
Comment

Critical thinking is defined by Nikolas Rose as being

partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of received wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's own experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter. (1999, p. 20)

Taken together, many of the articles in this issue introduce research findings and ideas that interrupt taken for granted assumptions, make them stutter, and hold out possibilities for transformative practices.

The writings of Lesley Lyons, Lynley Westerbeke, and Karen Guo challenge teachers to go beyond the rhetoric of inclusion to establish practices that afford equitable opportunities for full participation and learning by all children. Lyons, writing of children with disabilities, coins the phrase "enlightened ableism" to refer to a system of beliefs and practices that privileges ability over disability in organisational, structural, and individual practices. At the same time as perpetuating practices that marginalise persons with disabilities, the use of "enlightened" inclusive language highlights a huge gap between what is said and what is practised. Lyons calls on teachers, managers and owners to "examine and disrupt the discourses at work

in their centres to ensure that the barriers to taking up responsibility toward children with disabilities are overcome".

In Westerbeke's article, the focus is on a "safe path" to ensure an intellectually gifted young child who lives life "outside the norm" is supported academically, socially, and emotionally. The article paints a vivid profile of the child herself. It provides examples from this child's journey to illustrate aspects that influenced shifts in perspective amongst the teachers in this centre, from foregrounding the child's perceived interpersonal issues and behaviour management "needs" to recognising the child as a highly competent and capable learner. This came from teachers gaining an informed understanding of the nature of giftedness, strong relationships with parents, and ongoing dialogue and debate within the teaching team.

Early childhood teachers' perspectives and experiences of multicultural education is the topic of Guo's article. Guo contends that one hindrance to multicultural practice is teachers' subject knowledge about children and their uncritical attitudes towards the "mainstream" curriculum. Minority cultures are included only as additional elements to existing "mainstream" programmes within which all children are expected to fit. Guo argues for a new theoretical frame, social reconstructionism, where people from diverse cultures collectively develop the curriculum. This will require teachers to recognise and critically examine dominant "mainstream" practices, re-thinking their effectiveness beyond what is safe and comfortable.

A second set of articles in this issue examines ways in which teachers have found about and drawn on the funds of knowledge that reside within children, families, and communities to generate new thinking and practice. Maria Cooper, Helen Hedges, Bianca Harper, Daniel Lovatt, Trish Murphy and Niky Spanhake used the concept of “funds of knowledge” as a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tool to explore partnership connections between the contexts of home and early childhood centre. Their analysis shows ways in which visits to family homes were able to transform relationships and curriculum by positioning teachers as learners and empowering families to participate.

Daniel Lovatt’s article provides examples and analysis of how he investigated and unpacked teaching strategies that challenged and supported the development of children’s working theories. His examples of interaction

and dialogue reinforce the argument that, central to teaching and learning, “time for rich dialogue, strong relationships and conversations/experiences based on children’s interests are required”.

Finally, Lesley Rameka discusses aspects of the journeys and emergent thinking of teachers/kaiako who participated in the Te Whatu Pōkeka – Assessment in Kaupapa Māori Early Childhood Practice Study. Her study was undertaken from a kaupapa Māori research framework that focused on areas of importance and concern for Māori, and space for Māori voices to be heard. Rameka identifies the need to problematise current understandings of assessment and practice to ensure congruence with one’s own philosophical beliefs and aspirations for children. A breakthrough for some of her teacher/kaiako participants came when children’s learning was viewed from a whānau perspective and assessments were

written for whānau – an idea congruent with Māori thinking and ideas of communalism and whānau.

These articles suggest transformative practices are possible, but teachers must actively seek solutions to the challenges that arise from a commitment to social justice. They will be aided in these endeavours by professional guidance and support from researchers and advisers, access to theoretical understandings and research literature, and opportunities to gather data, discuss and debate together and with others.

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Reference

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom. Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.