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***FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
COMMUNITIES OF INQUIRY***

A thesis presented
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
at Massey University,
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Abstract

Inquiry is a fundamental human undertaking. The present study investigated interests-based curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education, through the creation of a community of inquiry between children, teachers and a researcher. In two case study settings, it explored ways teachers and children co-construct interests-based curriculum and ways teachers might strengthen coherence between research, theory, practice and professional learning to support such curriculum construction. During year-long fieldwork, the researcher drew on participant observation techniques, interviews, documentation and co-constructed inquiry discussions as sources of data. Data analysis occurred on two levels: descriptive and theoretical. Sociocultural theory provides a foundation for the approaches to learning and teaching, inquiry, the research design and lenses of interpretation.

The study uses two frameworks to explain its findings, challenging and extending current understandings of funds of knowledge and communities of inquiry. In addition, it illuminates the concept of working theories. Discussion of the notion of evidence-informed inquiry explains some types of evidence teachers bring to the complexities of curriculum decision making as their funds of knowledge and working theories, thereby arguing against narrow interpretations of evidence-based practice.

This thesis argues that interpretation of children's interests, from a sociocultural perspective, requires a more analytical understanding of children's family and community experiences and their impact on children's inquiry, and of teacher interests and responsibilities in relation to culturally-valued knowledge. Further, the thesis contends that children's and teachers' co-constructed inquiry is dependent on reciprocal and responsive pedagogical relationships that provide meaningful responses during engagement in learning-and-teaching. Links between everyday knowledge and conceptual knowledge in children's learning may be brought together. In this way, participatory learning enables children and teachers to co-create a foundation for conceptual learning. Two inquiry continua and one model are offered to incorporate the key theoretical ideas and arguments of the thesis. It is argued that the model represents components of an interests-based sociocultural curriculum and pedagogy.

A funds of knowledge approach has the potential to transform early childhood learning-and-teaching environments, and implement partnerships with families, communities (including the research community) and cultures authentically. Implications for teaching practice, teachers' professional learning, research and policy are discussed to recognise and strengthen both an inquiry focus in pedagogical relationships, and an awareness of funds of knowledge in early childhood education contexts.

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I have no special gift. I am only passionately curious.

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

- Albert Einstein

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	vi

Chapter one: INTRODUCTION

<i>Curriculum, pedagogy and inquiry</i>	1
Focus of present inquiry into curriculum and pedagogy	1
<i>Early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand</i>	3
Curriculum document: <i>Te Whāriki</i>	4
<i>Overview of thesis</i>	6

Chapter two: PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Introduction	9
<i>Curriculum and pedagogy based on play</i>	10
Teachers as key curriculum decision-makers	12
<i>Sociocultural theory in curriculum and pedagogy</i>	13
The nature of knowledge	14
Theories of formal and informal learning	15
Learning through intent participation	17
Working theories	18
Dispositions	21
Curiosity	21
Reciprocal and responsive relationships	23
Cultural tools, activities and events	24
<i>Application of sociocultural concepts to education</i>	25
Early childhood pedagogy: Current challenges	25
The role of peers in children's learning	27
Learning communities	28
Community of practice	29
Community of inquiry	30
The primacy of dialogue in co-constructing inquiry	31

A "spiral of knowing"	33
<i>Children's interests and inquiries</i>	35
Children's interests: Play-based and emergent	35
Towards a stronger interpretation of children's interests	37
Studies of children's interests	38
Children's informal learning in families and communities	39
Social capital	43
Family capital	44
Funds of knowledge	45
The potential of funds of knowledge to build sociocultural curriculum and pedagogy	47
Linking funds of knowledge with children's interests and inquiries	49
Linking funds of knowledge with teachers' professional knowledge	51
Curriculum and societal goals: Culturally-valued knowledge	52
<i>Summary</i>	53

Chapter three: TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND INQUIRY

Introduction	56
<i>Teacher knowledge</i>	56
Categories and models of professional knowledge	57
Early childhood teachers' professional knowledge	58
Teachers' funds of knowledge	59
Influences on teachers' professional learning	60
<i>Evidence-based approaches to teaching</i>	63
Linking research with teaching	63
Teachers' professional learning	66
Involving teachers in inquiry	67
Professional knowledge communities	69
Effective professional learning that links children's and teachers' learning	71
<i>Summary</i>	72
Assumptions of the present study	75
Research purposes and questions	76

Chapter four: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	77
Locating the present study methodologically	78
<i>Research design: Process, product and attitude</i>	79
Interpretivist methodology: Research design consistent with sociocultural theory	79
Case study	81
Positioning teachers actively in research relationships	82
Teacher inquiry	83
Co-constructed, participative reflective inquiry	85
The role of the researcher	86
Researcher capital and baggage	87
Positioning the researcher as the central data generation agent	88
A "critical friend"	90
Research design: An overview	91
<i>Ethical considerations: Process, product and attitude</i>	91
Ethical principles and procedures	92
Informed consent	92
Voluntary participation	94
Minimising harm and maintaining sensitivity	95
Ethical procedures: A summary	98
<i>Validity in qualitative research: Process, product and attitude</i>	99
Credibility and dependability	99
Validity and generalisability	101
Validity in the research report	101
Summary	102

Chapter five: METHODS

Introduction	103
<i>The research settings</i>	103
The centres	104
The No. 1 Kindy	105
Takapuna Kindergarten	107
The participants	109
The teachers	109

The children and their families	111
<i>Methods</i>	115
A two-phase approach	115
Phase one	116
Phase two	117
Data generation techniques	118
Participant observation	118
Fieldnotes	120
Photographs	121
Interviews	121
Curriculum documentation	123
Facilitated inquiry discussions	123
<i>Data analysis and interpretation</i>	124
Data analysis procedures	124
Step one: Descriptive analysis	125
Step two: Theoretical interpretation	127
Funds of knowledge	128
Teachers' relationships with children and families	128
Interviews in family homes	129
Teachers' interest in concept in phase two	129
Categorising popular culture	130
<i>Summary</i>	131

Chapter six: CHILDREN'S FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Introduction	132
<i>Children's funds of knowledge, dispositions and working theories in pedagogical relationships</i>	132
Family-based funds of knowledge	134
Participation with parents in household and domestic tasks	134
Parents' occupations	139
Parents' interests, talents and leisure activities	142
Parents' language, values and beliefs	145
Grandparents' occupations, leisure activities and interests	151
Adult relations' and family friends' interests and occupations	154

Siblings' and cousins' activities, interests and language	155
Holidays and other community experiences	157
Centre-based funds of knowledge	160
Peers' interests and activities	160
Teachers' interests, language and experiences	168
Community-based funds of knowledge	169
Cultural events	169
Popular culture	174
Children's working theories and spirals of knowing	177
<i>Summary and conclusions</i>	179

Chapter seven: TEACHERS' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Introduction	182
<i>Teachers' funds of knowledge</i>	183
Family-based funds of knowledge	185
Personal and family experiences	185
Relationships with children	187
Centre-based funds of knowledge	188
Relationships with children	188
Teacher beliefs and values	190
Influential role models	192
Community-based funds of knowledge	193
Teacher education influences	193
Professional learning programmes	196
Other study	198
Professional and academic reading	200
Networking	200
<i>Blurring the boundaries between research, practice and professional learning</i>	202
Connecting research, practice and professional learning	203
Approaches to boundary blurring	204
Research participation	205
Provision of data for teacher reflection	208
Data as evidence to inquire into and shift practices	210

Trial of research-based practices	214
Provision of readings	218
Teachers' working theories and spirals of knowing	223
<i>Outcomes for children</i>	226
<i>Summary and conclusions</i>	227

***Chapter eight: CO-CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES OF INQUIRY
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION***

Introduction	229
<i>Co-constructing communities of inquiry</i>	229
Inquiry as human activity	230
<i>Children's interests and inquiries</i>	233
A continuum of children's interests	234
Play-based interests	235
Continuing interests	235
Fundamental inquiry interests	236
Exemplar: Imogen and the lion hunt	240
Recognising and supporting children's interests and inquiries	241
<i>Teachers' interests and inquiries</i>	243
<i>A co-constructed interests-based curriculum in a community of inquiry</i>	246
Exemplar: "Why the tree cutting down?"	250
Making connections: Funds of knowledge, spirals of knowing, working theories and conceptual knowledge	254
<i>Summary</i>	258

Chapter nine: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction	260
Major findings	260
Key arguments of study	262
Contributions of study to the literature	263
Methodological contributions	265
Implications of the present study	266
Implications for teaching practice	266

Implications for teachers' professional learning	272
Implications for policy	274
Implications for research	277
<i>Limitations of study</i>	279
Methodological limitations	279
Case study	279
Theoretical lens employed	279
Sample	280
Interviews with children	281
Parents' contributions and positioning	281
Suggestions for future research	282
<i>Final words</i>	282
<i>Epilogue</i>	284
REFERENCE LIST	286
LIST OF APPENDICES	
Appendix 1 Teacher participant information sheet	318
Appendix 2 Teacher consent sheet	321
Appendix 3 Parents' and children's participant information sheet	322
Appendix 4 Parent consent sheet	325
Appendix 5 Child consent sheet	326
Appendix 6 Fieldnotes extracts	327
Appendix 7 Analytic memo re fieldnotes	329
Appendix 8 Teacher individual interview schedule	331
Appendix 9 Teaching team interview schedule	332
Appendix 10 Child and family interview schedule	333
Appendix 11 Analytic memos re child and family interview	334
Appendix 12 Professional learning: Content of co-constructed dialogue and inquiry sessions	336
Appendix 13 Summary tables: Descriptive analysis answering the four research sub-questions (shared with teachers)	347
Appendix 14 Summary table of children's working theories and spirals of knowing (extended version)	352

Appendix 15 Analysis of children's interests (example: Jack) (modified from Cremin and Slatter, 2004)	357
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1 Summary of research design and procedures	115
Figure 8.1 A continuum of children's interests and inquiries	234
Figure 8.2 A continuum of teachers' interests and inquiries	244
Figure 8.3. Co-constructed interests-based curriculum in a community of inquiry	248

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 Study's participants	115
Table 5.2 Data sources and alpha-numeric codes	128
Table 6.1 Participation with parents in household and domestic tasks	135
Table 6.2 Parents' occupations	139
Table 6.3 Parents' interests, talents and leisure activities	143
Table 6.4 Parents' language, values and beliefs	147
Table 6.5 Grandparents' occupations, leisure activities and interests	151
Table 6.6 Siblings' and cousins' activities, interests and language	155
Table 6.7 Peers' interests and activities	160
Table 6.8 Cultural events: A trip to Butterfly Creek	170
Table 6.9 Cultural events: Medical knowledge	172
Table 6.10 Cultural events: A researcher at the centre	174
Table 6.11 Examples of children's working theories and spirals of knowing	178
Table 7.1 Personal and family experiences	186
Table 7.2 Teachers' working theories and spirals of knowing	224
Table 8.1 "Why the tree cutting down? "	251