

## Nowhere can be an island: Making inclusion happen through seeing the world beyond the borders

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*In today's globalised, interconnected world, the mobility of people across physical and virtual spaces and time has a significant influence on the young generation. It is critical for teaching professionals to create inclusive learning spaces that accommodate the diversity of families, including those from distinct religious and socio-economic backgrounds. This article looks at inclusion through a human mobility paradigm, which implies that all places are tied into "at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an island" (Urry, 2007, p. 209). Some studies emphasise that the more mobile and fluid identity is, the more successfully the person integrates in the societal experiences (Bello, 2014; Butcher, 2009; Nowicka, 2007). This article stresses the importance for teaching professionals to develop an understanding that the notion of identity in the twenty-first century undergoes constant reconstruction, thus calling to perceive and accept children as global citizens by embracing transformational, inclusive teaching approaches and environments.*

*Whatever is the uppermost in his [i.e. the learner's] mind constitutes to him, for the time being, the whole universe. That universe is fluid and fluent; its contents dissolve and reform with amazing rapidity. But, after all, it is the child's own world. It has the unity and completeness of his own life.*

(Dewey, 2001, p. 105)

Massey, in her work *For Space* (2008), conceptualises space as "open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, as a prerequisite for history to be open..." (p. 59). This position statement is informed by such a dynamic understanding of space to think about identity, human mobility, home and, importantly, perceiving children growing up in the twenty-first century as *global citizens*. The national early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017, p. 7) suggests that "As global citizens in a rapidly changing and increasingly connected world, children need to be adaptive, creative and resilient. They need to 'learn how to learn' so that they can engage with new contexts, opportunities and challenges with optimism and resourcefulness". Thus, understanding culture today not as a separate set of customs and traditions of particular people of society, but as a dynamic, rapidly changing concept. It is paramount for early childhood teachers to promote inclusive learning spaces for young learners.

The concept of global citizenship is hardly new as suggested by UK Oxfam over a decade ago. A 'global citizen' can be depicted as someone who is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen. They respect and value diversity and "... is outraged by social injustice; is willing to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place; and participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global" (UK Oxfam, 1997, p. 1).

*Home* is a material place and spatial imaginary that helps to anchor identity, by relating to people's sense of themselves, their history and social connections, to a lived experience of being and belonging in a defined place (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). *Home* is something that provides stability, oneness and security. The concept of identity, however, has recently received an excessive amount of attention, with the current presumed displacement of identity from *home* in an era of global migration and digital connectedness across national boundaries (Massey, 2008). These transformations have unsettled naturalised connections between home and identity. In some cases, prioritising

mobility and cosmopolitanism as positive forces for identity construction may suggest overcoming tribal or conservative imaginaries of identity. Conservative in this case meaning those that are perceived to rest in nostalgic desire to *retreat to place*, pulling up the drawbridge against globalisation and social change (Massey, 2008). In current circumstances, there is a need to shift our understanding of how identity formation in the growing generation should be approached, what/who influences the way identity is formed and, ultimately, whether the debate related to nurturing a strong sense of cultural identity in young children is worth maintaining.

Identity politics represents a “vast array of struggles for recognition by immigrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, and often, non-European cultures and religions against Western cultural imperialism” (Soutphommassane, 2012, p. 43). While cultural diversity in a modern society is frequently understood in terms of multiculturalism, one’s cultural identity is not merely a chosen preference but is “fundamentally tied to self-respect and dignity as a person” (Soutphommassane, 2012, p. 46). Traditionally, the term identity conceptualises why an individual or a group would follow certain cultural patterns. According to this view, this eventually describes who these individuals and groups are (Bello, 2014). Identity or how we make sense of ourselves (Fouberg, Murphy & DeBlij, 2009) and cultural identity, in particular, is conceived as an amalgam of personal attitudes, cultural knowledge and participation in society (Durie, 2010). Identity obtains its meaning from the identity of the other from whom the self is constructed and can be. In other words, a type of nexus at which different constructions of self-coincide, and sometimes collide (Hermann, Kempf & Meijl, 2014).

Social categories such as gender, race, and religion, for example, contribute to producing the background through which a human being is capable of assuming particular attributes which then become elements of his or her identity. Identity is something that is constructed within the context of society, where shared values, beliefs and cultural practices allow members to unite as a community separate and distinct from others (Tabucanon, 2014). Identity, however, should never be perceived as static, or as a set of “fixed, pre-determined cultural features individuals share” (Tabucanon, 2014, p. 17).

In the era of increased mobility, the call for new paradigms to research the phenomenology of people’s movement experiences is essential. The new mobilities paradigm, suggested by Urry in 2007 and largely underpinned by the earlier works of Bauman (as cited in Urry, 2007) on liquid modernity, implies that all places are tied into “at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an island” (Urry, 2007, p. 209). It also attempts to provide insight into the patterns of concentration and create spaces of connectivity and centrality, as well as in some cases, the disconnection that might lead to social exclusion. Urry (2007; 2011) sees social life as the space full of multiple and extended connections often across long distances, where mobilities serve as the catalyst of new forms of social life. Grieko and Urry’s (2011) study on mobilities suggests that the rise of a mobile society *reshapes the self* – its everyday activities, interpersonal relations with others, as well as how we link ourselves to the wider world. Such individualised mobility situates personal life in a complex interconnectivity of social, cultural and economic connections.

Suggested by Bourdieu (1997), the concept of *habitus* is something that is structured by one’s past and present circumstances, something that helps to shape our present and future practices. *Habitus* is depicted as a structure or a system of dispositions that generate our perceptions, appreciations and practices. Bourdieu (1997) also mentioned that practices are not simply the result of an individual’s habitus but rather of relations between one’s habitus and one’s current life circumstances. This suggests that our habitus is not something *fixed* but rather a mobile concept that changes in accordance with our surroundings, new space of living and overall changing environments we are in. Thus, developing an awareness of this constant change and creating inclusive learning spaces in early childhood settings becomes a task of paramount importance for early childhood teachers practicing in classrooms today.

Globalising and transnational processes and the new paradigm of mobility emerging in the social sciences have contributed to the anti-essentialist view of home. This assumes that under these processes a disjuncture between place and culture has transpired (Marotta, 2011). Migrants now construct multiple homes and this home is less about locality and place and more about movement and process (Marotta, 2011). The act of mobility can become a source for change, resistance and transgression of pre-existing cultural practices, but it can also be the catalyst for maintaining, reinforcing and essentialising these very same cultural practices (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Marotta, 2011).

The new conceptualisations of identity are characterised by the synergetic combination of differences. In the current wide range of transnational realities, individuals develop multidimensional forms of identification which include the local and the global, in all their diversity and interconnectedness (Nordin, Hansen & Llana, 2013). The term *mobile identity* is not a new one, with a few sources suggesting that only those who can manage their different identities well, moving smoothly from one cultural network of relationships to another, are able to show more successful signs of interaction.

Recent theories of movement and place-making have had significant implications for the concepts of culture and identity. Culture can no longer be approached as a bounded, relatively static set of ideas or meanings that are shared by a whole population of homogeneous individuals (Hermann et al., 2014). Some studies emphasise that the more mobile and fluid identity is, the more successfully the person integrates into the societal experiences (Bello, 2014; Butcher, 2009; Nowicka, 2007). Therefore, an important implication for early childhood education teachers is that genuine cultural inclusion can only take place when this understanding is developed.

Jones (2012) discusses the *hybrid* nature of identities, which like all forms of culture - are hybrid mixtures that are in a constant state of change. The same study suggests that non-essentialist approaches to identity or theorising our identities as relational produced through intercultural encounters with others has far-reaching implications for our understanding and interpretation of identity. This relational perspective thus argues that no identity is *innate*, it does not exist automatically – which in turn opposes the traditional views on an identity as being something *fixed* (Hermann et al., 2014).

Identity undergoes a constant process of construction and, like any other social and cultural process, can be understood as a process rooted in places (Fouberg et al., 2009). Verkuyten (2014) argues that cultural adaptations, developing social contacts and networks and changes in one's sense of identity are different things. They may be related to each other but the underlying factors and processes differ. Cherrington (2017) adds that the development of a positive sense of identity can be seen as a journey of many steps, and identities need to be recognised as fluid, contextual and evolving rather than tightly bounded and fixed. In the twenty-first century, children should be viewed as global citizens and thinkers able to understand the world beyond just the boundaries of their own identity, let alone beyond the physical borders of their country.

Today, it is essential to expect diversity in early childhood settings, *diversity* referring to children's cultural, ethnic, social and family background. Foreman and Arthur-Kelly (2017) note that it appears common to observe students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, as well as diverse family structures, comprising today's classrooms. Fundamentally, early childhood teachers should be geographically, economically and politically literate in order to provide an inclusive learning environment for the children and families they work with. Furthermore, as stated in *Our Code, Our Standards* (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017), learning spaces should reflect a culture-centred learning which is "characterised by respect, inclusion, empathy, collaboration and safety" (p. 20). The expectation from the early childhood teachers is to support an environment that enhances learners' diverse abilities, identities, languages and cultures and where "diversity and uniqueness of all learners are accepted and valued" (p. 20).

The Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) supports children from a variety of backgrounds and metaphorically positions itself as “a mat for all to stand on” (p. 10). This encompasses the inclusion of “gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion” (p. 13). It implies that “a curriculum must speak to the past, present and future” (p. 7). Dyson (2018) asserts that a human life comes from nothing and that in an attempt to respond to current circumstances, we all delve into our past in order to make the future. The dynamics of modern learning spaces, and these spaces being of cultural and ideological nature, however, suggests that unfortunately, it is sometimes the case when children become passive participants of futures that teachers imagine for them. These ‘futures’ are often “constrained or furthered by dominant cultural and ideological beliefs” (Dyson, 2018, p.239), thus making the learning spaces submissive to solely one existing ideology and therefore, exclusive of child’s culture and originality. The great educational philosophers and thinkers, Piaget (1951), Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) illustrated childhood experiences as highly influential and offering transformational opportunities that affect each child’s future. It is important to note, therefore, that genuine inclusion is unlikely to take place if each child’s uniqueness and individuality is not acknowledged and if there are no opportunities for self-expression and chances to *simply be*.

Five essential aspects related to understanding young children’s lived experiences as global citizens developed by Twigg, Pendergast and Twigg (2015, p. 83) best illustrate practical implications for teachers looking at creating inclusive learning spaces today:

1. Children’s social experiences are important and memorable.
2. Children are cognisant of differences and similarities between people living in various countries around the world.
3. Children make thoughtful decisions about friendship based on social behaviour.
4. Children are experienced technological users who are aware of safety rules.
5. Children act as informed consumers who make judgments about sharing, spending or saving resources, such as money.

Unpacking the practicality of these suggestions, it is worth noting that raising and educating a child in complex, changing global circumstances is a multifaceted responsibility that simply cannot be exercised without teachers possessing a wide amount of knowledge. It also cannot take place without children being given an opportunity to participate in this process, “which in turn is regulated by the level of rights granted to the individual” (Twigg et al., 2015, p. 82). Importantly, promoting and celebrating the diversity of learners should not only be confined in traditional cultural events that take place in an early childhood setting. Practicing diversity starts with the understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of the world we live in, let alone with the realisation that today, there is no place for culture as an isolated term used to characterise a child and his/her family. Raising this awareness will support galvanising authentic messages of inclusion where there is no place for segregation by cultural, social or any other stereotypes. This is supported by *Te Whāriki* which asserts that “Children learn and develop best when their culture, knowledge and community are affirmed and when the people in their lives help them to make connections across settings” (MoE, 2017, p. 20). Importantly, diversity of cultural resources plays a significant role in this learning, where “Kaiako pay thoughtful attention to providing a facilitating environment that includes a wide range of resources and opportunities to engage with important cultural tools”, with ‘cultural tools’ being “both material and psychological” (MoE, p. 21).

Considering the notion of inclusion from the rights perspective, Moloney and McCarthy (2018) view its fundamental principle in all children being able to not only coexist but learn together in mainstream settings, regardless of any differences. Early childhood education in the era of global movement and mobility becomes the perfect catalyst for inclusion as its main principles can be enacted and enhanced through inclusive practices and approaches. To enable

this, Urban et al., (as cited in Moloney & McCarthy, 2018, p. 41) suggest a series of values that underpin ‘competent professional practice’ in early childhood education contexts:

- Child and human rights to orient towards rights-based pedagogies and practices with all children, families and communities
- Democracy as the basis for meaningful participation of all children, families and communities
- Respect for diversity as the basis for working towards social justice and more equitable outcomes for all children
- Empathy
- Early childhood as a public good and public responsibility

Today, when children construct knowledge and make meaning of their world, with knowledge being cultural, social and material (MoE, 2017), it is integral to early childhood programs that they ensure a democratic and inclusive approach that is open and reflective of global changes and partnership-based practices. In *Te Whāriki*, its strand of Belonging stresses the significance of “connecting links with the family and wider world” through “making connections between people, places and things” (MoE, 2017, p. 24). Crucial to establishing inclusive learning spaces, conducive of children’s and families’ culture, values and beliefs, is developing an inclusive culture in early childhood education contexts. As Moloney and McCarthy (2018) add, for learning spaces to become more inclusive, there needs to be a collective effort to develop a more inclusive culture within the classroom. At a micro-setting level, the meaning of inclusive culture could be unpacked as taking into account an individual child’s agency and their family’s funds of knowledge. Developing an inclusive culture is unlikely to take place without teachers’ willingness to learn more about and accept the inevitable change that happens every day in the world. It is also impossible without recognising and valuing that all children are unique and respecting the diversity of the child, their family and community throughout the early childhood service (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016).

Importantly, viewing children as global citizens erases cultural borders and limitations and allows for a more accepting and holistic approach to education. Understanding the notion of global citizenship serves as a solid foundation that empowers teachers and learners as agents of change, contributes to developing critical habits of mind and promotes a shared vision of the current and future needs of the growing generation.

As thoughtfully stated in *Te Whāriki*, “Early childhood is a period of momentous significance for all people growing up in [our] culture... By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth” (Donaldson, Grieve & Pratt as cited in MoE, 2017, p. 23). Viewing the world as a global system and seeing education through a global lens prompts an important need to shift current thinking to a more open, inclusive stream that promotes more harmonious, socially just and equitable practices.

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