

Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors

This is our house

Early Years Research Centre
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Making sense of diversity
and fairness:
Stories from one Aotearoa
New Zealand kindergarten

Research questions

How do young children express their working theories about diversity in the social world?

How do teachers provoke and respond to children's working theories about the social world?



Analysis framework

Working theories,
dominant discourses,
troubling taken-for-
granted (perceived) norms
and assumptions, multiple
readings possible



Contribution

Expectation that young children will learn about being citizens in diverse and democratic communities in ECE settings



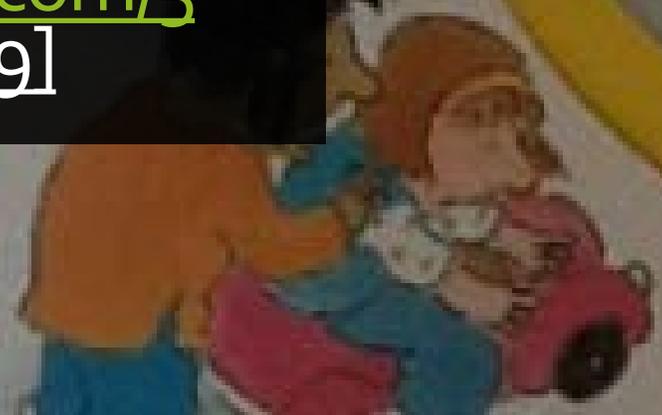
Picturebooks

Pedagogical tools such as picturebooks can act as “mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 1990) into young children’s lives and their thinking.



This is our House
(Rosen &
Graham, 1996)

<http://vimeo.com/58214461> [7.09]



LEARNING STORY This house belongs to everyone

Written by Janette (from University of Waikato) 28 May 2014 (Pseudonyms used)

Today at the end-of-session mat time Grace read a children's picture book called *'This is our house'*. Gabriel, I suspect that you had not heard this story before, as you are a new boy at Beech Kindergarten. You listened intently and ...

When Grace read the line in the story that goes: "This house isn't for people with glasses", I heard you gasp and say in a firm voice "Ohhhh, that's me, that's me." You realised that you would be excluded if you were playing that game. George, the boy with the red hair would not let you play in the house. I saw you touch your face and the glasses that you wear. The other teachers and I observed how upset you were by this part of the story. We thought that you were nearly going to cry.

And then you looked over at your mum who was near the edge of the mat and she had glasses on too, just like you. You seemed to be silently saying 'Would they do that to me? That's not fair!' Your mum gave you a reassuring look. And then you said "I'm gonna get angry at that boy". Grace stopped reading and talked to you about your feelings and the reason behind them...



WHAT LEARNING IS HAPPENING HERE?

Gabriel, you are clearly developing ongoing working theories about the social world. You were able to identify your own emotional response to the discriminatory behaviour in the story.

You confidently expressed your anger as you put yourself in the shoes of the child(ren) being excluded because they wear glasses, like you do. In your eyes, this was an injustice that demanded a response (just like the children in the story).

You have an understanding of some early concepts of the value of appreciating diversity and fairness. You also have an ability to take another's point of view and to empathise with others – the child in the story who wore glasses.

Gabriel, at Beech Kindergarten, and at home too, I expect that you will learn more about standing up for yourself and others. You will get to practise responding appropriately if you are being excluded in play, or if someone is hurting you, or hurting your feelings. The teachers, other adults, and other children can help.

Maybe your family, especially your mother who was at the kindergarten on the day you heard the story *This is our house*, could add more details to Learning Story about how you are making sense of the world in relation to 'fairness' and 'justice' these days.

Next, Jack stood up and turned to the audience of parents who had arrived to pick up their children and emphatically announced, *My hair is orange not red!*



One obvious reading:

Both Gabriel and Jack identified with the story, albeit in different ways

That's me (mirror)

That's not me (window)



Another critical reading:

George excluded others based on their differences -
This house is not for girls

Yet girls were silent throughout the story despite making up more than 50% of the child-audience



Working theories and ways of being are evident in book and amongst children

inclusion/ exclusion
problem solving
angry/ passive
outspoken / silent
leaders/ followers
being a boy/ being a girl



Parent Questionnaire:

Do you see the teachers at the kindergarten teaching children about what is fair and what is not fair?

Please give examples:



Parent response:

I love the way when children have some kind of conflict or disagreement, that the teachers ask questions in ways that make the child/ children think about their words and actions and how it affects others from the tone, body language or words



Parent response:

When they read books about bullying or unkind behaviour they ask the kids questions about how they would feel and what they think about the situation



How do teachers provoke and respond to children's working theories about the social world?

How can teachers promote an inclusive response to diversity by young children? (i.e. support young children to respect the equal worth of others regardless of their perceived difference)



How else might we use
this framework?

Closed door - Invisibility
Door opening - Revealing
Glass sliding door -
Need to look beyond the
obvious



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