

Exploring Literacy and Numeracy Possibilities. How wide and how deep can we go?

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“Building complex social relationships around meaningful activities requires genuine practices in which taking charge of learning becomes the enterprise of a community.” (Wenger, 1998)

Leadership that focuses on language, culture and identity strengthens children’s view of themselves as powerful life long learners. This article will explore ways to enable children’s literacy and numeracy interests to flourish inside vibrant communities that keep learning complex and connected.



Literacy and Numeracy in Early Childhood is not an add on, like a Whāriki, it is woven through everything we do in our Early Childhood settings. When we converse with children and document learning, primarily we are going to identify children as learners and support them to become competent and capable in this view of themselves. Margaret Carr (2011) has said,

Blocks and dough are great open-ended objects, and therefore can be rich contexts for acquiring knowledge about materials and architecture, and, also, depending on the activity, some lifelong dispositions such as: improvisation, imagination, collaboration, self-direction, problem-solving and high levels of attention or focus. The site for learning is the activity, the participation, "in the middle" between the individual and the environment. So I would say this. It is not about the blocks or the dough. It is about the activity

being the vehicle for the acquisition of the disposition to learn.

In Margaret’s quote she says it is not about the blocks or the dough, these are the vehicle for disposition to learn and we must keep this to the forefront when we think about literacy and numeracy. The environment supports children’s learning and the passions of children are the vehicle for literacy and numeracy learning. It is this situated learning that will support and encourage literacy and numeracy learning overtime. When we (teachers) work alongside a child, and recognise their ongoing passions, how do we highlight who this child is as a learner and how do we support the disposition to learn through their passions? Can literacy and numeracy be supported here in authentic ways? It might be drawing a map to the zoo, making a sign for a construction or a graph for a survey.

When Guy Claxton was here in November 2010 talking with a group of teachers I was fortunate to be a part of, he asked “What is our role as teachers? Are we here to help children learn or are we here helping children to become better learners?” These two reflective questions really are at the nub of the matter I think, and highlight the differences between teaching skills and knowledge to providing a rich environment where children explore what it means to be a learner.



Instead of thinking about the activity for the activity’s sake we are thinking about how this activity, how storytelling or how working with the mobilo supports not

only literacy and numeracy, but also how they support the child's identity as a learner. Te Whariki's socio-cultural framework clearly guides us as teachers to include literacy and numeracy in authentic ways into our daily practice. Book 18 of Kei Tua o te Pae, highlights the importance of play regarding mathematical learning. Bishop (Carr et al., book 18, p.2) emphasises the playing of games. He notes that playing is "indeed a most serious business" as well as a significant adult activity. Games model reality, and "it is not too difficult to imagine how the rule-governed criteria of mathematics have developed from the pleasures and satisfactions of rule-governed behaviour in games". When Luke writes about literacy learning, he also has a sociocultural view. Caroline Barratt-Pugh (2000, p.5) states, "Children learn about literacy as they engage in everyday practices in a range of social and cultural contexts within their families and communities."

So what might this look like in everyday practice? We all have examples of this and stories to share when children have been deeply involved and included literacy and numeracy into their learning. A child might be using the tape measure to work out the lengths of timber to build a bird cage or they might be acting out a story they have told to an adult. What ever the event, it is up to us as teachers to scaffold and make the most of these learning moments, as we learn alongside, we are the 'co-creator of knowledge' supporting the child to learn about literacy and numeracy over time.

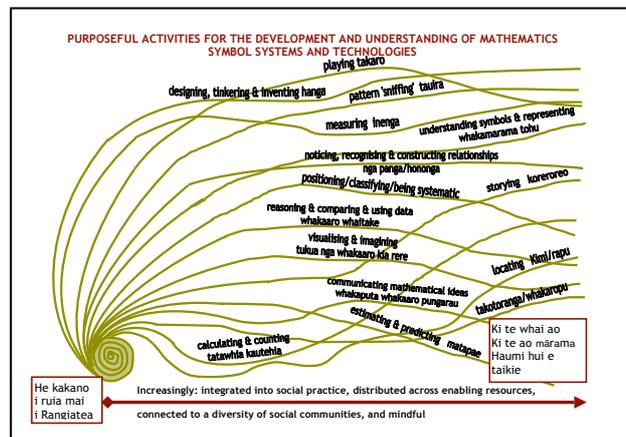


Kei Tua o te Pae (book 17, p. 2) states,

"Literacy assessment in early childhood settings has tended to focus on a ledger of skills and conventions to do with the mechanics of reading and writing, for example: the identification of letters of the alphabet, being able to recognise and/or write one's name, and knowledge of print directionality. Being literate is much wider than this. The qualifiers "oral, visual, and written" not only reflect a broader view of literacy but also acknowledge the importance in the early years

of establishing a sound oral foundation, particularly in the realms of conversation and storytelling. This foundation is integral to reading and writing enterprises."

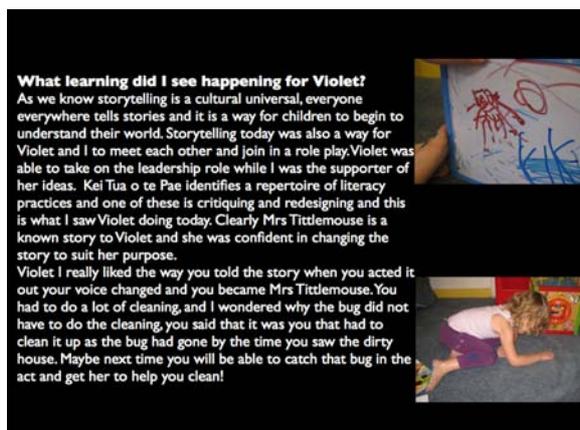
Mathematics can also be viewed in the same way, assessment focused on skills and conventions to do with the mechanics of counting and number recognition. Bishop sets out six activities: counting, measuring, locating, designing, playing, and explaining (Carr et al., book 18, p.2). Early childhood teachers notice, recognise and respond to children's mathematical learning throughout the day and these activities help children to "develop the symbolic technology which we call mathematics" (Carr et al., book 18, p.2). Kei Tua o te Pae also refers to Te Kakano and is a useful framework when thinking about assessment with a mathematical lens. The strands in the diagram overlap and show the connections between and through different learning experiences.



Literacy learning is a complex and multifaceted process, one that requires many approaches. Kei Tua o te Pae books 16 through 20 focus on the domain of symbol systems and technologies for making meaning and provide a rich resource of literacy assessment through multiple lenses. The repertoire of literacy practices adapted from Luke and Freebody outlined on in book 16 on page 8 offer teachers a framework for noticing, recognising and responding to children's literacy learning in every day practice. This framework has become a useful guide for teachers when they are beginning to share the literacy learning happening for children.

Teachers have used these headings in discussions they have with families about literacy. Using Kei Tua o te Pae, an example of 'observing and listening in' might be Ruby being actively involved in going shopping and, at the same time, observing the teacher making a list. An example of 'playing with symbol systems and technologies' from book 18 is Jack exploring space where there are a number of Learning Stories sharing Jack's investigation with different resources. William's

map drawing, showing the way to the zoo from his kindergarten in book 17 is an example of 'using the symbol systems and technologies for a purpose'.



We often see children critically questioning and/or transforming when they retell stories. An example of this is a recent Learning Story I wrote for Violet (see attached learning story) where she explores the role of storyteller and actor as 'Mrs Tittlemouse'. Violet had acted out a well known story, I noticed her competence and confidence in her role as a story teller and it was this competence and confidence that afforded her the ability to critique and redesign her story to suit her own purpose.

"Good learners don't always learn fast. The ability to hang out in the fog, to tolerate confusion, to dare to wait in a state of incomprehension while the glimmerings of an idea take their time to form is another vital aspect of resilience and thus of learning power [...]." (Guy Claxton, 2001, p.16)

Literacy and Numeracy should be embedded in our every day practice, woven through in sociocultural ways. As teachers we need to slow down and consider what it means to be good learners, to keep to the forefront of our minds the learning dispositions, write and discuss with children who they are as a learner and weave in the literacy and numeracy learning.

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