

## Globalisation and the reconstruction of the literate child

*Over the years, a variety of conceptions or paradigms of childhood have influenced the way humans have understood, cared for, and educated their young (Cleverley & Phillips, 1988, p. 141).*

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*ABSTRACT: In New Zealand, the turn from the welfare state since 1984 to a global market driven economy in the early mid 1990s has affected the way that primary curriculum documents have been developed and implemented. Those documents, together with teachers' handbooks, have in turn affected the way that teachers teach. In particular, the construction of literacy and what constitutes literacy teaching in these documents have affected teachers' work and have also constructed and are reconstructing childhood and the child literate. The way that teachers teach literacy depends on their constructions of children and childhood and that as their views of childhood and children change, so too do their views of the teaching of literacy. Against this background of locating childhood and children in educational and literacy discourses, other discourses of new technologies, cultural diversity, time and space of "new times" are also challenging the construction of literacy, the literate child and childhood.*

*KEYWORDS: Globalisation, literacy, childhood, discourse, new technologies.*

### INTRODUCTION

This article is concerned with constructions of childhood and the literate child and the ways these impact on conceptualisations of literacy and classroom practice. It examines three nodal points in this very broad topic – the construction of the child during the times of the welfare state, the reconstruction of the child by the "English" curriculum during the turn by New Zealand towards a globalised economy, and finally the reconstruction of the child in the new spaces of new technologies – and considers some issues for us as educators.

While the New Zealand turn to the global economy can be viewed to have begun in 1984 with the election and implementation of economic policy by the fourth Labour government, the curriculum document, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* was not implemented in New Zealand schools until 1994. Until then a range of handbooks developed and implemented in the period from 1960 until 1986 assisted and informed New Zealand teachers with their language and literacy programmes. The constructions of childhood and the child in these earlier official curriculum texts and resources for teachers in New Zealand can now be viewed as reflections of childhood and the child during times of protectionist economic policies and defined state boundaries – that what was constructed in these discourses can be viewed as the childhood and child/child literate of the welfare state. I will begin by viewing these discourses and then explore some work in progress that would suggest that in these more recent times of globalisation – these times of changing notions of what

constitutes the state and the state's role in education together with rapid technological change – “what counts” as childhood and the child are being affected, reshaped and reconstituted.

Prior to the release of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994) I carried out some research to examine the use of critical literacy by pre-service student teachers. One of the key findings of this research was that the constructions of the child and childhood available to my students in a course where we examined aspects of critical literacy using a range of children's literature influenced the way that they used or felt that they would use written texts in their classrooms as teachers. The students were able to critically examine texts in terms of a range of stereotypes, gendered and cultural constructions and the use of lexical devices in texts to position readers and their reading positions. The students were able to discuss in class, present seminars and write convincing essays about these. However, how they would use these abilities or even whether they would consider critical literacy in their classrooms seemed to particularly depend on which discourses of childhood and the child were available to the students, and in turn how they constructed children as “readers” or “interpreters” of books. These discourses of childhood that the students constructed or had available centred their concerns around whether and how children would be affected by what they read or not.

As part of this study, I also examined the construction of childhood and the child in curriculum documents and teachers' handbooks that centred around the teaching of reading and language in the New Zealand primary school at the time. The students' understandings and official handbooks and curriculum materials available to teachers constructed the child of the welfare state as “innocent” and “natural”, as developing in stages when the conditions were “right”. “Reading” itself was constructed as a pleasurable, independent activity where reading programmes were child-centred and children learnt to read by reading.

## **CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD**

The students were, with few exceptions, unified in their construction of children as readers. They constructed children as “innocent” who “read books for pleasure”. According to the students, children did not read books “to analyse them”. Indeed children with “innocent eyes” were viewed as being “not as aware of the world and of what is right or wrong”. Such children were viewed as seeing literature “with a different point of view” from adults, although this point of view appeared to vary depending on “the age” and/or “stage” that the child was at. Children were viewed as having similar experiences, and the students constructed a “natural unitary childhood” (Luke, 1991, p. 109) devoid of issues of gender, class, ethnicity or culture. The students also believed that children had similar experiences of and with books.

Most of the students consciously based their constructions of children and children as readers on their own experiences and/or idealised memories of childhood.

I never thought of things like that so I don't think that children of today think like that either...

...children do not see what adults see in their books because they don't think the way that adults think...

The students' constructions of childhood would have come from a variety of sources.

Models of childhood are disseminated in diverse ways – through the theories of philosophers and psychologists, through childcare handbooks, through the arts and the various popular media, through biographies, and by word of mouth, which remains as popular as ever. And it is not only parents, teachers and educational researchers who fall heir to the latest perceptions – for children themselves hold sets of ideas about their own childhoods, as evidenced in distinctive youth cultures, movements for children's rights, the contents of diaries kept by school children, and, of course, the ideas that persist about their childhoods when they have grown to maturity (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, p.146).

The students' construction of "childhood" and "children as readers" appeared to be discursively constructed across three major discourses of childhood. These were what I have termed: the "innocent and natural" child, the developing "ages and stages" child and finally the "sub-consciously psychological" child. This is not to say that the students understood these discourses in these terms or that they could identify the theories and theorists that contributed to the development of these. The students have been and continue to be inscribed within these discourses in a variety of ways every day as student teachers and teachers, as readers of both popular media and literature, as siblings, parents, and (as stated above) as a result of their own reminiscences of childhood and school.

Concepts of the child reside not only in teachers' and parents' heads or in the formal pedagogical discourses in textbooks, school rules, teacher guides, policy documents, or teacher education courses. They circulate as well across such a broad slice of everyday life, popular and educational culture, such that it becomes virtually impossible to think about or act upon the child outside of those categories of understanding (Luke, 1991, p. 109).

I want now to examine briefly each of these discourses of childhood and the inscription of the students within them and suggest how these inscriptions affected the students' potential uses of literature with children. I also want to make connections with similar discourses in the handbooks and curriculum documents.

### **The innocent natural child**

Firstly, the students constructed children as "innocent" and "natural". There are a number of theorists who have worked within this discourse including Locke, Rousseau, A.S Neill and Dewey. In contrast to the discourse of the sinful child, where the child's nature was/is viewed as needing to be overcome by "restraining and disciplining" the child, the innocent and natural child was viewed particularly by Locke as coming into the world

...with a mind like white paper, an empty cabinet, a blank tablet, or a tabula rasa (Locke used all these expressions). Where do the contents of the mind originate? "To this I answer, in one word," Locke wrote, "from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself" (Locke, cited in Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, p. 16).

Rousseau, also working within a natural innocent frame, emphasised freedom, whereby the child was allowed to follow its natural impulses in an unconstrained way. Rousseau equated this type of freedom with happiness. Rousseau's starting point was that when things are in their natural state they are good. "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil." Rousseau emphasised that the child was naturally good. "Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart" (Rousseau, cited in Beverley & Phillips, 1986, p. 34). One of the more recent theorists in the Rousseauian tradition was A.S. Neill, headmaster of Summerhill School. Neill believed that the "child is innately wise and realistic" (Neill, 1964, p. 250).

Within the construction of the child as innocent and natural there is the belief that

...children start life with the same potentialities; all inequalities between adults were due to deficiencies in, or differences between, the environments in which they were reared (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, p. 18).

The child as natural and innocent has also been constructed in literature, including children's literature, and used as an artistic symbol. Jacqueline Rose (1984) was concerned particularly with how the child is constructed in and by children's books, both as character and as reader. At every turn, she suggests, the literature constructs the child as innocent by denying the sexuality of the child. Positioning the child as "pre-cultural", as innocent and primarily untainted by culture, the child is viewed as having privileged perception and knowledge. This construction of the innocent child in literature would also have been an important means of disseminating this discourse to the students, inscribing them within it as they successfully experienced literature and literate practices during their schooling and in other literacy sites that they were involved in.

The natural child had also been constructed in the curriculum documents and handbooks. Teachers were advised to "adapt natural learning to classroom conditions" (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 16) and were warned about interfering with the natural creativity of the child. Such interference, it was claimed, could create reading problems. These could be avoided if teachers waited for the child to "develop the right attitude" towards their reading. Nor was there any need for teachers to force children, as teachers had done in the past, towards this right attitude because this would happen when children realised that reading was interesting and exciting, and that others such as classmates and adults found delight in it (Department of Education, 1961, p. 6).

My students also deemed specific reading practices as important. Because children were "natural" and innocent, they claimed that children's reading should be "for fun", for understanding surface meanings, for reading books for "what they are". Children did not read books to "look for deeper meanings". Indeed one student explained that

...children read to enjoy books not to explore certain ideas and/or themes that adults supposedly see!! [her emphasis].

This construction of children as readers was in contrast to constructions of adults as readers; children as innocent readers were viewed as not "seeing" what adult readers

saw. Adults, particularly teachers (and certainly me as their lecturer) were constructed as “reading too much into books that children do not necessarily see”.

Children may see some adult ideas in books but their interpretations could be quite different. Children are quite innocent and do not always see the things in a book which adults may....

Children as readers, constructed as reading for enjoyment and reading “at face value only” meant that any “analysis” in terms of critical literacy was viewed as spoiling reading, which was constructed as being for fun.

Most of all children should enjoy books, not to learn from them. Analysing can spoil your favourite stories.

With this construction of an innocent, naturally-learning, child reader who should read for fun and pleasure, the students appeared to subscribe to Rousseau’s notion that people, including parents and teachers “meddling” with natural things such as children, cause them to become evil, or contaminated. Hence, not only were adults “reading too much into books”, but there was a concern expressed that teachers would be “inflicting preferences and values on children”. Instead, it was claimed that adults and teachers should not “force” their opinions” but should instead “create an open, stimulating learning environment”.

Perhaps adults should not interfere putting ideas into children’s innocent minds that would not be there – they only read for fun.

There was a feeling that children should be protected from these so-called adult readings that saw “too much” that children did not see themselves. Indeed, in summary, it seemed that children with “innocent eyes” were viewed as being in a natural, almost pre-emergent state, as “not as aware of the world” or even of “what is right or wrong”. Such children were viewed as seeing literature “with a different point of view”.

This construction of children as “innocent” and “natural” necessitated, then, two contrasting responses by the students with regard to critical readings of texts and children’s literature. The first was that the students believed that because of children’s innocence, child readers would not be able to critically read texts and literature.

Children don’t see things like that! They read what is there, they don’t interpret or dig for symbolism, etc [students own emphasis].

The implication of such a response was that teachers, student teachers and parents did not need to worry about issues of gender construction, cultural stereotypes, power or issues of invisibility because the children would not “see” them. Because children read for fun and enjoyment, critical issues in texts and constructed by texts would not be noticed by them.

The second and more common response was that “innocent”, “natural” children were vulnerable and therefore needed to be shielded and protected from the “negative images” or “stereotypes of gender”, or what adults including teachers and parents believed would harm children if they read particular books.

Children are very vulnerable and their minds cannot tell what is right or wrong yet, so their books must be carefully selected.

The implication here was that teachers, student teachers and parents should screen, carefully select or purchase texts for children and thereby protect their innocent, natural state.

The screening, careful selection and purchase of books for children was also addressed in the curriculum handbooks. Children needed “help and guidance from the teacher in increasing the quality of children’s reading. Much of the success of the programme depends on the quality of the books available to the children” (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 26).

### **The subconscious child**

But while the students constructed an innocent, natural child, they also viewed the child as being vulnerable because the child is also able to learn “subconsciously”. This response, therefore, centred around another construction of the child, that of the “subconsciously learning” child.

The students’ notion of subconscious learning appeared to be derived from Freudian discourse, especially the notion of the “superego”. In his theory of human personality Freud proposed a tripartite structure comprising the "id", "ego" and "superego". The superego was viewed as “the unconscious agency in the mind with a censoring and prohibiting function” (Cleverly & Phillips, p. 63). Based on the internalised guilt of the Oedipus complex, the superego was believed to develop further as moral concepts were built up.

The original prohibitions issued by the superego were derived from the child’s parents; later the superego took on the influences of those who had stepped into the place of parents: the teachers, priests, and other father substitutes. Such other identifications were essential in forming the character of children (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, pp. 63-64).

Many students stated that in exploring texts critically, children could be exposed to ideas and understandings that they may not understand or even be aware of, but that these would or could influence them later on.

Freud did not doubt that things seen and dimly understood in the cradle set up elaborate networks in the mind of the child that could be reactivated and reinterpreted later (Cleverly & Phillips, p. 62).

The students expressed this in such statements as:

Children don’t know that they are picking up these messages because they are very subtle, but they are....Children pick up these messages without even realising it most of the time.

I think that children learn attitudes, values and morals even when they don’t realise it...I think that it depends on how close to the surface these are. If it is rather bluntly obviously then the children are bound to pick up on the messages. But their subconscious will learn the sexist/racist ideas that are more subtly hidden too.

Freud viewed the mind as a “storehouse of sexual knowledge in varying stages of completeness, which the child had put together as it strove to gain an intellectual grasp on its most urgent problems” (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, p. 61). While the students’ constructions of children contain no specific mention of sexuality or sexual knowledge, it is implied in their conviction that if children are read some texts, particularly those with stereotypical or unrealistic constructions of gender, ethnicity or dominant cultural values, the subconscious will store up, absorb and collect these constructions and that these will affect the children as they develop into adults. Therefore, because of this “subconscious learning” many students felt that the books that teachers read to, or selected for, children in reading and literacy events needed to be “carefully selected” to either positively influence children’s subconsciousness or to protect the children’s subconscious.

They absorb ideas and morals on how they should behave or be when they grow up. They might or might not understand these or take it in but I am sure it is in their minds till they’re older when they are exposed to similar ideas and they can relate to it. Possibly in their subconscious they store up information which could cause harm later.

### **The developing child: Ages and stages.**

The selection and use of texts by the students for use in their classrooms was also influenced by a third construction of childhood, that of the “developing child” discourse of developmental psychology. It was within this discourse that Piaget constructed stages of development of the child (Walkerdine, 1984).

The most famous aspect of Piaget’s theory was also heavily biological in conception – he divided development into a number of stages and even suggested rough age-ranges for each. He was clear that child growth was a continuous process; the stages were not as discrete as, for example, the stages of an insect (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986, p. 87).

The students believed that what children saw and read in texts – how children interpreted texts – depended “on the age of the child”. Some age-groups were viewed as being more impressionable than others.

What children understand and get from books depends on the age of the child. Some age-groups I think are more impressionable than others.

It depends really on their age whether children understand about stereotypes, particular roles of women and girls in texts and things. I think that it wouldn’t be until about Standard Two that children may start to pick up these meanings. Although children may subconsciously absorb meanings when they are younger.

Those students who were enrolled in the Early Childhood programme initially found that their position within this discourse justified restricting the selection and critical use of books for very young, pre-school children.

I can’t see a two-year-old picking up on issues such as these. Depending on their age, children are very imaginative and sometimes their innocence does not see the things that adults see. I don’t think that children read into books as much as we do.

I think very small children would not pick up those sorts of ideas unless they were very blatant in which case I don't think that they should read them. But as kids get older and more aware, they can pick these things up.

The developing child discourse also appeared to be relevant to the development of reading by the child.

What children understand and read in books really depends on the children, their age etc. and how developed they are at reading.

The curriculum handbooks also adhered to an ages-and-stages, developing-child discourse. Teachers were assured that

Children will make the best progress if they are helped to be most fully themselves so that they enjoy each stage of growth before it gives way to the next (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 6).

To assist this, teachers were encouraged to be “enthusiastic and well informed” about both children and books.

Nothing is more crucial to the success of the reading programme than the ability of the teacher, through his intimate knowledge of both books and children, to put the right book into the child's hands at the right time. To do this requires – as well as a good understanding of the children – a very wide and discriminating knowledge of children's books (Department of Education, [Volume II], 1961, p. 26).

These discursive constructions of the child by the students position the students' notions of their future or present teaching within what Baker (1999, p. 118) has referred to as the discourse of “childhood as rescue”, that is, children requiring protection and separation in schools, particularly from the adult world that would corrupt and negatively influence them.

The construction of the child and childhood within the field of “child-centred pedagogy” (Walkerdine, 1984) has influenced New Zealand education for a number of decades. Child-centred pedagogy has informed official curriculum texts and resources for teachers in New Zealand from the turn to progressive education in the early 1960s through the post-war times of New Zealand's Keynesian economic policies until the mid-1990s when the new curriculum *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* was introduced.

## **INTO THE NINETIES AND BEYOND: RECONSTRUCTING THE LITERATE CHILD**

The election of the fourth New Zealand Labour government in 1984 signalled the beginning of the restructuring of the welfare state as a neo-liberal, market-driven economy within a global marketplace. As part of further social restructuring of the state, the National Government of 1990 began to develop the New Zealand Curriculum Framework. This resulted in the development and introduction of the curriculum document, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of

Education, 1994). This document signalled a number of shifts in literacy education and I am presently examining these shifts as part of a wider study.

While this analysis is work in progress, I am interested here to examine some constructions of the child and of childhood that seem to be emerging from my initial analysis of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* together with other analyses emerging in related fields of study. A number of aspects of the construction of the child and childhood that my students reflected and outlined above continue to be relevant and inform teaching and teacher education. However, these constructions seem also to be changing and in conflict with earlier notions of what constitutes childhood and the child.

An initial difference in the reconstruction of the literate child is that the child of the national *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* has now become a “student” and/or a “learner” – a student/learner who needs to be taught to learn in order to develop and “participate fully in society and the world of work” (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 5). This naming of the child as a student/learner in relation to that of the teacher who teaches, signals a major shift in the construction of the child and childhood.

A second difference is the shift from unitary notions of “childhood” and the “child” previously located within the myth of “equality of educational opportunity”. This myth had served to “convey an overarching purpose, an ultimate aim that ...helped to shape the character and orientation of New Zealand’s schooling” (Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, Smith & Smith, 1990, p. 23) during the times of the welfare state. In the document, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, there was a shift that acknowledged that “all students” still needed equality of educational opportunity but they also needed “equitable access” and “equitable outcomes”. The new “all students” were constructed in terms of difference and diversity.

These two differences outlined in the curriculum document construct a real tension between unitary notions of student/learners and multiply positioned, “all students” of difference and diversity. This tension is not because of the constructions of these two differences, but because of their location within what appear to be a structured and levelled English language curriculum.

Notions of a “natural learning” child, where learning developed from the child through a series of natural “ages and stages” of previous documents have been displaced. This is not to say that these constructions have been eliminated. On the contrary, they are still important to the curriculum. However, the construction of the student who “needs to learn” is viewed as requiring a curriculum that outlines *what it is* that he/she needs to learn and therefore what the teacher needs to teach. This is stated quite specifically as students needing structured, planned experiences with the development of achievement objectives across eight levels of the school. In essence, the document signals a turn to reconstructing the child as learner within a more structured English curriculum. Now, by means of “clear” achievement objectives, it is the curriculum that needs to be developed progressively, rather than the child. The curriculum

...gives special emphasis to continuity and progression in English programmes specifying clear learning goals expressed as achievement objectives at eight levels

through all the years of schooling. It focuses on developing the highest levels of literacy, understanding of language for a variety of purposes to enable students to participate fully in society and the world of work (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 5).

This contrasts significantly with the previous curriculum syllabus, which stated:

The syllabus places no limits on what may be attempted other than the needs, capacities, and interests of the children, but it does insist that children should understand what they do and see point in doing it, and that they should be helped to be more creative and independent, and more critical of their own work (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 2).

This comprises a shift from what has been described as a “child-centred approach” to the teaching of the curriculum to what can be called a curriculum-dominant approach to the teaching of a student/learner.

The naming of the child as a student/learner also reconstructs the teacher and their teaching. The teaching of child-centred progressive education was officially viewed as a “personal art” requiring a teacher to understand the child and to be able to adapt their teaching in light of this.

Teaching is a personal art and a teacher’s methods are (their) expression of (their) understanding of children’s problems, of (their) care for children, and (their) concern for their full educational growth. There is no reason why a teacher should not try out another (teacher’s) ways of working to see if they suit (them), but (they) should be aware of the idea that the problems of teaching can not be solved by applying “one best method” (Department of Education 1961b, p. 3).

Teachers were expected to consider and develop programmes in language and reading “carefully for each child” and to consider whether the child was “doing enough of the right kinds of work at a high enough level in each language field” (Department of Education 1961b, p. 5). Teaching was to nurture the individual child’s “maturing awareness” of him/herself and his/her world, and his/her expression of that awareness. To this end, teachers’ “allowed children” the freedom to do things, and to help them learn and develop. Teachers needed to understand the stages of children’s physical, emotional and literate growth and to this end they were expected to “begin where the child is”, to suggest ideas and possibilities to the child. Such approaches required teachers to be “alert, sensitive, watchful, and always ready to foster a good thing when she recognises it” (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 37). Teachers also needed to create active and vital, creative classrooms and be “alert” to see that every situation, “activity and interest is turned to the fullest advantage in increasing children’s understanding and skill” (Department of Education, 1961b, p. 15). And, as stated previously, teachers were also warned about interfering with the natural creativity of the child.

In *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994) programmes are “learner-centred”. The teacher is required to develop, teach and monitor or assess structured, planned experiences with the development of achievement objectives across eight levels of the school. The basis of planning for three strands – oral, written and visual – are achievement objectives, spanning all levels of schooling, and which provide what are viewed as a clear and structured

progression. Teachers are expected to develop English programmes which have clear progressions of achievement, which are responsive not only to the individual learner but also to the community and to society. Teachers working within what has been termed a “discipline and compliance” approach (Luke, 2001, p. 113) are required to develop the high levels of literacy and English language skills that are needed by students to participate in both New Zealand society and within the international community.

No longer in these discourses is the child seen as “pre-emergent” and/or “pre-cultural”. In the document *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, learners are viewed as individuals with individual needs, progressing at individual rates and at the centre of all teaching and learning. The document, however, acknowledges that not all individuals are the same. This acknowledgement, which appears to construct a unitary “all students”, also, however, constructs and acknowledges difference and diversity. Individual learners/students can be male/female, constitute ethnic groups, have abilities or disabilities, come from different social or religious backgrounds, have “inequalities” and/or “special learning needs in the area of communication”. Students/learners can also be gifted or talented, be Maori students, come from Pacific Island communities, and have languages other than English.

Language development is based on the language that learners already have and is inextricably linked with their gender, social and cultural backgrounds, and individual needs (p.13).

What I find interesting in the reconstruction of the child or childhood as a student/learner, as individuals of diversity, with diverse language /literate backgrounds, strengths and needs, is the juxtaposition of this with other potentially homogenising discourses and constructions within the curriculum. Firstly, the child is reconstructed within the curriculum as a learner, a learner who needs to learn. This has the potential to position the learner as one who does not know, who needs to know what the teacher needs to teach. Prior to the implementation of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1994) New Zealand primary teachers had a “long standing commitment to child-centred learning” (McFarlane, 2000, p. 100) anchored in a range of theories of child development, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories of language and literacy learning. These theories positioned the child as an active learner who required the classroom to be “a place of secure and creative learning freedom” (McFarlane, 2000, p.103). With the implementation of the new curriculum, what teachers previously knew about children and learning needed to be translated into “formal, visible and strictly sequenced forms” (McFarlane, 2000, p.102) where learning, now comprised of skills and structured experiences, has become strand/ed across oral, written and visual aspects of language. Now, teaching from their achievement objectives, outlining functions and processes and developing specific learning outcomes, the teacher fits/reconstructs the child as a student/learner to an appropriate prescriptive level.

Secondly, the acknowledgement of student/learner difference and diversity requiring equal educational opportunity, equitable access and equitable outcomes appears to recognise the diversity and multicultural composition of New Zealand society. But this acknowledgement is located within the discourses of an inclusive curriculum which aims to enable *all* students to “participate fully in society and the world of

work”, where English is constructed as the dominant superior language of nationalism and internationalism. A structured curriculum, consisting of learning goals expressed as achievement objectives, centred on skills-based, specific outcomes for students who need to learn them, would appear to militate against diversity. Such issues are complex and problematic. This recognised diversity of “all learners” is also required to become the normalised unity of “every child” constructed across eight levels of specification.<sup>1</sup>

While my students located the child as reading for fun and enjoyment, as reading for what is there, not to analyse books which can spoil favourite books, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* broadens the construction of literacy within a wider construction than that of books or even written language. The use of the term “texts” includes a wide range of written, spoken and visual texts (including static images, video, film, posters and drama). Literacy is viewed as including the reading and writing, presenting and viewing of oral, written and visual texts. Reading is no longer for fun, to be enjoyed, as “a habit that will take care of itself if the habit is developed early enough.” Instead the child/learner is expected to develop strategies for responding to and analysing texts, recognising that their future reading needs will be not only recreational but also vocational, personal and informational.

While the 1994 curriculum recognised that “teachers and schools (were) facing new student populations, new knowledges, new technologies and changing economies and cultures” and affirmed these, locating these new and challenging issues within a “curriculum based on atomised outcomes” resulting in a fragmentation of literacy and language teaching and learning, creates tensions and deskills teachers’ capacity to develop approaches and ways of working towards “new student populations, new knowledges, new technologies and changing economies and cultures” (Luke, 2001, pp. 132-3).

An example of the need for teachers to develop new approaches and ways of working is the construction of the new technological child in new spaces of learning provided by new technologies. I want therefore to focus finally on the reconstruction of the child, away from what we might term “natural space” in which the natural innocent child of the welfare state was located, to the newly constructed spaces of technology and globalisation. The location of children in these new spaces constitutes new notions of vulnerability, challenges for teachers, perhaps even a threat to face-to-face teaching itself.

Previous notions of a “natural learning child” where learning developed within locations of active natural play and natural space have been displaced. In previous English/literacy handbooks the natural child learnt through:

*Joy in movement*  
*Delight in experiment with natural materials*  
*Pleasure in make believe and in playing a part*  
*The satisfaction of making things*

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note more recently the Government’s Literacy Taskforce Report (1999) uses the unifying term “every child” to name the learner who is presently the focus of government’s attention: “By 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write and do maths for success.”

*A developing interest in books and writing*  
(Department of Education 1961b, pp. 17-18).

Natural children learnt and played unhindered in the natural environment. Indeed, particularly in New Zealand, children's exploration of physical space and place was seen as basic to their development. In the handbook, the teacher is urged to use the surrounding environment of the school, to use the

...hedges and shelter belts where huts and forts can be built, pieces of waste ground that can be dug up to construct earth works, and patches of wilderness where broom and long grass, flaxbush and tussock offer opportunities for dramatic play as well as for the intent and reflective observation of natural things....This is their real and serious business, to place themselves in the scheme of living things and to learn the care and responsiveness which is part of our humanity. This intimacy fosters a strong and enduring concern for natural things. If a child's imaginative life is to be strong and sustaining he [sic] must, even in these early years, learn the habit of loving scrutiny of the world about him – of people, animals and things (Department of Education, [Volume I], 1961, p. 26).

However, now increasingly there is concern and fear about the safety of children in any kind of physical space (Walkerdine, 1999). During the recent trial and conviction of the rapist and killer of Teresa Cormack, media attention focused on the events of Friday, June 19, 1987 – the day that the six year old disappeared. Four years earlier, in the same city, another girl, Kirsa Jensen disappeared. Such events were claimed to “mark the end of innocence” (*Sunday Star Times*, October 13, 2002, p. A6), when being alone in the outdoors, even walking to school, became dangerous. More recently school playground equipment has been viewed as dangerous; indeed schools themselves have been viewed as dangerous places as cases of bullying and abuse are increasingly reported in the media. Public parks shelter lurking menaces and there are fears for parents about their children in public places especially after dark. As part of this concern with the fears of natural space, children/learners are viewed as needing greater surveillance – including self-surveillance – and regulation to protect them.

New spaces of learning in a globalised world are increasingly being defined by new technologies. The child/learner watches television, videos, films, plays computer games, surfs the net, listens to CDs and attends rock concerts. This is the child of popular culture, the child of cyberspace and the net. Walkerdine (1999) suggests that within these spaces children are often left to their own devices and cyberspace offers a new space, which is often devoid of adult interference (we adults being the children of “natural” 3D space of the “real” landscape). It is interesting to note here that in light of my students' discourse of the “ages and stages” child located within the theories of Piaget, cyberspace calls into question Piaget's notions of how children acquire spatial concepts. As Walkerdine (1999) says: “Cyberspace requires a conception of space as flow and energy, not as fixed, solid and geographical” (p. 7).

What then are the implications of the “media-cyber child” for literate practice? There is no doubt that the interrelationship of multimedia and cyberspace offers developing and new literate practices. Teachers of the welfare child saw “good books” as enshrining enduring and universal narratives and meanings. For the media-savvy, cyberchild, narratives and characters are more fluid, borrowed from across different media, so that, as Walkerdine (1999) outlines, the “story” and the characters are

continuously “in play”, allowing for narrative elements which the cyber-player can move, manipulate from level to level and stay alive, or use as a character to explore contemporary possibilities. “The ‘story’” itself becomes “a device for a narrative of movement through space” (Walkerdine, 1999, p. 9).

These sites in which subjectivities are produced focus the concerns of adults, parents and teachers in terms of both possibility and vulnerability. Children within these spaces continue to be constructed as “vulnerable”, as being at risk of imitating and/or becoming addicted to violence, or inappropriate models of behaviour or even of living in an unreal world. More recently, concerns with cyber-stalking and chatroom kidnappers have highlighted other potential dangers in these new spaces.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the new space-age child continues to be viewed as requiring protection and surveillance. This often centres around times allowed for video games or being on the net. And yet while there are concerns about children and their vulnerability, the discourse of the knowledge economy – of the new information super-highway – offers the promise of possibilities, futures – and new spaces for production.

In terms of *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* it would seem that the visual strand of the curriculum has been and is in place to develop these issues of cyber-literacies. But teachers who inhabit 3D landscapes are challenged by such notions of literacy. Would we recognise cellphone texting by young “learners” as literate competence? A memorable event and perhaps a challenge for teachers about what counts as literate practice and its effectiveness, or indeed even who are the “learners” and who are the “teachers” in terms of new technological literacies occurred when the Post Primary Teachers’ Association (PPTA) were engaging in industrial action in support of their pay claims. The teachers organised their strike in the conventional, industrial, rule-driven way. But their students organised a strike in 24 hours in an effort to support their teachers. All over the country, they left their classrooms and went into the consumer spaces of town, street and mall, all organised and synchronised via text messaging.

The child of the welfare state is not the child/learner of the new technological global economic state. The globalised student/learner is not unitary, but rather diversely constructed, being located within and across a range of new spaces and places, utilising a range of technologies, and requiring new knowledges and multiple literate practices. How we as teachers construct this student/learner will influence our teaching and our response to “new times”. While *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* recognises this global child/learner, the adherence to a discourse which demands teacher compliance to fragmented outcomes and the normalisation of the student/learner constructed across eight levels of specification creates tensions and would appear to be at cross purposes with the needs of students and teachers in a multicultural, diverse, technological, knowledge society.

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<sup>2</sup> I wonder at this point if this is not part of the attraction of books such as Harry Potter.

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