

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

**A CRY TO TEACH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: LINKING EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION, PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

A dissertation submitted by

Karen A. Hawkins

For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

January 2010

ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of children's literature as a vehicle to teach for social justice. It was conducted in two preschool settings that provided non-compulsory, prior to formal school years' care in a town on the Queensland coast of Australia. Five early childhood educators, two groups of preschoolers (aged between three and five years) and the researcher were involved in the participatory action research study which included a 10 week orientation phase and an 11 week action research phase.

The study was underpinned by the recognition paradigm of social justice which argues that marginalisation and exploitation result from inequitable and inadequate recognition of difference. With this paradigm in mind, the study was framed within a participatory worldview, critical theory and socio-constructivist perspectives. Participatory action research aligns with these perspectives and was used in this study to produce knowledge and improve practice collaboratively in the two preschool settings through the direct involvement of the early childhood educators as co-researchers.

Through cyclical, critically reflective analysis of weekly videotaped storytime sessions, the co-researchers found that the judicious use of children's literature worked as an appropriate pedagogical strategy to teach for social justice. The study heightened preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and it transformed their language regarding these issues from exclusivity to inclusivity.

The study concluded that teaching for social justice should begin in the early years and the use of children's literature is an appropriate medium to do so. Such pedagogy should help preschoolers to develop an appreciation of and respect for difference and diversity. A further conclusion of this study was that participatory action research is a collaborative and socially just mode of inquiry that values and acts upon the knowledge, skills, expertise and voices of those involved to create positive change.

CERTIFICATE OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisor/s

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This participatory action research project has taught me that I have so much for which to be grateful. There are so many people to acknowledge and thank that there is not sufficient space to do this justice. To the colleagues, friends and family who have not been specifically named: you know who you are and I sincerely thank you for your love and support.

I wish to acknowledge the following people for their love, guidance and teaching: To my dad, Vernon Lihou, thank you for teaching me “to thine own self be true”. To my mum, Barbara Lihou, thank you for teaching me the importance of caring. You would have got on so well with Maxine Greene and Nel Noddings. Thank you both for teaching me to challenge those taken-for-granted assumptions and to stand against injustice.

To my husband, John, thank you for challenging me to ask the tough questions. To my children Bree, Misty, Logan and Chanel: Thank you, Bree, for teaching me to live and think passionately (about everything!). Thank you, Misty, for teaching me to look deeply into my soul and find my centre. Thank you, Logan, for teaching me the importance of humour and *joie de vivre*. Thank you, “my little volcano”, Chanel, for teaching me the value of inner strength and reflection. To my grandchildren Bella, Brody and Elodie, thank you for teaching me to see the world through new, innocent, bright eyes filled with hope, wonderment and awe.

To my supervisors, Dr Robyn Henderson, Associate Professor Patrick Danaher and Associate Professor Gillian Potter: Thank you for teaching me patience in scholarly writing. Thank you for your professionalism, your guidance, your wisdom, your dedication, your long-suffering perseverance and your kindness, love and friendship. To Ester de Boer: Thank you for your artwork and the joy of your creativity.

To my co-researchers, I wish that I could honour you with your correct names; however, anonymity and confidentiality preclude me from doing this, so I will use your pseudonyms. To Kate, Shelley, Sandra, Lisa and Pippa, thank you for teaching me true communitarianism and how to research in an ethic of care. Thank

you for sharing your knowledge and expertise. Thank you for your understanding, your care, your trust, your empathy, your respect, your friendship, your love. To the preschoolers: Thank you for teaching me that “It’s what’s in your heart that counts.” Thank you for sharing your fun, your ideas, your feelings and your opinions. Thank you for teaching me a “pedagogy of love”.

To my God, thank You for bringing all these wonderful, gifted, amazing people into my life. Thank You for guiding me to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly (Micah, 6.8, NIV).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Certificate of Dissertation	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables, Figures and Photographs	xii
List of Appendices	xiv
List of Publications and Presentations Related to this Work	xv
Dedication	xvi
Chapter One. Introduction	1
<i>Prologue</i>	1
<i>Personal Conceptualisation of the Research Project</i>	2
<i>Karen's Story</i>	3
<i>Research Aims</i>	11
<i>Research Questions</i>	11
<i>Rationale Conceptualising the Research Project</i>	12
<i>Gaps in the Current Body of Knowledge</i>	16
<i>A Brief Outline of the Research Project</i>	18
<i>Unifying the Dissertation</i>	20
<i>Structure and Overview of the Dissertation</i>	21
<i>Summary</i>	23
Part One: Initial Reflections	25
Chapter Two. Issues Confronting Teaching for Social Justice	26
<i>Introduction</i>	26
<i>Towards a Definition of Social Justice</i>	27
<i>The Recognition Paradigm of Social Justice</i>	28
<i>The Meaning of Social Justice for this Project</i>	30
<i>Key Features of Social Justice for this research project</i>	31
<i>Social Justice: An Important Educational Issue in the 21st Century</i>	34
<i>Teaching for Social Justice</i>	38
<i>Reflection and Action</i>	40
<i>Critical Pedagogy</i>	41
<i>An Imperative: Teaching for Social Justice in the Early Years</i>	43
<i>What If All the Kids Are White?</i>	45
<i>White Privilege</i>	46
<i>Exploring Social Justice Issues in Children's Literature</i>	51
<i>Research Considering Social Justice and Children's Literature</i>	54
<i>A Socially Just Mode of Inquiry?</i>	55
<i>Implications for This Research Project</i>	56
<i>The Sociocultural View of Childhood</i>	57
<i>The Postmodern Perspective of Childhood</i>	58
<i>Moral Development of the Young Child</i>	59

<i>Summary</i>	63
Chapter Three. Theoretical Frameworks of a Participatory Worldview	64
<i>Introduction</i>	64
<i>The Participatory Worldview</i>	65
<i>Participatory Evolutionary Reality</i>	68
<i>The Practical Being and Acting in the Cosmos</i>	69
<i>Meaning and Purpose</i>	69
<i>Relational and Ecological Form</i>	71
<i>Extended Epistemology</i>	71
<i>Critical Theory</i>	77
<i>Philosophy</i>	80
<i>Levinas' Philosophy</i>	80
<i>A Slight Philosophical Shift</i>	84
<i>Existential Philosophy</i>	84
<i>An Ethic of Care</i>	89
<i>A Feminist Communitarian Ethic</i>	92
<i>A Collaborative Philosophy Built on Care</i>	95
<i>Summary</i>	97
Chapter Four. Praxis of Action Research	98
<i>Introduction</i>	98
<i>Action Research</i>	99
<i>Emergent Developmental Form</i>	101
<i>Practical Issues</i>	102
<i>Human Flourishing</i>	102
<i>Participation and Democracy</i>	103
<i>Knowledge-in-action</i>	103
<i>The Journey to Participatory Action Research</i>	104
<i>The Design: Participatory Action Research</i>	105
<i>The Problematic of the Facilitator of Participatory Action Research</i>	111
<i>Research Methods</i>	113
<i>Weekly Participatory Action Research Meetings</i>	113
<i>Methods of Observation</i>	114
<i>Initial and Concluding Conversations</i>	114
<i>Photographs</i>	115
<i>Informal Conversations</i>	115
<i>Fieldnotes and Journals</i>	115
<i>Recording and Storing the Data</i>	115
<i>Data Folios</i>	116
<i>Raw Footage</i>	116
<i>Reflecting on, Analysing and Interpreting the Data</i>	117
<i>Critical Reflection</i>	118
<i>How Critical Reflection is Employed in this Dissertation</i>	120
<i>Analysing Knowledge in Action: Language and Literacy</i>	121
<i>The Micro Level</i>	124
<i>The Macro Level</i>	124
<i>Quality and Validity in Action Research</i>	126

<i>Issues of Emerging and Enduring Consequence</i>	128
<i>Issues of Outcomes and Practice</i>	129
<i>Issues about Significance</i>	129
<i>Issues of Relational Practice</i>	130
<i>Issues about Plural Ways of Knowing</i>	130
<i>Reporting on the Participatory Action Research Project</i>	131
<i>Summary</i>	132
Part Two: Planning	134
Chapter Five. Setting the Scene	135
<i>Introduction</i>	135
<i>Overview of the Research Project</i>	135
<i>Establishing the Research Team</i>	137
<i>The Preschools in Context</i>	140
<i>Preschool A</i>	141
<i>Preschool B</i>	143
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	146
<i>Researching with Young Children</i>	148
<i>Initial Meetings with Parents</i>	151
<i>Critical Moment No. 1</i>	152
<i>Critical Moment No. 2</i>	152
<i>Summary</i>	153
Chapter Six. Orientation	154
<i>Introduction</i>	154
<i>Orientation Phase</i>	155
<i>Significance of the Orientation Phase</i>	155
<i>Critical Discussion No. 1</i>	156
<i>Critical Discussion No. 2</i>	162
<i>Critical Discussion No. 3</i>	162
<i>Initial Conversations</i>	165
<i>Preschool A</i>	166
<i>Preschool B</i>	170
<i>The Action Research Cycles</i>	174
<i>Summary</i>	176
Part Three: Action and Observation	177
Chapter Seven. From Exclusivity to Inclusivity	178
<i>Introduction</i>	178
<i>The Action Research Phase: Themes</i>	179
<i>The Importance Placed on Outward Appearance</i>	180
<i>Skin Colour, Race and Ethnicity</i>	194
<i>Indigenous Issues</i>	200
<i>Gender Issues</i>	205

<i>Issues of Integrity and Self-Worth</i>	209
<i>(Dis)Ability</i>	212
<i>Poverty</i>	218
<i>Loneliness</i>	220
<i>Concluding Conversations: Preschool A</i>	228
<i>Research Team's Reflection on and Analysis of Concluding Conversations (Preschool A)</i>	235
<i>Comparison between Initial and Concluding Conversations (Preschool A)</i>	235
<i>Concluding Conversations: Preschool B</i>	239
<i>Research Team's Reflection on and Analysis of Concluding Conversations (Preschool B)</i>	246
<i>Comparison between Initial and Concluding Conversations (Preschool B)</i>	247
<i>Summary</i>	251
Chapter Eight. From Shaky Beginnings to Solid Teamwork	253
<i>Introduction</i>	253
<i>The Participatory Action Research Phase</i>	255
<i>Critical Moments</i>	256
<i>Action Research Phase: Cycle One</i>	257
<i>Action Research Phase: Cycle Two</i>	264
<i>Action Research Phase: Cycle Three</i>	272
<i>The Research Team's Reflection on its Own Practice</i>	282
<i>Action Research Phase: Cycle Six</i>	293
<i>The Research Team's Reflection on its Own Practice</i>	299
<i>Action Research Phase: Cycle Nine</i>	307
<i>The Research Team's Reflection on its Own Practice</i>	310
<i>Summary</i>	321
Part Four: Final Reflections	322
Chapter Nine. Reflections	323
<i>Introduction</i>	323
<i>Team's Reflection on Its Practice Following the Action Research Phase</i>	324
<i>Issues of Emerging and Enduring Consequence</i>	325
<i>Issues of Outcomes and Practice</i>	327
<i>Issues of Significance</i>	329
<i>Issues of Relational Practice</i>	329
<i>Issues of Plural Ways of Knowing</i>	330
<i>Issues of Quality and Validity</i>	331
<i>Issues of Emerging and Enduring Consequence</i>	331
<i>Issues of Outcomes and Practice</i>	335
<i>Issues of Relational Practice</i>	336
<i>Issues of Plural Ways of Knowing</i>	338
<i>Issues of Significance</i>	341
<i>Limitations</i>	345

<i>Summary</i>	347
Chapter Ten. Looking Forward, Looking Back	349
<i>Introduction</i>	349
<i>Addressing Gaps in the Current Body of Knowledge</i>	350
<i>Emergent Findings Related to the Study's Aims</i>	351
<i>Summary of Findings: What Worked?</i>	354
<i>Expanding the Boundaries: Valuing Research in Early Childhood Settings and Giving Young Children a Voice</i>	357
<i>Expanding the Boundaries: Developing Teaching for Social Justice in the Early Years</i>	357
<i>Expanding the Boundaries: Empowering Participant Voice</i>	358
<i>Expanding the Boundaries of Current Knowledge: Upholding a Participatory Worldview in Collaborative Research</i>	362
<i>Possible Directions for Future Research</i>	364
<i>Concluding Comments</i>	366
References	368
Appendices	404

LISTS OF TABLES, FIGURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Tables	Pages
Table 1.1 Linking a participatory worldview: action research and quality and validity	21
Table 2.1 Key features in context	32
Table 5.1 Timeline/Overview of the research project	136
Table 5.2 The participatory action research team	139
Table 5.3 Pseudonyms for Preschool A children	142
Table 5.4 Pseudonyms for Preschool B children	146
Table 6.1 Preschool A: Summary of issues raised by individual children during initial conversations	169
Table 6.2 Preschool B: Summary of issues raised by individual children during initial conversations	173
Table 6.3 Participatory action research cycles displaying texts explored	175
Table 7.1 Linking teaching for social justice goals, themes that emerged from this research project and the research project’s key features	180
Table 7.2 Preschool A: Summary of concluding conversations using the same categories as the initial conversations	233
Table 7.3 Preschool A: Summary of categories that emerged during the concluding conversations	234
Table 7.4 Transcript of Ziek’s initial and concluding conversations	237
Table 7.5 Preschool B: Summary of concluding conversations using the same categories as the initial conversations	244
Table 7.6 Preschool B: Summary of categories that emerged during the concluding conversations	245
Table 7.7 Transcript of Tilly’s initial and concluding conversations	249
Table 9.1 Strategies that worked to support teaching for social justice	326
Table 10.1 Identified “gaps” linked with research aims	350

Figures

Figure 1.1	The cyclical spiralling nature of participatory action research	19
Figure 3.1	Characteristics/Dimensions of a participatory worldview	68
Figure 4.1	Characteristics of action research	101
Figure 4.2	Issues of validity and quality in action research	128

Photographs

Photograph 7.1	Carryn modelling the jewellery and costume that she created for Nini to wear to the carnival	187
Photograph 7.2	Adam, Kelly, Carryn and Dave creating a Spanish feast for Antonio's family (Colin in background designing decorations for the feast)	188
Photograph 7.3	Photographs showing Don leading bush tucker expeditions	204
Photograph 7.4	Jerry, Michael and Jedda playing dress-ups	209
Photograph 7.5	Tilly and Kurt displaying their list of alternatives to screaming	224
Photograph 8.1	The same children who had pulled disdainful faces at the mention of Spanish food cooking a Spanish feast at the playdough table and then creating a Spanish picnic	281
Photograph 8.2	Preschool A children engaging in play with a wheelchair	312

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A: Permission to use photograph on page 7	405
B: Children's literature used in the research project and Cited in this dissertation	406
C: Tabled summary of weekly action research cycles	408
D: Ethical clearance	419
E: Co-researcher consent forms	422
F: Parent consent forms	424
G: Child-friendly consent form	425
H: Preschoolers' letter to their parents (Preschool A)	426

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THIS WORK

Journal Article:

Hawkins, K. (2008a). Preschoolers' awareness of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues: Children's literature and participatory action research. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 15(1), 69-8.

Peer Reviewed Conference Papers:

Hawkins, K. (2007a, September). *Three imperatives: Valuing an anti-bias curriculum, investing in early childhood education and promoting collaborative research*. Paper presented at the Eidos Emerge conference, Brisbane, Qld.

Hawkins, K. (2007b, November). *Participatory action research, sacred existential epistemology, the eighth moment of qualitative research and beyond...* Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, WA.

Hawkins, K. (2007c, December). *Developing anti-racist futures through anti-bias multicultural early childhood education*. Peer reviewed paper presented at the international conference on Racisms in the New World Order, Pelican Waters, Qld.

Hawkins, K. (2008a, June). *Looking forward, looking back: Framing the future for teaching for social justice in early childhood education*. Peer reviewed paper presented at the biennial lifelong learning conference, Yeppoon, Qld.

Hawkins, K. (2008b). *Addressing Lather's concerns: Practising in research endeavours what is preached in theoretical formulations*. Peer reviewed paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), Brisbane, Qld.
(This paper received an AARE Postgraduate Student Award)

Hawkins, K. (2009a). *What if all the kids are white? Pedagogical quandaries related to the celebration of diversity in early childhood classrooms*. Peer-reviewed paper presented at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association conference, Strasbourg, France.

Hawkins, K. (2009b). *Teaching for social justice: A pedagogy for 21st Century early childhood education*. Peer reviewed paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education conference, ACT.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandchildren, Bella, Brody and Elodie, and all the grandchildren of this generation. You have inherited a world challenged by injustice, hostilities and prejudice – yet it is a beautiful world. Our hope lies with you.

And God says, I have a dream. I have a dream that all my children will discover that they belong to one family – my family, the human family – a family in which there are no outsiders. All, all belong, all are held in embrace of this one whose love will never let us go, this one that says that each one of us is of incredible worth, that each one of us is precious to God because each one of us has their name written in the palms of God's hands. And God says, there are no outsiders – black, white, red, yellow, short, tall, young, old, rich, poor, gay, lesbian, straight – everyone. All belong. And God says, I have only you to help me realise my dream. Help me.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 2000, p. 13