

CHAPTER



PLAYING WITH DIVERSITY:

LEARNING STORIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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KEY TERMS:

cultural diversity

culturally responsive pedagogy

funds of knowledge

interculturalism

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we explore findings from a qualitative study of culturally responsive teaching and learning in three diverse early childhood education (ECE) centres in New Zealand. Multicultural learning and teaching is a foundational value expressed within the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki* stresses

[...] the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection (p. 9).

The curriculum highlights the importance for teachers to support the cultural identity of all children through ensuring that programs and resources are sensitive and responsive to the different cultures and heritages among the families of the children attending that service. It places emphasis on communication, setting out as an aim that 'The languages and symbols of [the children's] own and other cultures are promoted and protected' (p. 72).

Multicultural education is an urgent educational priority as New Zealand's population becomes more culturally and ethnically diverse. The Ministry of Education's (2013) annual statistics of children attending early childhood services showed that, in 2013, around 59% of enrolments in licensed services identified as European/Pākehā. Māori children comprised 22% of all enrolments, 7% were Pasifika, 9% were Asian and 2% belonged to other or unknown ethnic groups. Over the last ten years, the Asian ethnic group has increased by 90%, representing the largest increase in enrolments of any ethnic group. Pasifika and Māori enrolments increased by 58% and 36%, respectively. These changes are reflective of shifting demographics in New Zealand's wider population.

Recently writers (Gundara & Portera, 2008; Guo, 2012; Miller & Petriwskyj, 2013; Portera, 2008) have critiqued the focus of multicultural education on co-existence, celebration of diversity and the absorption of minority cultural groups into a dominant group educational system. Rather, they argue that deficit assumptions about students from minority groups need to be challenged, and that interactions with students, families and community need to explore complexity and difference to an end that is open, rather than predetermined by teachers. Miller and Petriwskyj (2013) argue that intercultural education requires teachers to engage at a deep level with diverse cultures and world views and particularly to resist and address unequal power relationships. Portera (2008) states: 'Intercultural education offers the opportunity to "show" real cultural differences, to compare and exchange them, in a word, to *interact*: action in the activity; a compulsory principle in every educational relationship.' (2008, p. 488). In New Zealand, the Te Kotahitanga project carried out in secondary schools (Bishop et al., 2012) aimed to improve Māori educational achievement, and demonstrates the need for teachers to recognise and incorporate differing cultural knowledges within the curriculum, to address structural imbalances in power, and to position themselves in ways that remove deficit thinking (about students, families, schools, the education system and society) and enable them 'to offer solutions instead of reinforcing problems and barriers' (Bishop, 2010, p. 69).

In this chapter, we draw on empirical evidence from a research study of teaching and learning in three culturally diverse early childhood settings in New Zealand. Through discussion of children's drawings, observations and learning stories¹ of teaching and learning episodes within these early childhood settings, we highlight ways in which teachers based their practice on responsive, reciprocal relationships. It shows how they co-constructed a curriculum inclusive of the funds of knowledge of their families and children, and factors that supported them to do this. The underlying premise of a 'funds of knowledge' approach to theorising families, communities and early childhood settings is that 'people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge'(Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005, pp. ix-x).

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The study reported in this chapter built on prior research conducted by the authors. Mitchell and Ouko (2012) carried out a community research project with refugee families living in Hamilton to investigate their aspirations for children and experiences of early childhood education in New Zealand. These families wanted ECE to offer space for social and cultural connectedness. They wanted the opportunity for themselves and their children to learn English. They also wanted ECE to support a sense of agency so that they and their children could contribute to society. This study showed a gap between what these families hoped for from early childhood services and what they experienced. Bateman's (2013) study of everyday teacher-child interactions in New Zealand used conversation analysis to provide insights into how detailed 'turns' at talk between young children and their teachers practically implement the principles of *Te Whāriki*. The study revealed how teachers ask open-ended questions to prompt children's thinking and how each child's specific interests were attended to through responding to their answers in a way that was respectful of their unique funds of knowledge. Both the frameworks of investigating family and community funds of knowledge and conversation analysis were used in designing the study that is reported here (Mitchell et al., 2015).

In the present study, research participants included two teachers and three case study children and their families from three culturally diverse early childhood settings in New Zealand: a centre for refugee children and families (Carol White Family Centre), a centre with a predominantly Pasifika community (Mangere East Family Service Centre), and a centre with a predominantly Asian community (Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten). The teachers and researchers worked within a social constructivist theoretical frame (Creswell, 2013; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998), which holds that concepts are socially constructed within an historical and cultural context. The teachers articulated their centre's values in a focus group meeting and the selected children and teachers were video recorded to reveal how those values were played out during everyday practice. Family members of the case study children were then invited to comment on their child's video footage. Through interviews, the researchers sought to explore the perspectives of teachers and families, enabling

1 A learning story is a form of narrative assessment. It focuses on dispositions that offer the basis for identities that are positive about learning and able to support further learning.

greater understanding of the wider context of effective culturally responsive teaching and learning for all participating members.

The project was subject to the University of Waikato's Ethics procedures, stipulated in the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations. It had research ethics approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. Parents gave written consent for approval to use their child's drawings, learning stories, and quotes. Teachers spoke to children to gain assent for publication of their drawings and quotes.

The Carol White Family Centre is a refugee family centre, the only one of its kind in New Zealand. Children are Burmese, Sudanese, Afghani, Iraqi, Ethiopian, Burundian, Iranian, Japanese, Kurdish, European and Nigerian. Within the same ethnic group, families may be from different religions. Most of the centre children have parents attending the Refugee Education and Families (REAF) program, which operates in buildings adjacent to the centre.

Children at Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten are Pākehā New Zealand, Māori, Chinese, Indian, Tongan, Samoan, Malaysian, Taiwanese, South African and French. The teachers said that many parents and grandparents had concerns about their child's English language learning and parents who were interviewed spoke of language and socialisation as being predominant aspirations.

Children at Mangere East Family Service Centre are Māori, Tongan, Samoan, New Zealand European/Pākehā, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian and Indian. The centre also offers a range of services including parent advice and support, the Home Interaction Programme Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), Social Workers in Schools, counselling, and health services.

ENGAGING WITH FAMILY CULTURAL VALUES AND EDUCATIONAL VIEWS: RELATIONSHIP-BASED TEACHING

The idea that the role of teachers is relationship-based is 'at the heart of the Te Whāriki curriculum' (Peters, 2009, p. 23), and this idea informed the strategies teachers developed for intercultural exchange of ideas within their own teaching team and with families. Teachers took responsibility for finding out about child/family/community values, interests and cultural knowledge, and catering for these within their curriculum.

There is a game, an 'interaction', between people with different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds in which the aim is not assimilation or fusion, but encounter, communication, dialogue, contact, in which roles and limits are clear, but the end is open (Portera, 2008).

Working constructively with families whose educational views and cultural values are different from those of the teachers required great care and thoughtfulness. The teachers in this study held an understanding that values are not universally shared; that understanding different family values is necessary; and that conscious thought needs to be given to how family values are catered for. Each centre had different ways of working with this issue; each found out about parent aspirations and expectations and catered for these by foregrounding common values, adaptations of their program and reasoned explanation.

Families attending the Carol White Family Centre had varying and different experiences of education in their home countries. Some parents in the community, especially women, are illiterate. They do not read and write their own language and they did not have opportunity to go to school. Others experienced an education system very different from New Zealand's. Hence, expectations about what an education program should look like and what parents want for their children at this centre are diverse. 'Some people are very very happy with what's here and other people are a little bit sceptical because they think we're too soft. They are used to being hit [and reprimanded].' (Supervisor).

To address varying ideas and aspirations, teachers made opportunities to talk about how education works at the centre and for families to tell teachers how they experience education. The employment of teachers and teacher aides from the same cultural backgrounds as families was especially helpful in this process. Teachers are in a particularly good position to explain differences in New Zealand's systems and practices when they themselves are from the home countries of the families and understand their cultures and education systems.

The crucial foundation for intercultural understanding is the alignment of fundamental human values that are fostered in the centre and home. All parents interviewed identified with common values in home and the centre, and these were visible in the relationships and are foregrounded in documented learning stories. Robyn, the centre's supervisor, spoke of this alignment when she went into the homes to talk with families about video-recording their child for the research project:

Philosophically they're very close to us—the belief in the happiness, the kindness, those intrinsic values, they value really highly. And when they see their children operating and [...] being engaged in those types of behaviours they are really, really thrilled. [...] When we went to the homes, every single home articulated those values (Carol White Supervisor).

Other significant ways in which teachers cater for parent aspirations are through adaptations to the education program, through inviting family participation in the program, and through making visible and explaining desired learning. In the project, adaptations to the teaching environment were particularly evident with regard to structured teaching opportunities, which many families desired.

We make sure that we have some formality in here to meet [parent needs], especially the writing and reading expectations. So we make sure that everything is available—lined paper, pencils for more formal [writing] and models of letters [...] but we would have that anyway because we have a whole range [of activities]. And parents, we invite them [to teach] so they will sit with their children when they come, and do ABC (Carol White Supervisor).

The parents reportedly took great pleasure and pride in teaching their own children, and the children co-operated well. Explanations showed a balanced curriculum and learning through play.

In other conversations, teachers explained what they do and why, in order to generate parental understanding. For example, water play was described as being a source of tension with some families. These families are from land-locked countries where there may not be an abundance of

water and where water is not something children play with. To connect with families about the significance of these types of learning experiences, the teachers discussed with them the fact that New Zealand is an island and the importance of children learning confidence when interacting with water, and that water play can be soothing for upset or stressed children. 'And the families are very happy because the children are happy.'

Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten teachers Jacqui and Wendy described how they used deliberate processes to find out about the families' values. Communication about values was seen to be helped by having staff able to speak the languages of families. When families enrol their children, teachers asked them, in their home language where appropriate, what they wanted for their children. This is a common practice in many ECE centres in New Zealand, but more than that, these teachers consciously planned for discussions with groups of parents to talk about values—their own values as teachers and how these might meet with family values—and what that looks like with different groups of people. A common values base of respect and collaboration attracts families. These teachers recognised the complexity and plurality of values that existed. They could be characterised as having inquiring attitudes, a willingness to be uncertain and to investigate.

In a follow-up to the research project, the teachers carried out a review of language and culture in their kindergarten, gathering survey data from parents and inviting children to draw their ideas about relationships. They asked children the following questions:

1. How do you feel when someone speaks in their own language to you?
2. How do you feel when you meet someone who doesn't speak your language?

Children's responses showed they felt they could communicate with others and saw themselves as having the potential to learn each other's languages and to negotiate different understandings. Sometimes children found language issues frustrating.

Reflection

Ask yourself the same questions the children were asked: How did you feel when someone speaks in their own language to you? How do you feel when you meet someone who doesn't speak your language? The answers may help you develop an understanding of how your students, present or future, may feel.

Through these deliberate means to find out and review, these teachers were able to better understand and engage with family aspirations and educational values. The review highlighted areas for them to extend. They decided to be more intentional about incorporating stories and songs from different cultures into large group experiences and to include more Māori stories and traditional tales. They resolved also to prepare a booklet for parents of bilingual learners that talks through some of the issues parents have concerns about (e.g., mixing of languages) and what research says about this.

FOSTERING MULTILINGUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Many children in the three settings were learning two, three or more languages at the same time. A key finding from the research is the value of employing teachers who have culturally diverse backgrounds that complement the cultural diversity of the attending children and families in order to provide equitable teaching and learning opportunities for all children. The linguistic skills of these culturally diverse teachers support and encourage children with limited English language to fully engage with teaching and learning experiences.

Currently teachers from this Mangere East Family Service Centre are from Niue (speaker of English, Niuean, Tongan and Samoan and uses basic te reo Māori), and New Zealand (speakers of English, Māori, and some limited Pasifika languages). Families at this Centre valued their children learning Māori language.

The teachers were observed responding to this family value in their everyday interactions with children as they included the use of Māori language in ways that were relevant to the context. Such an example is noted here where the child initiates an interaction with the teacher, Leanne, and Leanne follows the child's interest whilst also incorporating Māori language.

Leanne We could probably make kites (looks up towards the sky).

Child Look, look (holds up a stencil to Leanne).

Leanne Yes, shapes (looks at the child's picture). How many shapes do you have? (points to the child's picture).

Child (Counts very quietly out of audio range whilst pointing to her picture)

Leanne Sixteen! Let's count. One ... two ...

Child Two (Leanne and the child count together up to ten).

Child Ten.

Leanne Ten! Tahi, rua, toru, wha, rima, ono, whitu, waru, iwa, tekau. (Counts to ten in Māori.) That's a lot. That is a lot isn't it.

In this example, the child initiates the interaction by attending to a specific object and activity as she shows the teacher the stencil she has been using to draw shapes with. Even though the use of stencils as a pedagogical tool could be perceived as restrictive, as they limit drawing to the shape that the stencil dictates, here we see how the stencil is attended to as an object with which to progress an interaction focusing on the child's interests. The teacher notices the child's interest and recognises it as an opportunity for a teaching and learning episode, shown in her next action as she responds to the activity that the child has been engaged with. She attends to the child's interest by looking at her picture and positively affirming her efforts, then extending on the learning by involving counting, first in English and then in Māori. Through following the child's interest in such a way the teacher engages in a bilingual knowledge exchange, reaffirming the value of the language and being respectful to the aspirations identified by the child's family. This type of interaction also demonstrates how the teachers practically implement the bilingual

Linda Mitchell and Amanda Bateman

immersion aspirations of *Te Whāriki*, where 'The use of the Māori language and creative arts in the programme should be encouraged, and staff should be supported in learning the language and in understanding issues relating to being bilingual' (1996, p. 73). Here, the teacher's knowledge of Māori language enabled her to provide a rich language learning environment for the children she was interacting with.

The learning story below is from Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten. Currently teachers at this kindergarten are from Southern India (speaker of Tamil, Hindi, English); Sri Lanka (speaker of Sinhalese, English); Hong Kong (speaker of Cantonese, English, Mandarin); New Zealand (speaker of English, Mandarin and Cantonese); and China (speaker of Mandarin, Cantonese and English). This employment of culturally varied staff has been important in communicating with families and children, and going beyond surface levels in developing cross-cultural understanding as families, staff and children all learn from each other. It illustrates how a commitment to and use of first languages of learners can develop the learning of second and other languages.

The teachers, Jacqui and Wendy, regarded it as very important that the child had a strong home language as a foundation for learning English and other languages.

Our job is to advocate for their home language as much as possible (Jacqui).

Greeting children with different languages is an important practice, helping children know that languages are 'accepted, valued and used' (Wendy).

Wendy also regarded her responsibility as offering a balance of speaking in Mandarin or Cantonese when this was the child's language and English, because in some environments teachers would not speak Chinese languages. These ideals were visible in the video clips and in documented assessments for children.

Qin Qin, aged four, was described by his grandparents as speaking mainly Cantonese at home, but when his grandparents were in China he was able to swap to Mandarin when he spoke to grandpa and to Cantonese when he spoke to grandma. He notices when someone is 'kiwi' and says 'Hello' in English. Qin Qin means diligent—this was said to be a good name for him because he is persistent. Qin Qin's proficiency in communicating in more than one language as appropriate is demonstrated in the learning story written by Wendy. The story exemplifies how, through recording and photographing Qin Qin in these social interactions, his linguistic competence is noticed, recognised and given value through the teacher's response. As well, the story expresses Wendy's understanding that Qin Qin's activities are contributing to the development of formal writing and reading, not through structured teaching but through play and interaction. These touch on an aspiration for families in regard to language and communication.

Later Wendy wrote the same story for Qin Qin in Chinese characters with his English words written in English, thereby helping Qin Qin explore a link between written language and spoken word in two languages.

Wendy's learning story of reading a Chinese book to Lucia and Chloe conveys the value for all children of learning the languages of each other. Stuart McNaughton suggests that, through family activities, children 'develop ideas and values about literacy practices and activities and their personal and social identity' (1995, p. 17). We extend this idea to the activities within the

FIGURE 4.1 Learning story: The multilingual Qin Qin

The Multilingual Qin Qin

29th July 2013

By Wendy



Qin Qin, today your best buddy Brendon did not come to kindy. You looked a little lonely in the beginning of the day but soon you started to find new friends. You played with Katelyn first who was new to kindy. You spoke in Cantonese to her and really looked after her. Later you and Ayzal set up an ice-cream shop. You eagerly offered it to Cullen in English: “Want ice cream? Want ice cream?” You left the sandpit for a while and found a rock in the garden. You saw Chen Chen and asked him in Mandarin Chinese “Do you want it?” Chen Chen said no and then you turned to Kumaran and offered it again in English to him.

Wendy’s reflection:

The central function of language is communication. Qin Qin is a confident communicator and has shown amazing linguistic skills when he approaches children with different languages. Qin Qin has demonstrated his social competence when he interacts with children around him with ease and confidence. Qin Qin is good at using drawing to represent his ideas and is also starting to show interest in letters and writing.

I am so proud of the progress he’s made!

kindergarten where reading activities at the kindergarten were helping children develop ideas and values about literacy activities in relation to themselves and others. Wendy’s reflections relate the learning to an idea that education is multilingual and supports children to learn to appreciate difference and diversity.

The program at the Carol White Family Centre is grounded and enhanced by knowledge and awareness of the refugee experience and the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). An overarching value is that there must be dignity and justice for all. Robyn, the centre director, spoke about the centre philosophy in a workshop at the start of the research project.

We pay special attention to supporting and enhancing children’s languages and cultures and enabling children, and then their families to develop a strong, rich identity which we believe bridges the past, and the present, and the future learning for all of us.

Linda Mitchell and Amanda Bateman

FIGURE 4.2 Learning story: Reading a Chinese book**Reading a Chinese Book**

Feb. 2014

By Wendy



Lucia you brought out 2 books from inside for me to read. One of them was a Chinese song book. I invited you to observe the Chinese characters and explained to you that this was a Chinese book. “I can speak Chinese. Maybe there are some songs that I could sing” I told you. You listened carefully to my singing and as soon as I finished you would flip the pages and look for the next one. While we were doing this, Chloe came over to see – I guess she recognised the song because Chinese is also her home language. It was lovely that Chen Chen and Ryan joined me singing one of the songs.

Wendy’s reflection:

We live in a multi-ethnic society which also is reflected in our kindergarten. Here children can hear different languages spoken and experience a little bit of different cultures. It is great to see Lucia develop interest and pleasure in discovering an unfamiliar language that is different from home. This can be the first place where children develop some early concepts of the value of appreciating diversity and differences.

For these reasons having a team of qualified, registered and bilingual and multilingual teachers is very important. Htwe Htwe, who is Burmese, spoke of being able to communicate with Burmese children on a deep level and explain teaching and learning to families who feel confident in talking to her. Communication at a deep level strengthens family engagement. Like Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten, this employment of staff who can communicate with families in their home language and who have cultural understanding has supported communication and intercultural learning.

The Communication strand of *Te Whāriki* takes a broad view of communication, having as an overall aim that the ‘languages and symbols of [children’s] own and other cultures are promoted and protected’. *Te Whāriki* portrays language as multimodal. ‘Language does not exist only of words, sentences and stories: it includes the language of images, art, dance, drama, mathematics,

movement, rhythm and music.’ Hence the goals for the Communication strand are for children to experience an environment where:

- they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures;
- they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 72).

The Carol White Family Centre offers rich opportunities for verbal and non-verbal communication to flourish. A video recording from the centre shows how Htwe Htwe uses her cultural knowledge of dancing to respond to children’s interest in music and dance. In order to analyse the video, we researchers used the framework described in the Ministry of Education resource, *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2005) of ‘noticing, recognising and responding’, after Bronwen Cowie’s description in her work on assessment in science classrooms (Cowie, 2000).

These three processes are progressive filters. Teachers *notice* a great deal as they work with children, and they *recognise* some of what they notice as learning. They will *respond* to a selection of what they recognise (Book 1, p. 6).

In this excerpt, the children collectively *show their interest* in the music and dancing, as they ask Htwe Htwe, their teacher, to put the music on for them so that they can play at dancing. The teacher *notices* the children’s interest, and *recognises* that the situation is an opportunity for teaching and learning cultural values through the transmission of cultural knowledge about a particular culture’s dance. Htwe Htwe demonstrates this: she *responds* by putting the requested music on for the children and joining in with the dancing and the specific hand movements associated with the dance. In doing so, she collaborates with the children in celebrating the funds of cultural knowledge that they bring with them to the centre regarding the dance of their culture, and also adds her own knowledge of the dance. She engages enthusiastically with them as they communicate their solidarity in their collaborative dance moves. When another child who is not of Burmese descent approaches, Htwe Htwe encourages his interest in the dancing too, passing on new knowledge that involves cultural practices. Htwe Htwe is implementing *Te Whāriki* as she notices, recognises and responds to the children’s willingness to contribute to the learning environment, ‘Each child’s culture is included in the programme through song, language, pictures, playthings, and dance’ (1996, p. 67).

As part of the research process, Htwe Htwe was asked if she would like to view the video footage of her interactions with the children, including this episode of dance, which she accepted. On looking at the video, Htwe Htwe notices that the child knows the right steps, can move his hands, feet and body. In Burma, dancing is part of the culture and both boys and girls are taught how to dance from a young age. Children as young as six months are already taught how to use their hands. This child has learned her dancing steps from home. Her co-ordination is amazing. Feet, legs, hands, eyes, shoulders, and hips come together in a choreographed dance. Htwe Htwe

points out that dancing is an important activity in the Burmese calendar of activities. The Carol White Family Centre has performances on the Burmese New Year, which is celebrated in the second week of April. Robyn notices the role adults play in encouraging the child and the high value the centre places on children's home cultures.

The Burmese parents who were interviewed particularly liked the celebration of Burmese culture and use of Burmese language at the centre. They liked the skilful use of home languages and English and celebration of cultural festivals.

The centre is very good; they learn Burmese language and culture, English language and also get a lot of support from the centre. [...] The centre celebrates the Burmese New-Year in April on the exact day they celebrate in Burma. [...] My child learn more Burmese language and culture at the centre than at home. I love the centre very much (Burmese dad, Carol White Centre).

I like the one on one reading to my son with auntie Htwe Htwe. I like when my son learns his culture because he learns about the different tones we use when he talks to his friends, his mum or grandmother (Burmese mum, Carol White Centre).

In combination, these varied interpretations highlight the worth in multicultural communities of enabling first languages to be used and cultural practices to be understood and incorporated as a basis for good communication, learning and development. Language is often linked to culture and identity, particularly in the early years of a child's life (Issa & Hatt, 2013), where parental involvement in supporting diversity of cultures and identity in the early years is being given an increasing amount of importance (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2001). What this project has contributed to this field of knowledge is *how* these ideas are practically implemented and supported through a national curriculum framework.

BELONGING AND IDENTITY

The observations and learning stories presented here have demonstrated how the teachers in each of the three culturally diverse centres work to engage in interactions with children and families attending their centres in ways that promote their unique values and views. Through implementing an inclusive environment, the teachers demonstrate how vital their roles are in encouraging a sense of belonging to the families and children who attend.

A Burmese dad commented on his child's sense of belonging, understanding and kindness as well as the breadth of other learning he saw in her play.

This is the first video clip I have ever seen of my child. It brings out the bigger picture of my child's learning and development. My child is wonderful; she is making a big road and playing with her friends [...] I saw my child play really comfortably at the centre. She feels she belongs there. I have the responsibility of supporting my child's learning. In the video, I can recognize which area to support my child in. [...] I like the way she builds the road. She is not distracted and copes with the other children who are destroying her work. My child is kind and she is able to understand that the destructive children are younger and they do not upset her.

Through providing for and actively encouraging opportunities for children and families to foster a sense of belonging, not only do the teachers' actions respond to the aspirations and values of the families, they also align with the intentions of *Te Whāriki* where,

The early childhood education setting should be like a caring home: a secure and safe place where each member is entitled to respect and to the best of care. The feeling of belonging, in the widest sense, contributes to inner well-being, security, and identity. Children need to know that they are accepted for who they are (p. 54).

The teachers did not overlook this important link between belonging and identity, and they were often seen reinforcing the children's positive identities within each of the centres, as the following observation demonstrates. Leanne, one of the early childhood teachers in Mangere East Family Service Centre, was sitting outside with two four-year-old girls, Esther and Oloveti, who were using the centre's felt tip pens to colour their finger nails:

Esther We love Samoan nail polish (colouring nails with a felt tip pen).

Leanne Is that what you call it?

Esther Yeah.

Leanne Is that what you call the Samoan nail polish?

Esther and Oloveti Yeah.

Leanne Aren't you Tongan Oloveti? (looks at Oloveti, who is also colouring her nails, and touches her arm)

Oloveti Hmmm?

Leanne Aren't you Tongan?

Oloveti Yes.

Leanne Oh.

Esther I'm not Tongan.

Leanne You're a Samoan.

Esther I'm a Samoan!! (smiles and looks up)

Leanne Yes! You say Talofa! And Oloveti says Mālō e lelei! Aye Oloveti?

Oloveti Yeah.

Leanne Mmmm.

Esther You always say Mālō e lelei.

Leanne Yeah.

Oloveti I need to coz my mum says to.

Leanne Coz your mum said! Huh! What other Tongan words do you know? Do you know how to say thank you?

Oloveti (Whispers something)

Linda Mitchell and Amanda Bateman

Leanne Like Malo [...]

Oloveti and Esther Mälō 'aupito.

Leanne Mälō 'aupito? Mälō 'aupito says thank you and what about [...] Esther? Do you know how to say thank you in Samoan?

Esther Yep.

Leanne What do you say?

Esther Fa'afetai.

Leanne Fa'afetai, well done, you're so clever. You are excellent!

Leanne encourages the children to use their home languages as she prompts them to speak these languages and positively reaffirms their efforts. Through attending to the children's cultural identity Leanne also encourages them to think about who they are through the words they speak, an aspect of teaching and learning that is valued by their families (as Oloveti observed, 'I need to coz my mum says to'). This relates to the aspirations of *Te Whāriki*, where the importance of positive cultural identity is recognised. Respect for children's knowledge of their language was often recognised in everyday interactions with teachers, with the teachers positioning themselves as learners of the children's cultural knowledge, reaffirming the child's sense of cultural identity as positive and as an area in which they have expertise.

This was observed in the following interaction in Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten where the teacher, Wendy, talked to a group of children during their everyday activity of colouring:

Child 1 (Moves around the table and takes a pen out of the coloured pens tin. Moves back to Wendy and shows her the pen)

Wendy Is that your favourite colour. What colour is it?

Child 1 (Sits down next to Wendy)

Wendy (Looks at Child 1) You could just try out all the colours?

(Child 2 approaches Wendy)

Wendy How do you say purple colour? Do you remember?

Child 2 Purple.

Child 1 Purple,

Wendy Purple that's English. I'm asking how to say it in Japanese coz I'm learning Japanese. So how do you say it? (leans closer to Child 1, frowns and narrows her eyes).

Child 1 (Shakes his head)

Wendy Pink? How do you say pink?

Child 2 Pinker.

Child 1 Pinker.

Wendy Pinker.

Wendy Just pinker? (nods head)

Child 2 (Nods head) Just pinker.

Here the child shows interest in an object; in this instance, the pen, and in the activity of drawing as he chooses a pen and shows it to the teacher. The teacher *notices* the child's interest, and *recognises* the situation as an opportunity for teaching and learning. This is demonstrated as she *responds* to the child's interest by asking him about colours and extends this interest by incorporating his home language into the interaction. This makes him the more knowledgeable person in the situation as the teacher positions herself as learner. Through doing so, the teacher recognises the funds of knowledge that the child brings to the centre in relation to his home language and makes it clear to everyone present that she is using this opportunity to learn from him. This shows the child and his peers that his home language is acknowledged as important in the centre and that he is respected by his teachers as being culturally knowledgeable, thus enforcing this value as a positive aspect of his identity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is set in New Zealand, where the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, aims to support the cultural identity of all children and for children to grow up to respect the ideas and beliefs of others. It is a bicultural curriculum intended to honour the languages and cultures of Māori, the original people of New Zealand. Challenges identified in national and international literature are for adults in early childhood settings to move beyond celebration of cultural diversity and co-existence within a dominant group educational system, to an interaction with others that leads to genuine understanding of cultural world views and incorporation of cultural knowledge within the curriculum. In doing so, we can start to address imbalances in power and deficit thinking about children, families and communities.

Interviews, observations, children's drawings and learning stories from research in three culturally diverse early childhood settings were used to highlight ways in which teachers based their practice on responsive reciprocal relationships to engage with family cultural values and educational views. In this way they co-constructed a curriculum inclusive of cultural funds of knowledge of children, their families and the community.

Educational goals are matters of value and reflect cultural preferences. Making understandings explicit enables perspectives to be recognised and to become open to debate. Teachers used deliberate strategies to find out about the interests and cultural knowledge of their children, families and communities. They talked with families about their own experiences of education and what they hoped for. The employment of staff from similar cultural backgrounds to families supported this process of understanding. In one example, teachers undertook a formal review of language and culture, using a survey of parents and inviting children to draw pictures of their ideas

about language and relationships to find out how they were doing in this regard. In all settings, teachers acted on what they learned through adaptations to the curriculum, inviting family contribution, provision of information and their own professional development.

The research identified the importance of employing teachers who have culturally diverse backgrounds that complement the cultural diversity of the attending children and families in order to provide equitable teaching and learning opportunities for all children. From this finding we argue that the linguistic skills of these culturally diverse teachers support and encourage the participation and contribution of children with limited English language to fully engage with teaching and learning experiences.

In their everyday practice, teachers engaged in culturally informed interactions, both verbally though engaging in multiple languages and non-verbally through dance. Through engaging in interactions with children that notice, recognise and respond to their cultural knowledge, the teachers celebrated the cultural identity of each child and their family in a positive 'educational relationship' (Portera, 2008, p. 488), removing deficit thinking about the children of 'other' cultures and power imbalances as the teachers often positioned themselves as learners, as promoted in culturally responsive pedagogy (Bishop, 2010).

These findings demonstrate how culturally responsive teaching and learning is co-produced by the children showing their interests, and the teacher noticing, recognising and responding to these in ways that extend the child's home knowledge. Each member of the community contributed towards creating the setting. In these ways, the early childhood community members were 'creating a world', a terminology used by Bruner (1998).

The findings have relevance for practice and policy, both in New Zealand and internationally. These teachers valued and spent time in observing what was needed and where, and listening to parents and children. They demonstrated an attitude of questioning and a willingness to change. Teachers had an articulated value base that was open for discussion. Consistently, teachers reflected on their own taken-for-granted assumptions, examining the roles and justifications for established practices. While doing so, they were supported through their reading and study, professional development workshops, and by being part of research investigating their own practice.

Policy needs to offer conditions that support such practice. The framing of curriculum through a vision of a democratic and equitable society offers a foundation. Staffing and professional development policies can support teachers to be deeply reflective and to engage in intercultural dialogue. In this way, communities can find ways to address challenges in culturally responsive pedagogy.

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QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Cultural world views underpin the development and implementation of early childhood curriculums. What cultural world views are implicit within the curriculum in your own country?
2. What are some ways in which you might find out about family and community cultural aspirations and knowledge within an early childhood setting?
3. How might you negotiate family and community cultural aspirations and invite these families and communities to contribute within your own curriculum?
4. How might you review your setting's responsiveness to language and culture?
5. What do you see is the link between language, culture and identity?

FURTHER READING

Guo, K. (2014). Early childhood teachers' perspectives and experiences of multicultural education. *Early Childhood Folio*, 18. [This is in press—page numbers to be provided before publication]

This article uses five approaches to multicultural education (from Sleeter and Grant, 1998; 2003) to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives and experiences. Findings suggest that the teachers' focus on children, culture and community building drives their endeavours, and the authors propose that a social reconstructionist approach has the potential to lead to transformative changes to multicultural education.

Miller, M. & Petriwskyj, A. (2013). New directions in intercultural early education in Australia. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(2), 252–66. doi: 10.1007/s13158-013-0092-3

This article argues that the incorporation of intercultural rather than multicultural approaches offers new possibilities for early childhood education, and directs attention to challenges for ECEC. In Australia, these challenges include cultural understanding of educators, deeper policy enactment in pedagogic practice and negotiation with diverse families and communities.

Mitchell, L. & Ouko, A. (2012). Experiences of Congolese refugee families in New Zealand: Challenges and possibilities for early childhood provision. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 99–107.

This article reports a small community research study that analysed the drawings, stories and focus group discussions of Congolese refugee families who talked about living in New Zealand, their aspirations for their children and for early childhood education and care. It argues that understanding these points of view could be the basis for cultural and social connectedness, social justice and equity, and agency within early childhood provisions.

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