



Editorial

Children's narratives: Exploring children's voices through *The Looking Glass* and beyond

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"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, Chapter 6

This Special Edition on Children's Narratives coincides with the onset of the 150th anniversary celebrations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in 2015. According to Smidt (2012), narratives largely refer to "the making of stories" (p. 7), the unique manner in which we make sense of the world around us. This is reflected in the quote above and can be seen intertwined through the articles in this issue of *He Kupu*, the idea of *meaning making*.

The *making of meaning* in life is closely linked to the background, the culture and upbringing of each person – young and old. Drawing on Gadamer's (1975) notion of *hermeneutics*, and the so called *hermeneutic circle* of perceiving the world, interpretation and meaning making, self-formation based on one's interpretation, and a subsequently altered perception of the world, the topic of children's narratives can be understood in, at least, two dimensions: the narratives of children's lives, and the narratives that children tell through expressing themselves. The first dimension acknowledges the many diverse backgrounds of young children and how these diverse narratives and experiences lead to different perceptions of the world and to different meanings derived from the way children, and adults, for that matter, see the world and interpret what they see – their world-view. The second dimension, the narratives or stories children tell – through their voices, their actions, their gestures and expressions, or their silences – derive from their world-views and their meaning making in a hermeneutical sense. The articles in this issue of *He Kupu*, therefore, address either the one or the other dimension of children's narratives – either the stories they tell or how their background shapes how they make meaning of the world – or both.

The Practitioner Research section consists of three articles, authored by students of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education qualification at New Zealand Tertiary College. All three articles befit the theme of the issue, in that they are narratives on the students' childhood experiences in relation to spirituality, autonomy and art education. Yan Lin offers a narrative on a Chinese perspective on spirituality, looking at it from a socio-political point of view. She also concurs with Bone, Cullen and Loveridge (2007) about the role of the early



childhood educator in nurturing spirituality into the daily curriculum by highlighting the significance that Steiner and Montessori give to the inclusion of spiritual development in their philosophies. Similarly, Yidong Zhao reflects on autonomy from an early years perspective, drawing on Rousseau and Montessori's philosophies through a narrative on how autonomy needs to be nurtured in order to help children develop a sense of responsibility and become more resilient. Jing Yu continues the discourse on this theme by querying the pedagogy behind Arts education courses in schools. She analyses two specific projects using Deleuzian and Reggio Emilia philosophies as a lens to review art education in her home country.

This Special Edition begins with Diane Gordon-Burns and Leeanne Campbell's article about *Biculturalism in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand* and discusses teacher quality and the preparation of high quality teachers in relation to biculturalism and bilingualism in early childhood centres across Aotearoa/New Zealand. In particular, the divide across and between policy, legislation, the practice of educationalists understanding, and their skill and knowledge about quality outcomes for Māori children are looked at. Anita Mortlock's article about *Children's narratives at 'show-and-tell'* reports on her research project analysing ten picture books concerned with 'show-and-tell'. Three themes were found that related to 'being known', 'being better', and 'being judged'. These themes are consistent with the studies of 'show-and-tell', suggesting that it is a socially complex event.

This is followed by Julie Plows' article titled *There's more to it! The visual art realm of three-year-old children*, where she explores selected aspects of five children participants in her visual arts research project. The article considers pertinent content knowledge, teaching strategies and implications for teaching practice in relation to the arts in early childhood education. Kate Smith's article engages with *creating alternative approaches to hear children through their writing activity*. Kate seeks to counter the predominant understanding of young children's writing activity within a classroom, which has been formed as a response to the structural framework of school literacy. "*Once there was ...*": *Expanding the literacies of storytelling in early years* by Julie Faulkner, Jane Kirkby, Julie Perrin and Dayle Manley introduces the idea of utilising professional storytellers as 'critical friends' to develop early childhood teachers' understanding of the relationships between storytelling and literacy development. Dorothy Faulkner's article *Storytelling cultures in early years classrooms*, likewise, explores storytelling, but with a focus on how children's storytelling is influenced by peers as well as adult practitioners and how especially the peer engagement supports children with English as an additional language in their telling and enacting of stories.

The final article in the Special Edition section, *Eliciting stories: Exploring images as prompts* by Nina Sabnani, draws on the Indian tradition of *Kaavad* storytelling. Here, creative storytelling, supported by a range of pictures and symbols, is explored, utilising the storytelling picture book *Home*, developed by Nina for this project. The book *Home* is inspired by the Indian *Kaavad* storytelling tradition and used as research tool to explore ways in which children *make meaning*.

The two book reviews focus on practice within the early childhood centre. In her review of Mary Renck Jalongo's (2013) edited book, *Teaching compassion:*



Humane education in early childhood, Akshada Chitre draws attention to effective strategies and resources that early childhood educators could use to facilitate compassion among young children, with specific reference to literature and other forms of narratives. Helen Lane endorses Page, Clare and Nutbrowne's, *Working with babies and children: From birth to three* (2013) as a useful resource that will support early childhood practitioners in understanding child development in more detail, with a focus on attachment, neuroscience, teaching and learning pedagogy and providing an optimal environment to support children across the early years.

We conclude this introduction to this *He Kupu* issue by drawing on Alice's wisdom to keep with the theme of narratives and the significance of children's voices:

"What is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, Chapter 1

References

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