■ Book reviews

Navigating language diversity

Review of 'Teachers voyaging in plurilingual seas: Young children learning through more than one language'.

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Reviewer: Mee-Ling Ting

Teachers voyaging in plurilingual seas **reports on a major study documenting the learning experiences of bilingual and multilingual young children in four early childhood settings in Auckland.**

As part of a project funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiatives (TLRI), the study also documents the families' expectations and aspirations regarding the heritage/ home languages, ways that educators engage in opportunities in promoting and extending children's heritage/ home languages, and addresses the challenges of deficit discourses including misguided beliefs about speaking more than one language. Last but not least, the study provides educational implications that validate and nurture children's heritage/ home languages, not only in early childhood settings, but also in the family and in the community.

According to the 2013 census, ethnic and language diversity is particularly evident within Auckland region in New Zealand. For a nation state that only recognised biculturalism barely 40 years ago (Stewart, 2016) with first bicultural education policies in place in the 1980s (Lourie, 2016), significant effort has been made to include the Māori language into English-dominant education settings.

Despite the continuing argument that biculturalism is very much symbolic rather than a genuine acceptance and validation of Māori language and culture by non-Māori (Lourie, 2015), the greatest achievements are perhaps the rejection of deficit theorising about Māori within mainstream education (Bishop, 2015) and the increased recognition of Māori culture, language as relevant and important.

Currently, a movement to transition New Zealand into a multilingual and multi-literate country is pushing the country's education sector into yet another level of challenge. Although early childhood education has a significant responsibility to ensure all children have the right to learn their language, there is a shortage of research literature about bi/ multilingual early childhood education. The early childhood educators who are working with many children from bi/ multilingual backgrounds in plurilingual contexts, are basically navigating through unchartered territory. Therefore, the research findings documented in this book serve to provide some useful insights and directions for teachers also venturing through the 'plurilingual seas' of multicultural/multilingual early childhood education.

The metaphor of 'ocean voyagers who are embarking on a relatively unknown journey' is used to structure the book, and each chapter begins with a whakatauki that signals an optimism about this voyage despite impending challenges.

By 'scanning the horizon', the first chapter provides the background to the research: outlining relevant policy and early childhood curriculum considerations. The first concern which drives this research is the disappearance of indigenous languages that poses a threat to the diversity of cultures, identities and knowledges. It has been pointed out that educational institutions that are predominantly monolingual, privilege dominant languages at the expense of indigenous and immigrant languages and to further accelerate the extinction of languages, among which, the loss of te reo Māori poses the biggest concern in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another concern is that the ways to address diversity of languages may be oversimplified without capturing the richness of language and culture – that is, a tokenistic approach to practice that denies the authenticity of the culture (Ritchie, 2003); diversity becomes invisible. The TLRI research sets out to consider the valued outcomes by teachers and families for children who learn in more than one language.

Chapter 2 of the book 'sets the navigation points' by
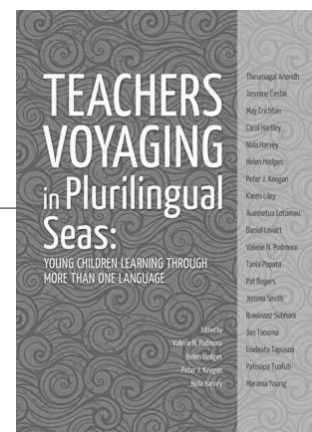
presenting three research questions drawn from literature reviews on language diversity, framed by two major theoretical concepts, which are 'funds of knowledge' and 'additive bilingualism'. The concept 'funds of knowledge' recognises and embraces children's languages and cultures, as well as validating children's styles of learning which enable 'self-determination' (Bishop, 2015). 'Additive bilingualism' is a model that recognises that children can learn effectively in more than one language. In fact, language can be used as a resource for learning, enabling different perspectives of meaning-making.

A key myth that is challenged in the research is the misguided fear that speaking and learning more than one language impedes children's English language learning. This myth is a relatively common belief in contexts where only one dominant language (predominantly English) is accepted and used (Espinosa, 2008). Therefore, the additive model of bilingualism provides an empowering, positive view with regards to bi/ multilingualism.

The third chapter of the book 'charts the procedure' by outlining the research design and processes, pointing out challenges faced by the teacher-researchers working with children who learn in more than one language. The transformative-emancipatory paradigm provided the research with a framework for addressing the issue using a sociocultural approach to mixed methods strategies. The sociocultural approach emphasises the importance of linking heritage/ home language with families and communities, therefore teacher-family partnership can be established and maintained while working collaboratively during data collection within the four different early childhood settings. This transformative mixed methodology addresses the complexities of research in culturally complex settings that can provide a basis for social change (Mertens, 2007).

Chapter 4 to 7 are written by teacher-researchers working in each of the four different early childhood centres. They documented bi/ multilingual children's learning experiences, and discuss the research findings and the pedagogical implications for each settings.

What is significant is that the research enabled deeper teacher relationships with children, families and fostering more systematic, in-depth discussions about families' aspirations for children. During the research, the teacher-researchers recognised there was a major shift from using heritage/ home languages as a transition tool, to using heritage/ home languages as a cognitive resource. As the research progressed, teachers came to realise and appreciate the values of including children's languages and cultures. They set about learning more and engaged in reflective development of culturally responsive pedagogies.

The last chapter provides reflections on the theoretical insights across contexts before 'negotiating landings' as the study maps out the implications for teachers, families, researchers and policy makers to foster and validate children's heritage/ home languages through intentional planning, innovative pedagogies, practices and policies.

The findings are of no surprise, confirming similar findings

in earlier research related to biculturalism in New Zealand's educational contexts. These earlier studies have already confirmed and solidified the importance of the validation, acceptance and recognition of children's heritage language, culture, practices and the knowledge that they bring with them into the education settings. They also confirmed the importance of working collaboratively with the children's families and communities to expand and enrich learning resources and experiences. What this new research adds is that these insights are now extrapolated to plurilingual contexts.

However, there is still space for further exploration with regards to the effectiveness of these strategies and how practical it is for teachers (especially those who are monolingual English-speaking) to meet the existing bicultural expectations of revitalising Māori language and culture while also taking on the tasks of addressing the different educational aspirations of the parents of children from diverse array of cultures.

Overall, *Teachers voyaging in plurilingual seas* offers a new space of negotiating a new territory for plurilingualism within the bicultural context of New Zealand. It offers a starting point for conversation around diversity while still keeping New Zealand's bicultural identity intact.

Providing a strong basis to address the issues of working with children of bi/ multilingual backgrounds, the incorporating of 'funds of knowledge' and 'additive bilingualism' approaches validate and nurture children's heritage/ home languages. This book is highly recommended to early childhood teachers and student teachers, as well as to centre managers and owners.

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