see OECD, 2006) the role of the educator in developing emotion regulation has become increasingly important. In this theoretical paper we have brought together some of the concepts associated with the development of emotions in unity with thinking. We have specifically drawn upon cultural-historical theory because it offers new ideas for how emotions and cognition (Ferholt, 2010) act in unity to support the emotional development of children during the telling, reading and role-playing of fairytales.

In this paper we theorised the place of fairytales for supporting emotion regulation in group settings, where fairytales offer a cultural device for making conscious children’s feeling state. That is, we discussed how fairytale characters react to the emotionally charged situations they meet in the story plot (for example, feeling frightened by the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood), and how educators create the conditions for children to more explicitly explore emotions consciously. Through this the unity of affect and cognition becomes evident in ways not previously discussed in the emotion regulation literature (Bell & Wolfe, 2004; De Houwer & Hermans, 2010; Gimenez-Dasi et al., 2009). By consciously considering emotions in fairytales, a cognitive orientation to emotions results, which we believe supports children’s emotion regulation.

In this paper we noted that fairytales can have an evaluative function for children, and educators can plan programs which emotionally energise children’s play so that the feelings and emotions can be made visible and conscious to children. We have also discussed how cultural-historical theory can support the outcomes of curricula, such as the EYLF, in realising the development of emotions in unity with thinking. As argued by Sumsion, Barnes, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy and Stonehouse (2009), the EYLF supports a range of theoretical tools for informing practice. A cultural-historical reading of emotion regulation supports this important agenda, and gives educators another tool for their pedagogical toolkit.

2 ‘Perezhivanie’ is a Russian term. It is acknowledged as being difficult to translate into English (see Smagorinsky, 2011). As such, the term has been introduced at the end of this paper so that the reader has had an opportunity to see through the example of fairytales the complexity of this concept.
References


