EARLY MULTILITERACIES: WORKING WITH FAMILY PRACTICES, CHILDREN’S AGENCY AND CRITICAL DIALOGUE

A portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Education

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Bronwyn Ruth Beecher

M. Ed. (Hons), University of Wollongong
M. Ed. Stud., University of Wollongong
Grad. Dip. (Ed. Stud.), Riverina College of Advanced Education
Dip. Teach., Wagga Wagga Teachers College
Dedication

For Hugh, Jinny, Pepe, Helvi, Mary and Mel,
For the chances you gave me
And the ones you didn’t have.
Acknowledgements

I recognise that many people contributed to my research journeys with early multiliteracies, travels which continue expanding. I acknowledge that children, families and educators generously contributed to the projects reported here. Numerous people sharing their experiences about multiliteracies, learning and life, made this research possible and children’s multiliteracies learning visible.

I thank my colleagues at the University of Western Sydney, Macquarie and Newcastle Universities for their partnership in the Early Literacy and Social Justice Project. These partners challenged my understandings of children’s literacies in different ways. I especially thank Leonie Arthur, Criss Jones Diaz, Annette Holland, Toni Downes, Jean Ashton and Jacquie Hayden from the University of Western Sydney, Laurie Makin from Newcastle University and Margaret McNaught and Lyn Clugston from Macquarie University for extending my research directions.

I appreciate the supervisor support of Toni Downes, Helen Woodward, Leonie Arthur and Kerry Robinson for their sustained encouragement and support during this degree.

I thank my family, friends and colleagues for their patience and encouragement.

Finally I thank the people who initiated the literacy interest early in my teaching, Wilma Emerton, Ian Harpley and Jinnie Lamb. Without your stories, laughter and questions, these journeys may never have started.
Statement of Authentication

I certify that the material in this portfolio, except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, is my own original work, and that it has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Signed:

Date:
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents i  
List of Tables vi  
Abbreviations vii  
Abstract viii

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PORTFOLIO

1.1 Portfolio overview 1  
1.2 Purpose of portfolio 2  
1.3 Introduction of topic 2  
1.4 Sole and collaboratively authored papers 5  
1.5 Overview of research papers 9  
1.6 Writing style 13  
1.7 Section conclusion 13

## SECTION TWO: OVERARCHING STATEMENT

2.1 Directions shaping the body of work 14  
2.1.1 Family Lives 17  
2.1.2 Dynamic Literacies 22  
2.1.3 Images of Children 33  
2.1.4 Images of Learning 37  
2.1.5 Living Curriculum 45  
2.1.6 Critiquing with Hearts and Heads 50  
2.2 Portfolio themes and dimensions 52
2.3 Research process
2.3.1 Experiences and assumption
2.3.2 Selected paradigms
2.3.3 Strategies of inquiry
2.3.4 Methods of collecting and understanding data
2.3.5 Validity of research

2.4 Rationale for research projects
2.4.1 Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice 1998-2001
2.4.2 Project B: Internet Services 1999
2.4.3 Project C: Play and Literacy 2000-2001
2.4.4 Project D: Critical Dialogue 2005-2008

2.5 Research components within projects
2.5.1 Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice 1998-2001
   2.5.1.1 Stage 1 Mapping Literacy Practices
   2.5.1.2 Stage 2 Piloting Professional Development
   2.5.1.3 Stage 3 Trialing Literacies, Communities & Under 5s
2.5.2 Project B: Internet Services 1999
2.5.3 Project C: Play and Literacy 2000-2001
2.5.4 Project D: Critical Dialogue 2005-2008

2.6 Personal and professional development
2.6.1 Strengthening my understanding of literacy to multiliteracies
2.6.2 Deepening my understandings of diverse Family Practices and educator’s responses
2.6.3 Extending my understandings of Children’s Agency with multiliteracies
2.6.4 Expanding my understandings of Critical Dialogue as essential meaning making in children’s multiliteracies
2.6.5 Extended my recognition of educator research for professional learning to strengthen multiliteracies for all children
2.7 Contributions to the field of scholarship

2.7.1 Extensive publications and presentations

2.7.2 Revealing family and educator understandings of early multiliteracies

2.7.3 Making visible children’s agency with multiliteracies

2.7.4 Emphasising potentials for children using the internet

2.7.5 Highlighting children’s learning through play

2.7.6 Investigating children’s critiquing of gender in play

2.7.7 Promoting educators’ learning to strengthen multiliteracies for all children.

2.8 Future directions

2.8.1 To investigate how educators examine issues with all families to extend children’s multiliteracies

2.8.2 To examine how figured worlds, identities in practice and artifacts provoke children’s agency especially with inspecting social meanings

2.8.3 To investigate how children use cognitive, affective, aesthetic and social processes to make meaning of and critique social issues

2.8.4 To scrutinise how children use intertextual meanings across mono-media and multimedia texts

2.9 Section conclusion

SECTION THREE: PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECTS

3.1 Research training

3.2 Research participation

3.3 Scholarly activity

3.4 Meetings

3.5 Section conclusion

SECTION FOUR: EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINED SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

4.1 Original literature review

4.2 Papers in the Family Practices theme

4.2.1 Paper One - Multiple Literacies in Early Childhood: What do Families and Communities Think about Their Children’s Early Literacy Learning?
4.2.1.1 Preface 140
4.2.1.2 Paper One 143
4.2.2 Paper Two - Early Literacy: Congruence and Incongruence Between Homes and Early Childhood Settings 158
4.2.2.1 Preface 158
4.2.2.2 Paper Two 161
4.2.3 Paper Three - Diverse Languages and Literacies in Early Childhood: At Home and in Early Childhood Settings 170
4.2.3.1 Preface 170
4.2.3.2 Paper Three 173
4.2.4 Paper Four - Exploring Literacy with Families 191
4.2.4.1 Preface 191
4.2.4.2 Paper Four 194
4.3 Papers in Children’s Agency theme
4.3.1 Paper Five - Literacy Learning Through Play 210
4.3.1.1 Preface 210
4.3.1.2 Paper Five 213
4.3.2 Paper Six - Play and Literacy in School Settings 231
4.3.2.1 Preface 231
4.3.2.2 Paper Six 234
4.3.3 Paper Seven - Effective Learning Environments for Young Children Using Digital Resources: An Australian Perspective 251
4.3.3.1 Preface 251
4.3.3.2 Paper Seven 254
4.3.4 Paper Eight - Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children 269
4.3.4.1 Preface 269
4.3.4.2 Paper Eight 272
4.4 Papers in Critical Dialogue theme
4.4.1 Paper Nine - Children’s Worlds and Critical Literacy 278
4.4.1.1 Preface 278
4.4.1.2 Paper Nine 281
4.4.2 **Paper Ten - Children’s Worlds: Globalisation and Critical Literacy**

4.4.2.1 Preface

4.4.2.2 Paper Ten

4.4.3 **Paper Eleven – “No, I Won’t Marry You!”: Critiquing Gender in Fairytale Play**

4.4.3.1 Preface

4.4.3.2 Paper Eleven

4.5 Section conclusion

SECTION FIVE: APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

5.1 Appendices

5.1.1 **APPENDIX 1** - Project A Stage 1: Early Childhood Environment Language and Literacy Scale

5.1.2 **APPENDIX 2** - Project A Stage 1: Educator Interview Questions

5.1.3 **APPENDIX 3** - Project A Stage 1: Family Focus Group Discussion Questions

5.1.4 **APPENDIX 4** - Project A Stage 2: Educator, Manager and Family Questions

5.1.5 **APPENDIX 5** - Project A Stage 3: Family, Educator Director, Facilitator Questions

5.1.6 **APPENDIX 6** - Project B: Educator National Workshop Focus Group Questions

5.1.7 **APPENDIX 7** - Project B: Children 3-5 Years Observations and Focus Group Discussions Questions

5.1.8 **APPENDIX 8** - Project B: Children 5-8 Years Observations and Focus Group Discussion Questions

5.1.9 **APPENDIX 9** - Project C: Educator Interview Questions

5.1.10 **APPENDIX 10** - Project C: Family Interview Questions

5.1.11 **APPENDIX 11** - Project C: Evaluation - Book Review A

5.1.12 **APPENDIX 12** - Project C: Evaluation - Book Review B

5.1.13 **APPENDIX 13** - Project C: Evaluation - Purchaser Details

5.1.14 **APPENDIX 14** - Project D: Family and Educator Interview Questions

5.1.15 **APPENDIX 15** - Personal and Professional Development: Children’s agency with multiliteracies and learning – Project C book cover

5.2 References
# LIST OF TABLES

## SECTION 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.1</th>
<th>Sole and Collaborative Authorship of Peer Reviewed Publications</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Overview of Themes, Publications, their Focus and Portfolio Contribution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## SECTION 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Early Multiliteracies Themes and Dimensions</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Research Projects</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3</td>
<td>Overview of Methods for Collecting and Understanding Data</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>Design of Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.5</td>
<td>Design of Project B: Internet Services</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.6</td>
<td>Design of Project C: Play and Literacy</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.7</td>
<td>Design of Project D: Critical Dialogue</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## SECTION 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
<th>Research Training</th>
<th>127</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Ethics Proposals</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Project A Stage 3 – Literacies, Communities and Under 5s Workshops</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Additional Professional and Presentations</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>Additional Research Publications Involving Themes</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>DAP</td>
<td>Developmentally Appropriate Practice</td>
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<td>ECELLS</td>
<td>Early Childhood Environment Language and Literacy Scale</td>
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<td>ECLLS</td>
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<td>ECERS-R</td>
<td>Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised</td>
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<tr>
<td>EdNA</td>
<td>Education Australia Online</td>
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<td>LDO TE</td>
<td>Language or Dialect Other Than English</td>
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<td>LDOTSAE</td>
<td>Language or Dialect Other Than Standard Australian English</td>
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<td>NSW DoCS</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Community Services</td>
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<td>NSW DET</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>Standard Australian English</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPIRT</td>
<td>Strategic Partnership with Industry Research and Training Scheme</td>
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<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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<td>UWS</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Early multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

Early childhood curriculum is limited when early multiliteracies are insufficiently understood. The purpose of this doctorate is to investigate and document children’s early multiliteracies. Children actively learn multiliteracies, including critical dialogue, through their relationships and interactions within family and community. My goal is to influence early childhood policy-makers and educators to reconceptualise early multiliteracies through examining family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue, subsequently strengthening pedagogical practice. This reconceptualisation is crucial to ensure engaging curriculum and equitable multiliteracies learning opportunities for all children. The challenge lies in deepening the integration of these distinctive themes within a broad curriculum.

Papers contained in this portfolio examine young children’s multiliteracies, at home and in educational settings from theoretical, practice and philosophical perspectives. They present findings from four research projects which respectively focus on early literacy and social justice, internet services, play and literacy, and critical dialogue. These projects primarily draw on qualitative strategies of inquiry located within the constructivist-interpretative paradigm. Three projects involved participants from largely metropolitan and coastal New South Wales in Australia, whilst one took a national perspective by engaging a small number of participants across Australia. My research strategies emerging from an educational ethnographic stance included grounded theory, case study and practitioner research. Methods of collecting and analysing evidence drew on literature, observations, individual and group interviews, focus groups and artifacts.
The portfolio brings together the major themes of family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue. My papers argue for educators and policy makers to reconceptualise early multiliteracies from children’s lived experiences, to strengthen relationships with families and so expand possibilities for all children’s multiliteracies learning and critical dialogue, especially enabling children to critique their social worlds.

This portfolio comprises an Introduction, an Overarching Statement, a Record of Research Participation, Evidence of Scholarly Activity containing 11 portfolio papers and Appendices and References. The Overarching Statement outlines themes within this doctorate in relation to literature and examines the directions which shape the portfolio papers. Next this statement identifies and rationalises the four research projects and research events. The strategies of inquiry as well as methods of collecting and analysing evidence are then explained. Next, the contribution of the research projects towards my personal and professional development, and the field of scholarship are given. Finally my future directions are outlined.
This section outlines the organisation, the purpose and the topic for this portfolio. Next the research papers are overviewed. Collaborative authorship and the writing style are then explained.

1.1 Portfolio overview

The purpose of this portfolio, Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue, is to increase educators’ recognition, responsiveness and social justice practices in working with all families and children, and to promote critical dialogue in educational communities.

The portfolio contains five sections: Section One: Introduction to the Portfolio, Section Two: Overarching Statement, Section Three: Participation in Research Events, Section Four: Evidence of Scholarly Activity and Section Five: References and Appendices.

Section One: Introduction to the Portfolio outlines the purpose of the portfolio and defines the topic. Then the sole and collaborative authorship is explained and the research papers are summarised. Finally the writing style is noted.

Section Two: Overarching Statement overviews the section and then investigates the directions shaping this body of work. Then the research process undertaken in the four research projects is explained. Following this each project is rationalised. The research components within projects are then explained concerning their temporal sequence and interdependence. The next sections summarise how the research projects contributed to my personal and professional development as well as the field of scholarship. Finally future directions indicate research possibilities.
Section Three: Participation in Research Events documents my research activity over the period 2000-2 and 2005-2008. This section reports my research training and experience, research participation, publication productivity, conference participation and attendance, research as sociocultural practice, post graduate seminars and meetings.

Section Four: Evidence of Scholarly Activity presents the portfolio papers. Firstly I indicate the original literature influencing my work when commencing the doctorate. Next the research papers, grouped across three major themes - Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue, verify sustained scholarly activity. Each paper is prefaced by a summary and explanation of its significance to the portfolio.

Section Five: Appendices and References concludes the portfolio.

1.2 Purpose of Portfolio

1.3 Introduction of Topic
Children actively learn many different multiliteracies with family and friends through everyday life in communities of increasing literacy and cultural diversity and technical change. Multiliteracies recognises that people use in everyday life diverse multimodal texts, including print, visual, audio, and digital, to access, construct or debate meaning. It draws attention to the ways people orchestrate the multiple modes and systems of texts within their daily sociocultural contexts (Jones, Beecher, Arthur, Ashton, Hayden, McNaught & Makin, 2001; New London Group, 1996, 2000). Multiliteracies signal how people use literacy for personal and public purposes through their work, leisure and civic participation.
The emphasis in my research is on the dynamic and diverse multiliteracies that families of young children currently use in their sociocultural worlds for their own purposes within relationships and everyday events. Family practices with multiliteracies embody varying patterns, and families keenly participate in their children’s multiliteracies learning. There is no fixed single literacy practice that all people use and that all children learn. Rather people generate many practices of living multiliteracies, where they express, challenge and deliberate meanings within rapidly changing worlds. Where policy makers and educators in societal and educational institutions maintain fixed understanding of and preference towards a single standardised literacy practice, they ignore the complex multiliteracies practised by contemporary children and families across local and global contexts. Family practices which embody global changes across social, political, cultural, economic and significantly technological fronts are neglected and resisted in dominant literacy discourses. Such deficit understandings position children with divergent literacies as ‘illiterate’ or ‘stupid - unable to learn English literacy outcomes’. This restricts children’s multiliteracies learning opportunities, impacts on their subjectivities and sustains inequity in curriculum and life.

My research investigated and made visible (Giudici, Rinaldi, Barchi, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Harvard Project Zero, & Reggio Children, 2001), children’s diverse and dynamic practices with multiliteracies, especially languages, and multimodal texts and systems. This research affirmed children’s multiliteracies learning through representing what they already know about the purpose, diversity and complexity of their own family practices. It valued children’s multiliteracies constructions and practices, and their multiliteracies learning through relationships in their everyday sociocultural worlds.

Contemporary perspectives recognise diversity of childhoods in relation to the multitudes of place, time and sociocultural contexts. These perspectives value children’s agency in their current being, perceptions, understandings and practices, rather than focusing on children’s future states and what they will become (Alanen, 2001; Clarke & Moss, 2001;
Giudici et al., 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003; Mayall, 2001; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Agency is defined as how an individual deliberately comprehends and directs their own actions within cultural fields through social practice as indicated by Bourdieu (Webb, Shirato & Danaher, 2002). Further individuals actively construct their sense of self through subjectification where they draw on conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings to define themselves in relation to the world (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). My research examined how children use agency throughout multiliteracies practices for their own purposes, in play and playful opportunities in everyday life and educational settings. Where educators understood diverse family lives and included family multiliteracies, they extended on what children knew. They offered children engaging multiliteracies learning experiences, which included over time standardised and valorised practices.

Children’s lives embody many joys and difficulties. This offers educators possibilities for extending children’s multiliteracies learning, in particular their critiquing concerning significant social worlds meanings. These spaces offer children enticing opportunities to activate their critiquing to examine sociocultural issues in life beyond and within the curriculum. Critiquing as an integral process of multiliteracies as social practice alongside speaking, listening, viewing, reading, drawing to name a few processes, demands children’s agency for deliberate awareness of textual meanings, how texts function and how texts position people (Jones et al., 2001). Since texts are rarely neutral (Comber, 2003; Knobel & Healy, 1998), critiquing provokes awareness and analysis of dominant discourses, especially involving how people are represented in texts by their gender, race and culture. Critiquing supports individuals to deconstruct, analyse and reconstruct meanings involving multiple perspectives (Jones Diaz et al., 2001).
My research examined multiliteracies curriculum practices that position children as strong and life-long multiliteracies practitioners. Children, as agents, make decisions and take actions to improve their learning and life experiences for themselves as well as for other people and their environments. The research inspected how children, families and educators use critical multiliteracies to understand, think, feel and act for improving their own social worlds.

1.4 Sole and collaboratively authored papers

The social context of each project enabled productive partnerships with academics which significantly contributed to my research possibilities and achievements as evident in my sole and collaboratively authored papers. Prolonged engagement with partners in research and publication activity led to continued collaborative and sole productivity as shown in Table 1.1. Here I identify my responsibilities as sole author or responsibilities and the proportional collaborative authorship amongst the authors. Sole authorship relates to Papers Four, Five, Six and Eleven. For collaborative papers, this involves my contribution to the total publication in complex ways, for example, the lead author of each section is identified in Author Responsibilities column but all authors significantly contributed to publication development. In many cases, this includes all sections of the publication, for example Papers One, Two, Three, Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten. In addition, authors constructed case studies which may form one section in the publication but a complex and major contribution, providing foundation work, for example, Sandy Bay case study in Paper Two.
Table 1.1 – Sole and Collaborative Authorship of Peer Reviewed Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Author responsibilities</th>
<th>Proportional authorship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper One</strong></td>
<td>– Literacies in diverse families and communities</td>
<td>Jones Diaz &amp; Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Literacies in Early Childhood: What Do Families and Communities</td>
<td>– Current approaches to early literacy in prior to school early childhood settings</td>
<td>McNaught</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think About Their Children’s Early Literacy Learning?</td>
<td>– Learning to be literate in diverse families and communities</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Linguistic capital and literacies other than English</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Literacies of technology and popular culture</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Critical literacy and preschool children</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– The study</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Conclusions</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Recommendations</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Two</strong></td>
<td>– Introduction/Literature Overview</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Literacy: Congruence and Incongruence Between Homes and Early Childhood Settings.</td>
<td>– Project overview</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Methodology</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Analysis of Findings</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Sandy Bay Case Study</td>
<td><strong>Beecher</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Happy Valley Case Study</td>
<td>Jones Diaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Conclusion</td>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Three</strong></td>
<td>– Introduction/ Literature Overview</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse Languages and Literacies in Early Childhood: At Home and in Early Childhood Settings.</td>
<td>– Project Context</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Methodology</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Analysis of Findings:</td>
<td>Beecher &amp; Makin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Blue Gum Preschool</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Tea Tree Children’s Centre</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Waratah Lane Preschool</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Wirra Wirra Preschool</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Themes</td>
<td>Makin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Future Directions</td>
<td>Beecher &amp; Makin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Summary Statement</td>
<td>Beecher &amp; Makin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.1 – Sole and Collaborative Authorship in Peer Reviewed Publications (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Author responsibilities</th>
<th>Proportional authorship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Four</strong>&lt;br&gt;Exploring Literacy with Families.</td>
<td>– Open communication&lt;br&gt;– Current practices&lt;br&gt;– Exploring communication practices&lt;br&gt;– Communicating with Australian families&lt;br&gt;– Family literacies&lt;br&gt;– Issues in communicating with families&lt;br&gt;– Ways of communicating&lt;br&gt;– Sharing information&lt;br&gt;– Professional development with families</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Six</strong>&lt;br&gt;Play and Literacy in School Settings.</td>
<td>– Home and community contexts&lt;br&gt;– Educators’ approaches and practices&lt;br&gt;– Issues in play-enriched literacy practices and associated responses&lt;br&gt;– Ways to organise play-enriched literacy experiences&lt;br&gt;– Suggested play-enriched literacy experiences and resources</td>
<td>Beecher</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1.1 – Sole and Collaborative Authorship in Peer Reviewed Publications (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Author responsibilities</th>
<th>Proportional authorship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Eight</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children.</td>
<td>– Theoretical perspectives&lt;br&gt;– Images of children&lt;br&gt;– Children’s families and community worlds&lt;br&gt;– Approaches to planning&lt;br&gt;– Implications of contemporary theories for practice&lt;br&gt;– Changing contexts&lt;br&gt;– Collaborative decision making and documentation&lt;br&gt;– Conclusion</td>
<td>Arthur, Beecher &amp; Harrison&lt;br&gt;Harrison&lt;br&gt;Beecher</td>
<td>Arthur&lt;br&gt;Harrison, Beecher, Arthur &amp; Morandini&lt;br&gt;Arthur&lt;br&gt;Harrison, Beecher &amp; Arthur&lt;br&gt;Arthur</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Ten</strong>&lt;br&gt;Children’s Worlds: Globalism and Critical Literacy.</td>
<td>– New literacies in globalised worlds&lt;br&gt;– The importance of critical literacy&lt;br&gt;– Popular media and digital culture generates cultural and social capital&lt;br&gt;– Popular media and digital culture in the lives of children&lt;br&gt;– Engaging in critical analysis of ideologies and power relationships&lt;br&gt;– Implications for practice&lt;br&gt;– Conclusion</td>
<td>Jones Diaz&lt;br&gt;Arthur&lt;br&gt;Beecher&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>Jones Diaz&lt;br&gt;Arthur&lt;br&gt;Beecher&lt;br&gt;Jones Diaz</td>
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Table 1.1 – Sole and Collaborative Authorship in Peer Reviewed Publications (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
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</table>
| **Paper Eleven**  
No. I Won’t Marry You: Critiquing Gender in Fairytale Play. | – Introduction  
– The fairytale study  
– Methodology  
– Validity and reliability  
– Data analysis  
– Findings  
– Children’s understandings of gender  
– Significance and implications for practice | Beecher  
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1.5 **Overview of research papers**

The research papers presented in the portfolio reflect three major themes and are listed in the following table, Table 1.2. Each research paper is identified by title, focus and contribution to the portfolio. Papers are organised according to the prominent theme, although all themes feature in all papers, since the underlying notions are integrated. Ten papers are published in a range of peer reviewed journals and edited books, and one is being reviewed. Numbering of papers relates to development within major themes rather than the publication date. These papers, published across a range of genres, communicate with diverse audiences - families, educators, students, and policy-makers. This reflects my goal of strengthening relationships between theory and practice for different partners with the purpose of improving the early childhood literacy curriculum for all children and all educators. See Section Three: Participation in Research Events for engagement with education partners and Section Four: Evidence of scholarly activity for full papers.
Table 1.2 – Overview of Themes, Publications, Focus and Portfolio Contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME: FAMILY PRACTICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLICATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper One*</td>
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<td>Paper Two*</td>
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<td>Paper Three*</td>
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<td>Paper Four*</td>
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*Note: The numbering of papers relates to development within major themes.*
Table 1.2 – Overview of Themes, Publications, Focus and Portfolio Contribution
(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME: CHILDREN’S AGENCY</th>
<th>PUBLICATION</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>CONTRIBUTION TO PORTFOLIO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Five</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy Learning through Play</td>
<td>Secondary research chapter in a professional book on play. Literature review and Project C: Play and Literacy evidence.</td>
<td>Analyses learning through play and examines learning literacy through play or playful experiences for children birth to twelve. Considers traditional and some contemporary aspects.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Six</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Play and Literacy in School Settings.</td>
<td>Primary research chapter in a professional book on play. Literature review and Project C: Play and Literacy evidence.</td>
<td>Analyses children learning literacy through play or playful experiences from family and educator perspectives. Examines benefits, challenges and ways forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Seven</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Effective Learning Environments for Young Children Using Digital Resources: An Australian Perspective</td>
<td>Primary research chapter in an international professional journal. Literature review and Project B: Internet and Under Eights evidence.</td>
<td>Analyses learning environments and resources for children under eight years. Examines the nature of the Internet as a useful resource for children under eight years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Eight</strong>&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children.</td>
<td>Secondary research discussion paper in a national journal. Literature review.</td>
<td>Analyses contemporary images of children and learning underlying the changes in early childhood perspectives. Recommends practices that reflect congruent philosophies and understandings.</td>
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*Note: The numbering of papers relates to development within major themes.*
Table 1.2 – Overview of Themes, Publications, Focus and Portfolio Contribution
(Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME: CRITICAL DIALOGUE</th>
<th>PUBLICATION</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>CONTRIBUTION TO PORTFOLIO</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literature review and evidence from Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice, Stage 1 and unreported projects.</td>
<td>Investigates how critical literacy operates as part of literacy as social practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literature review of evidence from Project D: Critical Dialogue and unreported projects.</td>
<td>Examines the need for critical literacy, especially with popular culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Eleven*</td>
<td>No, I Won’t Marry You: Critiquing Gender in Fairytales.</td>
<td>Primary research paper under consideration by an international early childhood journal.</td>
<td>Examines gender themes emerging in children’s play and critiquing and presents case studies of four children’s changing subjectivities.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note: The numbering of papers relates to development within major themes.
1.6 Writing style
The portfolio writing style involves personal pronouns and active voice since this acknowledges my participation in this body of work.

I use everyday language in attempting to communicate effectively with a range of audiences and promote research as early childhood education practice. Throughout I use particular phrases and words. The phrase early childhood setting or setting indicates the early childhood educational site which may be a children’s centre, a preschool or the early years of school. The word, educators refers to staff working with children. This includes teachers, child care workers, and preschool assistants as all these adults have a primary role in educating young children in partnership with their parents, family members and community. The educators draw on a range of educational qualifications and experiences and they benefit from varied professional development in strengthening their theory and practice. I also use the word educators for people working wisely with each other, children and families, rather than in technicist or elitist ways. Additionally my work seeks to include and address all educators. Project, is used in two ways. Firstly it refers to the research project or the major research event reported in the portfolio. Secondly, project refers to a significant approach to curriculum for supporting children’s investigation and learning, based on Helm and Katz (2001). For purposes of clarity, I define other terms and concepts within the relevant section.

1.7 Conclusion
This section outlined the purpose, focus and the organisation for the portfolio giving an overview of all sections and it introduced the topic. Then I identified the research papers, their focus and contribution to the portfolio. Next the collaborative authorship and writing style were explained. In what follows, Section Two: Overarching Statement, I introduce the directions shaping the research, explain the research process and outline the projects which produced the papers in Table 1.1.
In this section I establish the research foundation for the portfolio. My research investigates early multiliteracies - working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue across four projects. Firstly, I clarify the directions shaping this body of work. Then, the research process is identified and the projects are rationalised, next, the research components in each project are explained concerning their temporal sequence and interdependence. Following this, I identify the contributions the projects made towards my personal and professional development as well as the field of scholarship. Finally, I indicate future directions which emerge from this body of work.

### 2.1 Directions shaping the body of work

Many perspectives and theoretical concepts progressively influenced my work reported here. Changes across political, sociocultural, early childhood and literacy fields provoked re-examining the cultural practices of early literacy (Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998a; Larson & Marsh, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2003; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Rogoff, 2003; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Contemporary perspectives of childhood including sociocultural, postmodern, poststructural, the new childhood studies and reconceptualising early childhood stances, drew attention to unrecognised possibilities in all children’s early literacies, as expanded in what follows. Furthermore, these perspectives emphasised the ‘meaning making competencies of children as a basis for all learning’ (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.81). This deepened my examination of how children make meaning in different complex ways beyond narrow literacy practices of reading or writing English books and words. Investigating contemporary perspectives and concepts extended my understandings of how researchers and educators understand and value diverse children, families and multiliteracies, and how educators work with children, learning and multiliteracies.
As these multiple perspectives shaped my work, six dimensions featured in the writings. By the end of the doctorate these dimensions contributed three themes, as illustrated in Table 2.1.

1. Family Lives
2. Dynamic Literacies
3. Images of Children
4. Images of Learning
5. Living Curriculum
6. Critiquing with Heart and Head

Table 2.1 – Themes and Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Practices</th>
<th>Children’s Agency</th>
<th>Critical Dialogue</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family Lives</td>
<td>Images of Children</td>
<td>Living Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic Literacies</td>
<td>Images of Learning</td>
<td>Critiquing with Heart and Head</td>
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All my doctoral work examines early multiliteracies which was increasingly informed by contemporary perspectives of childhood and related concepts. Multiliteracies recognises diverse peoples’ rich meaning making practices with multimodal texts, for example, oral, visual, written or digital aspects, within various sociocultural contexts (Jones Diaz, et al., 2001; New London Group, 1996, 2000). Rapid social, cultural and technological changes in the world have made visible and increased peoples' purposeful practices especially with languages and multimodal texts. Further, multiliteracies involves people questioning how texts work and how they position people within sociocultural and political relations (Comber & Nixon, 2004a; New London Group, 1996, 2000). Understanding text contexts and purposes promotes individuals' critical thinking and civic participation (Anstey & Bull, 2006) as well as being able to determine their own social futures (New London Group, 1996, 2000).
In this body of work, early multiliteracies is defined as children’s diverse literacy practices in Languages Other Than English as well as English. How young children actually use multimedia and mono-media texts across technologies and local environments for everyday information and recreational activities in their family sociocultural contexts is central. With multimedia and mono-media children analyse meanings, including meanings of popular culture texts, showing critical awareness of texts as arbitrary objects (Jones Diaz, Arthur, Beecher & McNaught, 2000, Jones Diaz et al, 2001, Makin, Hayden, Holland, Arthur, Beecher & Jones Diaz, 1999).

My decision to use the word multiliteracies resulted from working on Project A (Makin et al, 1999) as well as reading the literature. Similarly, as part of the international New Literacies Studies, the New London Group (1996; 2000) concurrently advocated a broad view of literacy. However, their focus was with elementary and high school age students and adults with strong connections to their future work, civic, personal and leisure worlds while my work is with younger children and values what children currently are and do. My work focuses on children’s presents, which contributes to their futures.

‘Early multiliteracies’ resonates with repeated meaning making practices as young children access, create and deliberate texts as in the 'hundred languages of children' (Malaguzzi, 1998). Multiple representations of meanings by children and educators seek alternative ways to investigate and express meanings circulating in their community life. This notion of multiliteracies is rich and complex, serving as a timely reminder to educators to examine the broad practices of literacies, where children learn through everyday family and community life.

I explain in what follows the overlapping six dimensions that shaped my research and expanded my understanding of early multiliteracies.
2.1.1 Family Lives

Although family lives provide rich and changing contexts where children learn social practices and knowledge, theoretical perspectives interpret differently children’s family learning. For example, sociocultural perspectives regard family lives as the setting where children learn the families’ cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978) or household ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Sociocultural historical perspectives of learning value the socially interactive aspects of family lives (Cole & Cole, 1996; Heath, 1983; Razfar & Guiérrez, 2003; Rogoff, 1993, 2003) based on Vygotsky’s ideas (1978). Children learn ways of thinking, feeling, acting and valuing from their more experienced family and community members. In other words, they learn from their sociocultural historical contexts. Children establish understandings of current culturally relevant tools, concepts and practices through everyday interactions with family members and friends. They co-construct their meanings with these people and through their experience and interactions revise their original meanings to those generally shared by their community. Children learn through purposeful participation with others, rather than learning individually and isolated from their sociocultural contexts (Gee, 1990; Wertsch, 1991).

Each family’s funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) supports children to build expertise with family activities and passions. Participating in family and community lives enables children to build their household funds of knowledge and social networks (Moll et al., 1992). Children are often knowledgeable about valued ideas and experiences practised by their family. Children’s learning and competence relates to their presence and engagement in family and community experiences, for example, many Australian children use technologies at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001a, 2008).

Postmodern and poststructural perspectives explain learning from family and community as discourse, based on Foucault (1972) or/and social practice through habitus, capital and field based on Bourdieu (1993). These concepts provoke complex understandings of family life offering significant implications for early multiliteracies.
Habitus, as a generative concept, occurs as individuals establish a set of embodied inclinations and attitudes for thinking, valuing and acting in certain ways from participating in their family’s social practices to 'become themselves' (Bourdieu, 1990b; McNay, 2000; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. xii). People usually maintain these practices across different contexts although they may vary the practices to some extent, slowly changing their habitus. Habitus also refers to how individuals participate in these practices (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). For example, children draw on their cultural capital gained from family habitus within moments of social practice in various social fields (Bourdieu, 1990, 1993), for example, at daycare or school. Their cultural capital involves representational and symbolic knowledge, for instance, family multiliteracies involving the internet, video and computer games, which may reflect forms of privilege (or disadvantage), depending on the values operating in the particular social context or field (Corson, 1998; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Jones Diaz, 2007).

Social field defines the fluid space which authorises particular social practices deciding what constitutes discourses and activities. The field dynamically determines what governs and distributes the cultural, social and economic capital in the field (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). In an educational setting functioning as a field of forces, children and educators often, but not always, use differing capital reflecting their diverse habitus. The classroom field determines what counts as valuable capital, often translating as literacy inequality for children whose linguistic or literacy practices do not reflect those valued in educational settings such as English book reading and paper based writing practices (Bartlett, 2003; Jones Diaz, 2007; Makin et al, 1999; Reid, 2003). Across various fields, children use their cultural capital to gain group entry and try transforming their cultural capital to social capital through interactions, networks and friendships with children and adults. Social capital is explained as having access to social relations, networks and institutions through being group members (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Language (and literacy) usage establishes power relations between people, especially relating to field and capital (Bourdieu 1990a). Within educational fields, for example,
daycare and school, educators may discriminate and valorise the cultural capital of some children over that of other children. Some educators may affirm the formal vocabulary spoken by some children at home, over the non-standard dialects perceived as ‘slang’ used by other children with their families. This transforms children's habitus involving family literacy practices into cultural and social capital of varying value in those fields.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's ideas of linguistic capital, linguistic markets and linguistic habitus illustrate how an individual's language interactions within a field bring about complex power relations where the initiator seeks social approval and the group or recipient decides to acknowledge or evaluate this attempt (Bartlett, 2003; Jones Diaz, 2007). The linguistic market operating in the field of classrooms may authorise or silence particular children's interactions by determining acceptability and value in that field.

Children’s family and community experiences, whether regarded by educators as cultural capital or funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), present authentic resources for educators to integrate into the curriculum. It became apparent while undertaking my work that many educators resisted the habitus and capital of some families, not recognising the need to work with habitus of all families, especially those that differed from their own.

Towards the end of my work, the influence of discourse on literacies, families and children became more apparent. Foucault’s discourse theory (1974) drew attention to “how the world operated in terms of identity and power” (Robinson & Jones Diaz 2006, p 29). Foucault (1974) understood “knowledge (as) constituted in discourses operating in society, which are historically and culturally formulated” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p 29). He explained discourse as those “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1974, p.49). Robinson & Jones Diaz investigate how others explain Foucault’s discourse. Ball (1990) emphasises that discourses determine not only what people are likely to say and think but which people speak, when they speak and with what kind of authority. He highlights meaning and social relations as discourse, establishing subjectivity and power. Further Burr (1995,p. 48) defines discourse as the cumulative production of a “particular version of events” from multiple sources, for example, groups of “meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements”.
Although discourse features in many disciplines (Mills, 1997), this body of work draws from Foucault’s work as interpreted by theorists in education and the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 2003; New London Group, 1996, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Families act in the world influenced by the circulating cultural discourses representing knowledges, ideas and practices through integrating language, culture, actions and values moving around society (Foucault, 1972). The many forms of discourse include for example propositional, emotional, social and institutional patterns and practices. People may take for granted the prevailing forms as discourse involving people's ways of thinking, looking, speaking, feeling, acting and being (Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005).

Discourse is similarly defined as a significant concept in the New Literacy Studies with attention to people's flexible multiliteracy practices and power relationships (Gee, 2003; New London Group, 1996; 2000). Gee explains Discourse with a capital D as lively coordinations, when individuals “write, read, speak or listen on a particular occasion, … coordinate or get coordinated by other people, specific ways of using language, various objects, tools, technologies, sites and institutions” (2003, p.5). This definition echoes aspects of Ball’s and Burr’s definitions of the Foucaultian concept of discourse involving meanings, social relationships and multiple sources as noted earlier. Here words that individuals use are inconsequential in comparison to the “larger and specific co-ordinates of which they are a part in which they gain their significance” (Gee, 2003, p5). He explained how Discourse with a capital D greatly influences discourse with a lower case d (2003, p5.)

“Discourses are ways of coordinating and integrating words, signs, acts, values, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, objects and settings. A Discourse is a type of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions of how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise.”

In contrast, Gee defines discourse with lower case d as cohesive language components that express meaning within Discourse, for example, conversations, narratives or television advertisements.
Families can access, use or resist Discourses to represent meanings in their lives. Families do choose which Discourses they practice, but the availability, popularity and power of various Discourses influences their decisions (Mac Naughton, 2003). Where some Discourses establish dominance in communities and wider society, their presence and attractiveness influences what people choose, dampening interest in alternate Discourses. People in government, education and media may promote dominant Discourses as desirable (Mac Naughton, 2003). For example, educators may promote particular images of gender, family and literacy practices. Where families and their children use different Discourses they may encounter negativity from people, especially educators who prefer dominant Discourses and perceive diverse Discourses as ‘a problem’. Here, people draw on power relationships between each other and the ways they use and critique dominant and alternate Discourses.

Children learn much from their complex and changing family relationships which are increasingly shaped by many influences. These include social, emotional, cultural, political, financial and legal factors reflecting local and global circumstances. Families seek to balance family life with work rewards and challenges (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer, & Death, 2008; Brennan, 2008; Centre for Community Child Health, 2006). Family life translates into many realities, rather than simplistic household activities defined by modern universal objective truths (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003). Modern truths advocate prearranged sets of universal knowledge proven by scientific investigation as truths (Foucault, 1978). Such truths do not exist as they claim to be valid for all people, times and places (Foucault, 1978). Family worlds from postmodern and poststructural perspectives exist as intricate, shifting and confusing; since no person or thing is fixed. Change suggests inevitable multiple directions for families since postmodern perspectives identify changes within society and poststructural perspectives recognise transformations for each person (Mac Naughton, 2003). Although Australia is a largely technological, multicultural and urbanised nation, family life is increasingly diverse across changing urban, rural, remote and regional communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Families experience varying tensions between modern, postmodern and poststructural aspects of local and globalised worlds.
Over the last three decades, many researchers, policy-makers and educators neglected the ways that family life influenced children. They usually explained learning children demonstrated at the educational setting in terms of maturationist, developmental, behavioural or emergent theories of learning (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Crawford, 1995; Fleer, 1995). In addition, some educators tended to view some children’s learning from family and community life as inadequate (Comber, 1997, 1998; Dilena, 1995; Henderson, 2005; Kambler & Comber, 2005). Where educators make deficit judgements of families they fail to recognise families’ sociocultural contexts and how particular cultural Discourses and capital influence what counts as life learning and knowledge in families. More importantly they fail to understand complex life experiences for families and how setting practices may marginalise many children’s learning.

2.1.2 Dynamic Literacies
Family literacy practices engage children in learning languages, literacy processes, understandings and attitudes through everyday participation. Family literacy practices appear as lively interactions in communities and wider society, so in many senses demonstrate the shifting histories of human activity. International literacy research in the last thirty years seldom investigated children’s actual practices, apart from some significant whole language, emergent literacy and literacy as social practice research (See for example, Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1991; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Goodman, Burke, & Sherman, 1980; Hartse, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1983; Teale, 1986). Some small and large scale Australian projects (Barratt-Pugh, 2000a, 2000b; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 1994; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Comber & Barnett, 2003; Hill et al., 1998a; Kambler & Comber, 2005) investigated diverse family literacies which sharply contrasted with regulated literacy in settings. New Literacy Studies (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, New London Group, 1996, 2000) emphasise multiliteracies where globalism and technology expanded the multilingual and multimodal aspects of texts as used by people throughout the world for personal, work, civic and leisure purposes. A concurrent extension of New Literacy Studies, Situated Literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Barton, Hamilton & Ivonic, 2000) drew attention to local literacies in particular
community situations other than home and school for children, young people and adults. Further development of New Literacy Studies occurred in Australia, with Place-based Pedagogies (Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003; Smith, 2002) where children critically investigated meanings significant to themselves and families in their communities.

Family literacies embody many practices including diverse languages. There are as many as 200 different languages spoken in Australian families’ social practices. This includes 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). People use these as home languages, second languages or dialects with family, friends and community/ies. It seems that unrecognised family language loss includes Aboriginal Languages and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) for many children. Although in 1991, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) belatedly first sought the LOTE which families spoke at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006a), ABS still overlooked dialects. Standard Australian English (SAE) remains the dominant dialect in Australian early childhood settings and official, mainstream and globalised Discourses (Crystal, 1997), largely due to political, economic, social and military activity.

At home and in the community many Australian children and families use Languages or Dialects Other Than Standard Australian English (LDOTSAE). They use these in social, religious and commercial practices as well as in local activities, publications, broadcasts and transmissions. Up to 2.8 million Australians, including children, speak a LOTE (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006b). As many as 26% of NSW residents speak a LOTE at home and many families use LOTE and English dialects, including Aboriginal English (Eades, 1995a, 1995b). Furthermore, there are increasing numbers of children who, with family members speaking different LDOTSAE and SAE, could become trilingual (Wieczorek-Ghisso, K., personal communication, June 5, 2006). When educators ignore children’s LDOTSEA, they risk unfair practice, rejecting children, their families and familiar literacy practices. This reflects their sociocultural incompetence (Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005) as world citizens due to limited professional learning.
Literacy practices change over time as families engage in everyday social relations including education, work, migration and technology. Historical studies of the English language including Australian English (Bee & Thomas, 2002; Bragg, 2003; McCrum, MacNeil, & Cran, 2003; Swan, 2007) identified how people changed the English language and dialects throughout their social, education, work, technological, political, economic and cultural participation. Family practices with multiliteracies reveal diverse changes. Multiliteracies include singing, emailing, joking, interacting, viewing, drawing, reading, writing, gaming and other ways of creating and exchanging meaning. Families now strongly engage with digital and visual literacies (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001b, 2007). For example, Australian children aged four years, view television for twice as much time as they read books (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

The New London Group (1996, 2000) expanded understandings of multiliteracies beyond narrow understandings of literacy. Multiliteracies challenges understandings of literacy in several ways, including the flexible multimodality of transactions and texts, multiple texts, and the many processes that people use, foregrounding social, cultural and action dimensions of literacy practices (Anstey & Bull, 2006). Texts accessed by Australian children and families (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001b, 2008) expand far beyond paper. Multiliteracies emphasises contemporary literacy understandings and practices of literacy, so urges educators and policy-makers to understand the broader fields of family lives, education, work, leisure and civic activities within local and global communities, in other words people’s social practice. Multiliteracies acknowledges people’s diverse cultural capital, especially linguistic, and technological change in literacy practices, as well as networks of relationships and social issues across these contexts.

However, researchers, policy-makers, educators and the media respond differently to multiliteracies. For example, see responses to children’s texting, spelling and handwriting (Crystal, 2008; Rees, 2004). Many have largely disregarded these developments, maybe due to the complexity of change, limited opportunities for professional learning, daily responsibilities, politics and the accountability climate (Burgess, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Goldstein, 2006; Hamston, 2006; Kilgallon, Maloney, & Lock, 2008).
Despite the increased early literacy research, some researchers appeared to value only children’s literacy learning “in school” rather than their literacy learning “out of school”. For example, some studies investigated in depth diverse individual children’s literacy but only at the early childhood setting or school, (Cambourne, 1989; Cambourne & Turbill, 1994; Turbill & Cambourne, 1987). Other large scale projects (Breen, Louden, Barratt-Pugh, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwen, Lloyd, & Carr, 1994; Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995; Hill et al., 1998a) considered literacy in diverse families and communities. Importantly, some research investigated how family practices and children’s family literacy learning at early childhood and school settings complemented or contradicted each other (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Hill et al., 1998a). Despite the wide ranging significance of this research, politicians and bureaucrats have yet to take up and maximise the practice implications where all children are supported to learn literacy. Vast shifts in research identify the wealth and complexity of family literacy practices, as explained below, which governments need to recognise and work with, especially extending educators’ professional learning.

Family literacies embody diverse meanings when considered from different perspectives, including sociocultural, postmodern, and poststructural. Literacy as sociocultural practice (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Jones Diaz, 2007) examined families’ diverse and dynamic literacies within shifting cultural discourses (Foucault, 1972). Over the past thirty years some literacy researchers progressively recognised literacy as social practice (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Gee, 1990; Jones Diaz, 2007; Hymes, 1974; Muspratt, Freebody, & Luke, 1997; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). This concept acknowledged ways in which people use literacies within their regular sociocultural contexts to make, refine or reconstruct meanings about their ideas and feelings for social and representational purposes (Luke, 1993; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Some researchers acknowledged how family life influences children’s early literacy (Bissex, 1980; Comber & Barnett, 2003; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1983; Hill et al., 1998a). The impact of families’ diverse sociocultural contexts on children’s literacy learning emerged vividly in Heath’s (1983) ethnographic studies of local communities in the USA. For example, some families only valued the shared reading of recipes and Bible verses, rather than individual
practice. Hill’s (2002) reflections on children’s family and community experiences in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria, Australia emphasised the power of social relations and sociocultural contexts on children’s meaningful learning. Later research (Kamler & Comber, 2005; Marsh, 2000; Marsh, Brooks, Hughes, Ritchie, Roberts, & Wright, 2005; Vasquez, 2005; Xu, 2003) recognised the power of home literacy practices on children’s multiliteracies learning.

Situated Literacies research (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000), extended the notion of literacy as historically located but changing social practices by examining the actual practices of children, young people and adults largely in community, rather than educational settings. This research emphasises literacy as a multiple phenomenon, rather than a single entity. Researchers investigated mainly written practices, which purposefully influence events across diverse activities within sociocultural practice. Prisoners, farmers and child students of Holy Communion, for example, use various literacies in different life domains (Jones, 2000; Trusting, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Influenced by social institutions and power relationships, some literacies are more powerful and observable than others. Situated Literacies acknowledge changing literacy practices emerging from informal learning and sense making beyond settings. In contrast my work examines how diverse family lives primarily influences children's literacy practices, rather than literacies used in community institutions. Family literacies demand attention so that educators value and extend on children's knowledge and expertise to new learnings, because children bring these strengths to settings.

More recently, research extending community contexts in New Literacy Studies and Situated Literacies involve Place-based Pedagogies (Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003; Smith 2002), through critical sustained environmental work. This foregrounds meanings significant to children, families and communities concerning their local place, people, popular cultures and foremost the social futures of their regional environment. Given the environmental challenges for all people in the Murray Darling Basin region, Australia (Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007; Eastburn 2001), this involves matters important to participants as well as communities beyond. With unpredictable
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

environmental crisis, children constructed, analysed, contested and shared knowledges concerning local life. They examined language and power relationships as they analysed regular school and local texts, reconstructing texts in light of political and social purposes (Comber 2001). In this way, children critically acted as "fully literate citizens" (Comber, Reid and Nixon, 2007, p.13), reflecting the focus of the New Literacy Studies, "transforming ... relationships and (examining) possibilities for social futures" for life, community and environments important to themselves, family and community (New London Group, 2000, p.19). The research finds differential environmental awareness, as children, families and educators reflect diverse capital, positionings and capacity to critically act with power relationships inside and outside the classroom. While my work reflects many aspects of Place-based Pedagogies, early multiliteracies maintains focus on what children do with their families. Educators can complicate these practices in ways that respect children as capable agents examining meanings in divergent ways. Many community connections exist in my work but the core is the family practices of children.

The sociocultural space shaping individual’s practices and identities as examined by Bartlett and Holland (2002) extends on Bourdieu’s social practice theory. Investigating instances of literacy as social practice for some Brazilian adults, they noted how "culturally produced narratives ... and artifacts" (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p12) slowly change habitus. This occurs through figured worlds of local literacy practices, identities and artifacts despite shaming or symbolic violence against an individual’s literacy practices. Figured worlds (Holland, Lachocotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) involve socioculturally constructed universes of understandings which acknowledge particular actors and allocate certain meanings to actions where some outcomes are preferred over others. Artifacts, activities and identities in practice construct, challenge and enact the figured worlds. Bartlett and Holland regard artifacts as significant because they reveal the figured worlds which individuals take up and act on as tools of communal construction which provoke or enable people to change in some way. In my future research directions I could use these concepts to examine how children use resources to mediate meanings and gender identities.
Vygotskian perspectives explain semiotic mediation as occurring when people use cultural artifacts to manage their actions, understandings and feelings, thereby exerting some control over their own actions, indicating some extent of agency. Hybrid actors are formed when people use artifacts, as noted by Vygotsky in the early 1920s. Holland et al. expanded the concept of semiotic mediation by identifying that people adopt identities in practice who direct their actions, enacting their agency. They suggest that people use objectifications of social identities to control their actions, thinking or feelings. Eventually they "organise mental and emotional work through hybrid action with social and cultural artifacts" (Bartlett & Holland 2002, p 13), in other words establishing agency. This includes social positioning and figurative aspects of self which develop within figured worlds such as narratives, characters and desire. Holland et al. emphasise that actors form and perform within figured worlds. They argue that where individuals use cultural artifacts of figured worlds, and practise these within communities of practice, they may enhance their capacity to reject the influences of negative social positioning. Semiotic mediation with artifacts provides people with some opportunities to gain control over their thinking, feelings and actions, in other words, some agency for social change at an individual rate. Again these concepts provide insights into my upcoming examination of children’s critiquing within multiliteracies.

Further research involves space and how texts within particular spaces explicitly or implicitly reflect local and global sociocultural practices which influence people’s behaviour (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Objects in the material world which people use as markers of their social positioning and identities, influence the discourses of the world. In this concept the intertextuality of texts draws on the broader sociocultural practices supposedly known or unknown to each literacy user rather than each text being an independent and bounded text (Carrington, 2003). Although intertextuality as a feature of text design in multiliteracies (Fairclough, 1992; New London Group, 1996; 2000) offers possible directions in forthcoming research, many educators ignore multiliteracies, especially as practised by families as explained below.
Calls for educators to adequately recognise family literacy practices to support all children’s literacy learning (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Department of Education and Children’s Services, 1997; Hill et al., 1998a) continue to falter. Many educators still judge varied family practices as deficient as documented in Project A (Makin, Hayden, Holland, Arthur, Beecher, Jones Diaz, & McNaught, 1999). Such responses appeared to emerge from narrow understandings of literacy as English book based experiences, reflecting the dominant Discourse of Standard Australian English. Educators failed to recognise that families’ sociocultural contexts influence, through particular cultural discourses (Foucault, 1972), how families access, create and utilise literacy to negotiate meanings. Such responses contradict ‘good sense’ as well as contemporary images of children and images of learning, where children’s learning is extended from the current situation involving their capital and habitus reflected in literacy practice. This view of learning respects and builds on children’s literacy understandings, identities, strengths and interests (Barratt-Pugh, 2000a; Comber, 2003; Comber & Barnett, 2003; Henderson, 2005; Jones Diaz, Beecher, Arthur, Ashton, Hayden, McNaught, & Makin, 2001; Makin et al., 1999; McNaught, Clugston, Arthur, Beecher, Jones Diaz, Ashton, Hayden, & Makin, 2000).

Many educators’ limited interest in family multiliteracy practices may be influenced by their world perspectives, understandings of literacy, complex work responsibilities and accountability trends (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Goldstein, 2006). As previously discussed, postmodern perspectives argue that the world is complex, confusing and unclear (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003) contradicting modern perspectives of objective universal truths (Foucault, 1978) of various phenomena, including literacy. Such truths are nonexistent (Foucault, 1978). Furthermore the metaphors of games or stamps of truth (Mac Naughton, 2005; Peters, 2004; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006), may be useful ways to engage educators in analysing the wider cultural, political, economic and social influences on changing discursive practices, for instance people’s literacy practices (Hill et al., 1998a; Comber et al., 2007). When educators assume modern truths of predetermined stages, simplistic outcomes or pathways in literacy learning, they work with naïve understandings (Mac Naughton, 2003) that deny the complexity of children’s
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

learning. For example, the modern developmental truths of understanding children (Fleer, 1995, 2006; Mac Naughton, 2003) established through scientific disciplines such as developmental psychology and educational psychology do not capture children’s unique, dynamic and contradictory literacy learning. However, postmodernism acknowledges many changing truths, world views and pathways in learning and consequently urges people to examine local contexts for local truths. As a result, postmodernism can account for diverse sociocultural practices of multiliteracies with changing innovative potentials.

In response, contemporary development theory does emphasise sociocultural context (Rogoff, 2003) and social cognition does recognise agency (Bandura, 2001).

Postmodern perspectives shaped this body of work, in that my four projects investigated beyond universal literacy truths identified by developmental, behavioural and outcome based curriculum. The research projects investigated local realities of families and children’s diverse practices with multiliteracies. The work acknowledged and documented the complex and contradictory world as identified by postmodern perspectives through local truths embedded in family and community multiliteracy practices. This varied considerably from the bounded sets of knowledge defined by developmental, outcome or continuum literacy truths.

Understandings of literacy promoted by some managing educational authorities have begun to influence some educators’ understandings and practice. During this body of work, “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” (Jones Diaz et al., 2001), the professional development resource relating to Project A, contributed to broadening educator understandings across NSW. Similarly, another curriculum innovation, the “New South Wales Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services: The practice of relationships, essential provisions for children’s services” (New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2002) expressed rich understandings of children as literacy learners making meaning. This curriculum emphasised how children use literacy to investigate, communicate and progressively modify their operating theories of the world. The stance promoted children’s making meaning through many modes, including spoken, written and visual communication, and listening, viewing and reading to establish and refine
understandings (New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2002). This NSW initiative signalled curriculum that recognised “capable and resourceful” children with complex and contradictory lives, prioritising content that valued “life-enhancing relationships”, “striving for meanings and connections” and “honouring diversity” (New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2002, p. 24). The images of children underlying this document value children as competent and resourceful beings and link to broad developmental domains and dispositions valued by the New Zealand curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996).

In contrast, when beginning my research, literacy for children at school meant a focus on print-based text and the knowledge and processes of the oral, aural, written and read aspects. Although these understandings did not directly inform my work, they reflected widespread educator emphasis on standardised literacy devoid of learner and family literacy practices. For example, in 1998 the NSW Board of Studies defined literacy in the English syllabus, using a developmental psychology perspective sourced from a 1991 national policy document. This Board is responsible for setting mandatory syllabus for all children attending NSW schools. The Board, drawing on a definition from the national Language and Literacy Policy Document, seemed to value written language in integrated ways. However, this 1991 national definition remains validated within the NSW Board of Studies English Syllabus, despite recent 2007 revisions. See the following definition of literacy from the NSW Board of Studies English Syllabus (2007, p.x), quoted from the 1991 national policy document.

‘Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.’ (Source: Department of Employment, Education and Training, Australia’s Language and Literacy Policy, companion volume to the policy paper, AGPS, Canberra 1991:9).
The Board, however, acknowledges critiquing and expanded the concept of texts to include visual and digital aspects of multimedia and electronic texts as noted here.

‘The syllabus emphasises the development of critical literacy. This involves students in questioning, challenging and evaluating the texts that they listen to, read and view. Critical literacy enables students to perceive how texts position readers to take a particular view of people and events. In recognition of developments in multimedia and electronic communication, the syllabus outcomes also address the literacy demands of viewing and using computers.’ (NSW Board of Studies, 2007, p.5)

Furthermore, this NSW Board of Studies document perhaps signals undeveloped and general reference to multiliteracies. The document simultaneously acknowledges diverse literacies of learners in the syllabus introduction, while emphasising the importance of learning written Standard Australian English. Moreover, the literacy definition appears to reflect individual learning with little attention to interactive learning and multiliteracies. Educators often translate such definitions into adult centred literacy practices fragmenting children’s literacy learning in the curriculum and focusing on Standard Australian English. Many educators promote literacy learning in separate time blocks through their use of English language only worksheets and readers. They pay varying attention to phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge, book handling skills, oral reading, conventional spelling and particular forms of hand writing, for instance, NSW Foundation Writing. Critical literacy is generally restricted to cognitive activity without complexities, and digital texts appear an afterthought.

Despite children’s diverse literacies becoming recognized by some researchers and educators, government documents such as this syllabus offer few challenges and professional learning supports for educators to broaden their literacy understandings beyond a unitary and neutral view of literacy unrelated to children’s social contexts (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987). Governments are increasingly driven by accountability agendas. The emphasis on best practice testing appears to examine connections between
the tests and the syllabus (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2007) rather than connections to investigating children’s actual literacy practices, improving these practices and building connections to literacy practices new to the children, which informs the scope of my work. Alternatively, recent developments investigated children’s multimodal literacy opportunities that supported children’s understandings of literacy within their lives, expressive problem-solving and constructing meanings significant to children, some of which engaged their thinking and feeling (Arnold, 2005; Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Lambert, 2006; Leland & Harste, 2001; Wright, 2007). Further multiliteracies importantly enable children with diverse abilities to access and share meanings in new ways (Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Jones Diaz, Beecher & Arthur, 2007; Harrison & Morandini, in press). Multiliteracies demand revisioning of children as examined in what follows.

2.1.3 Images of Children

Developmental perspectives when interpreted by many educators, policy-makers and researchers, as a singular truth, evaluate children’s learnings in terms of a particular developmental milestone or stage. They view children ‘becoming’ the future child or adult, for example, beginning daycare or school, going to the next grade, doing the Higher School Certificate and getting work. Similarly behavioural views evident in outcomes based curriculum, emphasise the next step on an adult created continuum of learning or program (Arthur et al., 2008). This occurs despite contemporary perspectives urging educators to only examine children’s development within their sociocultural-historical contexts as previously mentioned (Rogoff, 2003). Increasingly, early childhood research reflects various perspectives including sociocultural-historical and reconceptualising early childhood which draw on postmodern, poststructural and new childhood studies/ new sociology of children. In these, children are regarded as strong, purposeful and resourceful beings (Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Dyson, 1993, 2001, 2003; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Lehtinen, 2004; Rinaldi, 1998; Vasquez, 2005; Woodrow, 1999; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). Children act powerfully in questioning and constructing understandings of phenomena in their worlds. They actively investigate, verify and document their world theories in original ways (Dyson, 1990, 1993, 2001a;
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT


Agency recognises the conscious intent of individuals to act meaningfully within a sociocultural context (Bandura, 2001; McNay, 2003; Robinson & Diaz Jones, 2006; Webb et al, 2002). Within sociocognitive psychology, agency is defined as the human capacity for intentionality and forethought, self-regulation and self-reflection about one's capacity and functioning concerning the meaning and purpose of one's action within sociocultural space. Especially in these new times of multicultural, globalism and technological change, people are seen to use agency personally or by proxy by letting others act on their behalf as well as using agency collectively to direct personal, countrywide or global futures (Bandura, 2001).

From poststructural perspectives agency is defined as “the power of individuals to actively participate in the construction of their self through the process of subjectification” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p 180). In this way, agency involves what individuals knowingly and unconsciously think and feel about themselves and their relations to the world. Criticism of Foucault's concept of subjectification where individuals are constructed through the available discourses, implying the passive construction of self, appear conclusive (McNay, 2003). However in his later work, ‘Technologies of self’, Foucault saw that individuals take active roles in shaping their own identities (McNay, 2000) and are able to oppose the ‘technologies of domination’ circulating in society (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

People's practice is shaped by their agency as they recognise and control their actions. However, Bourdieu draws attention to the social field for determining peoples' potentials for agency. The relations between habitus and field do not totally direct people’s intentional actions, but this context for agency needs to be always considered (Webb et al, 2002). Bourdieu defines the temporalised and dynamic relationship between habitus and agency where the body retains cultural norms as in retention but also anticipates and
lives through those norms as in protention (McNay, 2003). McNay argues that agency arises from this anticipatory aspect of social field within social practice, rather than as Butler's "indeterminacy of symbolic structures rather than social practice" (2003, p143).

The temporality leads to Bourdieu's notion of 'regulated liberties' that bring about particular and historical transformation through analysing power relations of social practice (McNay, 2003). The interaction space of object 'positions' with the space of 'possibilities' relevant to a social field and through the homogeneity and diversity functioning across fields produce the shaped potentials. This furthers greater diversity of social relations, establishing many potentials for innovation but also imposing 'the constraints and limits inherent in structure' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.116) and warrants future investigation in children’s multiliteracies.

Some research and practice documented children’s learning within their own sociocultural-historical contexts as active participants, unconstrained by views of universal stage/age patterns of development or outcomes based schooling (Canella, 1997; Fleer, 2006; Giudici et al., 2001; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Some researchers and educators (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007a; Edwards et al., 1998) recognize young children’s curiosity and resilience. Views of children as protagonists who shape their own learning in purposeful and playful ways challenged educators who assumed developmentalist and behaviouralist images of children and learning (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). These perceptions prevailed, for example, in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) where experiences for children are based on different ages and stages (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Fleer, 1995, 2006; Whitmore & Goodman, 1995). Here, educators drew on images of children being discrete entities as infants, toddlers, preschoolers or early schoolers. They viewed children in terms of performing adult predetermined curriculum as Early Stage 1 in English or Human Society and its Environment outcomes (NSW Board of Studies, 2006, 2007). In addition, educators and researchers who support behavioural understandings of children’s learning may be likely to expect that children will learn Standard Australian English literacy through teacher directed instruction, drill and practice with stencils and activities,
supported by extrinsic motivation and rewards. See the following section for further discussion, since images of children and images of learning go hand in hand with educators’ pedagogies.

Childhood as a social construct varies in time, sociocultural contexts and communities. People’s constructs are influenced by many images of childhood (Carrington, 2003; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001) circulating in communities and the media. People seldom question these; rather they participate in and circulate the prevailing discourses. Reconceptualists urge educators to re-examine their images and investigate the realities of children’s sociocultural contexts (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). Within their diverse lives, children as capable actors, co-construct and change their meanings, identities and over time, cultures. This contradicts limited stereotypes assumed by some researchers and educators. The notion of childhood as a relational concept draws attention to child/adult relationships within generations across time and diverse sociocultural communities (Alanen, 2001; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2001). Advocates of the new sociology of childhood, new childhood studies and the reconceptualist movement recognise children’s current experiences and understandings. They value children’s ‘being’ rather than their ‘becoming’. Childhood as a social construct reaches beyond the child/adult distinction where children become adults as suggested by developmentalists (James et al., 1998).

The new sociology of childhood and new childhood studies movement acknowledge children as agents. Children not only take action and establish views of their lives, but utilise their power, or not, to shape experiences and structures that affect their lives (Alanen, 2001; Alanen, Kiili, Kuukka, & Lehtinen, 2005; Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Lehtinen, 2004; Mayall, 2001).

Young children do know how to decide and act to organise how they use space, time and other resources including social action resources, for example, friendship, fellowship, popularity and trust (Lehtinen, 2004). Proponents of the new childhood studies value children’s agency as research partners (Alanen et al., 2005; Mayall, 2001) and take time to listen to children (Kinney & Wharton, 2008; Rinaldi, 1998, 2005). They respect
children to competently share their views on their experiences in research and programs (Clarke & Moss, 2001). This thinking challenges educators and researchers to look beyond the dominant images of children circulating as ‘innocent and needy’ (Cannella, 2002), and as ‘innocents’, ‘monsters’ or ‘embryo adults’ (Woodrow, 1999). This has implications for educators who only understand children as meeting or not meeting the adult determined outcomes (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003b) as well as influencing relationships between children, educators and families (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001).

2.1.4 Images of Learning
Although most early childhood educators in western communities have long recognised that children learn through play (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005), over the last three decades their steadfast acceptance of developmental psychology perspectives often resulted in widespread laissez faire Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) pedagogies (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). In spite of revisions to DAP (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) many educators still hesitate to participate in children’s play. They set up learning experiences for individual children to choose, and then they observed, rarely interacting with the children, worried about taking over children’s play. Research shows that many early childhood educators largely ignored literacy when selecting and organising the resources and the learning environment (Fleer, 1995; Raban & Ure, 1997). They seldom integrated literacy resources relevant to children into play experiences in the learning environment. Educators with traditional developmental perspectives, probably overlooked children’s literacy interests and competencies as they neglected offering literacy learning opportunities.

From wider early childhood perspectives, educators from an informed stance can extend children’s literacy learning. As they integrate children’s habitus/ funds of knowledge/cultural capital and interests into the curriculum, they prolong children’s strengths, interests and competence (Arthur, 2005; Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 2007; Jones Diaz et al., 2001; Jones & Nimmo, 1994; Malaguzzi, 1998). By paying attention to
children’s current learning, questions and interests, educators are more likely to extend and complicate learning (Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). Educators may draw from various teaching strategies promoting interactions with and amongst children to deepen learning (Arthur et al., 2008). At various times, useful strategies may involve little interaction, or mediated interactions, or explicit instruction, depending on children’s learning and the context. However mediating strategies most useful for strategic learning including supporting, scaffolding, co-constructing, reflecting and critiquing, require educators to observe and respond sensitively to children’s learning.

Within children’s play, educators can assess the current focus within children’s learning, identifying and analysing the concepts, processes and strategies used. More powerfully, however, educators can draw on complex teaching strategies to construct engaging and demanding curriculum which shifts in response to children’s learning in progress (Wood & Attfield, 1996). Within play, educators can focus children’s attention and thinking about their learning. Where educators engage in literacy play alongside children they can connect resources and children’s home experiences, increasing children’s attention to literacy resources, activity or particular meanings.

Where educators integrate into experiences literacy resources of interest to children, they invite participation, and children often respond in highly engaged ways. Pickett (1998) found that literacy resources added to block play promoted boys’ increased literacy activities, even though some resources, for example blueprints, were unknown by the children. In other research, familiar resources of interest to children in dramatic play areas attracted and intensified children’s literacy engagement (Marsh, 1999, 2000, 2008). These resources included Teletubbies, Batman and Batwoman artifacts. Recent research draws attention to the integration of play and multilteracies as both involve visual, sound, gestural, spatial and multimodal meaning making (Wohlwend, 2008).
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

Insights into how children learn literacies through play or playful experiences significantly shaped my body of work. Since developmental and behaviourist perspectives on learning dominated early childhood and school settings when commencing this work, learning through play and playful experiences provided engaging possibilities for children to learn and use literacy. Although learning literacy through the integration of literacy resources in play, especially dramatic play, featured in research (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2007; Wells Rowe, 2007), limited practice occurred in early childhood settings as reported above and seemingly little practice in school settings. Mostly educators who recognised play generally drew on developmental perspectives focusing on types and social categories of play (Piaget, 1962; Smilansky, 1968). Although Vygotsky’s (1978) work emphasised the sociohistorical and socially interactive aspects of play in learning, these works circulated much later in the UK, US and Australia (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Rogoff, 1993, 2003). Importantly, Vygotsky’s work emphasised interpersonal learning before intrapersonal learning, shifting the focus from a child’s activity to children’s interactive learning.

Dramatic play, where children act out roles in make believe situations (Johnson et al., 2005), provides the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) enabling the child to move “beyond his age, above his usually everyday behaviour” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 74). Vygotsky claimed that the ZPD in dramatic play provoked children’s development of the significant mental tools critical in literacy learning, including symbolic representation, metalinguistic awareness and self regulation (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Hanline, Milton, & Phelps, 2008). Dramatic play challenges children to use language precisely to indicate their roles, actions and goals in play while at the same time engaging in the emergent play theme (Johnson et al., 2005). This propels their cognitive and oral language activity (Dickinson & Tabours, 2001) and narrative competence (Sawyer & DeZutter, 2007). Participating in dramatic play enhances children’s social competence (Creasey, Jarvis, & Berk, 1998) as they negotiate, observe, turn take, and collaborate which may contribute to perspective awareness and the capacity to critique.
At the time of commencing this work, qualities of play, then usually understood as elements of play, referred to the voluntary, episodic, symbolic, self contained and pleasurable activity that children shaped during their engagement (Pellegrini, 1991; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983; Saracho, 1991). The initial concept reflected developmental psychology perspectives, which when combined with wider perspectives of sociocultural, new childhood studies, postmodern, poststructural and reconceptualising early childhood expanded ways to examine play (Arthur et al., 2008; Blaise, 2005; Carrington, 2003; Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Drawing on these perspectives enabled my more recent work to examine interactions, agency, identities, and increasingly subjectivities. However, developmental understandings initiated my work concerning children’s attraction to play, playfulness and literacy.

Dichotomies of play and work, widespread in literature and practice, neglect the complexities and swiftly moving moments of children’s play and learning as well as changes in children’s play over time (Goodman, 1994; Hughes, 1999). Play constitutes important meaningful experiences for children (Vygotsky, 1978), representing a common human activity across numerous cultures (Smith, 2007), which many educators and policy-makers overlook as a means to promote literacy. Since educators in settings for children prior to school assumed literacy to be the province of school educators in Australia, few promoted literacy. In these cases, they often used pedagogies they assumed to promote literacy, for example pre-reading worksheets, reflecting behavioural understandings of learning and narrow understandings of literacy. Many elementary educators recognise children’s literacy learning as one of their main responsibilities, however, images of learning in departmental documents in many instances ignore the use of play to support children’s literacy learning (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003b).

Interest based learning significantly shaped my work. When children persist in focusing on matters of interest to themselves as happens in play and interest-based experiences, this influences the complexity of their learning and higher order thinking (Basile & White, 2000; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992). Gee (2003)
suggests good video games engage players in complex problem solving as they combine learning with their assumed playing identity. From contemporary developmental psychology perspectives (Hidi & Renninger, 2006) interests involve cognitive and affective dimensions resulting from interactions between the person and the content matter. Interests may deepen and extend from a situational interest to an individual interest. Where people feel positive and have content knowledge, their interest is likely to deepen; they focus on goals, focus on content and learn.

Interest, enjoyment and engagement (Smith, 2007) makes learning literacy through play or playful experiences attractive to children. Costello and Edmonds (2007) suggest a framework of thirteen pleasures of play from their research with adults responding to interactive artworks. Many of these qualities including creation, exploration, danger, competition, sensation, camaraderie and others, reflect integrated learning processes involving cognitive, social, affective and aesthetic matters and imply future research directions with children. Children’s engagement in experiences results from their comfort and connection and follows their purpose within the learning environment and learning conditions (Cambourne, 1989). Curriculum approaches including emergent curriculum, the project approach, integrated curriculum and Reggio Emilia promoted educators working with children’s interests (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998; Helm et al., 2007; Helm & Katz, 2001; Jones & Nimmo, 1994; Katz & Chard, 2000).

Images of learning prevalent in NSW schools reflect a behavioural and developmental focus (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003b). There is some contradictory awareness of wider perspectives as in the following document, however prescription may dominate practice: “for students to explore in detail what it is they are being asked to learn so that they find excitement in the challenges presented ... Hence the title of our Report is Time to Teach – Time to Learn. We must avoid the danger of over-prescription while ensuring that ... curriculum remains rigorous” (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003b, p. 3).
A concurrent NSW initiative foregrounded children’s activity, engagement and sociocultural experiences, sharply contrasting with the policy previously discussed. The significant focus in the Quality Teaching Framework (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003a) reflects many aspects of play and complex learning as understood in early childhood education. For example, children’s play can demonstrate many elements of the three foregrounded dimensions, Intellectual Quality, Quality Teaching Environments and Significance. Crucial aspects of the pedagogical model refer to Intellectual Quality where children actively construct knowledge, member-check, participate in high order thinking and express their learning purposefully. High Quality Teaching Environments emphasise strong relationships between children and educators, where children engage, direct and self-manage their learning. Within Significance, children’s home and community understandings and identities represent opportunities for meaningful and connected experiences, which acknowledge multiple cultural perspectives. Such complex and connected learning is seen in children’s play/playful experiences. These could reveal the quality of the learning environment as well as that of children’s learning. For example, children engage with and integrate literacy within play, so educators may observe children’s current literacy purposes, practices, concepts and attitudes. Given that children initiate these practices, observations may offer greater insights in learning than testing. Better understandings of children’s learning foci, literacy activity, pleasure and deep engagement is useful for promoting further learning.

From sociocultural historical perspectives, contemporary views of complex learning (Razfar & Guiérrez, 2003; Rogoff, 1993, 2003) based on Vygotsky’s ideas (1978) emphasise the social interactions between children and those more experienced in their lives. Children learn the values and ways of thinking, feeling and acting practiced by their families as they take up the family cultural tools, for example, particular understandings, language and higher mental functioning. Influential social relations and diverse sociocultural historical contexts on children’s literacy learning emerged in home and setting research previously discussed (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Heath, 1983; Hill et al.,
1998a). As children investigate their world with others, they notice relevant feedback which refines their understandings, language and the higher mental functioning already mentioned (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky understood children achieve across two levels, within the ZPD. Firstly, they independently achieve a particular level; secondly, they achieve further complexity when others assist them. The difference between these points constitutes the current ZPD. The interactive social context involves more experienced children and adults extending children’s learning to greater complexity. With more experience, the zone progressively shifts as children expand their learning through the support and feedback of others. This perspective on the interactiveness draws attention to limitations with developmental perspectives, where educators appear reluctant to intervene and assertively extend children’s learning from their current ZDP.

Razfar & Guiérrez (2003) noted that some interpretations of ZDP promote images of children as compliant learners dependent on adults’ mediation (Cole & Cole, 1996). In contrast, alternate interpretations view children as actively learning through shared social experiences, including apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990), debate and problem solving (Wertsch, 1991). Additionally, differences of opinion, especially in play and playful contexts, often involve emotional responses that may promote deep reflection and high mental functioning (Martello, 2001; Pellegrini, Galda, Bartini, & Charak, 1998; Wells Rowe, 2007). Educators can also deliberately provoke children’s social problem solving within dramatic play contexts with purposeful literacy, for example, children completing a development application prior to constructing their play garage (Hall, 2007).

The reconceptualising early childhood movement (Jipson, 2001) draws on postmodern, poststructural, critical theory and new childhood studies perspectives to rethink aspects of early childhood education beyond the hardened dominant discourses of development which traditionally shaped early childhood education, in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries. Images of children as vigorous agents (Clarke & Moss, 2001; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007a; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001) resonate with contemporary images of learning. Where educators hold images of children as beings with agency, they expand spaces for children’s learning (Gutierrez, Larson,
Enciso, & Ryan, 2007). Woodrow (1999) suggested that children with agency may critique their social circumstances for fair practice, and work with contradictory complexities. They may establish responsibility for negotiating power and authority as they move towards connectedness and transformative practice. These directions highlighted children’s powerful learning of multiliteracies practices. See for example, the Childhood Yard Project where children critiqued and redesigned the playground with educators and designers (City of Helsinki Social Services Department, 2004).

Sociocultural research of children’s divergent, inventive and resourceful learning recognised in communities in Italy (Rinaldi, 2005) and Sweden (Barsotti, Bernemyr, & Hultman, 2004; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007b) extended images of learning through investigating children’s initiatives. Children’s agency rests on the dormant and available resources within various contexts and how they access and make the most of these resources in the context as individuals and as members of the social group (Alanen et al., 2005; Lehtinen, 2004). Children searching for meaning strongly use the environment as a learning partner, beyond interactions with people (Eaton & Shepherd, 1998; Edwards et al., 1998; Featherston, 2006). In settings that draw on Reggio Emilia and emergent approaches to curriculum, educators involve the environment as the third teacher. In relation to literacy learning, environments offer rich contexts for literacy play through available open-ended resources such as paper, pencils and markers as well as complex, culturally relevant and diverse texts including digital and multimodal texts. In some curriculum approaches, for example, place based literacy (Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007), the regional environment as significant content could be regarded as the third teacher.

Within pedagogies for the new literacies or multiliteracies, educators are positioned as designers of children’s rich and challenging learning processes and environments (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Healy, 2008; The New London Group, 2000), rather than selectors of fragmented decontextualised content for children to rote learn. Designers who recognise complicated connections between multimodalities of meaning, evident in linguistic, visual, sound, gestural and other modes invite children to examine meaning making in the world. Examining and producing texts, looking for differences and similarities, purpose
and how the form works, engages children in using metalanguage in integrated meaningful contexts, rather than decontextualised educator controlled tasks. Such experiences build on children's agency and current learning as previously discussed.

In prior to school settings many educators also reflect developmental and behavioural perspectives on individual children’s learning and tend to overlook family experiences and literacy practices, as well as children’s agency (Makin et al., 1999; Miller, 1999). In contrast, educators drawing on sociocultural, postmodern, poststructural and reconceptualising early childhood approaches to curriculum search for the many ways children construct and express their understandings as in the ‘hundred languages of children’ (Malaguzzi, 1998) and so enhance children's agency with learning. For example, the Reggio Emilia approach inspired some educators to promote children’s multidimensional meaning making in Italy, Canada, United States, Scotland, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand (Dahlberg et al., 2007b; Edwards et al., 1998; Featherston, 2006; Hatherly & Richardson, 2007; Kennedy, Ridgeway, & Surman, 2006; Kinney & Wharton, 2008; Rinaldi, 1998, 2005a). In many ways, this approach resembles broad perspectives of learning and literacy, in the sense of children’s meaning making involving a wide range of social contexts and purposes, literacy processes and texts. Educators can draw on children’s capacities for making meaning to actively extend their learning (Malaguzzi, 1998). Such curriculum approaches recognise and build on children’s strengths and current understandings. The ‘hundred languages of children’ resonates with broad understandings of multiliteracies, as children openly express, challenge and represent meanings through music, storytelling, art and dramatic play (Kolbe, 2005; Niland, 2007; Paley, 1992; Weddell, 2003; Wells Rowe, 2007).

2.1.5 Living Curriculum

Curriculum that strongly connects with children’s home and community experiences offers continuity in learning, as well as valuing their identities, relationships, families and social worlds. Within curriculum content, postmodern and poststructural perspectives highlight meanings in texts reflecting power and relationships. This especially involves
social meanings about people, their culture, race, colour, sexuality and relationships and social issues including gender, class, consumerism and oppression (Arthur et al., 2008; Carrington, 2003; Comber & Nixon, 2004a; Dau, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003, 2005; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Curriculum approaches, for example, emergent curriculum, the project approach, interest based curriculum and Reggio Emilia signal educators shifting to negotiate with families and children to build curriculum (Arthur, Beecher, Harrison, & Morandini, 2003; Dyson, 2003; Hamston & Murdoch, 1996/2004; Malaguzzi, 1998; New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2002; State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003a; Studens, 2003). Since relationships and family life with emerging social and environmental issues inform the living curriculum, critiquing becomes significant in children’s meaning making (Comber & Nixon, 2004a; Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007; Derman-Sparkes & The Anti-bias Taskforce, 1989; Hamston & Murdoch, 1996/2004; New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2002; Vasquez, 2004). Where children and families inform the curriculum, children are more likely to engage in meaningful experiences. They critique and refine their analysis in the social space and work towards improvements for themselves, others and their relationships. Curriculum approaches such as those listed above offer rich learning opportunities for children’s meaning making and critiquing.

Broadening understandings of literacy have potentials to inform curriculum in transforming from a singular universal practice to dynamic and fluid multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1999; Street, 2001; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Multiliteracies focus on peoples’ actual diverse literacy practices which include their critiquing and transforming of texts. Multimodal texts challenge the idealised concept of singular standardised literacy, primarily print in books. Texts may be talk, sound, images, animation, products, drama, gesture or print to name a few. As part of this expanded understanding of literacies, the necessity for critiquing accelerates as people experience an avalanche of multimodal texts, which seek to persuade, sell and position across their personal, school, work, civic and leisure activities. The world of texts is now globalised and a market place
for products, ideas and discourses (Carrington, 2003; The New London Group, 1996, 2000; Jones Diaz, 2007). People need to examine texts, the underlying purposes, meanings and possibilities and what this means for their selves, and other people as well as their relationships with others and the environment.

Critiquing (Jones Diaz et al, 2001) is explicitly named as one of many processes of literacy as social practice as well as of multiliteracies (Jones Diaz et al, 2000; Jones Diaz et al, 2002; 2007; New London Group, 1996, 2000). Critiquing occurs in conjunction with viewing, listening, talking, drawing, reading, writing and other literacy processes. In this body of work, critiquing refers to the text user's deliberate and positive action to analyse meaning in multimodal and mono-modal texts, rather than only accepting meaning at face value. Since scrutinising meaning is a conscious action, critiquing involves the individual's agency as previously examined. Critiquing puts the emphasis on what the literacy user does, in contrast to critical literacy which accents the literacy or critical literacy pedagogies used by educators.

Critiquing, and the critical literacy processes and pedagogies that support it, takes many forms. This may involve approaching all texts from an analytical disposition, examining particular texts with sets of focus questions or engaging in a prolonged project or unit of work where analytical inquiry or information processing drives curriculum (Arthur et al, 2008; Comber, 2003; Comber & Nixon, 2004a; Comber, Reid & Nixon, 2007; Hamston & Murdoch, 1996/2004; Jones Diaz et al, 2001; Jones Diaz et al 2002; Jones Diaz et al, 2007; State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003a). In particular, Comber (2001) identified overall pedagogical principles to promote critical literacy (Comber & Simpson, 2001). These include investigating local worlds, validating children's practices and understandings, examining children's use of local texts, analysing language-power relationships, questioning taken for granted school texts, and, investigating who uses power and how this power is utilised.
Multimedia texts facilitate children’s direct access to meaning making. Since they readily engage with multidimensional literacy processes, including viewing, questioning, listening, drawing, playing, reading, writing and surfing, they make and reconfigure meanings. Children’s access to visual, aural, multimodal and animated modes of texts liberates their participation in meaning making and critiquing as they aren’t always reliant on decoding printed texts. This enables children to access and critique meanings.

Within families’ social practices, many parents and children critique texts in differing ways (Jones Diaz, Arthur and Beecher, 2007). Children first learn to examine or take for granted text meanings with their families. Individuals are alert to differing issues as well as techniques of text production. Recognising that texts are not neutral and represent particular perspectives concerning people, power, language, place, relationships and world views (Jones Diaz et al, 2001; Comber, 2003; Comber & Nixon, 2004a, 2004b; Knobel & Healy, 1998b) constitutes significant meaning making practice. Critical literacy processes, integral to literacy as social practice (Jones Diaz et al., 2001) provide significant access for participants to education and employment opportunities (The New London Group, 2000). Critical literacy increases in importance for families and children with multiliteracies, globalisation and the sea of internet texts (Gaimster & Gray, 2002; Leu et al., 2004). Since internet texts supply vast amounts of information, researchers’ knowledge of how people comprehend, critique, problem solve and reconstruct texts is challenged with online reading involving hyperlinks, visuals and organisation that reshape texts and processes (Leu, 2007). Critiquing becomes essential as literacy users realise internet texts represent viewpoints of someone or some organisation as they access, examine, analyse and reconfigure texts (Knobel & Healy, 1998a; Luke & Freebody, 1999).

Multiliteracies research foregrounds the importance of children critiquing multimedia and internet texts (Leu et al., 2004; The New London Group, 2000). Since human relationships and the environment dominate texts, individuals need to examine how people and concepts are represented in texts and how they themselves are positioned as a result. Texts constructed by individuals or organisations reflect particular world views
which may or may not represent fair or accurate meanings and intentions. In daily life many children learn to access and analyse meanings from digital, oral or paper texts, and perhaps reconstruct them.

Critical literacy has changed over time as educators drew on various post traditional perspectives, including critical theory, multiculturalism, feminism, antiracist, social justice (Comber, 2003) as well as numerous areas in education. These included, for example, critical thinking (Striven & Paul, 2004), media education (Department of Education, 1994; Dwyer, 1984; Education Department of South Australia, 1984; New Mexico Media Literacy Project, n.d.), studies of human society and its environment (Derman-Sparkes & The Anti-bias Taskforce, 1989; Hamston & Murdoch, 1996/2004), reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978, 2004), the roles of the reader/ literacy resources (Luke & Freebody, 1999) and reconceptualising early childhood (Mac Naughton, 1999).

Critiquing offers children, educators and families, space where they can examine meanings and issues important to them. Where children examine matters that interest them they are likely to persevere, clarifying and analysing to a considerable extent (Arthur, 2001a, 2001b; Comber & Nixon, 2004a; Janks & Comber, 2005; Luke, Comber, & Grant, 2003; O'Brien, 1998, 2001; Vasquez, 2005). Family participation in issue-based discussions provokes inclusion of wider insights into the curriculum (Arthur et al, 2003; Arthur, 2008). For example, ‘little narratives’ (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000) based on Lyotard’s idea that disagreements may bring about sharing of perspectives, produce new questions and new stances for investigation. However Comber, Reid & Nixon (2007) identify that some educators resist critiquing, becoming silent on local issues due to their positioning within the local community. Despite this, hopefully many children will take some considered actions to improve some aspects of their interactions, understandings and attitudes that benefit their lives. Living curriculum values critiquing that is connected to children’s lives and seeks to extend understandings and actions for improvements and fair practice. This provides children with purposeful critiquing in their social worlds beyond educator initiated tasks of random book critiquing and reconstruction.
2.1.6 Critiquing with Hearts and Heads

With contemporary perspectives and reconceptualising images of learning and children, researchers and educators increasingly recognise the many integrated ways that children investigate, reconfigure and express their meanings (Dahlberg et al., 2007a; Gardner, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2005). As previously discussed, these educators look further than narrow and fragmented developmental and behavioural foci. In particular, multiliteracies extends consideration of children’s emotional engagement, through for example, recognising their favourite media culture narratives and characters from family practices within the curriculum (Dyson, 2003; Marsh, 2000, 2005). Since interest draws on both thinking and feeling (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), critiquing significant matters involves cognitive, affective and aesthetic aspects as Hamston (2006) found with tertiary education students.

Broad understanding of multiliteracies recognises that peoples’ flexible practices draw on multimodal texts through multiprocess activity. This challenges narrow understandings of standardised universal literacy which fragments various processes, skills and knowledges and prioritises print. In the past, comprehension, critical thinking, critical reading and reader response operated as discrete processes that arose from different traditions (Goodman, Burke, & Sherman, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978; Striven & Paul, 2004). However, these demarcations become obsolete in multiliteracies where people simultaneously view and chat online, for example, as they make and transform meaning. Furthermore, moves towards integrated curriculum embed analysis and action as significant processes with little distinction of discrete parts (Hamston & Murdoch, 1996/2004; Helm et al., 2007).

In addition critical literacy practices reflect various agendas (Lewison, Flint, Van Sluys, & Henkin, 2002; Striven & Paul, 2004). Critical literacy often investigates different perspectives, or work towards improving relationships and conditions between people and the environment. However, people may analyse a random text, or their own situation, and not contribute to any immediate or wider social improvements. This practice strongly influenced my work in that critiquing signals more than a decontextualised and abstract
cognitive process, as in the task of a comprehension worksheet. As signalled by Carrington (2003), critical literacy needs to function positively in children’s lives by refining their skills and knowledge so they can mediate their ‘self’ in globalised worlds of multiliteracies. They can use (multi)”literacy as a tool to construct possible worlds and possible selves … because in the end literacy is about who you are allowed to become in a given society” (2003, p. 97). They may use critical literacy in socially responsible ways through civic participation and conscious citizenship (Anstey & Bull, 2003) and mediate language and power relationships amidst conflicting agendas in local and global complexities (Comber & Nixon, 2004a).

Critical literacy broadens cognitive analysis to recognised pleasure, humour and feelings (Comber, 2001; Janks, 2002; Vasquez, 2005) as well as aesthetics, ethics and spirituality (Hamston, 2006), although the later was found with tertiary students. Where topics from children’s lived experiences provide focus for critiquing, for example, popular culture, children’s feelings, hopes and dreams become involved. Educators working with children sensitively provoke their questioning and support rather than threaten their ideas and feelings (Mac Naughton, 2000; Mission, 1998) but Comber & Nixon (2004a) note text interrogation often leaves no visible traces. Children investigate thoughts and feelings with creative arts through sketching and dramatic play (Leland & Harste, 2001; Wells Rowe, 2007) where they can test their ideas about characters, actions and perspectives in more visible ways as they move towards their own goals as well as mediate other children’s goals. Developing awareness and taking up multiple perspectives in dramatic play may enhance children’s critical understanding of text arbitrariness and authority.

In this section, I outlined theoretical directions shaping my early literacies work across six dimensions. In what follows I outline how research projects activated my work in the themes of Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue.
2.2 Portfolio themes and dimensions

Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice provided the foundation research for my body of work. This first project investigated diverse family and educator perspectives about early literacy in 79 settings for 0-3 and 3-5 year olds, with a focus on children in the year before school. Project A led to my research concerning:

- family practices
- children’s agency in using and learning literacy
- critical dialogue between children, educators and families.

The project set the directions for the early literacy work that I examined in subsequent projects, including Project B: Internet Services, Project C: Play and Literacy and Project D: Critical Dialogue. These following projects enabled me to investigate various dimensions of literacy, which emerged as the three portfolio themes of Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue and their constituent dimensions.

The theme, Family Practices, made visible children’s divergent capabilities for meaning making within their most significant relationships, events and situations throughout the body of work. At the time of commencing the doctorate, researchers, policy-makers and educators underrated Family Practices. Educators rarely investigated and integrated understandings of family lives and literacies into the curriculum to promote children’s literacy learning. Understandings of family practices are needed by educators if they aim to extend young children’s multiliteracies learning. My work consistently contributed to this newly emerging direction in early multiliteracies research and practice. Family Practices reflect wide diversity and complexity through family lives and dynamic literacies, including diverse languages. This theme integrates the two dimensions, Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies, because they occur together. All portfolio papers reflect this theme, especially Papers One, Two, Three and Four.
Children’s Agency as a theme in the work intersected across two dimensions, Images of Children and Images of Learning. Children’s agency for multiliteracies learning is realised to optimum possibilities where educators critically recognise, analyse and reconstruct their images of childhood. These images shape how families and educators provide or restrict spaces for children’s agency with their expertise and passions in multiliteracies. Children realise their agency as they draw on their resources or capitals, however, educators and social and material aspects of environments support or limit children’s action (Alanen et al., 2005). Increasingly, contemporary perspectives emphasise understanding children and families from their sociocultural historical contexts and their own activity within worlds of discourses. These insights demand that educators look beyond their assumptions of children, learning and literacy and negotiate directly with children and families to extend literacy learning. Papers Five, Six, Seven and Eight strongly reflect this theme.

As a portfolio theme, Critical Dialogue established the Living Curriculum dimension in settings where educators understood Family Practices and Children’s Agency. Living Curriculum enabled children to examine, critique and reshape meanings that are important to themselves, their families and their community as well as the wider society. Examining significant meanings engages children in the Critiquing with Hearts and Heads dimension, drawing on their multiple ways of learning and knowing. Living Curriculum is established through the overall theme of Critical Dialogue between educators, families and children, so educators can support children to critique meanings under construction and refinement. The dialogic space and attitude provokes participants to examine their shared and differing understandings and experiences, issues, questions, subjectivities and others. Critiquing within the shared space presents opportunities for improvements and fair practice beyond tokenistic awareness of diverse perspectives. Critical Dialogue features in Papers Nine, Ten and Eleven.
2.3 Research process

In this subsection I clarify the largely qualitative research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) used in the projects, namely Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice, Project B: Internet Services, Project C: Play and Literacy and Project D: Critical Dialogue. Project A also involved some quantitative research.

Between 1998 and 2008, as a chief investigator in all four projects, my participation shaped my research activity investigating different dimensions of early literacy (See Table 2.2 for detail). In each one I developed methodologies, analysed data and wrote reports and papers. Collaborating with families, educators, children and academics deepened my understandings. Within this doctorate I identify the ages of children targeted in each project for the reader. Age classification is contentious from contemporary childhood perspectives (Alanen & Mayall, 2001; Fleer, 1995; Rogoff, 2003), since children’s learning is understood as largely influenced by sociocultural experiences, engagement, participation and agency, rather than chronological time i.e. age indicating development or learning. In what follows I usually refer to projects by their short title, i.e. Project A.
### Table 2.2 – Research Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Strategies of Inquiry</th>
<th>Methods of collecting and interpreting data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Early Literacy and Social Justice (1998 – 2001)</td>
<td>Children aged 3-5-years</td>
<td>Educational ethnography; Grounded theory; Case study</td>
<td>Observing; interviewing; discussing in focus groups; journal writing; collecting artifacts; rereading data; hand marking for codes, patterns; exceptions and themes; managing data with Word; managing data with SPSS; managing data with Excel; managing data with NUD.IST; interpreting collaboratively; writing interpretive texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Internet Services (1999)</td>
<td>Children aged Birth to 8-years</td>
<td>Educational ethnography; Grounded theory</td>
<td>Observing; interviewing; discussing in focus groups; journal writing; collecting artifacts; rereading data; hand marking for codes, patterns; exceptions and themes; managing data with Word; managing data with NUD.IST; interpreting collaboratively; writing interpretive texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Play and Literacy (2000 – 2001)</td>
<td>Children birth to 12-years</td>
<td>Educational ethnography; Grounded theory; Case study</td>
<td>Observing; interviewing; discussing in focus groups; journal writing; collecting artifacts; rereading data; hand marking for codes, patterns; exceptions and themes; managing data with Word; interpreting collaboratively; writing interpretive texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Critical Dialogue (2005 – 2008)</td>
<td>Children aged 3 to 5-years</td>
<td>Educational ethnography; Grounded theory; Practitioner inquiry; Case study</td>
<td>Observing; interviewing; discussing in focus groups; journal writing; collecting artifacts; rereading data; hand marking for codes, patterns; exceptions and themes; managing data with Word; interpreting collaboratively; writing interpretive texts.</td>
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In what follows, I explain five aspects of the qualitative research process defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and applicable to all projects. These aspects include:

- firstly, my experiences and assumptions prior to the research;
- secondly, the selected paradigms;
- thirdly, the selected strategies of inquiry;
- fourthly, the methods of collecting and understanding data;
- fifthly, the validity of research reported here.
2.3.1 Experiences and assumptions

On commencing my research my life experiences had shaped my understandings and initial assumptions concerning early literacy. As a middle-income female academic of United Kingdom-Germanic-Australian heritage, I have lived and worked in diverse sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts. For example, I have worked in varied multicultural and monocultural communities in regional and metropolitan areas of NSW, Australia as well as in Finland. My experiences, especially thirty years studying, teaching and researching at elementary school and university, influenced my world views and initial assumptions with which I approached the research. My assumptions included:

- Most people practice various literacies within their different communities
- Children usually learn everywhere
- Most families understand their children’s learning
- Most children readily engage with popular culture texts
- Educators usually do not recognise children’s home literacies
- Educators and families often communicate in general ways
- Literacy is multimodal and dynamic as young children make meaning
- Most young children enthusiastically engage in literacy play.

With these mostly superficial suppositions, I began the research reported here. Although I maintain these directions are still valid, throughout the research I extended my understandings in terms of the complexity and depth. These assumptions influenced how I viewed myself as a ‘human instrument’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 131). I acknowledge the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the principle that people make meaning and act based on perceptions and understandings (Schwandt, 1994), as in research reported here.

2.3.2 Selected paradigms

Selected paradigms directed this research. A paradigm provides a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p.17), shaping the researcher’s role. I largely locate my research beliefs and practices within the constructivist – interpretative paradigm (Denzin
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

& Lincoln, 2003) or the social construction perspective (Patton, 2002). This paradigm enables researchers to investigate and represent multiple constructed realities. In my work I investigated the diverse realities of families, educators, children and researchers (reflecting relativist ontologies) with whom I engaged. This reflected interpretative and subjective epistemologies, where the “knower and the known” work together, influencing each another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). However, the Project A team selected quantitative and qualitative perspectives and methods for instrument development and use across many settings. This enabled us to understand pattern distribution within many early literacy environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

2.3.3 Strategies of inquiry
The project teams selected major strategies of inquiry congruent with paradigms and purposes. Using an educational ethnographical stance across these projects revealed the potential purpose and design of my body of work – to investigate early multiliteracies: working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue. These strategies, as outlined below, included educational ethnography, grounded theory, practitioner research, and case study.

Each team developed a flexible design to clarify the research questions and purposes, significant sources of information and most useful strategies for gaining data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) These designs guided researchers to orchestrate our real world investigations with our strategies of inquiry when we invited people to participate As a chief investigator, I negotiated with gatekeepers, to determine which organizations, managers, sites, educators, families and children would take part. For example, gatekeepers included sponsoring organizations (Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice and Project B: Internet Services), educational authorities (Project C: Play and Literacy) or the managing educator (Project D: Critical Dialogue). We also decided which sources of relevant research and interpretive materials would inform the project foci. In Project D the manager invited me to work with the setting educators. The dynamic design in all projects accommodated how each team accessed, investigated, interpreted, represented and legitimatised data, as detailed in Section 2.5.
We chose various strategies of inquiry, including educational ethnography, grounded theory, case study and practitioner research. Grounded theory process was used in all projects to understand the evidence, and case study was used to understand and represent data for diverse audiences and publications. Practitioner research was used in Project D. These strategies are briefly explained here and detailed in Section 2.5.

- Educational ethnography: Researchers using this strategy, especially applied ethnography, identify and represent complex cultural practices within human activity (Chambers, 2003). Researchers construct understandings from people’s actual or reported practices. Since people proceed on what they understand and know (Schwandt, 1994), usually participants credibly inform researchers. We sought to engage a diverse range of participants to ensure that data reflected multiple realities of early literacy. All projects engaged us in gathering data from various participants’ perceptions of actual literacy practices. Researchers can deliberately investigate matters of interest to themselves and their sponsoring and managing bodies (Chambers, 2003) so their research has potential to contribute to effective future decision-making, planning and resource allocation. For example, in Project A: Stage 1 we gathered and interpreted local data that provoked the sponsors to fund further research. This led to us constructing a professional learning resource. Project B engaged us in establishing elements of good practice using Internet services with young children, then disseminating the report on the internet and identifying additional educator resource development.

- Usually educational ethnography involves researchers in everyday community contexts over periods of time to establish understandings of phenomena within its usual location (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Researchers observe, interview and analyse artifacts, and I would add, continue conversations which expand the research. Researchers often form relationships as they seek to understand patterns in human activity from participant’s perspectives (Tedlock, 2003). In the first three projects reported here, we collected data within short time-frames. However, these
projects still reflected ethnographic practice as participants’ different perspectives strongly featured in all analysis, reports and further developments. Furthermore, in Projects C and D, participants member-checked and extended evidence as later explained. In Project D educators, children and I established rapport and relationships over the twelve week period.

- Grounded theory: This strategy supports the notion of multiple realities, where the viewer and the viewed both construct knowledge and work towards interpretative understanding of people’s meanings (Schwandt, 1994). Grounded theory, especially constructivist approaches, offer ways to analyse and understand peoples’ realities when open-ended and emergent (Charmz, 2003). General and flexible strategies include concurrent collecting and analysing data, two-step coding, comparative methods, keeping memos/journals, sampling more data and integrating the theoretical framework. Categories need to emerge from the analysed data, not forced from it as researchers revisit data to establish and check codes. The inductive directions in grounded theory enable researchers to “build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships between concepts” (Charmaz, 2003, p.251). In all projects grounded theory as an analytical process facilitated examining data and identifying codes, patterns and exceptions in themes. We revisited notes and artifacts for handcoding.

- Practitioner research: Researchers and practitioners use this strategy to deepen practitioners’ participation within inquiry, extending their understandings of theory and practice and supporting their improvements. As practitioners articulate understandings, they construct knowledge and decide meaningful practice changes and future directions (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). Academics and managers, as critical friends, facilitate participation. Critical friends provoke and define time, space and support so that practitioners articulate tacit and new understandings, construct knowledge and deepen awareness of improving practice and consequences. Participants may engage in democratic dialogue and decision making as they critique and construct understandings and practice (Patton, 2002).
Communities of practice may become visible (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) as educators, researchers, and increasingly children and families, sustain collaborative learning. As workplace based research, educators encounter opportunities to extend learning. This research acknowledges that people locate socially and share practice and theory at work. People learn from their own activity through social collaboration (Waibel-Fischer, Dick, & Wehner, 2004). Project A: Stages 2 and 3 involved considerable work-based professional learning. Project D enabled me to act as critical friend to educators during their change journey from DAP to contemporary curriculum approaches.

- Case Studies: Researchers identify boundaries and patterns in human activity to construct cases (Stake, 2005). They draw attention to theory and practice when they construct cases offering complex and integrated constructions. These reveal the relationships between elements within the case, for example people, contexts and practices. Cases challenge audiences with details and complexity drawing “attention to the question of what can be learned about a single case” (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

We constructed instrumental cases (Stake, 2005) that revealed insights into an issue or a principle. These offered various audiences rich representations of diverse participants’ complex and varied literacy practices. For example, Papers Two and Three from Project A Stage 1 concerned different family and setting literacy practices. We sought audience engagement in issues beyond the case in question to broaden their understandings of literacy. For example, cases in Papers Two and Three emphasised the consequences for children’s early literacies learning resulting from diverse relationships and communication practices and between families and educators. We constructed multiple or collective cases, combining several instrumental cases to further investigate a principle. These were similar or different or redundant or varied across the research sites. Cases importantly influence research dialogue and action, as well as sponsoring body decision and policy making and funding directions (Chambers, 2003) in Projects A and B. To give an example, in Project A: Stage 1 we conducted cross case
analysis of perceptions of diverse participants. Participants included educators managed by different departments, NSW DET and NSW DoCS. We analysed cases of particular participant groups across all settings, for instance educator perspectives, or across some settings, for example family perspectives. In other cases we analysed educators across all settings who shared congruent values with setting families. Consequently, the sponsoring bodies further funded the development and trial of a professional development resource for families and educators in Project A: Stage 2.

2.3.4 Methods of collecting and understanding data

Generally we combined multiple qualitative methods for gathering and analysing data, seeking high quality evidence and interpretation that decreases researcher misunderstandings (Patton, 2002). See Table 2.3 for an outline of methods and the following explanations and rationales. Sections 2.4 and 2.5 provide project details.
Table 2.3 Overview of Methods for Collecting and Understanding Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project A</th>
<th>Project B</th>
<th>Project C</th>
<th>Project D</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collecting data</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussing in focus groups</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting artifacts</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding data</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patterns, exceptions,</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>themes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing data with SPSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing data with NUD.IST</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing interpretative texts</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Collecting data: The project teams used multiple qualitative methods including observation, interviews, focus group discussions, journals and artifact collection. Our main exception involved developing, trialling, refining and using the literacy environment rating scale in Project A: Stage 1. We developed a literacy subscale (Makin et al., 1999) for an existing instrument ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998).

Observation was used differently in all projects to gather information about participants’ everyday activity within their usual environments (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). Standardised observations were taken in 79 settings in Project...
A: Stage 1, through identifying criteria on a quantitative rating scale that best matched the learning environment. We did not interact with participants. In contrast in Projects B, C and D we interacted with participants in typical ways as we wrote observation notes regarding the project foci. In Projects B and C we usually observed or interviewed participants once. However in Project D I observed three hours one morning a week for twelve weeks. Consequently, I became familiar to participants who often approached me with information.

As noted by Edwards (2001), researchers often combine observations with various types of interviews to confirm observation information as they construct case studies. For example, in Projects A, B, C and D we confirmed observations with different kinds of interviews. In Project A: Stage 1 we observed environments and then interviewed educators, and in some cases conducted focus group with families. In Project B we observed and conducted focus group discussions with children in pairs around a computer. In Project C I observed several classroom environments, depending on the timetable, and interviewed all self-selected educators. In Project D I observed and interviewed continuously, as explained below.

Interviews offer researchers varied ways to investigate participant understandings or confirm meanings as previously identified. They may be structured, semi-structured or open-ended (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999), as used in these projects. All projects involved individual interviews. Project A used structured interviews with standardised questions and protocols, without probes and prompts. The large numbers of 158 educators and 8 researchers made this structure crucial. This enabled us to ask participants the same questions in the same manner and order, producing greater reliability (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews provide direction and possibilities for the researcher to investigate further with probes and prompts (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Project B used semi-structured phone interviews with educators and
system consultants. Project C employed semi-structured face to face, phone and some email interviews. Such interviews included a set of questions with some prompts, reminding participants of additional possibilities, and some probes for further information, for example “Is there anything else you think I should investigate?” Project C participants read the questions prior to interviews.

Various interview options, including personal, phone or email, catered for participants’ busy lives, however most interviews were face to face.

Group interviews mainly occurred in Project D, for example semi-structured interviews with educators and parents, and open-ended interviews with children and educators. As focused conversations these enabled participants to share their ideas, possibly providing more information than simply replying to a question (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Usually participants conversed about topics related to the project foci. By the end of Project D separate educator and parent semi-structured group interviews were combined due to staffing and time constraints. Interviewing educators and parents together meant they addressed each other through prolonged informal dialogue.

Focus groups discussions bring together people to investigate topics (Patton, 2002). A facilitator proposes questions and a recorder documents the discussion, generating rich evidence in a short time frame. Researchers may form groups with participants sharing similar experiences, values and linguistic and socioeconomic community. Participants may relate easily, expressing understandings with people who are similar to themselves. Alternatively, groups may involve participants with diverse experiences and from various communities. Then participants may take longer to express understandings comfortably, but may offer diverse views. Project A: Stage 1 involved 9 focus groups in early childhood settings, and known families were invited to participate. All groups ran in the participants’ first language or dialect. Two groups used their home language or dialect, and a speaker of that language or dialect conducted the session. Some groups involved parents with similar sociocultural and linguistic experiences, providing familiarity.
for these people. Other groups included parents with diverse linguistic and sociocultural experiences, including the one I facilitated. Project B involved educators from across several states in a national workshop that included focus group discussions as well as local Sydney focus groups with children and families.

Journals offer participants and researchers ways to document understandings and reflections on practice, incidents and theory. Researchers often ask participants to keep journals, collecting further evidence (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999), and may further engage in research activity. Participant journals featured in Project A: Stages 2 and 3, contributing to the professional development resource.

Researchers keep journals to document personal research activity and thinking about aspects of practice and theory (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). Reflecting on entries may enhance their insights, including recognising their tacit assumptions and values (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). In all projects I kept a research journal for questioning and revising understandings, as well as analysing evidence. Returning to reflect on particular entries extended understandings (Holly, 1987).

Artifact collection often includes ‘traces’ or ‘products’ of research (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). They may reveal further detail in matters under investigation. Artifacts may communicate more effectively to diverse participants and audiences than abstract principles and concepts. In Project A: Stage 1 researchers observed artifacts, as noted in the environment rating criteria. In Stages 2 and 3 participants gathered writings and photos, for the resource. Project B researchers examined the usefulness of Internet sites available to young children. In Projects C and D participants identified artifacts, included children’s drawings, food containers, educators’ observation notes and family newsletters.
Understanding data: Researchers interpreted data critically shaping this work. Our data collection methods, for example, interviewing, involved qualitative interpretations. We drafted writings, and we continued analyzing as we established interpretative texts and public texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative interpretations in projects used both inductive and deductive processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2002). Through analysis, we inductively established previously unknown codes and themes in evidence and deductively drew on theoretical frameworks to interpret evidence. Deductive analysis can confirm findings established through inductive analysis, as suggested by Patton (2002). Corbin and Strauss (2008) identified both processes operating when inducting from evidence, then deducting by interpreting concepts from data.

In all projects most information was word-processed for hand coding analysis, while Project A involved some specialized programs to manage or analyze evidence. These included SPSS, Excel and Non-numerical, Unstructured Data: Indexing, Searching and Theorising (NUD.IST). SPSS was used to analyze the Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale information on 79 settings and Excel enabled graphic depiction of patterns. NUD*IST was used to handle some data including interview information.

Project teams interpreted most qualitative evidence with grounded theory to develop, refine and connect concepts (Charmaz, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We reread evidence, hand coded, check codes, noted code patterns and exceptions and themes. Then, we coded further evidence for emerging themes, project focus, own insights and literature findings. We used both inductive analysis, identifying new patterns emerging in the evidence (Patton, 2002), and deductive analysis where propositions, theoretical frameworks or previous patterns shaped the analysis. Collaborative discussions proved integral to interpreting in large and small projects to keep multiple perspectives open, visible and credible.
2.3.5 Validity of research

Readers trust findings when they find that research activity is believable (Wallace & Wray, 2006). Features of validity reflect fairness towards diverse participants and promote understanding of how researchers gathered, generated evidence and constructed knowledge, which when trusted, can guide action and policy (Freeman, deMarris, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2003). Several features follow.

- Involvement of diverse participants: Research involving diverse participants increases the representation of different understandings. In all projects researchers wanted participants to represent various sociocultural and linguistic communities, consequently providing space for wider participation and improved understanding of phenomena. For example, Project A researchers worked with settings located in diverse sociocultural and linguistic communities in low socio-economic regions. Project C involved schools with families from varied sociocultural and socio-economic situations in Greater Western Sydney. In all projects I focused on engaging diverse families and children in research as much as possible.

- Member-checking: Where observation and interviews comprise the major methods for collecting evidence, participants usually member-checked the notes, strengthening the authenticity of evidence. In Project A Stage 1 the time constraints and project scale made this impossible. However, in Projects B, C and D member-checking occurred as soon as the notes were processed. Some participants also member-checked draft interpretative texts, for example case studies or chapters as in Projects C and D.

- Triangulation: Researchers establish trustworthiness in projects when they triangulate (Denzin, 1978; Stake, 2005). They select multiple sources of evidence and methods of collecting and interpreting evidence, multiple theory and methodology perspectives as well as multiple researchers (Denzin, 1978; Patton,
The multiplicity embedded throughout all projects constructed robust meanings concerning diverse people’s realities of early literacy, overcoming limitations of single method and individual researcher analysis that narrow interpretation of data.

- Crystallisation: Where researchers draw on post modern and poststructural perspectives they appreciate that there is no single truth, they doubt what they know and they embed themselves in the research. They may understand infinite possibilities of a topic as in a crystal, which goes beyond triangulation. Crystallisation establishes and communicates a “deepened thoroughly partial understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 2003, p. 517). Furthermore, crystallisation opens many ways of communicating research. Researchers may acknowledge their uncertainties and themselves in the possibilities of the topic through academic writing, narratives or visual representations. Increased possibilities come into being through crystallisation as, “paradoxically we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know” (Richardson, 2003, p. 517). Projects C and D involved some crystallisation, where investigations and writings meant acknowledging topic possibilities and constructing representations with differing shades of meaning.

- High quality evidence: As a result of the previous features, data collected produced rich information. The evidence reflected many different participants’ understandings of early literacy, which some participants member-checked. As we regularly triangulated evidence from different sources with different methods, we drew on multiple theories and worked with different research colleagues. Triangulation ensured the robustness of emerging codes and themes. The high quality evidence reflected integrity, a dimension of credibility (Patton, 2002).

- Researcher experience and education: Where researchers draw on their research education and experience, they provide another credibility dimension (Patton, 2002). All project researchers as trustworthy inquirers collaborated on projects,
learning from each other, as well as continually analysing and representing diverse perspectives. Project D offered setting educators’ their first research experience alongside one experienced educator and me. One educator, new to research, stated she finally felt that she could find out and learn, and regarded herself as a researcher, reflecting her deep engagement in the project. In terms of extending my credibility as a researcher, I explicitly outlined my presuppositions in Section 2.1.1. The portfolio provides evidence of my researching and writing for diverse audiences (See Table 1.1 for a list of papers).

- Researcher beliefs: What researchers believe about the value of qualitative inquiry contributes to research trustworthiness (Patton, 2002). As researchers who valued qualitative research, we used mainly qualitative methods in the projects. I analysed evidence inductively and deductively, concerning deliberately selected purposeful samples over representative samples. For example, in Project C, I reread and coded family and educator understandings of literacy and play for school-aged children from interview and observation data, inductively building up codes to establish themes and deductively using these themes to analyse further data. Another example, Project D, involved my inductive coding of written observations and interview notes, combining codes to establish themes and using these themes to analyse further data. In these two projects, educators and I dialogued the early literacies phenomenon, questioning our individual and shared interpretations and seeking alternative understandings of evidence (Patton, 2002).

Considering the validity characteristics as outlined above, the projects reflected criteria for authenticity as identified in the literature (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2003). These include fairness of participant perspectives, promoting awareness and ethics, promoting action for participants and engaging researchers in further training and evaluation. Each project investigated and represented various participants and their differing perspectives. These included parents, children, educators, educational officers or managers and consultants of government and educational authorities. In this way fairness is represented.
However, if I was undertaking this research today, I would foreground children’s perspectives within longer term projects. This would increase the research fairness and sharpen one of the doctoral themes, Children’s Agency. In my research I considered children’s perspectives to some extent, but primarily through prolonged observations and brief interviews with children as well as through parent and educator interviews. Since trust and relationships with children require time and shared activity to develop, Project D reflects stronger inclusion of children’s voices than other projects. However, all projects advocated critical awareness of children’s perspectives.

All projects produced ongoing research activity through disseminating findings through various presentations and publications for diverse audiences. Dissemination of findings included reports to government departments, facilitation of action research in settings and publication of a professional development resource for families and educators, including a video and manual. Projects A and B impacted government policy and the provision of professional development resources for educators and families across the state and the nation (Downes, Arthur, & Beecher, 2000; Jones Diaz et al., 2001). Project C produced a book on literacy and play (Beecher & Arthur, 2001) but also instigated further action. The publisher commissioned writing from an informant educator (Studens, 2003) and involved research settings in further publications of the Primary English Teachers Association. This project raised the awareness of play in forthcoming publications. Project D promoted educator re-examination of children’s authentic sociocultural practices over idealised views as well as drawing attention to powerful multiliteracies in children’s lives demanding serious and ongoing engagement of educators with children and their families.
2.4 Rationale for research projects

In this section, I rationalise each project concerning its context and any related projects. I then briefly outline literature and establish my focus in each project.

2.4.1 Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice 1998 -2001

The shifts in social, educational and political contexts (See Section Four, Evidence of Scholarly Activity) provided the climate where two state government departments responsible for education and care of children under five, NSW Department of Community Services, (NSW DoCS) and NSW Department of Education and Training, (NSW DET), became aware of the need to investigate early literacy in local NSW sites. By 1998 the Departments recognized the significance of the early years for children in reaching their potential and enjoying enhanced life opportunities. NSW DoCS and NSW DET developed a funded partnership with early childhood academics from four NSW university sites. Departmental officers and academics negotiated to map early literacy practices. The purpose was to produce a relevant and informed professional development literacy resource for families and educators in all NSW long day care and preschool centres.

International research (Bissex, 1980; Hall, 1987; Harste et al., 1984; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983) as well as national research (Makin, 1998; Raban & Ure, 1997) indicated that young children learn literacy well before starting school. Research indicated that family involvement significantly influenced children’s literacy learning (Cairney, 1995; Cairney & Ruge, 1998). Furthermore, research suggested that children’s learning and development should be investigated within the context of their social relationships and families (Bradley, 1995). Some children experienced more difficulties in literacy learning, including those from Aboriginal and low socioeconomic (Freebody et al., 1995; Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998b) as well as bilingual families (Makin, Campbell, & Jones Diaz, 1995).
My focus within Project A examined some NSW home, community and setting literacies from differing perspectives of various family and educator groups as identified above. I investigated parent and educator understandings from individual and group perspectives in diverse communities, including a coastal Aboriginal community and diverse linguistic and cultural communities in metropolitan and regional communities. Settings reflected various curriculum approaches, including DAP, Montessori and emergent curriculum.

My involvement in Project A Stage 1 began with analysis and decision making in the meetings that guided the project. Team meetings occurred almost every week and meetings with the sponsoring departments happened every two or three months. I helped identify target groups for the project. I prepared draft questions for interview and focus group discussions in collaboration with site team members. I constructed and trialled the new literacy subscale for the observation instrument in collaboration with team members. I gathered data in metropolitan and coastal sites as well as analysing relevant literature. I analysed data with the team to establish codes and themes as well as contributing to the writing of the draft report. In Stage 2, I participated in designing the interviews, especially the family interview and the educator and manager interviews for collecting data. I drafted core principles for the resource being trialled, especially Principle 2, Educators build on children’s literacy experiences from home and community, as well as provided feedback to colleagues on their drafts. I worked with a small group of colleagues to write underlying theory shaping the resource. I assisted with the UWS Ethics application. I conducted the introductory workshop for a setting participating in professional development and trialling the resource. I worked on editing the video to accompany the resource as well as refining the resource materials. In Stage 3, I revised the resource materials for the pilot professional development with colleagues. I prepared a regional feedback session where critical friends, parents, educators and managers evaluated strengths and limitations of the resource. I prepared and helped conduct with two team members a one day workshop for DET educational officers regarding the resources. Following this I worked on the draft, “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” with colleagues in conjunction with the publisher.
2.4.2 Project B: Internet Services 1999

This project examined one aspect of literacy as social practice at home and in settings, children’s use of the Internet to play with, search for and make meanings, and to interact with each other. Educational Network of Australia (EdNA) funded this project. Internet was spelt in this way at this time in the project to draw attention to the concept.

The previous Project A (Makin et al., 1999) found that families acknowledged the role of computers in promoting children’s literacy learning. Despite the limited use of computer resources in 1999 in early childhood settings and in the early years of school, increasing numbers of children accessed and used Internet resources at home (Makin et al., 1999). Between 1998 and 2006-2007, the number of households with Internet connections in Australia rapidly expanded from 16% to 64%, (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Currently couples with dependent children strongly use the Internet (86%) and sole parents with dependent children show significant use (55%).

Research in 1999 indicated that young children eagerly responded to software as they followed visual texts and used contextual information to make meanings and engage in activity (Clements, 1999). The limited integration of computers in early childhood settings arose from many educators’ beliefs that children should handle actual resources rather than using a keyboard to manipulate digital representations (Dockett, Perry, & Nanlohy, 1999). Many educators declared computer use developmentally inappropriate. Such narrow developmental perspectives can influence educators to ignore children’s agency and initiative, and their home expertise, as they are blinkered by the underlying developmental assumptions (Fleer, 2006). Given this context, Project B sought to identify aspects of exemplary practice of educators working with young children under 8-years of age and the Internet. This project aimed to examine useful Internet resources for children, and to establish and rank educator requirements for organizing Internet resources for children, birth to 8-years.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

My focus within Project B investigated digital aspects of literacy learning environments for young children from child and educator perspectives. This attention on digital texts and practices stemmed from Project A findings where families identified children learning literacy through television viewing, computer use and play stations.

My involvement in Project B entailed preparing observation and interview schedules and the focus group discussion guides in collaboration with the team. I analysed relevant literature and reviewed websites identified by the research assistants. I implemented observation/ focus discussions with children and conducted educator focus discussions at the national workshop. I analysed data and wrote draft sections for the report as well as the ongoing presentations and papers.

2.4.3 Project C: Play and Literacy 2000 - 2001

The previous two projects highlighted the importance of children learning home and community literacies through play and playful experiences, the significance of family members’ roles in literacy learning and children’s active literacy learning, especially with digital literacies. Project C extended this investigation, especially children’s literacies as sociocultural practice. Project C examined the intersections between play, playful experiences and literacy learning where families and educators regarded literacy as sets of practices within children’s worlds. Play provides children with powerful environments in which they investigate, represent and question their understandings of their worlds (Hughes, 1999; Mac Naughton, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells Rowe, 2007). Project C is important because it investigated theory and strong practice about literacy learning and play at home and across educational settings for children birth to twelve. Research questioned some play assumptions and suggested that educators could locate play in the curriculum through negotiating children’s real and imaginary worlds (Van Hoorn, Scales, Nourot, & Alward, 1999; Wood & Attfield, 1996). Projects A and B led us to examine local sites where families and educators valued play to enhance literacy learning.
My foci as a chief investigator within Project C related to intersections between literacy learning and play; family/educator communications; and literacy learning as sociocultural practice for children five to twelve years in elementary schools. These followed research directions emerging from Projects A and B.

My involvement began with raising the idea for the work with colleagues and the publisher. I then developed the ethics application and research methodology for the UWS Ethics Committee and a regional elementary education organisation. This preparation included interview and observations schedules, information pages and consent forms. I negotiated the emerging book outline with the publishing editor and the co-author/s. I investigated field entry and educator recommendations with the regional educational officer. This involved negotiating entry to seven schools where fourteen recommended educators were invited to participate in the research. These educators then recommended families for participation in the project. I collected and managed the data, member-checked with educators and families, prior to analysing the data and continuing to collect data from educators and families who sought further interviews. From the analysed data and literature, I wrote three chapters for the book.

2.4.4 Project D: Critical Dialogue 2005 -2008

The previous three projects investigated the significance of children learning literacies as family sociocultural practices through everyday playful experiences. They examined how family members and educators promoted children’s agency in literacy learning. Play was recognised in these projects as providing environments enabling children to investigate, represent and critique their experiences of sociocultural worlds. This fourth project based at one site, involved children investigating their sociocultural practices, namely family multiliteracies of DVD and television viewing. Interested children engaged in a fairytale project (Katz & Chard, 2000) as they examined familiar and new fairytale narratives and characters in shared book, class meetings, dramatic play and other experiences. Projects focus children and educators to investigate and represent their changing understandings about a topic of interest to children. This fairytale project led to children contesting and critiquing some understandings, particularly gender within play and other experiences.
Project D examined curriculum change at one children’s centre as educators reconceptualised theory and practice to include children’s voices, active learning and family practices. Educators were rethinking philosophy, curriculum approaches and pedagogies (Arthur et al., 2008) that embrace children’s lives as authentic curriculum sources (Arthur et al., 2003). The research is significant as it documents a case of changing perspectives shaping relationships between children, families and educators. These changes enhanced the ‘lived’ curriculum and children’s learning opportunities. Educators and children, with families to some degree, constructed curriculum that valued children’s multiliteracies and promoted critiquing of some issues.

My foci, as chief investigator, examined family practices, including home multiliteracies as authentic curriculum sources, children’s critiquing of gender and extending critical dialogue between children, families and educators. This living curriculum materialised within reconceptualising philosophies, curriculum approaches and pedagogies.

My involvement began with the manager’s invitation to undertake research. I developed the ethics application for the UWS Ethics Committee, with research design, interview and observation schedules, information pages and consent forms. I undertook two visits to establish rapport before beginning weekly observation visits. I collected and managed all data, member-checked with educators and families, undertook preliminary analysis and shared ongoing analysis, interpretations and writing with educators.

2.5 Research components within projects

This section explains the research components of the projects in temporal order. Background to each project and details for collecting and interpreting evidence, evaluating projects, and project findings are outlined. Since Project A involved three stages, I address details for each stage in turn.
2.5.1 Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice

Background
This project ran from 1998 to 2001, comprised three stages and involved researchers from four NSW university sites - Newcastle University, Macquarie University, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur and University of Western Sydney, Nepean. In 1998 researcher mapped literacy practices as represented in family and educator literacy perspectives across 79 early childhood settings of preschools and long day care centres.

Researchers included Associate Professor Laurie Makin, Dr. Annette Holland, Dr. Jacqueline Hayden, Leonie Arthur, Criss Jones Diaz, Margaret McNaught and me. Sue Groom, Sue French, Eira Sproats, Dianne Wright, Alexandra Harper and Deborah Garrett were research assistants. The settings were located in diverse communities in NSW urban, suburban and coastal areas. Children 0-5 and 3-5 years attended these settings but we focused on children aged 3-5, many of whom started school in the following year. Stage 1 involved 158 educators and 60 families across diverse language, cultural and socioeconomic groups. See Table 2.4 for design details across stages.
### Table 2.4 Design of Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Feature</th>
<th>Stage 1 Details</th>
<th>Stage 2 Details</th>
<th>Stage 3 Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mapping current early literacy practices regarding</td>
<td>Implementation and evaluation of a pilot early literacy professional development program</td>
<td>Developing professional development resource, “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are literacy practices in NSW children’s services?</td>
<td>Evaluation investigated</td>
<td>Evaluation investigated</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are educators’ understandings of literacy and their role in children’s literacy learning?</td>
<td>• What changes in attitudes and practices concerning early literacy happened resulting from professional development activity?</td>
<td>• How clear and appropriate are the central concept and the core principles?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are family perceptions of their children’s literacy learning and the role of early childhood settings in supporting literacy learning?</td>
<td>• What constitutes effective professional development processes?</td>
<td>• How clear and relevant are the written materials concerning each principle?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How congruent are educator and family perspectives on early literacy learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How appropriate was the professional development process in settings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is needed to support children’s literacy learning in settings?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>158 educators</td>
<td>32 parents</td>
<td>25 educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 parents</td>
<td>28 educators</td>
<td>19 parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79 settings</td>
<td>11 managers</td>
<td>12 settings selected to represent diverse service types and socioeconomic communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 researchers</td>
<td>15 settings selected from Stage 1 as representing various service types and diverse sociocultural communities</td>
<td>8 researchers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 research assistants</td>
<td>8 researchers</td>
<td>9 research assistants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Settings in low socioeconomic communities in Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Central Coast, South Coast &amp; Hunter Valley</td>
<td>Settings in low socioeconomic communities in Sydney, the Hunter Valley and the Central Coast</td>
<td>Settings in low socioeconomic communities in Sydney and on the Central Coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of collecting evidence</strong></td>
<td>Interview with educators</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups with families</td>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>Artifac collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy environment rating scale</td>
<td>Artifact collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of managing, interpreting &amp; understanding evidence</strong></td>
<td>Rating scale - SPSS and EXCEL</td>
<td>Hand coding and identifying emerging codes &amp; themes</td>
<td>Hand coding and identifying emerging codes and themes</td>
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<td>Interviews – NUD*IST &amp; hand coding –codes and themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups – hand coding &amp; emerging codes &amp; themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of validity &amp; credibility</strong></td>
<td>Research team discussions</td>
<td>Research team discussions</td>
<td>Research team discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many participants with diverse experiences</td>
<td>Prolonged setting engagement</td>
<td>Prolonged setting engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple collection methods</td>
<td>Multiple collection methods</td>
<td>Multiple collection methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative analysis</td>
<td>Participants with diverse experiences</td>
<td>Participants with diverse experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Collaborative analysis</td>
<td>Collaborative analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced researchers who valued qualitative research</td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experienced researchers who valued qualitative research</td>
<td>Experienced researchers who valued qualitative research</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2.5.1.1 Stage 1 Mapping Literacy Practices

- Collecting data

We used multiple methods to investigate the perspectives of families, educators and researchers. We observed the setting learning environments with a rating scale, interviewed educators working with children and conducted family focus group discussions.

We developed and trialled an instrument, Early Childhood Environment Language and Literacy Scale (ECELLS) (Early Childhood Research Group, 1998) to observe the daily literacy program, based on the ECERS – R (Harms et al., 1998). Research (Scarr, Esenberg, & Deater-Deckard, 1994) found that a subset of items from the initial ECERS obtained the same reliability as using the whole scale. The Early Literacy and Social Justice Research Group identified a subset of 15 ECERS-R items or 35% of the scale for inclusion in the ECELLS. This included items 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 30, 32, 33, 34, 37 and 38. We selected all four items from the Language and Reasoning subscale, plus one item from each of the following five subscales, Space and Furnishing, Personal Care Routines, Interactions, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. Eight items, namely 4, 6, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28 and 36, or 19% of the original scale, were also included in the modified form. These items included Room Arrangement, Child-related Displays, Greetings/Departures, Meals and Snacks, Dramatic Play, Use of TV, Video and/or Computer, Promoting Acceptance of Diversity and Group Time. We developed a Literacy subscale with five new items relevant to early literacy prior to school. These included Literacy Interactions in Dramatic Play, Quality of Literacy Interactions, Literacy Play, Discussion of Literacy Concepts, and Metalinguistic Skill Development. This produced 28 items for the new scale, ECELLS (Early Childhood Research Group, 1998). (See Appendix 5.1.1 for a copy of the scale).
We modelled the ECELLS on the design of the ECERS – R by presenting descriptive criteria for each item, to enable us to confirm an observer rating between 1 and 7, 1 indicating inadequate and 7 signalling excellent. We selected the best-fit description for our observations. Where the descriptor was not observed or not relevant, we entered 0.

We established inter-rater reliability between the research team in various ways. As a chief researcher, I contributed to the ECELLS development, reaching consensus with team members on selecting items and how to interpret indicators. We all trained by using the scale and collaborating closely to check the items and the descriptive criteria for the ratings within the same child care centre. Following this, over a two day period, in pairs we checked our inter-rater reliability for all items in the field by observing in the same setting twice and in a second setting once. We discussed and confirmed item meanings and indicators, and where necessary, clarified understandings and revised aspects. When we began collecting data, we observed the environment in pairs together and after each five settings, checked reliability. All reliabilities featured within the acceptable range using Cohen’s Kappa, as they were greater than .50 (Makin et al., 1999).

In November and December 1998 a researcher or research assistant observed two hours of the morning program in 79 settings with the ECELLS. I observed and interviewed in 7 settings. We used the educator interviews which followed to clarify items not seen during the observation, following the recommendation of Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998). They suggested that researchers should only rate their observations or educator reports in the following interview on what was offered, rather than what was planned.

Following the observation, two educators working with the preschool aged children each participated in an individual hour long structured interview about their understandings of and attitudes towards early literacy. I contributed to developing the twenty questions with colleagues. These reflected four themes, including, Attitudes
towards Early Literacy, Literacy Practices in Settings, Identification of Children’s Literacy Strengths and Needs, Family Partnerships (Makin et al., 1999). We audio taped interviews for transcription and analysis. All researchers closely followed the same schedule, establishing validity (See Appendix 5.1.2 for a copy of questions). Usually we interviewed staff who worked with the children, usually the teacher and teaching assistant at the preschool, or the authorized supervisor or the teacher and the child care worker at the day care centre. We clarified any items not observed in the prior ECELLS observations during the interview.

As a chief investigator I worked with colleagues to develop the guiding questions for the family focus group discussions. We conducted nine discussions with interested parents at the early childhood setting attended by their children. For approximately two hours participants shared their understandings of, and attitudes towards early literacy, their child’s literacy learning at home, in the community and the setting. Setting staff approached parents, so parents usually knew each other. In the discussion I facilitated, participants came from varied socioeconomic and linguistic communities although their children attended the one setting. However in other setting based discussions, parents shared similar experiences and communities. Mostly discussions occurred in the participants’ first language. In some groups, parents used their home language or dialect, and a LDOTSAS speaker facilitated.

These discussions, involving between six and ten parents, occurred at times and in places suitable for families. The focus group questions investigated children’s home and setting literacy experiences, family expectations for their child’s literacy learning, and communication between themselves and the educators concerning literacy learning (Makin et al., 1999) (See Appendix 5.1.3 for a copy of questions). A facilitator and recorder facilitated and followed the question schedule.

- Interpreting data

Researchers used various methods to interpret the several sources of data. We taped and transcribed, and then analysed the interviews and discussions in terms of themes.
Next we analysed educator and family understandings and attitudes. At times, we triangulated analysis from different evidence sources representing different departments (NSW DET and NSW DoCS managed settings) or in terms of levels of educator qualifications as detailed previously.

The ECELLS observations ratings were graphed for each item, by subscale and by total score to give an overall pattern of features in each program. This included examining themes from family focus group discussions and educator interviews with the observation patterns, to identify and investigate aspects, for example, congruence and incongruence between family and educator perspectives on early literacy.

- Interpreting and evaluating Project A: Stage 1
The research team evaluated this stage in the report, Mapping literacy practices in early childhood services (Makin et al., 1999), prepared for the funding bodies. We noted four findings:

  - The general learning environment in the services observed is positive. However, the specific area of support for early literacy development demands attention.
  - A lack of congruence between the perspectives of families and staff in early childhood services is apparent when the area of early literacy is explored. This lack of congruence is more pronounced when the language and/or culture of families are not shared. However, it is also evident when there is a shared language and culture.
  - The impact of information technology and popular culture on early childhood literacies is a gap in the knowledge base of early childhood staff.
  - The complex nature of the ecology of early literacy is not so well understood, particularly in relation to the notion of literacy as social practice (p. 2).
We recommended 8 actions, specifically:

1. That findings from the data be used to design a broad framework for a Literacy Strategy for Early Childhood Services in New South Wales.

2. That the findings be discussed with the 1998 participants, both staff and parents, at a one-day workshop to be held in each of the four project centre areas, with representatives from each project centre, DET and DCS at each workshop.

3. That input from the workshops be used to refine the Literacy Strategy for Early Childhood Services and to develop a pilot Professional Development Program for 1999.

4. That a small number of services of diverse types in each of the four project centre areas be selected to pilot context-responsive implementation of the Literacy Strategy for Early Childhood Services.

5. That the implementation be video recorded and edited footage be used to produce a video for State-wide professional development in early literacy. This video should be accompanied by support materials.

6. That university researchers investigate the possibility of participants having the option to gain credit towards a tertiary qualification for study of the Literacy Strategy for Early Childhood Services.

7. That a training program for NSW DCS and NSW DET staff be developed in which the universities accredit NSW Departmental staff for State-wide roll out of the Literacy Strategy for Early Childhood Services.

8. That a Strategic Partnership with Industry Research and Training Scheme (SPIRT) application be developed for 2000 funding to:

   - develop ECELLS as a benchmarking instrument to be linked to the national system of accreditation of early childhood services;
   - map literacy practices in diverse services and then review the Strategy in terms of the needs of these services;
   - evaluate the pilot program;
   - include children’s voices (pp. 2-3).
In addition to this report, researchers constructed several case studies based on Stage 1. We represented understandings held by different participants as well as the rich evidence of early literacy across home and early childhood settings. Several papers in my portfolio reflect the diverse nature of early literacy as sociocultural practice as lived and understood by participants. Papers One, Two and Three involve case studies from Project A, Stage 1.

2.5.1.2 Stage 2 Piloting the Professional Development Program

- Background

From July 1999 till May 2000, the research team developed a pilot professional development program. This involved Associate Professor Laurie Makin, Dr. Jacqueline Hayden, Leonie Arthur, Criss Jones Diaz, Margaret McNaught, Lynn Clugston, Associate Professor Toni Downes and me. Research assistants included Karen Foote, Cindy Reismann, Justine Lawson, Christine Baxter, Sue Groom, Sue French, Dianne Wright, Alexandra Harper and Deborah Garrett.

We invited educators associated with 17 settings in Stage 1 to participate with families in a pilot professional development program and evaluation, and finally a trial of the support materials. Based on literature findings, researchers understood professional development needed to approach educators and families as adult learners. Researchers understood educators as reflective practitioners who evaluated their own practices and networked with other participants, especially families (Abbott, Walton, Tapia, & Greenwood, 1999; Pascal, 1999).

Researchers offered a twenty hour pilot professional development program to support educators and families in settings. Three assumptions guided the program, firstly, participants jointly construct knowledge with each other, secondly, that literacy is a social practice, and thirdly that five core principles support children under five learning literacy in early childhood settings.
These principles included:

Principle 1  Exchanging literacy information  
Principle 2  Building on literacy information  
Principle 3  Planning for individual literacies  
Principle 4  Integrating literacy experiences throughout the day  
Principle 5  Scaffolding literacy understandings  

(McNaught et al., 2000, p. 5).

During the pilot, a university based researcher worked with educators, families and management in each setting. Support varied according to priorities and needs for each of the 15 participating settings after 2 settings withdrew from the project. Professional learning involved workshops for participants from several settings, setting visits, telephone and email contact, and a group newsletter. Researchers assisted participants to reflect on current practices and to collaborate on goals and strategies that would enhance literacy in the setting program.

- Collecting data

Setting educators and families collected evidence of their learning. We distributed resources including scrapbooks, journals or disposable cameras to various settings to record their program and their progress. These resources enabled participants to document literacy artifacts from children, the setting literacy environment, and home and community environments and reflect on program progress. In these ways, participants collected evidence that reflected diverse perspectives of different families and educators and which was tailored to their own program goals.

Researchers reflected in journals on setting visits and on participant engagement with professional learning resources being used. We also noted participant activity at professional development sessions, telephone conversations, emails and their own reflections on the professional learning processes.
At the end of Stage 2, participants evaluated the strategies and draft resources and contributed more artifacts of home and setting literacies. Researchers interviewed and audio taped 28 educators, 32 families and 11 managers. These were transcribed for analysis (See Appendix 5.1.4 for interview questions).

- Interpreting data

Researchers read transcripts, journal entries and scrapbooks to identify codes and emerging themes. They analysed this information which provided directions for the professional development materials constructed and trialled in Project A: Stage 3.

- Interpreting and evaluating Project A: Stage 2

Researchers analysed themes in the evidence for changes in attitude, knowledge and practice through pilot involvement. Changes included the following. Most educators expressed enthusiasm for the project, and identified improvements in their practices and confidence, so increased children’s literacy learning opportunities. Educator understandings of literacy as social practice increased which also strengthened practice. For example, educators included home experiences in the setting and understood literacy beyond reading and writing. Some families noted that their understandings of literacy had changed while others confirmed what they already had thought. Some educators included popular culture, technology and home and community languages and dialects in the program while some appeared still resistant to expanding the program to include diverse literacies. Communication between educators and families in many settings had improved. Educators understood more about children’s home literacy experiences and included some aspects in the program. Families noticed these changes. Educators indicated that they needed facilitation and support during professional development.

The Stage 2 evaluation identified several critical issues demanding attention (McNaught et al., 2000), including:

- Recognition of the need for changed attitudes, knowledge and practice in early childhood literacy environments
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

- Support for professional development
- The need for similar research into other learning areas
- The importance of the whole setting involvement, including parents and others in the process of change (p.39).

Stage 2 recommended future directions (McNaught et al., 2000) that:

- Literacies, Communities and Under 5s materials be supported with in-service training for facilitators. This would include the development of a series of training workshops for facilitators and support material for facilitators.
- An evaluation model, to be developed for assessing the implementation of Literacies, Communities and Under 5s. This needs to emphasise assessment of outcomes for children. Families and staff in rural, regional and urban areas.
- Existing licensing procedures, accreditation and/or other tools aimed at quality improvement include evaluation of early literacy objectives as outlined in Literacies, Communities and Under 5s.
- Workshops addressing Literacies, Communities and Under 5s be developed for school Principals, K-2 staff and other community stakeholders not directly involved with its implementation.
- The Literacies, Communities and Under 5s package be used as a model for the preparation of similar training materials in other curriculum areas – especially numeracy and science and technology (p. 39).

Stage 2 identified research directions (McNaught et al., 2000) which included:

- A longitudinal study comparing children’s progress in literacy in the early years of school with their involvement in early literacy programs in prior to school settings.
- Further development and trialling of the ECLLS as a self administered tool for settings, and/or a tool for external accreditation of literacy environments in classrooms.
**Exploration of effective communication practices between families and staff across a diverse range of cultural and socio-economic contexts as well as geographical locations, i.e. regional and rural Australia.**

**Case studies of settings, which promote multiple literacies – i.e. support and extend home languages and literacies and make connections to children’s home experiences with popular culture and technology. This would include choice and perspectives from children who are experiencing literacy learning (p. 40).**

### 2.5.1.3 Stage 3 - Trialling “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s”

- **Collecting data**

Researchers developed, trialled and published the professional development resource for families and educators, “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” (Jones Diaz et al., 2001). Academics included Associate Professor Laurie Makin, Dr. Jacqueline Hayden, Leonie Arthur, Criss Jones Diaz, Margaret McNaught, Lynn Clugston, Dr Jean Ashton, Associate Professor Toni Downes and me. Research assistants included Janene Rox, Justine Lawson, Eira Sproats, Carol Burgess, Karen Foote, Sue French, Peter Whiteman, Deb Garrett and Alexandra Harper. Participants from 12 settings which were not involved in Stage 2 were asked to evaluate draft written materials and the outlined professional development processes. The family and educator feedback informed the revised materials and the professional development process.

- **Interpreting data**

Educators, directors, facilitators and families from diverse settings representing various experiences and qualifications, commented on draft materials and processes, and then completed a questionnaire concerning their responses to the materials. The participants informally discussed their feedback in small groups at university sites (See Appendix 5.1.5 for a copy of the questions). Their feedback indicated that participants valued the discussion and sharing between families and educators, the high quality content, engaging concepts and processes, useful experiences and
practical ideas to try. They worried about the length and wordiness of the documentation, the similarity of some experiences, the academic style of writing and the difficulty in locating sections. In addition, critical friends in the early childhood field offered feedback on the draft video. As researchers, we analysed the written and oral responses which contributed to how we further refined the materials and the process as outlined in “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” (Jones Diaz et al., 2001). As participants evaluated materials and process, they provided sources of triangulation. Including evidence collection methods enhanced the project credibility.

- Interpreting and evaluating Project A: Stage 3
Sponsoring bodies funded a NSW state wide rollout of the early literacy professional development resource. The project team introduced the resource in a two-hour workshop to educators and families at selected settings over NSW. I facilitated the development of this workshop with draft experiences and resource materials and then conducted several workshops in suburban and rural locations. (See Table 3.3, Section 3, for details of my workshops). As well as writing the final report (McNaught et al., 2000), the team constructed and piloted “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” (Jones Diaz et al., 2001). When DET educational officers and managers with a range of Aboriginal, additional needs and early childhood expertise attended a whole-day workshop in 2001 regarding the resource and the video, they reflected positive attitudes (See Table 3.4 for details).

- Project A findings
Stage 1 established that diverse parents held broad understandings of literacy which their young children learnt through interactions and activity with family and community experiences. Despite the strongly positive learning environment in early childhood settings, educators held restricted understandings of literacy as well as narrow images of children and learning. Information technology, popular culture, dramatic play and literacy, diversity and LDOTSAE were not strongly understood. Stage 2 indicated that with support many educators responded positively and changed some understandings regarding exchanging information with families, building on
children’s literacy, planning for literacy, integrating literacy throughout the day and scaffolding children’s literacy understandings. However there was some resistance to broadening understandings of literacy, specifically information technology, popular culture and LDOTSAE. Stage 3 identified that there was still need for changing understandings of early literacy and for professional learning, communication and relationships with families.

An independent small scale study of 25 educators examined how educators responded to three NSW early childhood curriculum innovations concerning literacy, pedagogy and health (Burgess, 2007). “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” was the first of the state wide professional learning resources disseminated over 2001-2003. Burgess found that the Literacies resource effectively expressed content to educators. Almost half the educators (44%) positively regarded and remembered some ideas from the resource. Almost one third of educators (30%) sustained their use of the resource over five years. Many educators continued to be engaged with literacy innovation with only a small number explicitly rejecting it. However Burgess warned that most educators superficially changed their practices. Her possible explanations included the limited organisational support with no mediator for collaborative and continued professional learning, the mismatch between the innovation with educators’ need or interest, or alternatively that educators’ heavy and complex workload prevented their engagement.

2.5.2 Project B: Internet Services

- Background

Education Australia Online (EdNA) funded a small research team in 1999 to investigate suitable internet resources for young children under eight years of age. At this time, educators rarely integrated computers within learning environments in early childhood settings, although elementary school educators regarded computers as common resources. Furthermore Project A reported that families found their children learning literacy through computers and other electronic resources. Many early childhood educators judged that computers were irrelevant, useless or unsuitable for
young children under eight years. They had similar views about the role of the Internet with young children. Some child care centres and preschools had computers but rarely used the Internet. This limited use appeared partly due to the complex frameworks of Australian early childhood service provision, regulation, and funding as well concerns about computers and young children previously mentioned.

Many children’s home computer experiences contrasted sharply with their limited use of computers and internet services in early childhood settings. At the time of Project B, 48% of Australian households whose oldest child was between birth and four years of age, had computers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). 1.1 million households were connected to the Internet and children lived in about 36% of these households. Given these gaps between home and setting access to computers and the Internet, many children enjoyed greater learning opportunities with digital resources at home than in early childhood settings to investigate, express themselves and understand their worlds.

Researchers, Toni Downes, Leonie Arthur, Lyn Kemp and I, designed Project B to investigate Internet Services for young children (See Table 2.5 for design details).

The project aimed to:

1. identify elements of good practice of educators using the Internet with children under eight years of age
2. investigate the availability of useful Internet resources for children
3. identify and prioritise requirements of educators for organizing resources
4. identify improvements to Edna services in this area
5. provide purpose and advice for EdNA concerning an early childhood pathway, for example a website (Adapted from Downes, Arthur, Beecher & Kemp, 1999)
Table 2.5 Design of Project B: Internet Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Feature</th>
<th>Project Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Focus</strong></td>
<td>This evaluation investigated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the elements of good practice of early childhood educators using the internet with young children under 8-years?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Which available internet sites are useful for young children?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What do educators require for organising above resources?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What improvements are needed for EdNA services in this area?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is recommended purpose and advice for EdNA for an early childhood pathway?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>8 children, 3 - 5 years</td>
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<td>10 children, 5 - 8 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 educators, including education system consultants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 education.au representatives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 IT specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 UWS academics interested in IT and/or ECE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Sydney based project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Workshop participants from NSW, Vic, SA, WA and Tas.</td>
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<td><strong>Methods of collecting evidence</strong></td>
<td>Literature review</td>
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<td>Internet sites review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus group national workshop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phone interviews with 15 educators (preschool - 4, school - 11)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Observations in Sydney of children with internet sites</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family focus group discussions in Sydney</td>
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<td>Children focus group discussions in Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of interpreting &amp; understanding evidence</strong></td>
<td>Analysis of transcripts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hand coding of emerging themes related to research focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Progress and final reports presented to national steering body</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Methods of validity &amp; credibility</strong></td>
<td>Researcher experiences and beliefs</td>
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<td>Multiple methods of evidence collection</td>
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<td>Involvement of participants with diverse perspectives</td>
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<td>Triangulation</td>
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- Collecting evidence

As chief investigators, we gathered evidence with various methods from different participant groups. These included children, parents, educators and educator systems consultants, likely to be experienced with the Internet. We reviewed literature and
internet sites aimed at young children; conducted a one day workshop involving focus
groups of the national steering group and selected early childhood educators (See
Appendix 5.1.6 for the discussion foci). We interviewed by phone early childhood
educators and education system consultants, facilitated a focus group discussion with
families which were based on the focus group discussion questions as well as two
focus groups of young children and observed young children responding to selected
children’s sites (See Appendices 5.1.7 and 5.1.8 for a copy of observation foci and
discussion questions). We collected evidence over four weeks May to June 1999.

- Interpreting evidence

The workshop, parent focus group discussion and the two children’s focus group
discussions were taped and transcribed for analysis. We wrote notes of observations
of children engaging with internet sites and all phone interviews. We reread and hand
coded all word processed evidence which we analysed in terms emerging themes
concerning the five project objectives. We collaborated with each other in terms of
making meaning across various sources of evidence. Progressive interpreting
occurred through a national workshop, phone interviews with systems managers and
all evidence gathered as outlined previously. This informed the next stage of the
research. We presented progress and final reports to the national steering group.

- Interpreting and evaluating the project

From analysis of the evidence, we wrote the report EdNa Internet Services for
Children Under Eight, available on the Internet for educators and families
df). We presented and wrote several papers for international conferences from this
project (See Tables 3.4 and 3.5, Section 3, for details). Paper Seven, Section 4.3
reports on one aspect of Project B.

The project expanded my emphasis on digital literacies. Internet and computer
programs engage many children at home. Increasingly children’s access to digital
texts in setting learning environments began to match that encountered at home.
Project B findings

The project identified some elements of good practice for educators using the Internet with children under 8 years. These included responsive educator interactions with children and the integration of digital tools within the learning environment. Effective learning environments with embedded digital resources resulted from educators’ strong understandings of children and their interests, competencies and experiences. These educators held deep understandings of significant curriculum processes and ideas and they integrated digital and traditional tools within play areas and learning centres. Through providing open-ended experiences, they extended children’s interactive learning with others, and supported children to direct their own learning.

The study found limited useful Internet sites for young children to investigate, play and consult information without any persuading influences, for example, advertising. There were few sites from Australian public institutions such as museums and libraries that provided or recommended sites for children, families and educators, apart from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Furthermore, at the time there was no public policy framework promoting high quality Internet sites for Australian young children. Existing sites were based on design and make, work and play, communicate and share, and online projects, but few were suitable for independent use by children under 5 years. More sites were available for older children, 5-8 years, however their quality varied.

Requirements for organising children’s resources were identified, where online collections needed to cater for both children and their educators. Furthermore resources needed to be located within the online communities that supported making and using these resources.

Recommended improvements to EdNa services included providing a collection of safe Internet sites where children could investigate, locate information and participate in online projects, increasing sites for children under 5 and offering educators
information about ways to adapt and use sites. Further directions involved promoting important Australian cultural bodies to develop high quality exploratory and information sites for young children.

2.5.3 Project C: Play and Literacy

- Background
The projects contributing to this body of work progressively shaped my focus concerning literacy as sociocultural practice. Project A mapped and analysed local literacy practices at home and in early childhood settings. It was found that the general learning environments were positive, understandings of early literacy as social practice, relationships and communication between educators and families and information technology and popular culture demanded attention (Makin et al., 1999). Further diversity, LDOTSAE and dramatic play and literacy were overlooked. Project B investigated digital literacy specifically the internet, a rapidly emerging literacy as sociocultural practice at home and in some early childhood settings. This third project investigated play and literacy learning in children’s social worlds. The previous projects established that children learn literacy through everyday life and play at home and in some early childhood settings. The third project, Project C, aimed to investigate practices and perceptions of interested families and educators concerning children’s literacy learning through play and playful experiences. In addition this project sought to identify how educators provide these learning experiences for children, birth to twelve. Three researchers, Leonie Arthur, Criss Jones Diaz and I planned this project. Criss withdrew from the project due to concurrent demands from co-editing and writing chapters for an early literacy book. Leonie and I, respectively investigated children learning literacy through play or playful ways in local child care centres and elementary schools.

Play has long been regarded by many families and most early childhood educators as how children learn about their world, although differently across sociocultural contexts. However, literacy learning through play was not commonly understood by early childhood educators and learning literacy through play under recognised by
elementary educators. In 2000, current NSW DET and NSW Board of Studies curriculum documents acknowledged active learning, including play and playful ways, for children over five years of age in some curriculum areas (Dockett & Lambert, 1996; New South Wales Board of Studies, 1998; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 1999). Contemporary understandings of literacy as sociocultural practice acknowledge that children’s literacy play represents home and community practice (Barratt-Pugh, 2000a, 2000b; Hall & Robinson, 2000; Harste et al., 1984).

This small team undertook the project with the purpose of gathering evidence of local practice and constructing case studies and examples for a book (See Table 2.6 for design details). A peak national literacy educators association contracted this book in 2000 for their membership. Leonie conducted research with educators, families and children associated with early childhood settings for children aged under five years, while I conducted research with educators, families and children connected with elementary schools for children aged five to twelve.

Project C aimed to:

1. Gather evidence on some of the ways in which children from birth to age twelve learn and use literacy through play and playful experiences.
2. Observe and interview children, families and educators who engage in promoting literacy through play and playful experiences.
3. Construct case studies and examples based on gathered evidence to illustrate book chapters about play and literacy.
### Table 2.6 Design of Project C: Play and Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Feature</th>
<th>Project Details</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Research Focus**           | Children learning literacy through play and playful ways. Investigation of  
                                 | - How are children learning at home, in the community and in settings?  
                                 | - How do families and educators support children’s literacy learning?  
                                 | - What do families and educators believe about play or playful experiences supporting literacy learning?  
                                 | - What are some advantages and disadvantages of play based literacy experiences?  
                                 | - How can educators respond to issues arising with a play based approach?  
                                 | - In what ways can educators support children learning literacy through play or playful experiences? |
| **Participants**             | 6 parents from early childhood settings & 13 parents from schools  
                                 | 10 early childhood educators & 16 elementary school educators, including 2 consultants and 2 executive educators with a strong interest in literacy learning through play  
                                 | 2 researchers |
| **Location**                 | 4 early childhood settings in Sydney and 4 schools in Greater Western Sydney  
                                 | 2 schools in Victoria, all reflecting diverse sociocultural communities  
                                 | 1 parent from Finland |
| **Methods of collecting evidence** | Face to face and phone interviews  
                                 | Observations  
                                 | Artifact collection  
                                 | Evidence member-checked by participants  
                                 | Researcher journal |
| **Methods of interpreting & understanding evidence** | Hand coding of emerging codes and themes  
                                 | Constructing interpretative texts, draft case studies of practice  
                                 | Member-checking by some participants  
                                 | Composing 6 chapters including case studies |
| **Methods of interpreting and evaluating project** | Distribution of over 6000 copies of book to organisation members  
                                 | Use as a tertiary text and professional development resource  
                                 | Ongoing sales to tertiary bookshops, individuals and schools |
| **Methods of validity & credibility** | Researcher education and beliefs  
                                 | Multiple participants with diverse perspective  
                                 | Multiple methods of evidence collection  
                                 | Triangulation across sources and methods |

- Collecting evidence

As chief investigators, Leonie and I used multiple methods to collect evidence in settings with educators recommended for strong practice. We observed, interviewed and collected artifacts. I interviewed 16 educators and 13 family members whilst
observing in four schools over a six week period, mid November to late December, 2000. Meanwhile Leonie interviewed 10 educators and 6 parents whilst observing in early childhood settings over the same period of time (See Appendices 5.1.9 and 5.1.10 for copies of the respective questions). I also interviewed two Victorian educators, who volunteered once they heard about the project I interviewed five family members associated with the Sydney schools. I observed children and interviewed eight volunteer parents from New South Wales, Victoria and Finland.

We observed by taking photos and making notes during the face to face and phone interviews. We collected or copied artifacts that children composed or used. All interviewees member-checked these notes and artifacts, a few made alterations and some offered further information. Some interviewees (four parents and four educators) associated with schools, wanted follow-up interviews which occurred in suitable places outside work hours. These knowledgeable educators, representing experience with early years and later elementary years as well as educational management voiced strong concerns about the need for reconceptualising images of children and learning. They believed these enhanced the potentials of children learning literacy through play and playful experiences. Some educators explained how their own children learned literacy through play or playful ways. Some families expressed deep understandings of children’s literacy engagement with challenging but pleasurable playful experiences. They appreciated how their children were learning at school in these ways.

- Interpreting evidence

All interview and observation notes were word processed and hand coded. Evidence, including artifacts, was sorted according to emerging themes and insights from the literature review. We triangulated evidence across sources and collection methods. For example, themes in educator interviews were contrasted with themes in observations, and children’s artifacts were compared with themes in educator interviews. From the evidence collected and analysed, we constructed interpretive texts with case studies and illustrative examples. We utilised aspects of this analysis
along with literature insights to each write three chapters in the book, Play and Literacy in Children’s Social Worlds. My chapters comprise Papers Four, Five and Six (See Sections 4.2 and 4.3).

- Interpreting and evaluating the project

The distribution of the book for Primary English Teaching Association in 2001 with over 6000 members, provided evidence of the worth of this project. Book reviews appeared in both a national and an international literacy educator journal acknowledging the importance of the text for the field (See Appendices 5.1.11 and 5.1.12). To date, January 2009, schools and individuals from all states and territories, including Northern Territory indigenous communities regularly purchase single copies. This book contributed to academic and professional development as a tertiary text and as a support material for educators’ professional development (See Appendix 5.1.13 for details of purchasers).

- Project C findings

Investigations revealed that many families and educators regarded literacy as social practice and believed that children learn literacy through play in diverse ways. Families reported their children learning literacy at home and in the community through everyday experiences, especially involving technologies, LDOTSPE and popular culture. Educators indicated that they provided children with experiences based on strong understandings of their family practices, cultures and languages as well as children’s interests. Educators planned integrated experiences and curriculum relevant to the children and promoted children’s active learning through differential scaffolding.

Families and educators of children birth-twelve years reported that children learn literacy through everyday life experiences. Parents understood that literacy learning was embedded in family and community activities, for example, making shopping lists, playing dress-ups or talking on the phone. Television and the internet were also identified by some families who worried about popular culture issues. Some families
reported children’s formal literacy learning experiences, for example, Saturday LOTE School. Parents reported they extended children’s literacy learning through conversations and playful activities, for instance, reading the directory enroute to sports events, chatting to relatives in LDOTSAE and playing ‘I spy’ games. They saw discussing television programs and sharing picture books as literacy learning. Strong educators reported their role as complex and intensive when supporting children’s literacy learning. They investigated children’s languages, cultures, interests and knowledge before they planned the program. They extended children’s home and community experiences in the program and integrated literacy and play. They supported children’s literacy spontaneously as well as through planned environments and experiences.

Most strong educators believed that play or playful experiences supports literacy learning because children learn through relevant integrated experiences and contexts where they feel competent and valued. They believed children learn spontaneously as they direct their own learning and connect to what they already know about the world. Children interact, investigate and represent understandings as they pursue their interests. Children try out roles, purposes and text features of literacy as social practice through literacy-enriched play for example, hairdressers and “roughey” car racing. Dramatic play enables children to experiment about meanings and literacy without fearing failure. For older children dramatic play offers alternative spaces for children to examine, create and critique meanings. One educator explicitly recommended that schools identify “what is happening outside school so that learning and play merges” Another educator noted “learning literacy through play offers a “messier” style”, and different understandings of the world and learning. However a few parents and educators believed that formal programs best supported children’s literacy learning, and play was “just play”.

Advantages of play based literacy experiences included children learning literacy in integrated ways, having fun, connecting home, community and setting literacy and everyday experiences, and wanting to revisit or sustain experiences since they felt
competent. They investigated their interests and represented personally meaningful experiences. Dramatic play offered children the opportunity to try out roles, literacy ideas and consolidate learning without worrying “getting it wrong”. Issues arising for educators in under five settings included the time taken to set up and resource the environment, sustaining children’s engagement and resolving safety matters. Young children often quickly used up expendable resources. For elementary school educators issues concerned differing understandings amongst colleagues about play, curriculum approaches and pedagogies. For example, some educators recognised and worked with children’s agency while others resisted children’s agency, or experienced difficulty in scaffolding children’s learning. Some educators faced difficulties with grade based literacy/play sessions especially as children benefiting from challenge or additional support were overlooked. Some educators worried about some parents responses. Assessment of learning concerned most elementary educators, as they felt pressure to standardise experiences, however other educators identified children’s learning through play through continuous assessment, which informed the program as well as their supervisor.

Educators recommended ways of responding to issues, particularly exchanging information with families, and examining each others’ perspectives. Educators found it essential to provide and organise resources for learning environments so they could interact with children. They valued documenting children’s literacy learning to share with colleagues and families, and to link to assessment foci.

Educators reported they supported children learning literacy through play and playful experiences through curriculum approaches that integrated children’s lives and literacy into the curriculum in spontaneous and planned ways. Planning pedagogies involved exchanging information with families about children’s literacy, culture and interests. This informed how educators selected and organised resources and experiences, prepared the environment, integrated units and learning centres.
2.5.4 Project D: Critical Dialogue

- Background

Again the preceding projects shaped this project and my development as a researcher. Project A outlined the landscape of literacy practices at home and in settings. Recommendations included broadening understandings of early literacy as social practice, strengthening relationships between educators and families and investigating popular culture and technologies to extend children’s literacy learning. Project B investigated digital literacy especially internet resources available to increasing numbers of children at home, rather than the early childhood setting. Project C investigated play and literacy learning in children’s social worlds from perspectives of families and engaged educators. These projects indicated that children learn literacy, including digital literacy through play and playful ways in everyday experiences at home and in many settings.

In Project D, the educators at Kyneton Kindergarten (pseudonyms are used in this project for ethical reasons), a metropolitan children’s centre, had commenced a change journey (Arthur et al., 2008). The managing educator invited me as critical friend to research with educators, the children and families. This role enabled me to gather evidence, ask questions, and understand changes that educators were implementing. I supported their dialoguing and reflecting on change and inquiry (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). In 2003, educators at this centre expanded their curriculum approaches from mainly DAP towards including Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 1998), Te Whariki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996), emergent curriculum (Jones & Nimmo, 1994) and the project approach (Helm et al., 2007). These approaches promoted curriculum based on children’s interests and reflected literacy as sociocultural practice (Jones Diaz et al., 2001). Unfortunately this centre was uninformed of regional introductory workshops for “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” and only learnt about it when the resource was delivered to the centre.
In 2005 a children’s project (Helm et al., 2007) offered children an expanded multiliteracies learning space (Gutierrez et al., 2007) by providing the chance to use their agency and deepen learning about their interests in fairytales. Educators built on children’s family practices and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Furthermore, the topic offered rich grounds for educators and children to establish continuous critical dialogue. It began when two girls provoked educators to recognise their deep interest in princesses. Educators and children negotiated a project with a wider fairytale focus, despite educators’ concerns about gender and violence issues. Children and educators began by identifying the fairytales that children knew. This encouraged educators to seek some family information about children’s multiliteracies practices and over a week families and children expanded the original list from 7 to 31, as everyone fused fairytales with superheroes and folktales.

However, educators initially resisted further family communication about the fairytale project because they were well aware of the embedded social issues, namely gender stereotypes and violence, as well as having a heavy workload. In previous projects, such as Football and The Sea, they comfortably sought family information and participation, despite issues, which were perhaps overlooked. Educators were possibly concerned about community backlash that could damage their well regarded reputation, when the vocal parents gossip about “violence” as children using swords, or complain about girls playing fairytale marriage as their life purpose. One educator, since embarking on the change journey with new curriculum approaches and pedagogies, recently experienced strong negative parental feedback. The parent demanded to know why the pedagogies had changed. She had difficulty understanding the new ways of documenting children’s learning, for example, narrative portfolios in comparison to DAP checklists. The educator felt overwhelmed explaining the new pedagogies since she was so confronted by the parent’s view and anxiety. Following on, educators cautiously approached family communication about controversial matters.
Educators realised that their own concerns about the fairytale project were valid so they critiqued topics and issues with children after book sharings and play experiences. They considered alternatives that would satisfy children and also themselves. For example, they jointly constructed safety rules for using swords, which resulted in children’s highly skilled safe play. Other examples involved options for girls and alerting children to including all interested children in play.

Children capably shared and contested their fairytale understandings during book sharings, in class meetings and in their play. They usually based their understandings on family multiliteracies, especially television programs and DVDs. In class meetings, the educators and children regularly discussed characters, actions and endings of the narratives. They compared differing variations of the same tale, as well as comparing tales. Children critiqued the unfair actions of some characters, such as Prince Ronald, for being mean to Princess Elizabeth in “The Paper Bag Princess”. They also examined possibilities for different actions and endings in tales. Children raised the issue of the lack of resources because swords and guns were banned in the centre. They explained that if they were playing fairytales, they needed swords, and negotiated with educators for paper swords.

After the daily book sharing, educators discussed possibilities for fairytales with children; bearing in mind they were anxious about the gender and violence issues. They shared traditional tales retold in Disney books familiar to the children from their family television/DVD viewing, and then expanded focus to traditional picture books and updated editions. Educators continued expanding the topic with fairytales from Korean, Indian and Chinese cultures as well as feminist tales, including “The Paper Bag Princess”. These texts provided a diverse range of characters, actions and narrative for educators and children to consider, critique and reconfigure.

The small research team included three educators, three parents, ten children, the managing educator and me. We undertook this project with the purpose of investigating how the self selected preschool aged children understood and used
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

... fairytales in their play and other experiences. (See Table 2.7 for details). On another level, the purpose was to investigate how changing philosophies, curriculum approaches and pedagogies influenced children’s learning, especially critical literacy. The curriculum that emerged maximised children’s agency, built on their family literacy practices and supported children to examine their interests.

This project aimed to:

1. Gather evidence on some ways interested children from age three to five use fairytales through play and playful literacy experiences
2. Observe and interview interested children, their families and educators who engage with fairytales through play and playful literacy experiences
3. Collaborate with educators and families in understanding setting practices with fairytales and playful literacy experiences
4. Collaborate with educators and families in understanding their curriculum change processes that they were currently undertaking
5. Construct case studies based on this gathered information to share with educators and contribute to presentations, journal articles and book chapters.
Table 2.7  Design of Project D: Critical Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Feature</th>
<th>Project Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Focus</strong></td>
<td>This project investigated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td> How do children learn literacy at home, in the community and in settings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td> How do fairytails promote children’s understandings of people in fairytale play or playful experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td> How do families and educators support children’s literacy learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td> How has curriculum change shaped educator and family interaction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>10 self-selected children, aged 3-5-years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 educators, 1 managing educator and 1 academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Children’s centre in metropolitan Sydney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Methods of collecting evidence** | Observation  
Interviews  
Artifact collection  
Researcher journal                                                                                                                                 |
| **Methods of interpreting & understanding evidence** | Member-checking written observations, interviews  
Hand coding for emerging codes and themes  
Revisiting evidence with participants  
Constructing case studies                                                                                                        |
| **Methods of interpreting & evaluating the project** | Composing papers featuring various case studies  
Writing book chapters                                                                                                                       |
| **Methods of validity & credibility** | Ongoing reflection with participants  
Multiple methods of evidence collection  
Prolonged engagement in setting  
Involvement of participants with diverse perspectives  
Nuanced representations of topic  
Crystallisation of meanings                                                                                                             |

- Collecting data

As chief investigator, I collected evidence with numerous methods, including observing, artefact gathering and interviewing. Prior to this, I visited for two mornings to establish rapport with children, educators and families. I observed the program three hours one morning a week for twelve weeks, May-July 2005. I wrote observations of children’s experiences, some of which involved fairytails. Children, whose families had given consent, were asked on the observation day if they minded me observing and documenting their play. I explained I wanted to tell other educators what they were doing with fairytails. Many children offered insights when I arrived.
at the setting. I conducted individual interviews with 4 educators and 3 parents as well as facilitating group interviews involving 2 educators and 3 parents (See Appendix 5.1.14 for a copy of the questions).

Practitioner researchers Narelle and Josifa (pseudonyms) regularly shared observations and reflections on children’s experiences as well as the program documentation for children and families. They identified artifacts providing further evidence of children’s literacy learning in the project and in other experiences. Another educator, Melina, became involved in the project towards the end by bringing in a resource. The managing educator, Jessica shared observations of her irregular times with the children.

- Interpreting data
  I word processed observation and interview notes before educators and families member-checked them. They confirmed these and sometimes extended them. Educators also shared further specific observations and interpretations.

Next, using grounded theory strategies (Charmaz, 2003), I reread, line coded by hand and then analysed according to emerging codes and patterns. After the patterns appeared strongly, I analysed these in consideration with literature insights. From this analysis, I constructed an initial case study of how some children used fairytales in constructing their social worlds. I shared and confirmed this case study with participants. I presented this case as a collaborative cross cultural paper at an international early childhood research conference in September 2005. I included aspects from this project for Paper 10, and constructed further case studies for Paper Eleven, Section 4.4.

- Interpreting and evaluating the project
  Findings contributed to my ongoing writing for tertiary texts and articles. Even though Project D educators all have since left the setting, they continue to strengthen their theory and practice as they work in children’s services and schools. In addition
two educators commenced further tertiary study. Three educators and I collaboratively reflected on aspects of Project D, contributing to my writing (Arthur et al., 2008) and Papers Ten and Eleven for various early childhood audiences. This in itself is evidence of making a difference in how educators better understand practices and theory as well as engage in research. Future directions include collaborative writing about this local curriculum reconceptualisation that influenced all children’s learning opportunities.

- Project D findings

Parents and educators held broad understandings of children learning literacy as multiliteracies at home, in the community and in settings, confirming previous research (Beecher & Arthur, 2001). Parents reported that their children learnt literacy at home through regular technology use, especially television and repeated viewing of videos/DVDs. Usually children dressed-up, played and discussed the characters and narratives with other children or parents, supporting previous findings where children revisit meanings from digital texts (Marsh et al., 2005). Additionally some parents read books to their children whilst some only viewed programs/films with children. Some children read books to their dolls and some attended community experiences including films and live performances. Educators believed that children learn literacy through playing, viewing, talking, listening, drawing and writing as well as from environmental print, investigating project topics and asking questions. They knew that children viewed and listened to fairytales at home and attended community performances. In the centre children listened to and discussed familiar, new and diverse fairytales read by educators, role-played characters using dialogue, retold narratives, drew and wrote tales. Children as a group constructed two fairytales with educator scaffolding. Educators thought that fairytale dialogue, repetitiveness and patterns in DVDs and books made it easy for children to role-play.

Fairytales in children’s play promoted their critical understandings of people, particularly involving gender, violence and relationships. The narratives offered children information about traditional and diverse ways of doing gender as identified
by Davies (2003). Their gender understandings dominated play, usually reflecting the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) supporting previous findings of young children’s play (Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2003). However, several children understood girls/women and boys/men in shifting and contradictory ways evident in their fluid subjectivities. For example, some children showed critical awareness of multiple understandings of women. They played or accepted in play women as manager, bride and nurturer reflecting wide “masculine” and “feminine” positionings perhaps reflecting wide positionings essential for a non-sexist society (Davies, 2003; Kristeva, 1986). Children regarded characters from The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1982) differently to previous research (Davies, 2003). They saw Princess Elizabeth as “cool” while Prince Ronald was “mean”. They did not view the princess as “getting it wrong” by rejecting the prince as found by Davies (2003). Possibly many children in Project D accessed expanded gender positionings from wider discourses and open critique with educators, parents and friends in contrast to previous research.

Educators found critiquing with children the fairytale stereotypes of people beneficial to challenge assumptions about women, men and families, for example, marriage as happy ever after, options for girls and families, and violence as in sword-fighting. Even though children often wanted a happy wedding ending, this only occurred occasionally as they composed diverse narratives. Sometimes, girls focused on “the look” of brides, not bothering about weddings. Sometimes they chose boys as grooms who agreed or disagreed with the wedding, and at other times, boys chose girls as brides who agreed or disagreed with the wedding. However, some children extended their gender positioning and critically expanded their ways to express femininities and masculinities. For example, Grace became a competent sword-fighter and a strong narrator and Josh played a prince with various guises, including marry/ not marry, sword-fight/ not sword-fight, caring and investigating mermaids. Children extended their positionings, occasionally encountering border-work (Thorne, 1993) or category maintenance (Davies, 2003). Sometimes this blocked them but other times they persisted.
Critiquing stereotypes of violence with children promoted deep considerations of meanings, negotiations, and multiple perspectives. Although guns and weapons were banned in the centre, some boys interested in playing fairytales questioned educators why swords were missing. Their agency promoted educators to reflect on their assumptions about violence as identified by Holland (2003). Because children and educators examined safe but exciting ways to use swords, children’s learning was provoked. Many boys then participated in narratives, critiquing the smoke and mirrors in trick-fighting and a girl extended her gender positioning through sword-fighting.

Families and educators supported multiliteracies learning by revisiting narratives, characters and issues with children. Often families viewed together and discussed aspects, provided resources such as toys and costumes, purchased DVDs and supermarket books and sometimes some attended community performances. All interviewed parents examined diverse topics with children. Parents appreciated that educators critiqued issues with children, although their priorities differed. Parents identified marriage, sadness, fear, love, death, girls’ and family options, cultural diversity, fairness and consumerism as issues. They shared some issues with educators including girls’ options and fairness. Educators prioritised some issues, such as health and fitness and overlooked others, for example, consumerism. Educators collaborated with each other to extend children’s multiliteracies and critiquing in the following ways. They integrated interests and family multiliteracies in the program, for example previous projects included Football and The Sea, although possibly overlooking social issues. Where educators felt anxious about problematic matters, they took some time to act, for example responding to the princess passion. They proceeded once they realised they could support each other to critically examine issues with children, and could broaden the topic, from princesses to fairytales to engage more children, supporting previous findings (Arthur, 2005; Marsh, 1999).
Curriculum change eventually deepened educator and family interactions, especially addressing the social issues which worried educators. Initially they resisted deepening parent communication beyond identifying family fairytales and using unsolicited resources, reflecting earlier research (Makin et al, 1999). By the project’s end, educators re-established confidence in explaining to parents the critiquing of project issues and the depth in children’s learning during interviews. In this forum they conversed deeply, rather than being interviewed. However, the interviews instigated this interaction, hence my critical friend role appears important to support educators addressing tricky matters. For example, educators explained to parents how and why swords appeared in a centre that promoted harmonious relationships and banned weapons. Prior negative experiences with parental responses to change reduced the educators’ communication confidence and maybe lessened program relevance for children.

2.6 Personal and professional development

This section explains my development across five areas. This includes how the projects expanded my initial literacy assumptions to my current understanding of multiliteracies. Then I signal how the themes and dimensions constitute early multiliteracies in my work. Finally further understandings vital to improving all children’s multiliteracies learning are identified.

2.6.1 Strengthening my understanding of literacy to multiliteracies.

The projects deepened my beginning assumptions about early literacy, identified in Section 2.3.1. I now recognise that multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) foregrounds the dynamic ways that young children express, examine or reconfigure multimodal meanings as social practice. This concept extends beyond the narrow focus on written words in paper texts of dominant Discourse. Educators can investigate
children’s diverse and multiple literacy strengths and interest in meaningfulness to extend learning. Children benefit when educators draw on their capital/funds of knowledge, interests and ways of learning, including play, investigation and integration to extend learning.

Educators’ understandings of Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies inform them of diverse and changing **Family Practices**. Strong Images of Children and Learning supports educators to extend **Children’s Agency** with multiliteracies. Where educators integrate Family Practices and Children’s Agency, they construct Living Curriculum which children investigate and Critique with Heart and Head, provoking **Critical Dialogue**. Weaving these dimensions together in various ways produces significant ways to improve all children’s learning by engaging with culturally relevant curriculum.

The multiple modes of multiliteracies reflect how young children in all projects question and express meanings about their world with their ‘hundred languages’, for example listening, viewing, talking, constructing, dramatic play as well as drawing, reading and writing with paper and screens. Multiliteracies, all its dimensions and contexts, need to remain integrated so that all children are supported to access, participate and express meanings in fluid, generative and alternative ways.

By investigating large scale practices Project A established rich understandings of many children’s complex literacy practices with their diverse families and communities. By Stage 3, literacies was used in the title of the professional development resource, Literacies, Communities and Under 5s. Project A provided the foundation for my work, establishing distinct representations of Dynamic Literacies that derive from complex and changing Family Lives as part of **Family Practices**. Early papers (See Papers One, Two, Three and Four, Section 4.2) offer insights into children’s diverse literacies, often overlooked by educators and policy-makers. More recent papers based on these principles investigate different aspects. Paper Eight, Section 4.3, provides the rationale and directions for contemporary curriculum, showing broad understandings of children, families and educators with inclusive implications for all children.
Project B instigated my investigating the internet as a powerful literacy resource, familiar to many families. Strong educators recognised **Children’s Agency** with the internet as they held robust Images of Children and Images of Learning resonating with family views. These educators believed that the internet offered multilayered levels of meaning and complexity enhancing active learning and meaning making. They strongly respected and built on children’s **Family Practices** in the curriculum (See Paper Six, Section 4.3).

Through Project C, I articulated my understandings of the connections between learning, literacies and play, as well as respectful educator-family relationships to inform curriculum for all children, birth to twelve years. Although not called multiliteracies, educators reflected strong understandings of this through their inclusion of Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies dimensions, **Family Practices** theme into the curriculum. They integrated family LDOTSAE, as well as digital, internet and paper texts in setting experiences. Building on these aspects enabled educators to expand children’s literacies. They recognised that children learn multiple literacies by active participation in playful experiences, projectwork and integrated curriculum (See Paper Four, Section 4.2 and Papers Five and Six, Section 4.3). Educators understood strong Images of Children and Images of Learning, promoting **Children’s Agency**. For example, an early years elementary educator extended Tagalog and English comparisons in the Filipino kitchen-play by integrating play with children’s Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies. A later years elementary educator reported a Paralympics integrated unit where children investigated how to prepare for a visit from three athletes with disabilities, share findings through multiliteracies and make recommendations to the principal for disability access at the school (Paper Six, Section 4.3).

Project D extended my understandings of how **Critical Dialogue** functions within Multiliteracies where children, educators and families investigate issues emerging from **Children’s Agency** with **Family Practices**. Where educators build curriculum on these sources **Critical Dialogue** often arises. Children engage in relevant Living Curriculum and then, Critiquing with Heart and Head. By the project’s end, multiliteracies became the way to name and explain peoples’ diverse literacy practices in everyday life (See
Papers Nine, Ten and Eleven, Section 4.4). These papers articulate how participants drew on multiliteracies to take up, critique and reconfigure personal and communal meanings across multiple modes, including conversations, play and drawings.

By the end of the research, my understandings of multiliteracies involving Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue crystallised (Richardson, 2003). The deeper my learning, the greater my awareness of alternate interpretations, the less I was sure about what I knew, and the more I wanted to investigate.

2.6.2 Deepening my understandings of diverse Family Practices and educators’ responses.

Working on all projects emphasised to me the extent to which Family Practices embody multiliteracies and how children learn these. Families from diverse NSW sociocultural, economic and linguistic communities enact Family Lives differently. All parents articulated rich understandings of their children learning different Dynamic Literacies seamlessly in home and community life. They expressed sharp awareness of technologies and popular cultures in children’s learning. Significant numbers of families with LDOTSAE emphasised that children learn languages, dialects and Standard Australian English through viewing television, DVDs and using computers across Family Practices.

I learnt more about educators’ responses towards diverse family multiliteracies across all projects. Despite Project A finding that many educators narrowly understood literacy and privileged English printed book literacy, most educators in Projects B, C and D thought differently. These educators, selected as strong practitioners as later explained, understood multiliteracies as diverse, complex, changing and multimodal. For evidence of these disparities, see Papers Three and Six, Sections 4.2 and 4.3 respectively. Project B educators saw opportunities for integrating the internet and children’s interests into the curriculum. Educators in the most recent projects generally investigated and incorporated children’s family sociocultural practices, including multimedia literacies and popular cultures, into the curriculum, however in varying ways. Early childhood and elementary school educators in Project C significantly promoted children’s multiliteracies learning
through extending on family practices and resourcing children’s play/playful experiences and integrated units (See Papers Four, Five and Six, Sections 4.2 and 4.3). Educators in Project D realised they could work with children’s interests from family multiliteracies, however, they were challenged by gender and violence stereotypes. They initially resisted, then realised they could support each other to analyse such issues with children, promoting critical dialogue (See Paper Eleven, Section 4.4).

Across all projects, educator understandings of **Family Practices** exemplify marked differences which impact all children’s **Multiliteracies** learning opportunities. This is not surprising given that the projects involved different processes of participant selection. Project A examined large scale common practice located in areas of disadvantage in metropolitan, coastal and regional NSW. Projects B, C and D investigated sites of strong practice recommended by educational managers. These projects significantly provided insights into complexities within **Family Practices**, involving diverse Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies. Educators included this capital/ funds of knowledge in the curriculum, promoting **Children’s Agency** through robust Images of Children and Learning, as well as promoting **Critical Dialogue** through Living Curriculum and Critiquing with Heart and Head.

Differences across educator understandings probably occurred because educators were selected on different rationales. Project A involved 158 educators as volunteer participants interested in literacy. These educators appear to reflect common practice. The irony here is that they generally worked with children with diverse linguistic and cultural capital, and low socio-economic resources. So the implications of their narrow understandings of literacy resisting **Family Practices**, **Children’s Agency** and **Critical Dialogue** further denied children their potentials in multiliteracies learning. In contrast educators in Projects B, C and D volunteered or were recommended by managers, because they respectively offered insights into strong practice with internet use, literacy and play. They also reported changing overall curriculum approaches and pedagogies, all of which influence multiliteracies learning opportunities for all children. Furthermore, educators in the more recent projects may have benefited from strong organisational
workplace climates and varying support for professional learning, including the professional learning resource developed in Project A.

2.6.3 Extending my understandings of Children’s Agency with multiliteracies.

Most families in all projects regarded children as capable learners of multiliteracies. All interviewed families and some educators in Project A, and almost all educators in the other projects, believed that children learnt multiliteracies through Family Practices. In all projects, almost all parents held capable Images of Children and active Images of Learning who self-initiated learning multiliteracies through family practices and interactions. Case studies, stories, samples and photographs throughout my work document consistent messages about diverse Children’s Agency and capabilities with multiliteracies (See Papers Two and Five, Sections 4.2 and 4.3, and the collaged images of robust children with multiliteracies on the book cover of Project C publication, Appendix 5.1.15, Section 5).

Dominant Images of Children as incompetent and needing explicit literacy instruction often through transmission curriculum emerged amongst many educators, mainly in Project A. They understood literacy as a singular and standardised practice, often devoid of sociocultural contexts and meanings relevant to children. Usually they valued discrete literacy processes such as reading of English language print texts. They often reflected Images of Learning with DAP and behavioural understandings. Largely ignoring Children’s Agency, they overlooked children’s curiosity and active learning of multiliteracies through multiple means and modes. These understandings may reflect the transmission learning and pushdown curriculum from school. Significantly the situation highlights the limited professional learning opportunities available to these educators in times of rapid theoretical, sociocultural and technical change.

Educators, who shared parental views, held Images of Children as curious and resourceful. Most educators in Projects B, C and D, extended children’s multiliteracies learnings from Family Practices, recognising their cultural capital/ funds of knowledge
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION TWO - OVERARCHING STATEMENT

and interests. They reflected powerful Images of Children and Learning, recognising **Children’s Agency** in learning multiliteracies, for example, children self-initiate, seek and make meanings, especially concerning their interests. Interviewed elementary school educators in Project C established such understandings through identifying children’s inquisitiveness and passionate participation. They valued complex learning, presenting children with challenges and pleasures through playful investigations, projects, integrated topics and issues, supporting **Critical Dialogue**. They understood children’s historical sociocultural contexts, cultural capital and funds of knowledge including LDOTSAE, multiliteracies and popular culture. They sought to make the curriculum relevant, enjoyable and engaging for children and themselves.

2.6.4 Expanding my understanding of Critical Dialogue as essential meaning making in children’s multiliteracies.

In all projects, data indicated that social issues often arose from the dimensions of Family Lives and Dynamic Literacies, as identified in the **Family Practices** theme in my work. Since children were very interested in family multiliteracies, opportunities for **Critical Dialogue** occurred in settings where educators offered Living Curriculum. Issues for children involved gender, relationships, fairness and text authority, usually surfacing in conversations and play where Critiquing with Heart and Head became intense. Issues for parents and educators emerged in representations of people, their gender, cultures, ‘race’ and relationships as well as consumerism, health, class and unfair practices (See Papers One and Two, Section 4.2, Paper 6, Section 4.3 and Papers Nine, Ten and Eleven, Section 4.4). Children, parents and educators shared some priorities and differed on others. Families in Projects C and D worried about texts influencing children and welcomed educators supporting children’s critiquing. In Project C, much educator-family communication tended to signal two way flows and relationships appeared to be strong (See Paper Six, Section 4.3, where educators spoke from informed understandings of families). In Project D, despite strong educator-family interactions, educators addressed issues with children, but for some time resisted particular investigations with parents (See Paper Eleven, Section 4.4).
Children’s **Critical Dialogue** emerged from deep engagement in meaningful experiences within project, play or integrated curriculum contexts in Projects C and D. Reflecting Living Curriculum, this curriculum offered personally significant meanings to children. They powerfully questioned single interpretations of texts, images, practices and relationships, for example, Jack questioned pink bikes for girls in the toy catalogue (See Paper Ten, Section 4.4). Some children expanded their understandings of gender positionings through their subjectivities, ways to be a boy and ways to be a girl. Some examples include, a girl who taught herself sword-fighting and a boy cared for others, liked mermaids, fought with swords, married or didn’t marry. Some children resisted these shifting gender positionings with border-work, as the girl who contested a boy’s interest in mermaids (See Paper Eleven, Section 4.4).

**Critical Dialogue** expanded the space (Gutierrez et al., 2007) for children, educators and families to exchange detailed multiliteracies information as well as their perspectives towards social issues. Integrating **Critical Dialogue** within prolonged projects enabled all partners to share and examine various matters, important to them. This extended enriched multiliteracies learning of significant matters for all participants. Sharing opened up different topics and expanded interpretations as well as deepening participants’ relationships. For example, in Project C an educator scaffolded children to analyse the school homework policy and justice issues in the playground and make changes to school policy and practice (See Paper Six, Section 4.3). Project D educators supported children investigating known and new fairytales in a children’s project. Children’s strong understandings and passions for meaningfulness enabled them to critically discern varying meanings. Feeling competent, knowledgeable and emotionally engaged about some texts promoted their sensitive engagement, reflecting Critiquing with Heart and Head. Children examined ways of being a woman as nurturer, manager or being powerful with wands and swords because they felt safe to take risks (See Project D Findings, Section 2.5.4 and Paper Eleven, Section 4.4). Educators supported children to reconsider some possibilities for fairness, drawing on their reconceptualised images of children, learning and multiliteracies.
Educators in Project D although already practising strong positive family relationships, became quietly empowered to address issues they considered controversial (See Paper Eleven, Section 4.4). Initially they resisted children’s passions and felt wary of tricky parental conversations involving complex social issues. They hoped that children would lose their interest in princesses and fairytales because they feared that children may become besotted with marriage, terrified of scary tales or aggressive with weapons. However, Project D findings supported previous research (Arthur, 2005), that through critical reflection with families and colleagues, educators and children can critically examine issues. Interviewed parents and educators believed that children could and do critique alternative ways for improved situations, for example, examining girls’ options (See Project D Findings, Section 2.5.4 and Paper Eleven, Section 4.4).

2.6.5 Enhanced my recognition of educator research for professional learning to strengthen multiliteracies for all children.

Research participation enabled educators in some projects to reflect on their practice to enhance children’s multiliteracies. Projects A and D provided educators with differing opportunities for examining practice. For example, in Project A, Stages 2 and 3, educators trialled the professional development program and resource in their program. They set and evaluated goals and strategies and sought relevant resourcing or professional support. However, a voluntary two-hour workshop was the only professional development available to state-wide educators during the dissemination of the resource, Literacies, Communities and Under 5s. Burgess (2007) found that despite educators’ initial positive responses, five years later most educators did not sustain their use of the resource with children. In Project D as critical friend I enabled educators’ reflection over three months supporting them to trust, collaborate and critically dialogue about multiliteracies. Educator-family communication and information exchange were finally positively extended. Follow-up research may reveal whether these shifts in practice were maintained in settings where educators now work and how the unevenness in educator professional learning may be explained.
2.7. Contributions to the field of scholarship

In this section I outline my seven contributions to the field of scholarship.

2.7.1 Extensive publications and presentations

My work makes research accessible to educators and policy-makers and promoting educators’ research activity regarding early multiliteracies. The integration of theory and practice is essential for improvement. As Rinaldi explained, "Theory and practice should be in dialogue, two languages expressing our effort to understand the meaning of life. When you think, it's practice; and when you practice, it's theory." (Rinaldi, 2005, p. x). Research dissemination through presentations are particularly important here, given most educators’ limited access to professional learning and journals due to financial, time and staffing costs. Policy-makers benefit from appreciating how educators respond to presentations and maybe understand their need for ongoing professional learning.

My contributions to the field of scholarship commenced in the mid 1990s. At this time, I co-authored an early childhood book, Programming and planning in early childhood settings, now in its 4th edition, (Arthur et al., 2008) and authored a book for families, Starting School (Beecher, 1996). Families, educators and policy-makers became the target audiences for my work. I have presented many workshops and papers about multiliteracies for early childhood, literacy and media conferences at local, state, national and international sites. For doctoral publications, see Table 1.1, Section 1.4. The book, Play and Literacy in Children’s Worlds, involving Papers Four, Five and Six, was favourably reviewed in national and international educators journals (See Appendix 11 and 12, Section Five). Further presentation titles include, Whose interests at the centre of the curriculum?, Biliteracy and play, and Children, pedagogies and the web (See Tables 3.4 and 3.5, Section 3, for details of presentations and publications).
2.7.2 Revealing family and educator understandings of early multiliteracies

My research in Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice in 1998 achieved significant contribution to the field, working on theory, practice and dissemination involving the themes of Family Practices, and Children’s Agency with some focus on Critical Dialogue. This project offered the first large-scale early childhood literacy research insights in NSW. Mapping Literacy Practices in Early Childhood Services (Makin et al., 1999) reported on Stage 1. This foregrounded local family and educator understandings of literacy practices which challenged the concept of a singular literacy. The final report, The Early Literacy and Social Justice Project (McNaught et al., 2000), accounted for the pilot for trialling the professional development resource and the implementation process. Project A culminated with the first state-wide publication and dissemination of an early childhood curriculum initiative (Burgess, 2007). The resource, Literacies, Communities and Under 5s (Jones Diaz et al., 2001), aimed to communicate research and provide some ideas but most importantly promote educator/family collaboration concerning early multiliteracies. Facilitating metropolitan and regional introductory workshops further extended my service. This change for incorporating multiliteracies in the curriculum was not sustained due to lack of support for early childhood educators’ professional learning, their heavy workloads or mismatch with their interests or needs (Burgess, 2007). Primary educators also hold limited understandings of multiliteracies as reflected in their practice (Hamston, 2006).

2.7.3 Making visible children’s agency with multiliteracies

My work in research projects, presentations and publications enhanced the field of scholarship, especially drawing attention to what children can do and the many strengths and competencies they already have learned. All my work promotes educators and policy-makers looking at what children do with multiliteracies, and considering how these can be extended, rather than seeking to transmit an unfamiliar set of practices. This means working with children’s strengths and initiatives, rather than against them. I emphasise investigating children’s early multiliteracies and extending these, and making connections to specific forms of literacy, especially those powerful forms valued by
society. Scholarship areas of interest evolved through four projects. Project A initiated my contribution to Multiliteracies, **Family Practices** and **Children’s Agency** with their family literacies. Project B extended my contribution regarding internet literacies while Project C enhanced my contribution to the role of play within children’s literacy learning recognising **Family Practices**, **Children’s Agency** and some attention to **Critical Dialogue**. Finally Project D deepened my contribution towards **Critical Dialogue** through Living Curriculum and Critiquing with Hearts and Heads.

2.7.4 Emphasising potentials for children using the Internet

My work in Project B: Internet Services research made visible children’s learning with the Internet. The project highlighted children’s home experiences and parental understandings reflecting the **Family Practices** and **Children’s Agency** themes. I investigated strong practice with leading educators and policy-makers who integrated technology in curriculum, promoting understandings of literacy and learning. This project was one of the first to examine the possibilities of the internet as a tool in the learning environment for young children. The report’s online availability enhanced educator access to the findings (Downes, Arthur, Beecher, & Kemp, 1999).

2.7.5 Highlighting children’s literacy learning through play

Project C extended my contributions across all three themes, **Family Practices**, **Children’s Agency** and **Critical Dialogue**. This project examined strong local practices where young children and elementary school children learn multiliteracies through play or play-based experiences. The resulting book (Beecher & Arthur, 2001), showcased a unique investigation into children under five learning literacy through play or playful experiences and children, five to twelve years, learning literacy through play or playful experiences. This book sought to engage educators, managers and policy-makers as there is limited research on this topic. My work addressed some aspects of understandings of learning literacy through play, communicating with diverse families and reported family and educator perspectives on promoting elementary school children’s literacy through play experiences. Project D extended the complex learning in the social space of play.
2.7.6 Investigating children’s critiquing of gender in play

The worth of Project D: Critical Dialogue for the field lies in integrating the three themes, Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue. The project examines critiquing through multiliteracies in project based curriculum and the contribution has yet to be established. However, in 2002 presentation feedback to earlier work in this area, Critical Literacy in Daily Curriculum (See Table 3.4, Section 3), indicated that strong educators found children critiquing aspects of their own lives surprising, challenging but worthwhile. Feedback from Project D educators suggested significant shifts in their curriculum renewal and confidence with family communication. Educators indicated enhanced understandings and use of pedagogies for integrating family practices, multiliteracies and critiquing into project based curriculum. Three educators significantly showed positive attitudes to research, especially one educator who now describes herself as able to investigate and work through issues. Some children significantly expanded their understandings of gender positionings and critiquing. They showed awareness of multiple perspectives and fairness amidst joy and some resistance.

2.7.7 Promoting educators’ learning to strengthen multiliteracies for all children

My work forms a noteworthy part of the wider shift in Australian early childhood education to improve all children’s multiliteracies learning within the curriculum, where Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue are recognised and extended. My individual and collaborative presentations, as detailed in Section 3.4, at international, national and local workshops and conferences often enriched my writing through questions and comments that triggered further investigation and analysis. My service to the field is evident in my writing individual and collaborative papers, articles and books (See Table 1.1, 3.4 and 3.5, Sections 1.4 and 3.5 respectively).
2.8 Future directions

This section indicates my future directions relating to issues emerging in recent research in the field and how the work of this thesis engages with these issues.

Even though pockets of practice extend children’s family multiliteracies in the curriculum, many early childhood and elementary educators still hold narrow understandings of literacy and resist extending on children’s family multiliteracies (Comber & Nixon, 2004b; Harwood, 2009; Hamston, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2006). While my work consistently showcased common and strong practice, there is still need to broaden educators’ and policy makers’ understandings of multiliteracies to support all children’s learning and life chances. The difficulty is not just new content, rather understandings of Discourse/discourse, language and power relationships in educational settings where children’s habitus, cultural capital and their social practices of multiliteracies are not well understood and often ignored (Arthur et al, 2008; Comber & Nixon, 2004b; Harwood, 2009; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). As identified in this doctorate, promoting all children’s early multiliteracies demands congruent pathways across philosophical and theoretical concepts, curriculum approaches and pedagogies concerning Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue.

2.8.1 To investigate how educators examine issues with all families to extend children’s multiliteracies

Although understanding Family Practices, especially multiliteracies, has featured in the literature for some time (Jones Diaz et al, 2001; New London Group 1996; 2000), this is far from common practice in early childhood (Kennedy et al., 2006). Educator reluctance to communicate with families about seemingly every-day but perhaps problematic curriculum and life matters still occurs, as in Project D. Despite the strong two-way educator-family communications and centre organisational climate more professional learning seems to be needed. Further examination of what strategies best support educators to examine issues concerning multiliteracies with families is crucial for fair and
relevant curriculum for all children. Perhaps this reluctance to dialogue with families is related to the notions of Discourse, diversity and language-power relations, deliberating one truth, when there are many truths, social practices, capitals and habitus. Addressing what scaffolds educators to negotiate with all families may be productive from a perspective of figured worlds, identities in practice and artifacts based on the work of Holland et al. (1998).

2.8.2 To examine how figured worlds, identities in practice and artifacts provoke children’s agency especially with inspecting social meanings

While this doctorate examined how some children used dramatic play and resources to critique gender possibilities and other social meanings, closer attention to figured worlds, identities in practice and artifacts is signalled as source of agency (Holland et al, 1998). As children assume identities in practice within figured worlds, for example, in dramatic play or video games, they use artifacts to signal meanings as they construct these worlds. Identities and artifacts may support individuals to challenge pressures in the social field, changing understandings of self, meanings and issues in some way (Bartlett & Holland, 2001). These concepts may offer potential tools to investigate Children’s Agency for critiquing social issues in dramatic play and gaming and so provide insights into the less transparent aspects of text interrogation (Comber & Nixon, 2004a). Strengthening children’s participation in the research of their play could involve their collective reflections on video or photos of play to examine their perspectives on their critical understandings and sources of their intended action within the moment.

2.8.3 To investigate how children use cognitive, affective, aesthetic and social processes to make meaning of and critique social issues

Multimodal texts often produce shifting complex feelings and thoughts as people critique important matters (Hamston, 2006). Strong feelings and thoughts characterise children’s critiquing of things that matter to them, as shown in the Critiquing with Heart and Head dimension in my work. Some children in Projects C and D questioned unfair practice,
relationships, gender positionings and matters of violence. They investigated how their social worlds worked, didn’t work or could work. Engagement in multidimensional processes may extend children’s awareness of self-regulation, subjectivities and multiple perspectives involving language, power and relationships on social issues, including gender, race and others. Diverse multimodal experiences, including storying, drawing, dramatic play and construction may scaffold children to produce a range of texts for themselves and others which may instigate collaborative analysis (Hameenlinna Children’s Art School, 2005; Lambert, 2006; Leland & Harste, 2001; Malaguzzi, 1998). Future research could examine critiquing and change practices for children with experiences involving cognitive, ethical, aesthetic and social considerations.

2.8.4 To scrutinise how children use intertextual meanings across mono-media and multimedia texts

Since children heavily engage in multiliteracies, they encounter rich intertextuality or cross references to meanings within texts, to other texts, text types, narratives or modes (Fairclough, 1992; New London Group, 2000). Project D revealed children accessed many cross references when meaning-making. Given that intertextuality as a concept has been established for some time, examining how children use this meaning focused feature with multimodal and mono-media texts may reveal more about meaning making practices. Intertextuality may signal to children meaning possibilities, nuances, relationships and patterns that could enhance critical approaches towards all texts.

2.9 Section conclusion

This section clarified the research base of four projects for my portfolio, examining early multiliteracies – working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue. To start with, I established the directions shaping my work. Then the research process was identified and the projects rationalised. Next, the research components were explained in terms of their temporal sequence and connections. Project contributions towards my personal and professional development, and the field of scholarship were then acknowledged. Lastly my future directions from this body of work were identified.
SECTION THREE – PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECTS

This section identifies my participation in research projects. My research training and scholarly activity, as well as meetings during my candidature are outlined.

3.1 Research training

My research training largely occurred by fulfilling my responsibilities as the School of Education (SOE) representative on the University of Western Sydney (UWS) Ethics Committee for several years, participating in identified and additional research projects, and attending training sessions. I also drew on initial training from prior study.

Candidature research training is outlined below in Table 3.1. Most training related to the research projects, UWS Research conferences and workshops. In addition I represented the SOE on the UWS Ethics Review Committee from 1999 to 2002.

Table 3.1 - Research Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Research Training Focus</th>
<th>Research Leader</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Facilitating focus group discussion (Project A)</td>
<td>Dr Annette Holland</td>
<td>UWS Bankstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Instrument development (Project A)</td>
<td>Dr Laurie Makin</td>
<td>Macquarie University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Instrument Rater Inter-reliability (Project A)</td>
<td>Dr Laurie Makin</td>
<td>Mia Mia Child Care Centre, Macquarie University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Running a Focus Group</td>
<td>Dr Lyn Kemp</td>
<td>School of Education and Early Childhood Studies Postgraduate Conference, UWS</td>
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</table>
### Table 3.1 Research Training (continued)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Research Focus</th>
<th>Research Leader</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002, 12th &amp; 13th October</td>
<td>Writing an Overarching Statement</td>
<td>Dr Chris Halse</td>
<td>UWS School of Education and Early Childhood Studies Post Graduate Conference, Parramatta Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005, 10th, 11th &amp; 12th August</td>
<td>Summer School in Childhood Studies Methods and Methodologies of Childhood Research and Ethical Issues in Researching with Children.</td>
<td>Dr Leena Alanen</td>
<td>University of Jyvaskyla, Finland, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005, August</td>
<td>Applying for Ethics for Research Project at a Finish University</td>
<td>Dr Leena Alanen</td>
<td>University of Jyvaskyla, Finland, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007, 24th February</td>
<td>Overarching Statement</td>
<td>Dr Mary Krone Dr Chris Halse</td>
<td>Higher Research Degree Students and Supervisor Information and Networking Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>UWS Graduate Writing Circle</td>
<td>Rosalie Goldsmith</td>
<td>UWS, Penrith Campus</td>
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</table>
3.2 Research participation

Section Two detailed my research participation for doctoral projects. See Section 2.3 for information on Research Process and Section 2.4 for Research Components. Further research participation involved conducting a series of research sessions, developing ethics proposals and dissemination workshops as reported below.

In 1998 I conducted a series of three Action Research Workshops for Sydney Day Nursery. The workshops implemented with Leonie Arthur (UWS) (31.8.98, 19.10.98 and 30.11.98) enabled educators to examine a range of topics in their settings.

I served on the UWS Ethics Committee for 3 years evaluating research design and ethical considerations. I successfully submitted four ethics proposals to the Ethics Committee for UWS and other relevant NSW and international organisations, as well as contributing to ethics proposals in other projects. The ethics proposals for which I was responsible, outlined in Table 3.1, related to my doctoral study, international research undertaken on UWS Professional Development Program and UWS Early Childhood Projects. These include Project C: Play and Literacy, Project D: Critical Dialogue, Changes For young children in everyday life, policy and curriculum: Some Finnish family educator and children perceptions and Blended Learning Environments: Phase 2 An evolutionary process in UWS early childhood programs.
Table 3.2 - Ethics Proposals

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Research project</th>
<th>UWS Ethics Application</th>
<th>Additional Ethics Application</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>UWS HEC 98/91 Developed with Chris Baxter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project C: Play and Literacy</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>UWS HEC 2000/067</td>
<td>Catholic Education Office, Parramatta Diocese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project D: Critical Dialogue</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>UWS HEC 03/033</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Changes for Young Children in Everyday Life, Policy and Curriculum</td>
<td>Professional Development Program</td>
<td>UWS HREC 05/192</td>
<td>Ethics Committee, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland, Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWS Early Childhood Blended Learning</td>
<td>UWS Early Childhood Staff</td>
<td>UWS HREC 06/045.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

In association with the professional development resource for families and educators as part of Project A: Early Literacy and Social Justice Stage 3, researchers and research assistants led introductory Literacies, Communities and Under 5s workshops across the state. I conducted these workshops as outlined in Table 3.3. Participants included parents, directors, teachers, teaching assistants, childcare workers, local council child development officers and parent representative from a public school.
Table 3.3 - Project A Stage 3 - Literacies, Communities and Under 5s Workshops

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<td>4.9.01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.9.01</td>
<td>Ruse Public School</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.10.01</td>
<td>Ruse Public School</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.01</td>
<td>Bega Public School</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.01</td>
<td>Bega Public School</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.11.01</td>
<td>Griffith Public School</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Scholarly productivity

During the period 1998 – 2008, I actively researched, published and presented within the areas of early childhood, literacy, computers in education and media. This focus emerged from the collaborative fields of research projects, professional development initiatives, conference presentations, professional writings and university teaching. It is important to identify the contributing interconnections between concurrent social fields of research projects, professional development initiatives, conference presentations and professional writings because all activity extended this body of work. As part of my professional activity emerging from research productivity I presented sixteen papers at conferences. These focused on early childhood and literacy at international, national, state, regional and UWS conferences for policy makers, managers, educators, researchers and graduate students as well as media educators and web designers. I also presented at UWS postgraduate conferences. See Table 3.4 for details.
### Table 3.4 - Additional Professional Presentations involving Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family practices</th>
<th>Children’s agency</th>
<th>Critical dialogue</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **1999 19th – 22nd June**  
Beecher, B. & Arthur, L.  
Diverse perspectives on early literacy learning: At home and in early childhood settings.  
Crèche & Kindergarten Association of Queensland International Conference, Brisbane. (State educator conference) | **1997 25th – 27th June**  
Beecher, B.  
Whose interests at the centre of the daily curriculum?  
Crèche & Kindergarten Association of Queensland International Conference, Brisbane. (State educator conference) | **2000 4th – 7th December**  
Downes, T., Beecher, B. & Arthur, L.  
An analysis of current online resources for young children in Australia.  
| **1999 12th-13th July**  
Arthur, L., Beecher, B. & Jones Diaz, C.  
Insights from Early Literacy and Social Justice Project.  
Beecher, B. & Arthur, B.  
Multiple literacies, play and diversity in early childhood – is it possible?  
Literacy Educators Research Network International Conference, Alice Springs. (International educator conference) | **2002 12th October**  
Beecher, B.  
Critical literacy in children’s social worlds.  
UWS Post Graduate Conference, Sydney. (Graduate conference) |
| **1999 1st – 4th September**  
Beecher, B. & Makin, L.  
Diverse languages and literacies in early childhood: At home and in early childhood settings.  
European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference, Helsinki. (International educator conference) | **2002 19th – 20th October**  
Beecher, B.  
Penrith Council Children’s Services Conference, Penrith. (Regional educator conference) | **2002 21st March**  
Beecher, B.  
Children, pedagogies and the web.  
Children, Learning and the Web Seminar. Australian Museum, Sydney. (National media and museum educator conference) |
| **2000 19th October**  
Arthur, L., Beecher, B. & Jones Diaz, C.  
Multiple literacies in early childhood education.  
Paper presented at Reconceptualising Early Childhood Conference organised by SDN Children’s Services and Lady Gowrie Children’s Services. (State educator conference) | **2002 19th – 20th October**  
Beecher, B.  
Early literacy learning through computer technology.  
Penrith Council Children’s Services Conference, Penrith. (Regional educator conference) | **2003 14th-18th July**  
Beecher, B.  
Learning technologies in children’s social worlds.  
The following Table 3.5 identifies research publications related to portfolio themes, and six additional papers in conference proceedings and articles in professional magazines.
Table 3.5 - Additional Research Publications involving Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family practices</th>
<th>Children’s agency</th>
<th>Critical dialogue</th>
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### 3.4 Meetings

Participating in research projects involved collaborating with many partners across the projects related to this portfolio. Each project involved regular meetings and email communications.

Project A involved usually weekly meetings in Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 with small and whole groups of chief investigators. As writing intensified, investigator meetings
became more often towards the end of each stage. Meetings with sponsoring bodies occurred usually every couple of months. Project B involved monthly meetings until evidence collection was complete, then weekly meetings towards the end of the project. Project C involved monthly meetings including meetings with managers at the start of the project, and then more regular meetings as the project progressed with the co-author. Project D meetings occurred weekly.

3.5 Conclusion

In this section, I outlined my research training and detailed my research and scholarly productivity, which was concurrent to the achievements in this portfolio. Section Four: Portfolio Papers follows. This presents the papers organised in themes.
SECTION FOUR: PORTFOLIO PAPERS

This section presents an initial literature review when applying in March 2000 to commence doctoral study. Next, the portfolio papers follow, grouped according to dominant dimensions within the themes of Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue. A preface precedes each paper, providing the title, authorship, publication, target audience, context, proportion of portfolio work and a summary. Next the preface examines the significance of each paper in terms of the themes and dimensions established throughout the doctorate. Finally a copy of the relevant paper follows.

4.1 Original literature review

The following section presents my initial literature review when I applied to study. I commenced in August 2000.

The significance and background area of research topic: Early literacies at home and in the community.

Young children are learning from the moment they are born and for most children in Australia, this includes literacy learning as they explore print rich environments and encounter siblings, parents and other adults utilising literacy in its many forms. In many homes siblings and parents engaged in getting things done in everyday life without explicit mention to the teaching of literacy (Hall, 1987; Hartse, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Parents make shopping lists, check bills, write notes and others. Thus many children encounter literacy as whole meaningful events where others pay significant attention to the purpose of their literacy acts (Hall, 1987). Several significant findings to emerge from the Early Literacy and Social Justice Project (Makin, Hayden, Holland, Arthur, Beecher, Jones Diaz, & MacNaught, 1999) relate to these early literacies that children learn at home and in the community which are well known and appreciated by their families.
Parents are well aware of the capacity and the extent of their children’s literacy learning in every situation. The multiple literacies which children currently encounter at home, include everyday functional texts, personal texts, environmental print, popular culture, technology and language other than English (Makin et al., 1999).

Despite strong parental awareness of their child’s literacy learning, there have not been many investigations into family literacy practices. The wide range of literacy learnings of children starting school has been identified (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, & Reid, 1998). Rich picture of home literacy practices within some different sociocultural and linguistic communities has been explored (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 1994; Bissex, 1980; Heath, 1983). However, most of these studies considered children attending school rather than children not attending school.

**Theoretical framework**

Within this project, literacy is viewed as talking, listening, drawing, writing, reading, viewing and critical thinking (Makin et al., 1999). The broad sociocultural perspective of literacy forms the major framework for this research project. This perspective focuses on people using literacy as social and cultural practices within various communities to meet their daily life purposes (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Within this perspective there are complementary theoretical approaches which share the sociocultural stance but each explore an aspect of early literacy in a differing way. These approaches central to this project include: emergent literacy, social interaction and literacy as social practice.

Within emergent literacy, the family is regarded as the site for much dynamic literacy learning as children learn from their siblings and the adults around them. Researchers identified many rich descriptions of patterns and continuums in young children’s active and playful literacy learnings and in family contexts. Family members focused on their everyday activities as they used literacy to get things done, thus children learn literacy without explicit teaching which appears o be similar across different sociocultural
dimensions (Hall, 1987). However individual families may mediate the literacy dimensions of family experiences in different ways (Teale, 1986). A social interactionist approach draws on the work of Vygotsky (1978) where the nature of the interaction between children siblings, peers and family members is central to early literacy learning. The nature of interaction in the individual family, as well as the wider social, cultural and economic factors of the community provides children with their central learning context, where they construct their image of themselves as active learners, as talkers, listeners, viewers, drawers, readers and writers. Children learn to construct literacy and utilise what is regarded as their own family’s ways with words (Heath, 1983). The siblings, peers and family members scaffold, extend and challenge young children’s learning.

Currently literacy as social practice views literacy as a social technology, as a tool to construct meanings and to interact within social and physical environments (Luke, 1997). Within this approach literacy becomes central to creating identity and special relationships with others as we create ways of interacting with each other and learning about others and the worlds (Hill et al., 1998).

References


4.2 Papers in the Family Practices theme

4.2.1 Paper One - Multiple Literacies in Early Childhood: What do Families and Communities Think about Their Children’s Early Literacy Learning?

4.2.1.1 Preface


Publication: Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 2000, 23(3), 230-244.

Context: Cris Jones Diaz presented this collaborative paper at Australian Literacy Education Association Conference in 1999.

Target audience: The paper, published in a journal for a national literacy educators association reached a wide audience of primary and secondary researchers and educators in 2000.

Proportion of Portfolio work: This article forms 8.3% of my portfolio work.

Summary: This paper reports on some major patterns investigated in Project A, a collaborative research project involving two state government departments and four university sites. This project focused on children from Aboriginal, bilingual and low socio-economic families. Researchers reported the literacy learning environments at home and in the setting for young children in the year before school from family focus groups and observations and educator interviews in 79 early childhood settings.

The paper compares broad family understandings of their children’s literacy learning at home with narrow educator understandings. Families, from different communities with varied cultural, language and socio-economic resources, recognised children’s multiple literacies. Children in their home language/s, dialect/s or/and in English, used technologies, media, popular culture, environmental print and books, to investigate,
retell, read and write known narratives and ideas. In contrast, educators mostly focused on English book based practices with some attention to environmental print. Usually they did not understand technologies, popular culture or languages/dialects other than English as children’s literacy learning. Educators rarely investigated family understandings or their expectations for children’s literacy learning. They regarded some parents as ‘pushy’ or ‘paranoid’ because they expected educators to extend children’s literacy learning from their family practices.

**Significance:** Paper One introduced **Family Practices** as the foundational theme for the portfolio. The theme became explicit through publication in a national elementary literacy educators journal. The paper investigated how the **Family Life** and **Dynamic Literacies** dimensions, **Family Practices** theme, contributed to early literacy learning. The paper also signalled **Children’s Agency**, the second portfolio theme through the underlying dimensions, **Images of Children** and **Images of Learning**.

**Family Practices** dominates the paper as diverse families expressed strong understandings of their children’s literacy learning as complex and multiple sociocultural practices through everyday **Family Practices**. Families consistently cited the **Dynamic Literacies** where their children used technologies, media, popular culture, environmental print, retold narratives and tried writing/reading in their home languages and/or English within **Family Life**. Families understood the broad and the particular features of literacy. For example, a parent identified her son’s literacy learning during the evening Euchre as he exclaimed over the players’ shoulders, “I see a J-O-K-E-R!” voicing the sounds. Another parent composed Ngo (sic – Nyugo) ‘princess’ stories for his daughter, reflecting the family Japanese Buddhist sociocultural histories. **Dynamic Literacies** are expanded in following papers, especially Papers Two, Three and Four.

Families signalled **Children’s Agency**, the second portfolio theme. Families shared their experiences, hopes and pride reflecting the dimensions, **Images of Children** and **Images of Learning**. They discussed many examples of children’s robust literacy
capabilities, engagement, pleasure and play. Families reported children’s participation in learning literacies everyday and everywhere.

Since many educators implemented narrow approaches to literacy curriculum and understandings, they ignored Family Practices. Many declined investigating diverse home and community multiliteracies actively practiced by children throughout Family Life and constituting Dynamic Literacies. The remaining portfolio papers communicate with educators the complexity and richness of literacy in Family Practices.

Although families and educators valued communicating with each other, further examination indicated educators initiated mostly formal and one-way communication. Educators explained setting literacy practices, for example, English book based practices to families, rather than seeking family information about home literacy practices to inform setting literacy curriculum. Educators overlooked strategic communication practices which deliberately gathered family literacy practices information to extend children’s literacy learning. Again the remaining portfolio papers seek to address this common neglect. Paper Four directly challenges educators to reconsider educator family communication practices in relation to the Family Life and Dynamic Literacies dimensions, Family Practices theme.

The paper briefly mentioned in the literature the third major theme, Critical Dialogue. Family Practices involving popular culture practices with texts and products offer potential sites for critical literacy. These may enable children to establish critical awareness and examine how texts that influence their own lives.
4.2.1.2  

Paper One

Multiple literacies in early childhood: What do families and communities think about their children's early literacy learning?

Criss Jones Diaz, Leonie Arthur, Bronwyn Beecher and Margaret McNaught

This article presents the findings of research that investigated literacy practices in homes and prior-to-school settings. The research was unique in its aim to seek families' perspectives on their children's literacy practices during the early years. The article explores family perspectives of their children's early literacy learning at home and in the prior-to-school setting. The authors suggest that there are disparities between children's literacies in prior-to-school settings and the literacies of home/community in relation to diverse literacies such as bi-literacy experiences, literacies of technology and popular culture.

Research has highlighted the importance of recognising the preschool years as a crucial time for literacy development (see Heath 1982, Harste et al. 1984, Wells 1985, Teale & Sulzby 1986, Clay 1991, Hill et al. 1998). This recognition emphasises the active role children play in constructing literacy-based knowledge through everyday literacy events. Children's capabilities as emerging literates are demonstrated in their interest in environmental print such as the writing on clothing, advertising, logos, instructions and trademarks on food and other packaging in the home. They respond to shop signs, road signs, and other advertising in the community. Children readily observe how members in their family and in the community utilise and respond to this print. Furthermore, children's literacy learnings from the family and community experiences become part of their play, as they read newspapers, magazines, menus and toy catalogues, as well as write notes, cards, lists and bills.

Literacies in diverse families and communities

Research that documents young children's early literacy learning points to the important work done by children and families. Yet apart from Heath's work and some others (see Heath 1982, Cairney & Ruge 1998), information regarding children's literacies in diverse communities and families' perspectives of their children's early literacy learning is yet to inform much of early childhood educators' work with children and families from diverse sociocultural groups.
The multilingual contexts in which many Australian children and families live their daily lives represent the extent to which many young bilinguals are emerging bi-literates. For children in many families in Australia, the language and literacy experiences they encounter represent multiple languages, literacies and cultures. Bilingual children exposed to literacies in both their first and second language have the potential to develop sophisticated knowledge and awareness about print, print conventions, appropriate book behaviours, print directionality and a recognition of familiar words and names, all examples of sociocultural knowledge related to literacy (Jones Diaz 1999). Unfortunately, for many Australian preschool children from bilingual backgrounds, opportunities for early literacy experiences in the home language are mostly confined to the home environment. Thus the central concern for and responsibility of early bi-literacy learning is most often relegated to the families.

Current approaches to early literacy in prior-to-school early childhood settings

In prior-to-school settings, current conceptualisations of how children become literate constitute a variety of theoretical approaches spanning from the more narrow ‘developmental readiness’ and ‘maturationist’ views to more contemporary views of ‘emergent literacy’ and ‘literacy as social practice’.

Many early childhood educators, drawing on Piagetian views, would argue that children need to develop at their own pace and not be ‘pushed’ by adults. As a result, early childhood educators are often reluctant to focus on literacy in their programs for fear of being accused of ‘pushing’ children beyond their developmental readiness. Settings may take a maturationist or developmentalist approach to literacy, emphasising early childhood as an unhurried time for ‘gradual unfolding of the child’s potential without being subjected to “stress” of active teaching’ (Makin et al. 1999, p. 21). Unfortunately this view takes little account of children’s daily experiences with literacy as a social technology, through which children learn to make use of powerful tools which are embedded in a range of social and cultural practices.

Many prior-to-school settings in New South Wales have been influenced by the emergent literacy approach (see Teale & Sulzby 1986, Schickendanz 1986), which emphasises the importance of children’s interests and capabilities in literacy learning through active child-initiated experiences where functionality, meaning and communication with print and texts are important. Theories of emergent literacy acknowledge individual continuums of literacy development from birth, but do not fully take account of social and cultural variations that exist in young children’s literacy learning trajectories. As a result, the variety of opportunities offered to children are often limited.
Learning to be literate in diverse families and communities

Children in most Australian homes and communities encounter a range of different types of language and literacy experiences. These experiences range from the traditional oral and written narratives to functional and extensive uses of information and entertainment technologies (e.g. computers, CD-ROMs, video, fax, answer machines). Literacy learning is more than the one unitary prescribed track that is most often associated with middle class, monocultural and monolingual urban children (Luke & Kale 1997). Differences in ‘ways of taking’ literacy exist across cultures and economic groups and the social categories of race, class, language, gender, sexuality, religion and ethnicity intersect and influence particular ways of using languages and literacies (Makin et al. 1999).

Text (both oral and written) is a social technology and its use and users are highly dependent on its interactive functions. Accordingly, literacy learning is embedded in a range of social practices in culturally specific sites, rather than universal stages of child development and growth. From this perspective the literacies, other than book-based, take on increasingly important functions as young children are immersed in a variety of literacy discourse practices. Such practices are embedded in their daily lives and include literacies of technology and popular culture, environmental print and literacies other than English.

Linguistic capital and literacies other than English

Bourdieu’s sociological frameworks provide educators with useful insights into the different ways in which educational settings privilege some forms of cultural and linguistic capital at the expense of others. Cultural capital, which includes the linguistic practices and representational resources of human disposition, also comprises various forms of linguistic capital (Carrington & Luke 1997). The linguistic capital of diverse literacies through which children are enculturated outside of prior-to-school settings often goes unrecognised and undervalued. Consequently, children from diverse backgrounds can meet a very structured form of discontinuity between the ‘practices widely used in their own communities and those demanded by the school or prior-to-school setting’ (Corson 1998, p. 120, emphasis added).

Young bilingual children’s linguistic and cultural capital which primarily involves the enculturation of the linguistic ‘habitus’ of the home, will ultimately compete in different sociocultural fields with other forms of capital in order to hold relative value. Thus the linguistic capital derived from the home language may hold currency in the home, but not necessarily the same levels of currency in prior-to-school settings. This can result in an exchange for other forms of linguistic capital, such as the acquisition of English at the expense of the home language.

The cultural and linguistic capital generated in children’s homes and communities is often very different from the cultural capital valued in
prior-to-schools settings. However, many settings operate as if children have equal access to the capital valued in education, and consequently ‘schools (and prior-to-school settings) reproduce arrangements that are favourable to some and unfavourable to other groups, by placing their assessments of success on children’s possession of this cultural capital, although it is unequally available’ (Corson 1998, p. 9, emphasis added). Like schools, the cultural capital mostly valued in prior-to-school settings, is constituted in mainstream school-like English literacy.

**Literacies of technology and popular culture**

The texts, images and meanings constructed through the popular culture of children’s video and computer games, toys and media advertising constitute powerful yet pleasurable discourses through which young children are positioned as ‘readers’ and consumers. Consequently, many parents, teachers and caregivers express concern about the power and impact these texts have on children’s developing perceptions of the world.

There is no doubt that the texts of popular culture are pleasurable, attractive and appealing to young children. However, many early childhood practitioners are uneasy with children’s consumption of the popular cultural texts such as **Xena, Hercules, Star Wars** and others, resulting in children often being strongly discouraged from bringing in toys, videos and CD-ROMs to the setting. Many children’s lives are absorbed by these texts and they know a great deal about the super-heroes, video games and other toys, regardless of whether they own them or not. Knowledge and ownership of ‘in’ toys, their names and their features represent significant cultural (and social) capital amongst children’s peer groups (Comber 1998a,b).

**Critical literacy and preschool children**

Rather than thinking of children as social dupes at the power of popular cultural texts, and banning toys, videos, and computer games from the setting, early childhood educators could maximise children’s expertise in the narratives, images and representations associated with these texts through a critical literacy approach.

Critical literacy draws on sociocultural perspectives of literacy and encourages children (and their teachers) to critique, deconstruct and reconstruct a range of sanctioned and popular texts and their cultural contexts (Muspratt et al. 1997). It involves working with children to approach the meanings represented in texts more critically, rather than benignly taking them for granted. Opportunities are provided for children to think about how meanings of their world are represented in languages and literacies and constituted in discourse.

The literacies of popular culture and technology so heavily featured in computer games, advertising and other media texts would be consid-
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

provided an appropriate starting point from which to think critically about how these texts may give somewhat distorted meanings to children's lives. Teachers can encourage young children to think critically about the marketing strategies and dominant discourses constituted in these texts as a way of capitalising on and valorising children's knowledge. Hence, critical literacy gives children a set of tools from which they are able to 'become critical and autonomous citizens who are in control of their lives' (Corson 1998, p. 75). However, it is important that we understand and appreciate the pleasure children gain from these texts, and care should be taken not to destroy children's pleasure and creativity derived from popular culture (Mission 1998).

The study

The project from which the findings were derived was a collaborative effort by research teams representing early childhood education faculties situated at four NSW university sites. It was designed to map existing literacy practices across different prior-to-school education settings in communities that were identified by the funding bodies as serving children (and their families) who are more likely to encounter later difficulties in literacy development, such as those with significant Aboriginal, bilingual and disadvantaged populations. These sites were mostly situated in city and urban areas across NSW and the authors acknowledge that in this regard the mapping exercise is as yet incomplete.

The participants in the study were staff and parents from 79 early childhood prior-to-school settings, where the children were in their final year before school entry. Twenty-four of the research classes were NSW Department of Education (DET) settings and the rest were Department of Community Services (DCS). Two key staff members were interviewed from each study playroom. These were generally the trained early childhood teacher and the assistant. Ten parent focus-groups were held with parent participants using preschool and long day-care settings from a range of social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (Harms et al. 1998) was chosen as a starting point for measuring the quality of the classroom environments. Modifications were made to ensure that the literacy environment was addressed in sufficient detail. The new and modified items were incorporated into a shortened form of the scale, which for the purposes of the study was renamed The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale, 1998 (ECLLS). All researchers underwent a

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1 This study was funded by the NSW Department of Community Services and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the NSW Department of Community Service and the Department of Education and Training.
two-day training program and inter-rater reliabilities were taken during the course of the research. No serious anomalies were found during these procedures. All data gathering was conducted within a two-month time frame at the end of 1998, and researchers visited all classrooms during a set time in the morning to ensure a measure of comparability of data. Following classroom observations, teachers and their assistants were individually interviewed using a twenty-item questionnaire designed by the research team. Each interview was audiotaped for later transcription and analysis. The open-ended nature of the questions gave staff the opportunity to talk in-depth about their beliefs, attitudes and practices in supporting young children’s literacy development. Staff demographic details such as age, experience, qualifications and recent professional development relating to children’s literacy growth were recorded for each setting. Gender, approximate age and language, and cultural background of the children in the settings were also recorded.

The views of families were sought by using focus-group interviews, with two of the focus groups comprising parents from specific cultural backgrounds: one was held within an Aboriginal community and moderated by a community member and the other conducted in Arabic for Arabic-speaking families. The inclusion of the focus-group interviews within the project gave the families the opportunity to have their perspectives represented in terms of their own experiences and viewpoints. Focus questions were designed to identify parents’ existing knowledge about their children’s early literacy development and their beliefs and understandings about children’s literacy experiences at home, in the community and in early childhood services. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

**Analysis**

The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale data were initially managed by graphing using Excel and will be subjected to further and more detailed analysis. The staff interviews were analysed using NUD*IST, a computerised qualitative data management package, and they have been compared across a number of emerging themes and patterns, as have the focus groups. Data from each site have been triangulated, as well as compared across settings to look for patterns, themes and trends. Centre observational data have been linked to interview and focus-group data where possible in order to tease out congruence and lack of congruence between teachers’ and parents’ viewpoints and practices. There is an ongoing cycle of reviewing the data as new hypotheses or questions arise.

**Findings**

The findings of this study suggest that current definitions of early literacy in NSW early childhood education do not appear to reflect the multiple
literacy practices in homes and communities, namely, the literacies of technology and popular culture, everyday functional uses of print, and languages other than standard Australian English. The current approaches identified often incorporated narrow and traditional views of book-based literacy practices. Furthermore, it was found that there was quite a discrepancy between family perspectives and staff perspectives on young children’s literacy experiences at home and in prior-to-school settings. A more detailed discussion of the emerging themes follows.

Families’ perceptions of their children’s development in literacies
During focus-group discussions, families stressed the importance of literacy learning for their children and recognised that this was occurring in multiple ways at home, in the community and at preschool or day care. Families tended to have broad definitions of literacy that included the use of technologies, media and environmental print, as well as aspects of emergent literacy such as book-handling skills, retelling familiar narratives and approximations of writing. Families were able to articulate clearly the variety of experiences and extent of opportunities through which their children’s literacy learning occurred.

Bilingual families also recognised and valued the importance of developing literacy in home languages as well as English. Similarly, staff recognised the benefits associated with bilingualism and bi-literacy, although in the ECLLS rating scale, recognition of diverse languages and literacies scored low in many settings. For example, in one site, despite the fact that there were a majority of children from Arabic-speaking backgrounds and no Anglo-Australian children, no staff from Arabic-speaking backgrounds were employed. Consequently, English was the dominant language used by staff.

Furthermore, bilingual parents expressed some concern over their children’s rejection of the home language while learning English at the centre. Children’s home languages were not perceived as being supported in the preschool or day-care settings. Yet at the same time, parents were aware of the speed at which their children learned English in these settings.

My daughter wouldn’t allow me to speak English with her at all, before she went to preschool. She used to cry and say to me: talk to me in Arabic only … When she went [to preschool], I mean in just a few months, she came back home, by herself, she was able to speak English.

So they’re getting all that from school. Whereas at home, speaking should be more and you concentrate more on Arabic.

Family and community literacy practices
Families described literacy as integral to everyday family and community
experiences such as writing birthday cards, reading catalogues and shopping. Literacy was also seen as developing through children's immersion in literacy artefacts and observations of adults and older siblings using literacy. A number of parents reported that children imitated adults' and siblings' literacy behaviour.

Parents viewed their contributions as being very important to their children's literacy development. Literacy experiences such as shared books, storytelling, sound recognition games, card games, computer games and writing were viewed by parents as extremely important. Parents provided many examples of joint literacy activities, where family members jointly constructed a text, played a game or engaged in cooperative reading to scaffold the child's learning. Many parents reported that they assisted their children's literacy development with explicit demonstrations of features of print, such as how to form letters or sound out words. A number of parents indicated that they focused on metalinguistic awareness with children, playing sound games with children and encouraging them to recognise rhyme, sounds and letters.

**Literacies of technology, media and popular culture**

Most families recognised television, computer games and Game-boys as rich sources of literacy, with many parents identifying technology as important to their child's literacy learning. Television programs and computer games were seen as significant aids to oral and written language development, particularly for children learning English as a second language. Many families recognised the role of popular culture in literacy learning as children read toy catalogues, advertisements, toy packaging and logos.

However, in contrast to parents' views about popular culture and computers, staff were less enthusiastic about the impact of popular culture on children's literacy development, as is evident in the following comment:

I think one example, watching TV, things they watch at home, they might come in and say power ranger, we don’t allow power rangers at preschool … this is something they are allowed to do at home but we don’t allow them to do it here.

Teachers' perspectives of literacy tended to focus more narrowly on book-based literacy in English. Although teachers did include environmental print in definitions of literacy they did not include technology and media literacies. The use of television and video was believed by many teachers to be detrimental to literacy development. Some staff held deficit views of children’s experiences with television at home as expressed in the following comments:

I’m not sure how much literacy is supported in the home. Television comes into it a bit too much I think.
A lot of children are read to before they go to sleep but a lot just watch TV or just have to sit down and shut up.

In contrast to staff views of television, the parents were clear about the impact of the media on their children’s language and literacy learning. In the Arabic focus group, the parents were highly aware of their children’s English language learning as they talked about the influence of television programs such as Sesame Street and Playschool.

You’d get them a video to teach spelling, talking, I mean, they’d explain on the video, how they read ... how they speak, for example cartoons, they speak and they write for them what they’re saying, so they learn how to write and read.

... and when she reached one year [the daughter], she used to like to watch television. Playschool, she used to sing, she was only one, she used to know all the [songs] and then, by two she knew the ABC just by watching Sesame Street and Playschool ...

The data from ECLLS indicate that while television and videos were available in many settings they were not utilised as a means to support language and literacy development. Field notes suggest that computers were often not available for children’s use and when they were available, staff did not often interact with children when engaged in these experiences. One staff member commented that:

We made a positive choice not to have a computer—due to the limited time for the sessions. Children need the important social interaction skills rather than computers. [They] get plenty of that [computers] at school so we focus on other issues.

Dominant discursive literacy practices
While interview data suggest that some teachers were aware and supportive of children’s diverse literacy expertise developed at home and in the community, many teachers did not fully understand the multiple ways that children experience literacy at home and in the community. As a result, these experiences of literacy were not fully integrated into the setting.

The importance of book-based and bedtime literacy practices was apparent in the interviews in which staff expressed concerns based on children’s lack of exposure to books in the home.

... maybe a handful out of all the kids in my class ... might be read to overnight or not at all. And usually what they get here is all that they get.

... a lot of the parents have the mentality that they don’t need to read a book to the children, that’s the teacher’s role, not the parents, and if they don’t
pick it up by the time they’re four, it doesn’t matter ‘cause they will learn it at school, and so I try to get them to even be able to read a book properly, like hold it up the correct way and turn the pages correctly and know the picture and the writing ...

The relative disregard for possible literacy practices in languages other than English that might occur in the home was evident in one site. The following comment is indicative of lack of tolerance about Arabic language print conventions, i.e. reading text from right to left.

... a lot of them go to Lebanese or Arabic schools as well as here. And I think that that could be confusing to them, because we have lots of problems with them writing back to front. Like what we suppose is back to front to us. I do think that they do get confused with that, because they have to still write that way when a lot of it is back to front and you have got to train them to do the other way around.

Universal assumptions about literacy practices based on English literacy conventions seem to result in deficit assumptions of children’s diverse literacy experiences. These assumptions were also applied to the children’s overall literacy competence as is apparent in the following quote:

... and so you can see those who have been read to, ‘cause they treat the books with more care or respect ... and the others they’ve never seen books, they don’t care, they throw them [around].

Family expectations
Many parents expressed concerns about the lack of time available to spend assisting their child’s literacy and believed that the prior-to-school setting should be playing a more prominent role. Settings were expected to be a place where children were strengthening their literacy, however parents indicated that they did not believe that this was happening. Rather it was felt that staff underestimated what the children could do and did not place enough emphasis on literacy. Writing in particular was seen as an area that was not given enough attention. This is reflected in comments from parents such as:

You try to teach them the alphabet stuff at home but it is not reinforced in the preschool.

We were from Hong Kong and I know from four years old they already started writing and it’s very common for them to write some simple words—they are capable of doing that

Interview data suggest that while some teachers engage in ongoing dialogue with parents about children’s literacy development and
parents' expectations, parents' views were often dismissed by teachers as 'pushy' or 'paranoid'. Teachers made comments such as:

It's very frustrating. Parents want us to teach reading and writing—and we have to try to explain that this is not developmentally appropriate. They don't believe us when we tell them that it is not what children should be learning now.

Parents' perspectives on literacy which were most often dismissed by staff involved cultural differences. As a result, a number of parents expressed lack of confidence in raising issues with staff:

My daughter was three-and-a-half and she already knows how to do her letters and they [teachers] told me that I was being forceful and I wasn't supposed to do that, and I say 'why' and she said 'because you are forcing your child to write'. And I felt bad.

Communication between staff and families about literacy
Parents viewed communication with teachers as essential and valued opportunities to share information with staff. Teacher-parent interviews, sharing of developmental profiles and samples of children's work and progress journals were identified by parents as positive communication strategies used by teachers. The importance of opportunities to raise issues with teachers informally was also highlighted. Some settings were reported to have strategies in place to enable them to find out about the literacy experiences of children at home and in the communities. This was particularly evident in Aboriginal communities where it was believed that it was essential that staff were well informed regarding cultural practices and expectations.

The ECLLS rating scale and interviews with staff indicated that many settings had a variety of strategies in place to share information with parents. These included parent meetings, newsletters and parent-teacher conferences, as well as informal communication. Although many settings rated highly on communication methods on the ECLLS rating scale, closer examination of communication practices reveals that much of the communication is one-way, with teachers providing information to parents about the setting's program and telling them what they should be doing at home, rather than a two-way exchange of information.

In focus-group discussions parents were clearly able to articulate the home and community literacy experiences and progress of their children. However they were not generally given the opportunity to provide this information to teachers. Few teachers had established mechanisms to find out about literacy practices in children's homes, instead making assumptions about children's home experiences based on observations or intuition. Teachers made comments such as:

I've never done anything formal, there's never been any survey of information, but the parents will offer things of what they do ... some of them don't say anything.
Interview and focus-group data suggest that in most cases teachers waited for parents to offer information rather than actively seeking it. As a result, teachers were well informed about the home literacy practices of children with confident parents who were articulate in English and had the time and opportunity to share information with teachers. Teachers were generally not well informed about home literacy practices where parents and the teacher were from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and parents did not feel confident to initiate communication.

In focus-group discussions, many parents expressed concerns about the lack of time to discuss issues with staff. However, staff often misinterpreted this as parents being disinterested. This was reflected in teachers' comments such as:

Our programs are up on the wall but I don’t think many of them bother to read it.
Okay, in my experience parents only really want to know what they want to know, when they want to know it.

Congruence and incongruence
In a few cases there were collaborations between settings and families and congruence between the home and the setting. This generally was the case where families and staff shared the same cultural and/or linguistic background, for example in many of the Aboriginal settings visited. Where staff and families came from different backgrounds congruence was less likely to occur and staff valued their own expertise while undervaluing families' experiences, languages and literacies. However, in some cases genuine collaborations involving two-way exchange of information and negotiation resulted when staff valued parents’ input and recognised that families had much valuable information to contribute about their child's expertise with literacy.

In settings where congruence was evident, teachers had developed strategies to enable parents to share information with them about family literacy experiences and expectations for their children. Teachers were then able to integrate many of these home and community experiences into the setting and discuss ways of meeting expectations with families. This may involve much discussion and negotiation as teachers share information with and listen to families. In settings where this occurred, parents made comments such as:

She [the teacher] always asks you what you do, remember when you go for your interview, she’ll always ask you what you do at home, sort of thing, like reading or whatever.

That’s what my daughter’s preschool has, ‘We want to know everything about your child so that we can shape the program. We want to know your expectations and then we will be able to talk to you about this during the year; whether you are happy with what is happening’. And they have.
In settings where there was little exchange of information, incongruence was evident. Instead of learning from parents about children’s home experiences with literacy, teachers in many settings made assumptions about children’s understanding of literacy based on their own, often limited, definitions of literacy. As a result many children, particularly those who were from cultural and language backgrounds different from those of the teacher, were labelled as coming from ‘literacy deprived’ backgrounds.

Conclusion
While research within the last twenty years has effectively contributed to how early childhood staff understand literacy learning in young children, the findings in this research suggest that early childhood staff need to go beyond traditional models of early literacy. This will ensure that meaningful and contextual literacy experiences that fully account for and acknowledge children’s multiple literacies are provided. This research questions the extent to which models of traditional and emergent literacy are able to fully embrace cultural and social variations in literacy learning, so that children who experience other than dominant English speaking book-based literacy practices are not marginalised within these frameworks.

The findings also suggest that in prior-to-school settings, the disparities between what children experience at the setting and what they experience at home or in their communities result in significant disconnections between home and the setting. Consequently, opportunities for early literacy learning are somewhat limited, resulting in inequality of learning outcomes for many children from diverse social and cultural groups.

Recommendations
The following recommendations have emerged as a result of this study:

- Early childhood staff need to develop greater understanding of literacy as social practice in order to fully acknowledge and value the diversity of family perspectives, practices and expectations regarding literacy in our communities.
- Ongoing exchange of information and input between families and teachers about children’s interests and experiences with literacy will result in more effective collaboration between families and staff.
- Staff’s understanding of the impact of technology and popular culture in children’s literacy development and the incorporation of these literacies into their program will result in greater opportunities for literacy learning for all children.
- The valorisation and incorporation of literacies in languages other than Standard English and the recognition of family concerns and
aspirations towards their children’s bilingual and bi-literacy encounters will result in meaningful and contextual learning experiences.

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### Appendix  Summary table of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Findings from the study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Models of early literacy as applied to prior-to-school settings need to go beyond maturationist and developmental readiness.</td>
<td>Staff held narrow and traditional views of early literacy learning in their approach to early literacy education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociocultural perspectives of literacy as social practice can offer an inclusive, equitable and critical framework for working with young children from diverse sociocultural groups.</td>
<td>The disparity between children’s experiences at the setting and experiences at home or in their communities resulted in significant disconnections between the home and the setting. The lack of shared understandings between staff and families about literacy results in incongruence between home and the setting for many children.</td>
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<td>Families’ perspectives of and contributions to their children’s early literacy experiences are relatively under-researched in Australian contexts. Hence these important contributions go unrecognised in prior to school settings.</td>
<td>Families were able to clearly articulate the variety of ways their children construct literacy based knowledge, such as bi-literacy, literacies of popular culture and technologies. Bilingual families expressed concerns for their children’s home language development. Families’ perspectives and expectations about their children’s early literacy learning were often disregarded. Communication between families and staff was often one-way, rather than a two-way exchange of information.</td>
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<td>In prior-to-school settings, school acquired English literacy is highly valued at the expense of ‘other’ literacies such as literacies other than English, popular culture and literacies of technology.</td>
<td>Children who experience ‘other’ literacies did not have opportunities to extend on these experiences in the setting and consequently became marginalised as having ‘deficit’ literacy practices.</td>
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<td>Staff can maximise literacy learning opportunities by encouraging children to critically work with and talk about how they experience texts of popular culture and technologies.</td>
<td>Most families recognised that the literacies of popular culture and technologies were important tools in their children’s literacy learning. In contrast, staff were less enthusiastic about popular culture texts. As a result, opportunities for children to connect literacy to these texts at the setting were limited.</td>
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4.2.2  Paper Two - Early Literacy: Congruence and Incongruence between Homes and Early Childhood Settings.

4.2.2.1  Preface


Context: Leonie Arthur presented this paper at the 6th International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference on Learning, Penang, Malaysia, 1999.

Target Audience: International literacy researchers and educators working with young children, elementary, secondary and tertiary students.

Proportion of Portfolio work: This paper forms 9.1% of my portfolio work.

Summary: This paper reports further analysis of selected evidence from Project A. The project focused on children from Aboriginal, bilingual and low socio-economic families. Evidence from two settings where families and children use LDOE, illustrated some key project findings concerning educator response to children’s home literacy practices.

The paper analyses two case studies representing congruence/incongruence between home and early childhood settings for two preschool settings with diverse communities. Every day families in each community used LDOE. Sandy Bay Preschool in a largely
Aboriginal coastal community used both AE and SAE (case study constructed by myself). Happy Valley Preschool operated in SAE within an urban community practising a majority LDOTE (case study constructed by Cris Jones Diaz). The settings differed in how educators acknowledged family life and extended diverse home language and literacy practices in the setting, valued and incorporated technology in the curriculum, for example, television viewing, and communicated with families.

**Significance:** Paper Two shares NSW research with international literacy educators focusing on the **Family Practices** theme. The paper made transparent varying educator understandings of and responses to **Family Life** and **Dynamic Literacies** dimensions. It also provided implicit evidence for **Images of Children** and **Images of Learning** dimensions, **Children’s Agency** theme. **Living Curriculum, Critical Dialogue** theme was signalled.

Paper Two through contrastive cases extends the general findings from Paper One concerning educator response to children’s home literacies. Sandy Bay case provided a local case of diverse **Family Practices** where educators and families shared strong understandings of cultural, literacy and communication practices. These promoted hope, trust and responsive relationships that extended children’s literacy learning. Educators, both Aboriginal and long term residents in the local community, shared deep understandings of community issues for all Aboriginal families. They understood language and culture shift and loss, parents’ negative schooling experiences, unemployment, imprisonment and domestic violence. They knew how sociocultural history influenced children over generations. From these understandings they emphasised the crucial role for emotional and sociocultural support for children. They used both AE and SAE dialects as they accepted and extended children’s AE while they supported children learning SAE. They accepted children’s exact language, for example ‘It was that fella down the road Miss’, writing this and responding so that they extended children’s bidialectal competence These understandings and practices strongly valued **Family Life and Diverse and Dynamic Literacies** dimensions, **Family Practices** theme.
Educator practices reflected strong *Images of Children* and complex *Images of Learning*, *Children’s Agency* theme. They expected children competent and capable of learning two dialects. They promoted children innovating on British nursery rhyme texts such as “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe/humpy” to compose an Aboriginal version, reflecting *Lived Curriculum*, *Critical Dialogue* theme.

Happy Valley preschool presented another case of diverse family literacies. However, educators reflected dominant Anglo Australian cultures and only spoke SAE. They reflected little understanding or use of diverse languages or resources that validated *Family Life* and *Dynamic Literacies* dimensions, *Family Practices* theme. Educators’ narrow understandings of literacy and bi-literacy denied *Children’s Agency*. They held needy *Images of Children* and problematic *Images of Learning*. For example, educators understood that as children wrote Arabic ‘back to front’ at Saturday language school, children presented difficulties for educators who taught English writing left to right.

Stark points of congruence/ incongruence across the cases emphasised *Project A* findings. Where families and educators shared understandings of *Family Life* and *Dynamic Literacies* dimensions, congruence occurred between home and the setting. Adults known to children related to and valued each other when they shared information. Children then entered settings where educators reflected *Family Life* and *Dynamic Literacies* dimensions. Educators and families shared responsibility in communicating, children were not accountable for continuity across contexts. Families and educators exchanged information, communicated and integrated home literacy practices and experiences in the setting. Educators integrated strong understandings of significant community people, current events and community generational history within the curriculum. This may seem more achievable in a small coastal community than settings in huge urban regions. However this may relate to the shared understandings of literacy, respect and relationships between these educators and families, in addition to professional learning and targeted staffing in Aboriginal communities.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

4.2.2.2 Paper Two

Chapter 5

EARLY LITERACY

CONGRUENCE AND INCONGRUENCE BETWEEN HOMES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

Leonie Arthur, Bronwyn Beecher and Criss Jones Diaz

Introduction

There is increasing recognition that children develop many understandings about literacy in the years before school and that families and communities play a substantial role as children learn particular ways of using language and literacy within social and cultural contexts (Harste, Woodward and Burke 1984; Luke 1997; MacNaughton 1996). Children whose home and community language and literacy practices match those of the school’s are most likely to experience success with literacy (Auerbach 1989; Cairney and Ruge 1997; Heath 1983) with the gap between those who can ‘do’ school literacy and those whose literacies differ increasing as children progress through the school system (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, Reid 1998).

The importance of home-school congruence has been highlighted in recent years (Breen et al. 1994; Hill et al. 1998) although this rhetoric is yet to be effectively translated into practice in many early childhood settings or schools (Breen et al. 1994; Hill et al. 1998). It is often the responsibility of the children rather than the teacher to make the links between home and school/pre-school (McCarthy 1997; Rivalland 1999). Strategies need to be developed that enable all children to make connections between early literacy teaching pedagogy; the funds of knowledge of their homes and communities;

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and the powerful literacies necessary to function effectively in broader society (Hill 1994).

The literacy experiences that children bring to early childhood settings and schools are diverse, with many differences within as well as between cultural, language and social groups (Breen et al. 1994; Hill et al. 1998). However, this diversity is not evident in early childhood settings (Makin, Hayden, Holland, Arthur, Beecher, Jones Diaz, McNaught 1999) or in schools, where classroom literacy practices ‘do not appear to take account of individual needs of some children or cultural differences between them’ (Breen et al. 1994, p.16). Standard Australian English, with a focus on written language, is generally emphasised, with the literacy expertise of children who speak diverse languages and dialects tending to be devalued and disregarded (Breen et al. 1994; Makin et al. 1999). Loss of home languages, as well as possible low levels of literacy proficiency in both languages, is therefore a real issue for many children (Breen et al. 1994; Makin et al. 1999).

Technology and popular culture are ubiquitous in the lives of most children in Australia (Breen et al. 1994; Misson 1998), with many print, video, digital and multimedia texts embedded in popular culture. These texts and associated commercial products are extremely attractive to young children (Misson 1998), and children are highly motivated to read and view print and images associated with their favourite characters and programs. Yet popular culture and its associated artefacts are ignored or even banned in many early childhood settings (Makin et al. 1999), meaning that opportunities for staff and children to understand the powerful images presented, to engage in shared reading and viewing and to critically analyse texts, literacy and social practices (Knobel and Healy 1998) are lost.

The Project

Early Literacy and Social Justice is an Australian project funded by the NSW State Departments of Education and Training and Community Services, with four university sites involved. Stage 1, ‘Mapping Literacy Practices in Early Childhood Services’ (Makin et al. 1999) involved 79 prior to school settings (pre-schools and long day care centres) in areas designated by the departments to be of social and economic disadvantage. Staff and parental perspectives on
literacy and current literacy practices in early childhood settings were mapped and will be reported on in this paper.

Methodology

Three data collection methods were used to investigate staff and family beliefs and attitudes about early literacy and to observe current literacy practices in early childhood settings:

- Rating of the literacy environments in early childhood settings using The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale (ECLLS). This is based on the revised Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale developed by Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998), adapted by the researchers to include a greater emphasis on language and literacy.
- Interviews with two staff members working with the four year olds.
- Focus group discussions with parents.

  ECLLS data was analysed using the software package EXCEL and the interview and focus group data was managed for analysis using the software package NUD*IST.

Findings

A major finding was the incongruence between home and the early childhood setting in most pre-schools/centres (Makin et al. 1999). This occurred where communication between staff and parents was a one-way, transmission model. Staff in these settings tended to value their own experiences with literacy while undervaluing ‘other’ experiences and to hold deficit assumptions about bilingual children’s and parents’ language and literacy proficiencies. Staff did not value parents’ knowledge about their children’s expertise with literacy at home and parents’ expectations for their children’s literacy learning were generally not acknowledged or discussed.

  Congruence between home and the early childhood setting was found to occur in some cases, mainly when staff and families came from similar cultural and language backgrounds and where there were shared understandings of literacy (Makin et al. 1999). In these settings there were effective partnerships between staff and parents, with genuine parent involvement. There were many strategies to initiate and maintain communication between staff and parents and shared expectations for children’s literacy learning. Staff knew about and
Languages of Learning

valued children’s home and community experiences with literacy and integrated them effectively into the program.

Congruence and incongruence between home and the early childhood setting will be explored through case studies of two of the settings from Stage 1. These are Sandy Bay Pre-school and Happy Valley Early Learning Centre (the names of the settings have been changed to protect confidentiality).

Sandy Bay Pre-school is in a coastal area of New South Wales and had only been operating for four weeks at the time of data collection. Family backgrounds reflect mostly Aboriginal language and cultural practices as well as low socio-economic situations. Both staff members are Aboriginal and speak Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English. The assistant comes from the local area.

Happy Valley Early Learning Centre is located in an inner western suburb of Sydney. The majority of the children are from one community language background, with a number of children coming from a range of other language and cultural groups, and no Anglo-Australian children attending at the time of data collection. No staff were employed who represented the dominant cultural/language backgrounds of the children and English was the dominant language used by staff.

Diverse Languages and Literacies

In the project settings where there was a lack of congruence staff tended to hold narrow views of literacy focused on book-based literacy in English (Makin et al. 1999). ‘Other’ literacy practices, including literacy in languages other than English and uses of technology and popular culture, were dismissed by these staff as not relevant or even detrimental to literacy learning, marginalising the literacy practices of many children from socio-cultural minority groups.

Some staff expressed concerns in interviews about children’s success at school if they spoke a language other than English at home and there was generally limited knowledge of the role of first language in second language acquisition, or the importance of literacy in the home language. The ECLLS indicated that in most settings there was a pronounced absence of community language materials with 77% of settings scoring at minimal levels for the item ‘promoting acceptance of diversity’ (Makin et al. 1999).
At Happy Valley Early Learning Centre the mismatch between the language of staff and the languages of the children played a major role in reproducing incongruence between the children’s homes and the early childhood setting. Concerns for children’s lack of exposure to books in the home were expressed by staff in interviews, with comments such as:

...a lot of the parents have the mentality that they don’t need to read a book to the children – that’s the teacher’s role not the parents ... so I try to get them to even be able to read a book properly, like hold it up the correct way...

Furthermore, one staff member stated in interview that parents ‘may not model appropriate reading skills themselves to the children, they wouldn’t be aware that it was a good thing to show the children how to read the books’. These deficit assumptions about the parents’ ability to participate in conventional English book based routines were based on culturally specific ways of using language and literacy.

Concerns about limited opportunities for children to engage in extended communication and conversations at home were also expressed in interviews – ‘some parents aren’t aware of the importance of actually talking to their children and having a conversation’ – with staff seemingly unaware of discourse practices in languages other than English. Similarly, acknowledgement of children’s biliteracy experiences outside of the setting, appeared somewhat problematic to staff, as is apparent in the following statement:

...a lot of them go to ... [community language] schools as well as here. And I think that that could be confusing to them, because we have lots of problems with them writing back to front ... and you have got to train them to do the other way around (staff comment in interview).

In settings where there was congruence between the home and the early childhood setting, staff held broad definitions of literacy and were supportive of children’s language and literacy development in home languages as well as in English (Makin et al. 1999).

At Sandy Bay staff were explicit about their role in supporting and extending children’s Aboriginal English as well as extending their understandings of Standard Australian English as shown in the following interview statement:

If we’re writing a story and a child’s doing a painting and they say ‘it was that fella down the road Miss.’ I will write that .... So we might be using two ways. I’m showing the children this is one way and there’s another ...
Languages of Learning

They learn we respect theirs and we are also saying this is another way that you can write that ...

Observations undertaken for ECLLS indicated that environmental prints in the preschool room included a map of Australia indicating regions for different Aboriginal peoples and their languages. Staff read from culturally relevant factual books, made references to current events in the playground and explicitly explored Aboriginal words. Traditional British nursery rhymes were innovated upon to reflect the children’s cultural and language background, for example: ‘There was an old woman who lived in a shoe/humpy’. The children constructed a humpy and the innovated text was written on a chart for repeated reading as individuals and groups.

Technology and Popular Culture

Analysis of focus group data indicated that most parents believed technology played an important role in children’s language and literacy learning (Makin et al. 1999). Bilingual parents in particular highlighted the role that television, video and computer games played in assisting their children to develop English. Children were said to be very aware of and interested in popular culture texts and images. While parents viewed technology as a positive learning tool, many staff expressed concerns about the negative impact of television, video and computers on children’s learning and development.

Observations and interview data indicated that technology and popular culture were conspicuously absent in most early childhood settings. While many settings had televisions and videos these were generally not utilised as literacy learning tools. Few settings utilised computers as part of the learning environment, with some staff members stating that they had made a deliberate choice not to include computers in the program. When computers were available staff did not engage in interactions with children and children who demonstrated literacy expertise with technology were often not acknowledged as the following interview statement indicates:

Mum makes a big deal and ‘oh, he can write his name’, but it turns out to be on the computer. When he comes in to do it here he has no idea. He might write an M.

At Happy Valley Early Learning Centre parents had a positive view of the influence of television, technology and popular culture on children’s acquisition of English and literacy learning. However, staff were less enthusiastic, expressing concerns about the extent of time
children spent in front of the television, and highlighting the quality of language input from television.

But a lot of them they watch TV and that's only where they get their words from and like their reading from commercials and McDonald's, they all know the McDonald's sign (staff comment in interview).

In contrast, staff interviewed at Sandy Bay Pre-school identified television as one of the ways that children learned language and literacy and knew about programs watched at home. However, due to the fact that the pre-school had only been open for four weeks, and the computer and television were not yet unpacked, these aspects of technology were not yet integrated into the program.

**Communication**

Most settings did not have effective two-way communication between staff and parents (Makin *et al.* 1999). As a result, staff generally had little knowledge or understanding of home literacy practices or of parents' expectations for their children's literacy learning. When asked in interviews what they knew about the home literacy practices of the children they worked with 30% of staff indicated that they did not know what happens at home (Makin *et al.* 1999). A further 20% held deficit assumptions about children's home experiences (Makin *et al.* 1999), making statements such as 'not a lot happens at home' or 'when they come to us (at four years of age) they are four years behind'. Other staff believed that they knew what happens at home, but they often based their assumptions on observations of children rather than conversations with parents.

The absence of staff members from the language groups of the families using Happy Valley Early Learning Centre and the perceived difficulties of using interpreters made staff-parent communication difficult. Communication between staff and parents appeared to be a one-way flow of information, with staff discussing report cards with parents, but not asking parents about what happens at home.

Where there was congruence between the home and the setting there were established systems of two-way communication and therefore staff knew each family's practices and expectations well.

Staff at Sandy Bay Pre-school displayed extensive knowledge about the children and their families, in terms of long-term situations as well as current events. They were well aware of the impact of language and culture loss on contemporary generations of parents in
4.2.3 Paper Three – Diverse Languages and Literacies in Early Childhood: At Home and in Early Childhood Settings

4.2.3.1 Preface

Authorship: Beecher, B. & Makin, L.


Context: I presented this paper for the 9th Annual European Early Childhood Research Association Conference, Helsinki, Finland, 1999. Margaret McNaught initially participated in this paper, but withdrew from further development.

Target audience: International early childhood educators, university educators and policy makers.

Proportion of Portfolio work: This article forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: This paper further examines selected aspects of Project A concerning home and setting literacy experiences. The paper analyses various theoretical perspectives concerning literacy learning, the educators” role and home literacy learning. Multiple theoretical perspectives were examined because educators often use various and multiple perspectives as part of their sociocultural historical practice. The evidence from family focus groups, educator interviews and environmental rating scale, Early Childhood Literacy Learning Scale (Early Literacy Research Group, 1998) adapted from ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998), presented rich insights of early literacy in four cases.
The cases, *Blue Gum Preschool*, *Wirra Wirra Preschool*, constructed by Laurie Makin, *Tea Tree Childrens Centre* and *Waratah Lane Preschool*, constructed by myself, illustrated variations in family and educator literacy understandings and practices. These settings operated in mainly monocultural coastal or multicultural metropolitan communities. Families practised diverse literacies, which educators, to differing degrees, overlooked or recognised, and sometimes extended. In settings with patterns of strong congruence between family and educator perspectives on early literacy, both partners generally shared understandings of family practices, especially cultures. This contrasted with settings with little communication or information exchange.

**Significance:** This paper contributed importantly to the portfolio and to international research because the case studies documented complex patterns in family and educator understandings, practices and relationships. Family literacy insights extended the evidence of diverse *Family Life* and *Dynamic Literacies* dimensions, *Family Practices* theme, and competent *Images of Children* and *Images of Learning* dimensions, *Children’s Agency* theme. Researchers chose the family focus group sites to deepen analysis of family understandings. Educator perspectives and environment observations indicated uneven responses to family insights and practices.

In all cases, families from diverse circumstances consistently reported that children interacted with family and friends, sought meaning, and learnt literacy reflecting the *Family Practices* theme. They noticed children learnt multiple literacies everywhere, including shopping, playing cards, using home languages and technologies within *Family Life*. They identified literacy culture connections, and the worth of maintaining home language/s. Families valued positive emotional environments where educators validated home cultures, extended home languages and extended known topics with children, for example, popular cultures, reflecting *Dynamic Literacies*.

Families across all settings cited *Children’s Agency*. They emphasised positively what their child did reflecting strong *Images of Children* and *Images of Learning*. They
concentrated on children’s competence in learning, “It all depends on what the kids are interested in and what they want to do”;’” we bought a little alphabet like a little computer so he’s sort of playing and learning at the same time”.

Most settings ignored children’s **Family Practices**. Despite many educators with diverse experiences, they reflected narrow understandings of literacy, curriculum approaches and literacy learning. Three settings promoted English book experiences, sound letter relationships, prereading, prewriting, name writing and reading.

Educators, including bilingual educators, preferred English over acknowledging and extending children’s home languages. At one centre, an educator let children speak their language, but overlooked extending them. She reported bilingual children experienced problems because the setting used English and only specialised educators use LOTE resources. She did not feel responsibility for providing bilingual resources. Generally most educators emphasised sound letter relationships, reading and writing, books and English. Observations reflected this emphasis. Literacy in the learning environment was largely ignored, for example, no educator enhanced literacy in the dramatic play while most overlooked music/movement and explicit literacy concept discussion beyond sounds and letters. Most educators ignored diversity influencing children’s literacy learning, which was problematic given diverse families in NSW population.

All themes, **Family Practices, Children’s Agency** and **Critical Dialogue** featured in the Blue Gum Preschool case. Practices differed to those reported above, as families and educators shared information to support children’s cultural identities and languages. Educators supported children’s dialect by writing exactly their words. Families in this and another setting indicated Living Curriculum dimension, **Critical Dialogue** theme. Parents reported how racism limited children’s learning and how refining vocabulary helped children differentiate meanings, for example, castles and buildings. These insights revealed the importance of significant matters in children’s multiliteracies for life learning.
4.2.3.2  Paper Three

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Languages and Literacies in Early Childhood:
At Home and in Early Childhood Settings

BRONWYN BEECHER  LAURIE MAKin
University of Western Sydney  University of Newcastle
Bankstown, Australia  Ourimbah, Australia

SUMMARY: This paper reports on one aspect of a collaborative early childhood literacy research project in New South Wales, Australia, where two government departments and three universities investigated the language and literacy environments of preschool age children at home and in settings. Researchers observed and rated the environments of 80 early childhood settings, followed by interviews with staff members working in the setting as well as focus group discussions with representative family members. The project focused on families and settings of children from Aboriginal, bilingual and low socio-economic backgrounds.

In settings with strong levels of congruence between family and staff perspectives on early literacies, both stakeholders shared understandings of cultural and family practices, in comparison to those settings where shared understandings about diverse literacies were not present.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article porte sur l'un des aspects d'une recherche sur l'écrit dans la petite enfance, menée en Nouvelle Galles du Sud, en Australie, par deux ministères et trois universités pour étudier les environnements, en termes de langage et d'écrit, d'enfants d'âge préscolaire, à la maison et dans les structures d'accueil. Les chercheurs ont observé et mesuré les environnements proposés dans 80 structures de la petite enfance, puis interviennent leurs personnels et organisé des groupes de discussion avec des représentants des familles. La recherche est centrée sur les familles et les structures d'enfants d'origine sociale défavorisée, Aborigène et bilingue.

Dans les structures présentant une forte convergence des points de vue des familles et des personnels sur l'alphabetisation précoce, les diverses parties prenantes partagent leur compréhension des pratiques culturelles et familiales, ce qui n'est pas le cas des structures où une telle convergence n'existe pas.


In Einrichtungen mit großer Übereinstimmung zwischen der Familie und dem Personals über die frühe Fachkompetenz zu lesen und zu schreiben, teilten beide ein Verständnis kultureller Sitten und Familiengewohnheiten im Gegensatz zu jenen Einrichtungen, in denen diese gemeinsamen Ansichten über unterschiedliche Fähigkeiten zu lesen und zu schreiben nicht vorhanden waren.
RESUMEN: Este artículo informa acerca de un aspecto de un proyecto realizado en conjunto entre 2 departamentos del gobierno y 3 universidades en NSW, que investigaron el lenguaje y el desarrollo de la lectoescritura en niños de edad preescolar y su vinculación con el ambiente familiar y los centros de enseñanza. Los investigadores observaron 80 centros de enseñanza (de edad preescolar), analizaron su claustro docente, hicieron grupos de discusión y hablaron con los representantes de las familias. Las familias y los centros de enseñanza correspondían a grupos sociales de nivel económico bajo, aborígenes y bilingües.

Los resultados que alcanzaron indican que las familias ofrecen a sus hijos muchas oportunidades de aprendizaje de la lengua y lectoescritura de forma variada y entienden su potencial de aprendizaje para toda la vida. Los centros de Enseñanza con congruencia entre ambas perspectivas compartieron puntos de vista esenciales en comparación con aquellos centros de enseñanza donde esta congruencia no estuvo presente.

Key words: Home-setting connections; Literacy; Bilingualism; Indigeneity; Technology.

Introduction

This paper reports on the first stage of the development of an Early Literacy Strategy for children's services in New South Wales, Australia, entitled, "Literacies, Communities and Under Fives: The Early Literacy and Social Justice Project". This project was commissioned by the two NSW government departments with responsibility for early education; the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). The first step was to investigate how early literacy was already happening at home and in the setting. To this end, staff from three universities, University of Newcastle, University of Western Sydney and Macquarie University conducted a mapping exercise over the period of August 1998 - February 1999. This paper reports findings from this project set in the context of theoretical perspective framing early literacy.

Early literacy

Current practices are always combinations of past and contemporary theory as well as a broad range of different interpretations of theory. In what follows, some theories influencing early literacy practices (Crawford 1995) are considered in relation to home and early childhood settings.

Traditional perspectives

Maturationist

Maturationist views of literacy learning focused on the child 'unfolding' into literacy in an unhurried way when they were 'mature', especially in relation to their development as concrete operational thinkers. Several aspects of this maturational change relate to literacy, e.g., an increasing ability to deal with abstractions and decontextualised information, the ability to organise information logically, increased attention to detail, the ability to do representational drawing, increased fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. Insisting that the child learned to read before they were 'mature' was thought to cause problems. In the 1930s, research supported this view, suggesting that children were mature enough to read when they reached a mental age of 6.5 (Durkin, 1972). Little investigation occurred of what children did at home.
Developmental readiness

This explanation of literacy learning emphasised children ‘getting ready’ for learning, through ‘pre-reading programmes’ and was reflected in the development of the standardised readiness tests of 1920s and 1930s. This view is still evident (Boyer, 1991) in beliefs that children need to be ready to learn at school. The assumption is that children become ready to learn literacy through drill and practice in isolated skills e.g. left to right movements, identifying colours, shapes and patterns, learning patterns and other formations in prewriting before actually writing/reading. Sometimes these ‘pre’ experiences had little to do with reading and writing eg visual discrimination - circling the animal that is different and so on. The ‘pre’ experiences, often on worksheets, were preparation for the real literacy later on. Scant attention was paid to what children were doing at home as this preparation was assumed to get children ready for reading.

Connectionist

This perspective concentrated on the child learning parts of the literacy from an out-side in model of reading as opposed to an in-side out model (Cambourne, 1979, 81). For example the child would discriminate letters, match sounds and letters, blend, pronounce aloud and arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the text. Children need to learn the hierarchy of skills, which included the alphabetic code, word identification, and decoding skills in order to read and gain meaning. The educator’s role in teaching children the hierarchy of skills was essential. This perspective has been widespread in schools and, as part of the downward curriculum push, has been taken up by some educators in settings for under fives. Little attention was paid to what occurred at home.

Contemporary perspectives

Developmentally appropriate practice

Original developmental views were based on Piaget’s belief (1962) that children constructed their own understandings in relation to their interactions with the environment. This concept was a significant difference to previous theories as the child constructed understandings rather than just memorising someone else’s instructions, rules and interpretations. Piaget believed that all children learnt in the same predictable order. Although the environment was considered important, the nature of environments, i.e. individual homes and the impact on children’s development in relation to literacy was not explored.

Recent interpretations of developmental theory have been largely based on the notion of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987, Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The earlier edition largely drew on Piagetic perspectives which emphasised the child actively constructing their understandings and learnings through play whilst educators observed and facilitated. Often this lead to missed learning opportunities and children not always reaching their potentials (Fleet, 1995). The later version of DAP (1997) is more explicit in terms of regarding children’s dynamic development across different contexts, i.e. the individual nature of the family, as well as wider social, cultural and economic factors of the community.

Literacy as social practice

This explanation of early literacy originates from a range of complementary perspectives. It includes sociocultural perspectives where literacy is seen as a social construction. Scribner and Cole (1981) identified Vai children learning literacies as social practices occurring in their family and community. Cook-Gumperz (1986) defined literacy as social construction as ‘literacy is constructed in everyday life, through interactional exchanges and the negotiation of meaning in many different
contexts' (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p.2). Currently literacy as social practice advocates that people utilise literacy as a social technology, as a tool to construct meanings and to interact within social and physical environments (Luke, 1998).

Literacy as social practice rests on three main concepts (Makin, Hayden, Holland, Arthur, Beecher, Jones-Diaz and McNaught 1999).

- Firstly we “make literacy” as we communicate with others in our daily life, for instance in ordinary everyday events we make literacy as we tell jokes and stories, use another language or dialect, pay the road toll, buy petrol;
- Secondly, we construct literacies of various types to interact with others and get our needs met, for example, paying for the tollway to travel to work - we need to use the swipe card, where the toll is deducted from our bank account, then we do various literacy tasks to reclaim the money;
- Thirdly we have many differences in literacy practices across social, cultural and economic groups because these particular contexts impact on how we construct particular ways of using languages and literacies in our lives. In some families and communities people will openly disagree with each other in prolonged verbal debates. In other families people avoid expressing any differences, avoid eye contact and shun the person.

Literacy as social practice has arisen from sociolinguistic and social anthropology foundations as well as the social interactionist theories of Vygotsky. It combines complementary perspectives including emergent literacy, social interactionist and critical theory. All three explored here emphasise the role of literacy in creating identity and social relationships with people (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivaland & Reid, 1998). Since the role of people is explicitly identified and explored within the context of interactions within diverse families and communities, the role of families and communities in children’s early literacy is central from the onset in these complementary theories.

**Emergent literacy**

Emergent Literacy, based on the work of Clay (1966), Holdaway (1991), Wells (1985) and Hall (1997), posits that most children growing up in a literate family and living in a literate society are immersed in literacy as part of everyday life with family and community. Hence, they learn literacy in similar ways as they develop oral language. Explicit descriptions of early literacy were initially labelled emergent literacy by Clay 1966. Often observers were family members who were also researchers (Smith, 1976; Crago & Crago, 1983; Bissex, 1980; Baghban, 1984; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Hall, 1987). General patterns in developmental continuums were established, which consider the individual within the family, community and cultural groups. However, within this perspective more attention was paid to children learning literacy as another social practice from significant others within their home and community, rather than educators transmitting literacy in formal settings (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1983, p12).

Family members often involve children in getting things done in their everyday life, without explicit attention to ‘direct teaching’ of literacy (Hall, 1987). They may mediate the literacy dimensions of these experiences in different ways (Heath, 1983; Teale, 1986). Children also readily integrate their literacy learnings into their dramatic play.

**Social interactionist**

Within this perspective, the nature of the interaction in the social context became the focus. The theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983, 1984) provided directions to investigate this in depth. Interactions between the child and others provided opportunities for learning from others through increasing zones of proximal development. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) described the child learning literacy, thought being involved by the significant others in their families as they got on with daily life.
Since the context of social interaction is significant in providing the environment in which the child constructs their understandings about languages and literacies, the uniqueness of the context is important. Heath (1983) provided powerful examples of the differences in languages and literacies in her ethnographic studies of children and families.

Within this perspective, home language and literacy practices need to be known and extended to promote early literacy. The educator’s role lies in leading explicit interactions that extend children’s current learning and interests in languages and literacies.

Critical literacies

Literacies are embedded in our social practices within a range of cultural contexts i.e. the worlds where children learn literacies. This perspective seeks to encourage analysis of the language and literacy relationships evident in discourses that reflect social, political and economic powers of different individuals and groups within the wider society (Knobel & Healy, 1998). Since technologies and popular culture play such powerful roles in multiple literacies and children’s lives, children need to be able to recognise and analyse meanings in the texts, realise texts are socially constructed and critically discuss and analyse the dominant representations and discourses.

Often in Australia, most educational settings value language and literacy practices from the dominant cultures i.e. Anglo and middle class, whilst offering little recognition, value or support for the home languages and literacies of many families and their children. Critical literacies promote children’s critiquing of social practices of language and literacies that advantage some groups over other groups within society. For example, to examine if all mothers look like the women portrayed and prefer the kinds of things advertised in a shopping catalogue. Within this perspective, the multiple literacies of children, their family and communities need to be known as the educator encourages critical discussion of dominant representations and discourses within texts.

Context

Stage 1 of the ‘Literacies, Communities and Under Fives’ project, ‘Mapping Literacy Practices In Early Childhood Services’, focused on 79 early childhood settings, with 4 year old children, i.e. day care and preschools, which were located in urban, semi-urban and semi-rural areas of New South Wales. The children in these settings were those likely to be starting school in the following year. The study involved 158 educators and 60 families across a range of different language, cultural and socio-economic groups and investigated family and educator understandings and attitudes to language and literacy learning.

Method

Data collection

The mapping exercise aimed to identify different perspectives of stakeholders, i.e. families and educators. This is reflected in the research design through the use of family focus group discussions and interviews with educators as well as observations of the setting.

Representative families participated in nine focus group discussions to share their understandings of and attitudes towards early literacy, their child’s language and literacy learning at home and in the community and in the early childhood setting. These focus group discussions of approximately two hours occurred at times and in places that were appropriate to the participating families. A facilitator and recorder were involved in each focus group.

Researchers developed an instrument to observe the daily program based on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998). Other re-
searchers have found that a subset of related items from the original ECERS offers the same reliability as the entire scale (Scarr, Eisenberg & Deater-Deckard, 1994). An appropriate subset was selected and a number of new items specifically related to prior to school literacy were added. The new instrument (ECLLS) was designed to describe the directions of the program on a particular day including the nature of and the organisation of the environment in general and the literacy environment in particular.

ECLLS follows the design of ECERS-R in offering descriptive examples of criteria that may be used to justify a rating of between 1 and 7, with 1 representing inadequate, and 7 representing excellent. Sets of criteria for the differing ratings are attached to each item. Researchers were advised to select the descriptions they believed to best fit the situation. In the development of the new scale, ECLLS, researchers worked closely to scrutinise items and their ratings for the scale. In addition, pairs of researchers checked inter-rater reliability for all items through visiting the same setting twice and a second setting once. Although the scale itself is 1-7, researchers were asked to note the absence or inapplicability of any descriptor. When the data were entered for analysis, 0 was included as a way of representing “not applicable or not observed”.

Researchers observed the morning program for two hours with this instrument. This period was chosen as it represents a significant part of the daily program. It was seen that experiences on offer in this time frame were likely to be reflective of experiences regularly offered throughout the day. The advice of Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998) was followed so that ratings were based only on observed experiences or on teacher reports on what is offered (not what is planned to be offered) in the follow up interview.

Two educators working with the preschool aged children within each setting were interviewed for about an hour concerning their individual understandings and attitudes to early literacy at home and in the setting. This interaction occurred after the observation of the morning programme and was used to clarify observations.

Data analysis

Data were analysed in a number of ways. Focus group discussions were audiotaped, transcribed and analysed in terms of themes. The ratings from the observation schedules were graphed for each item, by subscale and by total score to give a picture of the overall ratings of the programme.

Themes from the family focus group discussions and the educator interviews as well as the patterns in the observation rating were linked to each other in order to identify and explore congruence and incongruence between family and educator understandings and attitudes about early literacy. This analysis has been utilised to develop brief case studies of four of the early childhood settings within the overall project.

Case studies

In this paper, case studies are presented from four settings chosen from the 79 early childhood settings within the overall project. Families in 9 of the 79 settings participated in focus group meetings. Since the focus of this paper explores family and educator perspectives, case studies were developed from the nine settings where families participated in focus groups. The four settings selected represent the range of social, economic and cultural contexts within the data as a whole. They also represent services licensed by the two State government departments with responsibility for early childhood education. These case studies reflect early childhood settings that serve indigenous, monocultural, bilingual and multicultural families within metropolitan, semi rural and coastal communities of NSW.
Overview of settings

Brief details of each setting are presented in Table 1. It can be seen that these settings were managed by different organisations, served different communities, were in different locations, and included staff from a wide range of backgrounds. These characteristics are discussed further in the relevant case studies.

Findings

Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale

A summary of the ELLS findings are presented in Table 2. In the table, high rating items rated a 6 or 7 out of a possible score of 7, whilst low rating items scored a 1 or 2 out of a possible score of 7. It can be seen that different settings had different strengths and areas of concern. The potential impact on early literacy of the profile demonstrated in each setting is discussed in the appropriate case studies.

Case study 1: Blue Gum Preschool

Blue Gum was an indigenous preschool attached to a public school in a small coastal town in an area of socioeconomic disadvantage. There was an Anglo teacher and an Aboriginal aide.

Family perspectives

Representatives of Aboriginal families in the focus group included four adults who were all Aboriginal and all English-speaking. (The indigenous language of the area has been largely lost, but the culture is strong.) Three were married mothers. One was a single father. The aide acted as the focus group facilitator.

A number of themes emerged from the discussion. One important theme was the role of the supportive emotional climate to promote learning, “Teachers can scare children, then they don’t learn”, and the central importance of responding to children’s interests in learning. “It all depends on what the kids are interested in and what they want to do.” Another theme centred on the importance of whole school activities that help non-Aboriginal children learn more about Aborigines. All reported that they or their older children had experienced racism. They reported that many non-Aboriginal children still think of tribal Aboriginal life, not urban.

Families shared a strong desire to help their children combined with a feeling that they didn’t know enough about what to do and how. “Should I be teaching my child sounds?”

They saw collaboration between home and school as very important and expressed satisfaction at being asked about their views and being able to share ideas “to help our kids”. “It should have happened a long time ago.”

Educator perspectives

The teacher was Anglo-Australian, but she had had many years experience working with Aboriginal communities. She had a three-year early childhood degree and had taught both in preschools and in primary schools. The aide was Aboriginal. She was enrolled in a Bachelor of Teaching and had completed the first year. She had had experience both in preschools and in primary schools.

Both the teacher and the aide were very aware of the need to make sure that preschool experiences gave children confidence and prepared them for some of the experiences they would meet when they started school. The aide stated:
### TABLE 1: Overview of case study settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Focus Group Families</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Management of Setting</th>
<th>Name of Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Australian Teacher/Aboriginal Australian Aide</td>
<td>Representatives of Aboriginal families</td>
<td>Coastal small town (mainly Aboriginal, some Anglo Australian families)</td>
<td>DET, attached to public school</td>
<td>Blue Gum Preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Australian Teacher/Armenian Australian Child Care Worker</td>
<td>Representatives of Arabic, Cantonese, Dutch and Anglo Australian families</td>
<td>Metropolitan Multicultural (Arabic, Cantonese, Dutch, Anglo Australian families)</td>
<td>Community Child Care, Decs licensed</td>
<td>Tea Tree Children's Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Australian Teacher/ Anglo Australian Aide</td>
<td>Representatives of Anglo, Singhalase and Arabic Australian Families</td>
<td>Metropolitan Multicultural Australian families)</td>
<td>DET, attached to a public school</td>
<td>Wirra Wirra Preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo Australian Teacher/Anglo Australian Teacher</td>
<td>Representatives of Anglo and Maori Australian</td>
<td>Coastal town (mainly Monocultural, some Maori Australian families)</td>
<td>DET, attached to a public school</td>
<td>Wirra Wirra Preschool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2: Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Setting</th>
<th>High rating items</th>
<th>Low rating items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Gum Preschool</td>
<td>• Furnishings (relaxation &amp; routine)</td>
<td>• Music and movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Room arrangement</td>
<td>• Use of TV, videos and computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging communication</td>
<td>• Literacy interaction in dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informal language</td>
<td>• Discussion of literacy concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fine motor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accepting diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervision of children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff-child interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provisions for parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Tree Children’s Centre</td>
<td>• Furnishings (relaxation &amp; routine)</td>
<td>• Music &amp; movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Room arrangement</td>
<td>• Literacy interactions in dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Using language to develop reasoning skills</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informal use of language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fine motor Interactions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provisions for children with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussions of literacy concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provisions for parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waratah Lane Preschool</td>
<td>• Furnishings (routine)</td>
<td>• Furniture for relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervision Interactions</td>
<td>• Child display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programming</td>
<td>• Meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group time</td>
<td>• Dramatic Play Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Dramatic play and literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy interaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Literacy concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• discussions Metalinguistic awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirra Wirra Preschool</td>
<td>• Furniture (routine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Room arrangement</td>
<td>• Furnishings for relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Child-related display</td>
<td>• Greeting/departing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging children to communicate</td>
<td>• Snacks/meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informal language</td>
<td>• Books and pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fine motor</td>
<td>• Music and movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Art</td>
<td>• Dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of TV, videos &amp; computers</td>
<td>• Promoting acceptance of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supervision</td>
<td>• Literacy interaction in dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interactions</td>
<td>• Metalinguistic skill development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programming</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Group time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussion of literacy concepts</td>
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</table>
“If they don’t have the understanding of literacy and reading, it’s going to harm their development, you know, and understanding when they go to school. Well, they’ll have problems all the time. I think the kids get mocked, too.”

Meanwhile the teacher commented:

“I think that the literacy patterns and the capabilities are almost set before they start kindergarten and I feel if they’ve got that head start before they start school that that makes all the difference … We’re making a book so that they’re confident when they get to kindergarten. They’re not going to go, ‘What’s ‘retell’?’”

This concern about giving the children a head start in literacy is not surprising given the statistics relating to Aboriginal school achievement. In the Basic Skills tests held annually in years 3 and 5, Aboriginal children consistently perform below the norm (Kemp, 1999).

Both educators were also very aware of the need to support the children’s cultural background. The aide saw that her role was ... “[to provide] an Aboriginal perspective; I think, Aboriginal English”. Whilst the teacher stated, “We write down exactly what the child says to us...it does two things - it’s accepting of Aboriginal English and it’s also showing the development of their speech patterns.”

Comment

This programme was basically strong and there was a high level of congruence between educators and family views and concerns. Both educators and families recognised the need to engage the children and to ensure that they developed confidence in themselves as learners prior to school entry. They both worked towards supporting the children’s Aboriginal identity and there was a clear awareness on both sides of children’s experiences.

One strategy that assisted in the development of shared understandings about early literacy development was the use by the teacher, of a ‘Literacy Wall’. The teacher described it in this way:

“It’s got like on the grid ... all sorts of cues. Basically, does your child know how to turn the TV on and off? Do they write their name? Do they ask questions? There’s a whole map. It’s only on one sheet of paper but a whole map of these cues ... when they fill out their enrolment forms for the preschool I give them a highlighter and just highlight ones they’ve noticed in their child and ... then mid year when we start talking to them about how the child’s going and assessment and that, I get those back out and we highlight some more on them with the parent. That’s their thing to do. I don’t touch them, and you know, at the beginning of the year they might have highlighted only four or five boxes on the chart and then mid year they’ve done a lot more. At the end of the year I give them back to them and they can keep them and they look at them after and highlight and hopefully it’s basically filled in with things like are they drawing pictures and can they do symbols and do they recognise symbols in the environment like the bank or the TAB or whatever.”

On the Literacy Wall, there are also blank squares in which parents can include other things they have noticed relating to their child’s early literacy. The children in Blue Gum Preschool appeared to be receiving a high level of mutually complementary support in their early literacy learning.

Case study 2: Tea Tree Children’s Centre

Tea tree was a community centre in a multicultural metropolitan area. The teacher was Anglo. There was an Armenian/Persian child care worker.
Family perspectives

Families participated in the focus group consisted of six mothers from a range of language and cultural backgrounds as well as socioeconomic status i.e. Arabic Australian, Cantonese Australian, Dutch Australian, Anglo Australian and low - mid income levels.

The families expressed strong opinions of the diverse places and ways in which their children learned literacies. In all, they saw that their children were learning literacy everywhere: at home: “Jamie’s big on using up Dad’s envelopes”; in the community: “by the time Karla was two she could recognise Macdonalds anywhere and we didn’t go to Mcdonalds”; and in the setting: “a lot of exposure to different kinds of music activities, songs, rhythms, play experiences”.

Families thought children learnt a great deal through interaction with others i.e. siblings and parents: “Ali said to me ... ‘Is that a castle?’ ... I said, ‘It’s more of a building than a castle’, so just normal things when you’re going through the streets, I think kids learn a lot because they talk a lot”. “I’ll say to Jamie, ‘Whose name starts with ‘n’? ‘So he’ll be going around the table saying people’s names in his head, thinking whose starts with an ‘n’ noise ...’”.

Families were very aware of literacies beyond books. They stated that their children interacted with and learnt literacy from technology: “we bought a little alphabet like a little computer so he’s sort of playing and learning at the same time”; “I find that he picks up a lot from television”.

Families emphasised the importance of bilingualism and biliteracies: “My children ... are bilingual so at home they are mainly talking in another language. I try to enforce that ... and here (in the setting) they are talking in English”.

Educators’ perspectives

The teacher was Anglo Australian and a three year trained early childhood trained teacher who had been working in settings for children from birth to five year. The child care worker was Armenian/Persian Australian. Her qualification was a Child Care Certificate. She had been working in this setting for five years. Her languages and literacies included Armenian and Farsi.

Both educators identified the importance of early literacy in its many aspects (oral language, reading and writing) for school, “great headstart before they’re looking at the chalkboard and the teacher talking to them about words and spelling and phonetics”. They focused on forms of literacy, i.e. concepts about sounds/letters relationships, words, children’s names, print and books. Important resources were books, book corner, chalkboards, name cards, typewriter, ruler, pencils and playdough.

Although educators discussed the importance of literacy development in the child’s first language, they strongly emphasised the importance of communication in English between the child and the educators. There appeared to be little extension of the child’s home language with appropriate resources, experiences and planning strategies such as language based groupings - “if two little Chinese children want to talk Cantonese ... then that’s fine, just let them go ahead.”

Bilingual children were identified several times as having problems as the onus was on the child to communicate in English: “the child will feel more comfortable if the child knows the language”. Resources were seen as useful and appropriate for specialist educators, rather than the educator -

“we had a multi-cultural lady come in this year and she ... showed us how to write the numbers in Chinese, the numbers in Arabic ... We used those quite a lot during that particular time... but naturally she had to take them with her again”.

Educators only used random means of collecting information about family language and culture and literacy, for example, approaches were initiated by families, whilst educators took observations; consulted with families twice a year and infrequently used written communication. One educator stated, “I’m not sure if there is a question on the application form regarding ... cultural child rearing practices”.
Both families and educators understood the importance of early literacies for young children. However, they focused on different dimensions. Families emphasised the multiliteracies their children were learning and utilising, including environmental print, games, technologies, and their first languages in addition to book based literacies. Several parents expressed their concerns about wanting their child to learn their first language as well as English. They believed interaction promoted and extended children’s literacy learnings.

The ECLLS observation indicated high levels of interaction, use of oral language and discussion of literacy concepts. Educators focused on English literacy, primarily the form, i.e. letter/sound relationships, words and concepts about books and print, although they did identify processes of print conveying meaning and the importance of children’s names. Educators, whilst stating the importance of first languages, did not appear to have developed workable systems to investigate and extend children’s first languages.

Case study 3: Waratah Lane Preschool

Waratah was a preschool attached to a public school in a culturally diverse area. This was the only setting in which the teacher was bilingual, but English only was promoted in the programme.

Family perspectives

Families participating included five mothers from Anglo Australian, Singhalese and Lebanese-Arabic language and culture backgrounds representing the only minority groups within the setting.

Families shared many different ways that their children were learning different literacies. “They learn in different ways, they learn on computers ...”; “my children have a lot of books, they do a lot of reading, making, cutting things out and writing on papers, play shops a lot, buying, selling, they make a lot of their games up themselves and just go outside and just play, they don’t need anything just play”; “[She] would stand, ... in front of the computer and she would put in everybody’s names. She learned how to spell ... she’ll put mum M-U-M ... just playing at the computer.”

Families readily recognised technology assisting literacy learning. Television programmes included documentaries, educational and home shows such as ‘Homes and Gardens’ which often inspired children to initiate family interactions, for example, “Let’s make Mum a barbecue table”.

Families thought interaction with others in the home, community and setting promoted early literacy: “they’re learning through ... talk and observation”; “like at mealtime we sit there at the table and we have to talk about what each person did that day, and what happened at school, and it’s the next person’s turn ...”. Personal events such as birthdays provided interactive literacy learning opportunities in terms of making cards to send to someone special like Grandma or planning a birthday party. Family/community events included Clean Up Days, volunteer work and grocery shopping.

Educators’ perspectives

The teacher was Italian Australian and had three years early childhood training. She spoke, read and wrote Italian. She had been working for five years in settings for under fives. The aide was Anglo Australian and had been working in the setting for five years.

Educators thought literacy was important for preschoolers, especially pre-writing and pre-reading, focusing on books, stories, children’s names, letters and sounds. One educator said that children “take in the environment around with regards to reading and writing, focusing on stories.”
words and pictures as they develop love for reading and writing”. The other educator said children needed to read and write “properly” and that going over the same thing many times would assist them to do this. Both educators agreed that maintaining home languages was important for bilingual children for their literacy, as well as to communicate with family. However, children’s home language in the setting sometimes caused concerns:

“we have had a lot who have been very literate in their home language and we have found it very hard to encourage them with their English because we have so many from the same group ..., then they tended for most of the time to be speaking in their home language and that was quite frustrating [for us].”

Frustration and misunderstandings appeared as communicating with children and families was seen as problematic:

“Some are very bad. Some don’t say the first letter of the word and [the] little Asian group ... instead of saying your name, they will yell “Teacher”. If they want their shoes done up ... they will throw the shoe at you rather than use English and you have got to say ‘what would you like me to do?’ ... “shoe” ... “I will say, ‘Yes I have a shoe, too’”.

Educators generally identified literacy learning occurring at home, in the community and in the setting. However they also expressed differences in how children learned literacy: through approximations and with assistance from peers in fun ways; through repeated practice and close interaction with the educator, i.e. to form letters, identify sound/letter relationships as early attempts showed “bad habits”.

Book based literacy was valued by educators: “We use books a lot so children have the opportunity to be immersed in lots of print”. In newsletters and family discussions, educators promoted “great benefits of reading a story to a child”. Educators identified the amount and kind of “stories” read to the child “because that is one of the biggest mediums (books) through which they learn, even at school”.

Comment

The programme provided opportunities for high quality interactions between children and between educators and children. Families and educators stated children learned a great deal from each other and from “companionship and respect”. The highly structured daily programme may have been due to the setting’s sessional nature. However, families and individual educators emphasised different languages and literacies. There were substantial differences between what the educators said and what the ECCLS identified in relation to languages and literacy.

Families recognised the multiliteracies that their children were rapidly learning in playful and purposeful ways at home, in the community and setting. Educators focused on narrower literacies, i.e. story and book literacies. Often one educator emphasised doing things in the “right way”, mindful that children were to start school next year, thus the future curriculum impacted on the current programme - “learn their shapes to get ready for kindergarten”.

Books were seen by the other educator as the way to learn at home, preschool and school. However, observation showed that children did not visit the book corner where books in poor condition were not easily accessible. In group reading, there were insufficient books including some inappropriate ones.

Educators readily stated the importance of maintaining and extending children’s first language(s), however they experienced difficulties in relevant practices and in communicating with families speaking a language other than English. Families from the majority language were not represented in the focus group, so could not access this research opportunity and discuss their concerns.
Case study 4: Wirra Wirra Preschool

Wirra Wirra was a preschool attached to a public school in a coastal town that served a primarily monocultural community. Both teacher and aide were Anglo-Australian.

Family perspectives

The focus group involved seven mothers attending who were all English-speaking although in two homes a little Maori was used. All were employed with home duties. Parents obviously felt the pressures of school looming as shown in one parent’s fears:

“That is a scary feeling. Should [Mary] be doing this? Should she be going a wee bit further on this? To me I’m petrified as a first time mother of a five year – my baby’s starting school next year, that’s what I’ve got in my head. How does a parent know?”

Parents were very much in favour of the emphasis within the preschool on literacy preparation for school. One mother said, “it’s like they’ve changed their whole programme around and they’ve become more like kindergarten teachers; preschool used to be more of a socialising thing but now it’s much better: they’re learning.” Another remarked, “This preschool in here is terrific. I have had my other children in other preschools and all those preschools combined has not taught as much as this one.” They were aware that the teacher was studying and saw this as a benefit for the programme - “With [Sue] studying, she is probably more acutely aware of things...”

Educator perspectives

The teacher was Anglo-Australian, with almost 10 years of experience in early childhood settings for children prior to school entry. She was upgrading her qualifications from three-year trained to four-year trained. The Anglo Australian aide had not studied formally for 20 years but was thinking about returning to study now that her family was grown.

Both teacher and aide took a traditional getting ready for school literacy approach. The teacher stated, “Whatever we can give them or they can get and consolidate before they get to school, my belief is that then it's going to make their schooling a lot easier. The aide agreed: “School’s moving very fast these days, life’s moving very fast and they can be disadvantaged if they come into the school system without some previous knowledge of at least being able to perhaps write their name.”

These views were reflected in the preschool programme, which contained a clear emphasis on skill building - letter sound knowledge, number recognition, tracing letters and words, writing their names from left to right, shape recognition. It was also reflected in the conscious planning for transition that was occurring. The teacher commented that “I’ve worked much closer with the kindergarten teachers as well; I’ve seen the programme and what happens in the kindergarten [and] will marry it up with what I do.”

There was a difference in their responses to a question about children with special literacy needs. As was the case with the majority of the 158 educators who were interviewed, the teacher focused on children with problems - “We have a lot of kids with articulation problems, and receptive and expressive language problems.” The aide, however, included early readers and writers in her answer - “It sounds like you’re working a lot with the children that have problems but also I try to acknowledge the children that are - well, as I said, there is one highly developed and the little people in between.” The aide in this school seemed very conscious of not usurping the teacher’s role - “I’ll basically give me opinion, but… I’ll probably redirect them to the teacher - to [Sue] - for a more extended type of thing…” I may suggest [something]to somebody … but that’s more a mother’s answer.”
Comments

The parents in this setting were very supportive of the teacher’s work. Educators and parents shared the view that preparation for school should be the major feature of the preschool literacy activities. Both educators and parents appeared to see the main purpose of communication being to share problems and look for solutions.

Educators expressed the belief that literacy in the home language was important, but neither mentioned the fact that some of the children were exposed to some Maori at home. T - “I certainly know that if they did have any home languages here I’d try to bring it into our programme as well, but we don’t have any other languages.”

Themes in early literacy case studies

These brief case studies indicate that there is much diversity in early literacy from the perspectives of the home and the setting.

Families across different social, cultural and economic contexts often expressed similar understandings and concerns. They recognised that their children were actively seeking meaning and learning literacy everywhere, through their interactions and their play at home, in the community as well as the setting. They saw that their children were learning multiple literacies, i.e. different languages, computers, television, personal print, environmental print as well as book based literacies. Parents saw that their children learnt through interactions with others, with peers as well as with adults. They emphasised the importance of supportive emotional climates for children to learn, of extending first languages, as well as the impact of popular culture as providing topics of high interests and engagement for their child. Some parents expressed concerns about their child starting school.

Educators shared a range of understandings and attitudes to early literacy. Amongst the educators at each setting, it appeared that traditional theories of early literacy were being implemented, i.e. readiness, connectionist, developmentally appropriate practice. In some instances there were examples suggesting awareness of emergent literacy, social interactionist, and critical literacies perspectives, but these were few. In addition, educators sometimes stated particular concepts and attitudes whilst the programme demonstrated otherwise, thus translation of theories into practice presented difficulties. Generally educators regarded early literacy in terms of English book based literacy, pre-reading and pre-writing, name writing and reading.

Data from the rating scale (ECLLS) supporting the case studies varied widely. The rating scale indicated that on the observation day, there were two common strengths across programmes in the four settings, “Furniture for routine care, play and learning” and “Group time”. Reasonable strengths in three out of four settings included, “Room arrangement for relaxation and comfort”; “Staff-child interactions”; “Schedule-programme.” These items refer to the general environment rather than literacy as such, with the exception of positive interactions, which are very important in a broadened concept of literacy including oracy. Only one setting rated highly in an item related to literacy: “Discussion of literacy concepts”.

Areas of concern in all four settings included the item, “Literacy interactions within dramatic play”, whilst “Music and movement” was of concern in three out of four settings. Dramatic play offers children opportunities to freely explore function and form in literacy whilst music offers children the potential to develop many aspects related to literacy such as sound discrimination and pattern recognition. The item, “Acceptance of diversity”, was only strong in one of the four settings. This is of particular concern because acceptance of diversity is important in valuing and planning for the positive development of individual children’s languages/literacies, especially within multicultural as well as monocultural communities.
Future directions

These case studies, in miniature, reflected the findings of the wider study. This leads to the emergence of principles that should underpin effective early literacy practices. These Principles provided the framework for a professional development programme, “Literacies, Communities and Under 5s” (Jones, Diz, Beecher, Arthur, Ashton, Hayden, Makin and MacNaught 2001).

These are the Principles:

1. Systems exist to facilitate two-way communication between educators and families about children’s languages and literacies
2. Educators build on children’s home and community literacy experiences in the setting
3. Planning systems support children’s individual literacies
4. Literacy experiences are integrated throughout the curriculum and the day
5. Educators extend children’s constructions of literacy by mediating their literacy play and by explicitly teaching literacy concepts and processes relevant to children’s experiences.

Summary statement

Children’s early literacy is most strongly supported when families and educators share their understandings in a number of areas:

• What literacy entails – whether it is seen to include oral language, multimedia and popular culture or whether it is restricted to traditional paper based texts.
• What literacy practices are acknowledged for example, whether early childhood educators value and build on children’s language and dialects other than English;
• What recognition is given to the role of information technology and popular culture in children’s early literacy;
• What literacy experiences are seen as appropriate in prior to school settings.

Families and educators need to work together to develop appropriate approaches, processes and frameworks in contextually specific ways to strengthen their support for children’s literacy development prior to school entry. This process can be achieved through implementing the five Principles. If the five Principles are strong and underpin the programme, there are likely to be high degrees of congruence between families and educators where they can share information as well as extend ideas and experiences. Knowing about the languages and literacies of each child is an important place to start extending what the child is already doing in terms of early literacy. Extensive two way communication is essential to bring this about, as individualisation is important for each child. It is the research team’s belief that if the core principles are being well implemented, then children’s early literacy is well and appropriately supported.

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Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

B. Beecher & L. Makin

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Correspondence about this paper should be addressed to:

Bronwyn Beecher
Bankstown Campus, Building 4
School of Education and Early Childhood Studies
University of Western Australia
Bankstown
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797
Australia
4.2.4  Paper Four – Exploring Literacy with Families

4.2.4.1  Preface

Authorship: Beecher, B.


Context: This chapter is one of three, individually authored, for a national literacy educators publishing organisation.

Target audience: Association members include elementary school educators, early childhood educators, college and university educators and researchers.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This chapter forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: Provoked by primary research findings in Project A, this chapter examines the potential of open educator communications with families to broaden educator understandings of home practices and literacy. At the time many educators practised one way communications and often focused on their difficulties with children’s behaviours. They ignored gathering family literacy information to inform programs. Educators and families both can use power and knowledge within their practices that limit or enhance communication and move towards productive relationships. As educators shift from „experts” to „partners” with all parents exploring local literacy practices, educators may better understand how to extend children’s literacy learning.

Analysing complexities of communication challenged educators to review multiple modes and consider useful ways for all families. Since communicating with all
Australian families means understanding and working ethically with wide linguistic and sociocultural diversity, the paper illustrates diverse examples of family literacy practices and expectations. These challenged various educator stereotypes of families drawing attention to diversity, family/work responsibilities and family comfort with educator communication. Respectful communication usually becomes two way and accounts for these complexities. Practice recommendations included personalising diverse ways for gathering information for programs and sharing back about children’s literacy learning. Representations of family literacy practices in this section sought to extend educator understandings of diverse Australian languages and dialects, which many children learn at home, and what this may mean for extending children’s literacy learning.

**Significance:** The paper disseminated some *Project A* findings in a national elementary literacy educators text, supported by examples from other unreported research. Papers One, Two and Three advocated that educators seeking family information. Paper Four directly challenged educators to investigate and reconceptualise aspects of Family Practices. It made visible some complicated features influencing family educator contact that influences the relevance of setting literacy programme for children. Expedient communication based on assumptions of Family Practices may seem to work for most educators and some families. However, research suggested that communication is not respectful or successful for all families. In addition, the little existing communication in schools (Lawson, 2000), reflected limited Family Practices and subsequently narrowed opportunities for Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue. Four years later, *Project D* found that some educators still resisted communicating with families about Family Practices.

Paper Four urged educators to take on multiple perspectives and recognise diverse family knowledge of children’s home literacy learning, for example AE, television critiquing or playing with *South Park* dialect. This stance substantively differed from many existing educator/family relationships where educators sought to engage families
in supporting educators’ narrow understandings of literacy, investigate negative
behaviours or raise funds. The paper represented diverse Family Life and Diverse
Literacies dimensions as valid with the intent of deepening educators’ understandings
of literacy as sociocultural practice and beyond one dialect, SAE. For example, the
varied representations of Chan, Carter and Marshall family literacy practices all
contributed to children’s literacy learning. Papers One, Two and Three established
strong parent insights into children’s literacy learning and limited educator
understandings of diverse family literacy practices. The paper advocated benefits for
educators in opening communication with families to build knowledge of home literacy
practices to strengthen the literacy programme that galvanises Children’s Agency.

Paper Four signalled importance for educators strengthening relationships as they share
power with parents and children. Continuing open conversations may contribute to
support of all children’s literacy learning. However, the paper undervalued the
complexity and challenge. Such pedagogies rest within wider reconceptualisation of
philosophical perspectives and curriculum approaches and critical sociocultural
competence (Moll & Arnot-Hopffer, 2005). In addition pedagogies need to be
productive and cognisant of wider agenda and purposes as well as accountability
pressures. Reconceptualising how educators report children’s literacy learning to
families can only happen within purposeful curriculum practices. This differs from
graded reports or identifying universal developmental outcomes or continuum points as
wider influences need recognition. Awareness of such pedagogies within whole picture
in the paper reflected Images of Children and Images of Learning dimensions,
Children’s Agency. Examples from Project C highlighted children’s participation in
portfolio documentation, organising and setting up a theatre then inviting their families
as audience, sharing their integrated unit learning through culminating experiences as a
movie or project documentation. Critical Dialogue seemed a minor explicit focus in
this paper, but the whole paper actually reflected the Living Curriculum dimension,
Critical Dialogue theme, concerning important pedagogies of communication and
relationship building between educators and families.
4.2.4.2  Paper Four
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
4.3 Papers in the Children’s Agency theme

4.3.1 Paper Five – Literacy Learning Through Play

4.3.1.1 Preface

Authorship: Beecher, B.


Context: This book chapter is individually authored for a national literacy educators publishing organisation.

Target audience: Association members include students, educators, college and university educators and researchers.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This paper forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: Paper Five, based on secondary and primary research, overviews some changing formative and contemporary perspectives explaining how children learn through play or playful experiences. It investigates qualities of play that promote children’s complex active learning and build on children’s strengths, interests, and cultural capital including technologies and popular culture. Issues, potentials and contradictions concerning learning through play, as seen by interviewed families and educators, centred on the integration of play, work and learning beyond simplistic behavioural understandings of learning and work/play dichotomies. Crowded curriculum and assessment pressures promoted by teacher accountability discourses influenced how educators thought, felt and acted concerning learning through play/playful experiences.
Documentation from local families and educators illustrates literacy enriched play as current local practice. Illustrative evidence includes children’s constructions, drawings, writings and others. Analysed observations of dramatic play contexts shows children’s interests integrated into the curriculum and how educators reported participating in play/ playful experiences. Finally possibilities for understanding literacy learning through play connect back to the qualities of play.

**Significance:** Paper Five, reporting on aspects of *Project C*, importantly signalled the beginning of play and literacy learning connections in Australian early childhood settings and elementary schools. The paper foregrounded the importance of **Children’s Agency** in the portfolio. It made visible through photographs and samples children learning literacy through play/playful ways, as reported by many families and some educators in *Projects A* and *B*. Since researchers and educators generally explain play activity in various ways, the paper advocated educators thinking beyond play stereotypes and draws attention to changing theories. Within the **Children’s Agency** theme, I advanced *Images of Children* as robust learners and *Images of Learning* as complex challenging activity evident in the illustrative samples. In addition some aspects of play demanded considered responses towards issues in the **Living Curriculum** dimension, promoting the **Critical Dialogue** theme.

This paper examined some crucial relationships between learning, learning through play and learning literacy for the target audiences. It is still especially important for elementary school educators to strengthen their understandings of powerful learning through play beyond commonly held stereotypes. For example, I questioned the seeming paradox between play, work and learning, especially the simple dichotomy of play or work. This considered *Who initiates?* and *Who directs or negotiate play or playful experiences within multiple possibilities?* Furthermore I analysed how children may perceive themselves as autonomous learners and problem solvers shifting to become deep learners as noted in a forthcoming NSW initiative (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum
Directorate, 2003). Children as self-regulating learners, engage in their persistent search of ‘truths’. I critiqued the ‘Pollyanna’ notion of all play is ‘good’, since in some instances of unfair relationships and power play, play harms children’s learning, for example, children in the block corners tell the newcomer, ‘You can’t play here, you’re a girl’. However such play happens and demands educators’ critique issues with children concerning relationships, gender stereotypes and work towards fair opportunities for everyone. Such interactions emphasise the potential role for Critical Dialogue theme through Living Curriculum dimension.

The paper addressed early childhood educators through emphasising that children can and do learn literacy through play and playful ways rather than only stereotypical adult initiated and directed practices. These are usually based on various theories of learning and literacy as outlined in Paper Three. Since some early childhood educators were beginning to include literacy in the program, often their practices, as identified in Project A, reflected narrow understandings of literacy, influenced by behavioural perspectives about learning and ‘push down’ school curriculum.

Paper Five drew attention to the Children’s Agency theme. It represented contemporary understandings of learning that acknowledge learners actively construct understandings and attitudes through purposeful and self-managing interactions. Literacy play strongly reflected such Images of Children and Images of Learning, where children make and communicate meanings through playful literacy actions. Educators in Project C reported considerable integration of literacy within dramatic play contexts, a neglected area identified in Project A. For example, children played in the Olympic Games ticket office or read to their dolls, participating in playful experiences which they found purposeful. They reconstructed ‘Pokémon’ card game rules, designed signs for own skateboard ramp, designed a football poster and others. The paper foregrounded children’s persistent participation in literacy learning, which is expanded in Papers Six, Seven and Eight. Papers Ten, Eleven and Twelve report on multiliteracies and dramatic play aspects within projectwork.
4.3.1.2 Paper Five
Since their play reflects their social and cultural worlds, children may cause harm in their play as they reflect the meanings gained from each other, family and community — involving such ideas as gender, sexuality, love, hate, power, violence, friends, inclusion and exclusion (MacNaughton, 1995, 1999). The ways in which these ideas emerge may offer or deny individual children opportunities to participate and learn. For example, children in the block corner may tell the newcomer: “You can’t play here; you’re a girl”. If the rejection continues, the girl is denied opportunities to learn about spatial relations and other mathematical ideas.

Social contexts become increasingly significant as children grow older and seek entry, approval and support from groups to which they seek to belong (Hughes, 1999). In the process, friends become more influential than family members. Since older children think in more methodical, organised and analytical ways, their play reflects a realistic and rule-bound focus. By increasing their competencies, they contribute to an enhanced self-concept; they like to show that they can do things well, and they typically aspire to be industrious. Consequently, play for older children becomes less focused on symbolic play (as in dramatic play) and shifts into games with rules, including performance play. Collecting things — such as tiny teddies, Barbies or War Hammer figurines — for sorting, classifying and narrating becomes serious play, enabling children to feel competent. Rules increase in consequence, whether through rituals for doing things (“First we have to do this, then we have to do that”) or through playing games with rules, including sporting games. Children desire to learn the rules of these games from others, in order to participate in these social contexts.

**Family and community understandings**

Since children learn about play in ways that reflect their family and community contexts, educators should be wary of general interpretations about children’s play that derive from classic play theories. Families and individuals have their own understandings and values that impact on children’s play. For instance, parents who value tidy homes and clean clothes may prefer ‘clean’ play over ‘messy’ play; parents who enjoy singing, music and drama are likely to influence the play of their children accordingly.
Children’s play in Australia occurs in diverse social and cultural contexts. Although there is little play research across Australian children’s socio-cultural backgrounds, international studies indicate families of different backgrounds value play differently. Families may significantly influence children’s play, for example, by showing support for, or disapproval of, symbolic play (Fleer, 1999; Cannella, 1997). Cannella urges investigation into play around multiple realities in order that one ‘reality’ is not privileged over others. Not all children know Thomas the Tank Engine, or collect Star Wars figurines. This awareness is especially relevant for educators working with diverse groups.

While the play of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children is alike in many respects, Johns (1999) identifies some variations for Aboriginal children: adults and older children encourage risk-taking; play is viewed as a staying-alive experience; humour is used at the expense of adults; ‘play-fighting’ occurs; and older children and adults share responsibility for younger children.

**Play and learning**

This section explores the qualities of play, then considers the ways in which play provides a means of learning.

**Qualities of play**

There are many attempts to define play; however, current Western understandings regard play as an attitude, a way of approaching situations. Play is sometimes identified by dispositions as described by Pellegrini (1991) and Saracho (1991) after Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg’s (1983) classification.

1. **Play is voluntary.** Children choose play for their personal reasons — for example, interest, interaction, expertise and so on. Children do not play to satisfy any basic needs. They do not need social support from others. They take advantage of play opportunities wherever they are: in the pram, at the meal table, on the street, in front of the television, at a group event. When they play with something of interest to themselves, children are deeply engaged — and this is a crucial condition of learning (Cambourne, 1988).

2. **Play is episodic.** Play flows as players follow their emerging goals. The focus is on spontaneous processes and sequences, rather than products or goals set by others. There may be no product after the play, or there may be several. For example, children experiment with the textures and sensory appeals of paint-mixing, pattern-making and letter-writing before painting over everything.

3. **Play is influenced by children.** The meanings they hold — that is, the experiences, understandings and values they have gained from their families and communities — constitute and direct the play. For instance, a straw may become a fishing rod, a gun, a magic wand, or a sword, since children direct the play in the way they want.

4. **Play is symbolic.** It occurs ‘as if’ the activity is real. Children step into roles and contexts, follow scripts and accept ‘rules’ as they draw on their real-life experiences. For example, children dial up auntie on the wooden block phone, then follow the script for opening, chatting, listening, explaining, nodding, commenting and closing the call.
4.3.2 Paper Six – Play and Literacy in School Settings

4.3.2.1 Preface

Authorship: Beecher, B.


Context: This book chapter is individually authored for a national literacy educators publishing organisation.

Target audience: Association members include elementary school educators, early childhood educators and students, college and university educators and researchers.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This chapter forms 9.1% of my portfolio work.

Summary: This Project C primary research paper draws on interviews and observations with families, children and educators associated with five elementary schools, where children, aged five to twelve years, attended Kindergarten to Year 6 classes. Educators, recommended by their managers, promoted literacy learning through play/playful experiences as social practice. They implemented play based approaches to curriculum in numerous ways.

The chapter examines home and community contexts where children learnt literacy through everyday life with significant family members, especially using technology and popular culture. Families explained how their children learnt at home and in the setting through rich purposeful and playful experiences. Educators reported that their curriculum
approaches validated children’s family life and sociocultural practices. Educators’ understanding of children’s family life, languages and cultures guided how they developed curriculum content and decided practice. They based practices on children’s interests and socially collaborative activity. They supported children to integrate literacy within activities, to find pleasure in their literacy learning, and to investigate personally meaningful matters through social collaboration. Educators identified issues arising from play enriched literacy practices, including professional development, programme and learning documentation, colleagues’ differing philosophies and practices, assessment, time and planning. Educators’ pedagogies reflected various ways of organising play – enriched experiences, balancing learning area demands with integrated units or sessions and different methods to manage time, groupings, space and resources. Suggestions for experiences and resources conclude the chapter, based on educators’ practice.

Significance: The paper importantly examined a neglected area in Australian literacy research, elementary children’s literacy learning through play and playful experiences. The local practice case study extended Project A and B findings that young children learn literacy through play in everyday life with popular culture and technology. Family and educator perspectives in Project C revealed congruence in understandings of Family Life and Dynamic Literacies, Family Practice theme and Images of Children and Images of Learning, Children’s Agency theme. Educators shaped practice from these understandings and they could readily articulate why they used playful literacy experiences in their classrooms. Most educators could explain how their philosophy and approaches to curriculum shaped their selected pedagogies. Some parents and some educators showed awareness of Critical Dialogue through Living Curriculum and some understood Critiquing with Heart and Head.

Paper Six foregrounded the outcomes of strong two way communication between families and educators. Families knew and supported how educators extended literacy learning at school. Educators knew Family Practices to resource the program. They promoted Children’s Agency through emphasising children’s capital/funds of knowledge. For example, an educator negotiated with families regarding authentic
Filipino resources for dramatic play and reflected strong understandings of multiliteracies. She found children comfortable and active with these resources, using their own languages, leading to children comparing Tagalog and SAE vocabulary and sentence structures. Culturally relevant resources promoted children’s purposeful playful learning where the educator assessed literacy learning involving vocabulary and structure.

In recognising how Family Practices and Children’s Agency provoked integrated literacy learning, educators expanded curriculum space for more children (Gutierrez, Larson, Enciso, & Ryan, 2007). In addition, to children’s cultural and linguistic capital, educators extended children’s interests provoking participation, especially of Aboriginal, boys and children with LDOTE and additional needs. Fun, pleasure, persistence and deep engagement featured in children’s learning according to families and educators indicating their robust Images of Children and Learning. These dimensions reflecting integrated curriculum follow.

Robust integrated curriculum including playful experiences promoting dimensions of significant learning (State of NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate, 2003). These included Intellectual Quality (IQ), Quality Teaching Environment (QTE) and Significance (S). Educators reported practices where children researched school issues and developed homework policies through examining problematic knowledge and establishing deep understandings (IQ). Children investigated their interests including fairies, Ned Kelly or television advertisements where they developed self-regulation and direction (QTE). They also researched Bendigo human occupation history, Paralympics and popular cultures such as Harry Potter. Children integrated knowledge and determined inclusivity and connectedness (S).
4.3.2.2 Paper Six
4.3.3 Paper Seven - Effective Learning Environments for Young Children Using Digital Resources

4.3.3.1 Preface

Authorship: Downes, T., Arthur, L & Beecher, B.

Publication: (2001) In Information Technology in Childhood Education Annual (pp. 139-153). Norfolk, VA. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Context: Toni Downes presented this paper at the National Educational Computing Conference, Georgia World Congress Centre, Atlanta, USA, June 26-28, 2000.

Target audience: International early childhood educators, researchers and policy makers with an interest in technology.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This paper forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: The paper reports on the development of a pedagogical framework for using digital resources in early childhood settings. It rationalizes the use of digital resources within early childhood programs since many children increasingly accessed the internet at home as part of family practices. Then it investigates pedagogies such as effective learning environments involving digital media and useful educator interactions that purposefully integrate digital resources in the curriculum.

These arguments lead educators to reconsider their rationale for action or inaction, especially concerning family practices, sociocultural explanations of learning and open-ended nature of well designed digital resources. The potential flexibility of digital resources within the learning environment rest on how educators believed children
learn and the types of pedagogies involving learning experiences that they deemed worthwhile. Finally the paper highlights the significant role of pedagogies for educator interactions that scaffolded children’s thinking and learning.

**Significance:** Paper Seven importantly reported aspects of *Project B* groundbreaking Australian research into digital resources for young children under eight in an international educators’ publication. The **Children’s Agency** and **Family Practices** themes dominated this paper as significant numbers of children already used the internet as part of *Family Life* and reflecting *Dynamic Literacies*. Digital resources featured in *Family Life* for half the Australian children under five years old in 1998 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Digital resources reflecting *Dynamic Literacies* supported **Children’s Agency** through their communication, interaction, discovery and problem solving. Here children’s resource use reflected broad and purposeful understandings of literacy and demonstrated strong *Images of Children* and *Learning*.

Through examining pedagogies involving the nature and use of digital resources that supported **Children’s Agency** theme, strong *Images of Children* and *Learning* emerged. Here children acted capably with digital resources just as they would have made sense of their world with other resources, for example, sand, paper, brushes. Complex *Images of Learning* surfaced from children’s active social use of open ended digital resources for their own reasons, for example, “kids want to find the European soccer results through sites on the Internet, and it’s a passionate interest”. Experiences involved fellow children and educators jointly negotiating and provoking children’s learning. The *Image of Learning* capitalised on children’s differing interests, participation and capabilities as they did different meaningful things with the multiple layers of meaning and complexity in digital resources. So this challenged assumptions of drill and skill activity and behavioural learning where children seemingly do the same thing at the same time and learn the same thing in response to educator directed experiences. Some minor focus on **Critical Dialogue** appeared through the *Living Curriculum* dimension, where digital resources supported children’s critical thinking and problem solving to investigate issues. However this was not extended in this paper.
Attention focused on children establishing understandings of significant ‘big ideas’ in early childhood curriculum, for example, questions, ideas and feelings associated with change, social and cultural systems, in contrast to learning facts and set bodies of knowledge. Within child directed experiences, digital resources offered children opportunities for investigating issues, to further develop understandings. Educators reported that digital resources could challenge children’s thinking, refine their research and extend their knowledge.

This primary research paper was essential to my research activity for its sole focus on pedagogies with digital resources and associated interactions as learning resources. At the time of Project B, the paper represented one of the first Australia research initiatives into digital resources for young children. It expanded the potential of Internet resources as effective learning resources at which time early childhood educators under-utilized (Downes, Arthur, & Beecher, 2001; Makin et al., 1999). This was despite many families using the internet. This digital literacy resource was yet another aspect of literacy as sociocultural practice that children learn at home and in the community, which many educators still overlook (Kennedy, Ridgeway, & Surman, 2006).

The paper is important to the portfolio because it persuaded audiences to question assumptions concerning resources and images of children and learning, consequently recognising Children’s Agency. Educators with strong Images of Children and Learning extended children’s learning by integrating resources within the curriculum and promoting interactions. Again the paper argued for educators to broaden understandings of literacy, and investigate Family Practices especially Internet usage. Where educators recognised these, they were well informed to extend children’s literacy learning. The article identified the importance of children actively understanding significant curriculum ideas, for example, change, culture and social systems in contrast to fixed and limited bodies of knowledge as well as learning in self-initiated, participatory, interactive and playful ways, beyond behavioural understandings of learning.
Effective Learning Environments for Young Children Using Digital Resources: An Australian Perspective

TONI DOWNES, LEONIE ARTHUR, AND BRONWYN BEECHER
School of Education and Early Childhood Studies
College of Arts, Education and Social Sciences
University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC NSW 1797
t.downes@uws.edu.au

The use of digital resources in early childhood settings in Australia is a recent phenomenon. In 1999 Education.Au, a company funded by the various educational authorities in Australia, commissioned a study of the educational use of the Internet with children eight years and under. Data were collected through a literature review and discussions or interviews with all stakeholders in early childhood education: children, families, early childhood educators, school system representatives, academics, researchers, policy makers and advisers. This paper reports on the major outcome of the commissioned study: a pedagogical framework for the use of digital resources in early childhood settings. The framework includes a rationale and a description of the key elements of effective practice: quality resources, effective learning environments and appropriate teacher interactions.

The use of computers within early childhood educational settings in Australia is a relatively new phenomenon and there is a widespread lack of access to and use of computers and the Internet for educational purposes. The main reasons for the lack of access and use are two-fold: first, educator and community attitudes and beliefs that computer use is neither important nor appropriate in early childhood curriculum; second, the lack of funds and
low priority in most Australian educational settings for children from birth to five years of age means that there are no computers in the setting. Even in settings that provide education for children from three to twelve years of age, the limited computer hardware available is usually directed towards older children. This phenomenon also applies to the recent provision of access to the Internet and its use in programs.

The controversy surrounding the appropriateness of computer use with young children has been ongoing for almost two decades. One of the key arguments has been that young children do not have the fine motor, cognitive, or language and literacy development, to successfully engage in computer experiences. Another is that computers are a symbolic media which do not enable children to manipulate concrete objects and are therefore not developmentally appropriate. Also many early childhood educators do not see how computers can be included in a curriculum focusing on play and creativity. A fourth view questions the appropriateness of the pedagogy of drill and practice software, and the reflection of stereotyping and violence in content. These combine to generate a strong resistance to the use of computers in most early childhood settings in Australia (Dockett, Perry, & Nanlohy, 1999).

The complexity of resource provision and regulatory frameworks for early childhood education for the under fives in Australia also contributes significantly to lack of access to and use of computers in early childhood settings. For example, the provision of educational services for three to five-year-olds varies across states and territories and often involves community (non-profit), private (for profit) and government organisations. Regulatory frameworks are complex, focusing on the safety and welfare of young children rather than programs and resources. Funding mechanisms vary but all create significant problems for early childhood budgets, particularly in settings with small numbers of children.

In contrast, the education of five to eight-year-olds is within the school sector and sector-wide initiatives have combined to generate some expectations and minimum resources for the early years of schooling. Often, however these are implicit rather than explicit, as most explicit strategies are still aimed at older children. For example, where the use of the Internet is included as a requirement in curriculum documents, the requirements generally begin with children aged eight years and older. The NSW Human Society and Its Environment K-6 syllabus, requires teachers of Stage 2 students (ages 8-9 years) to provide students with first-hand experiences of communication networks. Similarly, where a recent government initiative in NSW required school principals to assess their current resources against their student population and curriculum needs, rarely if ever were the chil-
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue  
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Effective Learning Environments for Young Children

... (text continues)

THE STUDY

In 1999 Education.Au, a company funded by the various educational authorities in Australia to develop online resources and services for the education sectors in Australia, commissioned a study of the educational use of the Internet with children eight years and under. The study involved research and consultation regarding the identification of the key elements of good practice of early childhood educators. Among other things, the study explored the use of the Internet with children under 8 years and the availability of good Internet resources for children under 8 years. Within the study, information and empirical data were collected through:

1. A literature search of Australian and international research, policy and professional literature on the educational use of the Internet with under...
eights. (In addition, telephone and e-mail contact was made with a number of key researchers both within Australia and internationally.)

2. A one-day workshop with invited system representatives and early childhood educators to explore theoretical, research, policy, and practical issues associated with young children’s use of the Internet.

3. Telephone discussions with selected early childhood educators to explore curriculum and pedagogical issues facing educators using the Internet with children under eight.

4. Two observation/discussion sessions with young children who regularly use computers/Internet at home and in educational settings to explore children’s own practices and views on appropriate, useful, and enjoyable Internet activities. The groups included three to five-year-olds from a day care centre and five to eight-year-old children from a school.

5. A focus group of parents whose young children regularly use computers and/or the Internet in their home or communities exploring children’s current uses and parental views on children’s use in home and educational settings.

6. Telephone and/or e-mail discussions with system consultants and educators working in the area of early childhood curriculum and the use of new technologies in each state in Australia. The discussions centred on system-level curriculum issues facing early childhood educators using online resources, curriculum plans for integrating online activities across the curriculum, and requirements for EdNA Online services.

7. A search of the EdNA site and the wider Internet, to identify and evaluate appropriate educational, recreational and popular culture sites relevant and appropriate for young children, in the age groups 0-5, and 5-8 years, to identify trends in the nature and provision of sites.

The one-day workshop, parent focus group, and the two discussion sessions with children were recorded on audiotape and transcribed for analysis. Notes were taken during the individual telephone discussions. The data were then examined to identify issues related to the study’s purpose.

**A FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

This article presents the framework developed in the study. It has three inter-related components: (a) a rationale for use, (b) a description of effective learning environments, and (c) a description of appropriate teacher interactions. These components drew heavily on current literature and the
views of those stakeholders within the study who are already using these resources for teaching and learning in early childhood settings. In general the views of the stakeholders were consistent with the literature.

A Rationale for Use

In western cultures, communication and information are increasingly embedded within digital technologies as well as in the traditional print-based technologies. Digital artefacts and tools abound within these cultures. In their home and community, many young children, as well as older children and adults are learning through manipulating digital tools as well as print-based tools. From early on they are interested in and making sense of images and symbols in digital and print media, as well as manipulating language and mathematical symbols in both media (Makin, Holland, Arthur, Beecher, Jones-Diaz, Hayden, & McNaught., 1999).

All young children need to develop the capacity to express themselves and make sense of their world with digital media, artefacts, and tools just as they do with traditional media (paper and sand), artefacts (paintings and constructions), and tools (brushes and spades). Digital resources offer children a range of ways to play, to interact with other children and adults, to explore and represent their environments and solve problems, to be creative and to represent their ideas with symbols, words, sounds, and images.

The renewed understandings of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) which takes a stronger Vygotskian perspective leads early childhood educators to plan experiences that challenge children within what Vygotsky refers to as “their zone of proximal development.” Vygotsky viewed learning as socially constructed, where children learn what is necessary to participate within their society and culture through interactions with cultural tools that are mediated by peers and adults. In the 21st century these cultural tools include digital as well as paper-based communication and information tools, artefacts, and media.

Experiences that challenge children to develop new concepts and processes, especially when scaffolded by an adult or peers, are highly appropriate for young children’s learning whether they be with manipulatives or symbolic media based on print or digital technologies. When the dominant computer software environment was drill and practice, as it often was in the 1980s, it was appropriate for early childhood educators to reject the computer-based environment as an appropriate resource for early childhood curriculum. Today, open-ended and digital resources that promote communication,
interaction, discovery, and problem solving abound. In the study such resources were categorised into four main types:

- *design and make resources*—where children can design, draw, paint, create, make, build, or construct artefacts such as patterns, pictures, scenes, written texts, galleries, cards, slide shows, and music;
- *work and play resources*—where children can play, explore, investigate, look things up, solve problems, and do puzzles and other activities;
- *communicate and share resources*—where children can talk, send messages, join in a group discussion, and display products of their work and play;
- *project resources*—where children work collaboratively on agreed tasks on- and off-line with children in other locations.

Clements (1999) in a review of 20 years of research concerning young children and digital technologies found that very young children have comfort and confidence in using such resources; they have little problem using keyboards and other devices and they can follow pictorial directions and use situational and visual cues to understand and think about their activity. These capabilities, along with those associated with using paper-based resources such as pens, crayons, paper and books, need to be developed through opportunities to play and learn with the tools and artefacts in a variety of situations.

**Effective Learning Environments**

Digital media have unique potential as flexible and relevant resources within early childhood learning environments. A number of issues connected with the development of high quality environments for the use of digital media in early childhood educational settings were raised by the informants in the study. These issues include:

- the pedagogical approaches needed to shape the use of digital resources;
- the learning goals and outcomes to be achieved;
- the embedding of digital resources within effective learning environments;
- digital media use as a social activity;
- using digital media in child-directed experiences;
Effective Learning Environments for Young Children

- using digital resources in ways that create open-ended learning experiences.

Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

**Pedagogical approaches to the use of digital resources.** Educators identified the central importance of continuity between philosophical and pedagogical approaches and digital resources in order to provide appropriate curriculum for young children. As one informant said: "good practice (with digital resources) comes out of a philosophical perspective of how kids work (learn)." These include the recognition that children mature at different ages; have different interests and different learning styles; and that there is a need to create a balance between familiar and new topics and processes for the child as well as a balance between novelty, predictability, and appropriate repetition. For this to occur, the design of the learning environment needs to be progressively layered so that an individual child or group of children can actively investigate further to satisfy their learning focus, strengths, interests and needs in appropriate and challenging ways. In designing learning environments, educators need to actively seek the integration of everyday manipulatives, print and digital resources.

**Learning goals shape the use of digital resources.** In the discussions educators expressed a belief that children's use of digital technology needs to relate to specific learning goals or to have a particular focus. Current curriculum directions for young children focus on processes such as critical thinking, problem solving and learning to learn. One educator who participated in the study expressed this in terms of it being crucial that children get past the novelty and develop understandings and competence with processes: "Beyond 'Isn't this exciting?' they are also understanding what they are doing."

Current approaches to early childhood curriculum emphasise significant ideas across rapidly changing details and contexts. Critical understanding of these "big ideas," which include change, cultural, and social systems, is more important than developing defined sets of knowledge. Digital resources primarily need to be used in the service of these broader curriculum processes and goals while at the same time meeting the needs and interests of the child. In many ways, this helps to shape the way digital resources are used, rather than what they are used for. As one educator said, using digital resources is: "about process and content... the interaction between the two is very important."
Embedding digital resources within learning environments. Educators participating in this study were unanimous in their emphasis that digital media need to be integrated into the curriculum to be most useful to children. They saw the effective integration of digital resources in the learning environment being reflected in their timely, flexible and varied use within the total learning environment. As dictated by the degrees of engagement shown by the children and the defined curriculum goals, digital resources needed to be judiciously moved around and integrated within the play areas/learning centres of the environment.

Examples of integration include the computer being part of the art area for a couple of weeks, offering tools for drawing and designing as well as providing access to art works related to families for the children to investigate. When moved to become part of dramatic play area, an appropriate Internet site or piece of software with factual information or exploratory environments in relation to skeletons and broken bones can support children’s role playing in the hospital context. This could lead to further investigation through access to various Internet sites, or paper-based texts of what makes healthy bones. When moved to become part of the science area the Internet could provide the communication channels and information for children to participate in a whale watch project, in collaboration with children from other settings.

In some settings the computer and its related resources cannot be easily relocated to the various areas. In these settings it may be possible to bring the “area” to the computer. Changing the displays and props with the changing use of the computer helps shape children’s perceptions. They do not see it as a “computer corner” but rather as part of the “writing area” or “art area.” In these ways digital resources are utilised to extend and elaborate on the program in an integrated way along side other learning experiences and resources. The use is not a focus in itself, and children are not “doing computers.” The educators who participated in this study agreed, saying, for example, “Access (to digital media) is supported by teachers, but it’s not to say go away and use it as an isolated activity...it’s not just isolated from other experiences...having the Internet activities related to the other activities is part of the matrix and that goes to all sides—purposefulness, related use and supported by parents and educators when needed.”

Research suggests that this approach of combining digital and traditional resources within a learning environment is a powerful framework for learning and development. Haugland (1992) found that child’s play and active learning using a wide variety of learning media, artefacts and tools, including digital ones, improves learning and development.
Using digital resources is a social activity. Educators saw that the computer provided a major focus for much child interaction and learning prompted by peers and educators. Sometimes the educator provided the modelling, scaffolding, and challenge for further learning, and sometimes it was peers. As one educator noted: "children learn from peers and siblings more than from anyone else. So that modelling, the exposure to anticipation, is, for instance, to draw a friend into what you are doing." The social interactions that children engage in scaffold and challenge each other's learnings in literacy. The use of digital media as part of a literacy program also results in the further positioning of literacy as social activity, because children within the room and across the city, country and world can collaborate and communicate with each other (El-Hindi, 1998).

Since young children talk so much about what they are doing, social activity and interaction are important aspects of the collaborative learning that young children engage in when using digital resources. The nature of children's social interactions is influenced by the characteristics of the digital resources they use for learning. Clements (1999) found that collaboration is encouraged through the use of resources that create open-ended experiences. A number of educators in this study particularly recognised the value of children having access to: "sites, which show how other children have solved problems...focus on what other children are doing." One educator commented: "When kids ask questions of other kids who created their own pages then they became the resources and a wealth of material is generated."

Using digital resources in child-directed experiences. Educators in this study indicated that digital resources need to support children's self-directed learning experiences where they need to be able to investigate their own interests. These educators believe "that our role is not to 'teach' children, but to be conduits for children, enabling them to explore issues, to further develop ideas."

When planning child-directed experiences with digital resources, the planning needs to start from careful observation of each child. The resources that young children use and explore need to be relevant to the child. As one educator expressed: "the child makes the decision where to go." When the digital environment incorporates concepts, processes, attitudes, and values that are relevant, known, and understandable to the child, they are likely to be very interested and intrinsically motivated to respond, listen, read, and investigate further. Relevance to, and appropriateness for, the child often reflect environments or elements within environments that are known to the child and relate to their experiences and interests as well as their family, languages, cultures, and lifestyles.
The power of children’s interest in the use of the Internet was readily recognised by the educators who participated in this study, for example, one educator commented that: “...kids want to find European soccer results through sites on the Internet, it’s a passionate interest.” As Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992, p.39) state, “considering children’s interests does not mean indulging children or abdicating responsibility,” it does mean harnessing the high levels of responsiveness and engagement shown by the child. Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1995) include this as one of the characteristics of engaged learners, namely children showing learning energises them. Importantly, one educator cautioned “That is not to say that a particular child (using the Internet) may say from time to time ‘Oh that’s boring’ compared to the faster pace of an electronic game that they’re used to playing, but reading a book or watching TV is different to playing a game and (the goal is) children who can move comfortably between those based on their own dispositions....”

**Digital resources provide open-ended learning experiences.** In this study, educators saw that it was important to provide open-ended learning experiences with digital resources. Children need depth in the resources; that is, many layers of meaning and complexity to explore rather than fixed or narrow resources.

Digital resources for child-directed experiences need to be open-ended, in order to cater for the multiple ways and directions in which young children learn. Young children can repeat and practice similar or same experiences many times as they develop greater understandings, and more refined development, from gross approximations towards more conventional ways of doing things. Young children need to be able to return to experiences again to focus on aspects of interest. The experiences need to be able to offer different responses to the child’s attempts, rather than the same as last time. For this reason, digital resources need to be sufficiently open-ended and challenging to encourage children to return time and time again. An educator reinforced the cyclic and dynamic nature of young children’s learning which is necessary to account for in digital resources: “They are picking up different things all the time, things can be developed in that way, then there’s this freshness but repetition and they’re learning new things all the time and relating the elements.”

The nature of the open-endedness of experiences created by digital resources is complex. The experience needs to respond to the individual child or small group of children utilising the experience. In this situation, individual children are likely to need different experiences, with various kinds and
Effective Learning Environments for Young Children

levels of response and further experiences, as well as being different on other occasions for repeated practice. This feature of appropriate experiences has been identified as “sorting the chaff from the wheat” in relation to particular digital resources (Dublin, Pressman, Barnett, & Woldman, 1994). The experiences need to be able to:

- encourage children to respond in “thoughtful ways,”
- offer responses to children’s answers,
- offer variations that are child-controlled, and
- cater for individual children’s abilities, cognitive development and computer skills as well as the child’s culture, language/s and experiences.

The challenge of providing appropriate digital resources reflecting the complexity of learning was clearly defined by the participants in the current study: “Kids work very well with the exploratory mode”; “Lots of interaction and lots of colour and feedback… should also not be anything too complex (or) you lose the children.”

Another important point arises from the research literature on the power of open-ended learning experiences. Well-designed, open-ended group projects result in better learning for children than when children explore in random ways (Lemerise, 1993). More recently Clements (1999) argued that when designing learning experiences using digital resources educators need to enable children to spend more time looking for ways to collaboratively solve problems whilst working on a specifically designed group project. Once the environment is effectively set up, the educator is then free to observe and to interact with children in appropriate ways as explored in the following section.

Appropriate Educator Interactions

The informants in this study identified a number of key elements of effective interactions between educators and young children. Of primary importance was the role of the educator in scaffolding children’s use of digital media, thereby encouraging risk taking and persistence, and asking questions that challenge children’s thinking.

The adult’s role in scaffolding children’s thinking and learning is complex and crucial. Since young children need different types of scaffolding at different times, the educator firstly needs to be a consistent and close observer of children’s actions and interactions (Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer, & Death, 1996). At times, observations may need to be prolonged
in order to see the learnings with digital resources (Cochran-Smith, Kahn, & Paris, 1988). In addition, the public nature of children’s interactions with screens and keyboards and their prolonged engagement with open-ended experiences enable educators to observe children’s diverse learning and thinking styles and social interactions (Emihovich & Miller, 1988; Wright, 1994).

Appropriate interactions may range from acknowledgment to co-construction to directive interactions with children as explored in the continuum of teaching strategies (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1992). The following aspects need to be considered:

**Warmly encourage both risk taking and persistence.** The emotional and social environment implemented by the educator will strongly impact on children’s responses to using digital resources. Children need to feel comfortable and that their efforts with digital resources, as with all experiences, are valued and accepted. They need to feel that it is acceptable to have a go, and to understand that mistakes are part of the learning process. This can be promoted as educators demonstrate, model, and co-construct risk taking with children using digital resources. As one educator explained: “When children see educators have a go, get it wrong and the sky doesn’t fall in, they believe it’s safe for them to take risks as well.” Indeed, educators and parents believed that “kids who have experiences on the Internet...are more confident and take a risk to get something out of it, they are pretty cluey at that age, it’s more than child development, the processes will be more aligned.”

Persistence is an attitude as well as a behaviour. This positive problem solving means attempts to achieve a goal are repeated. This begins with random attempts at the goal, but from evaluation of attempts, trial and error becomes more strategic in reaching the goal. Educators need to model this attitude and behaviour when solving problems using digital resources, as well as when using traditional resources. Representation and celebration of children’s risk taking behaviours and persistence in problem solving through further discussions, questions, photos, drawings, dictated sentences, children’s meetings (Watson, 1997) are important dimensions of the adult’s role in promoting these learnings. It is important that these representations and celebrations are extended to problem solving environments using digital resources as well as traditional resources.

**Ask questions that challenge children’s thinking.** Educators are able to ask a range of questions to promote children’s learning while using digital resources. Young children’s oral language learning and associated cognitive learning is usually reflected in the functions of language (Tough, 1981) that
Effective Learning Environments for Young Children

they utilise. Such functions include self-maintaining, directing, reporting, logical reasoning, predicting, anticipating, projecting, and imagining. Higher order functions such as reasoning, predicting, projecting, and imagining reflect higher order thinking.

The informants felt that using digital resources for challenging children’s thinking was achievable from as young as three years old: “Probably a lot of the older children (3-5 years old onwards) are starting to question a lot more. So with the programs that are on there, they are starting to ask why, what is happening, there is a lot more language associated and they’re interested in refining their research and gaining that extra knowledge.”

Indeed, there was a general recognition amongst educators and parents that, in the case of digital media, the children were the ones with the greater expertise, and their use of such media formed a challenge to adult’s thinking. As one educator suggested;

Student’s Internet projects are good for getting educators involved, activity can take off with kids, but teacher initiated. If kids are at an age to process the project they can take the teacher along with them, instead of the other way round.

Thus, in addition to encouraging and supporting children’s use of digital media, the need for educators to be confident modellers of appropriate use of digital media was also identified as an important component of effective educator interactions.

FINAL COMMENTS

Establishing a sound pedagogical framework for the use of digital resources within the early childhood sector in Australia is a necessary part in the overall process of ensuring the effective use of these resources with young children. The commissioned study took the process a step further by identifying the key elements of appropriate use of digital resources and arguing for the development of an appropriate online pathway into those resources. The recommended pathway addressed the issues of integrating curriculum and professional development resources and strategies for early childhood educators. To compliment these strategies any further national agenda must also address the regulatory frameworks and funding in the early childhood sector in Australia which combine to maintain the growing gap in provision of appropriate hardware and network access to this sector of
education in Australia. Only when these issues are addressed will the main barriers to access and effective use in early childhood education be removed.

References


Effective Learning Environments for Young Children


Acknowledgements

Education.Au, a company funded by the various educational authorities in Australia to develop online resources and services for the education sectors in Australia, commissioned a study of the educational use of the Internet with children eight years and under. A full report of the study has been published: *Online Appropriate EdNA services for children eight years and younger* (1999) and is available at www.edna.edu.au
4.3.4  Paper Eight - Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children

4.3.4.1  Preface


Publication: In Australian Journal of Early Childhood. 28 (2), June, (8 – 13).

Context: Published in a national early childhood journal.

Target audience: Early childhood educators, university educators and researchers and policy makers.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This article forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: Paper Eight acknowledges the complexities of children’s daily lives as valued opportunities for children, families and educators to connect, celebrate and learn. Shifting sociocultural, post modern and reconceptualising early childhood perspectives about children, families, communities and early childhood settings were expanding understandings of curriculum and innovative ways of documenting children’s learning. The paper seeks to broaden educator thinking and valuing of children, families, communities and themselves as thoughtful decision makers in complex worlds. Acknowledgement and celebration of diverse lived experiences for all participants resonates with the dynamic richness and complexity of everyday life.

Since the reconceptualising early childhood perspectives focuses on strengths and interests, these acknowledge children’s expertise. The paper argues for enhanced communication and collaboration as ways to develop authentic curriculum to extend children’s learning. The collaboration of children, families and educators across the documentation and decision-making contributes to effective learning communities.
Congruence needs to be established across perspectives, understandings of learning and pedagogies including the learning environment and documentation, if educators are to reconceptualise their images of children as sociocultural learners.

**Significance:** Paper Eight painted the broad picture of contemporary curriculum since it connected multiple broad perspectives about children, families and educators with reconceptualising curriculum and pedagogies. Although the focus is broader than literacy, the processes involved in curriculum development showed congruence with processes for establishing literacy curriculum in portfolio papers. The paper extended **Family Practices** and **Children’s Agency** themes with some focus on *Living Curriculum* dimension, **Critical Dialogue** theme. Similar to Papers One, Two, Three, Four, Six, Seven, this paper extended arguments for educators needing firm understandings of *Family Life*, **Family Practices** theme. The lived experiences of children and families featured as rich and complicated sources of curriculum and learning. The paper positioned all participants, children, families and educators as complex, diverse and capable beings, living in changing and intricate worlds. It urged educators to rethink images of children and families based on contemporary perspectives and informed understandings of multiple realities. Recognising family and community as significant sites for children’s self-regulating learning is a recurring portfolio theme, linking to **Children’s Agency** theme.

Respectful communications and relationships between families and educators are necessary to establish authentic curriculum which enable **Children’s Agency** through positive *Image of Children* and *Image of Learning* dimensions. Where educators reconceptualise children and families as strong capable actors, they draw attention to strengths and diversities, rather than regarding children and families as deficient, wanting or nonconforming to narrow educator expectations or assumptions. For example, families interact differently and seek various goals for themselves and their children.
Responsive relationships between children, families and educators can lead to genuine collaboration about significant meanings in daily life. This involves families and educators in open exchanges, friendly disagreements and continued conversation about emerging issues and concerns, signalling the *Living Curriculum* dimension, Critical Dialogue theme. The paper emphasised educators respectfully recognising and working with families who are different to themselves. Educators then build on this knowledge to construct authentic curriculum with children. Within the curriculum co-construction, educators offer children personally meaningful and engaging curriculum experiences including literacy, reflecting the *Living Curriculum* dimension.

The paper is important to the portfolio because it continued to extend educators’ understandings of relationships between perspectives, theory and practice and the consequences for children’s learning. The focus centred on local investigations and conversations to build relationships that support the exchange of information between families and educators essential when co-constructing the curriculum. Documentation of children’s learning whether in photos, constructions, play, drawings or writings as advocated in this paper constituted multiple representations of literacy as social practice or multiliteracies. These concrete examples offered important incentives for family and educator communication.
4.3.3 Paper Eight – Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children
4.4 Papers in the Critical Dialogue theme
4.4.1 Paper Nine – Children’s Worlds and Critical Literacy

4.4.1.1 Preface

Authorship: Jones Diaz, C., Beecher, B. & Arthur, L.


Context: This paper is published in an edited collection of works by Australian and New Zealand education researchers.

Target audience: Early childhood education students, educators, university educators and researchers and policy makers.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This chapter forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: The paper investigates how changing technologies and globalisation shape Australian children’s diverse literacy experiences. These involve popular digital culture in English and Languages Other Than English. New understandings of early literacies reflect underlying theory, including literacy as social practice, theory of practice, discourse and, cultural and social capital. The new multidimensional understandings of early multiliteracies emphasise visual literacy which is often embedded within the technologies and community texts that children access. Paper Nine examines popular culture practice for adults and children. Appraising popular culture issues including social practices of violence, consumerism and stereotypical representations of people, offers educators significant opportunities for educators and children to increase critical awareness of meanings in texts, perspectives and alternatives. Responding to societal issues reaffirms the complexity of life for everyone, children, families and educators.
Children engage with popular culture media texts through everyday life. The paper drew attention to the prevalence and importance of family media literacies and examined new pedagogies that build on children’s home and community literacy practices. It provokes educators to investigate digital popular culture texts and issues, and critically dialogue with colleagues, families and children in examining and reconstructing texts and considering alternatives.

**Significance:** Paper Nine is important to the portfolio because it sought to broaden educators’ understandings of underlying perspectives as well as diverse family sociocultural practices and understandings of literacy. The paper located Critical Literacy within the broader social and cultural perspectives, literacy as social practice, theory of practice, discourse and critical theory. Popular culture as previously identified in Projects A, B and C constitutes ubiquitous sociocultural practices for many families and children, reflecting *Family Life and Dynamic Literacies, Family Practices* theme. Children participate with popular culture texts for pleasure and power, and so educators have opportunities to complicate learning from these interests. Educators can use children’s cultural capital as resources to complicate their interests and promote literacy learning. However, as identified in *Project A*, many educators preferred particular kinds of cultural capital. For example, they valued middle class English book based literacy over others. They experienced difficulty in validating children’s diverse lives and literacies. Some educators appeared reluctant to validate popular culture practices as literacy resources. Some popular culture meanings may seem controversial, challenging some educators even though the meanings reflect life, with all its ambiguities, complexities, and contradictions.

Additionally, these educators may narrowly interpret *Images of Children* and *Images of Learning* dimensions, *Children’s Agency* theme, if they understand children as innocent and need to be protected (Woodrow, 1999). Where educators understand learning content as fixed, predictable and neutral (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007) they are likely to expect learning the content and process to be straightforward, unproblematic and non-
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

controversial. Furthermore they may interact with children and support their learning based on a transmission curriculum model (Lovat & Smith, 1998). The new pedagogies may seem difficult for educators confident with fixed bodies of knowledge as children’s curriculum and non-critical of their assumptions about home literacy practices, images of children and learning. Some educators may feel uncomfortable in recognising and working with children’s agency since it signals relationship and power shifts. Paper Nine provides educators with extended rationale for rethinking their images of children, literacy and learning so they may incorporate new pedagogies for including children’s family life and dynamic literacies in the programme.

The paper integrated three themes, Family Practices, Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue through investigating the role of popular digital culture that shape children’s sociocultural literacy practices. Many children readily participate in popular digital culture reflecting the dimensions of Family Life and Dynamic Literacies, Family Practices theme and the dimensions of Images of Children and Images of Learning, Children’s Agency theme. For example, many children engage with their household technologies to access popular digital culture through television, videos, and computer games. These practices provide for children’s pleasure and passions as they learn, reflecting the dimensions of Image of Children and Images of Learning, Children’s Agency. As well they extend the digital, visual and sound dimensions of literacy understandings illustrating the dimensions of Family Life and Diverse Literacies within Family Practices theme. Families use technologies in diverse ways and consume differing popular culture texts.

Critical Dialogue theme is extended where children and educators co-investigate why and how particular meanings are embedded in popular culture texts, rethink alternatives and address what is fair for all people, and work towards improvements. Pedagogies, for example, gathering information, investigating children’s experiences, integrating home practices into the curriculum, attempt to persuade educators of the benefits of Living Curriculum dimension. The following papers further examine these ideas with expanding the space for dialogue.
Chapter 17

Children’s worlds and critical literacy

- Criss Jones Diaz, Bronwyn Beecher and Leonie Arthur

Abstract

Within the last twenty years, the impact of new technologies and globalisation has meant that young children today are immersed in a variety of literacy experiences, including popular media and digital culture, in English and in languages other than English. In multicultural, fast capitalist societies such as Australia, these literacies have a powerful impact on children’s everyday experiences. It is essential that early childhood educators are aware of the significance of these literacies and plan to extend children’s home and community literacy experiences. In this chapter, we explore new approaches to early literacy education which maximise meaningful learning experiences for all children. We also examine ways in which critical literacy can offer opportunities for children and adults to critique contemporary texts, including popular culture, media and digital texts.
Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

**Literacy as social and cultural practice**

Within recent years, there have been significant reconceptualisations about what constitutes literacy. The works of Cook-Gumperz (1986), Lankshear and Lawler (1987), Gee (1990), Luke (1993) and Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997) have been influential in reframing our understandings of literacy. Current definitions of literacy as social and cultural practices situate literacy directly in our social worlds and encompass listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, visual and critical literacy. Many types of literacies are available to us, ranging from those of new technologies, including the Internet, email, and telecommunications, to everyday functional community literacies involving maps, timetables signs and forms. New applications of technologies appear almost every day, often bringing with them different social practices and social relations.

In technological societies, visual images are increasingly used as a means of communication. This is evident in children’s reading, viewing, drawing and writing, where visual elements created with pens or on the computer are essential tools in creating and interpreting meanings. With the visual culture of computers, televisions, videos, moving screen images, multimodal texts, billboards, signs and symbols, images play an important role as sources of entertainment, advertising and information in everyday life. As Callow (1999, p. 2) notes, ‘being literate in these contexts means being able to understand, enjoy and critique the kinds of messages that these images convey’.

Children’s experiences with these literacies situate them in a variety of social practices that are constantly shifting, depending on the social identities and power relations within which they operate. For example, young children’s emerging expertise with literacies of technology such as game- boys and computer games brings them into direct contact with narratives of popular culture which often present gendered and racialised identities. These narratives and literacies have a powerful impact on children’s material and social relations with peers, teachers and family members. Indeed, their consumption of popular culture, fuelled by television and video games, mediates their understandings about the world. Throughout childhood, ‘children are indeed immersed in the texts of popular culture, and their understanding of narrative, of good versus evil, of heroes and heroines, gender, race, and social power, is learned from those texts’ (Luke 1997, p. 29).

**Bourdieu’s theory of practice**

The interconnections between language and literacy as social meaning systems emphasise that literacy is never value free. Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of social practice highlights the significance of language in constructing power relations. Grenfell and James (1998, p. 73) suggest that, for Bourdieu, ‘words are never just words, language is never just a vehicle to express ideas’.

306
Bourdieu claims that we need to examine the use of language in view of the relationships from which it is generated, and within the power relations through which it operates (Grenfell & James 1998).

Bourdieu uses concepts such as field, capital and habitus to highlight how social practice becomes an exchange and conversion of social and economic power, depending on the validity and legitimacy of an individual's social and cultural power in any social context (see, for example, Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). This framework is useful for understanding how educational practices reproduce social and cultural power to privilege some groups and marginalise others.

Bourdieu's notion of linguistic/cultural capital refers to the resources used to communicate thoughts, feelings, knowledge and opinions. Educational settings tend to operate as if all children have equal access to these resources. As a result, settings 'reproduce arrangements ... favourable to some and unfavourable to other groups, by placing their assessments of success on children's possession of this cultural capital, although it is unequally available' (Corson 1998, p. 9). Literacy practices of early childhood settings most often represent those of dominant Anglo middle-class monolingual families, giving meaning and voice to their experiences and silencing other experiences. For example, a NSW study found that dominant English literacy practices promoting books were frequently privileged at the expense of other literacy practices such as those of popular culture, literacies other than English, everyday and technological literacies (Makin et al. 1999).

Social Capital is having access to social institutions, social relations and networks as a result of group membership. For example, the social and cultural capital generated through Pokémon can promote children's social networks as they engage in complex talk about different moves and characteristics applicable to the different types of Pokémon. Children don't necessarily need to possess cards to have this knowledge, as it is readily accessible through television and children's play.

The social practices which popular culture produces legitimise various kinds of social and cultural capital in particular social fields. Bourdieu uses the notion of social fields to illustrate how certain kinds of capital have relative exchange value. Young children move across a number of social fields, such as day care, playgroup, birthday parties and extended family, accumulating different types of capital. Yet it is the uptake that activates capital which Bourdieu refers to as habitus. Habitus is the set of values or dispositions gained from our cultural and social experiences that are constructed in moments of practice within particular social fields. It can be understood as a 'feel for the game' that is everyday life (Shirato & Yell 1996).

Different social fields authorise various kinds of capital which individuals take up as habitus. For example, an early childhood setting may not view children's knowledge of popular culture as significant in making friends or extending literacy learning. However, at a birthday party, there is much to be gained from the cultural and social power generated through sharing
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children's agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

knowledge if the birthday gift happens to be the latest toy, superhero or character. This knowledge is given legitimacy. Children moving between these two different social fields will use their habitus differently according to the particular social or cultural capital that has relative exchange value.

The social networks that children develop as a result of talking about, sharing and trading popular culture characters and narratives are significant. However, the cultural and social capital derived from children’s expertise in texts of popular culture hold little value in early childhood settings that ban children’s use of these texts. Consequently, children’s awareness of adults’ disapproval of popular culture can encourage a habitus of ‘black market play’ in which toys are hidden in pockets or lockers and trading cards are exchanged secretly. When this type of underground social practice occurs, certain kinds of cultural and social capital are generated in that particular social field.

**Discourse and critical literacy**

Poststructural frameworks, informed by Foucault’s work, articulate the relationships between language, social practices and social institutions. These frameworks emphasise that knowledge is socially constructed and power is constituted in discourse and subjectivity (see, for example, Foucault 1977). Discourses are socially constructed ideologies, values and belief systems. They are inherently ideological and individuals take up certain positions or locations in discourses that influence the way people think, act and speak.

Discourses emphasise social practices and processes that are historically and contextually constructed over time to provide a set of meanings about the world. Meaning systems, beliefs, statements, and ways of thinking which express social values are constructed in discourse. For example, dominant discourses of motherhood construct beliefs about women as nurturers and caregivers, and convey these beliefs as essential characteristics of femininity. Therefore, discourses produce social processes and meaning systems which are constituted in language. It is precisely the relationship between discourse and language that is of significance here.

Critical literacy involves ‘analysing relationships between language, social groups, social practices and power’ (Knobel & Healy 1998, p. 4) and challenging the power structures and social practices that privilege some groups over others. Adults working with children need to adopt a critical disposition that interrogates the social, cultural and power relations that structure the everyday social practices and identities in young children’s lives.

The focus of critical literacy is ‘identifying the power relationships that are embedded within literacy curricula, school systems and society, and then working to change those relationships’ (Crawford 1995, p. 83), so that marginalised groups have greater access to literacy. This means challenging existing hierarchical power relationships and including the literacy practices...
of diverse sociocultural communities in education and care settings, while at the same time ensuring all children have access to the language of power.

Texts position us as writers and readers (Knobel & Healy 1998; Green 2000) by presenting one version of reality and encouraging a single 'correct' reading (Gee 1990). A critical perspective involves examining how texts work and analysing the ways that authors and illustrators present particular worldviews in the decisions that they make about words and images. This means 'that the world of the text is seen as problematic; that the choices made by the author (such as who is included/excluded in the text) can be contested; and that the position from which the reader is being asked to see the text can be resisted' (Green 2000, p. 203).

Critical literacy encourages children to critique, deconstruct and reconstruct sanctioned popular texts (Muspratt, Luke & Freebody 1997). It promotes textual analysis, where 'commonsense' readings are interrogated and assumptions challenged. It means going beneath the surface of the text to critique ways in which dominant world views, discourses and ideologies are valued, and minority views suppressed.

Critical literacy involves deconstructing the ideological dimensions of texts to reveal whose interests are being served (Hall 1998). Readers can challenge the 'taken-for-granted' values, beliefs and assumptions about reality presented by a text (Knobel 1998), engage in resistant alternative readings (Green 2000), and explore multiple interpretations of the same text (Johnson 1999). Text reconstruction enables alternative realities through retelling, replaying, rewriting or redrawing texts from multiple perspectives.

The sample in Figure 17.1 illustrates Dominic's understanding of racism from a critical perspective, as evidenced in his 'speech' for the 'Multicultural Public Speaking Competition', which he presented at school.

The significance of popular culture

Popular culture relates to the social and cultural practices many people engage in and find personally meaningful and pleasurable. These everyday 'lived experiences' are outcomes of each individual's passions and tastes and include interests as diverse as cake decoration, football, classical music, fashion, horse racing and cars (Bennett, Emmison & Frow 1999). The choices that we make about social and cultural practices are related to clear but very complex patterns associated with each individual's social class, age, gender, education and ethnicity, and are also influenced by globalised economies, migration and social networks (ibid.).

Rapid advances in technology and communication mean high levels of access to available transmission of media and electronic culture for most families. Almost all (97 per cent) Australian children between five and fourteen years of age watch television and videos as leisure activities. At least half of these children watch television or videos for more than 20 hours
Figure 17.1: Dominic’s multicultural speech

Racism

Racism is a bad thing because.

1. The person who gets teased thinks his/her language and culture is bad.
2. She/he thinks his/her family and community speak a bad language.
3. The person doing the teasing gets more power and support which makes it worse.
4. Then people might lose their language and think bad about themselves.

when I was 6 years old I wrote a letter to [a politician].
This is what it said,
“Dear [Politician] you are racist. I hope you don’t get any more power.” I have been thinking about this for a very long time.
Children's worlds and critical literacy

within a two week period (ABS 2001a) as families hired over 152 million videos over the period 1999–2000 (ABS 2001b). Families have taken up computers and Internet connections at a fast pace. By May 2001, 60 per cent of households were predicted to have home computers, with 50 per cent of households likely to have Internet access (ABS 2001c). Currently, many children (69 per cent) play electronic or computer games, with more boys playing with these resources than girls (79 per cent as compared to 58 per cent, respectively) (ABS 2001a). Hence, watching television and videos, playing electronic and computer games and using the Internet are daily social, cultural and literacy practices for many Australians.

Popular culture is significant in shaping self-identity and life experiences (Bennett 1990). This is evident in the popularity of the Australian television program Sea Change. This program presents significant meanings and feelings to many, whether it is the setting of the coast (McGregor 1995), where most Australians dream about living, or the idea of escaping the urban rat race.

Images and texts of popular culture offer people a major source of cultural capital. This capital gives entry to social groups that value this type of knowledge. For example, Star Trek followers share a whole world of characters, plots, play and terms, of which outsiders are ignorant. People retell narratives and events or utilise characters and language of popular culture texts, and they use these funds of knowledge to give authority to their own voices. Many of us appropriate aspects of popular culture that represent our favoured attitudes and understandings about life and integrate these ideas and actions into our daily social practices. We innovate on the characters, narratives, language and values of popular culture as we construct our own popular cultural practices.

**Popular culture and young children**

Just as many adults engage with texts of media and digital popular cultures with a passion, so do children. The range of items linked to children's popular characters includes toys, DVDs, books and CD-ROMs, as well as logos and symbols on clothing, bags and food packaging, with many links between programs and products. Everyday texts such as catalogues and advertisements are also often linked to popular culture. Consequently, popular culture is part of everyday life and is cultural capital for many children growing up in Australia.

Many children are highly engaged in and knowledgeable about the characters, plots, texts and toys associated with popular culture, and often utilise and innovate on them in their play. Children draw on their cultural capital to share, discuss, challenge, reinterpret and construct their own meanings in relation to popular characters and plots as they construct their own popular culture practices. The sample in Figure 17.2 illustrates this, as Miguel draws his own video game. His illustration shows the fifth level of a game.
Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

Figure 17.2: Miguel’s drawing of the fifth level of his video game

which has many levels of difficulty. Here, Miguel draws on his knowledge of playing video games. As he draws, he recreates the levels, playing from the first level to the fifth.

Children often integrate aspects of literacy as they engage in play linked to popular culture. Research with three- and four-year-olds in England has demonstrated that literacy experiences connected to a popular children’s television program result in high levels of engagement with literacy and increased verbal language over a sustained period of time, as children made links to their home and community experiences (Marsh 2000). As Marsh (2000, p. 130) notes ‘popular culture can provide a means of locating new understandings within a familiar discourse’, as well as provide opportunities for children to share understandings and dialogues. Drawing on popular culture, as Dyson (1992, p. 459) argues, helps to ‘widen the boundaries of possible discourse’ and to validate the ‘diverse oral and written language genres, discourse traditions and interrelationships’ that children bring from home to the early childhood setting.

A number of researchers, including Dyson (1992; 1993), Bromley (1996) and Sefton-Green and Parker (2000), have documented ways that children draw on their knowledge of popular culture when creating their own narrative scripts and images. For instance, children make connections to television programs and videos in their writing, drawing, and creations of moving
images and dramatisations. Shared narratives of popular culture often provide an 'enabling frame for children's narrative composition' (Sefton-Green and Parker 2000, p. 43), where children are able to develop new plots within the basic narrative structure, elaborate on known stories, suggest innovations and even subvert conventions.

**Fears and misconceptions regarding popular culture**

Often parents and early childhood staff express concerns about the prevalence of popular culture in children’s lives. They strive to 'protect' children from its 'bad influence' by banning or limiting popular culture programs, toys and play. Issues of violence, consumerism and normalising constructions of gender, 'race', family and so on are often used as arguments against the use of popular culture.

While concerns that popular texts promote the use of violence are legitimate, violence is also inherent in many other texts such as traditional fairy tales and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island oral stories, as well as in many social and cultural practices. Texts of popular culture reflect current societal values and practices, so if there is a problem with violence on television it may be more useful to analyse what this tells us about society than to blame television for society's problems (Kavanagh 1997). Adults can assist children to critique the way that violence is normalised as a way of dealing with conflict, particularly for male characters, in many narratives of popular culture. Children can explore alternative problem solving strategies and alternative endings to narratives involving conflict.

Many adults also view the commercial nature of popular culture and the ways in which children are targeted as consumers of related merchandise as problematic. While children's toys, clothing and videos are heavily marketed and children often express the desire for these products, they are not necessarily victims of commercial manipulation by advertisers, toy manufacturers and media magnates. With adult scaffolding, they are able to critique the ways in which products are represented and how pictures, words and music are used to capture attention, appeal to children and influence them to buy a product (Brown 1997). The ways that texts are constructed for commercial and ideological purposes (Misson 1998) can be a focus of critical analysis with children in ways that extend on their pleasure in popular culture (Comber 1998; Kavanagh 1997; O'Brien 1998; Misson 1998) and that valorise their cultural capital (Comber 1998).

Normative discourses of femininity, masculinity and the nuclear family are regularly presented in popular television programs, digital texts and toys. People from diverse sociocultural groups are underrepresented and often constructed as 'social problems', giving privilege and voice to dominant cultural groups while silencing minority sociocultural identities. Many texts, including 'quality' children's books, construct particular normalising prac-
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

tices and worldviews which present opportunities for critical analysis, reflection and exploration (Kavanagh 1997). Critical literacy can encourage children to ‘question the limited identity formations presented’ in media and popular culture (Comber 1998, p. 14).

Everyday texts such as advertisements, catalogues and food packaging, as well as books and videos, can be critically examined and the ‘versions of reality portrayed’ in the images and text compared with the children’s own lives (Brown 1997, p. 2). At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that popular culture is actively appropriated by children as they manipulate playthings into what they want them to be. ‘Barbies become plastic in children’s hands. They turn Barbie into what they want her to be’ (Dubin 1999, p. 28).

Because much of children’s popular media and digital culture is viewed negatively, adults tend to disapprove of and discourage children spending time on pursuits such as watching television, using computers, playing video games and viewing videos. Parents who ‘allow’ the television, video or computer to be a substitute ‘babysitter’ are often perceived to be ‘bad parents’ (Makin et al. 1999). Kavanagh (1997, p. 12) suggests that ‘the negatives of television are also closely linked to assumptions about class’. Watching too much television, particularly too much ‘poor quality’ commercial television such as cartoons and soaps, is viewed by educators as more prevalent in families living in poverty (Kavanagh 1997) as well as in bilingual and working-class families (Makin et al. 1999). On the other hand, watching ‘quality children’s television’ such as Playschool and educational documentary programs is seen as ‘appropriate’ television viewing and as more likely to occur in educated middle-class families.

Educators’ fears of the perceived poor quality, commercialisation and violence in texts of popular culture mean that any dialogue or play based on popular culture is silenced in many early childhood settings. Educators do not generally know about or build on children’s interest in and expertise with popular culture, technology or everyday texts (such as toy catalogues), thus providing few opportunities for children to use their cultural, social and linguistic capital in these areas. While planning based on children’s interests is prevalent in early childhood settings, this generally does not extend to interests related to popular culture. However, it is precisely children’s ‘other’ interests that have so much impact and influence on their daily lived experiences, and that need to be acknowledged by early childhood staff and incorporated into programs.

While children’s texts of popular culture can be criticised for the discourses they construct as well as their commercial nature, they are ubiquitous and a very powerful part of children’s everyday lives. The use of popular texts helps to make links to children’s home and community experiences, provides opportunities to critique taken-for-granted assumptions and enables children to extend on the literacy understandings they have developed through interactions with these texts (Kavanagh 1997; O’Brien 1998).
Popular culture, digital and media texts are part of children's lived experiences and therefore have a place in early childhood programs.

**Implications for practice**

**Finding out about children's home and community experiences**

The early childhood setting is only one social field that children experience. Children also have funds of knowledge and cultural capital in other social fields, such as home, shopping centres and playgrounds. It is important for educators to regularly seek information from families about their child's home experiences with literacy that may include popular culture, media and digital texts. This information can be collected upon enrolment and updated regularly as illustrated in Figure 17.3. Knowing about children's popular culture interests translates as recognising and accepting children's worlds. Combining information gathered about home and community media and digital experiences with observations taken in the early childhood setting offers strong foundations for relevant planning which builds on children's strengths and interests. Figure 17.3 is an example of how educators can survey and document children's interest in media cultures.

Knowing about the popular, media and digital cultural interests of the families of the children in your setting, such as fishing, playing cards, watching television quiz shows and visiting football club websites, provides unique learning opportunities. When educators go beyond their personal preferences (and assumptions) to integrate aspects of the lived experiences of all

**Figure 17.3:** Short surveys enable educators to regularly update information about children's home and community literacy experiences and interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>My child's popular culture interests</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong> Nellie <strong>Date:</strong> 20/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child watch TV, videos, DVDs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are regular favourites?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are new favourites?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child enjoy CDs, radio or cassettes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which ones?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

315
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children's agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

children and families within the program, they create a meaningful curriculum. Information collected from families about their favourite media cultures, as in Figure 17.4, can provide a useful planning resource.

Seeking and responding to information from the home may require educators to sensitively discuss issues not usually discussed by families and educators, as the example from the communication book in Figure 17.5 illustrates.

As well as communicating with parents, educators can broaden their funds of knowledge by watching children's current television programs or DVDs themselves, trying out computer games or Internet sites, and going to children's movies, concerts or theme parks. Children can also act as important sources for educators. For example, O'Brien (1998) found that children shared their funds of knowledge about the characters, plots, behaviours and expectations for Smurf characters, especially female Smurfs. Children readily

Figure 17.4: Information about families' favourite media and digital cultures can be collated to promote integration of children's experiences and interests into the program

| Television programs, videos, DVDs, CDs and websites (November 2001) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hlen | Shaun | Martie | Than | Tam |
| 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' | Sports websites, especially about soccer and world news | Music websites and CDs, especially country music and nature documentaries | 'Toy Story 2' on DVD | 'Rex Hunt's Fishing Show' and 'Oz Lotto' |

Figure 17.5: This page from Birch's communication book illustrates an exchange between parents and educators where issues relating to popular culture and gendered social practices are explored and used as opportunities for planning related experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home: 13/7 (Bob—Birch's dad)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birch still likes Digimon and game-boys. He has been watching for the footy scores on TV and reading out winning teams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting: 20/7 Linh (Birch’s teacher)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football might be worth investigating further especially on team websites. Several boys and girls show interest and there has been discussion over why mainly men are on TV sports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
responded to her interest and questions since their cultural capital became authorised and they were the empowered experts. Her continued interactions assisted children to critically analyse the implications of the gendered discourses evident in the texts of Smurf narratives.

Integrating critical literacy into early childhood programs

Media culture interests offer many critical literacy learning opportunities for young children and adults. Investigating further information and critiquing the views presented is important. However, families may respond in a range of ways to the use of popular media cultures, so educators need to be sensitive and proactive in opening up investigation and continuing discussions.

Educators have a crucial role to play in scaffolding young children's critical literacy. Scaffolding may occur in play, or through interactions between children and resources or the educator. Sociodramatic play especially provides rich opportunities for children to represent and refine their ideas. Through this play, children become the characters as they utilise language, narratives, events and plots as well as to hypothesise their understandings of their world. The significance of the educator's role relates to promoting sociodramatic play as well as revisiting and reflecting with children on the critical literacy dimensions of the play. Table 17.1 provides examples of experiences, resources and strategies that can scaffold children's critical literacy. These experiences are relevant for children in birth to five years settings as well as the early years of school, and can be adapted accordingly.

Continuing conversations with families about children's critical literacy learning is important. Families know that their children critique ideas, perspectives and themes within their media interests, and they can inform staff about new learnings, as evident in comments made by family members about their children, below.

'Over the weekend, I noticed, that when I put the Wiggles CD on, Maya looked and looked at the television. She's used to watching Wiggles video and was most confused by the sound with no image.'

Buay commented after the TV news, 'Judges are pretty powerful people you know, they can make some people go to jail and they can give some people more money for their work'.

Zaklina read the ice-cream stick. She asked, 'Who said this ... What's fun? What's yummy?'

I told Rayden, 'You've had your half an hour of television'. He replied, 'No, I haven't. I've only had 23 minutes because of all those ads'.
### Table 17.1 Scaffolding children's critical literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Scaffolding critical literacy opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Centre: <em>Teletubbies</em></td>
<td>Video of <em>Teletubbies</em> &amp; video player, <em>Teletubbies</em> posters and magazines, cushions, textas, paper</td>
<td>Educator views video with small group of interested toddlers and preschoolers. Talk to children exploring meanings from video. Scribing of child's statements about the characters in relation to their free drawing or writing. Later—Initiate rereading and discussion of children's texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Play Centre: Toy Shop</td>
<td>Shelving, toy catalogues, posters advertising toys, range of toys, stickers, paper and textas, cash register</td>
<td>Set up toyshop with children. Discuss where to put things and why. At appropriate times, discuss—Which toys do you enjoy most? Why? Why are some pages in the toy catalogue pink? Why are there pictures of girls with dolls and boys with action toys? What might be the best toys for Kim and Cassie? Why? Photograph children with their favourite toys—Write children's exact language about the photo. Make into a poster or book of 'Our favourite toys' for the toy shop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project: Star Wars Spaceship</td>
<td>Downloaded NASA website, Star Wars video, books, posters and action figures, cardboard boxes, aluminium paper and tape for construction, posters made by children and diagrams of spaceships, photocopied star maps, space helmets, made by children, gumboots, tracksuits, notepads and textas, Factual books about space</td>
<td>Explore the photos, website and diagrams with children. Jointly decide how to plan and start spaceship construction. Ask about the need for signs so the project won't get packed away. Ask about problems encountered in space exploration. Later—Initiate critical discussions of images in videos, books and posters. Are there many women astronauts? Why? Are astronauts from diverse backgrounds? Why? How could we redraw this poster/illustration/image?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Children’s worlds and critical literacy

Table 17.1 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Scaffolding critical literacy opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewing/Reading Centre: Peter and the wolf</td>
<td>Range of different versions of the story—golden book, collection of traditional folk tales, CD-ROM storyteller and orchestra, DVD—cartoon, video—local dance, cushions, mat, finger and hand puppets, paper and textas</td>
<td>Read first text and promote children’s retellings through dramatisation and puppets. Later—Read, show and discuss other texts one at a time. Promote investigation into events and language in different versions e.g. duck flies away or gets eaten, story starts with One day . . . or Once upon a time . . . How are these versions different? Why are they different? Who writes them? Who were they written for? Investigate versions in a range of languages. Compare events and language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical literacy school performance focus: Exploring different versions of same narrative—different forms written for different audiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Centre: Pökémon Centre critical literacy focus: Human Society unit: How and why do we play? Fair play, consumerism, empathy, fairness, social justice and problem solving</td>
<td>Cushions, albums, sticker books, cards, posters, video/DVD player, paper, scissors, tape and textas</td>
<td>Promote discussions so children reflect on experiences: What is fair play when you don’t know the rules? What happens when you give away a valuable card? What might be some better ways to do the card trading? Later—Who makes the cards in shops? Why do they do it? Do we really need to buy cards? How could we create new games that all children enjoy? How can we make our own cards? What new rules could we work out?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

It is essential that early childhood educators develop insights into the social constructedness of literacy, which situates children’s experiences of literacy far beyond traditional pedagogical frameworks. Children’s literacy practices do not occur in isolation, but rather are inextricably bound to broader social practices and discourses, important to their families and communities.

Educators cannot ignore the influence of popular media and digital culture
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice

by taking the high moral ground and banning associated toys, videos and
computer games, or disregarding their knowledge. Children’s worlds and
social practices are interwoven with literacy learning through their inter-
actions with everyday texts, including texts of popular and digital culture.
These texts are sources of pleasure for children and also provide oppor-
tunities for children to engage in critical literacy. Young children can and do
appreciate multiple perspectives when utilising and critiquing texts. The
challenge for early childhood educators is to find ways of valuing the social
and cultural capital where children’s expertise with popular culture and tech-
nologies can contribute to their literacy learning.

Reflection and follow-up

1. In small groups, examine one of the following quotes. Brainstorm
arguments for and against each perspective presented. Discuss relevant
elements of media culture that may be used to support each
viewpoint.

'We never watch television or videos in the setting. It's just a great
waste of time for children. They can do that at home. Anyway they go
wild about that program. Families won’t be impressed, especially
when they pay money and expect their children to be learning.'

'We have become more aware of the potentials of popular media
cultures that we banned in the past. We see children's excitement,
energy and enthusiasm. And sometimes conflict, but we're improving
at guiding children's conflict resolution. I know so much about the
characters and the narratives. So we are learning from them!'

'Children might know much about the many characters and the
storylines in the shows they watch at home. But some children are
antisocial towards others, especially in the playground. Media
cultures will never become accepted as valid resources in early
childhood literacy.'

2. Share your group’s contribution with the whole class or with other
staff in your early childhood setting. Analyse the learning potentials
of using media and digital culture to promote critical literacy. Identify
implications for young children’s critical literacy learning and the role of the early childhood educator.

3. How influential are popular media and digital cultures in the lives of
young children that you know? Interview three children and their
families and analyse how their media and digital interests contribute
towards their literacy learning. Develop this analysis as well as ideas
from this chapter into a rationale for utilising texts of media and
digital culture as valid resources within your literacy and human
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children's agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Children's worlds and critical literacy

society program. Predict some possible counter arguments and think through some relevant responses.

4. Identify a digital media cultural text popular with children that you know. Make a diagram of the possibilities of this interest in a learning centre or project over a period of time. Identify specific learning opportunities to extend children's critiquing processes and explain how you could adapt these experiences for particular children. Develop a communication item for families about benefits of critical literacy learning opportunities offered by this learning centre project.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001c, Video Hire Industry, Australia, (Catalogue 8562.0), Commonwealth of Australia, Australia.
Comber, B. 1998, 'Coming, Ready or Not!': Challenging What Counts as Early Literacy, keynote address to the Seventh Australia and New Zealand Conference on the First Years of School, New Approaches to Old Puzzles—Reconceptualising the Early Years of School, the Australian National University, Canberra, 13–16 January.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children's agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

Literacies in early childhood: Changing views, challenging practice


McGregor, C. 1995, 'The beach, the coast, the signifier, the feral transcendence and pump at Byron Bay', in D. Heaton, J. Hooton and D. Horne (eds), *The Abundant Culture: Meaning and Significance in Everyday Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.


4.4.2 Paper Ten – Children’s worlds: Globalisation and Critical Literacy

4.4.2.1 Preface

**Authorship:** Jones Diaz, C., Beecher, B. & Arthur, L.


**Context:** This paper is published in the second edition of works from Australian and New Zealand educators by an international publisher.

**Target Audience:** Early childhood education students, educators, university educators and researchers and policy makers.

**Percentage of Portfolio work:** This paper forms 9.1% of my portfolio work.

**Summary:** Paper Ten re-examines new literacies in a globalised world. Children engage in diverse multiliteracy experiences everyday when they use popular culture media and digital culture in English and LOTE. Popular culture meanings and practices circulate globally through multiliteracies within communities in multilingual Australia. Children find these meanings meaningful and powerful. Critical engagement with texts offers educators ways of extending children’s multiliteracy practices. Critiquing offers opportunities to examine and rethink commonly accepted everyday practices, values and meanings as symbolised in popular texts. Educators can extend children’s home and community literacy practices through supporting children’s critiquing. This informed pedagogy develops from strengthened educator family communications.
Significance: Paper Ten is significant to the portfolio because children’s preferences and practices with popular culture through multiliteracies even with old technologies, for example, television and DVDs, were under-recognised and not usually built on by educators in settings or researchers (Baxter, 2007; Donald, Spry, Götz, Hofmann, Dobler, Scherr, Bulla, & Schreiner, 2008; Moses, 2008). Given that technologies engage children for considerable periods of time this practice demanded attention. The paper expanded understandings of critical literacy within multiliteracies. It locates critical literacy within wider notions including globalisation, power and relationships within discourse, text authority and popular media cultural practices for adults and children. Furthermore it signals the complexities of meanings in popular media culture offering the grounds and imperative for children’s critiquing.

The paper increased the visibility of Living Curriculum, Critical Dialogue theme through the popular media culture in everyday life demanding strengthened critical literacy perspectives for everyone. With increasing globalisation movements influencing Australian communities, few families remain insulated from cultural meanings circulating through the new technologies. Many media meanings relate to values and images of people and their relationships with each other and their environments, significant content in any curriculum and important matters in everyone’s life. Meanings particularly cluster around consumerism, gender, sociocultural representations, and conflict resolution. Where educators appreciate the benefits of critiquing in mediating how popular culture media and digital texts impact on their own understandings, values and actions, they may recognise the imperative for supporting children to think critically with texts.

Evidence in the paper included some aspects of my work in Project C and Project D. This alerted educators to the many opportunities for promoting critiquing, including for example, a LOTE speaking child who viewed English language television news. He realised that people started a war close to his home, reflecting Family Practices. His family trusted him to view and make sense of the item, showing robust Images of Children and Learning dimensions, Children’s Agency theme. He worried for family
members near the war zone. Feelings and thinking whirled in his reactions. He started
drawing almost simultaneously to document his panic and distress (Unreported evidence
*Project C*). This focus on *Critiquing with Heart and Head, Critical Dialogue* is
extended in Paper Eleven.

The paper presented evidence from *Project D* where educators moved beyond their
initial judgements on children’s *Family Practices*, through deeming fairy tales as
unsuitable curriculum and avoiding any contentious issues arising. When educators
collaborated on this challenge, they included and extended on *Family Practices* in the
curriculum. They tentatively trusted *Children’s Agency* and finally communicated with
families who shared their own understandings and supported educators” stance in
promoting children’s critiquing. Papers Eleven and Twelve further report on the shared
space arising from *Critical Dialogue* in *Project D*.

The *Critical Dialogue* theme drew on the previously discussed themes as it dominated
the case of educators, children and families. It emerged from collaborative practices
where participants investigated relevant critiquing opportunities in known popular
culture media and digital texts. For example, conversations between some educators and
children alerted some children to issues of gender and consumerism in everyday
experiences, for example, “*Let's look at the toys (in the catalogue. Are the girls’ bikes
pink?*” Children responded with various viewpoints, including Jack who explained, “*Just
because you are a girl, you don’t have to have pink*”, while another boy listened closely
to the conversation. When educators integrated critiquing throughout the day, in relation
to children’s activities, this pedagogy expanded the space for *Critical Dialogue* and
signals children to embedded meanings in everyday texts.

Paper Ten further refined the *Critical Dialogue* theme. The fluid communications
between children and educators were established throughout the previous papers. The
paper drew attention to complexities and depth in collaborations involving families and
trusting children as robust beings to approach texts in a critical manner.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

4.4.2.2 Paper Ten
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue
SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS
4.4.2  Paper Eleven – “No, I’m Won’t Marry You!: Critiquing Gender in Fairytale Play

4.4.3.1  Preface

Authorship: Bronwyn Beecher

Publication: This article is submitted to an international journal for review.

Percentage of Portfolio work: This article forms 9.1 % of my portfolio work.

Summary: Paper Eleven reports on how a three month fairytale project enabled children to use their previously silenced home knowledge and questions, in other words, their cultural capital or funds of knowledge. Children and educators began investigating fairytales from family multiliteracies. Theoretical directions influencing the paper included gender, critiquing and gender in fairytales, opening up new spaces for examining gender meanings in multiliteracies and life. Children’s understandings of gender emerged from social contexts of their fairytale play as they constructed, contested and reconfigured their gender positionings according to the fairytale character or narrative at hand.

Recent curriculum developments challenge educators to seek family information for relevant experiences so children connect old learning to new learning and examine what they already know. Educators critically dialogued with each other and children, then finally with families to promote children’s critiquing of gender understandings. Fairytale play provided meaningful social contexts in which children identified, questioned and symbolised gender understandings. They constructed, reconstructed and transformed gender understandings within this space. Children, as agents, to different degrees, used their critical multiliteracies capabilities to extend their masculine and feminine positionings relevant to themselves and the differing social contexts of play.
Significance: This paper is important to the portfolio because it highlights curriculum where meanings important to children promotes their critiquing. Educators usually overlook gender, as in children’s worlds and multiliteracies, as significant curriculum content. Through discursive practice, gender understandings strongly influence children’s lives, learning and futures. This includes how children perceive themselves, who they may become, how they do gender and how they relate to others (Barrs, 2000; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). This paper provides some basic insights into the complex and dynamic nature of gender understandings for both social contexts and individual children. The paper firstly examines themes in gender understandings that emerge in the social contexts of children’s dramatic play, based on fairytales and life experiences. Secondly the paper analyses four children’s play for their shifting and lively gender understandings as they expand their positionings.

Paper Eleven extends the portfolio themes of Children’s Agency and Critical Dialogue, through interest-based curriculum extending Family Practice. This involved children’s expertise from television and DVD practices as Dynamic Literacies and playing characters and narratives as part of Family Life. Spaces for children to engage in Critical Dialogue arose as educators reconceptualised philosophies, approaches and pedagogies. Children, as experts, used their Children’s Agency to investigate familiar and new fairytales with varied gender meanings. Children reflected Images of Children as robust investigators who contested different gender understandings throughout their dramatic play and other experiences. Complex Images of Learning appeared as deep learning occurred in play. Children grappled with complex concepts about women’s work, women with power, tricky relationships and men as princes in a range of guises within dramatic play. Children used their agency to effectively use various resources within the social space to express traditional and contemporary gender meanings. These included physical, conceptual and emotional resources as found by Davies (2003). Mostly children used resources competently, but on one occasion a resource reflecting emphasised femininity overwhelmed nearly all children.
The theme, **Critical Dialogue** dominates this paper as the whole project reflects *Living Curriculum* as children investigated fairytales from their **Family Practices**. They regularly examined meanings including gender throughout the fairytale project, either with all children and the educators in classroom meetings, or most importantly with playmates in dramatic play and other experiences. They tested their notions of gender in dramatic play and in reflection with each other concerning the narratives under construction. Children persisted joyfully with their own notions, as well as shifting their understandings from time to time. They did not always see eye to eye and often challenged each other in light of their own understandings and current focus. This self-initiated dialogue involved *Critiquing with Hearts and Minds*. Their strong and passionate examination of gender meanings arose from their own instigation, they were not answering educators’ questions and they did not have to do any project experience. They constantly sought to reconcile diverse feelings and ideas about gender in experiences. They sought to keep the narrative going as well as negotiating to keep children with different ideas in the play. These changing tensions regularly engaged some players with increasing options in their understandings and interactions to include others, reflecting fairer and improved situations.

The four case studies illustrate children’s unique and contradictory subjectivities regarding gender understandings. Children’s play and experiences all reflect varying combinations of traditional and contemporary gender understandings with a broadening of positionings.
4.4.3.2 Paper Eleven

“No, I Won’t Marry You!” Critiquing Gender in Multiliteracies Fairytales Play

Abstract
This article reports on some aspects of a three month fairytale project extending children’s family multiliteracies. Children and educators examined fairytales from their family practices with multiliteracies; the educators later introduced diverse and feminist tales. Analysis of play found themes in children’s gender understandings which they constructed and critiqued in dramatic play and other experiences. Case studies of four children indicate twists and turns in their subjectivities as they expanded their gender positionings over the project.

Introduction

Family multiliteracies involve children in diverse literacy practices with monomedia and multimedia texts across media and technologies using Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and English. Since multiliteracies from the New Literacy Studies recognises diverse meaning making texts and practices in local and global environments, children’s viewing, listening, speaking, critiquing, drawing, playing, reading, writing and so on are valued (New London Group 2000; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2001). As families make meanings for functional, informational and recreational reasons, children learn various ways to analyse meanings, including popular culture. They question how texts work and how texts position people (Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007). Through these practices, children become aware of themselves, their changing concepts and identities, including gender, which contribute to their social present and future. This article reports on how educators, who understood multiliteracies as a broad concept, extended children’s learning about gender from family multiliteracies in the children’s centre.

Children’s play provides social contexts for constructing, critiquing and reshaping their own and others’ gender understandings. This establishes important knowledge for themselves and others (Davies 2003; Mac Naughton 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006), although many educators overlook the complex implications. Ignoring narrow gender understandings limits children’s learning and life choices.

Children construct their identities drawing on gender discourses from their family, friends and the media (Davies 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). This involves participation through “ideas, feelings, words, images, practices, actions and looks” (Mac Naughton 2003, p. 81).

Gender lives in social contexts and not individuals (Thorne 1993). So femininity and masculinity influences and emerges within discursive practice as children act intentionally with their habitus in social fields according to Bourdieu (McNay 2003). They perform gender in fluid contradictory ways as they position themselves through many ways to be a girl/woman or a boy/man (Butler 1990; Davies 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). Performativity refers to past dimensions of time according to Butler (McNay 2003) as
children establish themselves as masculine and feminine through repeated patterns as they try to get their gender “right”, especially with friends (Butler 1990) and within the current social order (Davies 2003). In contrast, McNay (2003) identifies how Bourdieu explains habitus and agency involving retention and protention of social practices. In these ways, children can be seen to retain gender understandings from outside cultural practices but also anticipate and transcend gender understandings in the present.

Resources, whether conceptual, physical or emotional, enable children to mark their bodies with feminine and masculine meanings, positioning themselves as male or female, and shape others’ responses and their relationships (Davies 2003). Children compose and contest ideas, actions and feelings about what a girl or boy is, or can do with physical resources, especially clothing, for “the look”, “the action” and “the feelings” influencing their activity, thought and desire. They cross dress to perform their desired actions (Davies 2003) and use emotions to position themselves, recognising their own attractiveness and this influences others (Davies 2003).

Ways of practising masculinities and femininities shift across time and culture as discourses expand and narrow reflecting sociocultural, economic and political shifts. This enables individuals to take positions or be positioned and vary their subjectivities in multiple ways. Their subjectivity tends to change, twist and turn, looking contradictory in different contexts. Subjectivity involves an individual’s concepts, feelings, actions and language concerning their self and their relationship to others and the world of discourses (Davies 2003; Mac Naughton 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). Following this, as children establish narrow or broad understandings of maleness or femaleness, they shape their sense of self/subjectivity and importantly their presents and futures.

Over the past three decades explanations of children’s gender understanding have shifted beyond biological and socialization theories (Mac Naughton 2000; Davies 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). More recent feminist poststructural theories examine discursive practices where children construct gender and influence the gender identities of others (Davies 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). While their biological sex is usually permanent as male or female, children change how they compose their gender as girl/woman or boy/man, according to their sociocultural context (Davies 2003; Blaise 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). While children actively construct gender in complex ways, gender inequities exist as narrow interpretations discriminate anyone differing from the hegemonic “tough boys” and “pretty girls” (Mac Naughton 2003; Blaise 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006).

Feminist movements during the 20th century emphasised improving gender equity. Kristeva’s concept identifies three shifts in women’s movements, from accessing the male symbolic order, valuing femininity while rejecting the male order, and then refusing to conceptually separate the masculine and the feminine (Kristeva 1981; Moi 1985). In Kristeva’s later view (1986), constructing a non-sexist society occurs when both women and men work in the third way where they identify their multiple positionings across masculinities and femininities (Davies 2003). Queer theory examines how heterosexuality constructs gender understandings (Connell 1987; Butler 1990). The heterosexual matrix, as defined by Butler (1990), may explain how a person becomes a gender in normative ways,
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

with a “grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires get naturalised” (p.208). “Hegemonic masculinity” as the dominant form of masculinity (Connell 1987), regulates and defines other forms of masculinity and femininity. “Emphasised femininity” exists in response to hegemonic masculinity. Although both act as authorities, they enable other types of masculinities and femininities to exist while never-the-less maintaining the social order of men’s dominance over women (Connell 1987). Despite the many ways of doing masculinities and femininities across contexts, some ways become dominant, desirable and authorised as “the ways” through discursive practice as previously discussed. When people consider particular ways as “right”, their interactions influence and regulate how children understand and construct their identity, positioning themselves and others as male or female. When children examine less traditional positions, others may border-work defending the dominant positions (Thorne 1993).

Using multiliteracies in play children construct gender understandings through the heterosexual matrix and heteronormative discourses when they wear particular clothing, play mothers/fathers or enact weddings (Blaise 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). Educators may ignore these understandings, assuming children are “just playing” (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). Often educators hold images of children as innocents needing protection from gender discourses or images of literacy as reading and writing (Blaise 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007). Furthermore they may resist gender as “out of school” knowledge in a similar manner to ignoring family multiliteracies, especially “trivial” popular culture (Gutierrez, Larson et al. 2007; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007). When educators overlook children’s understandings, they neglect children’s agency to examine powerful gendered influences in their presents and futures. Although complex and challenging, the act of critiquing is vital to improve gender equity (Mac Naughton 2000; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007).

Investigating children’s lived experiences, involving “out of school” family multiliteracies practices may usefully inform programs for gender equity (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007; Arthur, Beecher et al. 2008). Since many Australian four year olds spend twice as much time watching television as reading books, they access many gender understandings in popular culture media (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Educators should evaluate their curriculum for useful gender equity pedagogies (Mac Naughton 2000). These may include, investigating gendered power relations, extending children’s gender practices, appreciating children’s joys and rewards in traditional gender practices, rupturing gender borders and extending children’s narratives. Particularly worthwhile is challenging children’s border-work (Thorne 1993) where children in single gender groups advocate dominant gender practices maintaining distinctiveness between genders. However, where border-crossing occurs, children challenge narrow gendered practices and create broader practices. Where educators promote border-crossing, they may scaffold children to construct less polarized gender practices and so enhance gender equity.

Multimedia texts involve talk, sound, images, animation, products, drama and gesture to name a few modes of meaning-making (New London Group 2000). Intertextuality across texts (Fairclough 1992) identifies the possibilities for meanings that are constituted in
relationships between texts, text types, narratives or modes of meaning. In fairytales, for example, many cross references in DVDs are made by the movie-maker or children as text-viewers. These references represent culture, gender, relationships, and often singular world views promoting one reality over others (Knobel and Healy 1998). Critiquing gender meanings in known multiliteracies with children may prove more relevant than only examining educator-selected picture books.

Critiquing, a crucial dimension of multiliteracies, scaffolds children to analyse meanings representing social groups, practices and power and construct alternatives (New London Group 2000; Leu, Kinzer et al. 2004; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007). Critical literacy is complex, reflecting many traditions and pedagogies. These include challenging the accepted, investigating various perspectives, scrutinizing socio-political problems and acting for fairer practices and improved futures (Knobel and Healy 1998; New London Group 2000; Lewison, Flint et al. 2002; Comber 2003; Comber and Nixon 2005).

Space for children’s reflection on their own and others social practices is expanded by critiquing (Gutierrez, Larson et al. 2007). This interaction supports children’s awareness of multiple perspectives (Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007; Wells Rowe 2007). They can examine their lived and new gender experiences deepening their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti et al. 1992).

Critiquing Multiliteracy Fairytales

Gendered fairytale meanings, particularly within multiliteracies, cannot be viewed away from the discursive practices, people or corporations who construct them, or from their purposes. Fairytale authors may be anonymous or not, and in conjunction with moviemakers or web designers. They may intend enculturing, entertaining or persuading. For instance, many traditional texts reflect gender stereotypes (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003; Harwood 2009). In “Cinderella”, the powerful prince rescues beautiful Cinders from poverty and her step-mother. Some current editions promote the original gendered meanings and promote consumption, with no improved gender possibilities. For example, the “Cinderella” Disney page links to DVDs and to furnishings for making-over “princess rooms”. Even early feminist tales failed engaging children in critiquing meanings because they didn’t learn what their parents and educators told (Davies 2003). For example, Princess Elizabeth, “The Paper Bag Princess” (Munsch 1982), acted beyond the “feminine” stereotypes. Children rejected her, believing that she failed the gendered script for “the look” and “the action”, perhaps because they accessed discourses portraying such positionings as “incorrect” (Davies 2003).

Analysing how texts function and attempt influencing people strengthens children’s critiquing. Unless children learn to critique and reconstruct texts, configuring fairer possibilities for all characters, they may believe the disadvantaged representations of the character’s gender, „race”, class, culture or language. Despite evidence of children’s critiquing (Arthur 2005; Comber and Nixon 2005; Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007) critical literacy seems silenced in many early childhood settings (Kennedy, Ridgeway et al. 2006; Harwood 2009).
The Multiliteracies Fairytale Study

The small scale study examined these research questions: How do children learn multiliteracies at home, in the community and in the setting? How do fairytale stories in children’s play promote their understandings of people? How do families and educators support children’s multiliteracies learning? and How has curriculum change shaped educator and family interaction?

This paper investigates the research question: What does an analysis of children’s play indicate regarding their understandings of gender in multiliteracies fairytale stories and other experiences? Findings reveal that children constructed fluid and contradictory gender understandings within various social contexts, often reflecting the underlying heterosexual matrix. Themes in their understandings involved women’s work, women with power, tricky relationships and men as princes in various guises. Within these, children performed various gender positionings with joy, engagement and persistence as well as increasing critical awareness.

Methodology

The research design draws on the constructivist-interpretative paradigm. This enabled the educators and me as researcher to investigate children’s understandings through practitioner research. Four educators and I shared our thinking about children’s home multiliteracies, and educators negotiated experiences with children. Case studies made it possible to define the components in children’s understandings and connections within the data. Case studies describe and analyse how children constructed, critiqued and sometimes reconstructed gender meanings. Pseudonyms are used for confidentiality.

Twenty children participated in the program at Kyneton Kindergarten, a long day care centre in metropolitan New South Wales, Australia. The children’s families included sole-parent, two-parent and extended-generation households. Most families reflected United Kingdom (UK)-Australian ancestries, and some have Italian-Australian, Greek-Australian and Croatian-Australian heritages. New families included those with Korean and Indian ethnicity. Most families live and worked locally, earning low to middle incomes in various occupations.

In 2003, the educators began curriculum change, reconceptualising their philosophy, curriculum approaches and pedagogies. They moved beyond developmentally appropriate practice to include emergent curriculum and the project approach (Arthur, Beecher et al. 2008). Robust images of children and learning from Te Whariki (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996), the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini et al. 1998) and Curriculum Framework (New South Wales Department of Community Services 2002) shaped their curriculum.

The team represented various education levels, experience and UK-Australian and Croatian-Australian heritages. The managing educator, Jessica, highly qualified in early childhood education, promoted contemporary images of children, gender equity in curriculum and children’s literature. The supporting team Narelle and Josifa were college-qualified educators with wide experience. Their priorities slightly differed but both based
curriculum on children’s interests. Narelle encouraged children to think critically and Josifa supported children to voice their needs. In 2005 I was invited by Jessica to undertake research as a critical academic friend interested in multiliteracies and social justice.

Data collection involved observations, interviews and artifact collection over three months. Prior to this I paid two three-hour visits to the centre to establish rapport with children, families and educators. This enabled me to learn about the children, their friendships and play. Following this I collected data for three hours a week. I wrote observations of child and educator interactions during the morning program, interviewed children, educators and mothers, and gathered artifacts. I observed the morning snack, shared book experiences, class meetings, free play and lunchtime. My focus was interactions between educators and children, and the children’s self-directed experiences in the fairytale area.

Each week I observed the morning session, including the whole group book sharing and class meeting and then the ten children who regularly played with dress-up clothes, props and books in the fairytale area. Children had easy access to this large area where the educators regularly changed resources. At the project beginning, educators shared variations of tales known to the children from their home multiliteracies. Later, they introduced tales from diverse cultures as well as feminist tales. While educators raised gender issues in class meetings, children played diverse gender understandings with fused fairytale and superhero scripts in the fairytale area.

Each visit I interviewed some children and educators and at the end of project some educators and mothers. Every week, I briefly interviewed some children, especially Keira, Josh, Gina and Gilly, and the educators, Narelle and Josifa. These interactions enabled me to clarify the data collected. I less frequently interviewed Jessica and Melina, another educator. After twelve weeks, I conducted three semi structured collaborative interviews with two educators and three mothers.

**Validity and Reliability**

The diverse participants and methods of data collection and analysis enhanced the research reliability and validity. Over a prolonged period, the participants with differing perspectives informed the research. I used numerous methods to collect data, including observation, interviews and artifact gathering. Data robustness was established by four educators checking the written notes by email and phone.

Triangulation was achieved by analysing and reflecting on the multiple data sources gathered using different methods. Repeated reading of the data for codes, patterns and exceptions ensured strong coding and rich interpretations. In many cases, triangulation did not only confirm interpretations reached through analysing one data source, it also produced possibilities. For example, gender issues raised in the collaborative parent-educator interviews lead me to re-examine interpretations of children’s understandings. To illustrate, my observations indicated Keira appeared to understand women as nurturers or brides. However her mother and educators reported her rejecting marriage in play just as much, so extended my insights.
Data analysis
Educators checked the observation and interview notes. I reread and coded the notes, before triangulating across different sources to establish themes, exceptions and case-study children. Educators contributed to analysis by confirming data and sometimes extending interpretations. For example, Narelle confirmed observations, analysed learning and shared her future directions. In the vignette Wedding Fairytales?, children refused to marry so Narelle opened discussions on alternate endings, relationship consent and changes in everyday life and society.

During and after the project, triangulation, analysis and data coding established the themes, exceptions and case studies. I analysed data across the participant sources and multiple methods of observation, interviews, artifacts and literature. I reread, hand coded and analysed patterns and exceptions in notes and artifacts. Developing interpretations were shared with educators. The multiple sources, processes and collaborative analysis limited my bias on interpretations while increasing educator participation.

Findings
Children reflected fluid gender understandings as reported in research (Davies 2003; Mac Naughton 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006) within the space opened up by multiliteracies through dramatic play and critical dialogue. They constructed characters, dialogue and narratives drawing on images, words, ideas, looks, feelings and actions from family life and home and setting multiliteracies. They accepted different meanings of personal significance as they negotiated space for expressing differences. Children followed their desires for traditional and contemporary positionings as they were attracted to various resources for ideas, looks and action. Sometimes resources overwhelmed them, suggesting limited critiquing tools and educator scaffolding. Participating in narratives and using resources supported their investment in traditional and expanded positionings. Although the study involves children from a single site, conclusions cannot be generalised, but conclusions show equity possibilities in critiquing with children their multiliteracies interests and extending gender positionings.

Dramatic play reflected children’s mainly heterosexual/heteronormal understandings of gender in the social space (Thorne 1993). However, their subjectivities showed twists and turns as they investigated and widened various gender positionings with playmates. Four gender themes emerged: women’s work; women with agency, tricky relationships and men as princes in a range of guises. First I identify how these themes emerged within the social space, and then I use case studies illustrating how four children performed gender within these spaces.

a) Gender understanding themes

Purposefully selected examples show how the social space of play promotes children’s fluid and contradictory gender understandings. Here I describe, analyse and reflect on the themes.
Women’s work was contested by Keira and Gina early in the project. Although not involving fairytales, this kitchen play vignette reveals differing understandings.

### Eating Together Vignette

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>Today I took the pizza out. In the cupboard. He’s late OK? Very hot HHH. I put these here to cool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>I just pretend to be a baby. A boy baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>Hurry... there’s more cooked in the cupboard ... so it can dry ... cool down. It needs to be in the cupboard to cool down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>(Twisting controls on stove and speaking to Taylor) Baby- hot. Baby- hot. Do you want some eggs? I’ll put it up here so you don’t reach it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>(Keira gets pizza out of the cupboard). It needs to cool down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>(To Taylor) You are going to wake up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>(Keira reads the recipe cards, then speaks to Taylor and points to Molly) She’s your big sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Can I be the big sister?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>(enters the kitchen-play and addresses Keira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>You can’t be the mum cos you don’t have nail polish … and the bracelets. (pointing to her own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keira</td>
<td>(frowns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>I know. We can take turns to be the mum. This is a restaurant!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>I’m making spaghetti bolognaisan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>(serves out food on plates for Keira, Taylor, Molly and other children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>(To Keira) Your turn to be mum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keira often played a busy mother juggling multiple demands at home or work. In Eating Together, she cooked for three children, kept the baby safe, dealt with latecomers, reminded children of relationships and woke a sleeping child to eat. Gina entered the kitchen, confronting Keira that she had “the look” wrong. “You can’t be the mum cos you don’t have the nail polish … and the bracelets”. When Keira frowned, physically resisting, Gina negotiated, “I know, we’ll take turns to be the mum”. Then Gina declared the kitchen a restaurant and read the recipes. She made and served spaghetti bolognaisan and handed over to Keira, “Your turn to be mum”.

As both girls recognised each others’ understandings of women’s work, stemming from the different discourses they accessed (Davies 2003), they accepted multiple meanings crucial in early critiquing (Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007). Various resources signalled their masculine and feminine positionings (Davies 2003). Keira emphasised action, concept and emotion for nurturing children, managing time and maintaining safety. She prioritised relationships and care, although her mum worked outside the home and advocated girls’ options. In contrast, Gina’s actions, concepts and emotions reflected her mother’s work as a cafe owner/manager. She identified painted finger-nails and jewellery marking “the look” of a business woman. She focused on action, including reading recipes, cooking and serving food, while limiting emotional interactions. Gina’s family cared for her but she did not draw on this in the gendered moment.

Since they played different understandings of women, Gina forced Keira to take turns contesting their understandings. Their play produced different interactions, from an elaborate family script to that of a brief commercial transaction. Turntaking meant that they tested and recognised different concepts of women rather than a single meaning. This example may represent understandings of women reflecting stages of feminism (Kristeva 1981). Gina’s play reflected the
first stage, where masculine power dominates the public space. Keira’s play portrayed women’s nurturing, resembling the second stage. Their acceptance of both masculine and feminine positionings may indicate awareness of the third stage, integrating masculinity and femininity which draws on the most useful aspects within particular contexts. Strong beginnings of critiquing emerge as they accept different personal meanings, and negotiating space for expressing such views.

- **Women with agency** occurred in children’s play as they used magical wands or exciting swords to achieve their desires. Gilly and Keira played different understandings of women with agency. They drew on intertextuality from known texts but also anticipated new ways to do gender. They established power over others, each other and themselves through using wands or swords in the following vignettes. Their critical choices, actions and ways of being powerful (Blaise 2005) expanded their gender positionings.

**Women with Wands Vignette**

(Five children wearing capes including Gilly and Keira, delightedly waved their wands, changing each other)

Holly: I’m a fairy godmother and I’ll change you … you. (waves her wand)
   I’ll change you back. Pooo! Pooo! (waves her wand over children)

Keira: I’m Cinderella.

Holly: Yes.

Keira: I’m going to the ball.

Gilly: (as Cinderella to Taylor) I can turn you into a toad.

Taylor: (he sword-fights another child with his wand) I’m making you …

Josh: I’m the godmother.

Gilly: (to Keira) Cinderella, does she have a wand?

Gilly: (waves her wand around Taylor) Cinderella says …

Keira: Cinderella doesn’t have a wand. Cos she’s a princess.

Bronwyn: How do you know?

Keira: Cos I got a movie of it.

Gilly: (puts down the wand)

Keira: Do you want to be the Cinderella baby?

Gilly: No. I'm not playing anymore. I don’t feel good.

Children were keen to use magic for new possibilities. Josh signalled crossing gender as Godmother with a wand. Gilly enjoyed being powerful changing Taylor with a wand and desired being Cinderella. She questioned Keira for possibilities. Both girls accepted the authoritative DVD. This silenced Gilly’s play, without questioning the text or possibilities. Keira sought to include children reflecting a setting rule promoting fair practice. She tried sustaining Gilly’s play participation, offering a new character, Cinderella baby, unlikely to be on any DVD. Gilly refused, showing little analysis. Alternatively Gilly may have resisted giving up her desire, interpreting Cinderella baby as powerless with no wand.

**Woman with a sword vignette** occurred shortly after Gilly was silenced in the above vignette. Gilly investigated sword-fighting, watching the boys dressed in green and white capes sword-fighting in the open space and then clumsily tried.
She turned her face away and fought. She rested, then fought with Taylor, Josh, Kurt and Bradon explained how they sword-fought.

Gilly was the only girl I observed sword-fighting. She challenged the narrow gendered discourse of traditional tales, and taken up by most children in this project. Gilly expanded her ways of being a powerful woman through the seemingly tricky sword-fighting by establishing physical competence. She didn’t look as she awkwardly sword-fought compared to experienced sword-fighting princes. She encountered no border-work from boys. Indeed she was supported by boys, differing from some research where boys rejected girls attempting to join their play (Davies 2003). Gilly became competent and she engaged boys in the girls’ narratives.

Across these two vignettes, Gilly increased agency with critical capabilities to achieve her desire and expand her gender positioning, supported by the boys. She tried critiquing possibilities for Cinderella’s magic and learnt sword-fighting reflecting hegemonic masculinities. Unlike most girls and boys focusing on “the look”, in the later vignette Gilly sought an action resource for sword-fighting, not the capes worn by godmothers, princesses or princes. She challenged restrictive gendered activity by expanding her physical capability (Davies 2003). She may have desired the excitement of sword-play. Gilly, alternatively, could have been investigating or accepting the authority of contemporary texts. Perhaps she drew on understandings from “The Paper Bag Princess” where Princess Elizabeth needed physical expertise and courage, not clothing to achieve her desire. When the children discussed this book with Narelle, they regarded Elizabeth as “cool”, despite Josh’s conditional comment, “She’s brave … for a girl”. This differed from previous research (Davies 2003) perhaps because these children accessed wider discourse patterns and critiqued gender with family, friends and educators.

- **Tricky relationships** often developed as both boys and girls regularly played weddings reflecting romantic love and heterosexual discourse (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006), however, in varying ways. Children drew on real life experiences of family, friends and educators, including Narelle. They discussed Narelle’s forthcoming wedding, options of not getting married and being happy, girls choosing their partners and the importance of consensual relationships.

Wedding themed play produced diverse narratives as children chose or rejected partners, as in the following **Wedding Fairytales** and **Silenced Bride and No Groom** vignettes. Girls played brides, flower-girls, queen mothers or stylists and boys often sword-fought or joined wedding parties. Girls prepared wedding clothing and flowers, emphasising “the look”, supporting previous research (Blaise 2005) but sometimes overlooked the groom. Then sometimes they chose a groom, who sometimes agreed, and at other times, disagreed. Boys including Josh volunteered but if the girls rejected Josh, he would get upset and no wedding eventuated. At other times, the selected boy rejected marriage and went sword-fighting. Sometimes a wedding, often managed by queen mother Keira, eventuated with a princess and prince with much dancing and singing. Girls often selected
princes to marry; who were torn between wanting to join the wedding or the swordfight as in this next vignette.

**Wedding Fairytales Vignette**

Keira as Sleeping Beauty lies on a pillow. Two children play with Holly and Josh who wears a crown.

Keira: (to Josh) You need to wake me up ... and marry me.
Keira: (to Holly) You’re the fairy godmother.
Josh: (to Keira) I’m already picking you.
Gina: (holding the flowers and lying on a pillow) I’m going to be Sleeping Beauty.
Keira: (switching roles to a fairy, then Cinderella) I’m the fairy now. No I don’t want to be the fairy. I want to be Cinderella!
Josh and a friend read fairytale books. The boy tells Josh that he has to kiss Keira as Cinderella.

Josh: I’m not marrying her!
Keira: (switching roles) Well, I’m her mother and you’re the prince.
Josh: (takes off crown and moves away) I’m not pretending.
Keira: (to Josh who returned with an umbrella) I’m the queen. You can be kind to me.


Keira: (to Josh) You have to have the crown on.
Holly: I’m the fairy godmother. This crown’s too big for me.
Josh leaves. Another child wants to wear the crown. Gina lies still with the flowers and her purse. She keeps opening her eyes to check who is coming and going.

Keira: I’ll go and ask the prince to come. Prince, prince!
Harry, Josh and another boy sword-fight.
Harry: I came to get another pirate.
Josh, Harry and others sword-fight. They move away and keep fighting. Keira keeps fetching them back.

The children wove intertextual meanings from “Cinderella”, “Sleeping Beauty”, “The Paper Bag Princess” and pirates into their play, changing characters to reflect their interests or resources. While Keira shifted between being Sleeping Beauty, the fairy, Cinderella, or the queen, she organised a wedding, regardless of characters or tale, signalling hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities. She clarified the children’s characters, relationships and actions to this end, orchestrating rich intertextualities. She continually fetched Josh from sword-fighting for the wedding.

Gina paid attention to “the look”, the aesthetics and passivity of Sleeping Beauty, perhaps reflecting emphasised femininity. She waited to be kissed to life, dependent on the emerging narrative. This sharply contrasts with her role as manager in the Eating Together vignette. There she capably cooked and distributed food but also disrupted and directed several children’s play in line with her masculine positioning.

In the Wedding Fairytales vignette, the boys as princes chose the bride, reflecting hegemonic masculinities. When a boy explicitly drew on intertextuality by checking a book that Josh needed to kiss Cinderella, Josh refused to marry. According to educators he was not averse to kissing. Here he firmly resisted, rejecting the text authority and his friend’s expectations, despite actually “picking” Keira. Perhaps he drew on Prince Ronald from “The Paper Bag Princess”. Several times Josh shifted his positionings of ways to be a man, and demonstrated some resistance to expectations for hegemonic masculinities.
The next vignette, Silenced Brides and No Groom was provoked by an authentic wedding dress. Noticing the children’s wedding interest, Melina, an educator in another room, brought in her wedding dress for children to play with. All children silently watched a girl wear the dress with the hem bunched up. Because Gina was aware of this planning, she wore her flower-girl stockings and shoes to the centre. She watched the girl walking slowly. Gina told everyone about being a flower-girl, showed her white satin shoes and expressed her interest in dressing up next as she had “the look”.

Children examined “the look” while educators helped Gina into the dress. They commented that “the bride” had the dress on and “looked beautiful”. Gina was not so overawed by the dress as the previous girl, perhaps because she knew the dress was coming in, and wore her special shoes. Using her agency she directed the narrative, demanding that the children cover her as “Sleeping Beauty” from the evil witch. Another child became that witch, unable to “see” the covered up princess. Gina said that she would be dead until the prince came to kiss and wake her. One girl wanted to play the prince. Gina resisted cross-gender play, “No, the prince has to be Martin”, so the children searched unsuccessfully for him.

In the exciting wedding preparation, most children focused on “the look” of “the bride in the dress”. The feelings, aesthetics or “the look” of emphasised femininity appeared important to them. The missing bridegroom did not influence their play, although this may have reduced the ongoing narrative possibilities. They overlooked the missing groom and so the wedding as gendered heterosexual discourse did not seem a priority. Two children became “cats” following Gina, possibly reflecting small creatures in Disney weddings, but no-one interacted. Gina commented, “I’m pretty. These are my wedding stockings”, concentrating on “the look” but she still directed the narrative. Keira, who narrated many complex weddings and changing relationships, remained silent, possibly overwhelmed by excitement, “the look” of the dress and Gina’s performance.

When another girl demanded her turn to become Cinderella, Gina, showing her agency, became the expert “wedding dresser”, an authoritative source on emphasised femininity. Gina collected fabric flowers, shawls and curtain fabric and asked the girl, “I will dress you up, ok?” She placed the curtain over the girl’s face, stabilised it with a band and offered the flowers. The wedding dress resource seemed to paralyse most children’s collaborative narrative. They just watched these children correcting “the look”. Josh, a frequent fairytale player and analyst, critically concluded “That’s what brides wear”, articulating that “the look” matters in bridal practices. He closely watched the wedding play without participating.

On this occasion, the authentic resource, symbolising emphasised femininity powerfully suppressed spaces for most children’s agency, interaction, narrative construction and critiquing. Even though Melina said how she pragmatically cut off the sleeves because the weather was hot, all children, apart from Gina, seemed to find the dress overwhelming. Perhaps educators could revisit photos of this play and analyse with children, families and colleagues why play disappeared and why
most children were silenced. Perhaps regular use of this resource would provoke children’s play where they complicate the narrative beyond establishing “the look” of the characters. Furthermore educator awareness of the issues for themselves as well as for children becomes crucial if critiquing is to materialise. Educators appeared to value the children enjoying dressing up, “the look” and the excitement, overlooking the silencing of most children’s play. It may be difficult for educators to critique such discourses if this forms a cherished part of their own subjectivities, especially if they have limited access to professional learning.

- *Men as princes in a range of guises* occurred as many boys gravitated to fairytale area with the desire of being a prince, accessing resources especially swords and capes. They briefly participated in narratives directed by Keira, Gina and Gilly. Then they went sword-fighting away from the fairytale area. One boy, **Josh**, regularly joined the narratives in this area, expanded many different ways to be a man. As a sword-fighting prince, he ran with the boys. He carefully tucked the sword inside his cape, as it seemed special to him. This probably reflected “the look” of the prince and potentially signalled “the action”. But in this area he accessed resources, entered the narratives and expanded his gender positionings.

In the changing play his contradictory subjectivities shifted moment to moment. Josh vacillated between many prince possibilities - sword-fighting, marrying, not marrying, kissing or not kissing, caring for others and respecting the queen mother. Furthermore he showed interest in becoming a mermaid fan. Perhaps his varying performances reflect the different stances from traditional and contemporary tales. Josh showed agency by testing various masculine and feminine positionings. For example, in the *Magic Wands* vignette, he wanted to play the godmother, probably attracted by the magical wand, rather than conforming to gendered characters and getting his gender “correct” (Davies 2003; Robinson and Jones Diaz 2006). He took varying “prince” actions, sometimes marrying a princess, and sometimes avoiding marriage as in the *Wedding Fairytales* vignette where he resisted the stereotype and his friend’s advice. Interestingly he was highly sensitive when girls rejected his marriage offers. He often took up sword-fighting but sometimes he cared for the queen mother. He encouraged other children to do the same, performing as a dutiful child or extending his performances to include the “feminine” aspects of nurturing.

On several occasions, Josh discussed *The Little Mermaid*, nominating this as a favourite book. When a girl told him that mermaids couldn’t be boys as there were none in the Disney book, Josh did not respond. He seemed to quietly take a critical stance, resisting her assertion, but not examining illustrations of Little Mermaid’s father. This assertion of the mermaids’ gender involved some strong border-work (Thorne 1993; Davies 2003; Marsh 2003). Alternatively Josh could have been interested in the prince rather than the mermaid. However he maintained his agency and interest in broadening possibilities for performing masculinities and femininities in play. He showed curiosity beyond sword-fighting reflecting dominant masculinities and resisted the mermaid border-work.
b) Case studies of children

This section presents snapshot summaries of some gender understandings of four children. Keira, Gina, Gilly and Josh played and critiqued differently, showing rich and shifting subjectivities.

- **Keira**, an only child, spent most time with her two UK-Australian parents and her grandmother. At the centre she interacted strongly with educators and developed confidence with some girls and boys. She competently constructed characters, managed emerging narratives and guided children’s play while maintaining her interests. She liked playing the queen, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, a princess, a fairy godmother and a fairy.

Keira understood women as nurseries of babies, children and men, reflecting aspects of emphasised femininities. She largely constructed gender with resources signalling concepts and action. She prioritised relationships and caring with her extensive concepts and actions, but seemed ambivalent about marriage. As queen mother, she promoted marriages of princesses and princes. For example, she directed Gilly, “Darling, darling, darling, now your father wants you to marry”, despite having resisted marriage herself, “No, I won’t marry you!” She delighted in the aesthetics of clothing and flowers but paid only some attention to “the look” of women, drawing more frequently on narrative concepts and detailed actions.

Her critiquing increased through playing multiple interpretations of gender. Initially Keira accepted the single text authority for characters, for example, Cinderella didn’t have a wand. She finely discriminated character variations by adjusting her pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structures. Keira accepted multiple interpretations of being a woman, nurturer and business-woman. Although her positionings involved nurturing and inclusive relationships, she often promoted but also rejected marriage signalling her resistance and awareness of girls’ options. Her play showed fairness, as she comfortably negotiated to include children in play, mindful of their gender and character interests.

- **Gina** lived with her Italian-Australian mother and enjoyed a close relationship with her grandmother. At the centre she played confidently with her many friends, boys and girls, often directing their play. Her favourites included princesses, babies, queen mother, Little Red Riding Hood and Sleeping Beauty. Resources for herself and others were carefully selected. She even wore clothing from home to the centre, for example, wedding shoes.

Gina understood women as beautiful princesses or brides and capable but beautiful business-workers, reflecting largely emphasised femininities. She paid close attention to “the look”, the aesthetics and the action of gendered identities. She corrected “the look” of clothing and accessories, but she also performed the action in diverse ways, for example, getting married or running a restaurant. Selecting clothing resources seemed crucial to establish her characters, for example, she wore white shoes to the centre to play with Melina’s wedding dress. Gina loved “correct” resources and assisting children dress as characters, for example, brides.
She commented on the aesthetics or the emphasised feminised symbolism of “the look”, for example, “This is a pretty dress”.

Gina’s critiquing fluctuated between adhering to textual authority for gender understandings and accepting multiple interpretations. She valued “the look”, for instance, the painted finger-nails to mark a business-woman. This fine discrimination in using resources enabled her to correct “the look”. On the other hand she accepted multiple perspectives concerning the concept and the action to be a woman, including Keira’s nurturing as well as her own café manager role.

- **Gilly** lived with her two UK – Australian parents and her older sister. She played frequently with both girls and boys. She was impressed with “the look” of princesses, like many girls, and with “the magic” of wands, like many boys and girls. She frequently narrated the unfolding fairytales and often played Cinderella, princesses, Spidergirls, and little sisters.

Gilly’s understandings of women reached beyond emphasised femininities. She reflected comfort with extending feminine and masculine positionings. Although Gilly enjoyed traditional emphasised femininities as in princess and wedding play she used conceptual, action and emotional resources to expand her ways of being a woman. She wanted Cinderella to be magical with a wand but was silenced by Keira. She excluded herself without openly challenging the authority of the single text. But she then performed new positionings and competences with sword-fighting as she acted on the ideas, courage and learnt the action.

Throughout the project Gilly appeared to persistently critique and performs significantly expanded gender positioning as she was the only girl to engage in sword-fighting. She didn’t stop when blocked by Keira regarding the wand and she didn’t seek “the look” with a cape like the boys who sword-fought. Rather she sought the action. Awkwardly she began sword-fighting. Perhaps she was drawing on the textual authority of “The Paper Bag Princess” where physical resources such as clothing were unimportant but emotional and action resources such as courage and physical prowess were vital. She expanded her positioning with attention to the emotional, action and conceptual aspects of a woman. After developing physical competence, Gilly often sword-fought and ran around with some boys, engaging their participation in the unfolding narratives showing ease and confidence with new ways.

- **Josh**, an only child, spent much time with his UK- Australian parents and his grandfather. At the centre, he communicated competently with adults while he was learning to make friends with children of both genders, especially Harrison and Keira. He often underestimated his strength and physical power when playing superheroes and police officers, running around the centre. His many favourites included “The Little Mermaid”, “Mulan”, “Batman”, “Aladdin”, “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella”. Playing princes with differing interests dominated his play,
including sword-fighting, marrying, avoiding marriage, caring for Sleeping Beauty and helping the queen mother.

Josh expressed wide understandings of gender in his play of sword-fighting, marriages, mermaids and nurturing others. He seemed comfortable with diverse masculine and feminine gender positionings. He enjoyed hegemonic masculinities with sword-fighting and running with the boys, while he reflected feminine positionings through caring for others and negotiating with the queen mother. He engaged in the family and princess narratives that Keira guided as well as sword-fighting play with the boys.

Josh often critiqued concepts, feelings and action about gender, sometimes broadening his positionings. He reflected multiple prince interests, discriminating diverse positionings, rather than adopting dominant masculine sword-fighting. His comfort with wide positionings meant regular participation in girls’ narratives. He used feminine nurturing positions as he cared for babies, the queen mother and princesses. Although border-work challenged his mermaid interest Josh resisted.

Children’s Understandings of Gender
Findings indicate that the four children performed varied understandings of gender largely based on the heterosexual matrix through play and critiquing. Their play showed increasing awareness of multiple gender meanings from home and setting multiliteracies that were significant to themselves and others as they negotiated space for alternate views. Sometimes, they enjoyed their desires for traditional gender positionings and other times they followed their desires expanding gender positionings. At times they encountered some support or resistance. On one occasion, they were mostly silenced by a resource with traditional positioning. Over the project two children appeared comfortable with critiquing and different ways of doing femininities and masculinities.

Case study children drew on varying emotional, conceptual and action resources for extending their gender positionings as masculine and feminine subjects. They constructed, critiqued and expanded understandings through their subjectivities changing from moment to moment. Some encountered border-work in some instances but established competence in critiquing.
Significance and Implications for Practice
Few studies investigate classrooms extending family multiliteracies where young children actively construct and critique gender through dramatic play. This study extends on previous research (Jones Diaz, Beecher et al. 2007) by investigating children’s gender critiquing within prolonged projectwork. Furthermore the curriculum drew on diverse family multiliteracies involving DVDs, television programs, performances and books rather than only book-based experiences (Wells Rowe 2007). Therefore, this study importantly offers new insights into children’s self-initiated gender understandings and critiquing through dramatic play extending on family multiliteracy fairytales. It differs from some research (Davies 2003) because it examines children’s gender understandings in contexts where educators integrate family multiliteracies and gender in the curriculum. It provides evidence of children’s capacity, passion and agency for understanding and critiquing gender since it is embedded in almost all text.

Examining how children construct and critique gender play at home and in the centre informs educators about extending children’s gender understandings and critiquing. When they recognise and trust the many ways that children understand and play gender (Blaise 2005) this informs their pedagogies that locate gender in the curriculum. Play and critiquing enable educators to work with children’s interests in traditional and less traditional positionings. In this study fairytales provided the social space with many issues to critique, including gender, sexuality, power, class and „race“. Girls’ options, inclusion of everyone and being fair became the focus of this project, however many gender issues demand attention, to name a few, boys’ options, beauty and courage.

Implications for practice begin with educators working collaboratively to recognise gender in family multiliteracies and children’s subjectivities, and deepen children’s gender understandings. Since many challenges arise, collegial collaboration assists educators to examine with children their issues within the living curriculum. This supports educators to critique assumptions in their own and children’s lives.

Establishing a supportive environment for all children is crucial so they feel comfortable with their subjectivities, take risks, critique and extend gender positionings. Although workloads are high, exchanging information with families extends educator insights for family multiliteracies and living curriculum. Where educators integrate critiquing in the curriculum they expand possibilities for children’s learning through discursive practice. Reflecting with children on gender themes in play provides grounds for investigation and critiquing. This may extend children’s positionings that enhances their present and future as well as fairer practice for all children.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS

References


Early Multiliteracies: Working with family practices, children’s agency and critical dialogue

SECTION FOUR - PORTFOLIO PAPERS


4.5 Section conclusion

This *Section Four: Evidence of Scholarly Activity*, provided the evidence of scholarly activity for this portfolio across the three themes of **Family Practices**, **Children’s Agency** and **Critical Dialogue**. Each preface detailed the title, authorship, publication, target audience context, proportion of portfolio work and a summary of paper. Next, the significance of each paper towards the portfolio was identified. A copy of the paper followed which established the scope of the integrated themes of **Family Practices**, **Children’s Agency** and **Critical Dialogue** within the body of work.
SECTION FIVE: APPENDICES AND REFERENCES
5.1. APPENDICES

5.1.1 APPENDIX 1 - PROJECT A STAGE 1: Early Childhood Language and Literacy Scale
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 1</th>
<th>ECERS-R 2</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Furniture for routine care play and learning*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Insufficient basic furniture for routine care, play and learning (Ex. Not enough chairs for all children to use at the same time; very few open shelves for toys)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Furniture is generally in such poor repair that children could be injured (Ex. Splinters or exposed nails, wobbly legs on chairs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.6 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.7 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.8 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.9 Furniture is insufficiently sturdy and in good repair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes for clarification:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Basic furniture: tables and chairs used for meals/snacks and activities; mats or mats for rest or nap; cubbies or other storage for children's things; low open shelves for play/learning materials. To be given credit for low open shelves, they must be used for toys and materials that children can reach by themselves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there are no children with disabilities enrolled or if children with disabilities do not need adaptive furniture, mark NA for 3.3 and 5.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since children are different sizes at different ages, the intent here is that furniture should be the right size for children in care. Furniture that is smaller than adult-sized may be the right size for a 6- or 7-year-old, but not small enough for a 2- or 3-year-old. For chairs to be considered child-sized, the children's feet must rest on the floor when seated. Table height should allow children's knees to fit under the table and elbows to be above the table.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

#### SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM 2</th>
<th>ECERS-R 3</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>SAMPLE SCORING STRIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort.*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of literacy interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 No soft furnishing accessible to children (Ex. Upholstered furniture, cushions, bean bag chair, rugs).</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 No soft toys accessible to children (Ex. Stuffed animals, soft dolls).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Some materials present, but either not available on regular basis (closed cabinets) or not regularly used for language development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Some soft toys accessible to children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Cozy area + accessible to children for a substantial portion of the day**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2 Cozy area is not used for active physical play.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Most soft furnishings are clean and in good repair</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Soft furnishing in addition to cozy area accessible to children (Ex. Cushions in dramatic play areas, several rug areas or wall-to-wall carpeting).</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.2 Many clean soft toys accessible to children.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES for clarification:**

* Furnishings for relaxation and comfort means softness provided for children during learning and play activities. Routine care furnishings such as cots, blankets and pillows used for naps are not considered when scoring this item.

**A cozy area is clearly defined space with a substantial amount of softness where children may lounge, daydream, read or play quietly.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 3</th>
<th>ECERS-R 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Room arrangement for play</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 No interest centres* defined.</td>
<td>3.1 At least two interest areas defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Visual supervision of play areas is difficult.</td>
<td>3.2 Visual supervision of play areas is not difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 No library corner and/or writing centre.</td>
<td>3.3 Sufficient space for several activities to go on at once (Ex. floor space for blocks, table space for manipulatives, easel for art).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Most spaces for play are accessible for children with disabilities enrolled in the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Library corner with some books accessible to children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAMPLE SCORING STRIP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of literacy interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note for clarification:**

* An interest centre is an area where materials, organised by type, are stored so that they are accessible to children, and appropriately furnished play space is provided for children to participate in a particular type of play. Examples of interest centres are art activities, blocks, dramatic play, reading, nature/science and manipulative/fine motor.
### Item 4
**ECERS-R 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Child-related display</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. No materials displayed for children</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inadequate materials for predominant age group (Ex. materials in preschool classrooms designed for older school-aged children or adults; pictures showing violence).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Appropriate materials for predominant group (Ex. photos of children; nursery rhymes; beginning reading and math for older preschoolers and kindergarteners; seasonal displays).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Some children's work displayed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Much of the display relates closely to current activities and children in group (Ex. artwork or photos about recent activities).</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Most of the display is work done by the children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Three dimensional child-created work (Ex. play dough, clay, carpentry) displayed as well as flat work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note for clarification:**

* Appropriate means suitable for the developmental level of the age group and the individual abilities of the children. This concept is also referred to as developmentally appropriate and used in a number of items in this scale.

+ Recently completed artwork that does not relate to other things going on in the room does not account for this indicator.

# Individualised work means that each child has selected the subject and/or media and has carried out the work in his or her own creative way. Thus individualised products look quite different from each other. Projects where children follow a teacher's example and little creativity is allowed are not considered individualised work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Inadequate 1</th>
<th>Minimal 2</th>
<th>Good 3</th>
<th>Excellent 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECERS 9</td>
<td>5. Greeting/departing *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Greeting of children is often neglected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Departure not well organized.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Parents not allowed to bring children into the classroom.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Most children greeted warmly (Ex. staff seem pleased to see children, smile, use pleasant tone of voice).</td>
<td>3.4 Some literacy related events, with some interactions between staff and parents during these events (Ex. sign-on book, permission slips, surveys).</td>
<td>5.1 Each child is greeted individually (Ex. staff say &quot;hello&quot; and use child's name; use child's primary language spoken at home to say &quot;hello&quot;).</td>
<td>7.1 When they arrive, children are helped to become involved in activities, if needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>7.2 Children busily involved until departure (Ex. no long waiting without activity; allowed to come to comfortable stopping point in play).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy related events at greeting and departure</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 No literacy related events within children's view.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Parents greeted warmly by staff. NA Permitted</td>
<td>5.5 Bilingual families use LOTE with children and staff if appropriate. NA Permitted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.4 Frequent use of literacy related events between staff and families, with high levels of child involvement. NA Permitted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.5 Information, newsletters, notices in relevant LOTEs in respect to the relevant communities represented. NA Permitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES FOR CLARIFICATION:
* In case only a few children are observed being greeted (or departing), generalise based on that sample.
+ If children are not brought into the program by their parents, mark NA for 5.3 and 7.3 (also 3.4, 5.4, 5.5, 7.4 and 7.5) and rate communication between parents and staff in Item 3800. For 5.3 and 7.3 it is not required that every parent be greeted warmly or receive information from staff, but that in general, parents are treated in this way.
### Item 6

**ECERS-R 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Meals/snack</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Meal/Meal schedule is in
appropriate (Ex. child is made
to wait even if hungry).

1.2 No promotion of peer
and adult interactions with
children.

1.3 No attention to
environmental print in
English or LOTE.

3.1 Schedule appropriate for
children.

3.2 Promotion of adult-
child and child-child
interactions are mostly
within large group size.

3.3 Children's interest in
environmental print is
acknowledged. (Ex. Direct
children's attention to task
of eating rather than
discussing print on food
packages).

5.1 Most staff sit with children
during meals and group
snacks.*

5.2 Small group size
enables conversations and
exploration of print.

5.3 Adults read
environmental print with
children when children ask
about it (Ex. discussion of
print on food packages and
drinks, reading posters in
bathroom).

7.1 Meals are and snacks are
time for conversation (Ex.
staff encourage children to
talk about events of day and
talk about things children are
interested in, children talk
with one another).

7.2 Adults draw children's
attention to and extend
children’s interests in
environmental print.

---

**Notes for clarification:**

* Although staff may need to leave a table to assist with the meal, most of the time should be spent sitting with the children. It is not required that each table have a staff member. Some staff may help with serving, while others sit with children.

**NB:** Several items from the original scale that relate to nutrition, health and safety have been omitted.
### Item 7
**ECERS-R 15**

7. Books and pictures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Very few books accessible.</td>
<td>3.1 Some books accessible for children (Ex. during free play children have enough books to avoid conflict).</td>
<td>5.1 A wide selection of books are accessible for a substantial portion of the day.</td>
<td>7.1 Books and language materials are rotated to maintain interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Staff rarely read books to children (Ex. no daily story time, little individual reading to children).</td>
<td>3.2 At least one staff-initiated receptive language activity time daily (Ex. reading books to children, storytelling, using flannel board stories).</td>
<td>5.2 Some additional language materials used daily.</td>
<td>7.2 Some books relate to current classroom activities or themes (Ex. books borrowed from library on seasonal theme).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Some books are not accessible or are used infrequently.</td>
<td>5.3 Books organized in a reading center.</td>
<td>5.4 Books, language materials, and activities are appropriate** for children in group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Staff read books to children informally (Ex. during free play, at naptime, as an extension of an activity).</td>
<td>5.5 Staff read books to children formally (Ex. during storytime, for a specific purpose).</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes for clarification:**

* Reading may be done in small groups or in larger groups depending on the ability of the children to attend to the story.

** A wide selection of books include: variety of topics; fantasy and factual information; stories about people, animals, and science; books that reflect different cultures and abilities.

I Examples of additional language materials are posters and pictures, flannel board stories, picture card games, and recorded stories and songs.

** Examples of appropriate materials and activities include: simpler books read with younger children; large print materials for children with visual impairment; books in children's primary language(s); rhyming games for older children.

**Questions:**

(7.1) Are there any other books used with the children? How is this handled?
### ECERS-R 16

#### 8. Encouraging children to communicate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Inadequate 1</th>
<th>Minimal 2</th>
<th>Good 4</th>
<th>Excellent 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>No activities used by staff with children to encourage them to communicate (Ex. no talking about drawings, dictating stories, sharing ideas at circle time, finger plays, singing songs).</td>
<td>3.1 Some activities used by staff with children to encourage them to communicate.</td>
<td>5.1 Communication activities take place during both free play and group times (Ex. child dictates story about painting; small group discusses trip to store).</td>
<td>7.1 Staff balance listening and taking appropriately for age and abilities of children during communication activities (Ex. leave time for children to respond; verbalize for child with limited communication skills).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Very few materials accessible that encourage children to communicate.</td>
<td>3.2 Communication activities are generally appropriate for the children in the group.</td>
<td>5.2 Materials that encourage children to communicate are accessible in a variety of interest centers (Ex. small figures and animals in block area; puppets and flannel board pieces in block area; toys for dramatic play outdoors or indoors).</td>
<td>7.2 Staff link children’s spoken communication with written language (Ex. write down what children dictate and read it back to them; help them write notes to parents).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes for clarification:**

* Children of different ages and abilities or those speaking a primary language different from the primary language of the classroom require different methods to encourage communication. Suitable activities must be included for children speaking a different primary language or those requiring alternative communication methods, such as signing or the use of augmentative communication devices.

* Materials to encourage expressive language include play telephones, puppets, flannel board stories, dolls and dramatic play props, small figures and animals; communication boards and other assistive devices for children with disabilities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 9</th>
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</thead>
</table>

9. Using language to develop reasoning skills

1.1 Staff do not talk with children about logical relationships (Ex. ignore children's questions and curiosity about why things happen, do not call attention to sequence of daily events, differences and similarities in number, size, shape, cause and effect).

1.2 Concepts are introduced inappropriately (Ex. concepts too difficult for age and abilities of children; inappropriate teaching methods used such as worksheets without any concrete experiences; teacher gives answers without helping children to figure things out).

3.1 Staff sometimes talk about logical relationships or concepts (Ex. explain that outside time comes after snacks, point out differences in sizes of blocks child used).

3.2 Some concepts are introduced appropriately for ages and abilities of children in group, using words and concrete experiences (Ex. guide children with questions and words to sort big and little blocks or to figure out the cause for ice melting).

5.1 Staff talk about logical relationships while children play with materials that stimulate reasoning (Ex. sequence cards, same/different games, size and shape toys, sorting games, number and math games).

5.2 Children encouraged to talk through or explain their reasoning when solving problems (Ex. why they sorted objects into different groups; in what way are two pictures the same or different).

7.1 Staff encourage children to reason throughout the day, using actual events and experiences as a basis for concept development (Ex. children learn sequence by talking about their experiences in the daily routine or recalling the sequence of a cooking project).

7.2 Concepts are introduced in response to children's interests or needs to solve problems (Ex. talk children through balancing a tall block building; help children figure out how many spoons are needed to set table).

Notes for clarification:

* Concepts include same/different, matching, classifying, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence, spatial relationships, cause and effect.
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ECERS-R 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Informal use of language*</td>
<td>1. Staff talk to children primarily to control their behavior and manage routines.</td>
<td>3.1 Some staff-child conversations (Ex. ask &quot;yes/no&quot; or short answer questions; give short answers to children’s questions).</td>
<td>5.1 Many staff-child conversations during free play and routines.</td>
<td>7.1 Staff have individual conversations with most of the children.**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2 Staff rarely respond to children’s talk.</td>
<td>3.2 Children allowed to talk much of the day.</td>
<td>5.2 Language is primarily used by staff to exchange information with children and for social interaction.</td>
<td>7.2 Children are asked questions to encourage them to give longer and more complex answers.** (Ex. young child is asked &quot;what&quot; or &quot;where&quot; questions; older child is asked &quot;why&quot; or &quot;how&quot; questions).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 Children’s talk is discouraged much of the day.</td>
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<td>5.3 Staff add information to expand on ideas presented by children.**</td>
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<td>5.4 Staff encourage communication among children, including those with disabilities (Ex. remind children to listen to one another; teach all children to sign if classmate uses sign language).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes for clarification:

* When multiple staff are working with the children, base the score for this item on the overall impact of the staff’s communication with the children. The intent of this item is that children’s need for language stimulation is met.

** In order to be given credit for “conversation,” there should be some mutual listening and talking/responding from both the staff and child. This is different from one-way communication such as giving directions or commands. For children with less verbal ability, the response may not be in words but may involve gestures, sign language, or communication devices.

** Expand means staff respond verbally to add more information to what a child says. For example, a child says, “Look at this truck”, and the teacher responds, “It’s a red dump truck. See, it has a place to carry things.”

** To give credit for these indicators several instances must be observed.
### Item 11

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECERS-R 19</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Fine motor</td>
<td>1. Very few developmentally appropriate fine motor materials accessible for daily use.</td>
<td>3.1 Some developmentally appropriate fine motor materials of each type accessible.</td>
<td>5. Many developmentally appropriate fine motor materials of each type accessible for a substantial portion of the day.</td>
<td>7.1 Materials rotated to maintain interest (Ex. materials that are no longer of interest put away, different materials brought out).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2 Fine motor materials generally in poor repair or incomplete (Ex. puzzles have missing pieces, few pegs for pegboard).</td>
<td>3.2 Most of the materials are in good repair and complete.</td>
<td>5.2 Materials are well organized (Ex. pegs and pegboards stored together, building toy sets stored separately).</td>
<td>7.2 Containers and accessible storage shelves have labels to encourage self-help (Ex. pictures or shapes used as labels on containers and shelves; word labels added for older children).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Notes for clarification:
- * There are several different types of fine motor materials, including small building toys such as interlocking blocks and Lincoln logs; art materials such as crayons and scissors; manipulatives such as beads of different sizes for stringing, pegs and pegboards, sewing cards; and puzzles.
## Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

### SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 12</th>
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<tr>
<td>12 Art*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Art activities are rarely available to the children.</td>
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<td>1.2 No individual expression in art activities (Ex. coloring work sheets; teacher-directed projects where children are asked to copy an example).</td>
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<td>3.1 Some art materials accessible for at least 1 hour a day.</td>
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<td>3.2 Some individual expression permitted with art materials (Ex. children allowed to decorate pre-cut shapes in their own way; in addition to teacher-directed projects, some individualized work is permitted).</td>
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<td>5.1 Many and varied art materials accessible a substantial portion of the day.</td>
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<td>5.2 Much individual expression in use of art materials (Ex. projects that follow an example are rarely used; children's work is varied and individual).</td>
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<td>7.1 Three-dimensional art materials included at least monthly (Ex. clay, play dough, wood gluing, carpentry).</td>
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<td>7.2 Some art activities are related to other classroom experiences (Ex. paints in fall colours when learning about seasons; children invited to do picture following field trip).</td>
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<td>7.3 Provisions made for children four and older to extend art activity over several days (Ex. project stored so work can continue; work on multistep projects encouraged).</td>
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<td>NA permitted.</td>
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### Notes for clarification:

- Examples for art materials: **drawing materials** such as paper, crayons, non-toxic felt pens, thick pencils; **paints**; **three dimensional materials** such as play dough, clay, wood gluing, or carpentry; **collage materials**: tools such as safe scissors, staplers, hole punches, tape dispensers.

- “Individual expression” means that each child may select the subject matter and/or art medium, and carry out the work in his or her own way. A number of paintings each of which is different because the children have not been asked to imitate a model or assigned a subject to paint, is considered “individual expression.”

- In groups with children under 3 or which certain developmental delays, staff may bring out materials to make them accessible daily with close supervision for as long as there is interest. Some adaptations may be needed to make art materials accessible and usable for children with disabilities.

### Questions

- (7.1) Are three-dimensional art materials such as clay or wood for gluing ever used? If so, how often?
- (7.2) Do you offer art activities that children can work on over several days? If so, please describe some examples.
### Item 13
**ECERS-R 21**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 No music/movement experiences for children.</td>
<td>3.1 Some music materials accessible for children's use (e.g., simple instruments, music toys, tape player with tapes).</td>
<td>5.1 Many music materials accessible for children's use (e.g., music center with instruments, tape player, dance props, adaptations made for children with disabilities).</td>
<td>7.1 Music available as both a free choice and group activity daily.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Loud background music is on much of the day and interferes with ongoing activities (e.g., constant background music makes conversation in normal tones difficult; music raises noise level).</td>
<td>3.2 Staff initiate at least one music activity daily (e.g., sing songs with children; soft music put on at naptime, play music for dancing).</td>
<td>5.2 Various types of music are used with the children (e.g., classical and popular music; music characteristic of different cultures; some songs sung in different languages).</td>
<td>7.2 Music activities that extend children's understanding of music are offered occasionally (e.g., guest invited to play instrument; children make musical instruments; staff set up activity to help children hear different tones).</td>
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<td>3.3 Some movement/dance activity done at least weekly (e.g., marching or moving to music; acting out movements to songs or rhymes; children given scarves and encouraged to dance to music).</td>
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<td>7.3 Creativity is encouraged with music activities (e.g., children asked to make up new words to songs; individual dance encouraged).</td>
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</table>

### Notes for clarification:
* For this indicator, "occasionally" means at least 3-4 times per year.

### Questions:
(7.2) Do you ever do special music activities?
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<tr>
<th>Item 14</th>
<th>Inadequate 1</th>
<th>Minimal 2</th>
<th>Good 3</th>
<th>Excellent 4</th>
<th>SAMPLE SCORING STRIP 5 6 7</th>
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<tr>
<td>ECERS-R 24</td>
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<td>Quality of literacy interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Dramatic play</td>
<td>1.1 No materials or equipment accessible for dress up or dramatic play.</td>
<td>3.1 Some dramatic play materials and furniture accessible, so children can act out family roles themselves (Ex. dress-up clothes, housekeeping props, dolls).</td>
<td>5.1 Many dramatic play materials accessible, including dress-up clothes. +</td>
<td>7.1 Props provided to represent diversity (Ex. props representing various cultures; equipment used by people with disabilities).</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
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<td>5.2 Materials accessible for a substantial portion of the day.</td>
<td>7.2 Props provided to represent diversity (Ex. props representing various cultures; equipment used by people with disabilities).</td>
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<td>5.3 Props for at least two different themes accessible daily (Ex. housekeeping and work).</td>
<td>7.3 Pictures, stories, and trips used to enrich dramatic play.</td>
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<td>5.4 Dramatic play area clearly defined, with space to play and organized storage.</td>
<td>7.4 Many literacy related props incorporated into dramatic play areas (Ex. menus, order pads and pens, cash register, recipes, newspapers and magazines added to restaurant dramatic play theme).</td>
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<td>5.5 Some literacy related props incorporated into dramatic play areas (Ex. notebook and pen next to telephone).</td>
<td>7.5 Staff model engagement with literacy props (Ex. studying menu, writing prescriptions, taking telephone message).</td>
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Notes for clarification:

+ Dress up clothes should include more than high heel shoes, dresses, purses and women's hats commonly found in a play house area. Clothing worn by both men and women at work, such as hard hats, transportation worker caps, and cowboy hats, as well as running shoes, clip on ties, and jackets should be included. Nilt some original ECERS items deleted.
### Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

#### SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Use of TV, video, and/or computers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Materials used are not developmentally appropriate (Ex. violent or sexually explicit content, frightening characters or stories, computer game too difficult).</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>All materials used are non-violent and culturally sensitive.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Alternative activities accessible while TV/computer is being used.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Materials used are limited to those considered “good for children” (Ex. Sesame Street, educational video and computer games, but not most cartoons).</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Some of the computer software encourages creativity (Ex. creative drawing or painting program, opportunities to solve problems in computer game). NA permitted</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 No alternate activity is allowed while watching TV/computer is being used (Ex. all children must watch video program at same time).</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Time children allowed to use TV/video or computer is limited to one hour daily in full-day program; computer turns limited to 20 minutes daily.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Computer used as one of many free choice activities. NA permitted</td>
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**Notes for clarification:**

* If neither TV video or computer is used score the item NA (not applicable). You must always ask about the use of TV and computers as they are often shared by several classrooms and may not be evident on the day of your visit.

**Questions:**

Are TV, videos or computers used with the children? How are they used?

SECTION FIVE

APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 16</th>
<th>ECERS-R 28</th>
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<th>Minimal 3</th>
<th>Good 5</th>
<th>Excellent 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Promoting acceptance of diversity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 No racial or cultural diversity visible in materials* (Ex. all toys and pictures are of one race, all print materials are about one culture, all print and audio materials are in one language where bilingualism is prevalent).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Materials present only stereotypes of races, cultures, ages, abilities, and gender.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Staff demonstrate prejudice against others (Ex. against child or other adult from different race or cultural group, against person with disability).</td>
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<td>1.4 No use of resources that represent social diversity (Ex. resources all represent one socio-economic group).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Some racial and cultural diversity visible in materials (Ex. multicultural or multicultural dolls, books, or bulletin board pictures, music tapes from many cultures; in bilingual areas some materials accessible in children’s primary language).</td>
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<td>3.2 Materials show diversity (Ex. different races, cultures, ages, abilities or gender) in a positive way.</td>
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<td>3.3 Staff intervene appropriately to counteract prejudice shown by children or other adults (Ex. discuss similarities and differences; establish rules for fair treatment of others), or no prejudice is shown.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Many books, pictures and materials accessible showing people of different races, cultures, ages, abilities and gender in non-stereotyping roles (Ex. both historical and current images; males and females shown doing many different types of work including traditional and non-traditional roles).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2 Some props representing various cultures included for use in dramatic play (Ex. dolls of different races, ethnic clothing, cooking and eating utensils from various cultural groups).</td>
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<td>5.3 In homogenous settings, relevant resources are used to extend children’s awareness.</td>
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<td>5.4 Adults encourage children to make links between the resources and their own families, communities and the wider community.</td>
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<td>5.5 Children encouraged to use their home languages and literacies NA Permitted</td>
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Note for clarification:

* When assessing diversity materials consider all areas and materials used by children, including pictures and photos displayed, books, puzzles, games, dolls, play people in the block area, puppets, music tapes, videos, and computer soft ware.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>17. General supervision of children (other than gross motor)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Inadequate supervision of children (Ex. staff leave children unsupervised; children's safety not protected; staff attend mainly to other tasks).</td>
<td>1.1 Sufficient supervision to protect children's safety.</td>
<td>3.2 Attention given to cleanliness and to prevent inappropriate use of materials (Ex. messy science table cleaned up; child stopped from emptying whole glue bottle).</td>
<td>5.1 Careful supervision of all children adjusted appropriately for different ages and abilities (Ex. younger or more impulsive children supervised more closely).</td>
<td>7.1 Staff talk to children about issues related to their play, asking questions and adding information to extend children's thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Most supervision is punitive or overly controlling. (Ex. yelling, belittling children, constant &quot;Nos&quot;).</td>
<td>1.2 Most supervision is non-punitive and control is exercised in a reasonable way.</td>
<td>3.3 Most supervision is non-punitive and control is exercised in a reasonable way.</td>
<td>5.2 Staff give children help and encouragement when needed (Ex. help child who is wandering get involved in play, help child complete puzzle).</td>
<td>7.2 A balance is maintained between the child's need to explore independently and staff input into learning (Ex. child allowed to complete painting before being asked to talk about it; child allowed to discover that her block building is unbalanced when it falls).</td>
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<td>Item 19</td>
<td>ECERS-R 32</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Staff-child interactions*</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff members are not responsive to or not involved with children (Ex. ignore children, staff seem distant or cold).</td>
<td>3.1 Staff usually respond to children in a warm, supportive manner (Ex. staff and children seem relaxed, voices cheerful, frequent smiling).</td>
<td>5.1 Staff show warmth through appropriate physical contact (Ex. pat child on the back, return child's hug).</td>
<td>7.1 Staff seem to enjoy being with the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Interactions are unpleasant (Ex. voices sound strained and irritable).</td>
<td>3.2 Few, if any, unpleasant interactions.</td>
<td>5.2 Staff show respect for children (Ex. listen attentively, make eye contact, treat children fairly, do not discriminate).</td>
<td>7.2 Staff encourage the development of mutual respect between children and adults (Ex. staff wait until children finish asking questions before answering; encourage children in a polite way to listen when adults speak).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Physical contact used principally for control (Ex. humping children along) or inappropriately (Ex. unwanted hugs or licking).</td>
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<td>5.3 Staff respond sympathetically to help children who are upset, hurt, or angry.</td>
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Notes for clarification:

* While the indicators for quality in this item generally hold true across a diversity of cultures and individuals, the ways in which they are expressed may differ. For example, direct eye contact in some cultures is a sign of respect; in others, a sign of disrespect. Similarly, some individuals are more likely to smile and be demonstrative than others. However, the requirements of the indicators must be met, although there can be some variation in the way this is done.
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<th>Item 19</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>SAMPLE SCORING STRIP</th>
<th>Quality of literacy interactions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Interactions among children</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Interaction among children (peers) not encouraged (Ex. talking with peers discouraged, few opportunities for children to choose own playmates).</td>
<td>1.1 Interaction among children (peers) not encouraged (Ex. talking with peers discouraged, few opportunities for children to choose own playmates).</td>
<td>3.1 Peer interaction encouraged (Ex. children allowed to move freely so natural groups and interactions can occur).</td>
<td>5.1 Staff model good social skills (Ex. are kind to others; listen, empathize, cooperate).</td>
<td>7.1 Peer interactions usually positive (Ex. older children often cooperate and share; children generally play well together without fighting).</td>
<td>3.2 Staff stop negative and hurtful peer interactions (Ex. stop name calling, fighting).</td>
<td>5.2 Staff help children develop appropriate social behavior with peers (Ex. help children talk through conflicts instead of fighting; encourage socially isolated children to find friends; help children understand feelings of others).</td>
<td>7.2 Staff provide some opportunities for children to work together to complete a task (Ex. a group of children work to cover a large mural paper with many drawings; make a soup with many ingredients; cooperate to bring chairs to table).</td>
<td>3.3 Some positive peer interaction occurs.</td>
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**Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue**

**SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Schedule</td>
<td>1. Schedule is either too rigid, leaving no time for individual interests, or too flexible (chaotic), lacking a dependable sequence of daily events.*</td>
<td>3. Basic daily schedule exists that is familiar to children (Ex. routines and activities occur in relatively the same sequence most days).</td>
<td>5.1 Schedule provides balance of structure and flexibility (Ex. regularly scheduled outdoor play period may be lengthened in good weather).</td>
<td>7.1 Smooth transitions between daily events (Ex. materials ready for next activity before current activity ends; most transitions handled a few children at a time rather than whole group).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Written schedule is posted in room and relates generally to what occurs.</td>
<td>3.3 At least one indoor and one outdoor play period (weather permitting) occurs daily.</td>
<td>5.2 A variety of play activities occur each day, some teacher directed and some child initiated.</td>
<td>7.2 Variations made in schedule to meet individual needs (Ex. shorter story time for child with shorter attention span; child working on project allowed to continue past scheduled time; slow eater may finish at own pace).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4 Both gross motor and less active play occur daily.</td>
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<td>5.3 A substantial portion of the day is used for play activities.</td>
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<td>5.4 No long period of waiting during transitions between daily events.</td>
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</table>

**Notes for clarification:**

* Daily events refers to time for indoor and outdoor play activities as well as routines such as meals/snacks, nap/rest, and greeting/departing.

H The written schedule need not be followed to the minute. The intent of this indicator is that the general sequence of events is being followed.
21. Group time

1.1 Children kept together as whole group most of the day (Ex. all do same art project, have story read to them, listen to records, use bathroom at the same time).

1.2 Very few opportunities for staff to interact with individual children or small groups.

3.1 Some play activities done in small groups or individually.

3.2 Some opportunity for children to be part of self-selected small groups.

5.1 Whole group gatherings limited to short periods, suited to age and individual needs of children.

5.2 Many play activities done in small groups or individually.

5.3 Some routines done in small groups or individually.

5.4 Small groups promote child/child & child/adult, adult/child interactions.

5.1 Different groupings provide a change of pace throughout the day.

7.2 Staff engage in educational interaction with small groups and individual children as well as with the whole group. (Ex. read story, help small group with cooking or science activity)

7.3 Many opportunities for children to be part of self-selected groups.

7.4 Planned LOTE groups to extend bilingual children's home languages and literacies. Planned awareness of indigenous children's participation, wherever these children attend the setting.

Notes for clarification:

* The definition of small groups may change with the age and individual needs of the children. For typically developing 2 and 3 year olds, a suitable small group might be three to five children, whereas for 4-5 year olds five to eight children might be manageable.

+ Whole group gatherings may not be suitable for children under 32 or some children with special needs. If this is the case, no group gatherings are required for a 5 and credit should be given for this indicator. One way to determine whether the whole group gathering is suitable, is whether the children remain interested and involved.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 22</th>
<th>ECERS-R 37</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. Provisions for children with disabilities*</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of literacy interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 No attempt by staff to assess children's needs or find out about available assessments.</td>
<td>3.1 Staff have information from available assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 No attempt to meet children's special needs (Ex. needed modifications not made in teacher interaction, physical environment, program activities, schedule).</td>
<td>3.2 Minor modifications made to meet the needs of children with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 No involvement of parents in helping staff understand children's needs or in setting goals for the children.</td>
<td>3.3 Some involvement of parents and classroom staff in setting goals (Ex. parents and teacher attend IEP or IFSP meeting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Very little involvement of children with disabilities with the rest of the group (Ex. children do not eat at same table; wander and do not participate in activities).</td>
<td>3.4 Some involvement of children with disabilities in the ongoing activities with the other children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes for clarification

* This item should be used only if a child with an identified disability is included in the program. Otherwise, score this item NA.

† Minor modifications may include limited changes in the environment (such as a ramp) to allow the children to attend, or a therapist who visits the program to work with the children periodically.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 23 NEW</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
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<th>Good</th>
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<th>Excellent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Literacy Interactions in dramatic play</td>
<td>1.1 No/little adult involvement in children's dramatic play.</td>
<td>3.1 Adults facilitate dramatic play that encourages language and literacy development.</td>
<td>5.1 Adults support children's language and literacy in dramatic play by modelling use of resources and encouraging experimentation with print (Ex. adults join in children's play, engage in reading and writing behaviours with literacy props provided, assist children to integrate literacy props into their play themes).</td>
<td>7.1 Adults extend children's language &amp; literacy in dramatic play by scaffolding, co-construction and demonstrating (Ex. adults engage in co-operative writing with children, encourage children to have a go at writing, provide a demonstration of how to write particular letters or words if appropriate).</td>
<td>7.2 Aboriginal &amp; bilingual children are encouraged to use home language and literacies to extend dramatic play, wherever these children attend.</td>
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<td>Item 24 NEW</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Quality of literacy interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Adults inattentive or unresponsive when children are engaged in experiences.</td>
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<td>2. No or little communication with children about their literacy learning experiences.</td>
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<td>3. Most communication to redirect/direct children’s behaviour at transitions and routines only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 During children’s literacy play experiences staff control the direction of the play Not Permitted</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Staff read books to children as a whole group with little discussion of literacy concepts.</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Staff read books to children individually and in small groups and discuss literacy concepts when children comment on aspects of literacy (Ex. finding the letters of their name in the book).</td>
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<td>7.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Adults scaffold children’s language and literacy learning in a range of experiences. Adults observe and respond to children individually, drawing on a range of strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.2 Staff encourage the discussion of literacy concepts such as print, words and letters in many experiences (Ex. shared books with children individually and in small groups, writing experiences, environmental print).</td>
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<td>Item 25</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>SAMPLE SCORING STRIP</td>
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<td>25. Literacy play</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Quality of literacy interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. No encouragement by staff for children to explore print, letters, words, illustrations, books etc within their play and routines throughout the day.</td>
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<td>3. Some encouragement by staff for children to explore print etc but mainly confined to one curriculum area and/or one time of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Consistent encouragement and support by staff for children to explore print throughout the day across a range of curriculum areas and routines (Ex. writing own symbols on painting, writing and reading signs for dramatic play, writing and reading menus and rosters).</td>
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<td>7. Adults use many opportunities to scaffold children’s understandings of literacy in meaningful and purposeful ways throughout the day.</td>
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<td>7.2 Children are encouraged to explore LOTE prints and scripts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA Permitted</td>
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<td>Item 26</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Discussion of literacy concepts</td>
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**NEW**

1. No use by adults or children of texts, games, other resources to encourage conversations and understandings of literacy concepts.

3. Some use of resources such as texts and games but largely adult directed.

5. Use of a range of resources and literacy concepts in meaningful contexts (Ex. writing sign about the chickens that are hatching; discussion of author and illustrator of book).

7. Many opportunities for the use of literacy resources and discussion of literacy concepts that extends children's understandings (Ex. literacy resources integrated into many curriculum areas).

1. Adults respond to children's questions and comments about literacy (Ex. discussion of letters and words when a child identifies a letter from her name in a book; read environmental print when child asks what it says).

2. Adults draw children's attention to literacy concepts in meaningful contexts (Ex. adults point out environmental print and discuss its meaning; discussion of how to find out which train to catch to go to the library; use recipe chart when cooking with children).

3. Adults provide demonstrations of literacy concepts to children in response to individual children's developing understandings (Ex. adults help child to understand how to structure a birthday greeting, where to use a full stop when writing a sentence).
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<tr>
<th>Item 27</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

27. Metalinguistic skill development (Awareness and encouragement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1</th>
<th>No games, materials, or activities to extend and encourage metalinguistic awareness. (No attention paid to rhyme, no teacher word play, jingles, etc. no poetry books on shelves, no alphabet books etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>No teacher attention to children's interest in or attempts to play with language. (Language play may be discouraged.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NA Permitted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1</th>
<th>Some games, books and materials encouraging metalinguistic development eg poetry /rhyme book available, other activities present, but used with minimal teacher guidance or not readily available. (Ex. presence of these materials appears incidental, not planned for.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Children's language play sometimes acknowledged but not extended or appreciated by staff.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**NA Permitted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.1</th>
<th>Sufficient games, metalinguistic awareness materials, and activities available on a regular weekly basis. Teacher reads poetry weekly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Good provision for poetry, alphabet books, riddles and texts utilising word play in book corner. (Ex: more than one of each type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Staff draw attention to sounds in words or language patterns when reading poetry or patterned text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NA Permitted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.1</th>
<th>Daily use of poetry, rhymes, jingles etc (Ex. class favourites?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Children's attention frequently drawn to rhyme, sounds in words, alliteration, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Transitions may be related to word play, initial sounds in children's names alliteration, phoneme manipulation.</td>
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**NA Permitted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.4</th>
<th>Children's language play actively encouraged.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Children's attention drawn to words in community languages, poetry books, chants and rhymes from home languages encouraged.</td>
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</table>

**NA Permitted**

NOTES: Clarification Question. Do you use poetry, rhymes or riddles with the children? At what point in the day? How often?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 28</th>
<th>ECERS-R 38</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>28. Provisions for parents</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 No information concerning program given to parents in writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Parents discouraged from observing or being involved in children's program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Parents given administrative information about program in writing (Ex. fees, hours of service, health rules for attendance).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Some sharing of child-related information between parents and staff (Ex. informal communication; parent conferences only upon request; some parenting materials).</td>
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<td>3.3 Some possibilities for parents and family members to be involved in children's program.</td>
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<td>3.4 Interactions between family members and staff are generally respectful and positive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Parents urged to observe in child's group prior to enrollment.</td>
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<td>5.2 Parents made aware of philosophy and approaches practiced (Ex. parent handbook, discipline policy, descriptions of activities).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.3 Much sharing of child-related information between parents and staff (Ex. frequent informal communication; periodic conferences for all children; parent meetings, newsletters, parenting information available).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4 Variety alternatives used to encourage family involvement in children's program. (Ex. bring birthday treat, eat lunch with child, attend family pot luck).</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1 Parents asked for an evaluation of the program annually (Ex. parent questionnaires, group evaluation meetings).</td>
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<td>7.2 Parents referred to other professionals when needed (Ex. for special parenting help, for health concerns about child).</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3 Parents involved in decision making roles in program along with staff (Ex. parent representatives on board).</td>
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**SAMPLE SCORING STRIP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of literacy interactions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES</strong></td>
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5.1.2 APPENDIX 2 - PROJECT A Stage 1: Educator Interview Questions

1. What do you understand by the term literacy?
2. How do you think literacy development begins?
3. How important do you think literacy development is for young children?
4. How important do you think literacy development is in children’s home languages?
5. Where do you think children develop literacy?
6. How do you think children develop literacy?
7. Do you think a focus on literacy in the years before school is appropriate?
8. What sorts of literacy behaviours do the children in your setting display?
9. When and where do these behaviours occur?
10. What experiences do you provide that help children with literacy development?
11. What are the three most important experiences that you provide for literacy?
12. What is your role in children’s literacy development?
13. What strategies do you use to extend children’s literacy development?
14. How do you communicate with families about literacy development?
15. What do you know about the literacy practices of the children at home?
16. How do you use what you know about what happens at home in the program?
17. What information do you provide to families about their child’s literacy development?
18. Can you identify children in your group with particular literacy need?
19. What strategies do you use to support these children?
5.1.3 APPENDIX 3 - PROJECT A Stage 1: Family Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you remember about learning literacy as a child?

2. How was your experience similar or different from how your own children learn similar things now?

3. What kinds of activities that you and your family do that help your child develop literacy?

4. How do you think your child’s preschool / centre experiences help your child to develop literacy?

5. How are the literacy experiences that your child has at preschool/centre different from or similar to those she/she has at home?

6. Can you tell us about any discussions or conversation that you have had with your child’s teacher/carer about your child’s literacy development?

7. Do you have any additional comments?
5.1.4 APPENDIX 4 - PROJECT A Stage 2: Educator, Manager and Family Questions

Contact Staff
1. Can you tell me your impression of the early literacy project that you have been involved in?

2. What changes or benefits have resulted from this project? Have any of these surprised you?

3. We are currently developing a video and support materials for use in early childhood settings. What suggestions would you like to give us about the development of these materials?

4. What materials would you include?

5. What suggestions would you make do these materials get used in the most effective way?

6. These are the 5 core principles (display) upon which the project is based. Do you feel that your practices have changed in accordance with these principles?

7. Has involvement in this project influenced your use of popular culture and technology in the setting?

8. What role did your immediate supervisor play in this project?

9. Would you have preferred a different role for your supervisors? (why/why not?)

10. What do you have in place that supports the continuity of literacy learning as children move from the early childhood setting to the school setting?

11. Do you have any other comments about this project?

Managers
1. Can you ascertain any changes in the classroom since the project commenced? What changes have you noticed?

2. Tell me about the communication between you and the staff in the classroom concerning literacy issues?

3. How do changes in the preschool generally are implemented?

4. Tell me about the communication between you and the parents.
5. The project was based on 5 core principles for literacy development. Can you comment on any changes you have noticed in the last two terms that might reflect these principles?

6. What do you have in place that supports the continuity of literacy learning as children move from the early childhood setting to the school setting? Who is responsible for this?

7. We are currently developing a video and support material for use in early childhood settings. What suggestion would you like to make about this?

Parents

1. Did you learn anything about literacy that you did not know this project began?

2. Are there any questions about literacy that you would like answered?

3. Do you feel that there has been a change in the relationship you have with the staff at the setting?

4. What things have changed for you and your child in the way you approach literacy?

5. What changes have you noticed about your child’s literacy experiences at the setting?

6. What changes have you noticed in the communication between you and the staff regarding your child’s literacy?

7. What changes have you noticed regarding the staff’s knowledge about what you do at home, particularly in the area of literacy? (optional) What changes have you noticed in the staff’s use of your home language and your literacy practices in the program?

8. What changes have you noticed regarding the staff’s use of home materials and resources in the daily program?

9. Has your involvement in the setting changed as a result of this project? Please explain.
5.1.5 APPENDIX 5 - PROJECT A Stage 3: Parent, Educator, Director, Facilitator Questions

Main concept of Literacy as Social Practice (Introductory Session)
1. What do you see as strengths in the main concept of Literacy as Social Practice?
2. What are your concerns with the main concept of Literacy as Social Practice?
3. What do you recommend to strengthen the main concept of Literacy as Social Practice?

Materials for each of five principles as evident in the introductory activity
4. What do you see as strengths in the materials for this Principle?
5. What are your concerns with the materials for this Principle?
6. What do you recommend to strengthen the materials for this Principle?
5.1.6 APPENDIX 6 - PROJECT B: Educator National Workshop Focus Group Discussion

Focus: Children 0-3; Children 3-5; Children 5-8 (3 variations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using the Internet</th>
<th>Learning techniques</th>
<th>As a communication and information technology (for the purpose of early literacy in the same way as a ‘book’)</th>
<th>To support language, socio-emotional and cognitive development through developmentally appropriate play</th>
<th>To support formal and informal learning in key areas</th>
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<td>Child independent</td>
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<td>Peer – supported – same age/ older age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher directed/mediated</td>
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</table>

Please answer the same questions in each cell:
1. What are the key elements of good practice in relation to the Internet use in this context?

2. What resources currently exist? What is their quality and quantity? Are they easy to find?
5.1.7 APPENDIX 7 - PROJECT B: Children 3-5 Observations and Focus Group Discussion Questions

The following Internet sites will be bookmarked.
Ozkids Cubby House

Theodore Tugboat Activity Centre
http://www.cochran.com/theodore

Kayleigh’s Playground
http://www.kayleigh.tierranet.com/

The ABC site (The playground)
http://www.abc.net.au/

The Electric Zoo
http://netvet.wustl.edu/e-zoo.htm

Focus group discussion questions
When visiting the above sites, ask the children
What do you like and not like about each site? Why?
Which site is the best? Why?
Which site did you like the least? Why?

Home use questions
Do you usually do this at home?
What is your favourite site? Why?
Who showed you how to use the Internet?
How long have you been using the Internet?
Do you ever talk/write to people or get message from other people through your computer at home? Do you look up information/visit places on the computer?
Describe your favourite activities on the computer at home?

Potential at school
How do you think you could use the Internet at school?
5.1.8 APPENDIX 8 - PROJECT B: Children 5-8 Observations and Focus Group Discussion Questions

The following Internet sites will be bookmarked.
Ozkids Cubby House

Theodore Tugboat Activity Centre
http://www.coehran.com/theodore

Kayleigh’s Playground
http://www.kayleigh.tierranet.com/

The ABC site (The playground)
http://www.abc.net.au/

The Electric Zoo
http://netvet.wustl.edu/e-zoo.htm

Focus group discussion questions
When visiting the above sites, ask the children
What do you like and not like about each site? Why?
Which site is the best? Why?
Which site did you like the least? Why?

Focus group questions for children 5 – 8 years

1. What do you do with your computer at home/who with? How often? What do you like about it?

2. How would you feel if you didn’t have it any more?

3. What do your parents and older brothers and sisters do with the computer at home? Do your parents or older brothers and sisters use the computer at home to:
   – talk to children relatives or people they work with
   – look at information in other places or countries
5.1.9 APPENDIX 9 - PROJECT C: Educator Interview Questions

1. How do you think children best learn literacy? What about home and community experiences?

2. As an educator you have an important role in promoting literacy learning use through play or playful experiences. How would you describe that role?

3. What kinds of experiences have you found useful in promoting children’s literacy through play or playful experiences?

4. What are the benefits of integrating literacy and play/playful experiences for children? Any benefits for staff?

5. Any benefits for families?

6. What are the constraints of integrating literacy and play/playful experiences for children? Any constraints for staff? Any constraints for families?

7. Do you have any strategies for dealing with the constraints?
5.1.10 APPENDIX 10 - PROJECT C: Family Interview Questions

1. Children learn through listening, talking, drawing, reading writing viewing in many different places and contexts such as home, in the community, at day care, preschool, school, visiting friends.

2. Can you tell me about the ways in which your child is learning literacy? When? Where? With whom? What sorts of things?

3. What sorts of things do you or family members say and do that supports your child’s’ literacy learning or literacy use?

4. How are these experiences taken into account at your child’s daycare, preschool or school?

5. What are the benefits of integrating literacy through play/playful experiences for children? Any benefits for families? Any benefits for staff?

6. What are the constraints of integrating literacy and play/playful experiences for children? Any constraints for staff? Any constraints for families?

7. Do you have any questions about children learning/ using literacy through play or playful experiences?
5.11 APPENDIX 11 - PROJECT C: EVALUATION: Book Review A

BOOK REVIEW

"Play provides a supportive environment in which children are able to purposefully integrate literacy and try out their understandings." (Beecher & Arthur, 2001, p. 7)

These are the beliefs that Beecher and Arthur so ably support in the text Play and Literacy in Children's Worlds. The reader is invited to enter the world of children, literacy and play and discover or perhaps re-discover how play and literacy can support each other. This text provides both Early Childhood and Primary educators with an opportunity to extend their knowledge of both literacy and play.

As the following six chapters are developed the reader is led from an understanding of the theory-base that supports the value of play in the lives of children and onto an exploration of the benefits of establishing open communication with families. The unique perspectives of a range of educators with respect to the value of literacy-enriched play are discussed. Finally both the early childhood and primary settings are explored and the perspectives of parents and educators in these settings discussed.

Chapter 1: 'How children learn to be literate' Here the more contemporary viewpoint of literacy is explored with its focus more on what children will require to function in the twenty-first century are the tools to support processes such as critical thinking, meaning-making and creativity. (p. 9)

This chapter highlights the view of literacy as social practice, inextricably woven into the fabric of daily life, it also discusses the power and influence of community based texts and their use and value in a range of culturally specific situations. A range of traditional views on how children learn to be literate is also explored. Here Beecher and Arthur draw together the range of literacy theories upon which their book is based.

Chapter 2: 'Literacy learning through play' provides an interesting, brief and easy to read background of both the formative and contemporary views of play.
The authors explore the qualities of play and how it assists learning.

They also discuss curriculum, assessment and accountability, issues pertinent in both early childhood and primary settings.

Chapter 3: 'Exploring literacy with families' discusses a range of
important issues that impact on families, communities and schools. Here ways to create active home-school partnerships across a range of contemporary Australian communities are explored. A number of possible ways to share literacy experiences that involve a range of stakeholders are a highlight of this chapter.

Chapter 4: 'The role of the educator in literacy-enhanced play' provides access to a range of possible documentary systems to assist the educator to link play in real life contexts with a range of literacy experiences. A variety of practical examples are provided to demonstrated how this may be achieved, using a range of resources.

There is no recipe for a play-based literacy program. Each educator needs to develop an approach and practices that are context specific. (p. 72)

Beecher and Arthur present the types of teaching strategies that involve educators in children's literacy-related play on a continuum, discuss these briefly and link them with the appropriate research base. Also discussed are the ways in which educators can organise learning environments to more actively support interaction, learning and sustained play. Environmental factors such as space, time, resources and grouping are also explored.

Chapter 5: 'Play and literacy in birth-to-five settings' presents the authors' observations and staff and parent interviews. These provide a comprehensive snapshot of home and community contexts where parents discuss the diverse types of literacy experiences that have impacted on their children's learning.

Early childhood educators, too, discuss their views of literacy and learning and discuss the ways in which they integrate the literacy experiences of children both in planned and spontaneous ways. These interviews provide an insight into perceptions of the role educators' play in the literacy development of the children in their care. A range of issues are raised that include parental expectations, resources and safety. This chapter concludes with a range of examples of the ways in which various early childhood settings have provided experiences that enrich literacy learning through play.

Chapter 6: 'Play and literacy in school settings'. This chapter contains parent interviews, which continue to support views that literacy learning at home and in the community is diverse, and includes many elements of popular culture. It explores how educators use their knowledge of children's home contexts to design appropriate literacy experiences that utilise elements of popular culture and technology. Here educators articulate their learning philosophies, link this to practice, discuss their views on how children learn literacy and how this may be integrated in a variety of ways. Educators also identified a range of issues that impact upon the creation of a play-enriched literacy environment. These include
programming issues such as creating blocks of time and working towards the integration of experiences. Issues of conflict between colleagues in implementing literacy-related play and the ‘messier’ style that this requires are also discussed. Assessment, time constraints and planning issues were all identified and discussed by educators. This chapter concludes with concrete ways in which primary teachers can organise play-enriched literacy experiences for children. Grouping, time, space and resources are discussed and a sample weekly program is included. A range of play-literacy experiences that have been observed in various schools are identified.

This book provides both early childhood and primary educators with a rich theory base, a series of interesting classroom observations, interviews with parents and educators and practical, do-able classroom specific activities that will promote play-based literacy learning in children across a range of settings.

The book is organised in such a way that the reader can explore single chapters of specific interest, or read it from cover to cover. The language is reader-friendly and although written from an Australian perspective provides a valuable insight into the ways in which literacy development can be promoted through play.

A timely book, ably discussing the value of play as a medium for literacy learning. A ‘hands-on’ resource that advocates the use of a wide range of community-based texts to extend children’s home-based literacy development into the classroom.

Barbra McKenzie, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong.
Early Multiliteracies: Working with Family Practices, Children's Agency and Critical Dialogue

SECTION FIVE – APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

5.1.12 APPENDIX 12 - PROJECT C: EVALUATION: Book Review B

Book Reviews

Play and Literacy in Children's Worlds
BRONWYN BEECHER & LEONIE ARTHUR, 2001
Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association
111 pp., ISBN 1 875622 40 3, AU$27.00

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that if we are laying foundations for young children to meet the challenges of twenty-first-century living, literacy skills will be a key issue. There are public policy initiatives worldwide to ensure higher levels of literacy achievement; and success in the early years appears essential as literacy is seen as a fundamental tool for lifelong learning. However, as educational reform, including calls for accountability and increasing use of narrow systems of baseline assessment are high on the agenda, it is timely to consider how we approach central elements of literacy learning and teaching in the early years. The curriculum content and teaching approaches we choose will have significant consequences for our society.

Beecher & Arthur address these issues in Play and Literacy in Children's Worlds. They explore the connections between literacy and play, and the implications for teachers in prior-to-school and primary school settings. Play is examined through a Vygotskian lens; children learn about play in ways that reflect their family and community contexts. They argue that contemporary views of play have more relevance for promoting children's learning than classic play theories. Although there are certainly many other recent publications examining contemporary views of play (for a summary, see Roskos & Christie, 2000), there is little of a practical nature revealing how teachers are enacting this philosophy. This text is aimed at teacher practitioners and pre-service teachers, but a reasonably extensive reference list is provided for those wishing to delve more deeply into empirical data and theoretical perspectives.

The authors move beyond a traditional definition of literacy that has focused almost exclusively on print, to a focus that involves reading, producing and critiquing multimodal texts. They draw on recent conceptualisations that emphasise literacy as a social and cultural practice and that recognise that literacy learning occurs wherever literacy practices are occurring. Their perspective is effectively captured in a quotation from Roskos (2000): 'Like the maxim, 'You are what you eat,' the literate self is formed from countless encounters in all manner of times, situations, places and moods' (p. 125). The process of becoming literate begins well before children start school – pre-school children can and do explore literacy in a range of social and cultural contexts. Beecher & Arthur point out that school literacy

147
practices are only a selection from the broad range of community literacy practices; popular media culture and technology are often marginalised. Where there is a poor match between home and school practices, many children fail to ‘take up’ the literacies of school; children from minority backgrounds frequently underachieve in school literacies. They show ways of creating literacy environments that value what children can do and provide clear illustrations of culturally responsive pedagogies as teachers draw on the funds of knowledge that children, their families and communities use in their daily lives. When teachers are aware of children’s current experiences, they can use them as a starting point for new literacy learning. The authors encourage teachers to consider whether their literacy environment is within children’s reach – whether it connects to their culture, language, thinking and interests. When teachers know and use the diverse literacy practices of the children with whom they work, children are more actively engaged; they perceive themselves as learners and problem solvers (Beecher & Arthur, 2001, p. 32).

The clear explanations and examples that these authors provide are useful for teachers wishing to challenge and critique aspects of current practice and deeply entrenched perceptions about literacy learning. Recent research highlights the way teachers’ views and beliefs about literacy learning shape the opportunities that they provide for young children. Although the majority of teachers foster the growth of literacy in numerous ways, there are missed opportunities (Nielson & Monson, 1996; McLachlan-Smith & St George, 1997; Rowell, 1998; Taylor & Makin, 1999; Dunn et al, 2000; Raban & Ure, 2000). These researchers suggest that many current practices relating to literacy learning are limited in focus. Some teachers may need to reassess their role in children’s literacy learning and consider the messages that they convey, through the ways they value and deal with literacy. Beecher & Arthur explain the collaborative, socially constructed nature of literacy learning and teaching, as well as provide practical guidance for implementing change. Chapter 4 advocates a proactive role for the educator. Key elements include documenting literacy learning, organising literacy-enriched play environments and guiding literacy learning in play. Anecdotes, work samples, photographs and examples from research are presented to convince the reader that a sensitive and skillful educator can support and guide learning and encourage children’s reflection and growth of metalinguistic awareness. Effective teachers ‘tune in’ to children’s intentions and choose from a continuum of strategies so they can move in and out of more or less directive roles. They stress that young children need more than access to print and literacy experiences. The mediation of experiences by adults who model aspects of language and print relevant to children’s current focus is the significant factor in helping them make essential meaning-making connections.

Motivation, meaning and enjoyment are important ingredients for early literacy success. Teachers of young children have a ‘window of opportunity’ to make a difference. If they have skills and knowledge, they can work with
parents and in a range of prior-to-school and school contexts to help all children build firm foundations for future development. A literacy rich environment that values the multiple literacy practices of homes, communities and early childhood settings offers abundant opportunities for children to make use of print and practice literacy habits and skills in enjoyable and productive ways. Beecroft & Arthur successfully address these contexts as they demonstrate the effectiveness of play as a curricular tool for teaching literacy in the early years.

SANDRA LENNOX
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

References


5.1.13 APPENDIX 13 - PROJECT C: EVALUATION: Book Purchaser Details

----- Original Message -----
From: Val Noake
To: beecherh@bigpond.net.au
Sent: Friday, August 08, 2008 12:45 PM
Subject: Play and literacy

Hi Bronwyn
I’ve checked the membership and sales figures for Play & Literacy in children’s worlds – see attached.

Actually knowing out who bought it and when is challenging. Our system which we are on the verge of replacing does not ‘do’ sales reports. The print out the Business Manager has produced doesn’t give dates. What I can tell you is that we have sold copies to:
University Cooperative Bookshop (Broadway) 467 including orders of 153 and 136
Monsu The Campus Bookshop (Monash University) 100 including orders of 20 and 15
Lady Gowrie Childcare Centre (Melbourne) 100 including one order of 30 and one of 20
Australian Association for the Teaching of Reading (Adelaide) 30 – regular orders of 5
La Trobe University – couple of orders of 2

They are the only ones that stand out as ordering regularly. The rest are mainly single copies to schools, individual and wholesalers.

I hope this is the sort of information you need. Let me know if you have any other questions.

Best wishes
Val Noake

Project Manager
Primary English Teaching Association
phone 02 9565 1277

-----Original Message-----
From: Bronwyn Beecher Heino [mailto:beecherh@bigpond.net.au]
Sent: Friday, 8 August 2008 1:19 PM
To: Val Noake
Subject: Re: Play and literacy

Hi Val
Many, many thanks for this as I know you would be pretty busy. This is exactly the information I need. Just one more question - were there any international buyers? or just impossible to tell?
Bronwyn

Hi Bronwyn
I can’t really tell about OS orders. There are many transactions with no record of who purchased the item. I was able to identify all the bigger sales. But there are a lot with 1-3 copies that I can’t identify.
James Bennett, Peter Pal Library Services and DA Information Services have purchased 1 or 2 copies on a number of occasions so they could be for buyers anywhere.

Interestingly copies were bought by Batchelor Area School, Walgett Community School, Kimberley Bookshop, Pipalyatjara Anangu School all of which I am assuming are in Aboriginal Communities. There are orders from schools in all states and territories so it has travelled well.

Best wishes
Val

Val Noake
Project Manager
Primary English Teaching Association
phone 02 9565 1277

PET 068 Play and Literacy in children’s worlds by Bronwyn Beecher and Leonie Arthur

Sales figures

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5.1.14 APPENDIX 14 - PROJECT D: Family and Educator Interview Questions

1. How do you think children best learn literacy? What about home and community experiences? What about fairy tale experiences?

2. As an educator you have an important role in promoting understandings about people and literacy learning/use through play or playful experiences. How would you describe that role?

3. What sorts of experiences have you found useful in promoting children’s understandings of people through literacy play/playful experiences? How have fairy tales experiences been useful?

4. What are the benefits of integrating understandings about fairy tales, people, and literacy play/playful experiences for children? Any benefits for staff? Any benefits for families?

5. What are the constraints of integrating understandings about fairy tales and people, with literacy play/playful experiences for children? Any constraints for staff? Any constraints for families?

6. Do you have any strategies for dealing with the constraints?

7. Is there any thing else you think I should investigate about children representing fairy tales and people through literacy play/or playful experiences?

8. Is there anything else you think I should investigate about the role of fairy tales in children’s literacy play or playful experiences
5.1.15 APPENDIX 15- PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS – Project C Book Cover
5.2 REFERENCES


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