

Every household object tells a story: using artefacts to unlock families' funds of knowledge.

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When the teaching and learning space shifted from centre to home during the level three and four lockdowns in 2021 in response to Covid-19, student teachers used family artefacts (objects) in remote teaching activities to meet learning outcomes during their Field Placements. We will explore the use of family artefacts and their pedagogical importance in early childhood education, drawing on our own stories of two artefacts. We focus on children and families from culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) communities in early childhood education as we also come from CALD communities. We use the term CALD to emphasise the multicultural community of immigrant children and families in New Zealand who are neither Pākehā nor Māori. We propose that early childhood kaiako (teachers) could take a fresh look at ordinary household artefacts of CALD children and families in light of the unique cultural and personal meanings attached to the artefacts. Kaiako could use these artefacts in innovative and empowering ways to embrace people's culture as everyday lived experiences.

Introduction

Centre closure during the level three and four lockdowns in 2021 caused the teaching and learning space to shift from ECE centres to households. Many centres operated via remote teaching while children and families stayed at home, and kaiako worked with learning opportunities that were available in the home environment (Education Review Office [ERO], 2021). As lecturers of initial early childhood teacher education programmes, we were inspired by early childhood practitioners (also known as kaiako, including student teachers and other teachers) who adapted their curriculum innovatively and compassionately during lockdown. We asked ourselves: what can we learn from remote teaching during the lockdown as the teaching space shifted from childcare to home? From our observation, we see the potential of utilising household resources in new ways. During the lockdown, kaiako used their own family resources to design activities for children and families. Kaiako had to think outside the box to encourage children and families to use their family resources for learning. Similar to our observation, encouraging children to share their treasured objects from home is recognised as a successful example of the collaboratively-created home learning environment during lockdown (ERO, 2021). We believe that utilising family resources provides an opportunity to learn funds of knowledge from children and families. Funds of knowledge (FoK) encompasses historically accumulated and culturally developed knowledge of every household (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013; Kahuroa et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2005) and everyday cultural practices reflected in children's interests (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). We urge kaiako to pay more attention to ordinary everyday objects in children's households as a means to move towards more authentic cultural practices. We draw on Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) theory of

artefactual literacy to develop our working definition of artefact as a valued object that carries unique personal and cultural meanings to people and families. The object can be found in one's household or evoked in memory. The terms of artefacts and objects are used interchangeably in this article in line with Pahl and Roswell's (2010) theory.

Implementing cultural practices authentically

In this article, we take the sociocultural and anthropological definition of culture as everyday lived experience (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2005; Orellana, 2016), a definition that is compatible with the concepts of Funds of Knowledge (FoK) and artefactual literacies and which is key to this article. *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017), the national ECE curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand, acknowledges that children's learning derives from families' activities and everyday cultural practices. *Te Whāriki* guides kaiako to create a "local curriculum" that includes children's cultural practices and family values that are important to them (MoE, 2017, p.18). Although we focus on CALD children and families in this article, we acknowledge that all families have their cultural practices specific to their households (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Kahuroa et al., 2021). Our recommendations in this article are not exclusive to CALD children and families only. Rather, we hope to offer a springboard from which kaiako can reconsider and refine their culturally responsive practices with CALD children and families and beyond.

Te Whāriki (MoE, 2017) in New Zealand acknowledges cultural diversity and entrusts kaiako to enact pedagogy that considers children's cultural knowledge and encompasses diverse ways of knowing, being and doing. However, *Te Whāriki's* espoused value of enacting cultural diversity within ECE settings could present challenges for kaiako, unless, as Chan (2011) argues, ECE kaiako as frontline workers manage to authentically implement cultural diversity in their teaching. Researchers discuss many reasons for barriers in developing effective partnerships with CALD families (Brennan, 2007; Chan & Ritchie, 2016; Hedges, 2010; Hedges & Lee, 2010). For example, Hedges (2010) questions if teachers effectively communicate with CALD parents about the latter's understandings of curriculum and pedagogy from a cultural perspective (such as an understanding of Asian parents' cultural knowledge and perspectives or presence of Pasifika families' diverse languages in ECE settings). Another barrier in developing effective partnerships with CALD families is that kaiako may not know the families' knowledge well (Barron, 2009; Chan & Ritchie, 2016). Chan and Ritchie (2016) argue that teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand need to develop "dialogical relationships" with parents to access their families' knowledge that is otherwise not evident in dominant discourses (p. 300). Their findings demonstrate that parents whose aspirations differed from the dominant and institutionalised discourses and practices, are often disempowered from participating in ECE settings. Such disempowerment may be because of the power imbalance between teachers and CALD parents, with teachers authorising more power within their settings (Barron, 2009; Hedges & Lee, 2010). For example, many CALD parents often do not question teachers' practices because of their perception of teachers as being more knowledgeable (Chan & Ritchie, 2016).

It is important for kaiako to implement cultural practices authentically and this involves kaiako challenging generalised understandings of one's culture. Cultural knowledge that develops and accumulates over time may vary for every household (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013; 2014). This means that knowing each household's cultural practices, even if they belong to the same ethnicity, is significant. Without doing so, cultural/ethnic groups' heterogeneous nature may be overlooked (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). For example, the *saree* is a well-known ethnic

Indian wear. However, the *ghagra* and *choli*, draped as a woman's traditional attire, may hold more significance than *sarees* for families from the Rajasthan State of India. Rajasthani women's traditional dress includes a *ghagra* (a full pleated skirt), a *choli* (short blouse) and an *odhni* (a piece of light cloth to drape around the body) (Bhandari, 2004). In contrast, a *saree* is an unstitched drape worn with a long skirt beneath and a short blouse. The Rajasthani costumes are culturally significant as “a part of the socio-cultural traditions of the people”. Even though these costumes have evolved over time, they still signify Rajasthani people’s “distinctive and unbroken identity” (Bhandari, 2004, p. 52). It is important to provide families with agency to decide what aspects of their culture should be celebrated so that teachers can better understand the cultural practices of every family in ECE (ERO, 2004; Hedges & Cooper, 2016; MoE, 2017).

We agree with the scholars who advocate for family pedagogies, acknowledging that families are a rich source of cultural knowledge and practices (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Hedges, 2015; Hedges & Cooper, 2016; MoE, 2017). Pedagogies that value families as experts of their own worlds and legitimise the family/community knowledge as cultural capital (Jacobs et al., 2021) are powerful. As discussed previously, during the lockdown, the main teaching and learning space shifted from ECE settings to home. Kaiako developed a rich family-centred curriculum at that time which should be continued in innovative ways after lockdown. Now is a good time for kaiako to reflect on how to genuinely invite families and children to bring their knowledge and cultural practices to ECE. We believe that FoK and family artefacts (inspired by the theory of artefactual literacies by Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) are key to enacting family pedagogies.

Funds of Knowledge

Funds of Knowledge (FoK) comprise culturally developed and historically accumulated bodies of knowledge of each household (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2005). Gonzalez et al. (2005) used the term FoK early in their studies in the United States to refer to families' historical and cultural knowledge. They identified the significance of this knowledge to the household's wellbeing and suggested teachers explore students' cultural contexts better to support meaningful learning. FoK should be understood in relation to people’s lived experiences. Lived experience encompasses the internalisation of cultural practices, “the subjective side of culture that mediates and organises behaviour” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013, p. 33). Children learn the cultural practices specific to their households and these meaningful life experiences are often reflected through play. Cooper and Hedges (2014) offer an example. Hunter, a child whose immense interest in drumming resulted from his household's valuable knowledge of music, which he naturally observed in his church and home settings. Hunter's teachers were able to implement rich learning experiences because they accessed his FoK through ongoing meaningful discussions with his parents. Consequently, the process empowered Hunter to be a confident and competent learner (Cooper & Hedges, 2014). FoK-based pedagogy reflects a credit-based approach to education that fosters positive learner identities and aligns with the vision of children as confident and competent learners indicated in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). In Hunter's example, his FoK, when utilised in the ECE setting, contributed to his drummer identity; “I am not Hunter ... I am drummer boy!” (Cooper & Hedges, 2014, p. 170). The way Hunter uses his FoK to describe his identity as a drummer shows his funds of identity (Fol). Funds of identity is when individuals use their FoK to describe themselves; it becomes “a person’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013, p. 31). Hunter's statement provides a striking example of affirming children's identities through learning experiences embedded in their cultural practices. Other research also emphasises the significant role of teachers in developing a

deeper understanding of children's cultural knowledge that matters to children and their families (Barron, 2009; Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012; Fleer, 2012).

Teachers need to reach out to CALD families and empower them to participate within ECE settings across the ECE-home divide. It is noted that teachers who visit children's homes to learn about their cultural practices and knowledge from parents can foster meaningful learning experiences for CALD children (Cooper & Hedges, 2014). However, such cultural knowledge can be implicit to parents. "Every day cultural practices are implicit; therefore, they can be hard to recognise and articulate by parents" (Hedges & Cooper, 2016, p. 310). An additional effort from kaiako to learn about CALD families' cultural knowledge is required. CALD families and children can be invited to share their cultural knowledge through narratives concerning their everyday household artefacts.

Every object tells a story: the power of artefacts

We are inspired by Pahl and Rowsell's (2010) theory of artefactual literacies and their words that every object tells a story. Although Pahl and Roswell (2010) created this theory in the context of literacy education, we draw on the strengths of the theory and its emphases on everyday practices, the relationship between artefacts, stories and identities, and the embodied experiences associated with artefacts in the context of early childhood education. The intention is to bring awareness to everyday artefacts and objects in children and families' households, and to the special stories attached to them. The importance of valuing children's relationships with things (including objects) is also recognised in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017).

Drawing on anthropology and sociology, Rowsell (2011) argues that artefacts are integral to people's lives. Artefacts are material objects and they represent culture (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). They define artefact as:

"A thing or object that...has physical features that make it distinct, such as colour or texture; is created, found, carried, put on display, hidden, evoked in language, or worn; embodies people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities, and experiences; is valued or made by a meaning maker in a particular context (p.2)."

Artefactual literacies involve memories. They include the actual objects whether actually present in homes or remembered in narratives (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Artefacts are also sensory and embodied (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). To understand artefacts requires a way of understanding experience that is located in the body. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) remind us that "artefacts smell; they can be felt, heard, listened to, and looked at" (p. 10) and thus "telling a story involves evoked sensory experience" (p. 11). Artefacts can trigger storytelling. The theory of artefactual literacies acknowledges that every object tells a story and everyone has a story to tell (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Furthermore, it is believed that artefacts can provide "the connecting piece" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 3) that bridges the home-school divide.

The storytelling opportunity triggered by artefacts has pedagogical values. In Pahl and Rowsell's work, they argue that bringing in objects and telling stories of objects enables educators to create spaces for listening to children and families (2010) and their lives and experiences (Rowsell, 2011). The special relationship between artefacts and

migration is found in Pahl and Rowsell's work. They notice that objects can evoke migration experiences and experiences of the country where people come from. The link to migration makes this theory specifically applicable to CALD families and children who are usually new immigrants to New Zealand or descendants of earlier generations migrated from overseas.

We will use our own artefacts to explore how stories elicited by artefacts can be used to understand one's funds of knowledge and the possibility of opening up a space that welcomes and embraces people's stories.

Narrative one: dholak

The artefact significant to my family, particularly my son, includes an Indian musical instrument called *dholak* (drum in Figure 1). This drum is a handicraft artefact and a miniature version of an Indian drum. Often a *dholak* is played alongside other Indian musical instruments, and people would sit in circles while singing Indian songs in Fiji. These songs include *kirtans*, *Faag* and *bhajans* (religious hymns), traditional wedding songs, and Bollywood songs.

Figure 1

The first dholak received as a present



Note. *Dholak* is an Indian musical drum. *Tabla* is a pair of Indian musical drums. *Harmonium* is a stringed musical instrument that has become an integral part of Indian music.

I choose the *dholak* as a cultural artefact because my son has a special attachment to this drum. This *dholak* is the first musical instrument that he owned. He received this drum from my uncle when he was three years old because of his immense interest in drums. He became attracted to *dholak* when he saw them played at Indian functions as a child. Even as a toddler, he would choose to sit/stand next to the drummers at the functions and wait for opportunities to tap the drums. He chose to bring his *dholak* as one of his artefacts to New Zealand when migrating from Fiji. Again, the *dholak* found a special place in our new home, this time in the prayer room, because he seemed to have begun developing a cultural and perhaps spiritual understanding of his musical instrument. I believe it is

spiritual because *dholak* is often played with other musical instruments when *Ramayana* (the Hindu Holy book) is recited at prayers.

Moreover, his little *dholak* sparked his interest in learning to play the real *dholak* (Figure 2) with support from friends and families. His keen interest in the *dholak* prompted another present from a family member, a real *dholak* this time. His musical learning trajectory continued as he began to play other musical instruments like the *harmonium* and the *tabla*.

Figure 2

The first dholak and the real dholak



As a parent, I view the *dholak* as integral to Indian culture. I perceive that the Indian culture encompasses music and dance, gatherings and togetherness, sweet, tangy, spicy food, and much more. While recalling my son's childhood memories associated with *dholak*, I could envision lots of laughter at gatherings, colourful Indian costumes, little children running around, sounds of kitchen utensils while serving food, people having vegetarian food while sitting on mats on the grounds, and many other memories. Thus, a *dholak* is a cultural musical instrument that marks cultural celebrations and signifies togetherness, nurturing, and kinship. Moreover, I also recognise how one's cultural affiliation could inform their cultural identity. For example, my son's initial association with a *dholak* inspired his musical learning trajectory to become a classical singer, drummer and *harmonium* player. I also vividly recall him playing the *tabla* while his peers played Western musical instruments on the tune of 'Jingle bells' at his annual school function in New Zealand (Figure 3). I believe it is a beautiful example of his transcultural identity, reimagining himself as a music lover in a new cultural and physical context.

Figure 3

A photo of my son's school performance



Narrative two: Chinese calligraphy

Figure 4

A Chinese calligraphy set



The calligraphy set (in Figure 4) shows my childhood interest in writing and calligraphy. In the photo, there are two ink brushes (maobi 毛笔), one brush stand (bige 笔搁), ink (mo 墨), an inkstone (yanshi 砚石), a piece of calligraphy paper (xuanzhi 宣纸), a calligraphy mat (shuhuazhan 书画毡), and an instructional book for beginner calligraphers adopting Yan Zhenqing's work. Chinese calligraphy (shufa 书法), which can be translated as the art of writing, holds a

significant cultural meaning in China. Chinese is a hieroglyphic language and thus writing is a crucial component to the language. The calligraphy set also represents the Four Treasures of the Study (wenfangsibao 文房四宝 - brush, ink, paper and inkstone) in Chinese culture. Yan Zhenqing was one of the leading Chinese calligraphers in ancient China. He was one of the most influential calligraphers and inspired many renowned calligraphers in China for more than a thousand years. Nowadays, beginner calligraphers often imitate his script style, the Yan style, as they start learning Chinese calligraphy.

I had various interests as a child and calligraphy was one. My family supported me in attending different classes to explore my interests. I remember going to calligraphy classes, learning how to hold an ink brush (maobi), persevering even though the soft brush was difficult to control, and feeling excited about learning new Chinese words and writing them beautifully. The ink brush (maobi) is also a traditional writing tool used in ancient China. Thus, to me, learning Chinese calligraphy was also a way of learning my culture and Chinese history when I was young. In 2020, during the first lockdown in Auckland, I picked up calligraphy as one of my hobbies and self-care strategies. In recent years, I have noticed my Chinese writing abilities regressing as I do not usually write in Chinese having lived in New Zealand for many years. I have a complicated feeling that this regression may signify losing connections to my cultural roots. I wonder, if I could not write Chinese anymore, would that make me less Chinese?

Through the process of looking for artefacts that carry my personal and cultural stories, I realised that I did not bring over many objects from China. This may be due to the many times that I had moved in China, in New Zealand, and travelled between China and New Zealand. Many objects were lost in the moving process. The objects presented in this article have been acquired recently and they represent my early memories. Living in New Zealand causes me to become more conscious of my home culture. My story reflects the ideas of interculturality and transculturality as I move across cultural boundaries. I value openness towards others and acceptance of differences. I believe ethnic culture is important as I affiliate with the Chinese Han ethnicity. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) state that artefacts and identities are intertwined and I resonate with this idea. I also see my language as part of my identity and through my home language I connect with my cultural roots.

Discussion and implications

The anthropological and sociocultural definition of culture as everyday lived practices (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Orellana, 2016) is exemplified in our narratives. The artefacts demonstrate culture as lived, mundane and simple practices associated with food, family, migration, religion, music, culture, education, language, and a sense of success and pride. Household objects make visible the rich, lived, mundane and everyday practices of children and families, and special personal and cultural meanings are attached to them. As discussed previously, authentic cultural practice in ECE is desired. Celebrating cultural festivals is a critical step towards understanding cultural differences; however, kaiako need to avoid a superficial approach to celebrating cultural festivals (Hargraves, 2020). Notably, festival celebrations including food and music are mentioned in narrative one. Deep personal meanings are given to the artefacts. This finding is similar to Orellana's study (2016) as she reminds us that moving beyond a superficial approach does not mean devaluing cultural food or festivals, rather it is about how to work with these cultural symbols and events. In her study, Orellana found that talking about food that was close to children's hearts in their own cultural experiences could be a valuable way of displaying one's skills in a transcultural space. Similarly, in the author's narrative about *dholak*, *dholak* symbolises the author's personal memories about her culture, including

cultural celebrations and cultural food. Even though the story was about Fiji-Indian culture, the joy of sharing food and having intimate family time shared by the author can resonate with many across cultural boundaries.

Intercultural learning and communication occur during the narrating process. Artefacts provide good tools for people from different cultural backgrounds to express their stories and identities while making intercultural connections. By using the term intercultural, we want to emphasise that we had the opportunity to share and exchange our everyday FoK as our cultural knowledge. We talked about traditional Indian musical instruments and Chinese musical instruments and it was interesting to find that *Suona* was used in both China, India and Fiji. An open space was created for the storyteller and audience to engage deeply with culture and make visible their everyday knowledge (FoK). It was found in our narrating experience that storytelling was transformative. Telling stories about the artefacts allowed us to recognise and explore our cultural identities, language, home cultures, our relationships with others, and the cultural aspects of our personal experiences. One of the authors summarised that “I never thought about my culture so deeply before”. In our personal reflections, Pahl and Rowsell’s idea that artefactual literacy is powerful because we all have a story to tell, and we can bring the stories into our learning is evident.

The special attachment children and families have with objects should be valued, respected and reconsidered. This respect could involve kaiako learning why some objects hold significant meanings to some children which may require kaiako to work closely with children and families and let go of personal biases and assumptions. For example, during home-centre transitions, children may bring familiar family objects to the early childhood centre. Kaiako can inquire about the value and stories of the object with the child and their family and listen to their perspective with an open heart. This communication will help kaiako to cross the home-centre divide and unlock FoK of children and families. It can be mana enhancing for children and families when they are positioned as knowledge holders to share their everyday knowledge (FoK) elicited by artefacts and objects. Children and families could use artefacts to teach others about who they are (funds of identity) and where they come from. In narrative one, the musical instrument (*dholak*) contributed to creating the child’s funds of identity. The *dholak* had a special role in establishing connections between the child and his school, community, and people. The story makes visible the child’s cultural experiences that mediated his behaviour and empowered him to develop a drummer identity as a Fiji-Indian person living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Everyday artefacts can be used innovatively in ECE. Kaiako can challenge themselves to think innovatively and creatively about the relationship between artefacts, stories, and people’s culture as everyday lived experiences. One way to honour children and their relationship with special objects could be to create an exhibition in the centre (similar to the exhibition in Pahl and Rowsell, 2010) where a collective storytelling project could start. It is also worth noting that artefacts can exist in memories and a lost object can be as valuable as people’s possessions. Opportunities for storying about lost objects should be provided too. For example, drawing can provoke memories and storytelling, especially with lost artefacts. Other ways of expression, such as videoing, singing, digital stories, and photographs, should be encouraged. Kaiako could invite families to participate in storytelling together with their children through face-to-face interactions or online platforms. Artefact-elicited narratives can also be used to shift a generalised understanding of a culture to a personalised perspective of one’s culture when the unique personal and cultural meaning of an artefact is known. For example, although music is a strong aspect of the author’s culture in narrative one, a unique personal meaning is given to music and drums that other Indian households may not share.

Our final concluding comment is that through innovative early childhood practices during the lockdown, the shift in educational space from early childhood centres to home showed a way of deepening our understanding of CALD children and families, and their home cultures through household artefacts. Every household object can be viewed by kaiako as a tool to engage with each child's culture as everyday lived experiences. Artefacts allow for storytelling opportunities that can be transformative and empowering for children and families. We are all members of cultures. We invite early childhood practitioners to reflect on their cultures and work with their narratives and others as a way of entering a new space for intercultural learning and communications.

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