

Exploring Language, Literacy, and Identity Connections through Play-Based Education in Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Communities

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The starting point for this issue of *Language and Literacy* was a meeting of teachers who work with young children in northern rural and Indigenous communities in four Canadian provinces, together with researchers from Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. A Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connections Grant (SSHRC) provided the funding to bring everyone together to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in May, 2016 in order to create a dialogic platform between researchers, educators and collaborators to engage in collaborative analysis and knowledge production focusing on young children's oral language and writing development in rural, remote and Indigenous contexts.

The teachers are participating in a six-year action-research project funded by a SSHRC Partnership Grant, entitled Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play (NOW Play), aiming to support children's oral language and writing development, and their educators' pedagogical and research capacities. The project responds to a need to examine and challenge dominant metrocentric curricula, research and practice perspectives (Corbett, 2015) that "tend to position the rural in deficit rather than as different" (Corbett & White, 2014, p. 1). The project also responds to research showing that Indigenous children are not being well served by Euro-centric curricula and teaching practices that are carried out by teachers with inadequate understandings of Indigenous cultures, languages, epistemologies and beliefs (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele, & James, 2014).

At the time of the meeting, participating teachers and early childhood educators had been video-recording children's play interactions and photographing written work that accompanies play in their kindergarten, grade one and Aboriginal Head Start classrooms for two years. Selected video and photograph data were released to researchers collaborating on the project for their analyses and insights on what the data show about children's language, literacy and conceptual learning. The collaborators, bringing their experience and knowledge from the fields of Indigenous education, speech-language pathology, early writing, and play in early childhood, presented the results of their analysis and proposed implications for classroom practice and teachers' action research at the Toronto meeting. Some of those presentations were revised to become the papers in this special issue.

With the overarching goal of informing practice, these papers do not take the conventional research report format usually found in *Language and Literacy*. Their emphasis is on implications for classrooms and starting points for classroom-based research. Additionally, because collaborators whose papers are included in this special issue had not been part of the data collection process and had access to a small portion of the NOW Play data gathered over two years, their papers emphasize ways in which the literature and their previous research within their international

contexts open up new ways to think about the NOW Play data. Their papers do not include the research questions and methods for the data collection. This information can be found in publications by some of the NOW Play researchers (Peterson, 2017; Peterson, Eisazadeh, Rajendram, & Portier, submitted; Portier & Peterson this volume; Yaman Ntelioglou, McIntyre and Palmer-Clarke, submitted). As summarized in the following paragraphs, collaborators, with their multidisciplinary theoretical lenses and diverse cultural backgrounds, have provided interesting insights into ways of supporting the language and literacy of young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

Focusing on the Calls to Action by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the need to support the literacy achievement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Northern, rural and remote Canadian communities, the first two articles examine culturally sensitive play-based approaches in early learning and child care environments. In their article Anderson, Horton, Kendrick, and McTavish provide an extensive historical background of the concept of "funds of knowledge" and provide a model of how "funds of knowledge" were actualized with young children analyzing data from an Aboriginal early learning context from NOW Play Manitoba sites. Building on the discussion on culturally sensitive approaches in language and literacy education, Peltier, an Anishinaabe scholar, in her article presents case narratives, including a narrative that focuses on NOW Play data from the Aboriginal Head Start Program in Manitoba drawing conceptually and theoretically on the Aboriginal pedagogy she developed from her research in an elementary school. She proposes that this Anishinaabe pedagogy can be considered as a framework for a family literacy model.

The articles in this special issue illuminate the cognitive, social and affective potentials of play-based pedagogy for language and literacy learning. Language, literacy and identity connections through play-based education are further examined from an international perspective in the article by Joanna Williamson and Helen Hedges from New Zealand, the article by Gisela Wajskop from São Paulo, the article by Resi Damhuis and Eefje van der Zalm from the Netherlands. Williamson and Hedges stress the importance of local and culturally responsive frameworks to empower children's voices bringing into focus aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural and bilingual early childhood curriculum framework, *Te Whāriki*, and ideas from the corresponding early childhood narrative assessment framework developed by Māori early childhood academics for Māori children, *Te Whatu Pōkeka*. Wajskop explores the connections between play-based learning and literacy drawing on data from an action research with 285 children in impoverished areas of São Paulo. She argues that "by enriching children's oral skills with the reading of books, teachers create opportunities to turn playing into a literate activity". In their article, Damhuis and van der Zalm explore the role of interaction and dialogue for language development during play-based classroom practices sharing findings from their empirical study with teachers and students in three preschool institutes in the Netherlands. Working within the learning community teachers from preschool and kindergarten they propose what they term as a "provocative approach" in order to enrich student interaction during play and create a rich verbal learning environment for first and additional language learners.

With the understanding that early experiences and development in writing are significant for literacy development, another international collaborator of the NOW Play project from New Zealand, Judy Parr, examines how play-based approaches support early writers through the examination of writing samples from kindergarten and grade one children in three Indigenous Northern Communities in Ontario and three kindergarten classrooms in a Northern Alberta that are part of the NOW Play project. The last article by Shelley Stagg Peterson and Christine Portier

presented in this special issue describes an action research project conducted as part of the larger NOW Play in order to explore the design and use of an observation/formative assessment tool, Observing Children's Use of Language (OCUL), that allows teachers to examine the ways in which children use language to carry out social purposes during typical dramatic and collaborative play in kindergarten and grade one classrooms.

The examination of a range of theoretical perspectives about language, literacy and identity connections through play-based approaches in education presented in this special issue aims to inform advocacy and ongoing culturally-relevant practice to develop young Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children's oral language and literacy development in their first as well as additional languages.

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An Anishinaabe Perspective on Children's Language Learning to Inform "Seeing the Aboriginal Child"

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Abstract

This paper critically examines attitudes and professional practices based on Western-European epistemologies that perpetuate the socio-cultural mismatch between many Aboriginal children's home and school. In the spirit of the Calls to Action by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an Anishinaabe¹ collaborator on the NOW Play interdisciplinary collaborative research project advocates for social responsibility and cultural competency in research and educational praxis within the context of the early learning and child care environments of Aboriginal² children. Culturally sensitive approaches for "seeing the Aboriginal child" are illustrated for moving forward in supportive relationships to promote research and learning in early learning and child care settings. This paper underscores and illustrates the first priority for researchers and educators: to take the time in research and pedagogical encounters to really "see" the Aboriginal child through appreciation of the sociocultural, philosophical, and linguistic distinctiveness of Aboriginal families.

Discovery of new knowledge in novel contexts and refinement of understandings with new insights, once consolidated are foundational to knowledge mobilization strategies that include professional development training. A generative process uncovers more effective strategies that honour Indigeneity³ and meet Aboriginal children's learning needs.

Introduction to the Context

This paper arises from my role as a collaborator on the interdisciplinary team of NOW Play project researchers and draws on my expertise in Aboriginal education, language and literacy development in early learning and childcare contexts and the field of speech-language pathology. The NOW Play research project aims to bring an interdisciplinary collaboration of university-based researchers and expert educators together with community-based early learning educators and child care practitioners,

¹ The term Anishinaabe refers to Anishinaabemowin-speaking people and the group includes the Algonquin, Chippewa, Delaware, Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibway and Potawatomi people of the Great Lakes Region.

² The term Aboriginal is commonly used in Canada and is used in this paper to refer specifically to the Indigenous people in Canada (Helin, 2006). "Aboriginal" is the term used in the Canadian Constitution to refer to Indian, Inuit and Metis".

³ According to the International Labour Organization of the United Nations, the concept of indigeneity refers to: *tribal peoples whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations, and to peoples who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabit the country at the time of conquest or colonisation.* (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Article. 1.

parents and other caregivers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children (Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play, website). Critical discourse ensures the integrity of research and mobilization of locally-developed contextualized practices across theories of language and literacy development, assessment, and professional learning in this project. A collaborative, relationship-based process integrating Aboriginal cultural knowledge and ways of learning is foundational to the project long-term goal of developing a family literacy model tailored to the needs of educators and parents/caregivers in northern communities.

As a NOW Play project community collaborator I strive to inform a process of disrupting the status quo of Western-based research and educational approaches and bring forward the need to change the way we “do” education and school-based interventions and research. This paper will identify complex issues to consider within a wide context of home-school-community and will illustrate reflexivity to inform praxis, overcoming cultural bias and developing culturally safe practices.

Educators and researchers face challenges in collaborative relationships with Aboriginal communities due to epistemological differences and professional attitudes that stem from historical subjugation of Indigenous knowledge. Most educators and investigators are unaware of the sociolinguistic practices and cultural background of the Indigenous community and language and learning assessments do not take into account the cultural and ideological differences (Ball, Bernhardt, & Deby, 2006; Ball & Lewis, 2005; Jonk & Enns, 2009). Development of our professional cultural competency allows us to have a glimpse into what it means to experience learning and assessment from the perspective of an Indigenous consciousness.

This paper presents case narratives to illustrate how an Indigenous learning paradigm can be honoured and how to develop orality consciousness within an Aboriginal context. I describe an Aboriginal pedagogy developed from my research in an elementary school that is inclusive of thinking, intuitive reflecting, experiencing and doing, relating and feeling (Peltier, 2016). This model is shared to inform the NOW Play research project process of creating a wholistic⁴ family literacy model. A wholistic learning experience for the Aboriginal child is especially relevant as it honours Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. The Aboriginal pedagogy is beneficial to all learners by stimulating a learning paradigm inclusive of ongoing meaning-making and learning, student belonging in the classroom community, and reinforcement of identity and value as a learner. A context that stimulates all aspects of the learner and emerges from being in-relationship with early learning educators and staff, Aboriginal children and families will fuel creative processes for multi-literacy cultural connections, play-, narrative-, and inquiry-based learning processes.

Developing the role of allies in Aboriginal education and early language and literacy development is foundational to an ethical research relationship that places the vision of the Aboriginal community in the center. “Seeing the Aboriginal child” requires non-Aboriginal educators and researchers to work from an observational and listening stance that informs a contextualized inquiry in research in the NOW Play project.

⁴ The ‘w’ at the beginning of this word places emphasis on balance in the circular, inter-relational aspect of an Indigenous paradigm. The term is used here to invite a critical response to the term “holistic” associated with a Western-European Christian ideology (“holy”) and the violence of the colonial project which have inflicted harm and caused myriad spaces of emptiness (“holes”) within Indigeneity.

FitzMaurice (2010) illustrates his challenging role as a non-Aboriginal researcher and ally and states that “meaningful alliances . . . require a voluntary giving up of advantage as a coming together on the Other’s terms. . . . Attempting Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal alliances . . . requires a full consideration of the intersecting manifestations of power, race, and colonization” (p. 353). Battiste and Henderson (2000) and Battiste (2008) discuss protective factors for Indigenous knowledge and ethical approaches in culture-based research.

Background

Addressing bias – Western literacy and Indigenous orality

Western literacy and Indigenous oral traditions are situated within two different types of knowledge or epistemological frameworks and modes of discourse and oral traditions have been misrepresented. Indigenous scholars, hermeneutic researchers and postcolonial theorists have examined historical contexts, cultural differences and educational implications of Western literacy and Indigenous orality traditions. In classical Greece, conceptions of Western literacy arose from Plato’s theory that only rationality founded on logic and cognition are the method and goal of education. The Western tradition created “a Cartesian dualistic notion of a print/oral split whereby the value of textual necessity was prized over oral and experiential knowing” (Kulnieks, Longboat, & Young, 2010, p. 22). When a binary opposition of Western literacy versus Indigenous orality is perceived, Aboriginal cultures are defined as oral traditions and the discourse follows that they are non-literate societies. Chamberlin (2000) explores how the English word holds social and political power while the Indigenous orality of traditional Aboriginal cultures affects how knowledge is imparted to Aboriginal students in a way that does not conform to Western logic. A CBC interview of anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner explains that “a different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance” and fuels marginalization (as cited in Chamberlin, 2000, p. 136).

Dichotomous thinking regarding Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples interferes with respectful relationships and solutions to educational, social, and political inequities. Kulnieks, Longboat, and Young (2010) distinguish Western and Aboriginal ways of knowing about the world in terms of world views, consciousness, and modes of discourse rather than in terms of a Western-literate/Aboriginal non-literate dichotomy. Chamberlin (2000) applies postcolonial theory to acknowledge contradictions in our dichotomous thinking and talking about language. The author (p. 138) describes the Aboriginal context, pointing out that “every culture has eyes and ears” and forms of writing with meaningful signs and symbols are just as important as the stories and songs. “Every culture not only sees things, but also *reads* them” and “every culture not only hears but also listens to things”.

Indigenous ways of coming to know and Indigenous knowledge have been marginalized in the formal Western-European-based educational system and when oral language is considered as a teaching method, it has historically been the literate Western tradition that is implemented. Piquemal (2003) illustrates the dichotomy between native North American oral traditions and Western literacy and implications for narratives in educational practices. “Orality tends to reveal a world in terms of action, process and becoming,” whereas “literacy is directional and focussed, allowing the viewer to select and dissect from the field of visual experience [textual representations]” (Frey, 1995, as cited

in Piquemal, 2003, p. 115). Piquemal discusses the differences between orality and literacy in how narratives are read, heard, and understood in that Western literacy consciousness usually requires an analysis and deconstruction of texts, whereas orality consciousness implies that meanings arise from the story as a whole in a holistic context.

In spite of new theoretical approaches and political will to enter into new relationships towards educational transformation, orality consciousness remains to be less important than literary consciousness in the schools and the oral tradition of Aboriginal learners is ignored. Literacy has become the hallmark of Western societies and the privileging of written language in schools has created overpowering positions of the literate Western tradition in schools (Piquemal, 2003). Orality and literacy are different in how stories are read, heard, and understood (Cajete, 1994; Piquemal, 2003). “Most schools pay attention only to Western forms of storytelling and ignore Native oral traditions of storytelling” (Piquemal, 2013, p. 119) that relate to Aboriginal culture, identity, and socialization. Archibald (1990) discusses the problem in education where Aboriginal people find it difficult to find a suitable bridge between orality and literacy and the author advocates for recognizing “First nations orality . . . as having intellectual as well as social benefits to learners” (p. 78). Kulnieks, Longboat, and Young (2010) discuss the hermeneutic reading event for meaning making and explains that within an oral culture the storyteller integrates and synthesizes meaning from dynamic interaction and unification of mind with the lesson of place. Such a landscape and storytelling dynamic has generative qualities pertinent to current literary traditions and curricula.

Creating space for the oral tradition and Indigenous ways of knowing

Indigenous scholars acknowledge the power of attitudes, beliefs and values within society to transform educational space and identify Indigenous thought and ways of being that are foundational for dialogic inquiry regarding contemporary issues and equity (Battiste, 2010; Dion & Dion, 2004; Simpson, 2004 & 2014). An essential principle of an Aboriginal paradigm is perception of the big picture or seeing all contextual interconnections and this wholism is an essential principle of Aboriginal epistemology. Western ways of knowing are closely tied to viewing the world objectively with scientific and rational thought and logic. Aboriginal ways of knowing focus on the “heart-mind connection” (Gehl, 2012) and an “inner space or incorporeal knowledge paradigm” (Ermine, 1995). Dumont (1976) explains this perception as “a primal way of *seeing*” or “360° vision” that is different from a view of the world “in its tangible form and in a linear fashion . . . [Ojibwa] regard their own personal life and history as the mysterious complement of ordinary and non-ordinary reality . . . expressed as *simultaneous* realities” (p. 78).

Scholars from diverse academic and cultural perspectives have provided information about Indigenous knowledge as a process situated within a context of relationships. A few examples from the body of literature are presented here. Anishinaabe scholar Ray (2012) illustrates that Indigenous knowledges are not like Western knowledges. “Traditional knowledges are not held to the standards and constricted to the boundaries of Western knowledges” (p. 90). Mi’kmaq scholar and educator Battiste (2008) states that “no uniform or universal Indigenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge exists—many do” (p. 501). Indigenous knowledge is an animated process and experience. Cree philosopher Ermine (1995) discusses Indigenous knowledge as an interaction of life

experience, relational collectivity, and inner knowing, for example, “experience is knowledge” (p. 104).

Respect for and acknowledgement of different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing go a long way toward creating relationships in life-long learning and research collaborations that are responsive to the vision of the Indigenous community. The re-telling of traditional stories from Indigenous elders maintains an interconnected body of ancestral knowledge in the classroom. Indigenous knowledge means different things depending on what the listener knows, understands, and experiences and listener interpretation is governed by what they need to focus on. How human relationships with place are understood and experienced ties directly to the relationships that Aboriginal people have with each other. Educational and environmental theorists identify the problem with specific subject areas in school that compartmentalizes education into discrete subject areas and this is a disservice to students when opportunities for understanding the connections between language, location and environment and appreciation of interconnectivity and inter-dependence with the Earth and nature are ignored.

Cultural competency and cultural safety

Universities and training programs do not adequately address cultural bias and the development of culturally safe practices within the Indigenous learning context. Teachers’ and professionals’ epistemologies are Western literacy-based and focus on abilities to write and represent information in specific ways. Academic disciplines represent very compartmentalized knowledge into specialties while Aboriginal people perceive a wide ranging and wholistic knowledge base (Kulnieks, Longboat, & Young, 2010). Mainstream approaches to educational assessment often focus on the learning deficits of Aboriginal people and ignore positive outcomes (Cappon, 2008, p. 61). Rather than seeing the Aboriginal child as “at risk” and in need of educational and specialized child development approaches and responding by enacting our Western-based teaching and consultative roles of evaluation, assessment, and intervention, we can support the child’s autonomy as a learner by appreciating cultural differences and by striving to acquire cultural competence. Ball (2008) investigated the practise of speech language pathologists and their training needs and illustrated a process model to approach cultural safety in practice. Practitioners’ engagement in observing, listening, interacting and reflecting leads to understanding interactions among members within the cultural community on their own terms. Respecting the child’s cultural identity and way of being without challenge or harm means that the teacher or practitioner’s interactions promote cultural safety.

Professional engagement in a process of developing cultural competency honours the Aboriginal child as we value their unique cultural, social, historical and political experience and honour our role as learners in the Aboriginal education context to develop understanding about the wide context of the home-school-community-nation. Learning about and coming to understand the experience of colonization and socio-cultural-linguistic impacts of displacement from the land and intergenerational trauma from residential schools is a personal process that requires commitment and time.

Researcher and educator relationships with Aboriginal people have been shaped by popular historical discourses of stereotypes and racism in Canada. Dion (2013a) is an Aboriginal educator who illustrates “learning in and through relationship” and the process where true, respectful relationship-building creates “valuing of Indigenous peoples” in the

schools. Dion (2013b & 2007) leads teachers to overcome their personal resistance to the transformational process which she describes as “the perfect stranger” phenomenon, a form of racism. She leads teachers to examine the source of biased attitudes and to examine their relationships with Aboriginal peoples and to move forward in developing relationships with Aboriginal students and communities.

Of particular relevance to engagement within the Indigenous research and school context is understanding the relationship of the child, school, and community to develop teaching and assessment strategies. Hart (2007) illustrates a strong focus on people and entities coming together to help and support one another in their relationship within the community. He refers to Weaver (1997) who coined the term “communitism” to describe the “sense of community tied together by familial relations and the families’ commitment to it” (Hart, 2007, p. 32). Aboriginal peoples’ ways of knowing are complex, and understanding the educational and research implications requires turning our attention to see the breadth and depth of issues from the perspective of the child’s community and family.

Today, Aboriginal people are in the process of critical awakening and cultural resurgence and Aboriginal cultural and identity factors are complex. McCaskill, FitzMaurice and Cidro (2011) explain that Aboriginal identity is understood through a complex process pertaining to how one self-identifies (e.g., sense of self, family background, personality, socialization experiences, etc.) as well as how members of the larger society perceive them (e.g., positive or negative stereotypes, media images, effects of residential schools and colonization, etc.). An individual’s identity is about ‘meaning’ and is formed and maintained as a social process of interaction with others. Identities are both individually unique and collectively shared. Sense of cultural identity and supportive relationships are strongly associated with school success of particular relevance for Aboriginal student engagement in school.

Professional and social responsibility are motivating factors as we respond to the Truth and Reconciliation *Calls To Action* synopsis report (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015b) and engage in relationship with Aboriginal peoples toward educational transformation. As Aboriginal people tell their stories, Canadians in general—and educators in particular—are being exposed to the history of Canada concerning the Aboriginal peoples’ experiences of losing Indigenous languages and cultural ways of knowing, doing, and being with family and community (Government of Canada, 2008; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a, 2015b; United Nations, 2008). Federal and provincial governments support a climate of change, and decolonization processes are advancing in Canadian society and schools. Wholistic healing processes and the reclamation of cultural practices such as the oral tradition and language, and family and community ways of being in relation are called for in light of reconciliation.

Speech-language pathology transformation

Aboriginal students have experienced biased educational practices based on colonial discourses, racialized identities and misunderstood Indigenous English language varieties. Non-Aboriginal researcher, Sterzuk (2011 & 2008) draws on postcolonial and critical race theory to discuss these issues and to make a contribution to radical changes in teacher training and Aboriginal education. Speech-language professionals can be

supportive allies for transformation in their work that can build communicative competence and empowerment. Professional practice guidelines concerning clinicians working with Aboriginal populations in Canada recommend that the speech-language pathologist work in collaboration with people in the community who are proficient in the language or dialect and who are from the same cultural background as the child. Recommendations for effective, culturally and linguistically appropriate services responsive to community values and needs are described (Speech-Language & Audiology Canada [SAC], 2010). It behooves speech and language pathologists engaged with service provision to Aboriginal children to use a lens of viewing the Aboriginal child's presenting profile of speech and language behaviours to identify dialect and socio-linguistic cultural differences versus speech and language impairment and to communicate this to teachers and family members.

It is important to note that the historical subjugation of Indigenous languages and knowledge has also impacted the values of *Aboriginal* teachers, parents, and community members. In most instances, Aboriginal people have not had the opportunity to engage in a formal educational setting with their children that honours Aboriginal identity and ways of learning and interacting. Aboriginal parents and community members have a long history of hurt and distrust regarding formal education. Involving the learner's parents and family in learning assessment and programming can facilitate trust and increase parents' interest to engage with their children at the school. Consequently, cultural integrity will be safeguarded as Indigenous people model the oral tradition and relational, process-based ideology of Indigenous pedagogy and thought within the context of the educational institution. Additionally, as Aboriginal parents and community members participate, their capacity to be acknowledged as knowledgeable and helpful resource people can be realized and celebrated. Transition issues between the home and school/childcare center can be better understood and responded to when the child's family is involved in the child's childcare program or school.

"Seeing" the Indigenous Child through Case Narratives

The following case scenarios are presented here to illustrate how seeing the Aboriginal child relates to culturally responsive research and teaching praxis. Experience and maturity as a speech-language pathologist and educator who engages in critical, reflective practise supports my contribution.

Twenty years ago, my speech-language professional practise experiences, observations, and intuitive processing as an Aboriginal woman, supported my sensitivity to culturally-based communication patterns and relationships to emerge. I worked in a community mental health clinic setting, and one winter, an Anishinaabe father and child visited me for a series of weekly sessions. My work at this setting followed a Western-centered medical model. I first documented deficits and assigned one or two labels to define the child's disability, and this was followed by a written treatment plan with explicit speech and language targets and exact pre-planned language stimulation techniques based on behaviour modification protocols for each session. The two-and-a-half year-old girl had been born with a cleft palate and she arrived at the clinic in a tiny sleigh pulled by her father. This little girl's parents had been navigating the health system to access medical specialists and procedures located in the city five hundred miles away and her dad showed commitment to bring her for speech therapy in their community. I recall abandoning my specific intervention goals and behaviour modification approaches to correct her speech

that I had pre-planned for the session. Instead, I put on my coat and opened the windows along one wall of the therapy room. The three of us observed and talked about the birds and trees and took turns blowing bubbles out of the windows. We happily noted their course of movement in the wind, exclaiming “Pop!” when each met their demise. This girl has grown into a beautiful, personable young woman and when I was recently back in the community and saw her working, I shared this story with her. She laughed and shared a big smile and said that she would ask her dad to remember and share this story about her early life.

A few years later, I was in private practice and worked out of my home. A parent had been contacted by her four-year-old son’s early childhood educator in response to him “failing” the kindergarten screening. It was the Anishinaabe boy’s father who brought him to see me for language programming. I remember highlighting vocabulary and concept learning in a play-based approach. The boy’s dad was over 6 feet tall and he was receptive to getting down on the floor in my small play room with his child. I was familiar with the father’s role in our community as a heavy equipment operator and strategically made available a variety of trucks and vehicles and books and pictures about heavy equipment. I observed that the boy and his father named every type of vehicle and machine, labelled parts in detail, and sorted and grouped the items by function and features! It became clear that this little boy spent much time with his father and knew a lot about working with equipment to dig, push, or pull material and move things. After seeing them a few times and visiting the early learning center, I felt confident that this child was capable and had excellent language-learning supports and relationships in his environment. I did not consider the Western-based speech and language screening results at face value and did not see this young boy as language-deficient. This, I knew, was enacting my clinical judgement and was based on my Indigenous perception of the big picture surrounding this case. I encouraged family members and educators to keep doing what they were doing. I think that if this child had been seen by a clinician using a Western pedagogy without cultural competence, he would have been seen individually for session after session of labelling and describing activities using picture cards perhaps with his father sitting outside in the waiting room. Sadly, this child’s father passed away a few years ago. Recently it was my pleasure to see his son (who is now a young man) working in the city. We chatted about his success in school and his new job and together we storied about the special time when he was so small in comparison to his dad while they played on the floor together.

In my consultative role with the NOW Play project, I had the opportunity to view a transcript and six-minute video from an Aboriginal early learning context where a child’s grandfather demonstrated skinning a marten. I appreciated the opportunity to observe the interaction and to reflect on the cultural paradigm. Grandfather knelt at the table with his grandson on his lap and he spoke into the child’s ear as he demonstrated to the group of several children who were gathered around. He provided hand-over-hand experience for his grandson as he shared holding the knife and demonstrated how to separate the pelt from the animal’s head and feet. The little boy and the other children moved in to closely watch the procedure. I could not help but notice how the educators brought chairs and asked the children to sit down at the table during the interaction because I have never seen anyone sit while engaging in an activity like this together in the community context. Use of a sharp knife in close proximity to young children is a novel experience in most schools, and most certainly, supporting a young child to cut with it is unheard-of. I also thought about a barrier

to this learning opportunity in the schools as health and safety legislation precludes such activities and involvement of the Aboriginal community.

Grandfather talked about what he was doing and named the animal, directing attention to features such as markings on the pelt. He related this activity to some of the children's home experience, and mentioned certain children's family members who are hunters and fishermen. Grandfather recounted seeing different colours of martens in their natural habitat. The children talked about what they were seeing and one child held his nose to express how he was feeling. The early learning teacher shared her knowledge by speaking about what part of the animal was being skinned and she directed the children's attention to actions. What an excellent culture-based activity that builds the identity and self esteem of the children and creates space for an Indigenous paradigm of learning by seeing and doing. The grandson's identity and pride are especially honoured by the creation of space for Grandfather as teacher.

Language Revitalization and Bi-Literacy School Contexts

In the institutions of education and care, Indigenous languages are not particularly visible and in spite of this, Indigenous children naturally create a space where they can use their language. Within early learning and childcare settings, Indigenous language use tends to occur in or around literacy. The local Indigenous language is frequently printed to label objects and places in the class/room and reference is made to pictures in story books using names for animals, family members, places. An Indigenous child attending an early learning or childcare program in a First Nation community and situated within the context where educators/practitioners speak the Indigenous language, are immersed within a local literacy (e.g., Cree language, Anishinaabemowin). Since the official language of the institution is English, the child experiences a bi-literacy environment, engaging receptive and expressive oral and written language skills and they develop first and second language abilities.

Such a bi-dialectal educational context is supportive of language maintenance and revitalization efforts of the Aboriginal community and provides an impetus for involvement of family and community members to honour the oral tradition. Hornberger (1997) discusses the societal and grassroots impacts on the maintenance of minority languages and states, "...the status of Indigenous literacies is linked to larger political, economic, and attitudinal forces" (p. 358). Teachers and Elders in the Indigenous community demonstrate that Indigenous language counts and attitudes change as political will is created from the bottom-up for Indigenous language literacy. As multiple literacies are demonstrated in Canada, the child's Indigenous language is valued as a wonderful resource and Anishinaabemowin or Cree language for example are not seen as a problem, Hornberger states that local literacies will thrive in such a situation. The storytelling oral tradition provides learners with opportunity to become immersed in the culture/language/thought process of coming to know the self in relationship to others and the Earth.

Engagement in Discovery and Innovation

Respect for Anishinaabe ecological relational knowledge and awareness of Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom is supportive of socially-responsive educational transformation that leads educators and practitioners to provide stimulating approaches and

engagement in innovation. The educational model of inquiry-based learning in group collaboration with teachers is in-line with this shift in our role from ‘lead knower’ to ‘lead learner’ (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 5). In the learning context of the Aboriginal child, we have opportunity to question and investigate our existing knowledge and assumptions and to foster a culture of inquiry.

Receptivity to different ways of interacting and speaking facilitates an attitude of appreciation and respect that is counter-intuitive to prescribing Standard English based on teachers’ and practitioners’ Western-based professional training and socialization experiences. Researchers and educators examine the language that Aboriginal children bring to school in consideration of the oral language tradition and how they share their understanding of the world in story. “The persistence of stories and story telling suggests that it is central to an Aboriginal intellectual tradition and provides the core of an educational model” (Graveline 1998, p. 64). Speech-language practitioners and linguists have described First Nations dialect and illustrated how it as an integral component of an individual’s identity and represents a culturally relevant link to the home community and land base (Ball, 2006; Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Peltier (2014) offers a model for including dialect in positive communication experiences in school, plus skill development for code-switching for “home talk” and “school talk”. Non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal researchers have described the oral tradition and unique narrative features of Aboriginal students (Pesco & Crago, 1996; Peltier, 2014 & 2011).

An Indigenous Pedagogy

An educational approach is described by Peltier (2016) to demonstrate a culturally relevant wholistic learning process that honours learner autonomy in a classroom setting where an hierarchical power structure is absent in the Circle. This is different from a Western-centered formal learning context where the teacher or practitioner is an authority-figure and are perceived to hold all of the knowledge or answers to questions that arise. The Anishinaabe oral tradition is illustrated through presentation of local Teachings and learner engagement in Story Circles. The figure below represents aspects of a wholistic teaching/learning process that involves all aspects of the learner with engagement in: listening and thinking; intuitive reflecting and visioning; experiencing and doing (engaging in reflective experiences in Place, drawing, writing); and relating and feeling (storying). Often times in a conventional pedagogical approach to curricula, much emphasis is placed on the student’s thinking and demonstration of knowledge through text (pen, paper, computer keyboard). In this approach, listening, processing verbally presented information, and time for inner reflection and coming to understand are important aspects. An Indigenous cosmovision ideology is shown by the two colours forming the background of the schematic. Ways of knowing from within an Indigenous knowledge paradigm and pedagogical process negotiate the physical world as well as the unseen. Receptivity to the world of the imagination, not in the sense of making an escape from reality, but as a valid means of engaging reality on terms that reflect the Indigenous learner’s own meanings and values is demonstrated in this process.

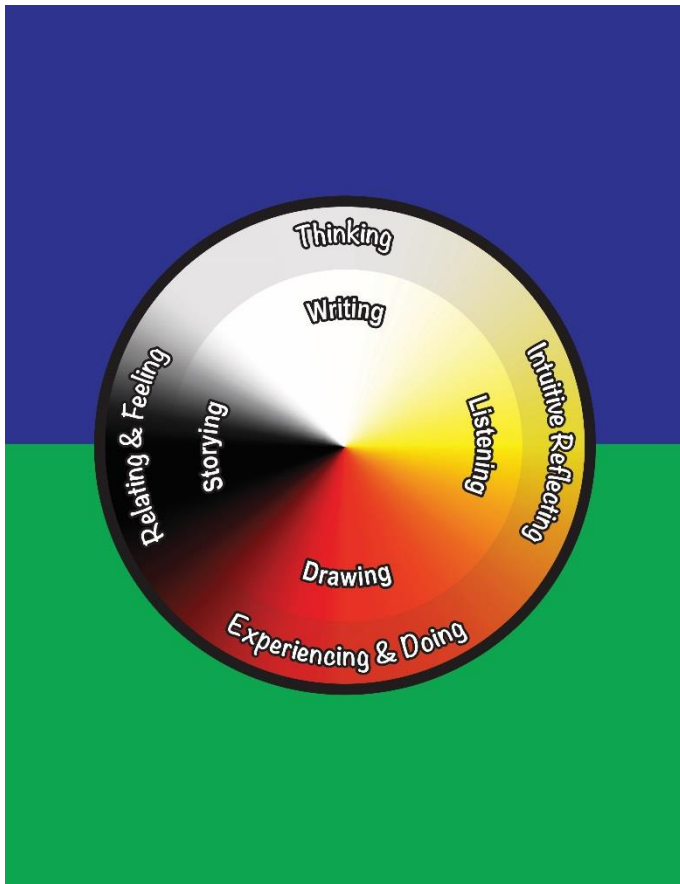


Figure 1. Wholistic Anishinaabe Pedagogy (from Peltier, 2016)

This pedagogical model honours an Aboriginal process of relational learning and is applicable to an early learning or childcare environment. A story, legend, video, or book can be shared to focus the children's attention and a related activity involving movement or the creation of a product can be followed by a facilitated visualization process or alone-time for reflection. A sharing Circle bringing everyone together to talk about their thinking and experiences offers opportunity to listen and learn from each other and to inform ongoing investigation and inquiry. This process creates space for learning in a wholistic way that taps into many aspects of the learner; this benefits children of different cultural backgrounds, abilities and interests and increases opportunity for learning to appreciate different perspectives and worldviews. The Circle is inclusive of everyone and is an enjoyable experience where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners participate as listeners without the teacher's expectation to talk. Opportunity for silent reflection and inner processing of the story and responses from peers is something that is not typically valued in a Western-centered pedagogy. The Circle is beneficial to all learners. It builds self-esteem by giving the child an opportunity to play an important role in a group process and reinforces their identity and belonging.

A transformative process of educator action and reflection emerges when educators and practitioners initiate contact with Elders, keepers-of-the-language, and knowledgeable people in the community and embody a listening and observing stance. This Anishinaabe pedagogy can be considered as a framework for a family literacy model.

Conclusion

The goals of social science research are related to having a practical impact that contributes to the solution to social problems and achievement of social goals. Too often, researchers succumb to external pressures to ‘create change’ and this results in a premature rush to implementation before new relationships and new understandings have been consolidated. My role in the NOW Play action research project as a community consultant has presented an opportunity to contribute to a critical examination of the perspectives, belief, and values of the educator and researcher in the formal, Western-based context of the early learning environment. A transformative process of researcher and educator action and reflection emerges from a culturally sensitive lens to develop a culturally competent way of “seeing” the Aboriginal child. My professional and personal roles and expertise serve to inform a critical process of understanding about Western-European epistemologies and educational approaches that maintain the socio-cultural mismatch between the Aboriginal child’s home and school.

The Indigenous research paradigm supports being-in-relationship with the learner in a respectful way to appreciate cultural and socio-linguistic differences and culture-based interactions and pedagogy that support the Aboriginal child’s self-concept and learning. Supporting all learners to gain deep understanding of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge is facilitated by socially responsible teachers and educational practitioners utilizing an approach that: values family and community members and keepers-of-the-language and their perceptions of what is relevant; invites Elders, family and community members to lead culture-based and land-based learning and stories; and presents opportunities to engage in a wholistic Indigenous pedagogical process based on the oral tradition inclusive of thinking, intuitive reflecting, experiencing and doing, relating and feeling.

The topic of this paper focuses on “seeing” the Aboriginal child by being-in-relationship with the learner to understand the context of what the Aboriginal child is experiencing and responding to and enacting culturally sensitive approaches that honour Indigenous ways of knowing. As teachers and practitioners develop cultural competency, formal learning environments undergo change to be more inclusive and respectful of Aboriginal people. This process serves to mitigate some of the challenging factors affecting Aboriginal student achievement such as bullying, racism, peer discrimination, and teacher discrimination, while building self-concept and identity, enjoyment of school, a love for the Land, and developing the whole child.

Opportunities arise as researchers and investigators observe local educators, families and community members supporting the learning of the Aboriginal child through Indigenous wholistic ways of thinking expressed in the language of connection and relationship. Aboriginal teachers and community members can put Indigenous knowledge to use in listener-storyteller interactions, play and dialogue. A myriad of possibilities exist for further inquiry and exploration that arise from the children’s sense of wonder and the potentiality of the learning environment to highlight the gifts of the child. Experiencing a shared activity with an Aboriginal family or community member serves as a spring-board for multi-literacy cultural connections. Oral language, play, and experiential exploration and skill development can be addressed in learning opportunities such as: venturing out on the land to investigate animal habitats and to observe animals and their behaviour; engaging in story-telling and legends about nature and our relationships with each other, animals,

and the land; seeing and talking about related topics by looking at and creating books, photos, videos. I could say, “The sky is the limit”, however, from an Indigenous perspective the expanse of the universe and the potential of the child are limitless.

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Children's Funds of Knowledge in a Rural Northern Canadian Community: A Telling Case

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Abstract

In this article, we describe how the funds of knowledge in a community in rural Northern Canada were actualized or leveraged in an early childhood classroom. We draw on a video recording of a First Nations elder demonstrating to the children (and early childhood educators) how to skin a marten, a historical cultural practice of the community. We argue that elders are an untapped source of knowledge that preschools and schools can call on to legitimize and bring to the forefront, Indigenous knowledge that has been ignored or undervalued by assimilationist and colonialist policies. We also argue that the elder's demonstration is culturally congruent with First Nations traditions of sharing or passing on knowledge and that it is imperative that educators are aware of and implement culturally appropriate pedagogical practices. We conclude by sharing some ideas of how early childhood educators might facilitate through play, children's taking up and appropriating cultural knowledge such as the elder shared in this case.

Introduction

If we were to spend half an hour in a school staffroom or join in a teacher education class today in North America, inevitably we would hear someone make reference to "funds of knowledge." The construct originated in the anthropological literature (e.g., Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1989) and Luis Moll and his colleagues popularized the term in education circles nearly two decades ago. They reported on a project in which researchers and teachers visited the homes of Latino students, and employing ethnographic techniques, documented the learning and teaching strategies that families employed as they went about their daily lives (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). In their work, Moll and colleagues demonstrated that the rich funds of knowledge, learning processes, skills and strategies evident in the homes and communities of these families could be incorporated into teaching in schools.

¹ Author note: Authors are listed alphabetically to indicate equal contributions.

In this paper, we examine how funds of knowledge were actualized with young children from a community in Northern Canada, who along with their teachers, are participating in a transnational, community based Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded research initiative that aims to support young children's language and cognitive development through play-based curricula. We begin by tracing the development of the concepts of funds of knowledge and review studies that have examined the intersection of that construct and play. We then describe the context in which the larger study took place and present our analysis of one "telling case" (Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000) from a short video, in which an elder from the community who is a trapper and a grandfather of one of the children in the classroom, demonstrates how to skin a marten, a cultural practice of that region. Of course, this is but one example of the cultural practices and funds of knowledge in this community and we present it as one model of how funds of knowledge can be leveraged.

What are funds of knowledge?

Funds of knowledge have been described as "the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 321). They are historically situated and culturally developed (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; González et al., 2005) "strategic and cultural resources ... that households contain" (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 313). Because a funds-of-knowledge approach to research, learning, and teaching involves close consultation and personal experience with families, it offers a powerful way to showcase their existing resources, competence, and knowledge (see e.g., Namazzi & Kendrick, 2014). This approach provides a counter-narrative of marginalized families and communities by forwarding a more nuanced understanding of their lives, skills, knowledge, and practices that challenges a deficit view (González et al., 2005). From an Indigenous point of view, utilizing funds of knowledge aligns with the signing of treaties and the emphasis on sharing knowledge, rather than dictating it. The concept is also important in helping us uncover and confront unconscious biases by ensuring that all types of knowledge are valued, particularly within learning spaces in socially disadvantaged communities.

Although there was a time when European settlers depended on Indigenous funds of knowledge to survive, Indigenous knowledge systems continue to be actively dismissed and marginalized. A funds of knowledge approach to learning and teaching attempts to reverse this history through a more conscious, gracious way of listening to one another in order to create space for Indigenous voices, knowledge, and practices that have been silenced, often for centuries. The concept of funds of knowledge also fits with broader understandings of learning, namely, the idea that we use our existing knowledge or schemata to construct new knowledge (Kant, 1934; McVee, Kailonnie, & Gavelek, 2005). In other words, it reflects the understanding that people use what they know to learn something new in the context of their culture and communities.

Related Literature

A number of studies have focused on the relationship between play and children's funds of knowledge. Although the "learning through play" movement has been ubiquitous in Western early childhood education, Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) critique the

pedagogy for romanticizing children's play choices and interests. Their study provides critical understandings of how children's play interests are evidence of power relationships and inequality in classrooms and peer cultures. Hedegaard, Fler, Bang, and Hviid (2008) examine play from the perspectives of children, parents and teachers, foregrounding the social, cultural and historical practices integral to children's lives. Building on previous studies of children's funds of knowledge, Chesworth (2016) argues that understanding the intricacies of play cultures requires that teachers and researchers engage critically with children's individual and collective funds of knowledge by making sense of the social and cultural activities they reconstruct in their play. Chesworth also demonstrates that when children mutually develop collective funds of knowledge, it provides opportunities for them to co-construct meaning with their peers; moreover, the interests that arise from these co-constructions may also contribute to more equitably shifting how power, agency and status interact within peer cultures.

Within play cultures, there have also been attempts to identify children's interests for the purposes of enhancing early childhood programs. The tendency in much of the literature, however, has been to view children's play interests as their individual engagement with the play materials or activities available in their immediate play environment (Carr, 2008 cited in Chesworth, 2016), which offers only a superficial interpretation of what constitutes children's interests (Hedges, 2011). Focusing instead on funds of knowledge moves beyond the immediate environment and acknowledges the rich experiences that result from children's participation in intergenerational household and community activities (González et al. 2005). As Moll et al. (1992) contend, these activities contain "ample cultural and cognitive resources" (p. 134) and offer deeper understandings of children's lives and authentic possibilities for home-school connections in the classroom. Similarly, Riojas-Cortez's (2001) study of sociodramatic play in a bilingual pre-school offers insights into how funds of knowledge can inform the creation of a culturally responsive curriculum infused with children's interests and capabilities. Oughton (2010) forwards both a critique and a caution regarding the adoption of a funds of knowledge approach, namely, that practitioners and researchers "need to be critically reflexive to avoid imposing their own, however well-intentioned, cultural arbitraries on learners" (p. 63) as we "identify and privilege what we regard as 'funds of knowledge'" (p. 64). This point is especially poignant when working with Indigenous children and communities, given the imposition of an education system rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies that they have experienced.

Indeed, within Indigenous cultures, separating children by age groups and the concept of formalized early childhood education are relatively new (e.g., Mashon, 2010). The traditional practice was for children to learn through emulation, watching others who are older, more skilled, listening to the language, vocabulary and nuances of how thoughts are strung together and voiced. Traditionally, play was considered an imitation of life on the land, on the water, in the home or wherever young people were observing. By engaging in different practices during play, children learned about their communities' ways of knowing and doing. The underlying premise of these beliefs was that during play, children constructed their understandings of what they had seen, using items, toys, natural materials, or whatever was at hand (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Play was the pathway to the cultural lifestyle of the family and Indigenous funds of knowledge were passed down from one generation to the next and adapted to the changing

world, and it is only within the last few decades that preschool Indigenous children have been attending daycare and early childhood education centers (Greenwood & Shawana, 2000). Currently in many Canadian First Nations communities, children spend their day in schools and early childhood centers, and are usually in homogeneous age groups. Often, the mentors (i.e., the teachers) are not related to them nor do many of them have the cultural knowledge necessary to pass knowledge and skills down to those in their charge. This disconnection is well recognized; funds of knowledge offer one possible link between the current education system and the families it serves.

Understanding Culture

In this article, which focuses on cultural practices, we view culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [humans] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). Rogoff (2003) argues that to date, “the study of human development has been based largely on research and theory coming from middle class communities in Europe and North America” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 4). Furthermore, Genzuck (1999) indicates that culture has often been reduced to simplistic notions of the foods, folklore, festivals, and fashions of a particular group, and that what is required instead is an understanding of the dynamic social, physical, spiritual, and economic resources that individuals and families use to survive in the world. He emphasizes that it is common practice for many educators to devalue the knowledge that non-mainstream children bring to school and to view households as situations “from which the student must be rescued, rather than as reserve of knowledge that can foster the child’s cognitive development” (p. 10).

Play offers children a way of exploring the complex situations that arise in social and cultural situations in their homes and communities, and also allows for the construction of new or alternative perspectives (Huizinga, 1950/1955). As Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) observe, when players make up worlds through play, they engage in a serious process of identity making as they draw on their intuitive cultural knowledge. In play, children “tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are....” (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 3). In other words, play is “a story the players tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz, 1973, p. 237).

We would be remiss in discussing First Nations children and families and their cultural heritage without acknowledging the devastating legacies of assimilationist, colonialist policies in Canada. Reflecting these policies, the residential school system in which children were taken from their homes and communities, placed in residential schools, operated by churches and other organizations, had incredibly negative consequences. Children experienced the trauma of being removed from their families, forced to speak a foreign language while forbidden to use their own, offered substandard education, and many of them were subject to physical and sexual abuse. Residential schools were a disruptive force for families because children who were raised institutionally did not learn the cultural ways of parenting (e.g., Battiste & Barman, 2000; Hare, 2005). Although residential schools have been closed for some time, memories of abuse still percolate to the surface and some children and grandchildren of former residents have negative associations with schooling (see e.g., Anderson, Morrison, Leighton-Stephens, & Shapiro, 2007; Hare & Anderson, 2010). Parenting knowledge is still in need of repair,

rebuilding, and remembering. Families, educators and communities need opportunities to work together collaboratively, and the current community based initiative in Northern communities that we described earlier affords a chance to do this, especially when curriculum and pedagogy include families' and communities' funds of knowledge.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Harper acknowledged the inter-generational damage caused by the former policy of Indian Residential Schools (see www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca). Much has happened since then including the release of the final report from The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which proposes 94 Calls to Action, (see www.trc.ca) that challenge governments to redress the legacy of residential schools and the devaluing of Aboriginal cultures and languages. NOW Play (<https://now-play.org>), the larger study from which our example is drawn, engages Aboriginal funds of knowledge and is able to embrace and address several of the proposed Calls to Action. For example, the project emphasizes, "full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples" (Call to Action #10) and it "enable[s] parents to fully participate in the education of their children" (Call to Action #10: vi). In addition, primary objectives include the "development of culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal peoples" (Call to Action #12) and "preservation, revitalization and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal peoples and communities" (Call to Action #14: iv). In the next section, we address more specifically how these Calls to Action are being interpreted and activated in an Aboriginal Head Start program in Northern Canada.

Marten Skinning: Funds of Knowledge in an Aboriginal Head Start Program Context

As noted previously, in this paper we draw on data from the NOW Play project taking place in Northern communities in three Canadian provinces. The project aims to support young children's oral language development through play. The video that we analyzed was recorded in an Aboriginal Head Start program in a small community with a population of about 4,000 in Northern Manitoba. Parents are involved in the program and with their children's education more broadly, and children, parents, teachers and the community have good relationships. Aboriginal Head Start is a Canadian offshoot of the original Head Start program in the United States designed to provide early educational support for children who are socially disadvantaged. It has six component areas: culture and language; education and school readiness; health promotion; nutrition; social support; and parent and family involvement (Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia, 2016). Parent participation in the Head Start program is more spontaneous than planned and occurs when the opportunity arises. Participants in the research project indicate that they believe the program has served as a bridge, bringing educators, families and the wider community together to support young children's development and learning.

For this paper, we analyzed one video that was recorded by a researcher observing in an Aboriginal Head Start program. As the six-and-a-half minute video opens, we see a grandfather with a marten (a weasel-like mammal) he has trapped; he has laid it out on paper on the table in front of him and is about to begin skinning it. His grandson sits on his lap, and five other children sit around the semi-circular table watching him. After nearly a minute, an early childhood teacher and a seventh child join the others at the table and watch the grandfather meticulously skin the marten, guiding his grandson's hand, which holds

the knife. The grandfather makes observations, engages the children in conversation using his knowledge of their parents' hunting and trapping activities, and responds to comments or answers questions posed by the children and on one occasion, the videographer. During analysis, we viewed the video multiple times and coded isolated segments that illustrated how funds of knowledge were invoked or demonstrated through gestures, movements, or both. We cross-referenced our coding of the video with a written transcript of the video (which cannot be included here for reasons of confidentiality) and then coded the transcript separately. We then compared the codes from the video and from the transcript and sorted them into categories. We then collapsed the categories as necessary until themes emerged.

Invoking funds of knowledge

Funds of knowledge were actualized and incorporated into this early childhood classroom in a variety of ways: *demonstration and modelling*, *participation*, and *worldview*. It is important to emphasize that all funds of knowledge are contextually bound and in the particular community where these children live, hunting and trapping are part of their lived reality. That is, while some might question the idea of demonstrating how to skin a marten to a group of young children, hunting and trapping are common in their community and the children are familiar with these practices. For example, during the discussion with the grandfather, one of the children indicated that her father trapped beaver while another said that his father hunted ducks.

Demonstration and modelling. Funds of knowledge are often used to refer to specific content knowledge from children's homes and communities. For example, Dyson (1997) documented how inner city African American children integrated their wealth of knowledge of popular culture and sports in their writing in school when they were encouraged to do so. However, funds of knowledge also refers to cognitive strategies and mediational processes (Rogoff, 2003), as well as modes of meaning making (Kendrick, 2016), which can differ significantly across cultures and communities, along with expectations of children. For example, in the video we analyzed, the grandfather held and guided his grandson's hand as he was holding the knife, kinesthetically teaching the child the motor skills involved in the delicate task at hand. The young boy was simultaneously watching and doing as he listened to the language of his grandfather to learn about intergenerational ways of knowing and living in his community. From a contemporary, middle-class, Eurocentric perspective, teaching a four-year-old child to use a knife might be considered developmentally inappropriate; however, Rogoff (2003) reminds us that this practice would be considered quite normal in some cultures, illustrating the point with a photograph of a toddler using a machete to cut a fruit (p.6). Although the grandfather also verbally explained some of his actions, this was primarily a demonstration. Rogoff (2003) and others point out that in some cultures, demonstration or modelling such as what occurred here is the preferred way of inducting young children into the social practices of their communities. For instance, Anderson and Morrison (2011) documented how some parents assumed this pedagogical stance as they supported their preschool children at an art center in a family literacy program. Demonstration and modelling are also consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1999) notion of legitimate peripheral participation in which participants first learn the skills and knowledge on the outskirts of an activity and then gradually move toward full participation. Early childhood educators immersed in a

child-centered, “hands on, learning by doing” philosophy typical of most early childhood education programs in North America sometimes have difficulty accepting such as pedagogical stance.

Participation. Although the vignette in our video is primarily a demonstration, the children were also learning through participation in the discussion. In particular, at one point, one of the children asked about the “white fur on his [the marten’s] mouth?” The grandfather answered, “Martens are all different colors. Sometime they are pure black, sometimes they are nearly orange, and sometimes they are really white.” In addition to answering children’s queries, the grandfather also helped them make connections between the demonstration and their own experiences, using his detailed knowledge of the children and their families and capitalizing on community relationships. For example, at one point, he asked a child, “Your dad does trapping, right?” to which the child replied, “Beaver.” Extending that conversation, another child reported, “My dad gets ducks.” The grandfather then responded with a question, “Does he use a knife? Or does he pull the feathers?” helping the child distinguish the difference between preparing a marten fur and preparing a duck for food. Indirectly, he was also teaching the children the difference between mammals and birds. After he had completed the demonstration, the grandfather brought closure to the activity by explaining that the fur would be sold and that the money would be used to buy things that he and his family need: “Why we got the fur off? Cause we go sell the fur and we get a whole bunch of money and we go buy bread and gas and toys.” In other words, the grandfather brings the life skill of trapping, skinning and entrepreneurship to the children’s attention.

Worldview. Perhaps most importantly, this vignette exemplifies and brings to life a worldview of First Nations that too often is ignored in education and schooling. Specifically, Indigenous people have a long history of hunting and trapping, and the marten skinning exemplifies this traditional way of life. As Cajete (1994) explains, trapping is a “highly evolved survival skill based on direct and personal experience with Nature” (p. 56). Although most of the children in this vignette seemed to be aware of hunting and trapping, the demonstration in the formal context of the Head Start program conveys to them that the skills and knowledge and ways of life of the local people and their community – their funds of knowledge – are legitimate and valuable. An example of such teaching comes from Elder Bebomijiwebiik-iban of Rainy River First Nation who would give teachings of Biskaabiiyang – Pay Attention. Biskaabiiyang is an Ojibwe verb meaning “returning to ourselves” (Geniusz, 2006, p. 13) or to “look back” (Simpson, 2011, p. 49). Laura Horton, one of the authors of this paper and former director of the post-secondary education program at Seven Generations Education Institute, helped develop with Elder-Bebomijiwebiik-iban (Elder Anne Wilson) a Biskaaijiyang approach to research that attempts to decolonize Indigenous knowledge. According to our co-author, Elder Anne Wilson would tell listeners: “turn around and look at what you have let go of, there is much Indigenous intelligence” (personal communication, March 19, 2017). The Elder loved life and all that it offered in this modern world but reminded us to temper life with original teachings.

Implications, Issues, and Concerns

As young children participate in activities and experiences in families and communities, they develop local and situated cultural repertoires of practice (Rogoff, 2003). This form of learning can be highly motivating, and as the children observe adults intently in these interactions and experiences they come to understand and value the ways of acting and participating in their families and cultures.

Children make meaning in the social and cultural contexts of which they are a part. In the context of the marten skinning, cultural ways of knowing are shared by a caring grandfather; children learn and encounter the world by those who have come before. As Säljö (1998) points out,

We do not encounter the world as it exists in any neutral or objective sense outside the realm of human experience.... [T]he world is pre-interpreted for us by previous generations and we draw on the experiences that others have had before us. (p. 55)

As mentioned previously, Indigenous people have a long history of hunting and trapping. This knowledge has been passed down from generation to generation and now is passed down again as the grandfather carefully and thoughtfully demonstrates this traditional way of life to his grandson and his classmates as they observe the task taking place in front of them.

Unfortunately, it has been common practice in educational institutions to view and dismiss the funds of knowledge of families from diverse backgrounds as low-status, not valid, or common-sense and thus not worthy of being integrated into curriculum and pedagogy (Oughton, 2010). This deficit perspective often accompanies the expectation that families must learn the dominant culture in order to be academically successful. Even when diversity is recognized in schools and early childhood centers, culture is often reduced to compensatory, fragmented programs that focus on the aforementioned “Fs” (food, folklore, festivals and fashion) highlighting the differences between cultures rather than an understanding of them (González et al., 1993; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006). In this way, culture is viewed as static and normative, rather than dynamic and diverse (Amanti, 2005). Such practices call into question whose knowledge “counts,” highlighting the systematic exclusion of local families, students, and community members from decisions about what matters most in cultural representations.

Although changing the beliefs and practices of schools and teachers from a deficit to a credit-based view of families’ diverse funds of knowledge and experiences has been a recent focus of pedagogy with shifts towards culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education, there is still much work to be done in actualization. Teachers may wholeheartedly embrace the inclusion of expertise by inviting families and other community members to visit their classroom; however, many Indigenous families may approach these invitations with caution, their concerns grounded in the historical narrative of the systematic denigration of Indigenous knowledge and culture practices of residential schools (Hare, 2012). By building bridges across the community, schools may form very comfortable relationships with parents, children, and community members. Inclusion of community members then may not always be planned but may happen spontaneously as the opportunity arises.

The marten skinning demonstration and modeling and the children's participation in the activity offers a window into possibilities for including, exploring, and understanding a worldview that is not taught in schools. In this context, the early childhood classroom is a place in which family members are welcomed and cultural knowledge is shared and valued. The marten skinning afforded a moment in time in which teaching was based on Aboriginal ways of knowing and enhanced the learning opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and learners.

To further these opportunities for young children, provocations such as this become catalysts for culturally appropriate play, and can push the boundaries of mainstream play practices typically found in early learning settings. For example, to extend the marten skinning demonstration, children could be provided with dried pelts and skins from local trappings (e.g., rabbits, beavers) in addition to culturally appropriate tools for the children to touch and manipulate. Teachers could also plan follow-up activities or scenarios to demonstrations and modelling like the example we described in the video, which may encourage children to take-up activities such as hunting and trapping, preparing furs, and so forth in their play. These kinds of activities not only respect families' cultural knowledge but also honor children's abilities to take on new responsibilities.

With decades of school education, many Indigenous people have been removed from the land and its teachings, and from their cultural funds of knowledge. The marten demonstration serves as a starting place for a continuation of content and a re-connection to the land. There is also a need to take the classroom outside where children can engage in authentic experiences such as hanging traps, participating in fishing and hunting, picking plants or berries, or gathering and preparing traditional foods.

Cajete (1994) speaks of Indigenous tracking which is a "highly evolved survival skill based on direct and person experience with Nature" (p. 56). He states that people can use their physical environments as ground for their teaching, learning and spiritual tempering. He further explains,

Indigenous complexes of hunting throughout the world followed a pattern that, while finding a diversity of expressions, included basic component processes ... first setting one's intentions through prayerful asking. Second,...intense questions and application of skill and attractive behavior toward the goal of a successful hunt. Third,...includes the community process of respectful treatment of the prey, celebrating and thanksgiving.... The Hunter and his community entered a spiritual exchange, a creative process of learning and teaching that has formed the foundation of human meaning since the dawn of history. (p. 63)

Cajete continues, "Moderns no longer experience a daily and direct relationship with animals.... To truly understand animals, is also to truly understand others" (p. 64). As we reflect upon the marten skinning demonstration and the words of Elder Anne Wilson (as communicated through our co-author Laura Horton) and Cajete, we can imagine how to extend a demonstration into a richer experience for the children and involve the community. Creating an environment in which children can play hunting and trapping, taking on the identities of members of their community in the school playground, is a meaningful way to connect community and school, for children to listen and talk, and to participate in experiences that are authentic. Community members could also be asked to

imagine and help create spaces where children could construct their own understandings of the hunt, the traps, the skinning, and preparing food on the land. By encouraging children to bring their family and community funds of knowledge into the classroom and onto the playground, children's oral language is extended to what they know, and in this way, school can become much less foreign. Those who deliberated over the contents of Treaty #3 would be pleased. The Head Spokespeople ensured education was included, education that was directed both ways (e.g., Anishinaabe would learn mainstream ways and the mainstream would learn Anishinaabe ways). Funds of knowledge is a platform to bring this concept to a place of respect and dignity.

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“Literate Playing”—An Oral Language Empowerment Strategy for Underprivileged Children

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Abstract

This article describes an ongoing collaborative action research study, and presents initial observations of the outcomes of teachers’ interventions in early childhood education centres in a major Brazilian city. Designed as a professional development initiative, the action research is based on a view of a quality program being one that offers both play-based learning and linguistically enriching experiences for children and opportunities for professional learning of its professionals to support those same programs in a personal, self-confident, and collective manner. It presents initial observations of the outcomes of teachers’ interventions in four non-governmental early childhood education centres, and some implications the results can suggest for the NOW Play Project.

Introduction

Investment in the first three years of life—whether through educational programs or isolated actions with families—has become one of the priorities of Brazilian government policies in the last decade. The complementarity of Brazil between education and care—and integrity in the development of the child in daycare centres—became a childhood policy since 1988 with the New Democratic Laws (Brasil, 1988).

Since then, children became represented to society as capable instead in need of care. ECE became children’s right for education and care as citizens. (Nunes et al., 2011). The most recent legal document that defines the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Brasil, 2010) points to giving priority to discussions on how to guide the development of children’s play and oral language, as well as recognizing their participation in the cultural world as well as the importance of development of children in daycare centres. Although discourses change, few policies have been made: coverage rate is still 25.6%, which represents only 3.2 million Brazilian children, revealing a substantial space for expansion of supply, especially for the poorest children. Only 21.9% of children enrolled in daycare centres come from 25% of the poorest Brazilian families that need more educational and care attention and who remain at home in absolute poverty (Brasil, 2017).

When it comes to public daycare centres that enrolled most of the poor children, Brazil still faces major challenges to establish and implement quality programs consistent with the legal frameworks for early childhood education of the new Brazilian democracy. Recent studies on the quality of daycare centres in Brazil (Campos et al., 2011) reveals weak implementation of the Ministry of Education’s mandatory guidelines and quality standards (e.g., Brasil, 1998, 2006, 2009, 2010) especially when it comes to reading and oral activities, and children’s play (Campos, Coelho, & Cruz, 2006; Kramer, 2009; Medeiros, 2013). Nevertheless, it has been shown that children’s regular attendance in quality daycare centres boosts equality and its effects can have a lasting beneficial impact

whenever there are sound quality programs available (Campos et al., 2011, pp. 29). Brazilian laws and documents defined quality programs based on political, ethical, and aesthetic principles from the National Mandatory documents (e.g., Conselho Nacional de Educação, 1999; Ministério da Educação, 2010; Brasil, 2014), which advocate that every child has the right to be cared-for and to learn, in a respectful local culture. This would include play-based learning which provides opportunities for language experiences and knowledge environments (Ministério da Educação, 2010, pp. 16). Quality is also defined by coverage in attendance, by the ratio of children/teacher, by teachers having a bachelor's degree that includes pedagogical courses and practice teaching and, finally, by safe and healthy infrastructure. The influence of quality childcare should be more significant for the poorest children because educational institutions can offer them cultural, social, cognitive, affective and emotional development opportunities, which may not be always accessible within their families of origin (Barros et al., 2009; Brasil, 2017). This also means that daycare centre attendance can offer children literate environments rich in experimentation, exploration and research experiences, as well as play activities that enable them to grow and develop into creative and self-confident individuals.

Attendance at quality daycare centres and pre-schools also contributes to success in the early years of primary school (Campos et al., 2011). Research shows that low-quality institutions—which don't have an educational and healthy infrastructure, childhood educational program and qualified practice teachers supported by the municipalities—may not have a significant impact on children's current educational performance (Amaro et al., 2015) as well as on their future ones (Barros et al., 2009). The author states, "The quality of the activities and program structure heavily impacts the development of the child." (Barros et al., 2009, pp. 227).

Other studies reveal that many early childhood teachers do not have the qualifications needed to develop a quality early childhood program in full-day care centres (Campos, 1999, 2003; Campos et al., 2006; Gatti, 2010; Kishimoto, 2005). Campos, Füllgraf, & Wiggers (2006), for example, have found that daycare teachers and educators do not, themselves, have the knowledge about child development and care to interact with and help them grow up. In another study, Campos et al. (2011) showed there are few institutions in Brazil that provide enriching experiences for children and support regular training activities for educators to be able to provide quality programs. In response to this identified need for professional learning initiatives for daycare teachers, my colleagues and I proposed a collaborative action research project, modelled after the NOW Play project in Canada (Peterson et al., 2010).

This article describes an ongoing collaborative action research study and presents initial observations of the outcomes of teachers' interventions in early childhood education centres in a major Brazilian city. Designed as a continuing professional development strategy, the action research is based on a view of a quality program as being one that offers both play-based learning and linguistically-enriching experiences for children and opportunities for professional learning of its professionals to support those same programs in a personal, self-confident, and collective manner. Our research addresses the following question:

What are the content and teaching strategies needed to collectively build and bring together the knowledge brought by the children into their play in order to

foster the development of literacy and, more specifically, the oral language of three and four year olds?

Theoretical Constructs

A technical report on the recent survey about the quality of early childhood education (Campos, Coelho, & Cruz, 2006) showed the evident influence of experiences offered to children regarding their oral expression. According to this work “children who have opportunities to hear explanations, opinions, excuses, stories and are encouraged to do the same, formulate longer and more elaborate sentences” (Campos, Coelho, & Cruz, 2006, pp. 74). The survey also revealed most of the Brazilian poor children interviewed construct very short sentences, and a large number of them give single-word answers. The authors suggest the fact “may be associated with the type of weak work with oral activities offered in most institutions attended by poor children in our country” (Campos, Coelho, & Cruz, 2006, pp. 75).

Studies have shown language development of children during play and how such activities enhance both their oral language development as well as their literacy education (Peterson et al., 2010; Pellegrini & Galda, 2000; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). They may also update current pedagogical practices, which contribute to continuing education training for the teachers and educators involved.

The significant use of language in specific cultural contexts to be created by teachers and educators within the institution may lead children to learn expectations, meanings, values and perspectives of their culture as well as vocabulary, grammar, basic phonology and semantics for their own language development (Teberosky & Jarque, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Elkonin, 1987; Goncú, 1999).

The hypothesis that gave rise to this work is that there can be an enrichment of play and children’s oral language learning whenever adults create successful experiences of reading books aloud to children. We believe that reading aloud can provide linguistic and imaginative models for children to incorporate them into their play, favouring the development of literacy and, more specifically, the expansion of verbal communicative skills and playful narratives, even leading to spontaneous written production.

In this perspective, this paper considers three interconnected concepts, as described below, namely: (1) Children’s Play-Based Learning; (2) Oral language as the foundation of cultural learning; (3) Culturally relevant monitoring.

(1) Children’s Play-Based Learning

Our action research project is underpinned by a view of play as important to young children’s learning (Bodrova, 2008; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2003; Goncú, 1999; Pellegrini & Galda, 2000; Wajskop, 2004, 2012; Wajskop & Peterson, 2015). Such centrality has been present in many public policies in Brazil (Brasil, 2010) as well as in countries with good international models of early childhood education such as Australia and Canada (Australia, 2009; Ontario, 2010–2011). According to a recent official document for public consultation, play is one of the main activities where children learn. Simple interactions such as holdings objects and elements of nature, recognizing the behaviour of peers, enjoying a musical performance or a story being told are also great learning experiences (Brasil, 2016, pp. 19–20).

This article understands play as both a social practice and also a particular language of childhood. (Pellegrini & Galda, 2000).

(2) Oral language as the foundation of cultural learning

The social constructivist theories (Elkonin, 1987; Goncú, 1999; Vygotsky, 1984, 2003) based on the idea that learning occurs in social contexts is at the core of this work. According to Peterson (2014) based on Halliday, it is in the everyday and ordinary use of language with parents, brothers and sisters, children of their neighbourhood, at home, on the street and in the park, shops, trains and buses that we convey to children the essential qualities of a society and of the social human nature. Through meaningful use of language in specific cultural contexts, children can also learn the expectations, meanings, values and perspectives of the culture in which they live as well as vocabulary, grammar, basic phonology and semantics suitable for the language development of young children. (Soares, 2016; Teberosky & Jarque, 2014).

Thus, we gave priority to reading children's books aloud in order to create a particular cultural context—a real social practice—to be consistently implemented by teachers in a monitored way, to create language and imaginative experience conditions different from those experienced by the child within his/her family unit every day.

(3) Culturally relevant monitoring

The monitoring of children's achievements should involve the use of everyday language and also be culturally and linguistically appropriate to the suggested play. The monitoring of children's language progress is made with the aid of recording devices, as well as with the observation of the teachers¹ involved, by taking into consideration the meaningful narratives created during contexts of play. The development of children's language has been monitored in authentic contexts of heuristic and spontaneous play during the course of our investigation and on several occasions in the classroom. This helps update teaching practices and improve learning experiences for children, and it also works as content material for professional development. Instead of assigning diagnostic labels for the classification of children, monitoring the development of language in play contexts during their regular interactions conducted by adults or simply those that take place spontaneously among peers has been a tool for updating pedagogical teaching practices in order to help enrich childhood experiences (Peterson et al., 2010).

Methods

Research Design: Action Research

This paper is framed by assumptions about a collaborative action research as a possibility to teachers engaging in reflective inquiry, often with the guidance of an experienced colleague or a university facilitator/researcher who serves as a mentor. (Peterson et al., 2012).

In agreement with Tripp (2005), we consider the collaborative action research approach to be a forum for teachers and researchers to improve their teaching as well as their investigative practices and, consequently, to have a positive effect on children's learning.

According to Peterson (2012), the first assumption underpinning action research is an assumption that active participation and opportunities to reflect on own experiences

¹ In Portuguese, the teachers and educational professionals who work directly with children will be identified in the feminine gender, since women are the vast majority of them.

and assumptions are integral to adult learning. Teachers can collect data from their classroom, reflect and make decisions regarding particular teaching practices for their children and classroom context.

A second assumption underpinning collaborative action research is that teachers' knowledge about their own students—about their classroom and the community context and teaching—provide the foundation for research decisions and practices.

A third assumption is that local knowledge is essential for accurate understanding of children's needs within specific classroom contexts. They are able to ask about specific practices, gather data daily and observe students systematically and regularly over long periods of time.

Researchers may provide specific questions and ideas that would not be available otherwise because of teachers' limited time for professional reading and lack of research experience. They are considered co-researchers who value and seek to draw on teachers' professional knowledge and expertise.

To achieve these goals, as a mentor/researcher, I started observing and video-recording two classes, and then used my observations and recordings in the action-research meetings with teachers. We discussed how to observe children and what we could learn when we watched and re-watched children interacting in their play after reading aloud for them. After three meetings, it was agreed that teachers would present their video recordings in an internal seminar. 23 teachers collected 23 videos of children's interactions in free or heuristic play. The average duration of each video recording was 1-to-5 minutes each. After being recorded, videos were posted to Google Drive or sent to me via email for transcription and analysis. They were watched and analysed in 5 monthly action-research meetings for a year, ensuring the collective and collaborative construction of the pedagogical proposal.

Teachers also transcribed, reported, documented (in an individual portfolio), and general reflections were gathered in a collective notebook when action-research meetings occurred. Five hours' worth of meetings were recorded.

Context and Participants

This research has been carried out in four different daycare centers in a non-governmental institution of a large Brazilian city. This institution was selected as a research context because of its relevance to the history of public daycare centers in poor Brazilian suburbs of big cities during the 1970s. It was created as a result of struggles and mobilization of women during the Movement for Day Care Centers that took place during the 1970s (Rosemberg, 1984). It proved to be an important leader in early childhood education in Brazil, and its influence can be felt to this day. Since the beginning, its mission was based on community: to respect children and appreciate the local culture by making sure they had the right to play. Through education and culture, it aims to rescue citizenship, dignity and improve the lives of children, teenagers and adults of the community.

Additionally, the researcher has been a volunteer student, an educational consultant and, a Board member of the institution.

The action-research has been going on since March 2015, and it involves teachers from its four different daycare centres. Children aged zero to 3.11 years spend their whole day there, from 7am to 5pm, which are located in a low-income neighbourhood in

a big city. 70% of children enrolled there come from families earning up to 3 minimum wages² and another 30% of them earning up to 10 minimum wages monthly. Teachers come from the same community as the children, and most of them are the first in their family to have university studies. They earn up to 3 minimum wages monthly for 44 hours per week.

Table 1
Staff and Number of Children

Day care	No/Age of children		Average children per teacher	Teachers: assistants
A	140	2–3.11	12	11:2
B	140	0–3.11	12	13:2
C	160	0–3.11	10	15:3
D	160	0–3.11	10	15:3

We found, after 20 years of its implementation, a play-based pedagogy where the “*livreiras*” (door storage pockets) are still used in all rooms, and infants and toddlers are in constant contact with books, which are sometimes read aloud to them. The presence of classroom book collections was the result of an organization of the books in each one of the units. Management and teachers had the initiative to do so and created a cloth support with plastic pockets in which children can see the covers of books. These “*livreiras*” are much like the ones in which we can place our shoes. There is a practice of telling stories based on a book’s images and pictures.

Children play in dramatic-play hairdresser environments, playhouses, pretend school sets, and toy castles, complete with dolls and strollers. Although it is a regular practice in educational institutions to use the terms ‘nooks’ or ‘corners’ to refer to the space for play, we will use the term ‘environment’ or ‘stations’ consistent with the idea of ‘environment experiences’ defined and proposed by the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education—DCNEI—(Brasil 2010). The terms ‘nooks’ or ‘corners’ create the opposite desired effect, for they bring the idea that play activities are ‘pushed’ to the nooks or corners of the rooms, as residual activities since the central activities are undertaken by the adults.

Action Research Starting Points

In one of the classrooms where we recorded a video, we were able to observe that four of the 18 children present spoke very little. In another class with 17 children, we observed an activity in which children had to read their names and their colleagues’ in flashcards, which revealed an old schooling method. In this classroom only 3 children read all the names while all the others only read their own names, and 5 of the children seemed to be guessing at them.

These observations served as the starting point for a discussion with teachers in an action-research meeting on the work done with children and the demands for the

² The National minimum wage is \$300 US monthly, or \$1 US per hour.

construction of new educational paradigms associated with the development of oral language and literacy based on books and free play.

The scenes we watched and discussed in one of the training meetings showed children spontaneously playing with real life themes, expressed through the use of phrases or meaningful words such as: “*am goin’ wo’k now*”, “*taking care our baby*”, “*already back wo’k?*”, “*sleep son*”³. While the expressions used by children to play revealed their understanding of everyday life, they also revealed the construction of important oral language. While playing, children used the oral language to explain their peers their playful actions.

In one of such scenes, there is a girl and a boy playing side by side. He is holding a chunk of play dough, a rubber elephant and a tiny pot. She is playing with a doll and a chunk of play dough as well. The boy “eats” some of the play dough and uses the tiny pot to pretend to feed the rubber elephant. The girl has a (naked) doll on her lap while playing with the play dough. The boy approaches her and asks, “Did HE poop?”—emphasizing the male gender in his speech. She quickly replied: “SHE did.” After that, she turns her doll and begins to move it, whereupon the doll’s penis becomes apparent. The boy laughs and points to the penis, trying to touch it. The girl says: “It’s MY baby!” and sits the doll in front of her (G. Wajskop, field notes of recorded video, June 29, 2015).

One can see here that play allowed these two to think about the meaning of the words regarding the genitals of the doll and the gender assigned to it, while using words to construct the plot of their playing.

In another scene,

While the girl feeds the doll, the boy says: “Want pacifier!” To which the girl replies: “Want pacifier? Here.” And gives him a “litt’e airplane car”. The boy immediately puts the object into his mouth sucking its tip as one would a pacifier. The girl is watching and the boy nestles beside her, and she says, touching his face: “Now go sleep. ”

After a few seconds the boy says, “Already up. Up. ”

Girl: “Up?”

Boy: “Up! Go school! “

Girl: “Go school?”

Boy: “Go wo’k.” (Wajskop, recorded video, June 29, 2015)

These two scenes show an evolution of the narrative of the children associated with familiar everyday scenes: sleeping, sucking pacifiers, going to work, accompanied by:

- Gestures and sounds;
- Clear naming of objects whose meanings are transformed by language;
- Definition of roles through the use of appropriate and negotiated language;
- Dialogues and plots from specific contexts.

We can also see that for such interaction between the girl and the boy to work, certain requirements had to be met for it to last more than 4 minutes without interruption:

³ We chose to transcribe the speech of children exactly like they verbally expressed themselves. There were small adaptations to the English language. The original Portuguese sentences were: “*vai tabalá, agola?*” “*eu vou ficá cuidando do nosso nenê . . .*” “*já voutô do tabalo?*” “*dómi filho . . .*”.

1) The two had to communicate clearly the meaning of the changes brought on to the object, as well as their gestures or actions that would be accepted by the partner, as in the case in which the girl said that despite the doll's penis, it was being used as "her baby" (with the feminine designation of it in Portuguese);

2) These clarifications and negotiated settings such as the doll gender definition and the decision the child would work and would not go to school took an important part of the playtime, establishing itself as an ongoing and spontaneous narrative.

More Systematic and Intentional Interventions as Part of Action Research Process

Based on the previous scene, we presented our thoughts to the research team: (a) all these issues go unnoticed by teachers in everyday care, which would demand a more accurate observation as well as a more careful log of the teaching materials used (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2016); (b) this scene is based on everyday knowledge to be expanded and transformed.

With this in mind, the team of teachers established a more systematic and intentional line of work with the 'door storage pockets' and books, that were defined as the most appropriate strategy for the expansion of the linguistic universe of the children.

Twelve (12) reports were gathered in a first training meeting (as letters to the researchers). They represented the thirty-eight (38) teachers in attendance, who were divided into groups of three, and were presented the criterion of choice within a collection of books and their proposed activities. We found two themes—or interesting categories—to be further explored (Charmaz, 2014) associated with the choice of books. Half of the letters (reports) reflected a preference for books with a clear disciplinary theme and moral aspects such as: teaching children to apologize; talking about prejudice, gender and race; autonomy; facing fears; and taking on responsibilities. The other half of the letters demonstrated a preference for book titles based on genre: rhymes, illustrations, and text. The results were discussed in groups where the force of morality themes in the community was considered as well as the need to enhance their oral language, the latter deemed as more important than taking on the responsibility to teach morals. This new line of action was decided together.

In subsequent training meetings, teachers and assistants chose titles to read aloud to children. The main criteria chosen of such books were the linguistic and aesthetic aspects of the texts as opposed to the previous moral criteria.

The choice of reading aloud was due mainly to the fact most of the stories told in the classrooms are done so by teachers. Each teacher tells it in his/her own way, with different words and, sometimes, even changing the meaning of the words. We discussed the fact that storytelling is a common practice in daycare centers because it facilitates children's contact with books, especially where teachers are poorly educated.

Nevertheless, the team decided reading aloud would be the best teaching strategy to enrich playing and it could also create opportunities for children to think about the written language. The strategy of reading aloud is for the purposes of sticking to the identity of the narrative. The stability of the written text can, in this way, provide a literacy environment by introducing children to text, sound, writing, and the meaning of words.

Among its many advantages, reading aloud provides the following benefits, as stated by Culliman and Galda (2000, pp. 135–136):

- Provides opportunities for children to hear fluent reading;
- Increases children's vocabulary: as they listen to new words in interesting texts, they can use them in other significant situations;
- Provides different types of narratives, such as rhymes, stories, descriptions, etc.;
- Increases children's storehouse of experiences, through the situations and characters presented;
- Allows children to make connections among books. They can compare writers styles, noticing what it is that writers do;
- Provides object-handling models and how to turn pages;
- Helps children develop their own ideas about writing—more particularly about its regularity— so they can understand that words are always the same, regardless of how many times the stories are read.

We then read and chose rhyming books, as well as narratives of pirates, circuses, and other descriptive—or even fictional—texts about different animals. From there, participants planned activities for a month's work with the groups. The regularity of the activities allowed them to observe the impact of reading books in the play and oral language development of children. They read and showed the pictures, setting them apart from the text several times and for several days, avoiding to tell them based on their memories. They provided conditions so the children could have literacy experiences based on the familiarity with the books as a text carrier. In order to do this, the teachers also showed them the name of the authors and illustrators, talking about authorship and characteristics of different book genres.

Of the various experiences developed and presented in an internal seminar—which took place only a month after the beginning of the investigation—we chose one of the experiences to illustrate the results of the work with the book “Smelly Bill” (Postgate, 2010). The book is inventive, comprehensive, provocative, and has a character that seemed exemplary for the rest of the team⁴.

One Example of Action Research Intervention Based on the Book “Smelly Bill”

Like most of her colleagues, this teacher took a book from the institution's newly updated library collection to her classroom, which had been previously selected by the group. She was featured because she was the first teacher who pushed a reflection within other teachers of the impact her interventions had on children's learning. She chose “Smelly Bill”, a fun book filled with rhymes that tells of the antics of Smelly Bill, a dog that loves to play in the dirt. He loves smelly things, like muddy ponds and rubbish bins. Her choice sought to relate to her classroom's curiosities and taste. Choosing a rhyming book had the goal of increasing the linguistic possibilities of children, assisting them in expanding their vocabulary use through an entertaining story with which children would find easy to identify.

In response to the project under discussion, the teacher read the story several times for the children. After the first reading, the children produced a collective drawing, followed by the individual production of booklets, so that we could evaluate their

⁴ Special thanks to the teacher of the class that not only gave researchers full access, but authorized the publication of the results of the project carried out with the children using the book “Smelly Bill.”

takeaway. Most of them scribbled, so we did not identify the presence of any kind of relationship with the story they had just listened to and there were also no traces of spontaneous writing.

The teacher later proposed a number of activities in order to integrate the book and its narrative with the story of the class. She brought a dog and a turtle for the children to observe and explore their characteristics such as hair texture, snout shape, and the number of legs, in order to establish a comparison with the information provided by the book. At this point, we could notice the children using new words they had just learned from the book to describe and compare the animals. The difference between the dog's hair and the turtle shell was what caught their attention the most. Furthermore, they used the word 'snout' and 'moustache'—presented in the text and new for most of them—to describe and differentiate the dogs: the real ones from the fictional ones. At a later moment, the teacher suggested they created a papier-mâché Bill puppet, using plastic bottles and caps so they could play with it later. They then had the opportunity to take part in different activities, such as mixing paint to create colours as well as making a snout, paws, and tail from papier-mâché. During this activity, children produced and imagined the dog from the book with the help of their teacher, but they were mostly able to anticipate and plan the activity using phrases and words from the text read. "Fred" (the dog's Brazilian name from "Smelly Bill" in translation) was then positioned next to the book, available to play.

The book was available to the children via the 'door storage pockets', and they used it in several ways: they went through the pages alone, in pairs, or in trios, enacting the reading practices used by the teacher. They also pretended to read the book aloud to themselves as well to their friends. The teacher recorded the children correcting each other when using phrases derived from the book in an attempt to faithfully reproduce the written text read by the teacher.

In the process that lasted over a month, besides observing and registering the children's testimonies, the teacher produced small note pads shaped like little books in which they were able to draw individually. Many of them registered the title and author's name in their own way. Also, besides presenting more elaborate drawings, most children spontaneously made different forms of writing.

Outdoor and inside play received new objects and characters: Bill, the dog; a turtle; Great-Aunt Bleach—all characters from the book—and also a tank in which to wash imaginary clothes, among other things. The teacher reported that children started to use new words in their dialogues while pretending to wash and hang clothes on clotheslines or as they walked the papier-mâché dog. Words like smelly, grimy, hair, legs, snout and moustache started to be a part of new narratives and dialogues created during their playtime. Smelly Bill—both the book and its papier-mâché recreation—became a part of their oral practices and their play when they spontaneously reproduced entire sentences from the book as their own.

What We Are Learning about Supporting Children's Language: Implications for Northern Canadian Contexts

1. Children's play-based learning

The emotional, affective, cognitive, cultural and social benefits of play for children have been known for quite some time. As an activity that is constituted *by* and *in* children's language, it is a unique opportunity for children, whether alone or in a group,

to try and use their abilities to transform the meanings of objects, gestures and actions through words. By using concrete support such as objects, toys or gestures to create their play, children were able, for the first time, to dissociate the literal meaning of the word and create new semantic relationships between what they see and what they mean whenever in action.

During this process, some authors believe a rich relationship between play and the construction of children's narratives is developed (Pellegrini & Galda, 2000). During playtime children can understand new knowledge and beliefs (representations of reality) taking on different roles or characters.

In order to adapt the use of objects to play (such as the little plane that turned into a pacifier in one of the scenes described above) the children had to access some meta-representational cognitive abilities (when an object is represented as something else in that individual's mind) to construct their own playing, along with the spontaneous interactions we observed (Smith, 2009, p. 10). This occurred also in some of Northern Canadian videos, such as "Camping Dramatic Play". As transcribed from the video:

"The kindergarten teacher created a camping-themed dramatic play centre using a small fold-up tent, three sleeping bags and a few non-camping related items (e.g., pine cones and blocks). While the children played in this centre, they talked with each other about camping and were free to use the props in any way they needed. During this first week of the camping dramatic play centre, the teacher would also group the children together to explore themes around camping, using both props and imagination. For example, she brought in cotton balls and sticks and asked the children what they might do with these. One boy used the sticks to build a "fire" and the cotton balls then became "marshmallows". Another time, the teacher brought an imaginary picnic basket to the carpet and suggested that they needed to fill it. She had wooden blocks to serve as props. The students suggested that the blocks become items for a recipe, and they contributed suggestions to a recipe for "rainbow juice". The teacher emphasized the different senses to see how these descriptions might relate to camping. For example, she pretended to feel something wet, which led to students sharing their ideas about water and then about going fishing. The classroom items that the teacher brought into the lessons became imagined camping related items." (Video transcript, from personal correspondence, May 2016)

In both situations, by making use of objects, toys or objects with altered meanings, children were able to imagine themselves as someone different and create imaginative dialogues that allowed a spontaneous and collaborative narrative to emerge.

2. Oral language as the foundation of cultural learning

In our observations, whenever they played with toys whose evident characteristics had to be modified—for example, disregarding the gender of the doll and referring to it by the feminine pronoun *ela* ("she")—children developed a high degree of literacy because they had to think, communicate, and negotiate with their peers the words used to modify the objects with which they were playing.

After reading aloud, we found that Bill (the papier-mâché dog) had become part of the play. With the mediation of the puppet, children used new words in consensual play

interactions. The book's text expanded the oral repertoire of children and made it possible to enrich their play beyond the objects with which they were already familiar.

During several moments throughout their play, children in pairs, trios, or quartets would use phrases from the book, such as "Smelly Bill will take bat! [. . .] No! Auntie Bleach told him" or, for example, "He was duped! Let wash it? Yeah all grimy!" A new narrative was gradually created in a highly rich cognitive and linguistic process in which children added and changed the words and their own roles in a continuous indeterminate series of events. If we compare to the "Camping Dramatic Play" video, we can find the same idea about oral language as the foundation of cultural learning. The Canadian teacher had found that both groups—morning and evening classes—of children gave different names for the same objects/props, depending upon their own experiences camping and their own imaginings. The teacher noticed the same thing in the camping-play centre, for example, some children referred to the tent as a camper, while others called it a tent, depending upon the narrative that they were creating. With the camping centre, she noticed that the students had very different experiences around camping, and so she wanted to explore this further. [...] She encouraged the children to draw pictures and write words to contribute to the word wall in the dramatic play centre (NOW Play project transcript, personal communication, May 27, 2016).

Our ongoing investigation has revealed that, just as actual toys such as dolls or props as used at the Camping Dramatic Play, reading literary books—especially fiction stories with familiar themes and rhymes—provides content for play. Reading aloud encourages children to talk and play as if they were the characters in the stories, creating opportunities for the understanding of oral narratives while playing with them.

Our study shares similarities with a previous work (Istomina, cited in Bodrova, 2008, p. 360) in which the number of words that children could remember and use during a game in a make-believe grocery store were higher than those used in classical experimental educational activities. In that work, children had to list words from a shopping list and were more successful in doing so, than when they were simply given a list of words to memorize and repeat.

As we have shown by the results of reading "Smelly Bill", our research confirms that there was an expansion and diversification of the use of oral and other modes of language by children in situations of everyday interactions. More importantly, however, we noticed that their play was enriched and expanded the children's oral language as well as gestures and other modes of communication.

Would those Brazilian reflections inspire Northern Canadian teachers? Should we ask about how children in Brazilian preschool and Northern Canadian Aboriginal Head Start classrooms use language and other modes of communication to achieve social purposes in their play?

3. Culturally relevant monitoring

In the world of early childhood education, it is traditional to create opportunities and offer different types of material for children with which to play freely, with minimal adult intervention. Authors have reported frequent conflicts of interest between playing and teaching (Rogers, 2011; Wajskop, 2012) as if both activities were not two sides of the same coin. This division between play and education—characteristic of various educational practices found in children's education—has resulted in inadequate proposals

for children's learning, including oral language skills, for it prevents the integration of play and pedagogical practices (Rogers, 2011, p. 5) as well as focuses exclusively on educational objectives (Wajskop, 2012).

Our research, in contrast, has shown that planned and intentional activities with children's literature (such as reading books aloud) can provide them with rich linguistic repertoire and imagination. The analysed results lead us to believe that play—inspired and enriched by children's literature read aloud by adults in daycare centres—may be a key strategy for the development of children's oral skills.

The playing analysed has shown to have impact also on children's familiarity with letters as well as their literacy process. Other Canadian videos showed the same results, as we saw in "Responding to Folktales": Grade 1 Indigenous children listened to the story "The Three Billy Goats Gruff". During the week, the teacher reread the story and the children participated verbally, and with actions and gestures. They created masks in the drama centre for their enactments, and later were asked to write the story or create a new version.

By using new words and expressions learned from the books to name objects and actions in their playing, children develop naming and description skills as well as semantics explanation at the same time they become more aware of the significance of their use. The books read enhanced the oral skills of children in situations where the use of new words was necessary and also enabled them to develop meta-linguistic awareness—i.e., the meaning of the words—and the expansion of their imaginative skills.

Burying the myth of the misleading debate concerning playing and early education, the study leads us to reiterate that there is an intrinsic and interdependent relationship between play, language and literacy (Pellegrini & Ryzin, 2009).

We found that education—by means of cultural interventions by the teachers—can enrich and qualify children's play when developing intentional teaching practices such as the meaningful reading of books in daycare centres. We can say that by investing in research on the expansion of linguistic and narrative repertoire of children through literature, teaching activities can create conditions for children to take ownership of literate language. This means they develop the ability to produce and understand the formal language used in educational institutions. Play turns into a creative exercise of spoken language, where children can use new words and understand sense units in playful interactive contexts. Thus, rather than mere innate behaviours, play becomes a language activity.

We can say from the results, that by enriching children's oral skills with the reading of books and offering them open-ended props, teachers created opportunities to turn playing into a literate activity.

What we are Learning about Supporting Professional Learning: Implications for the NOW Play Project

Finally, throughout this process, one learns more about this by carefully examining the practice as well as the research itself. In this perspective, we have developed a work related to the reflection and registration of teaching practices, investigating how the use of personal narratives associated with the importance of teaching practices can impact the change of attitude and vision about the profession.

First of all, a number of participants reported the impact of learning about research practices such as observation and video-recording as tools for later reflection. Secondly, they reported the use of individual notebooks as tools of thinking. Through writing and reading their own notes and ideas, they became their own mentors.

A number of participants reported that their action research impacts their teaching practices. It made them aware of the need to provide opportunities for children to be free to choose a story to read. Many of them also reported that they became aware of the impact on children's learning and imagination of reading aloud rather than telling a story. They also started to see themselves as a model for children as they became more attentive to their own language, correcting each other.

One teacher reported that their action research made them aware of the necessity to hear children's needs to learn in a process through play. Many teachers reported that their action research made them aware of children's voice. One teacher reflected that her action research confirmed her understanding about the importance of listening to the children for better teaching.

We agree with Peterson (2012) "through participation in action research, teachers become more adept at collecting and evaluating evidence of children's learning and using this information to refine and improve their teaching." (p. 5). According to Peterson, action research "also fosters teachers' greater confidence in their practice, a greater sense of professionalism, and a greater depth of knowledge. The professional growth of teachers through opportunities to reflect on each other and with their mentor to make sense of their experience and develop their own theories and principles of effective practice." (p. 5).

Through their participation in action research, teachers began to reflect more deeply about their own practice in a learning community, articulating intentions, assumptions, and connections with theory.

As reported, one teacher participating in their action research has changed their children's approach as well as their own teaching.

Finally, there is still much to do, but it has become clear that the appropriation of new, significant, and creative teaching strategies that take children's rights into account takes time. However, a big step was taken, indicating the possibility of collectively building a pedagogy based on literature and 'literate play' that creates fairer opportunities for poor children to take ownership of communication processes, expression and linguistic meanings by fluent and creative use of oral language within early childhood institutions.

Supporting professional learning of teachers from low-income Brazilian communities made us aware of the impact that collaborative research could have on teachers' practice. In a deepened understanding, supporting professional learning showed us the power of helping teachers to become theorists. They amplified their understanding about poor children's right to learn and the classroom context in a new cultural meaning, becoming more than just a good teacher. They became aware of the power of their own teaching and their cultural interventions within poor children's rights to play and learning in daycare centres as well as the power of collaboration between research and teaching.

Our action research could have some implications for the NOW Play project because of our similar cultural context. Northern Canadian teachers, just as our own communities' teachers, could go beyond the profession and theory. If participating in

collaborative action research provided opportunities to make Brazilian teachers be aware of children's voices as well as their own, Northern Canadian teachers may also think about children's aboriginal voices as well as theirs in a school learning context.

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A Provocative Approach for Communication with Low-Proficient Children: Examining How the Interactive Role of Teachers and Children Changes

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Abstract

Low-proficient children need to be engaged in high-quality oral interaction as soon as possible. Educational design research was conducted to discover elements of a provocative approach to enhance language and thought development of these children. These elements are presented and illustrated. Interactions were analysed in order to assess how teachers and children changed their role in the interactions, when teachers applied the approach. Results show that change is indeed possible, but not for everyone, nor to the same extent. Implications for teaching and professional learning initiatives are proposed.

Introduction

*a child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking*

Loris Malaguzzi –The 100 languages / No way. The 100 is there. (Meeuwig, Schepers & van der Werf, 2007)

We were asked to draw on our research in the Netherlands with teachers of young children to provide recommendations to teachers participating in the NOW Play project. In response to this request, we present the results of our educational design research focusing on improving language learning opportunities for low-proficient young children. Working together with teachers we developed a didactical and pedagogical approach that provokes children to think and talk actively. We call it a provocative approach. We examined changes in teacher practice and the changes in young children's language that result from this new approach.

Early Childhood Education in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, early childhood education and care involves children from 2.6 to 6 years of age. Until the age of four years, children go to preschool for two-to-four half days, although preschool is not compulsory. From the age of four, children attend

kindergarten for five days of about five hours each. Kindergarten constitutes the first two grades of Dutch primary school.

Children who may be educationally disadvantaged are encouraged to participate in preschool. According to the national educational priority policy (OC&W, 2013), children are considered educationally disadvantaged when they are from a non-Western background (i.e., working immigrants from Turkey and North Africa and refugees from Asia, the Middle East and Africa), or when their parents have a low educational level. Educational preschools—which use special educational programs to stimulate language, literacy and mathematics development—have been developed for these children. Research on the efficacy of these programmes has shown that the teacher is the crucial factor in early education (Haan, Elbers, Hoofs, & Leseman, 2013). The amount of time the teacher spends with the children on language, literacy and mathematics activities is significantly related to children's development, independent of the program used. However, for future research, the authors advise examining not only the *amount*, but also the *quality* of the teacher's interaction.

Mercer and Littleton (2007), in their educational adaptation of sociocultural theory, show that high-quality classroom interaction has a positive influence on children's success in school and on their thinking. Dialogic teaching considers the interaction between teacher and children as a collective enterprise. Teacher and child participate actively in the thinking and talking. Through dialogue the participants invoke and create knowledge and understanding together (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). This strand of theory, which is discussed in more detail in the next section, is appealing for early childhood education. For young children, play activities may offer rich opportunities for such interaction. Through communication with their teacher and peers, they make sense of the world around them. While playing, they encounter surprising situations or problems, and think up and try out solutions. For example: *This sand does not stick together to build a sand castle. Now what? Or: That sand does not come out of the bottle. How come?*

Teachers and educators in early childhood education and care in the Netherlands are well aware of this importance of interaction for learning. Based on educational design research, interaction courses for teachers and student teachers have been developed (Damhuis & De Blauw, 2008; De Blauw et al., 2012). In everyday practice, however, teachers and educators still experience difficulties in realizing high-quality interaction, especially with children who are learning Dutch as a second language and children from low socio-economic backgrounds, with less rich language environments at home. A teacher participating in one of our interaction courses signalled this as an urgent practical issue: "How can I involve the low-proficient preschoolers actively and verbally in conversation?"

These signals from educational practice initiated our educational design research project. Its first aim was to develop a pedagogical approach that provoked low-proficient young children to communicate. This took us on a journey with practitioners in search for powerful elements of a teaching approach to support these children. Our second aim was to examine the interactions that practitioners realized when they implemented this approach. Does the approach help teachers to create more opportunities for active thinking and talking from the children? This aim led to two main research questions that we address in this article:

1. How successful are teachers in changing their own role in interaction with low-proficient young children when they implement the approach?
2. How do children's contributions to the interaction change when teachers implement the approach?

We will first discuss the theoretical foundations of our research. Then we will describe the pedagogical approach that we developed. Lastly, we will present the research method and findings for the two questions, not only the initial findings, but some further explorations of the data as well. All in all, this article offers suggestions for the Canadian situation: how to realise more language- and- thought-provoking interactions with children in early childhood education, regardless of whether the context is rural, urban, Indigenous or non-Indigenous; and ways to support teachers and educators in learning to apply this approach in their own contexts.

Theoretical foundations for developing the pedagogical model

We draw on two main strands of theory and research in our project. The first concerns the role of interaction from the perspective of (second) language learning. Children need to *act, think and talk actively* in order to develop their language and cognitive proficiencies. It is not the case that children first learn language and then apply their learning in a conversation. Rather, through active participation *in* the conversations, children learn language and expand their proficiency in first language acquisition (Snow, 2014) and second language acquisition (Swain, 2005). The focus on the interaction as the crucial force in language acquisition rose from the pragmatic view on language around the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Young children learn through communication with their parents: parents provide input that is related to the gestures and gazes of the child (semantic contingency, Cross, 1977). For children acquiring a second language, interaction is similarly crucial (Hatch, 1978).

In the context of second language learning the Input Hypothesis was introduced (Krashen, 1981): learners need comprehensible language input just a bit beyond their current level of proficiency; the context enables learners to understand such input. Soon, the Output Hypothesis was added (Swain, 1985). It stated that comprehensible input is not sufficient, but language learners also need to produce comprehensible language: they have to express their intentions in interaction with others. "Grammatical encoding is quite different in its effect from grammatical decoding, which does not push learners to reorganize their form-meaning mappings" (Swain, 2005, p. 476). Swain uses the term 'pushed output' to indicate it goes beyond mere comprehensibility: "Negotiating meaning needs to incorporate the notion of being pushed toward the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed *precisely, coherently, and appropriately*." (Swain, 1985, p. 248–9). Swain emphasizes that output is not to be seen as a product, but as a process: the act of producing output triggers language learning instances (Swain, 2005). She presents descriptions of, and empirical evidence for, three functions of language production for second language acquisition:

1. The noticing/triggering function. While trying to produce the target language, learners may consciously notice a linguistic problem, which triggers cognitive

processes to solve the problem and thus create new knowledge of the language (p. 474).

2. The hypothesis testing function. Learners produce language according to their current hypothesis of how to formulate their meaning. Feedback on the production then functions as either confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis (p. 476).
3. The metalinguistic (or reflective) function. When learners use the language to reflect on the language that they or someone else have produced, it mediates language learning (p. 478).

In early childhood education and care in the Netherlands, a lot of emphasis is placed on providing ample and adequate input. To counterbalance this one-sided focus, it is important to draw the attention of teachers to the output side of language acquisition. In our work with teachers on how they may foster language and thought development of young children, we had to make several adjustments to the output hypothesis on the level of practical teaching implications:

- Swain (2005) reports that communicatively oriented classrooms and collaborative writing tasks provide more opportunities for the three output functions. The communicative orientation is very feasible in activities with young children, but it will be mainly oral communication.
- The way Swain discusses the three functions of the process of producing output involves learners who are consciously noticing, testing and reflecting on the language. For young children this will rarely be the case: they are generally focused on communication.
- The reflection in the third function is a problem-solving activity, focused on a linguistic problem: learners gain knowledge about the language. Speaking is considered “a way to complete thought” (Swain 2005, p. 479). In the second theoretical strand on which we base our work (see later on in this section), problem-solving by speaking is considered from the broader perspective of gaining knowledge about the world, e.g., science. It opens up the way to combine opportunities for language learning on the one hand, with opportunities for developing thinking proficiency on the other.

We rephrased these insights as the *language learning mechanism*, Figure 1, to clarify for teachers what children need for language learning. Learning in a conversation works only under the condition that the children contribute actively to the conversation and bring in their own intentions. The children themselves have to put their ideas into words. When they really want to convey their intentions, they will use the language knowledge that they presently have, even though this requires an effort. They will notice what they do not know yet: which words they miss, which sentence structure or verb inflection. This is the best moment to pay attention to the language around them. From the input and feedback they get, they will pick up the missing element and add it to their knowledge of the language. This language learning mechanism is only triggered when the child acts, thinks and talks actively. It enables the child to learn new language in natural conversations during play.

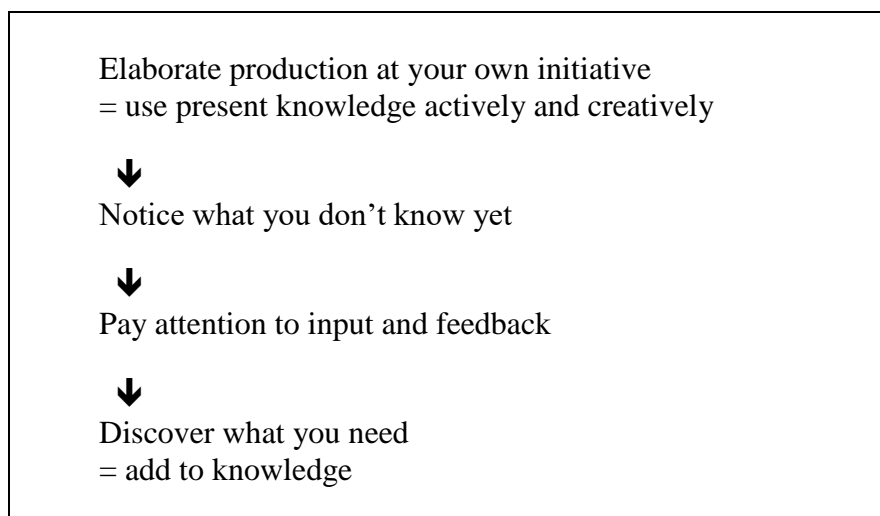


Figure 1. Language-learning mechanism (Damhuis & Litjens, 2003)

Example 1 makes this language learning mechanism concrete. A child and a teacher are playing with sand. The teacher has created opportunities for the child to express his thoughts and ideas. By participating actively in this conversation, he finds out what he did not know yet and adds it to his knowledge of the language and the world. It is the process of producing language that creates learning opportunities.

Example 1

Conversation turns	Interpretation of what happens in the turn
Child: That's because the sand, it-it- uh... holds on to itself.	Child expresses his ideas himself and discovers he lacks the proper word. He produces a circumscription 'holds on to itself'
Teacher: Ah, it sticks together?	Teacher offers the appropriate word in her natural response of implicit feedback in the conversation

The second theoretical strand is learning theory in a broader sense and concerns dialogic learning and interthinking. Dialogue is considered important in education for several reasons. It functions as a learning tool: research has provided empirical support for Vygotsky's claim of the relationship between thought, language and social activity (Mercer 2008). In addition, being able to participate in dialogic learning is considered a necessary skill: it ranks high in lists of 21st century skills. The present and future society poses an increasing need for people to work with knowledge together (Bereiter 2002, Wells, & Claxton 2002, Binkley et al. 2010). From yet another perspective, dialogue is seen as an educational aim by itself. Dialogue is an important part of present-day cognitive development: one needs continuous dialogue to work with multiple perspectives and ultimate uncertainty (Wegerif, 2013).

Education offers many opportunities for interthinking: collaborative thinking through talk (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). Spoken language has a central role in interthinking, in the process of thinking collectively. However, such interthinking is rarely found in classrooms (op. cit.). Mercer and colleagues found that in classroom talk, the most enhancing form for interthinking is *exploratory talk*, a term coined by Barnes (see Barnes 2008). In other instances, it is indicated as productive interaction (Littleton & Howe, 2010). Exploratory talk is described as talk in which

- everyone engages critically but constructively,
- everyone offers relevant information,
- everyone's ideas are treated as valuable,
- partners ask for reasons and give them,
- members try to reach agreement,
- reasoning is 'visible' (op. cit. p. 16).

In the settings of early childhood education and care the level of knowledge that is created often concerns the direct surroundings of the children. In the classroom a play station has been created into a bakery shop. By playing 'bakery', children learn how a client acts and talks, and what to do and say as shop owner. The teacher may join the play as a client and enrich the play with new lines of thought. For instance, after buying a bread and some cookies, she may ask for a kilo of potatoes. This starts up an exchange about what you can and cannot buy in a bakery and why that is so. Children and the teacher offer reasons with their ideas, allow each other to talk freely and accept each other's ideas. For instance, that some bakeries may have a special section with other food that they go shopping with their dad and buy bread and vegetables in the same shop that they think they could change the name of the play station shop, *et cetera*. Talking and thinking together deepens the knowledge of the children of the world around them.

When exploratory talk is combined with ample opportunity for pushed output, both language development and thought development will profit. Although young children's language proficiency may be low, they can express their ideas by using their current language knowledge. Even very young children can indicate relationships between object and events: they can reason. In the bakery play station, the child may say: "That one? Is more money". Teacher: "Oh, why?" Child: "Is bigger." Thus she expresses her reasoning that the apple pie the teacher-client has chosen is more expensive because it is bigger. The teacher may offer feedback that shows the more complete language structures and forms: "Oh, I see, so this one is more expensive because it is bigger." In a next series of exchanges, the teacher could provoke a similar instance for the child to apply more precise language. Teacher: "And what about this pie?" Communication is the focus here, the feedback offers the more precise language forms the child is lacking: the adjective *expensive*, the function word *because*. The opportunity for learning lies in the interaction.

Combining both strands in our project adds to the importance of creating rich dialogue in preschool and kindergarten as well as to the scope of developmental aspects that are enhanced by rich dialogue. Rich dialogue is not 'merely' required for (second) language learning, but for thinking and learning in general and for preparing children for a life in the 21st century society.

Background: Designing our Provocative Pedagogical Approach

Our project's aim was to develop an approach for enhancing language development and cognitive development simultaneously. We conducted an educational design study. To ensure practical feasibility as well as theoretical and educational validity, learning communities were set up of co-operating teachers and researchers. Teacher participation in the project was crucial, because teachers' personal and professional knowledge forms a valuable source for understanding what happens in education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) and for improving teacher education and the success of educational innovation (Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001). Our project combined the practical knowledge of teachers, the theoretical findings of research and the knowledge of the researchers through intensive dialogic exchanges.

In the first phase of the project an inner circle was formed of teachers from preschool (N=9) and kindergarten (N=15) and two researchers. One learning community was based in one of the biggest cities in the Netherlands. Two preschool institutes were involved, with a total of four preschool teachers, and one primary school with seven kindergarten teachers. The pupil population showed a high percentage of L2 learners. The other learning community was in a small town in a more rural area. Three preschool institutes with a total of five teachers and three primary schools with a total of eight kindergarten teachers participated. Here the pupil population comprised a middle to high percentage of L2 learning children. All teachers were female. Approximately half of the teachers were fairly new on the job (0–4 years of experience), the others were very experienced teachers.

Working within the learning community teachers from preschool and kindergarten allowed us to learn from each other's experiences and ideas. Each learning community participated in a series of four group meetings of half a day each, with practicing periods of approximately six weeks in between. By the end of every practicing period, each teacher was individually supported in a coaching session with a researcher. The researchers led the group meetings.

The project focused on small-group activities, where a teacher joins one or two children, since these are often found to be more enhancing for language development than whole-group activities (Damhuis, 2000; Powell, Burchinal, File, & Kontos, 2008). In the first meeting, several concrete elements (e.g., how to pose fewer questions, how to keep silent) were introduced, derived from theory and research. The teachers explored those, discussed how they could be realized in their own groups, and made a personal working plan for the next practicing period. In the last two weeks of the practicing period a researcher visited each teacher in her group and videotaped the intended interactional activity. Directly (or shortly) after the classroom visit, the researcher and teacher discussed several parts of the video in an individual coaching session.

The researchers took up issues that were raised by the participants during the group meetings and the individual coaching sessions. Ideas for tackling those issues were prepared for the next group meeting. In these meetings teachers also discussed their videos amongst each other, formulating ways in which a possible element did or did not work as expected. In this way, elements were discovered and refined gradually with which teachers felt they were able to provoke less talkative or less proficient children to communicate.

In the second phase, an outer circle was formed (N=12) of teachers and school leaders in the field. In a working meeting of half a day we acquainted them with the approach that

was developed in Phase 1. Over the course of one month these participants experimented with the approach. In a second meeting they provided critical feedback.

Based on these real life practices we adjusted the approach, making sure it was feasible in a broad range of practices. The result is an approach that combines several powerful strategies in order to provoke children to act, think and talk actively.

Our Pedagogical Model: A Provocative Approach

In Figure 2 we present the 10 powerful elements for a provocative approach as a result from the work with teachers. These elements are posted on a freely-accessible website, <http://www.uitdagentotgesprek.nl> including explanations and illustrative video fragments.

A provocative approach

Powerful practice = Combine strengths

1. Create a rich verbal learning environment
2. Join as co-player, do not ask test questions
3. Connect to the L1 life of the child
4. Create communication immediately, put into words what the child is doing
5. Create space on the speaking floor and challenge with respect to content
6. Use surprise and provocative statements
7. Give implicit feedback and continue the communication
8. Offer fixed phrases ('chunks')
9. Be less helpful: linguistically and in terms of actions
10. Create a problem

➔ Create opportunities & seize opportunities

Figure 2. Ten powerful elements to provoke low-proficient children to communicate

Most of these elements are not new by themselves, as the research that informs our project has already identified them. The strength of our pedagogical model lies in the purposeful combination of these elements. Here we first discuss element 10 as a starting point. Then we present an example in which several elements are applied. We finish this section with element 4, which addresses the alleged silent period.

Creating a problem (element 10) is powerful way to provoke children to act, think and talk actively. This works with all children, even the less talkative or less proficient ones. The preschool and kindergarten teachers in our project experienced that creating a problem works as a trigger for the other elements.

Teachers may *seize* an opportunity by picking up a problem that occurs spontaneously during play. This may be a very simple problem, for instance in the house play station, where two children invite the teacher to have tea with them but only two cups are on the table. The teacher exclaims "But you already drunk from these cups!" This provokes children to think, act and talk: look for another cup, or argue that it does not matter that the cups are already used. The teacher may also *create* a problem in line with

the play. For instance, when a child offers the teacher ‘a slice of pizza’, the teacher calls out “Wow, that’s too hot!” The child takes back the slice while saying “Go let it cool off a bit”.

Closely connected to this element is element 9: Be less helpful. It is essential that teachers do not immediately offer a solution to a problem that occurs. The problem is meant to provoke the child to act, think and talk actively for him or herself. Teachers don’t solve the problem of the heavy box by lifting it themselves, but just wait and look around encouragingly. Nor do they offer too much linguistic help. A question like “Mmm, what do we need now to lift this box?” fills in already most of the language elements that a child might have used. The child now can suffice with “a rope”, a simple utterance that does not trigger the language learning mechanism. A better response by the teacher would be something quite open: “And now?” Or even a surprised “Oops!” could do the job, if followed by silence on the teacher’s part.

Combining Several Elements: Playing Along in the Sandbox

Example 2 illustrates what the interaction looks like when the elements are applied. A preschool teacher and a 3-year-old girl are playing with sand and toy animals in a sandbox play station. Both are scooping up sand with their hands to fill up a ridge along the side of the box.

Example 2

Conversation turns	Interpretation of what happens in the turn
1. Child: Hey, a pig!	Child comments on toy animal hidden in the teacher’s scoop of sand.
2. Teacher: Is there a pig in it?	
3. Child: Hey.	Child picks out the pig and sees that sand is leaking very slowly from the hands of teacher: surprised exclamation.
4. Teacher: Is there another one? What happens?	Teacher first thinks there is another toy animal. Then she questions what is happening while expressing surprise using facial expressions and intonation.
5. Child: You open it.	Child asks teacher to open up the crack between her two hands.
6. Teacher: Can I open it? There it comes. (silence)	Teacher lets sand leak slowly through.
7. Child: Done. (silence)	Child catches sand until her hands are full. She drops the sand on the ridge and holds her hands under those of the teacher again. But teacher has closed her hands; no sand is coming out any more.
8. Child: I want too. Open now.	Child has to solve this problem now, by using more language.

9. Teacher: Do you want more? Shall I open it?	Teacher rephrases in more complete language.
10. Child: Yes.	
11. Teacher: Okay, here it comes. (silence)	Teacher is opening and closing here hands quickly and child laughs.
12. Child: You this.	Child wants to let the sand leak out of her own hands now.
13. Teacher: We do it the other way? Open it.	Teacher rephrases and holds her hands under those of the child now.
14. Child: Gone.	Child closes her hands.
15. Teacher: And close again.	Teacher puts child's action into words.

Throughout this example we see element 2: the teacher joins as a co-player, follows the child in her play (line 5, line 12) and does not ask test-questions. She does not interrupt the play by asking things like “Which other animals do you see?” Element 5 is applied regularly: Create space on the speaking floor and challenge with respect to content. The teacher's contribution to the talk comprises listing responses (lines 2, 9), silence after a turn (lines 6, 7, 11), and statements instead of questions (line 6, line 11). These contributions create opportunities for the child to take the speaking floor: to express her own ideas, by which her language learning mechanism is triggered (Damhuis, De Blauw & Brandenburg, 2004). The teacher also applies element 6: uses surprise (line 4) and lets the child continue. And last but not least, element 10 is put into action: the teacher creates a problem by closing her hands (after line 7).

In this short example we see instances of both *creating* and *seizing* opportunities for active acting, thinking and talking. By closing her hands and thus stopping the desired flow of sand she created an opportunity that adhered closely to the play of the child. Earlier in the example she seized the opportunity that was raised by the child's surprise in line 3, where the child noticed that sand was trickling.

This example shows how the teacher can really play an important role in deepening play and interaction of children, in creating opportunities for active acting, thinking and talking:

- by following the play of the children – not taking control
- by communicating naturally – not asking too many questions
- by creating ample space for the children to talk – not talking herself all the time
- by creating a problem directly connected to what is happening in the play – not solving it herself

Supporting Silent Children: Engage in Communication

In our work with teachers, we paid special attention to children who appeared to be silent in preschool or kindergarten. We found that some young children entering preschool or kindergarten who were experiencing a shift in language and culture did not talk for a period of time. From a language learning point of view this may be a normal phase in the acquisition process: children are building up L2 repertoire by *listening* and *understanding*,

before actually *producing* language themselves (Gibbons, 1985). Learning a new language is sometimes traumatic: it is difficult to switch between the easy-to-speak language at home, L1, and the suddenly new, unfamiliar language used in school, L2 (Granger, 2004). Silence may also be caused by other traumatic experiences and lead to psychological withdrawal (op. cit.). This is not typical for the process of language development (Gibbons, 1985). It may occur with refugee children who escaped a war in their home country, or with children who perceive the new school situation as having no connection at all with the home situation.

Teachers wondered if they should respect the silence and hope for the child to overcome this silent period soon or if that would mean missing important opportunities to support the child. They found that they could help the children by establishing communication right from the beginning. Such communication may not even need language right away. The teacher simply joins in the activity of the child, copying the action of the child. For instance, if a boy is piling up building blocks, the teacher sits next to him and also starts piling up some blocks. With facial expressions the teacher shows interest in the child's action and maybe some surprise. In this way she, the teacher, acknowledges the child and his actions and makes herself available for contact. The child and the teacher may take turns in putting another block to their pile: this turn taking in actions is already a form of communication. Now and then the teacher may add some language: she puts the ongoing action of the child into words. For instance, "Yes, you add one more block to it". Such interaction may soon elicit also some verbal contributions of the child, however short or incorrect these may be. Establishing communication thus leads to verbal interaction gradually and without pressure.

This element 4 thus encourages teachers not to comply passively with a silent period, but to actively seek means of establishing contact and non-verbal communication. Participating teachers found that this works best with an activity the child feels attracted to. They learned that it is important to find out what fascinates children, so much that she or he will forget how difficult they find the L2 and really feel the urge to make their intentions clear to the teacher. Materials that connect to the home environment play an important part: add objects from their home for instance to the house play station.

Teachers found that by applying this element they were able to create the earliest possible opportunities for active acting, thinking and talking.

Investigating changes in interaction

Research Methods

The research questions that we answer in this article concern the effects of the implementation of Provoking Active Thinking and Talking:

1. How successful are teachers in changing the interaction with low-proficient young children when they implement the approach?
2. How do children's contributions to the interaction change when teachers implement the approach?

We compared the interaction realised by teachers before the first group meeting with the interaction at the end of Phase 1, using video recordings. The teacher carried out activities

with one or two children: before the first meeting an activity that was ‘aimed at interaction’, at the end of Phase 1 was another activity in which she applied the elements.

Because of time limitations we were unable to analyse all 48 videos (24 teachers with 2 videos each). Our aim here is to show that the interactional role of teachers is not a static trade, but one they can change purposefully. Therefore, we selected 12 teachers who were judged the most motivated and enthusiastic and with a variation over location and age and gender of the children. In preschool there were four teachers representing a large city and two in a small town, and at the kindergarten level, two teachers were from a large city and four represented a small town. In each video we analysed one ‘target child’, a total of six girls and six boys. We analysed the ‘before’ and ‘after’ videos: 24 videos in total. Table 1 shows how experienced the teachers were and some information on the children with respect to gender and whether or not they were L2 learners.

Table 1

Information about experience of teachers in analysis of change in Phase 1, and about the children

Teacher code	Teaching experience	Large city	Small town	Preschool	Kindergarten	L1	L2
Ag	10 years		x		x	b	
Au	14 years	x			x		b
D	8 years		x	x			g
E	4 years		x	x		g	
F	3 years		x	x		b	
H	4 years	x			x		g
I	2 years	x		x			g
J	8 years	x			x		b
L	9 years		x		x		b
Ma	2 years	x			x		g
Mi	0 years	x		x			b
R	8 years		x	x		g	

(L1 = Dutch as first language; L2 = Dutch as second language; b = boy, g = girl)

Because we aimed at showing maximum changeability, we identified a “window of opportunity” (Mercer, 2009) of 10 minutes in each video. By watching the video and judging it by overall impression, we identified the span that contained the most successful interaction for linguistic and cognitive development. Such a window of opportunity is not a representative sample that shows how an average teacher usually realizes the interaction, but a sample that gives the maximum achievable quality of interaction by this teacher.

The window of opportunity of each of the 24 videos was transcribed, using each speaking turn as *coding unit*. A turn was considered to be everything a certain speaker said until someone else started to speak, or until someone else contributed non-verbally to the communication. The *unit of analysis* is a teacher and the one or two children in the filmed activity: a couple/triad.

Of the 10 elements, three were used for micro-analysis, the others for macro-analysis. In the micro-analysis we operationalized seven variables for teacher turns and seven variables for child turns. These are indicative of high-quality interaction. Table 2 shows

the major relationships between elements and variables. There is, however, not a simple one-to-one relationship between elements, teacher variables, and child variables. For instance, speaking time of the child may be enhanced by all three elements; a decrease in teacher speaking time may lead to an increase children's speaking time, but also in increase in initiatives in turn-taking and topic, or the number of longer turns. In addition, elements in the macro-analysis may have a positive influence on the child micro-variables.

Table 2

Overview of elements, variables and expected direction of change in micro-analysis

Element	Teacher Variable	Child Variable
2. Do not ask test questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> percentage of open questions on total number of questions ↗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> initiative in topic ↗
5. Create space on the speaking floor and challenge with respect to content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaking time ↘ number of questions ↘ percentage of question turns on total number of turns ↘ number of non-questioning turns ↗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaking time ↗ number of turns ↗ verbal participation ↗ number of longer turns ↗ initiative in turn taking ↗
6. Use surprise and provocative statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provocative (questions and) statements ↗ surprise ↗ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complex cognitive language functions ↗

(↗ = expected increase; ↘ = expected decrease)

In the micro-analysis, each turn of the teacher was coded for every teacher variable; each child's turn for every child variable. Coding instructions were developed using a few transcripts as tryout material. Five coders were involved, working in pairs on one or more variables. Thorough discussions of codes given independently by a pair of researchers led to refining the coding instructions. After several tryouts, inter-coder reliability was assessed using 421 turns from five different transcripts. Teacher variables showed a kappa between 0.62 and 0.82, child variables between 0.67 and 0.99. This is considered to be a good-to-high reliability (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986).

Frequencies of variables were standardized to 10 minutes, adjusting for some shorter videos. For the 12 teachers, one-tailed t-tests ($p < 0.05$) were performed on the scores before and after applying the approach, based on the expected direction of change.

Results: Initial Findings

Teachers' interaction practices. The micro-analysis showed a significant improvement on five teacher variables when the provocative approach was applied, see Table 3.

Table 3

Overview of significant one-tailed t-test results ($p < 0.05$) on teacher variables, with expected direction of change, means and standard deviations (. . .) per 10 minutes of the activity

Teacher Variable	Expected Direction	Before	After	t(11)	p(1-Tailed)
Speaking time (in minutes:seconds)	⬇	3:24 (1:30)	2:22 (0:48)	1.93	0.040
Number of questions	⬇	50.65 (19.71)	38.77 (11.85)	1.89	0.043
Percentage of question turns on total number of turns	⬇	45.29 (10.90)	37.23 (11.51)	2.10	0.030
Number of non-questioning turns	⬆	58.6 (16.50)	66.8 (20.4)	-1.94	0.040
Percentage of open questions on total questions	⬆	7.88 (8.82)	18.01 (10.40)	-2.52	0.014

(⬆ = expected increase; ⬇ = expected decrease)

The amount of speaking time a teacher used decreased, on average, from three minutes to two minutes during the 10 minutes of the activity. On average teachers asked 12 questions fewer per 10 minutes when applying the provocative approach. Note that there still remain 38 questions per 10 minutes. Within the teacher turns, the proportion of questions decreased with 8 percent points. The number of non-questioning turns increased with eight turns on average. The percentage of open questions more than doubles. Increases in provocative statements and the use of surprise did not prove statistically significant. In sum, the teachers as a group did show quite a few changes.

Children's language. Do these teacher changes concur with changes in the children's interaction after the provocative approach is applied? In contrast with the teacher results, most differences in children's variables were not statistically significant. Only the number of longer turns by children was significantly higher, as you can see in Table 4.

Table 4

Overview of significant one-tailed t-test results ($p < 0.05$) on children's variables, with expected direction of change, means and standard deviations (. . .) per 10 minutes of the activity

Children's Variable	Expected Direction	Before	After	t(11)	p(1-Tailed)
Number of longer turns	⬆	3.66 (4.50)	10.83 (8.87)	-2.380	0.019

Longer turn of full sentence + full sentence	↗	0.89 (2.43)	4.45 (5.48)	-2.158	0.027
Longer turn of full sentence + fragment	↗	1.16 (1.54)	3.48 (3.26)	-2.135	0.028

(↗ = expected increase; ↘ = expected decrease)

The number of longer child turns almost tripled when the provocative approach was applied: from almost 4 to almost 11. It could be suggested that this is not a result of the new approach but merely a result of natural development of the children. However, we were able to rule this out by comparing older and younger children in the interaction before teachers worked with the approach: no difference was found.

Another reason why we really may attribute this difference to the provocative approach is the character of this variable. A longer turn is a turn that consists of more than one utterance. An utterance may be a fragment or a complete sentence. Longer turns contain a combination of two or more full sentences, or of a full sentence and a fragment, or of two (or more) fragments. In this way, a longer turn indicates that the children get the opportunity to express their ideas and thoughts more freely. So these turns indicate that the interaction is really different from the short question-and-answer sequences that are so typical for many conversations in education and care. And that is exactly what the provocative approach is meant to achieve.

Results: Pairing Teacher and Child Variables Leads to Further Explorations

Why did we find more significant teacher improvement of quality than children's? Were teacher changes still too small to provoke more children's participation? Indeed, when teachers still pose 38 questions per 10 minutes (i.e., 4 questions per minute), children may not yet feel free to show initiative. Children may still have the impression that the teacher is in control and that the appropriate way to participate is foremost to respond to questions, not to take initiative themselves by talking when not solicited explicitly. And when still 80% of these teachers' questions consist of closed questions, children's participation is still very often restricted. We explored patterns of change of the individual teachers in his or her small group (couple or triad) to gain more insight in the character of the changes.

Examining the number of variables where change occurred. We ranked the couples/triads according to the *number of variables* on which they improved in Figure 3. We see quite some variation in the number and type (teacher or children) of variables that improved.

This is consistent with our experience as teacher trainers: to change routine behaviour in interaction, teachers need to focus explicitly on the changes on the micro level. Teachers need time to build a new routine with the changed element of interaction. During Phase 1 teachers set up their personal development plan for the next period of practice with a focus on just two elements. Other elements may improve as a natural consequence, but this is not necessarily so for each and every element. Several change patterns were found. Some couples/triads changed on almost every variable (green ellipse), some on many children's

variables (blue ellipses) or many teacher's variables (orange ellipses). One couple/triad improved on only three variables (red ellipse).

The statistically significant results (Tables 4 and 5) seemed to suggest that *teachers* start to work on their own interactional behaviour, and that only when they succeeded on that level would *children* have the opportunity to improve their participation. But in Figure 3 we have identified four couples/triads where more variables on the children's side improved than on the teacher's side. Apparently the teacher side, as represented by the micro-variables, is not a prerequisite for the intended change in interaction on the children's side. Macro-elements may play a part here (see later in this section).

All in all, Figure 3 shows that there are quite a lot of changes on the children's side, even though they are not large enough to be statistically significant.

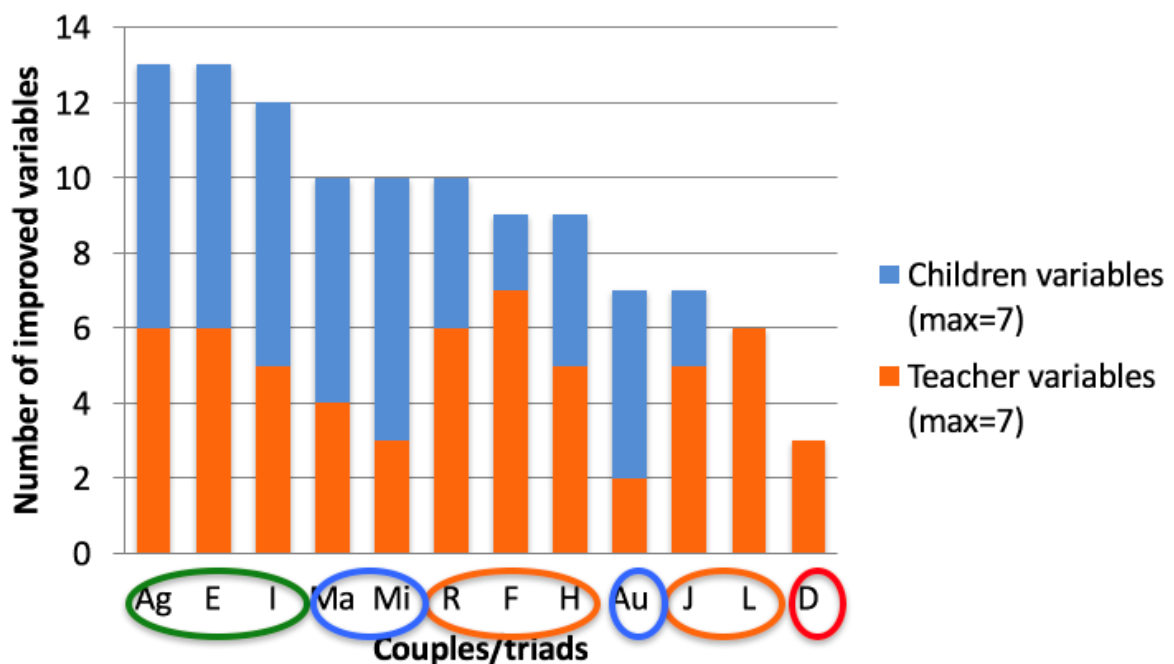


Figure 3. Number of variables on which each couple/triad improved (Ag, E, I etc. = initial of teacher)

Examining the magnitude of the changes. The next step in our exploration focused on the *magnitude* of the changes by individual couples/triads. Are couples/triads that change on many variables also the ones whose improvement on these variables is the *largest*? For instance, did teacher speaking time decrease with many minutes, or just with a few seconds? We counted per couple/triad with how many variables they belonged in the *top 2 of largest improvements* as per Figure 4.

In this graph we maintained the order of couples/triads according to the highest number of improved variables from Figure 3. So, the left side shows couples/triads that changed on many variables, the right side couples/triads that changed on few variables.

On the high side of the couples/triads of teachers, E and I have the most variables in the top 2 largest improvements. On the low side we find teachers J and D: they had no

variables at all in the top 2. Teachers E and I are thus identified as high changers, and J and D as low changers.

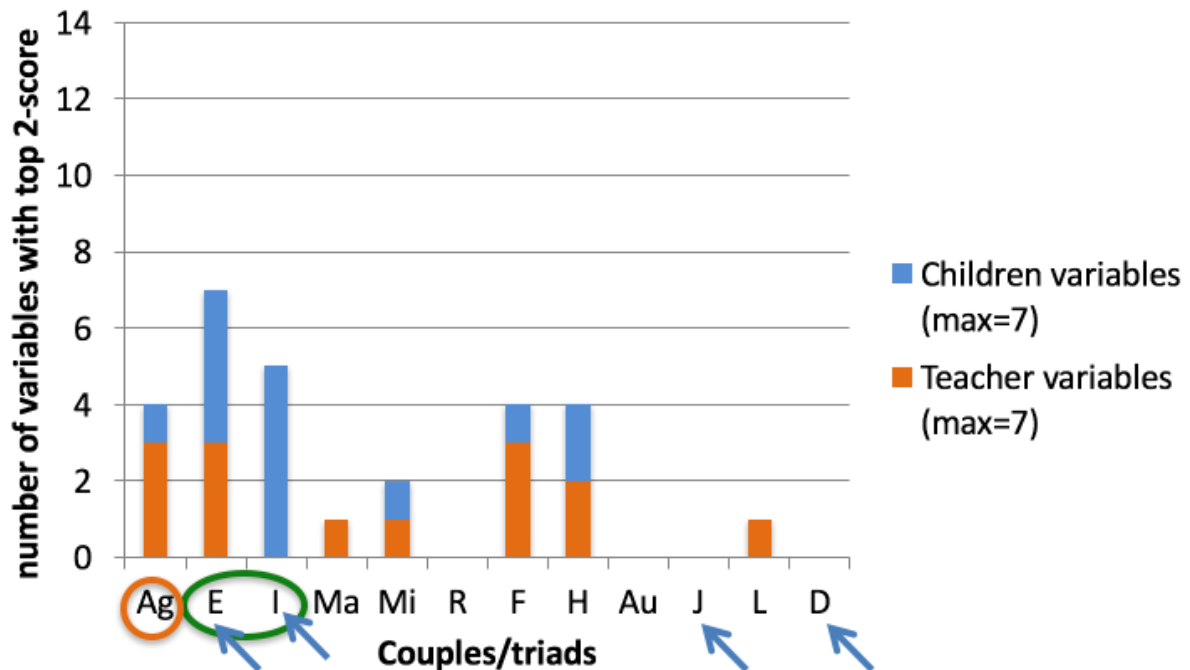


Figure 4. Number of variables on which each couple/triad belonged to the top 2 of largest changes (Ag, E, I etc. = initial of teacher)

High and low changers. By examining the number of variables where changes occurred and the magnitude of the changes, we identified four teachers (refer to arrows in Figure 4). For these teachers we conducted a macro-analysis on the other elements of the provocative approach. Two researchers observed the videotapes of the activities after applying the approach and independently judged the quality on each of the macro-elements in terms of applied (+) or not applied (-). These judgements proved concurrent between the two researchers.

The high changers were found to score positive for *being less helpful* (element 9) and *creating a problem* (element 10).

Taking macro- and micro-elements both into account, the success of the high changing couples/triads lies in the combination of micro- and macro-elements. Couples/triads that improved on *many* variables did this on teacher micro-variables as well as on child micro-variables. Moreover, they also showed the *largest* improvements.

Contextualizing the results using teachers' notes. In order to find explanations for the differences in change between the couples/triads, we consulted the personal development plans of the teachers and the notes on their coaching sessions made by the trainers. In the personal development plans, teachers not only wrote down their intentions for the next practice period, but also made reflective notes after conducting the intended activities. Directly after a coaching session, trainers made notes of salient remarks that the

teachers made. Several low change teachers indicated that they felt heavily pressed for time. They experienced the provocative approach as an activity that had to be added on top of the already full schedule of their daily program. They did not yet see how they could integrate the provocative interaction in these other activities. As a consequence, they also had less time than other teachers to practice and experiment with the approach and felt less confident with their new role. In contrast, the high changers were really able to integrate the approach in several activities of their usual program. They felt more confident in their new interaction role as well as in their possibilities of adjusting the program to their new needs while simultaneously maintaining the aims of the program.

In conclusion, from these analyses and explorations it appears essential for the provocative approach to combine elements at both the macro-and-micro level. By applying the approach, it is possible for teachers to change their interactional behaviour and to provoke children to act, think and talk actively. But not all teachers succeed to the same extent: in some couples/triads there was hardly any change. Of the 10 elements, some seem to be more powerful: e.g., be less helpful, create a problem. It requires further research to uncover more favourable and hindering factors and to discover how the several elements are interrelated.

Implications for Teaching and Professional Learning Initiatives

The core of this provocative approach is to get children to act, think and talk actively as soon as possible, and teachers are needed to provoke this. When children play freely, often a lot of such opportunities occur. Teachers can pick up these opportunities, using the elements of the provocative approach, and thus enrich the interaction without obstructing the line of play and ideas of the children. However, sometimes opportunities may not emerge spontaneously. Then the teacher needs to *create* them him or herself. Creating an opportunity has to be done in close connection to the interest of the children. For instance, when playing along with children in the sandbox, a teacher might pour deliberately too much water on the sand and exclaim “Oops!” This would provoke the children to think and talk about how to solve this new problem.

As our research has shown, it is possible for teachers to change their interactional behaviour in the direction of provoking more active acting, thinking and talking. However, this task is not a simple one. Teachers are asked to change their routine, to operate from a different mindset, from a different view on what constitutes high-quality interaction for language and cognitive development. That takes a lot of practice, a lot of experimenting and reflecting. Teachers deserve to be supported in that endeavour. Based on experiences of teachers and trainers in our educational design research, the following elements for an effective support are recommended:

- Create learning communities in which teachers feel safe to exchange experiences from their own real life practice and search for solutions to problems that occurred.
- Facilitate regular moments for the teacher to experiment with a small group of children.
- Use video coaching focused on the provocative approach aims of active acting, thinking and talking, and the 10 elements.
- Provide expert support in order to discover how this approach can be interwoven with the activities of the daily program.

- Facilitate teachers to work on this change for a longer period of time, with frequent video coaching and meetings in the learning community.

Such investment in teacher support and teacher professionalization in the application of this provocative approach may yield high revenues in language and cognitive development of children across continents.

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Empowering Language: Lenses of Knowing, Being and Doing

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Abstract

Mana, a notion reflecting empowerment, is a central concept in *te ao Māori*, the world views of the indigenous culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Mana* forms a key component within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* and Māori early childhood assessment framework *Te Whatu Pōkeka*. Lenses of these culturally responsive frameworks are applied to verbal interactions amongst Indigenous Canadian children playing in school. Play was utilized to empower the children's ideas and oral language towards richer storytelling. We argue that it is important for all teachers to consider and work with local and culturally responsive frameworks relevant to their context to empower children's voices.

Introduction

Empowering children's learning is vital across cultural contexts. This article examines possibilities for empowering Indigenous Canadian children's language through the use of play in primary/elementary school. We do so using aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural and bilingual early childhood curriculum framework, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1996), and ideas from the corresponding early childhood narrative assessment framework for Māori children, *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2009). Our intention is to provoke the repositioning of indigenous ways of knowing across contexts.

We were invited to link our work on play and curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand to data from a project in Ontario, Canada, called *Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play* (NOW Play). The NOW Play emphasis is on ways oral language might be empowered and strengthened through play-based learning. This project is working with a number of primary schools in remote and rural communities, some of which include Indigenous children. One premise of the project is to introduce more play into teaching programmes in the first years of schooling to foster richer oral language exchanges between children and teachers.

Our challenge was to apply ideas from our curriculum context in a different cultural context. This article examines excerpts of data we were provided with of children at play. We use lenses for analysis that may be responsive to Indigenous children's ways of knowing and being. Like many non-Indigenous teachers working with Indigenous children, we too are grappling with what it means in practice to work with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Our intention, therefore, is to highlight some key concepts of our

early-years frameworks in ways that might be considered across cultural contexts in locally responsive ways.

Aotearoa New Zealand is recognised as standing at the forefront of culturally responsive education due to its twenty-year history of working to implement a bicultural early childhood curriculum framework underpinned by *te ao Māori*, sociocultural and ecological theories of learning and development (Ritchie & Buzzelli, 2012), and prioritising attention to Māori learners in primary and secondary education (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2012). However, paradigmatic shifts are slow to evolve. As teachers and researchers we tend to fall back on enacting the world we know, and therefore may encounter difficulty applying an indigenous lens when it is not recognized readily within existing practices. These difficulties may include recognizing different communication styles and how Indigenous children may respond to, or resist, more westernized teaching and assessment approaches.

Shifts require on-going learning in teachers' professional knowledge and practice, for example, in using assessment for learning in culturally appropriate ways. This may be particularly the case in locating ways that are responsive to children's embodied ways of knowing or ways responsive to family knowledge. In the specific context of Canada, Peterson, McIntyre and Forsyth (2016) are concerned that teachers of Indigenous children "need to learn more about bridging children's home and school cultures and languages" (p. 11) in an effort to recognise and value the knowledge that Indigenous children bring to their learning.

Allen (2014) comments on the "urgent necessity" (p. 1) of teachers having culturally relevant assessment practices for Indigenous children in Canada, particularly in the area of language assessment, highlighting that typically Westernized assessment tools are employed which do not recognize the linguistic and cultural diversity of Indigenous children's language. For example, she identifies that questioning techniques may be different between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, and that Indigenous children may be quiet as a sign of respect, or may feel shy and less inclined to participate until they fully comprehend what is expected of them. In this way play can be a useful context to encourage participation in learning and for assessing understanding. Here the inseparable relationship between language and culture, and teachers' recognition of this, is exemplified. Elsherief (2016) similarly problematizes culturally responsive teaching and learning because culture is dynamic, and not a fixed way of knowing and being. Therefore, she argues that to teach and learn with children in culturally responsive ways teachers need a deep understanding of the "nuanced ways in which our students internalize and 'do' culture" (p. 3). These challenges highlight the importance of working to understand and apply frameworks that are informed by and designed for Indigenous children to better enable us to work in ways that are culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012). We engage with Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum and assessment frameworks in this paper to provoke thinking in the Canadian context with regard to Indigenous children.

Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa translates as "land of the long white cloud" and is the Māori name for New Zealand. It originates from the words of the first Māori navigators to arrive, upon seeing a long cloud indicating a possible land mass on the horizon. As Māori is now an official language the addition of Aotearoa to the name New Zealand recognises a commitment to fore fronting *tangata whenua* (the people of the land), and the founding

treaty. Aotearoa New Zealand is a nation founded on a treaty partnership—*Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, The Treaty of Waitangi. This treaty was signed by representatives of the British Crown and many Māori chiefs of Aotearoa in 1840. Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of partnership between Māori and immigrant settlers has been fraught over the years, and has more recently been approached from perspectives of settling historic claims. Correspondingly, and following patterns similar to Canada and other post-colonial nations around the world, the Indigenous population of Aotearoa New Zealand is overrepresented in statistics for poorer educational and health outcomes, higher rates of offending and imprisonment, and lower-socio-economic status. These societal realities for Indigenous populations reinforce the importance of education systems being relevant and responsive for Indigenous children and for teachers to explore more effective ways of working with culturally responsive curriculum and assessment.

As non-Māori authors we acknowledge that we cannot speak with authority about Māori concepts and values. However, as partners to the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa New Zealand non-Māori early childhood teachers take responsibility to learn about and uphold the bicultural intentions of our curriculum framework. We also work towards recognising Māori ways of knowing, being and doing as we work with lenses of culturally responsive curriculum design and assessment to empower Indigenous children's play and language. For the purposes of this paper we selected the curriculum lenses of *Whakamana*, the empowerment principle, and *Mana Reo*, the communication strand of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996), alongside the concept of *whakapapa*, represented as the layered lenses of knowing, being and doing within the Māori assessment framework *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (MOE, 2009). We explain these te ao Māori concepts shortly, offering our interpretations and thoughts in the knowledge these may be partial and still in development. *Te Whatu Pōkeka* was developed with two groups in mind, firstly Māori early childhood services, and secondly as a support resource for all early childhood services across Aotearoa New Zealand to inform more culturally responsive assessment practices for Māori children in mainstream services. In this way it is also intended for non-Māori teachers to work with (Rameka, 2007).

We encourage other non-Indigenous researchers and teachers to take up similar challenges and responsibilities in their contexts, that is, seek local and relevant concepts for responsive curriculum and assessment. We reiterate that our interpretations are subjective and somewhat limited, nor are we embedded in the Canadian context. Our intention is to provoke thinking about the potential applicability of local culturally responsive frameworks in other contexts.

Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum

As the first bicultural curriculum document in Aotearoa New Zealand, the national early childhood curriculum framework *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) became a flagship document locally and internationally. Its bilingual text, structure and interwoven principles (*Whakamana* – Empowerment, *Kotahitanga* – Holistic Development, *Tangata Whenua* – Family and Community and *Ngā Hononga* – Relationships) and strands (*Mana Atua* – Well Being, *Mana Whenua* – Belonging, *Whānau Tangata* – Contribution, *Mana Reo* – Communication, and *Mana Aotūroa* – Exploration) weave together to reflect partnership and reciprocity. “In early childhood settings, all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te

Tiriti o Waitangi. The curriculum reflects this partnership in text and structure” (p. 9). *Te Whāriki* translates as “woven mat”, a metaphor for weaving a responsive curriculum for all to stand on, to belong, and be empowered. One of the Māori co-developers of the curriculum stated:

Te Whāriki recognises my right to choose, and your right to choose. It encourages the transmission of my cultural values, my language and tikanga, and your cultural values, your language and customs. It validates my belief systems and your belief systems. (Reedy, 2013, p. 52)

Early childhood education, understood internationally as birth to 8 years, is the beginning of a child’s journey into education outside the home, therefore teachers and researchers cannot underestimate the importance of Indigenous children experiencing curriculum and assessment that empowers their identity and values, and upholds their rights. Empowering children’s identity development begins in the early years and extends into formal schooling contexts. The following concepts of te ao Māori (the Māori world) embedded within our national early-years curriculum and assessment documents *Te Whāriki* and *Te Whatu Pōkeka* are particularly relevant to Māori identity and values in this paper.

Te ao Māori values *whakapapa*—a layered knowing of who we are, where and who we have come from; what is embodied in our past, present and future ways knowing and being. “Ko wai koe? Nā wai koe? I ahu mai koe I hea? Who are you? From whom are you? Where have you come from?” (MOE, 2009, p. 50). In Western world views this concept is similarly expressed through a family tree but is limited to ancestors rather than incorporating place as spiritual and physical links to the land and gods. It is these multiple layers of identity and connection that create the layers of knowing, being and doing. Whakapapa is a traditional form of knowing that underpins every aspect of te ao Māori.

Whakapapa provides a continuum of life from the spiritual world to the physical world, from the creation of the universe to people past, present and future. While whakapapa permits Māori to trace descent through to past generations, it also allows movement and growth into the future. (Rameka, 2012, p. 33)

As educators and treaty partners in Aotearoa New Zealand, we acknowledge this Māori valuing of identity and connection. Conceptually, whakapapa may also speak of non-Māori knowing and being, our past, present and future, our connections with time and place, how we came to be here, and our right to be here as treaty partners. In viewing our world this way, we challenge our Westernized world views as we ‘look’ through these other lenses.

Mana and Mana Reo – Empowering Languages

“Mana can be translated as ‘prestige’ or ‘power’” (Rameka, 2007, p. 129), and is central to being empowered as an individual. Mana is a cornerstone of *Te Whāriki*, ensuring that

the learner is empowered in every possible way. ...The child is nurtured in the knowledge that they are loved and respected; that their physical, mental,

spiritual, and emotional strength will build mana, influence, and control; that having mana is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny. (Reedy, 2013, p. 47)

We question how empowering children might happen if traditional and embodied ways of knowing are not recognized through relevant cultural lenses. Empowered children are in control of their learning and the direction of their learning. In Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood education context this often translates as the child leading their play, through embodying their ways of knowing in their play and this being recognized and valued. Mana is central to, and named in, all five strands of *Te Whāriki*.

In this article we highlight one strand: Mana Reo: Communication. Mana Reo empowers children's languages through the explanation: "The languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected" (MOE, 1996, p. 72). The goals for this strand are for children to:

experience an environment where they: develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes; develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes; experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures; and, discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive. (p. 72)

Suggested learning outcomes include experience with developing stories, an ability to be creative and expressive through play and storytelling, using language for increasingly complex purposes, showing a playful interest in sounds and words, and the expectation that verbal communication will be a source of delight and amusement. Examples of experiences for young children include opportunities for sustained conversations and to take the initiative in such conversations, opportunities for play and having fun with words, and talking about topics that encourage complex language.

Whakamana – Empowerment

The overarching curriculum principle of Whakamana is interwoven with Mana Reo. Whaka may be translated as "to enable", "Whakamana in the context of education relates to the process of empowering the child to learn and grow" (Rameka, 2007, p. 129). *Te Whāriki* emphasises the interconnections between Empowerment and Communication and the three other principles of the framework:

[T]he communication strand is grounded particularly in the principle of Empowerment. Communication is vital for children to be able to contribute their strengths and interests, to find out what they want to know, and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care. Experiences in this strand also help to build Relationships, as children develop the "give and take" of communication and learning and have opportunities to work effectively with others in ways which have an impact on their environment. The ability to communicate increases their enjoyment and involvement with Family and Community, helping them to make sense of, and participate in, the wider cultural and social world. Communication reinforces the child's

Holistic Development of a concept of self, enhancing their recognition of their spiritual dimension and the contribution of their heritage and environment to their own lives. (MOE, 1996, p. 72)

This principle is identified as evident when children show an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment, contribute their own special strengths and interests, and understand their own ways of learning and being creative.

In relation to the Indigenous Canadian context, the concept of whakamana is relevant to the cultural and linguistic diversity and funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) that Indigenous children bring with them into early childhood centres and schools. Both *Te Whāriki* and *Te Whatu Pōkeka* align theoretically with the concept of funds of knowledge. While not unproblematic (Hedges, 2015), within this concept, children's ways of knowing and being embedded in everyday routines, practices, and activities in their family, community, and cultural lives are recognised and valued in their learning and assessment. Through this lens both content and process—that is, the relationships in which knowledge building happens—are reflected in the context of education settings to include wider family, peers both in and out of centre settings, and cultural knowledge such as traditional and contemporary culture.

If children's ways of communicating, and the rich social, cultural, and linguistic practices learned in homes and communities are not recognized within educational settings, children are likely to feel disempowered. In the context of Canada, it has been argued that “Aboriginal children [may be] erroneously identified with language, speech, and learning exceptionalities [i.e., difficulties] because educators lack knowledge and training in language variation, students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the challenges inherent in learning to use standard English” (Peltier, 2010, p. 139, cited in Peterson et al., 2016, p. 13). We suggest that the curriculum principle of Whakamana, and the strand of Mana Reo provide examples of lenses for teachers to notice, recognize, and respond to student's linguistic and cultural capital as embodied ways of knowing and evident in the variety of ways they use language and express their ideas and creativity.

Assessment framework for Māori children: Te Whatu Pōkeka

Upholding a child's mana is illustrated in many ways, including when assessing Indigenous children through a relevant and culturally sustaining assessment framework. “Assessment for Māori must therefore acknowledge, respect, and protect each child's mana and further promote and encourage its growth and development (Rameka, 2007, p. 138). In keeping with Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural curriculum framework, an approach to assessment that affirms whakapapa, holism, and interconnectedness was developed: *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (MOE, 2009), an indigenous assessment framework (Walker, 2008).

Te Whatu Pōkeka was developed by Māori early childhood academics. It incorporated narrative assessment, appropriate given the oral traditions of story-telling valued by Māori, and in alignment with Aotearoa New Zealand's dominant narrative assessment framework—learning stories (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012), where the lenses of assessment are predominantly framed through the notion of dispositions. *Te Whatu Pōkeka* emphasises te ao Māori lenses and dispositions for learning, where Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing are at the heart of assessment. Assessment through te ao Māori lenses values the importance of embodied ways of knowing and being, immersion in cultural practices, and how these are embedded in ways of doing that may be viewed as

dispositions for learning and teaching. For example, the valued qualities inherent in the demigods of Māori myths and legends highlight differences with what might be valued in a Western assessment paradigm. In te ao Māori resourceful qualities like mischievousness and cunning are valued alongside dispositions such as perseverance, involvement, and the multiple ways a child might be curious. Thus both Māori and non-Māori ways of knowing and being might be highlighted in bicultural assessment narratives.

Mohiotanga, Matauranga, and Maramatanga: Ways of knowing, being, and doing

Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing are three interconnected layers of whakapapa which frame the lenses of assessment practices for Māori children. In *Te Whatu Pōkeka* they are as follows: *Mohiotanga*, ways of knowing as understandings of the world(s) and relationships within them. Through this lens, what a child already knows and what they bring with them highlights new beginnings, new knowledge, and new discoveries. This perspective takes into account spiritual and ancestral knowings as well as more tangible understandings and ways that non-Indigenous educators might identify with. *Matauranga*, ways of being as ways in which children act upon and within their world(s); these may be constructs of the child, family, and teacher. This is a time of growth, a phase of increasing potential, negotiation, challenge, and apprehension when dealing with new ideas and new learning. *Maramatanga*, ways of doing as the ways in which children learn and teachers learn, plan, teach, and assess within their world(s). (MOE, 2009). *Maramatanga* highlights uniqueness and identity and the process of coming to understand new knowledge. It is a space of enlightenment, realisation, and clarification for children and teachers.

While acknowledging that *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is built on theorizing about indigenous framings for curriculum and assessment in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, we argue that these kinds of conceptual lenses may be considered for application to curriculum and assessment for Indigenous children across cultural contexts. In the case of this paper, the concepts embedded in *Te Whatu Pōkeka* may be ‘re-lensed’ in ways that are relevant to the Canadian context. Responsive frameworks that recognize and create space for children to draw on the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) from their homes and communities enables Indigenous children to find and make new meaning in classroom activities. Referring specifically to Canada, Weenie (2008) notes that

[T]he landscape of Aboriginal curriculum involves the colonial history, worldviews, philosophies, languages, cultures, stories, songs, literature, art, spirituality, ceremonies and ethos of Aboriginal people. These are the ‘things’ or objects that make up our embodied ways of knowing. They form a body of knowledge that represents the order of things in the worlds we live and work in. (p. 551–552)

We turn now to consideration of the NOW Play project as we analyse data through these concepts. As researchers in a different context we were provided with a selection of conversation transcripts, with additional field work observation notes of context and actions, of children at play to select from to analyse using lenses from our own cultural contexts.

Project rationale and methods

The NOW Play project has been developed in indigenous and remote communities in Northern Canada. Its aim is to improve the oral language and writing capabilities of early school learners. The project has adopted play-based teaching approaches for part of the school day for a range of reasons that include: (a) To provide playful scenarios and opportunities to increase children's oral language; (b) That Indigenous children tend to respond best to playful tasks during language assessment rather than more standardized Western assessment tools (Allen, 2014; Peterson et al., 2016). In the project play and oral language are focussed on as mechanisms which might lead to subsequent richer narrative story-telling and later writing. NOW Play incorporates a number of methods; one of which was recording play-based conversational exchanges in classrooms.

We selected a transcript of dialogue of three Grade 1 (aged 6–7 years) Indigenous children playing with blocks alongside their teacher. The culturally responsive lenses outlined above are applied for consideration of planning and assessing the empowerment of children's language through play, with the aim of provoking wider exploration of what can be drawn on to acknowledge the unique and embodied ways children play and interact across contexts. We acknowledge our interpretations as partial as we do not know the children, the teacher, or much about the context under analysis. Likewise, without knowing the ancestral ways of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, we cannot draw conclusions; our goal is to provoke ways of viewing learning and assessment from our context that might encourage responsiveness for Indigenous children across cultural contexts.

Analysis and Interpretation of Concepts

We highlight children's—and at times the teacher's—embodied ways of knowing, being, and doing within these three lenses, alongside te ao Māori curriculum concepts of mana and whakapapa. The curriculum principle of Whakamana, Empowerment; the strand of Mana Reo, Communication; empowering language, and the theoretically aligned Western paradigm of social and cultural responsiveness, funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) are also considered. These concepts are interrelated and inseparable, as can be seen in the analysis of excerpts. They weave together to illustrate the embodied ways the children and the teacher talk, play, and story-build together. Through our shared analysis of the dialogue, we located excerpts of the transcript in which we could explore considerations for teachers using play and narrative as ways to empower pathways for richer language and literacy experiences. The importance of teachers working with young Indigenous children to recognise the children's embodied ways of knowing, being, and doing will be discussed.

In the following analysis, two of the three children—Cara and Alexandra—draw richly from their wider lives outside of the classroom to share and make new meaning using their own and each other's ideas as they build complex imaginary narrative. When the teacher responds playfully to the children's ways of knowing and being, joining them in shared thinking and dialogue, the children respond enthusiastically by inviting her into their playful scenarios. In this way the teacher joins them reciprocally as both a co-storyteller and a learner. During these particular interactions the two children and the teacher learn from each other and together, drawing on each other's repertoires, and elaborating each other's stories. This might be seen as embodying culturally competent teaching and

learning practices of being open to uncertainty and multiple truths through recognising other ways of knowing.

Excerpt 1 (Beginning of Transcript)

Transcript	Interpretation of Concepts
<p>Cara: A Vee.</p> <p>Alexandra: Can help me with the teepee?</p> <p>Teacher: Well you can ask.</p> <p>Alexandra: The [teepee]</p> <p>Teacher: [Cara] can help you with the teepee.</p> <p>Alexandra: She's building her little teepee to be in a movie.</p> <p>Cara: [Alexandra.]</p> <p>Teacher: [A movie?]</p> <p>Teacher: You're building a movie? What are you building, Cara?</p> <p>Cara: Nah.</p> <p>Alexandra: She won't tell. It's a secret.</p> <p>Teacher: Oh I have to guess. Okay. Weren't the two of you going to build something together?</p> <p>Teacher: Was that the idea, that you build things together? Is that how you do it?</p> <p>Alexandra: We're making a [...] movie.</p> <p>Cara: Look I made a computer.</p> <p>Alexandra: A stoney perk.</p> <p>Teacher: Ahhhh. For a Story.</p> <p>Alexandra: We're making a storybook for a wedding.</p> <p>Teacher: I'm looking forward to reading your storybook later on.</p>	<p><i>Mana Reo: Empowered to communicate and suggest ideas for a story.</i></p> <p><i>Ways of knowing: Drawing on real world and local knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>The teacher's way of being (i.e., her intention) appears to be encouraging collaboration to generate shared story building.</i></p> <p><i>Funds of knowledge</i></p> <p><i>Popular culture</i></p> <p><i>Ways of being: Resistance to teacher trying to lead the play.</i></p> <p><i>Whakamana: Leading own play—actively resisting teacher's attempts to steer them towards specific construction to write about later. Teacher still intent on encouraging collaboration and prompts accordingly.</i></p> <p><i>Whakamana: The children take the lead, each in their own direction.</i></p> <p><i>Child's way(s) of being clashes with teacher's way(s) of doing: Teacher is focused on the end product—story writing—rather than play and oral language.</i></p>

Alexandra: Puhpo bear came to my house to use the toilet.

Whakamana: Empowered to verbally resist questioning with cheekiness.

Mana Reo: Knowing that words can amuse and delight, playing with language.

Ways of being: Resistance to teacher trying to lead the play.

These two children appear empowered to know what is expected of them in this playful classroom scenario. Mana Reo is evident as they work both overtly and covertly to ensure their play and their subsequent narrative is directed by them. Their ways of being are evident in their play: they both resist and invite the teacher to play in their storied world depending on how responsive she is to their ways and intentions. The teacher's ways of knowing and being are evident through her apparent understanding of what it is to teach while children play rather than teach within their play. Her strategizing for story and language elaboration illustrates that more playful and responsive interactions draw richer ideas, language and invitations from the children. Contrastingly, her attempts to 'teach' by questioning and prompting for problem solving and elaboration rather than playing along with the story results in the two children either ignoring her questions and prompts, disrupting with 'toilet' humour, or redirecting the conversation back to their own intentions. The interaction continues:

Excerpt 2

Transcript	Interpretation of Concepts
Cara: I need—I'm homeless!	<i>Teacher and child's ways of being: Teacher prompts for clarification and to extend story.</i>
Teacher: Is that your story?	<i>Cara resists the teacher's prompts.</i>
Cara: I'm home inside familyless.	<i>Funds of knowledge or imagination? Child raises poignant themes of being homeless and alone, and of running away, and seems intent on persisting with these ideas to drive the story.</i>
Teacher: Oh! So but you've got a computer right here.	<i>Cara is not heard.</i>
Cara: I GOT NO FAMILY AND NO HOME.	<i>Whakamana: Raises voice to stress her idea in order to be heard.</i>
Teacher: No home. And. What are you building for yourself, since you have no home?	<i>Ways of being: Children are more responsive and generate more ideas when the teacher's suggestions and elaborations are more in tune with their play.</i>
Alexandra: No she can live with me	<i>Ways of doing: The teacher begins to recognize the play as potential for</i>
Cara: That's I Ka U.	<i>elaboration and tries to join in a more playful</i>
Teacher: That's a good idea, you can move in with your friend.	<i>way.</i>

...

Teacher: So now you have no place to go poor homeless girl. Your friend doesn't have a place to go either.

Cara: We could make one.

Alexandra: We could make a big one, like a big castle.

Mana Reo: empowered language; being creative and expressive.

Ways of being: The children are responsive to her ideas now and build on them using their language and narrative knowledge.

Fantasy and reality; imagination and creativity

Alexandra: With a big door, where we could fit in there.

Alexandra: Cause we have a lotta blocks.

Teacher: We do. We could make a lot of castles and a big castle with those blocks.

Alexandra: Oh no, you be—you be this guy. And you get in the car.

Ways of doing: The teacher is now playing along as a character in the drama and is no longer resisted, but invited into the play.

Ways of doing: shared thinking and working together. The narrative flows and builds on itself.

Teacher: Where are we going?

Alexandra: We are going on blue one.

Teacher: I'm gonna go right here? ...

Alexandra: Here we go!

Cara: Wait for—don't forget me.

Teacher: Oh no, we left our friend behind.

Teacher: We better back up.

Cara: Ahhh. My buddies.

Ways of doing: Teacher is playful; children are inclusive.

This dialogue shows the same two children continuing to story their creative ideas. Their language and thinking is empowered as they work with each other to negotiate plot lines. In the strand of Mana Reo this is defined as: “Language skills in real play, and problem solving contexts” and “language skills for increasingly complex purposes such as stating and asking others about intentions.... negotiating, predicting, planning, reasoning, guessing, storytelling” (MOE, 1996, p. 76). They actively choose collaboration or resistance to build on or shift the storyline according to their own agendas/ways of being. In their play they show confidence and competence to be involved, and Mana Reo are evident throughout the ways they believe in their ideas and they demonstrate knowledge of how to build, sustain, or disrupt a narrative. They appear empowered to resist the teacher's and each other's suggestions at times while also being competent in knowing about how to collaborate and share ideas.

Throughout their play the children link their own family and community experiences with popular culture and imagination to build and shift their stories into

complex narratives. In this way reality and imagination combine and mediate rich thinking and talking, an important combination identified by Vygotsky (2004): “Imagination always builds using materials supplied by reality” (p. 14). The children encourage each other in these endeavours by both building on and rejecting suggestions and concepts. Again, the teacher’s presence is less effective initially as she is intent on prompting for story building and collaboration. The two children demonstrate empowerment in their ways of knowing and being to lead their play. Later, the teacher opens up to new learning too as she shifts her ways of doing as a teacher to value the playful ideas the children bring. This playfulness is illustrated in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 3

Transcript	Interpretation of Concepts
Cara: Mmmm mmm hydro mana.	<i>Mana Reo: playing with sounds and words</i>
Cara: Ahhhh.	
Alexandra: You broke the house!	
Cara: I went to the house!	<i>Ways of doing: The teacher recognizes the children’s disruption as a kind of story building and avoids negative or pacifying responses...</i>
Alexandra: This is her.	
Teacher: Okay.	
Teacher: Where’s the house? What happened to the house? I thought I was coming for a visit?	<i>... in order to continue her presence and the story line</i>
Cara: I crashed into it.	
Teacher: Oh no! What did you crash in with?	
Cara: Where to, where’s the hammer?	
Cara: My hou—	
Cara: I broke the house. Hehe	<i>Mana Reo: The children negotiate and collaborate over changing direction in the play.</i>
Alexandra: That thing is—	
Alexandra: A bada bada.	<i>Mana Reo: playing with language</i>
...	
Cara: Ah! I blowed up again. Hahah!	
Alexandra: Buuuugh.	
Alexandra: Ay help me!	
Cara: Look. Here’s one of my missiles.	<i>Ways of knowing: Drawing on popular culture, and fantasy and reality</i>
Cara: And it blowed up you.	
Cara: Look. My missile. Blowed up you.	

Several times throughout the transcript these two children use destruction as a means of shifting storylines in the play as they grapple to take the lead from each other. They use karate chops, planes crashing, and missiles blowing things up—presumably drawing from popular culture and media based experiences. This playful combination of funds of

knowledge and imagination through storying aspects of their own lives while incorporating fantasy through the suspension of disbelief are used throughout as ideas for developing the narrative. New ways of doing (i.e., teaching) includes the teacher recognising and responding without judgment to the children's ways of being for solving story crises or a need for plot redirection. Popular culture is often an important interest of children in terms of how they make meaning in ways that may lead them to examine and inquire into aspects of their own lives (Hedges, 2011). This imagination continues in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4

Transcript	Interpretation of Concepts
Alexandra: Helka Taytha. Almost like in Frozen. Like on Frozen.	<i>Funds of knowledge: popular culture, movies</i>
Cara: You know. Let It Go. Let it Go!	
Cara: I can't hold it back Anymore!	<i>Mana Reo: being expressive, song and drama to delight and amuse.</i>
Cara and Alexandra: Hehahaha.	
Cara: A can't hold and back Anymore!	
Cara and Alexandra: Hehahaha.	
...	
Alexandra: Guess who is this thing. Mobly.	
Teacher: Mobly?	
Alexandra: Yeah.	
Teacher: Where did you get name from?	
Alexandra: Ahhh Jungle Book 2! Ehh this is the bench.	<i>Mana Reo: understanding that books and stories (extrapolated to movies) can amuse, delight, illuminate, inform and excite</i>
...	
Cara: You look here's my—here's my back pack...cause I'm- cause I'm- CAUSE I'M LEAVING THE TOWN.	<i>Funds of knowledge</i>
Teacher: Where you heading there with the back pack?	<i>Mana Reo: being creative and expressive, drama and pretend play</i>
Cara: Sioux-come.	<i>Mana Reo: a playful interest in sounds and words, using words to amuse and delight</i>
Alexandra: Soup de soup to see her best buddies.	
Teacher: Okay! So have a good time.	
Cara: Okay! Ahh. My back pack fell off.	
Alexandra: This is the water.	<i>Ways of doing: This is seen in both the children's and the teacher's recognition that the children resist attempts to be 'taught' solutions for their narrative crossroads.</i>
Teacher: Oh is there water around the castle?	
Cara: I'm takin a boat.	
Alexandra: You.	<i>Funds of knowledge: goodies and baddies</i>
Cara: Stop pretending the bad guys are trying to chase me.	

Teacher: They're chasing you?

Cara: Yeah.

Teacher: Are you going to get away?

Cara: Yeah.

Teacher: Are you coming back to the castle to get away or where are you going to get away? *Fantasy and reality*

Cara: Uh....

Alexandra: She'll get away in Winnipeg to hide.

Teacher: Winnipeg's a good place.

Alexandra: I'm driving.

Ways of knowing: Incorporating local places and driving across vast landmasses

In this excerpt, the two children draw on their funds of knowledge and ways of knowing—as they incorporate local language and landmarks, places, books, and movies. They reveal their familiarity with storying as they utilize the pervasive dichotomies of goodies and baddies, fantasy and reality while verbally reflecting aspects of everyday of family and societal life. Their vast array of collective experience is drawn from to create or disrupt new narrative, for example, running away, driving across the country, or visiting people in far off places, thus likely incorporating the real life experiences of travelling across the vast landmass of Canada. The shaped blocks become various means of escape for leaving home, and being homeless. Block constructions represent both reality and imagination: from tepee and cars for travelling, to castles with dragons and dungeons where bad guys are locked away. These two children draw richly from their accumulated ways of knowing, using the blocks as mediating tools across the reality-fantasy divide.

In their play and language, blocks become powerful, tangible, and abstract tools for storying their rich experiences and ways of knowing. As Weenie (2008) notes, “Aboriginal people came to know and understand their world through imaginative endeavour and this was most evident in the oral tradition” (p. 552). Through imaginative oral storytelling the children are creating and recreating complex narratives showing the “ability to be creative and expressive through a variety of activities such as pretend play, carpentry, storytelling, drama” (MOE, 1996, p. 80).

Enhancing all children's mana and Mana Reo

Alongside the richer interactions of these two children and their teacher we point out the actions and speech of a third child on the periphery of this play. Throughout this entire exchange, James makes minimal contribution to story building, and is acknowledged only occasionally by the other two children and the teacher. He rarely joins in the dialogue and largely remains outside of the play and the verbal narrative being constructed. The two interactions below are the only verbal contributions of James throughout the 21-minute play transcript.

Excerpt 5

Transcript	Interpretation of Concepts
James: Look what I found. Teacher: Oh what is that anyway? James: A circle dot? Teacher: What can you do with it? James: Uh...	<i>Mana Reo: initiates communication with the teacher about the block he holds up. James query is not recognized.</i>
...	<i>Ways of being: James faces new learning in his apprehension.</i>
James: Look I got the semi-circle. Teacher: Oh he can make a.... Two semi-circles make a...? James: A circle. Teacher: A circle. They do. Teacher: Can you use it when you're building?	<i>Ways of knowing: Teacher reverts to her way of knowing as a teacher and tests his knowledge. Appears unsure of how to engage with him playfully.</i>

The explanatory notes that accompany the transcript indicate that James appears to observe and consider but not contribute ideas. It appears his language and thinking is less empowered than the other two children who engage readily with their own and the teacher's intentions for play and story building. Perhaps James is embodying a way of being reported that Indigenous children may tend to be silent as a sign of respect or reticent to take part, needing time to reflect before responding (Allen, 2014). Perhaps he is not communicating as readily because he is not feeling empowered. Of potential interest, James' efforts appear to be more centred on either periodically trying to engage the teacher with talk that either he perceives she wants to hear about the shapes and sizes of the blocks, or trying to engage her in a discussion about size and shapes because it interests him. Either way, his intent is not as readily responded to and consequently his language input is minimal throughout the duration of the play. This makes it challenging to be sure of his intentions, without knowing the child, and more so, his intentions appear to not align with the teacher's intentions related to story building. Certainly, while the teacher tries to engage him through prompting a question and answer exchange, it is not playful, and her attention is quickly diverted back to the two other more verbal children who invite her into their play and are therefore easier to respond to.

Discussion

From a sociocultural perspective play is the leading activity for learning and development and all learning is socially mediated and explored through real and imaginary experiences:

A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired. He combines them and uses them to construct a new reality, one that conforms to his own needs and desires. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 11)

When we compare the empowerment of the three children in the transcript we see that the two more playful children, Cara and Alexandra, were more closely observed and listened to by the teacher as well as extending and building on their thinking with each other through play. As a result, their ideas and language were richer. Throughout most of the transcript we see these two children and their teacher come to understand new knowledge through playing and learning together, as they share their collective knowledge to create a complex narrative. The teacher gradually adjusts her teaching strategies and intentions, that is, ways of doing, and places herself within the play rather than as a facilitator of it. In doing so, she values the play first and foremost as the mechanism for more complex language and storytelling. Thus she empowers the children's language, play, and ideas through valuing their playful ways of knowing and being, and creates space for them to explore their specific interests and inquiries. As a result, richer language exchanges and plot lines are built on, queried, and negotiated. To this end the children and the teacher appear engaged in their play and the teacher's oral language goals are playfully incorporated into her prompting and elaborating from within the play, valuing the children's ideas and adding her concepts to the story rather than trying to explore them in isolation.

What the third child in this interaction brought to understandings or learned might only be revealed in later writing work in the classroom. James was less verbal and played largely alone on the periphery of this interaction. However, he too attempted to demonstrate ways to negotiate interactions with the teacher. Nevertheless, in contrast to the girls, the teacher's lack of responsiveness and James' lack of playfulness suggest his ways of knowing and being were not as well supported on this occasion. In short, these excerpts reveal the importance of play leading learning, and the value of a teacher being both playfully and culturally responsive within children's shared thinking space to empower their language and ideas, leading later to enriched storying which in turn can motivate writing.

Once again we stress our limitations; our interpretations of the teacher's and children's interactions are partial and subjective. Our aim is to share possibilities. The concept of whakapapa through layered ways of knowing, being, and doing, alongside Whakamana, Mana Reo, and funds of knowledge applied within a curriculum and assessment framework and cultural context are a means of seeing our way to working in more culturally and linguistically responsive ways, and of viewing the child as an empowered learner and communicator in their play and language.

Although the cultural emphases of *Te Whāriki* and *Te Whatu Pōkeka* are context specific to Aotearoa New Zealand, the underlying concepts and lenses for assessment may be considered across indigenous and diverse cultural settings. It remains teachers' responsibility to learn about and recognise the culturally specific embodied ways that Indigenous children bring to their play and learning. This then also becomes part of the teacher's ways of doing—to be open to learning and teaching with uncertainty, shifting the paradigm of Western educational discourse and coming to value the unfamiliar interpretations and possibilities that Indigenous children might bring. Creating and recognising space for indigenous embodied ways of knowing, being, and doing is the challenge for non-Indigenous educators of Indigenous children worldwide.

Conclusion

The NOW Play project promotes play-based teaching approaches for Indigenous children in Canada because of play's potential for rich language interactions. To add cultural and linguistic responsiveness to this understanding of play, we suggest it is important for all teachers to know about indigenous frameworks and/or culturally responsive ways of knowing, being, and doing that empower children's play and language. In particular, we argue that non-Indigenous teachers working with Indigenous children have a responsibility to understand and consider concepts relevant to local indigenous cultures. In the case of this article, we have illustrated concepts from culturally responsive frameworks for curriculum and assessment in Aotearoa New Zealand. Similar concepts from local cultures and indigenous groups might then be applied as ways of knowing, being, and doing in their contexts. In doing so, teachers may be better positioned pedagogically to respond meaningfully to children, and extend children's play and language in culturally relevant ways. Identifying with other perspectives or lenses is imperative if teachers and researchers are to work towards empowering local knowledge, and recognize and respond effectively to children's learning.

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Early Writers in Northern Communities: Ways Teachers Might View and Reflect on Writers' Representations

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Abstract

“What did I write?” is the title of a seminal book (Clay, 1975), illustrating how we can learn what children know about print, in part, from their representations. Children’s writing is socially and culturally situated; play is one context shown to help develop the use of symbol systems. A framing with several lenses is designed and applied to illustrate to teachers ways to consider the samples of early writing accompanying the play of young children in remote Northern communities in Canada. There is consideration of how information could be used to inform and optimize educative actions in such learning contexts.

Introduction

This article considers some of the outcomes of opportunities for children, in centres and schools in Northern communities in Canada, to write. Writing is broadly conceptualised to include visual art, drawing and other semiotic systems. These opportunities mostly arose from specifically designed play activities. In the play of young children language is central. In considering language in play, researchers have tended to focus on oral language. But, symbol systems are also important. “The play of young children gives most to their development of productive and receptive abilities with structured symbol systems...” (Brice Heath, 2013, p. 194). Research shows that early writing behaviours improve following dramatic play activities (Ihmeideh, 2015). The notion of Rowe (2009) that children are freer to be “textual scavengers” under the guise of play is an appealing one. When playing they may be more inclined to use their hands to create representations with whatever they can find: food, lipstick or crayons, applying them to walls or other surfaces. Play may serve not only as a means of exploring roles and identities and stimulating ideas and language but also of providing the visual images for writing, perhaps in the same way as a drawing “holds” the idea while a young writer struggles to encode it. And, it seems that the feedback gained through using the hand and the gripping action with a crayon or similar, enhances mental visualising (Reiner, 2008). Significantly, the use of visual imagery is one of the self-regulation strategies linked to enhanced writing performance (Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2016).

Early writing has a reasonable research base (Rowe, 2009; Tolchinsky, 2006, 2015). The majority of the work on young children’s written communication has investigated the form or patterns in the marks or symbols or has looked at specific skills such as writing letters of the alphabet or name writing (e.g. Clay, 1975; Both-de Vries, & Bus, 2010). Such research has drawn primarily from cognitive and socio-cognitive traditions. From this perspective, early writing includes the idea that the scribbles and marks of young children reflect their hypotheses about print. Even young children actively create and test hypotheses about how writing works (Bissex, 1980), building important

foundational understandings about print functions, form and content, understandings vital to later reading and writing development. Social and cultural perspectives further consider learning to write as socially situated (e.g. Brandt, & Clinton, 2002; Gee, 2004; Lave, & Wenger, 1991; Street, 2003). Children learn, for example, about the writing that is part of their homes, communities, and classrooms. It is about social participation as children learn, from the perspective of the social position they occupy, about the practices of their communities with respect to writing. In addition to viewing the child as producing writing that is culturally and socially situated, recent trends view the young child writer as producing writing that is more semiotically complex (Rowe, 2009). These are ideas that teachers, particularly of children who are linguistically and culturally diverse, should consider in the writing of their children. It may be necessary to think beyond the likely restricted categories we have for considering writing and the occasions for writing: to view writing from the standpoint of particular children in particular locations.

Research suggests that children's experiences of writing in pre-school are minimal (Pelatti, Piasta, Justice, & O'Connell, 2014), often limited to name writing and copying the alphabet (Schiller, Clements, Lara-Alecio, Sarama, & Irby, 2013). One of the reasons suggested as to why writing is underdeveloped in early childhood settings is that we do not have a clear idea of what to look for in children's efforts to represent ideas in written form (Rowe, & Wilson, 2015). There are few descriptions or developmental models to guide teachers. The detailed work of Rowe and Wilson (2015) is invaluable in considering how children represent the message and in exploring their understandings or intent. With the aim of providing an organizational framework for the assessment of young children's writing, Puranik and Lonigan (2011, 2014) examined the structure of individual and developmental differences of emergent writing and writing-related skills in preschool children (3–5-year-olds). Results from these analyses suggested that emergent writing skills are best described by three correlated but distinct factors:

1. Conceptual Knowledge: knowledge of the universal principles of print (e.g., knowledge of writing as a symbolic representational system, linearity of writing), concepts about writing (e.g., knowledge of units and means of writing), and functions of writing (e.g., purposes for which writing is used);
2. Procedural Knowledge: code-related knowledge such as alphabet knowledge, letter-writing skills, name-writing skill, and spelling, and;
3. Generative Knowledge: children's abilities to convey meaning through writing beyond the single-word level.

A close consideration of children's efforts in writing can provide educators with a window into what they and their actions are about; into their developing understandings, cognitions, and emotions. Knowing what to look for and recognizing what children are able to do in writing is important so teachers are able to reinforce and build on this. Barbara Comber and colleagues (2002) described what they called the "recognition factor..., the extent to which what children can do *counts*, and they can see that it counts" (p. 6, italics in original). These notions inform the focus of the current piece, namely, what teachers might notice and make of children's efforts to represent in writing and how they might respond to and use that information. The aim is to help teachers see the type of information that they could draw from their children's writing samples to find out what they can do.

And, it aims to illustrate this by analysing a set of data from a specific group of kindergarten and Grade 1 children, about whom limited information exists, those in Northern communities in Canada.

These analyses of writing samples were not, therefore, complex. However, the broader framing or the lenses (form, function, socio-cultural influence, and social interaction) were designed to suggest how teachers, and these teachers in particular, could enrich their knowledge of their developing writers. They might do this by moving beyond the marks on the page or similar, by talking with children about their writing and by drawing on their professional observations of interaction, for example, as well as their knowledge of the children and their experiences, both within the play and more widely in their community. These lenses may help to interpret further what was actually written but, applied to reflections around the writing event, would also be informative in designing writing opportunities and specific support for writers.

The guiding questions for the paper are:

How might analyses of writing be framed to inform teachers' learning about their developing writers?

What information is obtained when the framework is applied to the writing samples of kindergarten and Grade 1 children in Northern communities?

What additional information, particularly from the context, might teachers consider and utilize?

Lenses through Which to View Early Writing

The lenses to use to consider the writing of young children are drawn from the literature. They include the idea of analysing the form of the writing, including the interweaving of different semiotic systems; exploring the purpose and function of writing by considering the intentionality of the children to convey messages, and the socio-cultural and social influences on their representations. The latter focus, the social and cultural features of writing has received limited attention but, increasingly, researchers acknowledge that learning to write is centrally related to social participation.

Form: The majority of research around young children's writing considers form. Early work, including that by Marie Clay (1975), showed the marks to be visually organized.

There have been numerous terms for describing the marks on the page and studies use different descriptors for referring to the same kind of mark. The overall finding is that there is a general progression from undifferentiated scribbles towards more conventional forms but that, at any one time, an individual child might produce a variety of forms (Sulzby, 1996). Basically, in broad terms, children progress from drawing and scribbling, to letter-like forms and letters, then to using sounds, first beginning or other salient sounds, then to attending to individual sounds in words. A typical progression, largely gleaned from Clay (1975) and Rowe's work (Rowe, & Wilson, 2015), to describe growth in orthographic understanding is: from (a) uncontrolled scribbles, to (b) scribble units, to (c) individual stroke units, to (d) letter-like forms/personal manuscript/personal cursive/mock writing, to (e) conventional letter plus inventions, to (f) conventional letters (but no letter-sound correspondence), to (g) invented spelling (first letter, first and last, most sounds). The latter

category indicates knowledge of what is called the alphabetic principle, understanding that oral language is made up of sounds and these can be represented in a systematic way using letters and combinations of letters. Sometimes the conventional letter strings are memorized or learned, like names.

Marks can also be considered for the principles, both conventional and unconventional, that children use to arrange the print marks. This concerns placement and directionality, whether randomly placed or linear and whether left to right or right to left as appropriate to the language; the spacing of marks; the size of the units and the quantity and variety of characters.

Researchers note that, for young children, the boundaries between different sign systems are quite fluid and they interweave (e.g. Kress, 1997; Olson, 1993). Children utilize other sign systems like oral language, gesture, gaze, body movement (especially dance), dramatic play and drama, graphics, art, and music. They are natural multi-modal communicators and Rowe (2009) suggests that childhood writing will, increasingly, be studied as one aspect of a more complex multi-modal process in which combinations of the sign systems will be seen as resources for composing.

Function: Intentionality and meaning: While the research that focussed on the marks produced by young children concluded that they were not random, the work of Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) examined what children were thinking, what hypotheses they had when drawing, writing and reading. The results strengthened the idea of Clay (1975), Goodman (1986) and others that children intentionally use marks to express meaning. Broadly, intentionality relates to the knowledge of writing as a symbolic representational system; it is concerned with the meaning in the writing and the purposes for which writing is used.

Research is divided about whether very young children, 1-to-3-year-olds, distinguish between drawing and writing. Recent research by Lancaster (2007) with 1-and-2-year-olds suggests they do not but, rather, they use the structural features of both systems. But, work with 2-year-olds by Rowe (2008) found that most of them used different marks to distinguish drawing from writing. The understandings young children have about the functions of writing and drawing is an area open for further investigation.

To find out about understandings of writing as symbolic representation and about intentionality, researchers have looked at children's strategies when they "read" their work (e.g. Rowe, & Wilson, 2015). Coherence between image and articulated message is concerned with the extent to which the message "read" relates to the event, images, or text represented. The "reading" is examined to see whether the marks are used to "remember" the message (marks may represent physical features of message but children may "say" the message slightly differently with each "read"), or whether the marks are matched to the rhythm or length of speech stream, or whether they correspond to syllables and to phonemes, or whether there is spelling-sound correspondence between the oral message and letters written.

The kinds of messages, the topic children write about, and the complexity and register of the message have been less studied. Topic is the content of the message, what it is about but also includes descriptions of the process like "I wrote". Interestingly, some research suggests that children say "I *made* a w" when they create a wavy line something like a w but say "I *wrote* a w" when they produce the recognizable form (Harste,

Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Message complexity concerns the linguistic complexity of children's messages and is obtained not only from the writing but from considering the oral text generated when children "read" their messages. This aspect could include what has been also termed generative knowledge (Puranik, & Lonigan, 2014)—which concerns the developing writer's ability to draw on and integrate different levels of language: word, phrase, sentence—into a functional writing system (Beringer et al, 1992; Beringer, & Swanson, 1994). Register relates to the extent to which messages "read" sound more like oral or written language. The idea of differentiating oral and written language may also include knowledge of written conventions like punctuation.

Socio-cultural influences: With some exceptions (Brice Heath, 1983; Dyson, 1989) early research paid little attention to how children's efforts to use written means related to cultural patterns of homes and communities. There is evidence that the characteristics of early writing reflect those of the printed form of the language in the child's environment (Harste et al., 1984). Kress (1997) notes that children adopt and adapt culturally significant parts of complex signs when they combine mediums like paper, tools, and objects in their environment with gesture, talk, and drama. The idea that writing is a socially situated act has led a few researchers to consider how children's hypotheses and ways of writing are connected to the practice of local communities (e.g. Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003; Dyson, 1993, 2003, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Bloome and colleagues (2003), for example, demonstrated that African-American pre-schoolers' written narratives often reflected community storytelling patterns. Similarly, the fact that Western rhetorical norms differ from Canadian First Nations' storytelling practices in the structure (often ending at the climax), purpose (sharing cultural beliefs), and style (collaborative) of stories or narratives has caused non-First Nations teachers to perceive First Nations students as lacking knowledge or attentiveness (Crago, Eriks-Brophy, Pesco, & McAlpine, 1997, as cited in Malec, 2014). This foregrounds an important idea, namely, that whether children are able to utilize their existing repertoires of practice in writing and literacy more generally, is contingent on what their teachers judge as valuable or appropriate.

Social interactions and writing: Young children's writing at centre and school tends to be collaborative and this area of research explores how writing is socially mediated in interactions with others. It considers how adults scaffold young children to help them accomplish what they cannot do independently and, importantly, how teachers can open up space for dialogue about and around writing. Teachers may orchestrate certain sorts of play as a backdrop, as it were, for writing—what Shelley Stagg Peterson (2015) calls literate dramatic play—where writing is a tool that helps children to carry out their intentions in the play context or afterwards. In some cases, teachers see their role as providing experiences to build and stimulate children's use of language; in New Zealand the use of "language experience" is common. Language experience is most often described as growing from the 'organic method' of teaching and learning first articulated by Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963). Ashton-Warner railed against the imposition of what she saw as an unnatural curriculum upon the creative energies of the child. She wrote passionately about the need for literacy to be meaningful to children, and advocated for learners' own voices to be the basis of literacy instruction: "I reach into the mind of the child, bring out a handful of the stuff I find there, and use that as our first working material" (Ashton-Warner, 1963,

p. 15). Language experience involves orchestrating opportunities for activities that are meaningful for the child and can be used to encourage and support communication, oral and written.

Peers, too, feature in acts like talking over ideas, playing out drama, helping writers to think about the audience and to evaluate how well their texts are reaching others. Research also suggests that young writers use texts to construct social links to their peers (e.g. Dyson, 2003).

What Might Be Expected in Young Children's Writing?

The literacy knowledge that children bring to kindergarten or similar settings at around age 5 is wide-ranging and diverse, reflecting the experiences and contexts the children have encountered. Although, there is a general move towards more advanced writing forms, directional patterns, and message content across the early years (Tolchinsky-Landsmann, & Levin, 1985; Puranik, & Lonigan (2011, 2014), development is uneven. Children of the same age may show wide variation with quite different patterns and abilities; of strengths and gaps in their knowledge and skill (Dyson, 1985; Molfese et al., 2011). And, a particular child may use a variety of forms (Sulzby, 1996), for example, both conventional letters and also mock or letter-like forms. There is still much debate about whether there is a developmental ordering of children's early writing. Beyond agreeing that children's writing becomes more conventional, views about whether development is sequential and progressive or variable and individually patterned is still unclear (Rowe, & Wilson, 2015). So, teachers need an understanding of the range (and beyond) of abilities in writing to guide them as to what to look for and also to inform the nature of goals to work towards.

While an indication of broad patterns of development can be obtained from the research literature, for teachers, indications of expectations for writing can be gained from the curriculum that applies to the children of a particular age/level of schooling and from other related descriptions like standards or progressions that education jurisdictions employ. Common to such documents are statements that describe what children might be seen to do when writing and the knowledge they might demonstrate. Interestingly, most of these statements concern form although some could be seen to relate to intention and interaction. Examples are: "Children around 6 will (at first with a high level of scaffolding as teachers help them to):

Form: form upper case and lower case letters and numerals accurately; write from left to right and leave spaces between words; say, hear, and record the predominant (initial, final, and some medial) sounds in words they want to write; attempt to transfer words from their oral language or reading to their writing (using phoneme-grapheme relationships) or from the sounds in their known writing words; use some key personal vocabulary and simple, high-frequency words (from visual memory); write several sentences (including some compound sentences with simple conjunctions); attempt to use capital letters and full stops as they develop understanding of a sentence.

Intention: hold an idea long enough in their head to record it; reread what they write. *Social interaction:* write simple texts including an idea, response, opinion or

question; plan for writing using talk, pictures or text; and use resources such as word walls and peers.

Applying the Lenses to View (and Reflect on) Young Children's Writing

The Contexts and Data

The contexts, the socio-spatial nature of where the writing happened and the nature of the literacy event are important to describe. The characteristics of the setting are likely to impact on what the children represent and how they choose to represent it. Writing is shaped and produced through spaces and materials that are to hand (Kress, 1997). The way in which the teacher organizes, for example, for play and learning may both facilitate and constrain opportunities for development (Valsiner, 1997). The play space, the materials (tools and objects) available, the opportunities for talk and the nature of that talk, all help to position the children as writers and to give messages about writing and what is valued.

Teacher's reflection on writing opportunities should consider: How does this context (play or special learning-to-write event) allow children both to use and expand what they know about writing (consider the space, the tools and objects present, and their history or valence, and the access to these)? What roles are open to children and what agency do they have?

The data in this article are drawn from centres and kindergartens that are part of the NOW Play project, whose goals are to support young children's oral language and writing through play and to build teaching capacity in rural Northern communities. Three Indigenous Northern communities in Ontario provided data from kindergarten and Grade 1 children; children are four years old when they enter junior kindergarten, five years old when starting senior kindergarten and six years old when entering Grade 1. In addition, three kindergarten classrooms in a northern Alberta school division whose children are five years old at entry, and were of European descent, also provided data.

All sets of data have some detail of the context and examples of the representations. The teachers in the NOW Play project use iPods (either set up near the dramatic play centres or in parts of the room where children play with blocks or other materials) to record students' play interactions. The transcriptions of these are used at collaborative action research meetings that take place in the teachers' schools. Of the six contexts, at the time of analysis, for two there was a transcript of the talk around the representations; there were videos from three and for one an image of the play scene. These were viewed and read but used largely to amplify descriptions of the contexts; they were not analysed systematically. In total, there were over 100 ($N = 103$) samples (a sample was a page) of writing (also recorded on iPods) to analyse although it may be, in isolated cases, that some children were responsible for more than one. For example, there were two folktales read to the children in one context and some children may have produced a sample for the first one, "Billy Goats Gruff" and for the second, "Jack and the Beanstalk". Also, the context data do not record necessarily the teacher's exact invitation to the children to represent their experiences. With many drawings (with no writing) produced in response to the folk tales, these representations were somewhat problematic to interpret without knowing more precisely what the teacher said in inviting the children to 'write'.

Mostly the writing tasks arose out of play and could be considered as a naturally occurring classroom writing event in the sense that children were not asked to write from dictation

or write a caption for a given image (although many did the latter, spontaneously captioning their drawing) or respond by writing in a particular, specified genre (save the retelling of the folk tale and, perhaps, the labelling activity in the Sign Company).

1. **Blocks and stories:** Grade 1 Indigenous children (ages 6–7) created stories as part of their play and then captured their play and narrative in written form. The children first played in small groups, talking as they collaboratively built with blocks. Following this play, they were asked to write stories about their play and/or the narratives they created as they played.

Data: • 4 collaborative writing samples • 1 transcript of three children playing, then writing

2. **Camping play:** Centre Kindergarten children (ages 5–6) played in small groups in the camping-themed dramatic play centre. The teacher arranged for the children explore the centre during parts of the day, and then later grouped them for discussions about camping. In the following week, the children wrote about what camping means to them.

Data: • 23 writing samples • Image of camping play centre and materials

3. **Dress up play:** Kindergarten children (ages 5–6) played in a dress up dramatic play centre (complete with mirror), trying on clothes and taking on family and other real-life and imaginary roles. The teacher introduced some writing materials into the centre for the children to record descriptions of what they looked like in the different costumes.

The video series shows four (2 girls and 2 boys) kindergarten students (ages 5–6) in the play house and dress-up centre. The students enact a storyline of defending the house from a zombie attack. This results in demonstrations of parallel talk and collaborative talk.

Data: • 18 writing samples • 5 short videos (total of 4:01 minutes) • 1 transcript of video dialogue

4. **Milk castle:** Kindergarten children (ages 5–6) brought in empty milk cartons and, with the teachers' help, constructed a large castle in the classroom. The children used this castle as a dramatic play and dress-up centre and created signs that they posted on the side of the castle. The video shows three kindergarten students (ages 5–6; 2 girls and 1 boy) playing in the play castle created from collected milk cartons fastened together. The children put on dress-up clothes and use props such as a wooden toy cradle and dolls to create a narrative of their own making. While sharing accessories and outfits for both the dolls and themselves, they work together as well as collaborate (most of the time) to keep the story going.

Data: • 6 writing samples • 2 videos (3:35 and 3:55 minutes) • 1 document with transcripts of dialogues

5. **Responding to folktales:** Grade 1 Indigenous children (ages 6-7) listened to the story “The Three Billy Goats Gruff”. During the week, the teacher reread the story and the children participated verbally, and with actions and gestures. They created masks in the drama centre for their enactments, and later were asked to write the story or create a new version. This process was repeated with “Jack and the Beanstalk”.

Data: • 17 writing samples from “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” • 4 student-made books from “Jack and the Beanstalk”.

6. **Sign company:** Grade 1 Indigenous children (ages 6–7) became part of a classroom “sign company” where they took on roles, created signs to label important classroom items and places, and created messages for their peers around the classroom and school. The Grade 1 students also worked with the Kindergarten (ages 5-6) classroom down the hall, where students were implementing their own version of sign making.

Data: • 6 writing samples

Analyses: Questions Guiding “Noticing” and “Reflections” from the Data

“It’s all about the questions” is the conclusion of Deborah Rowe (2010, p. 134) after reviewing seminal and current research on young children’s writing. This is because, as she notes, questions create particular kinds of spaces for observing and analysing young children’s literacy activities. While her reference was to research questions, the observation applies equally to the questions teachers might ask of the evidence they have. The author of this piece, who has expertise in writing, particularly teaching and assessing writing, has been an international collaborator since the beginning of the NOW Play project. But, as author, I have not been fortunate enough to visit the settings or interact with the children in these settings. So, what is “noticed” and “made” of the representations is seen through my particular lenses. Such lenses are formed not only by research knowledge about development and writing but by experience and knowledge of young children and their learning experiences in my own context. Arguably, the data and subsequent interpretations are not as rich as those which could be gleaned by an inquiring and reflective teacher who is able, over an extended period, to engage with the children concerned, not only observing but talking with them (using some of questions following, for example) and learning from such, reflecting on what s/he has noticed. This limitation needs to be borne in mind; the one small advantage perhaps is that the questions that occur to me may help to cue teacher inquiry. Similarly, in the discussion, I bring a lens from researching, and working collaboratively with teachers, in a bi-cultural, and now highly multi-cultural, nation.

Following, we consider potential questions teachers might ask about children’s writing but, as noted above (under Contexts and Data), questions should also be asked of the children and about the environment in which the writing was produced.

Intentionality: The aim is to find evidence of the extent to which the children understand that their representations are intended to serve a communicative purpose, to convey a message.

- Consider the response to your asking children to read what their piece says or tell you what it says. Also consider what children may spontaneously tell you about the representation and its message.

Description	What child says/does
Marks—no interpretation	Unable to “read or tell” (Can’t/don’t know); unintelligible; gestures
Has concept of sign	Writes, draws but no clear idea of message (may ask you “What did I write?”)
Message intended—no conventional correspondence	No apparent letter-sound correspondence or matching of speech units to marks
Intends a message and there is either some print-speech match or letter-sound correspondence	Reads message and matches voice or finger pointing to specific marks. Next step is attempt at letter sound correspondence (has chosen a letter with the purpose of matching to sound)

Rowe & Wilson (2015)

In the latter categories especially, you might also consider the content of the message conveyed orally in terms of what it tells you about what is important to the child. How complex is the message (a word, a phrase, a sentence, or several sentences)? Also, does the child “tell” the message using the style of oral language or are there indications that the child knows that written language is somehow different to speaking?

Form (and use of different semiotic systems): The aim is to understand *how* children represent the message.

“Category”	Description
Mock letters	Letter-like forms (combinations of strokes within same unit or a “run” of loops or zigzags)
Combination of conventional letters and invented letters	One recognizable letter (may be upside down etc.)
Conventional letters (no spelling-sound correspondence)	All recognizable as letters but do not correspond to intended message
Conventional letters (memorized)	Name writing or known phrase
Invented spelling (part)	First sound represented (Note: may not use the conventional letter) or first and last (leaves out many sounds in message and may have random letters)
Invented spelling (most)	Most sounds in syllable or word in message are represented (letter choices may not be conventionally correct)

Rowe and Wilson (2015)

Also, for younger children, consider the direction of the marks: (a) Linear but not conventional (i.e., may go right to left or top to bottom); (b) Linear and left to right first line, then unconventional; (c) Conventional placement.

Other considerations are spacing between “words” (units), the size of the letters or words and the variety of characters (letters and mock letters).

Finally, what media are used to convey the message and how have children integrated multiple sign systems?

Socio-cultural influence: Consider whether ways of writing (e.g. structure) may be drawn from the children’s cultural backgrounds. What does the message content (including the drawing) tell you about the experiences of the child (in classroom, home, and community)? Do the tools chosen to represent the message (e.g. drawings, “carvings”) relate to socio-cultural experiences?

Social interactions: Is there evidence, for example in the dialogue of the play, of generating material (ideas or vocabulary) for writing through interactions with others? How are children positioning themselves in the writing they produce? Do children perform their writing for others; share their writing with others?

Findings: Analysis of Writing Samples

Diversity and Range in Performance

What was most noticeable from the analysis of the representations was the range of knowledge about writing both within an age grouping (5–6 or 6–7 years) and amongst children at the same centre. The Camping context is a very good example. The samples show a 5–6 year old who presents a very abstract (that is, unrecognizable without the scribe’s labels) representation of the footprints of Big Foot and of a car; to a child who is able to draw a recognizable, stick-figure-inhabited, relevant scene; to a child who draws, then adds scribbles, wavy lines, and marks that look suspiciously like letters (o, e, and t, or a plus sign); to a child who draws and adds random letters that appear to have no spelling-sound correspondence; to children who write (perhaps copying) the word camping or a similar, single word, sometimes with other seemingly random letters; to children who write a sentence “I’m fishing with my family” (although this sentence had unconventional placement of words!) or “Camping with family” which had no spaces between words or “We are fishing”, and, finally, to a child who writes a novel and correct sentence, “A squirrel jumped into my boot” (or is it boat because I am bringing a cultural frame of reference? We call the car storage a boot, while North Americans call it a trunk!). Similarly, there were samples from children aged 6–7 which suggested that a small number can barely draw more than a very basic representation, to children who can write more than one sentence and also write a compound sentence using simple conjunctions. These data from the children in Northern communities suggests the diversity and range of their writing is comparable to that reported in the literature.

Intent

Regarding whether the children understood that their representations were intended to serve a communicative purpose/convey a message to others, some considerable inference was required given there was generally only the representation as evidence. For

example, where a drawing related to the context of the play or story, it is clear that children intend to portray the play or story they had been involved with. However, what is not clear is whether they were intending to communicate ideas to others, to create a message for others. Just under 20% of 6-7-year-olds' samples were classified as "unclear communicative intent" in that it was not possible to discern an intent to communicate. The issue is that there may well have been one; information about intent is best obtained as teachers talk with children about their writing. The comparable extent for 5-6-year-olds was 30% (14 of 47 samples). This difference is likely either because the older children employed more letter or letter-like forms or were able to represent the play or story context more readily in recognizable drawing form, which could be taken to suggest the desire to share something others would relate to.

Form

Around half of the samples (27) from the older groups of children had no letters or letter-like forms: they were drawings. This may have been a function of the "instructions" but this is unknown. Although an individual child may, over different occasions, produce a variety of forms, this is a quite a high proportion, given widespread expectations of curricula that 6-year-olds will be able to form letters and write some words. Of those who produced letters or letter-like forms, about half of the children used mock letters or a combination of mock and recognizable letters. The other half of those who actually produced text (16), produced invented spelling where there was a good correspondence between letters and sounds. So, once again, amongst similar aged children, there was a range of proficiency.

Of the 5-6-year-old groups, the majority produced a mixture of drawing and "text". Only six children (13%) produced drawing only. Of those who wrote text, about a quarter produced conventional looking text but with no spelling-sound correspondence. Interestingly, just over half (59%) of the children who wrote text, showed ability to obtain reasonably close spelling-sound correspondence in their messages. As might be expected, there seemed to be more incidences amongst this younger age group where the text appeared to be copied or scribed (five children).

The samples where there was "text" were also considered for the conventions of direction, spacing, and size. About a quarter of 5-6-year-olds showed they could use conventional direction consistently although a few started out left to right, then faltered. Regarding spacing, about 13% had grasped the idea of spacing while the rest tended not to indicate word boundaries or the spacing between letters was quite uneven. Size of letters, too, was something they were still gaining control over. For two-thirds of the younger children, the size was unconventional.

The transcript (Blocks and Stories, 6-7-year-olds) shows children know about aspects of form like linearity and size ("I stay in the lines" notes James). Of the 6-7-year-olds who produced text, 85% of them could write text appropriately, direction-wise. They were slightly less in control of spacing with 57% employing conventional spacing while, for size, around 78% had letters of reasonable size.

Finally, the texts were considered for their extent. For the 5-6-year-olds just over half of the texts (that is samples that had recognizable writing) were single word texts, while just under half produced a single sentence. By contrast, only around a quarter of 6-7-year-olds wrote only a single word. The majority of students aged 6-7 who produced

texts, were writing a sentence or sentences, with half of them producing one than one sentence or a compound sentence.

Socio-cultural influence

The Blocks and Stories narratives (Indigenous children) showed evidence of drawing on different histories or experiences. While one group wrote about moose hunting—a community practice—another drew on themes of bad guys and parties, likely from television viewing. Children readily juxtapose the traditional with the modern and fantasy with reality. In the transcript from Blocks and Stories, Alexandra and Cara are building tepees (to be in a movie it seems) and there are cows but, within this setting, Cara has a golden car and there is reference to the house security system (which appears to get stolen). The tepees appear to morph into a castle with a moat. Later we learn the castle is made of ice-cream. The transcript records children referring to films (*Frozen* and *Jungle Book 2*) which they may well draw on for ideas.

The camping representations suggest that children have very different notions about what is involved in camping. Some associate it with large recreational vehicles and others think of more modest forms like tenting. The former representation shows a decided North American cultural influence; children in Australia and New Zealand may be more likely to draw a tent and a bar-b-que! Likewise, the rescue portrayed in one of the Camping context drawings, with the text “to the rescue,” involved four helicopters in formation, an image perhaps garnered from television action drama as it is unlikely in a real life scenario.

Social interactions

What was noticeable was that where there was a clear instance of collaborative writing (Blocks and Stories), the writing was of a different order to that of the individual samples from children of the same age group. It is not clear the extent to which an adult was part of this collaboration, although the children clearly scribed. The transcript from one group suggests the adult did not “supply” encodings.

The dramatic play, the talk, and the text reading that preceded the writing in each context provide stimulus for writing (and drawing ideas) although often the writing stimulates new ideas. The camping discussion around water introduced by the teacher clearly summoned up memories for the children of fishing and boating.

Discussion: Using Reflection on the Data for Optimizing Learning and Development

Early experiences and development in literacy, including writing, are vital for later literacy development. This section considers some examples of how information gleaned from a consideration of, and reflection on, writing samples and contexts could be used to inform and optimize educative actions in the NOW Play learning contexts.

The variability, the range, even at a young age, in children’s understandings about writing in any particular setting is important to consider. A major concern is that those who are not within the range of what might be expected, if they continue on the same trajectory, will fall further and further behind. Expert teachers design ways in which they can support children at all levels within any planned activity by involving them differently and providing varying levels of support. While keeping the broad ultimate goals or outcomes for language and literacy clearly in view, it is possible for children to take different paths, building on their strengths and pursuing their interests.

Sociocultural theory draws attention to ways that interactions among people and between people and artefacts are structured. For example, Valsiner's (1997) theory of 'bounded indeterminacy' emphasised that children's development is shaped through "the organisation of person-environment relationships in everyday actions" (p. 169). According to this frame, the environment is structured through boundaries, set up by other people, in the current case, teachers, which create 'zones' within which children develop. Valsiner identified three zones: the Zone of Free Movement (ZFM), the Zone of Promoted Action (ZPA) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through the interaction of the constraints set up by others (ZFM) and the actions that are promoted (ZPA), children can develop in ways that are within their ZPD. In this way, development can be characterised as *channelled*: allowing for free movement, but within constraints imposed by what is allowed and what is promoted (McNaughton, Phillips, & MacDonald, 2000).

This, channelling, is a significant idea to think about in relation to the current data. As the orchestrators of activities, teachers in the NOW Play project might reflect on how, in dramatic play or other play activities or when using books or other common classroom events, they are optimally designing learning opportunities and incorporating specific activities and structures to help move each child to the next level of understanding. Research shows that teachers of young children, when selecting texts to read, acknowledge criteria like word difficulty and frequency; they also include criteria, such as concept difficulty and considerations such as the prior knowledge and interests of the children (Fitzgerald, Hiebert, Bowen, Relyea-Kim, Kung, & Elmore, 2015). Teachers chose texts that fit these criteria when identifying stimuli for children's writing. The writing samples from children from Indigenous communities included the re-telling and representation of folk tales from Anglo-Canadian culture (e.g., "Three Billy Goats Gruff" and "Jack and the Beanstalk"). The individual samples produced were highly variable; the collaborative "books" written by the Indigenous children showed many quite sophisticated understandings. Reflecting on this and drawing from the theory outlined above, I thought more about the texts read to the children as a precursor to writing, and features of the context in which the samples were produced.

While the teachers selected materials that they felt would meet particular learning needs (Saul, & Diekman, 2005), they also may have considered how to build on the familiar as well as unlock the unfamiliar (McNaughton, 2002). For example, they may have considered how the folktales built on the Indigenous children's prior knowledge and interest.

Indigenous cultures are rich in their own folktales which may include not only different content and different textual structures but also these folktales are likely to represent rich historical material and cultural traditions and maxims (in the same vein as the 'moral' learning to be taken from "Jack and the Beanstalk"). When teaching students from diverse backgrounds, responsive teaching contexts include the element of cultural responsiveness. While the term might be operationalised in various ways, central is the acknowledgement of students' cultural identity, values and language. Teachers could also consider the kinds of prior experiences that 5–6 year-old Canadian children would have had with play contexts, such as the castle that the class built with milk cartons in one NOW Play context. The teacher's knowledge of the children's out-of-school literacies, such as those from television or pictures in books, could guide the narratives created through the

play within the classroom castle. Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carillo and Collazo (2004) argue for the learning potential of integrating these funds of knowledge.

There is a tension between the desire to support learning through building on the familiar, prior knowledge and the wish to extend horizons and challenge and excite children with new material. In a recent study of teacher text choice for Pasifika children (Jesson, & Parr, in press), we found that many primary teachers favoured texts that children could connect with; texts in which children saw something of themselves and their lives reflected—mirrors (Bishop, 1990). But one teacher in our research reminded the focus group that she also selected texts that supported an expanded view of the world, as window texts, including content in texts that was not commonly known to the learners. The teacher expressed the choice as “a two-way thing. Ok, you can make a connection [with the text] but, hold on, I want to broaden your experiences too”, a sentiment with which others in the group agreed. This notion of broadening experiences, expanding a child’s view of the world, may well have been the foremost aim when teachers in the NOW Play project chose activities and experiences to stimulate writing. These are complex matters that need to be weighed when a teacher is selecting not just texts, but other material to stimulate literacy learning, in this case, writing.

Further, I reflected more broadly on other aspects of the channelling in this activity of writing. We know that the engagement of children in writing is enhanced when it is purposeful; when they have some element of choice in how they engage in writing and what they write about and with whom. In my context, designing communicative tasks that allow for *tuakana/teina* pairings (more expert helping less expert, or older helping younger), providing familiar, comfortable contexts for Maori and Pasifika learners to retrieve, practice and generate vocabulary, develop fluency and build accuracy in writing is important (Si’ilata, 2014). I wondered whether the more sophisticated collaborative samples (in both Blocks and Stories and Folk Tales) were related to working in a way with which the children were most comfortable. This has implications for the teacher in structuring then supporting children’s engagement in the activities.

While one aspect of supporting children’s development as writers is in orchestrating the activity, the other is to utilize representations in the writing samples (together with the talk, including children’s responses to inquiry as they write), as formative information for teacher’s specifically designed responses. From the evidence, a large number of the NOW Play children are readily able to produce letters and letter-like forms. The goals for these children, from looking at likely usual progressions (some illustrated in the tables in this article), might be to represent salient or beginning sounds in words and to make stronger connections between print and sound. Any competent Grade 1 teacher knows that drawing attention to the connection between the letter and sound can be accomplished in a number of ways—perhaps by pointing out words in a message that begin with the same sound, asking children to verbalise what they are going to write and to tell you what sounds they hear and so on. In their article, “How do I write...?”, Cabell, Tortorelli and Gerde (2013) have a table with suggestions for scaffolding young children’s writing using individualized strategies. I particularly like the description of how Marvin is playing doctor in a dramatic play centre and signing prescriptions (interesting to note that Marvin’s idea of key aspects of a doctor or healer’s role is likely to be socio-culturally determined!) for his peers. Each prescription has his name, MAV, and some letter lookalikes. He remembers what his name looks like from memory, not from sounds, so adds additional letters as he senses the writing

should be longer than MAV. The teacher skilfully extends this by suggesting that they write his friend's names on their prescriptions. She talks to Marvin about the letter M and that the first sound in his name is /m/. Together they identify others whose names start with /m/—Maria and Meredith— and he writes their names as Ms, plus some letter-like additions. With further support, Marvin is also able to identify an /s/ at the beginning of Sam and an /l/ at the beginning of Liz. He is developing an understanding of how letters represent sounds, in this case at the simplest level, the beginning of a word. Expert teachers are constantly alert to opportunities like this to seize the moment and apply instructional force. But they may also make deliberate choices. At a group level of instruction, research in my contexts shows the value of humour and of song and rap-like poetry in emphasizing sound and representation correspondences, particularly with Indigenous and Pasifika children (Jesson, & Parr, in press; Si'ilata, 2014).

Teachers who know their children and interact with them on a daily basis are uniquely positioned to support them as developing writers; to consider not only the more obvious features of form and function but also the culturally and socially situated nature of their writing. The lenses teachers bring to bear in designing the opportunities for writing and in reflecting on the representations and other outcomes that result from particular contexts are best informed from the standpoint of particular children in particular locations.

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Rural Northern Canadian Teachers' Discoveries about Young Children's Oral Language

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Abstract

Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers collaborated with university researchers in an action research project aiming to find ways to support young children's oral language. Analysing video data of children's interactions during play, we worked together to create an observation tool that allows teachers to focus on ways in which children use language to carry out social purposes. In this paper, we report on teachers' discoveries about the wide range of social purposes which children carry out using language, and their use of an observation framework that captures the pragmatic aspects of children's language while engaged in play. Our research has implications for all teachers who wish to learn more about observing and supporting children's oral language use.

Rural Northern Canadian Teachers' Discoveries about Young Children's Oral Language

At home, in school, and out in the community, children interact with friends, family and community members, using their growing vocabularies and understandings of the ways that words are put together. Through these interactions, children learn new words, and use language to do many things, such as develop relationships, make requests, provide information, and express their needs or desires. They learn about the world and about cultural expectations for interacting with particular people in particular contexts (Halliday, 1978). Children become socialized to the routines of each situated activity and "learn the ways of talk and thought embedded in that activity" (Boyd & Galda, 2011, p. 7). As they develop understandings about sounds, meanings and constructions of the languages spoken in their communities, they are also acquiring the understandings and skills that are foundational to literacy (Owocki & Goodman, 2002; Resnick & Snow, 2009). The process of expressing ideas through words to communicate with others in clear and understandable ways leads children to further organize their thinking and reflect on their experiences (Barnes, 1975/1992). Additionally, children use talk to "build constructively and critically on each other's ideas" (Littleton & Mercer, 2013, p. 296), serving to expand and refine their understandings.

Researchers (e.g., Cazden, 2001; Fassler, 2013) and curriculum developers (e.g., Department for Education, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) agree that classroom interactions should build on the oral language that children bring from their home and community lives. Finding ways to achieve this goal is the focus of our large-

scale project, which brings researchers together with educators in northern rural and Indigenous communities across four Canadian provinces. A branch of this project emerged in response to teachers expressing their need for an observation tool that might help them capture what their students do with language during typical classroom play and small group interactions. As reported elsewhere (Peterson, Eiszadeh, Rajendram & Portier, submitted), participating kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers collaborated with us in a branch of the larger research study involving the video-recording of children's interactions during dramatic and construction play. Through inductive analysis of children's utterances in their play interactions, we developed codes and categories of children's oral language use, and determined a wide range of purposes for which children use language in their play. Teachers then worked with us to develop a tool, *Observing Children's Use of Language (OCUL)*, drawing on the categories created in the analysis of children's utterances.

In this paper, we introduce the observation tool, which focuses on children's "*communicative competence*, or the understanding of how to use language to communicate" (Boyd & Galda, 2011, p. 4—italics in original). Further, we asked participating kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers, working with five- and six-year old children, from three of the rural communities to incorporate this observation tool into their typical classroom practices. We report on their discoveries in terms of these research questions:

1. How do teachers use the *Observing Children's Use of Language* tool?
2. What do teachers discover about young children's oral language, and how do they use the information?

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Linguistic View of Language

As young children talk and interact with others, they are not only learning the language of their culture and community, they are learning *through* language and learning *about* language (Halliday, 2004). Our research is based upon a view of language as a meaning making or semiotic process, whereby the act of participating in language learning and language use engages young children in "learning the foundation of learning itself" (Halliday, 1993, p. 93). Through language interactions, children are immersed in recreating and learning the expectations, relationships and values of their cultures. Through the social relationships of talk, children make sense of the world, and discover the words, sentences, meanings and purposes necessary for independent thought (Vygotsky, 1962). When given opportunities for authentic talk in classrooms, children learn how to use talk to tell stories, imagine, provide rationales, hypothesize, explore, evaluate and re-evaluate, all vital cognitive processes for carrying out literacy practices.

Oral Language and Literacy

Children's oral language supports their construction of meaning in reading and writing (Dickinson et al., 2003). Research has identified important relationships between oral language and literacy in children's interactions before entering formal school settings (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1999; Heath, 1983; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1981), and later when attending school (e.g., Barnes, 1975/1992; Boyd & Galda, 2011; Wells, 1999). Through their interactions with others, children also learn social expectations about language use across contexts and develop the understandings of language that they will

bring to reading and writing (Resnick & Snow, 2009). Recognition of the importance of oral language to children's literacy is found in literacy research (e.g., McKeown & Beck, 2004), and is evidenced in Canadian provincial language curricula (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2014) and American state curricula (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009).

Literature Review

This paper presents the findings from an action research study that is situated within a much larger multi-year project taking place across northern rural communities in four Canadian provinces. The overall goals of this larger project are to co-create research-supported approaches and practices that will support young children's oral language and writing in Canadian northern rural and Indigenous communities, and in the process, take steps to develop teaching capacity in these communities. The study presented in this paper extends from participating teachers' requests for classroom oral language observation tools and from the view that classroom language assessments can and should include a focus on children's competencies in oral communication (Hymes, 1974). Further, in keeping with the larger project's objective, we considered how children's oral language might be observed and assessed in ways that are responsive to particular play contexts of the classrooms of participating communities. Our research is based on a recognition that northern rural and Indigenous classroom contexts have been marginalized in educational research (Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013). Our own classroom experience and research shows that researchers and educators should not assume that practices and tools developed for and used in southern urban Canadian classrooms are necessarily appropriate for northern Canadian contexts. Our literature review synthesizes relevant work in the fields of play and oral language, oral language assessments and in professional development of educators in rural communities.

Play and Oral Language

Our large-scale research project focuses on supporting children's oral language use in play contexts. Classroom dramatic play contexts, defined by Smilansky (1968) as the activities where children engage in pretend roles, offer ideal opportunities for children to engage in a wide range of communicative experiences (Whitebread, 2010). Some Canadian provincial curriculum and supporting documents, notably in Ontario, make reference to the importance of oral language to play, the role pretend play serves in language development, and how language serves to extend play into other contexts (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2014). Varied language use has been documented in research, specifically in the dramatic and block play. These authentic play contexts can offer more information about children's language abilities than that gained solely from standardized tests (Pellegrini, 1986).

In our own studies of northern Canadian rural and Indigenous children playing in dramatic and construction/material play settings, we found that classroom dramatic play contexts provided spaces where children created narratives with a theme or storyline related to the centre and its props, and engaged in "real talk" as defined by Boyd and Galda (2011). For the study reported here, these dramatic play scenarios provided the contexts for teachers to implement the observation tool.

Oral Language Assessments

Our systematic review of hundreds of research articles on oral language assessment showed that children's vocabulary is the predominant feature assessed. Of the tests focusing on vocabulary, the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition* (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), a one-on-one test requiring children to provide labels for pictures, is the most frequently used test. Another predominant branch of oral language assessment research involved the analysis of children's narrative retellings. Because the data gathered from retellings provide continuous text to analyze (as children can tell lengthy "stories"), researchers can assess more features than vocabulary assessments are able to assess. Some researchers (e.g., Justice et al., 2006) assessed children's narratives in terms of what they called "productivity" (e.g., total number of words; the total number of T-units, which are combinations of clauses), and structural complexity (e.g., mean length of T-units expressed by number of words and morphemes; number of coordinating conjunctions).

Many oral language assessment practices (e.g., Clay, 2007; Crevola & Vineis, 2004; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) involve children in a one-to-one context with an adult (e.g., a teacher or a speech-language pathologist) removed from the settings where children typically interact with others and naturally use language to communicate and express themselves. Administration of these assessments involves asking children to repeat sentences and/or verbally label pictures.

Some widely available tools have been designed to assess the social *purposes* of children's language use (e.g., Dickinson, McCabe, & Sprague, 2003; Scholastic, 2001), although many of these focusing on a child's interaction with an adult who asks questions or initiates the conversation. With our interest focusing on children's *peer* interactions, two studies are of particular relevance to our research. Studies by Tough (1976) and Corsaro (1986) involved contextualized assessments of children's oral language. Both researchers created classification guides for assessing children's interactions in dramatic and construction play settings. Tough (1976) found that children used language for a number of purposes, and years later, Corsaro's (1986) research resulted in some similar language purpose categories.

With an understanding that oral language is of significant importance to literacy development, we have responded to the requests made by teachers for observation and assessment tools that capture children's authentic use of language within the context of their typical interactions and community/school settings. Keeping in mind the larger project goal of developing ways for teachers to support their students' oral language development, our aim was to develop a "formative" assessment tool that could be easily used by classroom teachers while they observed their students in the context of typical classroom dramatic and collaborative play, and might serve to inform the decisions that they make when modifying learning activities for their students. This paper reports on how teachers responded to the use of this tool.

Rural Teachers' Professional Development

Although rural communities face many of the same educational challenges as their urban counterparts, they have some unique challenges. Rural schools often have more difficulty than urban schools recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly experienced teachers and teachers with specialties. As a result, rural schools often have a higher turnover rate, a lower rate of students who complete postsecondary degrees and more

young and inexperienced teachers than urban schools (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006; Corbett, 2007; Dadisman, Gravelle, Farmer, & Petrin, 2010; Howley & Pendarvis, 2003; Storey, 1993). School leaders recognize the need to mentor the many new and inexperienced teachers who teach in rural schools, yet it can be difficult to provide this support because of the physical distance between schools in rural districts (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006). Ongoing professional development opportunities with vital practice and feedback components built into them are especially challenging to provide because of the geographic isolation of northern rural and Indigenous schools (Clarke, Imrich, Surgenor, & Wells, 2003; Hansen, 2009).

The work of teachers in northern Indigenous and rural schools is enhanced through the positive relationships that are often found among community members and the schools. Teachers and students often live close to each other in their communities, so school “initiatives often attempt to entwine academic, social and community-building activities to foster citizenship and to create learning opportunities relevant to the lives of students and the community” (Wallin, Anderson & Penner, 2009, p. 70). However, because many teachers leave after only a few years of teaching in a community, they do not always establish close connections with the community and, in turn, community members are often wary of new people, knowing that they may only stay a short while (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006). When teachers who have stayed are asked why they have remained in their teaching positions within the small communities, they note that relationships have played a key influential role, specifically the supportive relationships with principals (Murphy & Angelski, 1996). Principals can foster beneficial relationships with colleagues and take steps to organize training, support and mentoring for young teachers. In Australia, steps have been taken to address this at the policy level, to encourage teachers to collaborate with one another to develop their own learning and take steps to address the professional isolation that rural teachers sometimes experience (Swift, 2010).

Researchers have also called for initiatives to address the rural-urban gap in access to professional development opportunities and models of delivery (e.g., Stockard, 2011). Our large scale action research project is taking important steps toward offering extended community developed professional development models and practices to support oral language and writing development efforts in rural primary classrooms. The smaller research cycle reported here involved rural teachers working collaboratively together to develop a practical classroom assessment tool that has potential (as discussed below) to contribute to a teacher’s own understanding about children’s oral language uses in relation to the daily classroom learning activities. It is important that the results of collaborative action research conducted in rural schools, particularly northern rural and Indigenous schools, be widely disseminated to provide alternative perspectives to curriculum, research and practice that tend to be urban-oriented (Corbett, 2014).

Background to the Development of the Observing Children’s Use of Language (OCUL) Tool

Collaborative Action Research Project

In action research, teachers select and examine topics that interest them based upon the issues they have identified within their own classrooms (O’Connor, Green, & Anderson, 2006). Action research helps educators familiarize themselves with current research and work toward finding ways for this research to meaningfully impact their own

classroom practices. This process spirals over time through several iterations of planning, implementing changes, data collection, analysis, and reflection (Creswell, 2008). These spiralling cycles emphasize self-reflection with the goal of fostering improvements in practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). Action research aims to collaborate with educators so that new practices are built upon what the teacher already knows about their classroom, community and students (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Thohahoken, 2011) and new theories are modelled from the practices within local contexts (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009).

With this in mind, over a school year, we (two university researchers) met regularly with the participating rural teachers to collaboratively plan, develop, implement and reflect on new teaching approaches that address our collaboratively created research questions about children's oral language and writing. For one cycle of this iterative process, the teachers implemented and tested the OCUL tool, and worked out how this might be used and managed in their particular classroom contexts with their particular students.

Approximately every six weeks, from October through June, we visited the participating students in their classrooms, met individually with each teacher during their planning time, and then met with all the teachers together after school. At these times, we reflected with the teachers on the classroom video and writing data that they had collected during the time between our visits and discussed possible new approaches to supporting the children's language and writing. During the intervening weeks, the teachers tried the new approaches. As with other documented action research practices (McAteer, 2013), we (researchers and teachers) used the video data to assess how well the approaches supported children's learning and then refined or designed new approaches in the ongoing cycle of data collection, analysis, and refinement of practices.

During one of the six-week cycles in the middle of the school year, the teachers used the OCUL tool, for assessing their students' communicative competencies. During the first year of our larger research project, we had created this tool collaboratively, organizing language use categories into an observation sheet that they could use and test in their classrooms.

Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted in rural communities in the far north of a western Canadian province. Eagle Hills (all names are pseudonyms) is an industrial center based on the abundant natural resources in the area. Within a 30-minute drive of Eagle Hills are Aspen and Deerview, two agricultural-based working class communities. These three communities range in population from 400 to 6000 residents. Of our six participants, two are kindergarten teachers in their third year of teaching, while the other kindergarten teacher and the three Grade 1 teachers have between 13 and 30 years of teaching experience. All teachers are female except for Marcel, a Grade 1 teacher (all names are pseudonyms). Class sizes range from 8–32 students who speak English as their mother tongue.

Developing the OCUL Tool

To develop an oral language assessment tool, during the first year of our larger research project, we used 81 video-recordings taken by the teachers of their students' talk and analyzed how the children used language in their dramatic play and other collaborative activities. Our inductive analysis methods took place over several months. The video

recordings were transcribed and then read through by the researchers who conducted a descriptive analysis of the function and type of each utterance that was made by the children. From these descriptions, we developed 37 initial codes and then used these codes to re-analyse many of the transcripts. Any discrepancies between us were discussed and codes were refined and categorized. Two doctoral students then joined our process and we used the refined codes to analyze an extensive transcript together, again comparing our coding, making minor adjustments, and clarifying the wording of our codes. We grouped the codes into categories and used several more transcripts as reliability checks before bringing our analyses to the teachers. Together we discussed these categories and codes, combined two of the codes and made very minor changes to the wording to clarify meaning. Our analysis revealed that children used language for six language purposes (categories): playing with sounds, satisfying their own needs, directing others, expressing disagreement, getting along with others, and creating, connecting and explaining. Once we arrived at our final version of the categories and codes, the teachers worked with us to design a format for the *Observing Children's Use of Language* tool (see Figure 1).

	Playing with Sounds	Own Needs	Directing
	Playing with sounds/words to accompany actions or feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing own actions • Asking for assistance or information • Asserting ownership of object or space • Attempting to get others' attention • Expressing need or desire • Asserting own role • Seeking affirmation Expressing emotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling or suggesting what a peer should or should not do • Assigning a role to others Persisting or convincing others
Tally			
Quotes			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejecting storyline, topic or role • Correcting peer's behaviour or showing disapproval • Rejecting help, advice or object • Excluding peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting collaborative action • Negotiating to get object or turn • Offering or accepting help or advice • Complimenting peers • Accepting peer's correction • Showing interest by asking or answering questions • Affirming the storyline or topic • Being polite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning what to do or talking through problem • Drawing conclusions about situation • Giving information, explaining or elaborating • Giving rationale for actions or suggestions • Narrating real-life events while playing • Asking questions to make connections or elicit explanations • Adding to the storyline or topic • Introducing a new narrative or topic
Tally			
Quotes			

Reflections

Figure 1. Observing Children's Use of Language (OCUL)

Learning to Use the OCUL Tool

Together, we planned a process for determining how useful the tool might be for teachers to gather information about their students' communicative competencies, possible contexts for how they would use the tool, and ways to make the tool use manageable during everyday classroom activities.

Once we were all satisfied with the tool, we watched a 10-minute video clip of four children in a dramatic play center, filmed in one of the participating kindergarten classrooms. We recorded and discussed our observations, and then repeated the process with another video clip to provide the teachers with further experience in using the tool. We developed a six-week implementation plan, whereby each teacher decided how they would observe students using the tool: one student at a time; several focal students over time; or, all the children within a small group.

All children were observed during dramatic or collaborative play activities. Each teacher planned to try one observation method for three weeks and then switch to another method. They based their plans on the specific needs and students in their own classrooms. Since we could only fly into their community to visit at the end of the six weeks, we arranged a web-conference mid-way through the cycle.

The template for the tool shows the broad categories of language use (in bold type in Figure 1) with the specific language use codes listed underneath (in small print in Figure 1). The teacher referred to these codes as examples of what children in their classrooms might say and to guide them in the meaning of each language use category. The tool was designed so that teachers could simply tally the number of times that focus children used language within each of the broader categories, and write down examples of specific utterances in the larger spaces. Once teachers have familiarized themselves with the tool, they could use the alternate format that simply lists the six categories (see Figure 2). A copy of the first template with the specific codes could be kept for reference as needed.

	Playing with Sounds	Own Needs	Directing	Disagreeing	Getting Along	Creating, Connecting & Explaining	Teacher's Reflections
Name:							
Contexts:							

Figure 2. Observing Children's Use of Language (OCUL)

Teachers' Use of the OCUL Tool: Data Collection and Analysis

To determine how teachers used the OCUL tool and information gathered from it, we analyzed the six teachers' notes and tallies on their OCUL forms. The teachers kept a log sheet to track which days that they were able to incorporate the assessment into their classroom practices and the number of minutes that they carried out their observations of the focus children playing.

Halfway through the research cycle, at the end of week three, we set up a web meeting to reflect on the process and progress to that point. We took notes and audio recorded the teachers as they shared their experiences using the OCUL tool and as everyone responded to each other's ideas. At the end of the six-week cycle, we visited each teacher to conduct interviews, asking the same questions that we asked at the mid-way web meeting:

1. Tell us about your experiences using the tool. How are you using it, in what contexts are children interacting and for how long do you tend to observe a child or children?
2. What kind of information are you getting? How are you using this information?

As with the development of the OCUL tool, we followed an inductive meaning-making process to identify patterns and consistencies in the teachers' observations and experiences (Patton, 2002). The results of our analysis are described below.

Findings

Teachers' Assessment Practices

The teachers recorded and analyzed the children's interactions at dramatic play centers and while the children were playing with blocks and other creative and construction materials. They also used the oral language assessment tool during small group settings when children were engaged in formal curriculum activities, such as collaborative writing and brainstorming, making patterns with pattern blocks, using an iPad to learn literacy skills, and word game centers. They all chose to either focus on different children (one-at-a-time) in different small group activities or track one child across many activities. Figure 3 shows how one teacher recorded observations on an OCUL form.

Name(s) [Redacted] Dates May 9-13

	Playing With Sounds	Own Needs	Reflections
Tallies	III III	III III III	- This was a good grouping - lots of give and take in conversation and also a good final product. - each student had time to share ideas no monopolizing of task.
Quotes	"raaarrr" (dragon sound) "pssshh" (fire sound)	"can you cut it out I can't" "I want to colour the dragons tail" "I need the crayons" "Give me the paper" "That's mine"	
Tallies	III	III	
Quotes	"Let's make a dragon with fire balls and fire breath and fire all over"	"I don't want red." "I want a big dragon" "Our dragon has to be green" "dragons are green"	
	Getting Along	Connecting & Explaining	
Tallies	II	II	This was a good cooperative activity. All students were engaged and absorbed in the task.
Quotes	"We can both pick powers" "What powers do you want"	"I have a dragon game at home" "The game has fire balls and fire air and fire cannons"	

Context: Create a dragon with magical powers or skills (working in partners) This was a student requested activity. Students in the entire class wanted to try this activity.

Figure 3. Adrianna's Notes Using the OCUL

Our observation template provided space for teachers to tally the number of verbal utterances and record the verbal utterances made by a child, however, the teachers said that when they observed the children's interactions, they only had enough time to either document some examples of what the children said or tally the number of children's utterances within each of the six categories. They found that it was not possible to do both while observing children and managing the class. Three of the teachers, Marcel (Grade 1),

Polly and Lila (kindergarten), tried writing as much of what the children said as they were able to record in each observation period, and then later went back to code and tally the students' utterances. The other teachers also tried recording the children's utterances for their first few observation periods, but then changed their practice to tallying the utterances within each of the categories and recording an occasional quote from a student that they wanted to remember as a particularly good example of one of the uses of language. On average, across all of the participating teachers' observations, they used the OCUL for 10-15 minutes at a time, ranging from 3.5 to 30 minutes per observation.

Teachers' Use of Information Gathered: Learning about Individual Children

Using the OCUL tool provided opportunities for teachers to get to know their students in new ways, such as how they solved problems when interacting with peers, how they applied their conceptual learning from formal instruction, how they used new vocabulary, and their articulation of speech sounds. The value of small collaborative group work, in offering opportunities for children to talk and develop their ideas, was reinforced for Marcel (Grade 1). He told us: "I feel like I've learned a lot more about my students ... just through the conversations, because they're being given opportunity to discuss ... to speak freely and comfortably with their peer group."

One of Adrianna's (Grade 1) focus students was a high-needs child, who had an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) developed for oral language. She used the information gathered from her OCUL observations during meetings with this child's parents to inform them about his progress. She and Polly (kindergarten) shared her observations with the speech-language pathologists who worked with two of the children they chose to observe. The OCUL tool gathered information about how children use language in real-life social contexts, and the teachers found that their observations provided rich information about the children's language that the speech-language pathologists were unable to gather during their one-on-one formal assessments.

Polly (kindergarten) and Kahli (kindergarten) found that use of the tool gave them a picture of the group dynamics involving their focus students who had been identified with speech and language delays. Kahli said that she learned that one student, who had been identified as having a social-communication delay, was talking more than she had thought when he was playing with peers at a building center. Sometimes this student surprised Kahli by using language to get along with others, as well as language to express his own needs. She also observed that: "He was right on the edge of playing ... He doesn't add to the story or add to the play, but he's there."

Lila (kindergarten) and Marcel (Grade 1) talked about what they discovered about language use of the English Language Learners they chose to focus on in their classrooms. As Marcel recorded the students' language uses, he was pleasantly surprised to find that Jay, an ELL student, was using English in many different ways, and that other children were helping Jay develop his English language use by demonstrating how to rephrase something that was said or by helping to clarify what Jay had said so the rest of the group understood. Similarly, during Lila's observations of one focal student, Trivien, as he played at the construction centre, she heard him explain a problem he was having with a bridge he was building. Lila recorded direct quotes of his language that she later used to assess his IPP goals. She explained that it was valuable to have evidence that students were "generalizing what they are learning in one-on-one settings to conversational settings with

their peers . . . they're taking it a step further." She also used the oral language information she gathered when reporting to Trivien's parents about his learning.

Janice (Grade 1) documented her observations of individual students' use of language while they engaged in collaborative literacy and mathematics activities, as well as during block play. She decided to use the information that she gathered to hold short 'on the spot' conferences with children to provide immediate feedback about their oral language uses. She told us about a group of students who tended to get into disagreements when they were constructing with blocks. After observing many instances of disagreements, she drew from the specific language uses in the *Getting Along* category of the OCUL (e.g., take turns), and intervened in their play to give them some examples of what they could say and do. Janice said that she "noticed a big improvement in their behaviour and how they're working with their peers . . . developing some strategies for when there is a disagreement." Based on her observations, she also told us stories about some English Language Learners and a First Nations student in her class becoming more involved in small-group activities after she had her one-on-one conferences with them. In these conferences, Janice provided examples of ways in which they could participate with others using language to carry out specific purposes, as in the *Getting Along*, *Directing* and *Creating, Connecting and Explaining* categories.

Teachers' Use of Information Gathered: Modifying Teaching Practices

The teachers found that, in addition to observing and assessing the children's language uses, the OCUL tool helped them assess the learning activities that they had created to engage students in collaboration with their peers. In many cases, the teachers made modifications to their teaching practices after reflecting on what they were observing using the OCUL tool.

The teachers said that their overall goal was for students to use language for a wide range of purposes. Through their use of the OCUL tool, they assessed the value of their classroom learning activities in terms of whether they provided spaces for children to use language for purposes that included as many oral language categories as possible. During our six-week implementation cycle period, Adrianna (Grade 1) had a student teacher working in the classroom with her. They both used their observations and the OCUL coding to assess the usefulness of various classroom activities to foster children's talk—both the quantity and the range of functions of their talk. Adrianna gave an example of a collaborative math activity that involved problem solving using paper clips. She noticed that the children in every group used language for their own needs (e.g., asserting ownership, asking for help) and for disagreeing (e.g., rejecting advice, choosing not to share). She felt that the students were not using language to explore math concepts in the way that she had intended. Adrianna used her OCUL observations to reflect on how she would set up the activity differently next time.

Adrianna also changed her method for grouping students after having used the OCUL tool for six weeks. She said, "I'm more mindful of groupings now so that some of the really strong oral language learners don't monopolize the entire conversation and my not-so-strong students fall to the background."

The value of collaborative play for encouraging children's talk and providing spaces for children to learn from one another was reinforced for the kindergarten teachers who already implemented play-based programs, and a welcome discovery for the Grade 1

teachers, whose curricula did not typically encourage time for play activities. Lila (kindergarten), for example, said that her observations supported some of what she knew about oral language and play, but was sometimes pulled away from: “Children pick up so much language from each other and learn from each other. And I know that, in theory, but there are all these things that I need to be teaching that take time away from that time when they could just be talking and teaching each other.” Similarly, Marcel (Grade 1) was delighted to discover just how creative the children’s ideas could be when they were collaborating to write. He said that he would continue to plan extended collaborative projects next year, as he “really noticed ... just how important oral language is in Grade 1.”

Janice (Grade 1) added a construction materials centre to her literacy rotation centres after using the OCUL tool. She gave a rationale for modifying her teaching practices: “I really noticed a difference in the language. They use more categories of language use when they get to do more of that free play and experiment with items . . . there’s more diverse language when they have that free time, and a lot more language, too.” Her observations through the OCUL form gave her ideas about how she could “tie the construction play into some of the other curriculum activities.”

Conclusions and Implications

Our findings have implications for all teachers who wish to learn more about how their students use oral language and how effective particular classroom learning activities are for fostering children’s language growth. Through the use of the OCUL template, the teachers found that they could easily gather useful information in as little as four minutes at a time spent focusing on how individual or small groups of children were using language during typical classroom play-based activities. The more the teachers used the tool, the better they became at identifying their students’ language strengths and the types of language uses they might encourage in individuals or through various activities. Rather than using the OCUL tool to draw conclusions or make final evaluations about their students’ oral language competencies, the teachers used it to learn more about the strengths and needs of individual students and inform the feedback they gave to students and parents, and to modify and shape further learning activities. Through using the OCUL tool and referring to the oral language categories and codes, the teachers also developed their own understandings of children’s oral language use in relation to what they knew about their students and communities (Thohahoken, 2011).

This aspect of language is a much-needed area of professional development as noted by researchers in previous studies (McIntyre & Hellsten, 2008) and by the teachers participating in our collaborative action research (Peterson, McIntyre & Forsyth, 2016). In addition, these rural teachers were engaged with colleagues from different schools and grade to pursue their own professional development and provide guidance and feedback to one another based on the discoveries and learning in their own practices. This model of collaboratively creating and implementing new practices helps teachers develop close connections to their colleagues, an element cited by rural teachers as vital to their positions (Murphy & Angelski, 1996; Swift, 2010). To address the need for classroom support in rural school districts, our next steps will be to work with these teachers to develop professional development models that will help them bring their practices and

understandings to other teachers in their districts (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006; Clarke et al., 2003; Stockard, 2011).

Through both the tallies and notes capturing student conversations, the teachers gathered useful information about how their students used language and how their classroom activities engaged students in peer interaction and collaboration. Their observations were informative to colleagues, especially speech-language pathologists, and to parents, offering contextual examples of a student's language competencies as well as areas to develop. The OCUL tool sometimes served to reinforce expectations of how a student was using language with his or her peers, and other times, showed language uses that surprised teachers. The teachers found that their OCUL notes could be used to provide immediate feedback and support to individual students in the classrooms, as well as examples to share with parents in discussions and on report cards. The teachers' observations and reflections showed us that "assessment" tools can take the form of less formal observation forms, and can capture children's typical peer interactions within various classroom contexts (Boyd & Galda, 2011).

The OCUL, a tool developed collaboratively by teachers and university researchers and based on children's language use in typical classroom activities, gave teachers ideas about how they might shape their programs and activities to encourage a wide range of language uses with their students. As intended in action research (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009), the teachers were able to confirm which of their classroom activities fostered the important sharing and building upon of ideas (Littleton & Mercer, 2013), which activities could be adapted to elicit more collaboration, and which student groupings were beneficial for student talk. In addition, the OCUL tool gave teachers support in adding play-based collaborative activities to their literacy programs, as they had gathered and could share evidence of the range of student language use during these activities. The tool was also easy for the teachers to implement with the variety of activities across their classrooms—activities that they each developed to meet the specific needs of their students in their communities. We feel that the feedback provided by the OCUL tool can give teachers a portrait of their students' language uses and be used create classroom play opportunities relevant to their community lives (Wallin, Anderson & Penner, 2009).

Our findings also suggest that this tool may be easy for other classroom teachers to implement. The phrasing of the OCUL categories and codes were shaped by classroom teachers to be understood by classroom teachers. In addition, learning to use this observation tool did not take a great deal of time and the teachers' understanding of the categories developed as they used it. As the teachers in our study pursue ways to bring their action research findings to their colleagues, further study will provide us with opportunities to observe how responsive the language use categories and observation tool can be for educators working in a wider range of Canadian northern rural communities, and to teachers who were not necessarily part of the development process.

Regardless of whether teachers use the OCUL or another tool that they develop or select from available commercial resources, it is important that teachers take time to observe children while they are interacting in play and other collaborative, small-group activities (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). These observations not only provide information about students' language use and conceptual learning that can be used to guide further teaching and reporting to parents and education professionals, such as speech language

pathologists, but also about how learning activities contribute to children's language growth. Teachers' own professional learning is enhanced in the process.

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