

Early Education



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- *Reo Rua Pukapuka Pikitia: Strategies for developing Te Reo Rangatira*
- *Talanoa, vā and picturebook pedagogy to support Pacific identities in a kindergarten setting*
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- *Children's mental health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*
- *Exploring the current climate of mathematics in early childhood education*
- *A data-informed look at sustained shared thinking*





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Talanoa, vā and picturebook pedagogy to support Pacific identities in a kindergarten setting

Angela Fuimaono, Nicola Daly and Janette Kelly-Ware

Abstract

It is important that children see themselves in the picturebooks that are available to them in their early childhood education [ECE] settings (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2021). Pacific picturebooks create spaces for meaningful conversations and emergent curriculum related to the identities, cultures and languages of Pacific families and whānau in the ECE setting. Using a Talanoa-vā approach, the researchers worked alongside teachers in a Pacific kindergarten to observe how they and the children interacted with picturebooks featuring Pacific communities and languages. Three vignettes were created typifying the variety of ways in which teachers and children connected with the picturebooks and each other to make links to the 'funds of knowledge' and 'cultural capital' of Pacific learners and their families. Many of our findings about the affordances of Pacific picturebooks connect with Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017) and Tapasā (MoE, 2018) which together provide the framework for culturally responsive pedagogy for Pacific learners in ECE settings.

Introduction

Picturebooks are an integral part of early childhood education in many countries including Aotearoa New Zealand. It is important that children see themselves in the picturebooks that are available to them in their early childhood education [ECE] settings (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2021); however, the number of children who have access to picturebooks that are culturally authentic is inequitable. Bishop (1990) used the metaphor of windows and mirrors to describe how books act as a wellspring of culture. For those who are depicted, the books act as a mirror, where their culture, beliefs and language(s) are reflected back at them. For those who are not depicted, the books are more like a window, showcasing a way of life different from their own. Some children see more windows than mirrors and vice versa, and this is where the inequity lies, an inequity that has implications for emerging literacy skills and the future educational success of learners. We believe that in a socially just world, all children should see themselves

reflected in the picturebooks they view as often as they see into the lives of others.

The focus of this article is representations of Pacific communities in picturebooks available in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) settings. It builds on the work of (Kelly-Ware, Foe, and Daly, 2021) in which 91 Pacific Picturebooks (picturebooks featuring Pacific characters and settings) published since 2013 were located, and a selection of ten were critically analysed in relation to Pacific languages, traditional tools and practices, geographical context and setting, and Pacific identities (Foe, Kelly-Ware & Daly, 2022). In 2010 Statistics New Zealand estimated that by 2050 one in five students in New Zealand will be Pacific learners (Statistics New Zealand, 2010), yet only 5.8% of ECE services are 'immersion' centres providing education and care primarily in Pacific Languages (Education Counts, 2020). The remaining Pacific populations of children who attend ECE are being educated in mainstream settings. Thus, there is a noticeable gap between the numbers of Pacific students and their access to education which mirrors their languages and cultures.

Currently, Pākehā educators account for 73% of teachers in New Zealand. They are tasked with providing culturally responsive pedagogy that benefits and values the cultures of students within the classroom (Education Counts, 2022). Te Whāriki, the Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017) and Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners (MoE, 2018) are documents that call educators to become aware of their own culture and those of others around them. By doing this the cultures, identities and languages of all Aotearoa New Zealand students will be valued and given *vā* (space) in which to flourish (Airini et al., 2010). *Vā* is broadly defined as the relational space between a person and others, or their environment and the importance of these relationships and connections being safeguarded (Airini et al, 2010). This Samoan concept has connections with the Mana Whenua /Belonging strand in Te Whāriki which is about connections between

the child, and the people, places and things in their wider world being extended and affirmed (MoE, 2017).

Hargraves (2018) suggests that for Pacific peoples, teachers can be the biggest barrier to learning or the greatest advocate depending on whether they ignore or value cultural connections. Picturebooks have the ability to facilitate Te Waihangā Hononga - the construction of connections and/or relationships (MoE, 2017) in an authentic and integrated way when children are able to connect with the characters depicted (Sotirovska & Kelley, 2020). Teachers have an integral role to play in creating space for these connections and relationships to be formed for the children they teach. Hargraves (2018) concludes that rather than making blanket assumptions about children simply from their nationality, individuals' needs must be considered. According to Airini et al. (2010), there is a common misconception that all Pacific Island cultures are the same or so similar as to be interchangeable. This is not the case, and care needs to be taken when teaching and learning about the multiplicity of cultures found in the Pacific. Hargraves (2018) argues that "an awareness of the diversity amongst Pasifika groups and individuals can help prevent stereotyping" (lines 8-9). The needs of individual students are able to be met when teachers make resources available, like Pacific picturebooks, and create spaces for meaningful conversations to occur about the identities, cultures and languages that are present amongst families and whānau in the ECE setting.

In this article, we begin to explore how children and teachers responded to Pacific Picturebooks during a six-week pilot study in one Aotearoa New Zealand kindergarten where Pacific languages, cultures and identities are nurtured and celebrated.

Methodology

Context and participants

The kindergarten was located in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the children who attended the kindergarten were from a variety of Pacific nationalities. Some were born in Aotearoa New Zealand to parents with Pacific heritage, others had migrated from Pacific nations, and some had multiple Pacific ethnicities. The teaching and administration staff at the kindergarten all had Pacific heritage (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Philippines, Samoa and Niue) and brought a wealth of cultural capital to the setting. After ethical approval was received for the project, and the kindergarten association gave approval for us to approach teachers, we met to introduce ourselves and our research in a Talanoa. We invited participants, and the five teachers who agreed to take part each chose pseudonyms (or had pseudonyms chosen for them) to be used during the research.

Research framework

In a Talanoa-vā approach, relational meaning-making is key to providing research that is positioned within Pacific “ways of being-knowing-seeing-doing” (Fa’avae et al., 2021, p. 7). At every step of our research process, we endeavoured to create space for all involved to articulate their position within the vā. As researchers we have varying nationalities and connections to Pacific cultures; we understood that for research about Pacific peoples to be relevant, it needed to be conducted in ways that valued and respected the knowledge held by all involved. In consultation with Pacific academics who guided the research, all practices including the presentation of data as stories helped keep Talanoa-vā concepts in the foreground of every decision.

Research data generation

At the start of the research, we engaged with potential teacher participants in a form of relationship-building conversation commonly

called ‘Talanoa’ (Fa’avae, Hemi & Aporosa, 2021). In this setting, researchers and teachers sit together as equals in the research process and have meaningful conversations which guide the research in ways that are beneficial for all (Fa’avae, Hemi & Aporosa, 2021). Over six weeks, one of the authors (Fuimaono) spent time at the kindergarten in a participant-observer role (Bryman, 2015). During her four observation visits to the kindergarten, Fuimaono also read Pacific picturebooks to children and engaged in other experiences, helping out where appropriate. This engagement is consistent with the Talanoa-vā conceptual approach, which focuses on interrelationality (Fa’avae, Hemi & Aporosa, 2021).

To value traditional styles of Pacific research, a series of short stories or vignettes were developed from observation data showing how children and teachers responded to specific picturebooks from the kindergarten’s existing collection and Pacific picturebooks gifted as part of the research. The intention of the vignettes was to document connections between the reader, researcher, teachers and children. At the conclusion of the pilot research, a final Talanoa was held to share knowledge between all parties involved in the process. Teacher participants were given an opportunity to add their insights to the draft vignettes to provide more in-depth understanding of the experiences. Their voices and words have been included in the sample of vignettes that follow.

Findings and discussion

In this section, we present three of the vignettes which were co-created during our final Talanoa to show ways in which children and teachers responded to the Pacific picturebooks. The first vignette shows how a teacher followed children’s interest in a fale (house) featured in the picturebook she was reading. The second vignette focuses on a child’s response to a picturebook in which she sees herself. The third vignette is an example of a teacher responding to a child’s interest in weaving featured in a picturebook they were sharing. Each of these

vignettes is discussed with links to Te Whāriki and Tapasā (MoE, 2017; 2018).

Vignette 1: Making a Fale

One day, Numara (teacher pseudonym) set up a large mat outside on the grass and spread lots of picturebooks on it. She encouraged the children to sit and enjoy reading picturebooks with her in the sunshine. Numara started reading 'Kaiana and Teiti' (Percy & Pond Eyley, 2020) to the children. It is a picturebook about a child named Kaiana, who goes overseas to visit her family. The child sees all the wonders of the island where her grandmother lives. Numara read half the picturebook to the children and then noticed how they were fascinated with the idea of a fale (house) featured in the book. One child noticed the absence of mats on the floor while another child shared that the roof looked like a mat. Numara ceased reading the picturebook and engaged with the children to create their own makeshift fale with 'loose parts' found around the kindergarten. The children worked together for almost an hour to construct their fale. Numara knew that the children's interest was fuelling their play and she was happy to see what magic they created. Later Numara reintroduced the picturebook, asking questions and reading the final pages to the children while they sat inside their new fale.

In Tapasā the authors write about culturally responsive pedagogy, where teachers "recognise and build" on the cultural knowledge and understanding of the tamariki and weave these foundational ways of knowing into their pedagogy (MoE, 2018, p. 3). Numara was able to do this over an hour-long exploratory learning experience. She had created a welcoming environment and several children joined her as she read the picturebook 'Kaiana and Teiti' (Percy & Pond Eyley, 2020) that one child had chosen. Numara was able to make connections with the illustrations during her reading of the story that the children could relate to (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson & Short, 2013). Whilst the text in the picturebook does not mention a specific island destination,

Numara inferred locations from the illustrations. She suggested that Kaiana was from Aotearoa New Zealand like the children listening and inferred that the island that Teiti lived on was Samoa, the country of origin/heritage for many of the children listening.

Having an understanding of what each child brings to the ECE setting in terms of 'funds of knowledge' (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) is necessary if teachers are to weave children's knowledge into the 'local' curriculum. These connections lead to a strengthening of educational outcomes for children and their families (Te Kete Ipurangi [TKI], n.d). Numara does not have Samoan heritage. She could have easily chosen her heritage homeland for the plane's destination, yet she valued the cultural background of the children in her audience and found ways to connect their culture to the picturebook. Numara adeptly asked the children questions to engage with their prior knowledge and cultural capital regarding traditional Samoan houses (Chu et al., 2013).

Following the creation of the fale, Numara continued to ask questions about the book and finished reading the picturebook to the children while they sat inside the fale that they had built. The children's play was an example of 'emergent' and 'local' curriculum (Vanover, 2020) that stemmed from the picturebook. They were ready and willing to hear the finish of the book once they were settled in the fale that they had created. It is possible that the reading of the book may not have had as much impact if the book was simply read from cover to cover. Numara remarked during the Talanoa that it was important to follow the children's interest, without a planned outcome. This vignette shows 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.

Vignette 2: "That is me"

A shy 3-year-old Kiribati girl with curly brown hair and bright brown eyes named Ákoi (Pseudonym) brought me a picturebook called *Au ko fano ki te akoga'* (Mareko, Cairns & Huia-Rutten, 2019) depicting a young Pacific girl who was preparing to start school. Ákoi (the child) did not say much at first as English is not her first language, but when she brought over this book she confidently stated, "That is me" while pointing at the smiling girl with curly brown hair on the front cover. She could see herself reflected in the images of the picturebook. Afterwards, she gently placed the picturebook back on the shelf.

In this vignette written by Fuimaono (one of the authors), this young girl saw herself positively portrayed in the picturebook I am going to school translated into Tuvaluan *Au ko fano ki te akoga'* (Mareko, Cairns & Huia-Rutten, 2019). The significance of her engagement with the book is possibly reflected in her gentle treatment of it afterwards. As discussed earlier, picturebooks hold a special power when it comes to identity; they can act as windows to different ways of life, and as mirrors in which readers can see themselves (Bishop, 1990). When Pacific children recognise themselves in educational resources, such as picturebooks, they are provided with a mirror to affirm their identity and provide a reason for engaging with books. The importance of books to support early literacy for all learners in early childhood and early primary settings has been extensively documented in research (e.g. McLachlan et al., 2006). In Te Whāriki there is also explicit mention of children learning "that text and illustrations carry a story, books can provide information and stories allow them to enter new worlds" and the importance of providing "a range of "literacy resources to support the development of reading and writing concepts" (MoE, 2017, pp. 44-45).

The picturebook "I am going to school" was edited by Caroline Mareko and Andy Cairns, with Chanelle Huia-Rutten providing the photos. It was created in Aotearoa New

Zealand by Whānau Manaaki Kindergartens who note:

There is a shortage of books in Pacific languages, particularly for the smaller Pacific communities in New Zealand, and this book will help fill the gap. It is designed so that teachers and families can easily read it to children. The book features four-year-old Atanise Marsters Lotomanu who attends Toru Fetu Kindergarten in Porirua and her extended family. It is available in Māori, Cook Island Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Tuvaluan, Niuean and Tokelauan" (Whānau Manaaki Kindergartens, 2020, no page).

According to Tapasā if teachers fail to understand and affirm students' cultural identities this can lead to student underachievement (MoE, 2018). Stereotypes and negative representations within media, and other social contexts can have a detrimental effect on a person's sense of self (Pauker et al., 2016). Conversely, positive and diverse portrayals teach children that we are all important and have a valued contribution to make (Sotirovska & Kelley, 2020). Picturebooks can express identities and become vehicles of cultural knowledge for young children, therefore the need for diversity in picturebooks cannot be ignored (Johnson, Matthis & Short, 2019). The young girl in the vignette "That is me" was able to connect with the imagery in a picturebook created especially for Pacific children and families in ECE. The teachers in this ECE setting clearly had the children's Pacific identities in mind when procuring this and other picturebooks (including the picturebooks from this pilot research) to create opportunities for children to see themselves mirrored in the stories.

Vignette 3: Weaving together

One day at the kindergarten a large mat was laid outside on the grass with many Pacific picturebooks on it. Ligaya, one of the teachers (pseudonym) saw the mat and picturebooks and yelled out happily, “Oh, I love books.” She sat alongside a child and together they looked at a picturebook about weaving called *The Walking Tree: A story from the islands of Vanuatu* (MacGregor, 2015). The teacher knew how to weave and offered to teach the child. They moved the mat into the shade and found paper which they cut into strips. They wove the strips of paper in an under one, over one pattern.

The picturebook, showing pictures of a young girl called Filo weaving a large mat from pandanus tree leaves, was open in front of the pair as they were sitting weaving. The child was keenly interested and clearly enjoyed learning about weaving. She could see the similarities between what she was doing and the girl in the picturebook weaving. When her mother arrived at ‘pick-up time’, she ran to her in delight and showed her the weaving that she had created with the help of the teacher.

In this vignette, the teacher was able to connect a cultural practice common in the Samoan culture and relate it to the practice of weaving depicted in the picturebook. In *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017), the metaphor of a woven mat made up of principles and strands encourages teachers to make connections for children between family and community traditions and ways of knowing within their learning environment (MoE, 2017). “Kaiako (teachers) in ECE settings weave together the principles and strands in collaboration with children, parents, whānau and community to create a local curriculum for their setting” (p. 10).

Once again, the power of this picturebook was in how it supported emergent curriculum. After looking through the picturebook together the teacher used it as a springboard to share her related skill of weaving, a particularly prized skill in many Pacific cultures. The delight of the

young girl when she shared the weaving with her mother at the end of the day showed the significance of this experience prompted by the sharing of a picturebook, and the subsequent weaving.

Conclusion

The vignettes generated during this six-week pilot study show a range of ways in which teachers and children responded to Pacific picturebooks. There were strong connections between the picturebooks and ‘emergent’ and ‘local’ curriculum as the teachers followed children’s interests. 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.

As researchers we learnt much about our own positionality and the need to engage with all involved in the research process through *Talanoa*, enriching the research and the process of making sense of the data. Through consultation with Pacific academics, teachers and leaders at the kindergarten as well as relevant literature we believe we were able to create a *Talanoa vā* (relational space) which recognised and privileged the knowledge of teachers and children involved, alongside the knowledge of the researchers.

Te Whāriki (MoE, 2017) and *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018) are important underpinnings for many of our findings concerning the affordances of Pacific picturebooks in ECE settings. The need for teachers to build relationships with students, the nurturing of each child’s cultural understanding of self, and the inclusion of extended family in the learning environment were all evident within the children’s and teachers’ responses to the picturebooks. 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. The strands of Te Whāriki were also demonstrated by teachers as they worked with the picturebooks to establish a place of wellbeing and belonging for all those who walked through the doors of this vibrant and inclusive Pacific kindergarten.

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