PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MAKING A
DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN:
CO-CONSTRUCTING UNDERSTANDINGS IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD CENTRES

A Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
at
Massey University
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Erratum

The following pages are bound out of order:

pp. ix and viii
pp. 3 & 4
pp. 56 & 57
ABSTRACT

This thesis reports an investigation of the ways in which teachers in four early childhood centres valued children’s voices as the basis for developing authentic learning experiences with them. The purpose of the study was to support teachers as they identified the changes they needed to make in their programming in order first to hear and second to engage with and extend children’s thinking. In the process of the research, teachers identified their current philosophies of learning and the evidence of this in their practices, with a view to working increasingly in sociocultural modes of interaction with and planning for children’s understandings. Changes in three propositions related to children’s and adults’ development of understandings, around which this report is organised, also represent the changes in the teachers’ thinking about children’s learning.

Teachers in four case study centres were involved in reflecting critically on their practices, in progressively focused action research programmes. Through critical analysis of teacher-child dialogues, it became increasingly clear that the metaphor of scaffolding, as researched in the psychological literature, was an inadequate one to support these teachers in developing and maintaining intersubjectivity with children. A more adequate metaphor for the sharing and revisiting of ideas seemed to be that of co-construction. In order to hear and respond to the child’s voice, as the foundation for developing intersubjectivity and co-constructing meanings, the teachers found they needed to work collaboratively with their community of learners.

A model representing levels of intersubjectivity was developed in response to the struggle to conceptualise similarities and differences between scaffolding and co-constructing learning. The model was useful in supporting understandings of the teacher’s roles in planning for children’s learning from a sociocultural perspective, through the development of ongoing and in-depth projects. The participant teachers’ transformation of their own participation and some influences on these changes were further clarified as a diagram linking the personal, the interpersonal and the institutional/community planes of interaction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research report would never have happened without the support of a great many people, many of whom I have never met, others who have shared intensely my life and my work. All have worked alongside me, across time and space, in co-constructing understandings of ways of encouraging teachers to engage with children in authentic learning activities that empower children.

My thanks to my children and grandchildren, for encouraging my commitment to research and writing, with my consequent absences from many family events. Trevor, your help in developing microphones for recording teacher-child dialogue was crucial in my data generation. Susan, your own experiences as a Masters student, including your recommendations of useful references, have been especially supportive. Vernon and Marjan, you worked even through Christmas Day to ensure that my computer was up to the task. Jenny and Angela, your support in so many ways has been consistent and valued. My extended whānau, especially Myra and Sandy you have each made your special contribution. To my partner, Mike, the perceptiveness of your “woolshed psychology” alternately supports and confronts my articulated theories of learning, providing a mirror that clarifies my thinking. While you question the vagaries of academia your support for my work is never in question.

To the teachers, the children and their parents in my case study centres, your trust in your own processes and in me has enabled many to benefit, and your challenges to me have generated new directions for understanding for us all about what happens in children’s lives. To the many early childhood groups who have invited me to speak on the topics of my research, thank you for the inspiration you have afforded me in thinking my messages through.

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To the facilitator of one of the centre programmes, your protected anonymity does not detract from my sincere appreciation of the thoroughness of your work in and your full records of, the centre’s programme of professional development.

To Chrissy Lepper and Anne MacIntyre, my thanks for taking the time to comment on my early drafts, especially when you were each facing challenges in your own lives.

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CERTIFICATE OF REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

This is to certify that the research carried out in the Doctoral Thesis entitled

Professional Development Making A Difference For Children: Co-Constructing Understandings In Early Childhood Centres

in the Department of Learning and Teaching, at Massey University, New Zealand:

(a) is the original work of the candidate, except as indicated by appropriate attribution in the text and/or in the acknowledgements;

(b) that the text, excluding appendices/annexes, does not exceed 100,000 words;

(c) all the ethical requirements applicable to this study have been complied with as required by Massey University, other organisations and/or committees: Early childhood case study management teams; the Kindergarten Association; and the Ministry of Education, which had a particular association with this study, and relevant legislation.

Please insert Ethical Authorisation code(s) here if applicable HEC97/81

Candidate's Name: Barbara Jordan
Signature: Barbara Jordan
Date: 23.07.03

Supervisor's Name: Dr. Joy Cullen
Signature: Joy Cullen
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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research carried out for my Doctoral thesis entitled Professional development making a difference for children: Co-constructing understandings in early childhood centres in the Department of Learning and Teaching, Massey University, Hokowhitu, New Zealand is my own work and that the thesis material has not been used in part or in whole for any other qualification.

Candidate's Name: Barbara Jordan

Signature

Date: 23.7.03
SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

This is to certify that the research carried out for the Doctoral thesis entitled "Professional development making a difference for children: Co-constructing understandings in early childhood centres" was done by Barbara Jordan in the Department of Learning and Teaching, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. The thesis material has not been used in part or in whole for any other qualification, and I confirm that the candidate has pursued the course of study in accordance with the requirements of the Massey University regulations.

Supervisor's Name    Professor Joy Cullen

Signature

Date   25 July 2003
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GLOSSARY

45:45 Expresses the number of children enrolled in public kindergarten morning and afternoon sessions, in this case 45 in each.

Core curriculum Regular programme provided for children; includes routines and a range of activities.

Emergent curriculum The programme of activities that develops in response to children’s own interests and strengths.

ERO The Education Review Office. A government organisation established under the 1989 education reforms with responsibility for reporting to the Ministry of Education on their reviews of schools and early childhood centres.

Encarta Computer online encyclopaedia

Focus child One of the children who are the current focus of the teaching team’s planning. Each teacher was responsible for her whānau group (see below), from which she nominated one child for each planning cycle. The teaching team then made decisions about appropriate activities and projects planned to extend each focus child’s interests and strengths, as ascertained through the team’s observations and discussions with the parents of each child and with the children themselves.

NUDist Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. (Qualitative Solutions & Research, 1997). A computer package designed to help users handle non-numerical and unstructured data in qualitative analysis by supporting processes of indexing, searching and theorising. A NUDist project is the product of the researcher’s knowledge and organisational and analytical skills. NUDist creates a powerful environment to store and explore data and ideas, to minimise clerical routine and maximise flexibility and to discover new ideas and
build on them. For further information and examples of the use of this programme in this research project, see Appendices C and D.

**Playcentre**

The Playcentre movement is a uniquely New Zealand early childhood parent co-operative that teaches and practices empowerment for both adults and children.

**Portfolio**

A folder or file for each child containing sample records of learning. Might include observations, teacher-child dialogues, records of projects, art work, photographs of activities. Maintained by Whānau teacher.

**Private kindergarten**

A sessional early childhood programme, registered under the childcare regulations with the Ministry of Education.

**Process cooking**

An area set up to provide children with maximum individual control in their cooking experiences. Equipment consists of storage units for materials and cooking utensils at child height, with choice of recipes and a display shelf for placing cards in order. Children follow instructions with support from adults; they make and cook one item, often in a microwave they programme with the aid of coloured dots; they then wash their dishes and leave everything tidy for the next child.

**Project**

An in-depth investigation of a topic worth learning more about. The investigation is usually undertaken by a small group of children within a class or group, sometimes by a whole group and occasionally by an individual child. The key feature of a project is that it is a research effort deliberately focused on finding answers to questions posed either by the children, the teacher, or the teachers and the children in collaboration (Katz, 1994).

**Project board**

A display area on which children and teachers collaborate to present the progress and some of the products of a project. This may consist of
information about the topic of investigation, artifacts that are products of this investigation and children’s representations of their developing understandings about the topic. This is a dynamic display to which teachers and children frequently refer and contribute.

Public kindergarten

An early childhood centre, usually sessional (3 hours), provided under the auspices of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Free Kindergarten Association. In contrast to some private kindergartens, public kindergartens are not run for profit. In New Zealand, early childhood centres generally cater for children in the birth to 5 years range; public kindergartens cater for the 3-5 year olds. Children usually start public schooling after their 5th birthday.

Whānau

Literally, “family grouping”. Often an early childhood centre groups children and teachers in smaller units, fostering closer relationships between teachers and children and between teachers and families. These units are sometimes called whānau, or roopu.

Whānau planning

The teacher of a whānau group maintained the portfolio records of the children in her group and was the main contact person with “her” children’s families. Although planning for each child is ideally a collaborative exercise in the teaching team, the whānau teacher had the major responsibility for co-ordinating plans for the children in her whānau group. Each child would be the focus of planning for a period of weeks, during which the child would be especially encouraged to engage in an ongoing project from their own particular interests, or a new group project might emerge.

Whāriki

Māori word meaning a mat of woven threads. Because the New Zealand national early childhood curriculum document is called Te Whāriki, the word and the metaphor of a whāriki have become popular in early childhood terminology.