

Language learning using Pacific picturebooks in an Aotearoa New Zealand kindergarten

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Abstract

Māori and Pacific learners in Aotearoa New Zealand have been identified as ‘priority learners’ by the Ministry of Education. The ‘Pacific picturebook project’ is ongoing research focussed on picturebooks selected to support the languages, cultures, and identities of Pacific learners in keeping with our government, Teaching Council and Ministry of Education expectations. This phase of the research was located in a kindergarten where teachers and children identify as Māori, Pākehā and from several Pacific Island nations. Teachers shared a selection of Pacific picturebooks with the children and recorded their own and the children’s responses to them over a kindergarten term. Thematic analysis of data showed that Pacific picturebooks were significant pedagogical tools for language learning, to support identity, and to contribute to the kindergarten’s emergent and localised curriculum. These findings clearly illustrate what pedagogy looks like when it is entrenched in key documents relevant to early learning in this country.

Keywords

Picturebooks, Pacific communities, Pacific languages, culture, identity, oral language, reading

Introduction

The number of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand increased from 6.9% in 2006 to 8.1% of the total population by 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018), and is expected to continue

growing. The median age of this population is 23 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2018) and there is an expectation that Pacific learners will make up 20% of the school population by 2050 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). In recent times, revised teaching standards as well as new

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requirements for initial teacher education have lifted the expectations of high-quality teaching practices to ensure that learning is designed according to the strengths, interests, needs, identities, languages, and cultures of learners (Education Council, 2017; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019). *Our Code, Our Standards: Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Education Council, 2017) combined with *Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2018) are important guidelines that support all teachers of Pacific learners throughout the wider education sector. Language, culture, and identity are also fundamental to *Te Whāriki: He whāriki matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (MoE, 2017).

The Education Review Office (ERO), the government agency charged with monitoring and facilitating improvement in ECE settings and schools, reports that nowadays more than 200 languages are spoken in Aotearoa New Zealand and that one third of children in this country have an overseas born parent (ERO, 2022, p. 4). There were over 160 ethnic groups with more than 100 people living in this country at the time of the 2018 census, and Pacific peoples were among the six major ethnic groups in this census and the two previous censuses in 2006 and 2013 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). This cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity also known as ‘superdiversity’ (Chan, 2019) presents challenges to teachers who are expected to “have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages and cultures” (New Zealand Government, 2020, p. 2).

In this article we present research findings from an Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) setting where teachers as co-researchers used Pacific picturebooks with children in their kindergarten, including children from several Pacific communities.

Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand

There is a long history of migration from Pacific Island nations to Aotearoa New Zealand. Like any people relocating to a new nation, Pacific peoples have typically encountered problems such as finding jobs, housing, and achieving in education, all while adjusting to cultural differences and establishing new social and community networks (Sin & Ormsby, 2019). Strong historical connections exist between Pacific people and Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand (Somerville, 2012).

The Census statistics discussed earlier are controversial in that they refer to a singular category ‘Pacific peoples’. In fact, there are distinctions between people who come from specific islands and island regions; varied languages and social and cultural differences exist among the Pacific nations (Rimoni, Glasgow, & Averill, 2022). It is also problematic that statistics or data collected in this country often generalise - grouping together people from the entire Pacific region, and new migrants as well as fourth generation New Zealanders with Pacific Island heritage (Talení et al., 2018).

The Pacific Languages Strategy Aotearoa New Zealand 2022-2032 (Ministry for Pacific Peoples [MPP], 2022) sets out the Government’s commitment to reverse the declining use of Pacific languages in Aotearoa New Zealand, and ensure Pacific languages thrive and prosper for the sake of future generations’ wellbeing over the next decade. “Aotearoa New Zealand is also unique in that we are a Pacific nation, and home to one of the largest Pacific populations in the world – this comes with a responsibility to protect and promote the languages of our Pacific communities” (MPP, 2022, p. 7).

The aim of the research project outlined in this article was to support kaiako (teachers) in ECE settings to use Pacific picturebooks which support Pacific children’s languages, cultures and identities, and support other children’s understandings of these in keeping with expectations in *Te Whāriki* and *Tapasā* (MoE, 2017, 2019).

Context: Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand work in a complex legislative environment. In ECE as in the compulsory sector (Primary and Secondary education) they are answerable to the New Zealand Government (National Education Learning Priorities -NELPs, [New Zealand Government, 2020](#)), Ministry of Education (curriculum), Education Review Office (accountability), and the New Zealand Teachers Council formerly known as the Education Council (professional standards, teacher registration/certification and ongoing practising certificates). Under these legislative guidelines, teachers are tasked with providing culturally responsive education for diverse learners particularly ‘priority learners’. Priority learners are groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special education needs ([ERO, 2012](#); [MoE, 2020](#)).

Pacific learners in early childhood education

Nineteen percent of Pacific children in ECE are enrolled in Pacific medium ‘immersion’ services (where at least 51% of their teaching time is in a Pacific language(s)). These services account for only 5.8% of the ECE sector ([Education Counts, 2020](#)), hence the majority of Pacific children attend English-medium ECE settings. [Fuimaono et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that these statistics emphasise “the importance of all ECE teachers having access to relevant teaching resources, knowledge and skills to respond to Pacific learners” (p. 4). These authors also note that “there is a noticeable gap between the numbers of Pacific students and their access to education which mirrors their languages and cultures” (p. 13).

The expectation that teachers will improve their cultural competencies by expanding the

range of pedagogical resources they use with connections to “identity, language and culture” for Pacific learners and families is clearly outlined in *Te Whāriki*, the ECE curriculum ([MoE, 2017](#), p. 12). References to language can be found woven throughout the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. The ECE curriculum also notes that “Children more readily become bi- or multi-lingual or bi- or multi-literate when language learning in the education setting builds on their home languages” ([MoE, 2017](#), p. 12).

The three ‘turu’ or competencies in *Tapasā* ([MoE, 2018](#)) are interwoven and focus on teachers’ behaviours and understandings during their journeys as culturally responsive teachers. Turu 1 is about ‘Identities, languages and cultures’, Turu 2 relates to ‘Collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours’, and Turu 3 centres on ‘Effective pedagogies for Pacific learners’ ([MoE, 2019](#), pp. 8–9). In ERO’s indicators of quality in ECE, it is made explicit that kaiako (teachers) should take action in fostering languages. “Supporting home or heritage languages and supporting English language learning, alongside building children’s understanding of te reo me ngā tikanga Māori, is one of the key challenges and opportunities for Aotearoa kaiako” ([ERO, 2022](#), p. 10).

Literature review

Research in the Aotearoa New Zealand context has already shown the potential of picturebooks to support identity, language, and culture in Pacific ECE settings ([Foe, Daly & Kelly-Ware, 2022](#); [Fuimaono et al., 2023](#); [Kelly-Ware et al., 2021](#)). [Foe, Daly and Kelly-Ware \(2022\)](#) critically analysed 10 picturebooks for representations of Pacific culture, values and languages. The entire data set involved almost 100 picturebooks, representing Pacific nations/communities including Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati, Niue, Fiji, Cook Islands, and Vanuatu, that had been published since 2013. The picturebooks’ potential as pedagogical resources to support ECE teachers in

developing cultural competencies for working with Pacific learners (MoE, 2019) and their families was demonstrated.

In a Pacific kindergarten Fuimaono et al. (2023) observed the use of such picturebooks, using several vignettes to show some of the ways in which children and teachers responded to the Pacific picturebooks. The cultural artefacts, arts and crafts and identities featured in the picturebooks and explored in the vignettes connect with four themes identified by Foe, Daly and Kelly-Ware (2022) namely Pacific languages, traditional tools and practices, geographical context and settings, and Pacific identities. They also connect with the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998)¹ and funds of knowledge (Gonzales & Moll, 2002)² of many Pacific learners in ECE and beyond.

There is a growing body of research showing how picturebooks can support Pacific identities, as well as be used to support language learning generally (Bland, 2013), and indigenous language reclamation and revitalisation specifically. Seals et al. (2020) have worked in Pacific ECE settings, recording the languaging practices evident in interactions, then using them in picturebooks created specifically for the settings. Work by Aмоса Burgess and Fiti (2019) showed that when such picturebooks were shared in a Samoan ECE setting, the languaging practices increased. Smith and Pryor (2022) described the creation of picturebooks to support the reclamation of Gamilaraay, an indigenous Australian language from northern inland New South Wales, Australia. Research confirms picturebooks can be used to support linguistic diversity in ECE settings (Seals et al., 2020) and language reclamation and maintenance. Brouwer and Daly, (2022, 2023) established a picturebook club for parents in an English medium kindergarten to promote the use of Te Reo Māori (Māori language), showing that familiarity with picturebooks featuring Māori language led to the development of many strategies which parents used to increase their use of Te Reo Māori at home

In the present study we explore the use of picturebooks selected by the teacher-researchers in conjunction with the university researchers in an English-medium ECE setting with a high Pacific roll and teachers who identified with Pacific communities (including Māori). The following research questions were explored:

- How are Pacific picturebooks used by teachers in an ECE setting with a strong Pacific community?
- How do Pacific picturebooks support the languages, cultures, and identities of Pacific children in ECE settings?

Methodology

Research framework

In the research we used a Talanoa-va approach based on relational meaning-making which was key to providing research that is positioned within Pacific “ways of being-knowing-seeing-doing” (Fa’avae et al., 2021, p. 7). There were two semi-formal relationship-building conversations commonly called ‘Talanoa’ (Fa’avae et al., 2021). The purpose of the first talanoa was to set the scene through sharing food, introductions and the broader research project aims and learning about the kindergarten community. The second talanoa also involved sharing food and the knowledge that we had all gained as part of the research process. This talanoa concluded our research partnership but our relationships endure. Data generated in the talanoa included subsequent written reflections from all involved. Throughout the entire research project to date we have been mindful about creating space for all involved to make their contributions through the Talanoa-va (relational space). For research about Pacific peoples to be relevant, it needs to be conducted in ways that value and respect the knowledge held by all involved (Fa’avae et al., 2021). We worked with Pacific academics at the inception of our research, and these colleagues graciously

guided the research to be suitable for Pacific participants and spaces. We have committed to the notion of ‘data as stories’ to help keep Talanoa-vā concepts in the foreground at every turn in our research, from data generation to disseminating our findings.

Consistent with the Talanoa-vā conceptual approach, which focuses on interrelationality (Fa’avae et al., 2021), since the on-site research ended, the teachers in the present study have continued to engage with teacher colleagues, sharing their findings with peers at a Teachers’ Conference hosted by their umbrella organisation, and co-authored this article for publication.

Research context

Clyde Street Kindergarten is located in Tokoroa in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. The kindergarten operates under the umbrella of Central North Island Kindergarten Trust (CNIKT). The kindergarten is staffed by four qualified, registered teachers (known herein by their given names): Lisa (Teokotai), Petra (George), Aunty Mihi (Marjoriebanks) and Emma (Sealey), who are co-authors of this article along with university researchers Janette (Kelly-Ware) and Nicola (Daly). The kindergarten is licensed for 40 children from two years to school age. A high proportion are from Māori families (66%) while the remainder identify as Cook Island, Samoan, Fijian, Indian and Pākehā. In their latest ERO Evaluation report about Clyde Street Kindergarten, reviewers noted that “Children from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with diverse needs are readily included in the programme...Teaching staff represent the family heritages of Māori and Cook Island Māori children at the kindergarten and naturally extend their home languages” (ERO, 2016, n. p.).

Our learning from sourcing and analysing the initial picturebook selection and the ‘pilot’ studies mentioned earlier (Foe et al., 2022; Kelly-Ware et al., 2021) have informed this

stage of the research. Picturebooks were chosen by the kaiako to suit the communities represented in their kindergarten from the list of Pacific Picturebooks identified by Kelly-Ware et al. (2021).

Ethics

Ethical approval was received for the broader project (FEDU 060/21), and the employing association Central North Island Kindergarten Trust gave approval for the research to be undertaken in the kindergarten. We met to introduce ourselves and our research at a talanoa (a form of relationship-building conversation) at the kindergarten and the four teachers all agreed to take part as teacher-researchers. They did not want themselves or the kindergarten to be anonymised.

Research data generation

At our initial talanoa, teachers and researchers sat together as equals in the research process and had meaningful conversations which guided the research in ways that we expected would be beneficial for all as described by Fa’avae et al. (2021). We shared food and stories about ourselves and our work. Information Sheets and Consent Forms were read and completed, and some of thirteen new picturebooks selected by the teachers (see [Online Appendix](#)), were shared. Over a ten-week period in August–October 2022 (Kindergarten Term 3), the teachers read Pacific picturebooks aloud to children and recorded their responses in research journals (exercise books) provided to share with each other and the researchers.

The new Pacific picturebooks were selected by the teachers from a list of Pacific picturebooks selected in a previous research project (Kelly-Ware et al., 2021) to complement the kindergarten’s extensive Pacific and Māori picturebook collection. New selections were made to reflect the communities and languages represented in the kindergarten. Both existing

and newly selected picturebooks were included in the research. These picturebooks were available in baskets throughout the kindergarten for children to access at any time for use indoors and outdoors. Such availability of picturebooks was related to the kindergarten team's strong focus on reading and literacy; they regularly replaced damaged books from kindergarten funds.

The teachers agreed to read picturebooks regularly within the format of their day and keep a handwritten log of the picturebooks they were reading in their individual journals along with notes about children's responses and related curriculum learning interactions/experiences in response to the two research questions (see above) that had guided the 'pilot' and this next phase of the research.

Following several brief visits to the kindergarten during the data generation period by one of the university researchers, a final talanoa was held on 13 October 2022 involving the teacher-researchers and university researchers to share knowledge gained during the research process.

Findings

After the initial talanoa, the ten-week reading period and the final talanoa, the university researchers thematically analysed data from teachers' individual journals, researcher reflections and notes from shared discussions. Using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the researchers identified themes, discussed, and then reviewed them until three themes emerged in relation to the research questions (see above).

These three key themes are now described. Pacific Picturebooks were being used,

1. For language learning
2. To support identity
3. As pedagogical tools

Language learning

A strong theme evident in the talanoa notes, journals and reflections was that the picturebooks were being used in many ways to support language learning. The head teacher Lisa noted in her research journal, "This was a learning journey for all kaiako and has inspired us to begin and continue to strengthen our language knowledge, pronunciation, cultural knowledge and to appreciate and value our local whānau and community".

Lisa also noted (in her research journal) that the kaiako she worked with were taking the opportunity to learn languages they were not necessarily familiar with, but which belonged to the children they worked with. She noted there were language struggles as some kaiako may not have attempted unfamiliar languages before. They worked on their pronunciation together, kept on trying, asked others for help, tried another book if one book proved too difficult, and used dialogic reading strategies, keeping the children engaged, rather than reading and disengaging.

The teacher-researchers noted in their journals that the children responded positively to hearing the languages being spoken and read. Children also began saying the words themselves. They smiled, laughed and cheered, questioned and guessed. The teachers also noted that there was increased oral language, more conversations and more turn taking at the kindergarten at this time.

In her transcribed reflections after the final talanoa, Nicola noted that there was, "...a lot of language learning going on, and real recognition from the teachers of what language learning is and how you have to be able to laugh at yourself and you don't know everything, and you have to have support. They needed to be able to learn the language and pronunciation and to be able to decode words in other languages and they enjoyed learning alongside the tamariki and each other". Janette (transcribed reflection) noted that the teachers saw themselves as role models,

modeling language learning to children. They talked about how they had to practise saying new words in other languages.

It was clear from the final talanoa (Talanoa notes), that if the teachers were struggling over some words they asked for help. This strategy was particularly evident in their relationship with the local A'oga Amata Samoa Taumafai [Samoan language immersion ECE centre]. Aunty Fili from the A'oga had become a friend of the kindergarten and she was able to support the teachers in Gagana Samoa (Samoan language and pronunciation). Aunty Fili had attended our initial talanoa and her name kept popping up as teachers were talking in our final talanoa because they had got support from her for reading the Samoan translation of a specific picturebook, *O le a ou alu I le a'oga [I am going to school]* (Mareko et al., 2019). During the talanoa, they explained that they had recorded Aunty Fili reading that picturebook aloud and were able to revisit the recording of her reading. They shared how they had all laughed when they first listened to the recording because they realised that she was too fast to imitate, and they had to ask her to re-record it more slowly for them.

The teachers noted other support that they received with their language learning from the picturebooks themselves: some books included translations and others had pronunciation guides. They also talked about their pronunciation being helped by singing in a language which wasn't their own (Aunty Mihi – research journal).

Progression

A subtheme related to language learning was that there was a kind of progression happening with the books. Before and while they introduced the picturebooks to the children they were getting support from each other and from Aunty Fili. Then children began bringing the teachers books to read, and then the children took the books away and read them to each other. Nicola suggested that this was a kind of

progression of ownership of the picturebooks (Transcribed Reflection).

Petra one of the teachers noted in her journal that sometimes when the children were reading a book that had English language in it, they'd just skip bits or choose bits to read or stop reading and break into song. The kindergarten had a strong culture of performance. Singing, dancing and drumming were commonly observed during Janette's informal visits to the kindergarten during the research. Breaking into song was something we talked about a lot at the final talanoa. The importance of song in the oral transmission of language among Pacific peoples was acknowledged by all.

Children's awareness of multilingualism

Another subtheme related to language evident in the journaling and reflections of the authors was the increased awareness and normalising of multilingualism in the kindergarten. In the beginning, when teachers read books in Pacific languages, some children were saying "why are you talking funny?" and then they got used to it. The children were working out that there's more than one way to say some things, and that their teachers could read in more than one language. Research shows that multilingualism gives people a cognitive advantage (e.g., Cummins, 2014), and Lisa particularly talked about this (Talanoa notes) because it refutes deficit theorising about Pacific and Māori children's educational outcomes (Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006) (Talanoa notes).

Links to sustainability in relation to language, culture, and identity

A third subtheme related to language learning was evident when Lisa said in the first talanoa for the research "we really want to do our bit to sustain language". In her transcribed reflection, Nicola expanded on this by saying, "it's not just sustaining languages, it's sustaining the cultures

that are wrapped inside them, so there's a sustaining of identity too". Again, in the first talanoa, Lisa said "we want the children to be proud of who they are, to know who they are. We want them to tap into that magical wonder and awe that can be found in books" (Transcribed in Talanoa notes).

Supporting identity

The second key theme found in thematic analysis of talanoa notes, teacher research journals and reflections was the ways in which the picturebooks recognised and supported identity among children at kindergarten.

The teachers commented (Talanoa notes and research journals) that it reaffirmed to them that through having a kindergarten learning environment rich in language and culture, tamariki are becoming strong in their own identity - seeking out their pepeha (a way of introducing yourself in Māori making connections with the people and places that are important to you, your family and your identity), revisiting and saying their pepeha, dressing up, singing and dancing to music, and expressing who they are and where they come from.

One book was particularly powerful in this regard: *Watercress, Tuna and the Children of Champion Street*. Lisa noted that "whilst reading this beautiful story by Patricia Grace (1984), we are using a range of Pacific and Māori waiata to sit alongside the cultural identity of our tamariki, whānau (children, extended family) and community. We are extending language and cultural knowledge while allowing children to see and feel themselves within the story" (Research journal).

In the data there were comments about children's identity, and about the identity of the teachers. In her transcribed reflection Nicola noted that she heard a lot of discussion amongst the teachers during the talanoa of the importance of children's seeing themselves. There were lots of reports of children pointing to the books and saying, "That's me!" or "That's so-and-so!" and

"I am going to school too." That's perhaps not something they were able to do a lot previously. The most significant picturebook in this regard was *I am going to school* (Mareko et al., 2019) which the Clyde Street teachers had requested in three languages - Samoan, Cook Island Māori and Niuean - to match the ethnic groups represented in the kindergarten. Translations of the same book which spotlights a child named Atanise who will soon go to school in real-life photographs had featured in the pilot research where children also identified with the children in the photographs as discussed in Fuimaono et al. (2023).

In relation to teacher identity, Petra and Aunty Mihi noted in their individual research journals that they felt they could be who they are here; they could bring their whole selves into the kindergarten where everybody's story, everybody's languages and everybody's identity can be seen and valued. While it is unlikely that this observation was solely the result of the Pacific picturebooks research at Clyde Street Kindergarten, it is likely that the Pacific picturebooks contributed to an already established ethos there.

Pedagogical tools

A third main theme found in the data was how the picturebooks were being used as purposeful pedagogical tools. The teachers talked about the most popular books being the 'right size', having the right amount of text, and being the right size to hold. Lisa talked about *Watercress, Tuna and the Children of Champion Street* (Grace, 1984) as being 'a way in' for other ECE settings and non-Pacific people to start connecting with communities, and to make them believe they can share those kinds of books. They noted that 'Watercress Tuna' includes Pacific and non-Pacific people, and single Pacific words, so it may be less overwhelming than some other books. *Teach me my feelings in Samoan* (Aflague & Aflague, 2018) was also a picturebook with single words in Samoan

which the kaiako and tamariki at this kindergarten loved (Talanoa notes).

Emma, a relatively new kaiako (teacher) at the time of the research without Māori or Pacific heritage or whānau, noted in her research journal “the books helped me to integrate into the environment. I’ve been learning about culture through the photographs in the books and the kids seeing themselves in the books.” In her research journal Lisa noted “the picturebooks are in baskets at Clyde St Kindergarten and that means the books are mobile. You can take them anywhere in the setting, inside and out. And you can take the books by the basketful”. Janette agreed commenting in her transcribed Reflection that, “the kaiako [teachers] are very keen on picturebooks but not just picturebooks on their own - the books act as provocations for their localised curriculum. Teachers support children to take the books outside. They share power with them, or perhaps give the children back the power. They are not always reminding them ‘That’s an inside toy; that’s an outside toy’. They let children take the resources where they want to take them. That has been really significant in terms of a change from traditional practice. It means that there are lots of books and story reading happening everywhere, outside even, and books get damaged in that way. They try to encourage respect for books but accept that if you are using books in a hands-on way, they are going to get damaged”.

The teachers also commented frequently on how the picturebooks could be used to support them in delivering curriculum. They discussed using picturebooks to connect with the expectations of the Ministry of Education for example *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018) and the *NELPs* (New Zealand Government, 2020). “Us as a people are known for telling stories. We have strong oral traditions and what we’re trying to do here is support the children to see themselves in those books, so the books have relevance. They can see their kai (food), that’s taro (a root vegetable), and all of that relates to language, identity, and culture” (Lisa – transcription in final Talanoa notes).

Janette noted that “the things that happen in the books get expanded into what happens around the place. For example, children get musical instruments out or build a fale (c.f. Fuimaono et al., 2023) so the books support emergent local curriculum” (Transcribed Reflection). As the teachers worked with the picturebooks, Janette identified how they had moved away from traditional planning. “They know that everything they do is centred around language, culture and identity which is strongly supported by the new *Te Whāriki*. The research has also been a catalyst for them to dig more deeply into *Tapasā*. They’re really excited about engaging with this document” (MoE, 2017, 2018). This finding is akin to what we found in previous research by Fuimaono et al. (2023): “Teachers incorporated their understanding of the Turu (competencies) in *Tapasā* into their picturebook pedagogy and reinforced the children’s positionality, as well as the teachers’, providing opportunities for sharing cultural knowledge with all involved” (pp. 17–18).

In her closing reflections, Lisa noted that “We will continue to use these pukapuka (books) and more. We have an extensive range of books and fostering a love of them, it seems to be a top learning outcome. In this digital age, we are able to intentionally spend time sitting, exploring, learning, repeating and tuning in to *Tapasā* to support our work with the *NELPs* and to guide our curriculum passion which is *Play* child-led, adult-supported, language-rich, diverse and inclusive environment” (Clyde Street Kindergarten Philosophy statement).

Discussion

Our findings showing how Pacific picturebooks were being used across a ten-week period in a kindergarten in Aotearoa New Zealand will now be discussed in relation to previous research about picturebooks in ECE settings, and also in light of key curriculum documents including *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017), *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018), *Talking together: Te Kōrerorero* (MoE,

2020) and more recently *The Pacific Languages Strategy 2022–2032* (MPP, 2022).

Our findings align with a range of research suggesting that picturebooks are powerful pedagogical tools when it comes to language learning (Bland, 2016; Mourão, 2014), and identity (Fuimaono et al., 2023). In our work about the pilot of this Pacific picturebooks research project, we summarised that “picturebooks can be provocations for learning when teachers are alert to potential learning experiences that draw on and connect with children’s prior knowledge” (Fuimaono et al., 2023, p. 15). We noted the importance of Pacific children recognising themselves in books, and that the kaiako appeared to be very cognisant of the children’s Pacific identities when choosing picturebooks that could engage them and provide mirrors to affirm their identities.

Like in the presents study we noted that, “[t]here were strong connections between the picturebooks and ‘emergent’ and ‘local’ curriculum as the teachers followed children’s interests (e.g., Weaving vignette). They made links to traditional cultural practices that are part of the ‘funds of knowledge’ and ‘cultural capital’ of Pacific learners and their families. In the Pacific picturebooks, teachers and children found resources which were culturally validating, enabling culturally responsive pedagogy and creating vā (space) for children to explore their own cultures and those of their peers” (Fuimaono et al., 2023, p. 18).

Tapasā

The three themes - language learning, supporting identity, and pedagogical tools - that were drawn from the data generated by teacher-researchers in conjunction with university researchers at Clyde Street Kindergarten can all be related to the Turu or competencies in *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018, pp. 8–9). Repeatedly, we see that bringing Pacific picturebooks into an ECE setting is about people and their interrelationships - teachers, children and their families, and their identities, languages and cultures (Turu 1

& Turu 2). The research process underpinned by the Talanoa-vā conceptual approach and the picturebook pedagogy observed and reported on also focus on interrelationality and relate to ‘collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours’ (Turu 2), and the themes of language learning and pedagogical tools for which we have generated many oral artefacts are connected to ‘Effective pedagogies for Pacific learners’ (Turu 3).

Pacific languages strategy Aotearoa New Zealand

This ongoing research and the phase involving the Clyde Street Kindergarten learning community supports the aspirations of the *Pacific Languages Strategy 2022–2032* (MPP, 2022). This strategy is very important in education generally and ECE specifically given the projection that Pacific learners will make up 20% of the school population by 2050 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). The kindergarten in the present study is located in an area that is home to large Pacific populations and teachers want to support Pacific languages to survive and thrive. In their daily work, teachers at Clyde Street Kindergarten have shown that they are working to support the Pacific Languages Strategy (2022–2032), that is they “recognise the value of Pacific languages across Aotearoa”, can act to “strengthen pathways and resources for learning Pacific languages and learning in Pacific languages” and are willing to “create environments for Pacific languages to be used more often, and in more spaces” (MPP, 2022, pp. 15, 30).

Te Whāriki and Talking together: Te Kōrerorero

In the New Zealand ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* there is a reflective question for teachers to consider - “How are children who are learning in more than one language supported to learn languages in daily practices?” (MoE, 2017, p. 45). Explicit support for

teachers in answering this question can be found in *Talking together: Te Kōrerorero* (MoE, 2020) a new English language resource distributed to all settings that is designed to better support teachers to implement *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). Information about English language learning for children experiencing bilingual and multilingual pathways is provided in this resource which also outlines specific intentional teaching practices related to language learning. Many of these teaching practices can be seen under ‘language learning’ the first theme that was drawn from the data generated in this research as described earlier.

Kaiako used “elements of oral language” supporting children to break into song or dance or to begin drumming or playing other musical instruments so that “repetition, rhythm, rhyme + actions (non-verbal communication)” were woven into the rich curriculum for language learning and using for all tamariki. They drew on “traditional (Māori and Pacific) ways of being, ways of knowing and ways of doing” (MoE, 2020, p. 64), and from their own and the children’s cultural capital and funds of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998; Gonzales et al., 2005).

Talking together: Te Kōrerorero (MoE, 2020) also encourages adults to support tamariki to develop in their home language/s while they learn English as this provides the foundation for them to become “bilingual, biliterate, multilingual and multiliterate” (p. 17). During this research teachers “use[d] music and songs from home languages as a way to build connection[s]...and made “different language scripts from a child’s home language/s visible in the environment” (p. 17) through the provision of picturebooks in a variety of Pacific languages. This project supported them in their existing efforts to “foster children’s language, emotional development, coping, self-concept and sense of belonging...”tell[ing] stories with the help of props” (p. 34). It also enabled them to “support home languages” and learn more about the “languages and cultures represented within [their] service and community” (p. 76). The kaiako were often the learners with children and

their friend Aunty Fili. They were constantly modeling teaching and learning aspects of their language and culture). Finally, the picturebook *Teach me my feelings in Samoan* was used to support children to talk about their feelings in keeping with the suggestion in *Talking together: Te Kōrerorero* “that adults can learn the words for different feelings in children’s home languages and understand the cultural norms associated with them” (MoE, 2020, pp. 37–38).

Conclusion

Our findings in this kindergarten show us that picturebooks are powerful tools in recognising and supporting the languages and identities of Pacific children in ECE settings. They show us a range of ways in which kaiako (teachers) use such books to value the languages and identities of the children they work with, and to learn more themselves. Our work has shown us that whilst books are special and valued, when they get handled; when there’s multiple readings; when they’re used in all sorts of places and not just in the traditional book corner; this changes how books are viewed as pedagogical tools, and their longevity.

Based on our experiences of working with picturebooks at Clyde Street Kindergarten with children and teachers from a range of Pacific communities, we see it as fitting to end with the valuable advice that these teachers-as-researchers presented to teaching colleagues at their Kindergarten Association Conference:

- 1) Don’t put books in a reading corner, put them everywhere.
- 2) Don’t worry if the books get hurt or mangled, just buy new ones, have multiple copies, top them up.
- 3) Don’t be afraid to try a language you don’t know. Just laugh at yourself. Learn alongside the children, get help from your colleagues if you have colleagues who can help.

(L. Teokotai, personal communication, April, 23, 2023)

Our shared commitment as co-authors (teachers-as-researchers and university researchers) is about starting early to improve learning outcomes for children, particularly Pacific children through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices and resources that give primacy to relevant home languages, cultural artefacts and practices, and positive identities represented in carefully selected picturebooks.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 1998). “Culture includes ways of being and doing and particular forms of knowledge. Our culture is not always valued in all social fields. What is valued in the playground or at home may not have cultural capital in the early childhood setting” (Arthur et al., 2015, p. 428).
2. Funds of knowledge is a sociocultural notion related to what children bring to the ECE setting from their cultures, and from participating in their families and communities beyond the ECE setting. Rather than the traditional curriculum that either misrepresents or ignore far too many communities, the funds of knowledge approach represents ‘communities in terms of the resources, the

wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching’ (Gonzales & Moll, 2002, p. 625).

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