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

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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

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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.

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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

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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).

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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

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Together we can help shape and mould the thoughts and beliefs of those children who will become caretakers of the planet for the next generation. We do this every time we create or support an expression of love toward children in need. We show it by example wherever children experience commitment to their care, their well-being, their sense of hope and purpose. The leaders of the future are not born to it, they are nurtured and their values and passions are shaped by the experiences they have. (Noble, 2003, p. 4)

PROLOGUE

No-one is born hating another person because of the colour of her/his skin, or gender, or ethnicity, or religion, or ability, or class, or sexual orientation (Mandela, 1994). People learn to hate, and this begins in infancy; however, people can be taught to love, because love comes more naturally to the human heart (Mandela, 1994). Indeed, both the *Convention of Human Rights* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations Children's Fund, 2008) are "founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each individual regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth, status or ability" (p. 1). For a future characterised by love, care and purpose it is imperative that, as early as possible, children are guided and nurtured to respect, value, care for and love others who may be different from themselves (Mandela, 1994; Noble, 2003). This requires a collaborative commitment which highlights the participatory sense in which this world is shaped and this participatory spirit is woven into and throughout this dissertation.

Almost a century ago Dewey (1916) urged educators to examine their activities with the aim of discovering possible pathways towards better teaching and ultimately better ways of life. Recently there has been an ardent call for research into new pedagogies that promise to engross students in critical dialogues where complex cultural particularities and social traditions are investigated, with the aim of encouraging new ways of relating to and understanding social relations (Apple, 2004; Elenes, 2002). Similarly there is a need for researchers and educators to explore ways whereby young children's negative attitudes towards difference are

challenged and they are encouraged to appreciate diversity (Connolly, 2003). The research project reported upon in this dissertation wished to address these directives. Such research endeavours may help create a peaceful, inclusive and just world (Apple, 2004; Connolly, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Elenes, 2002). The research discussed in this dissertation attempts to address the challenges posed by Apple (2004), Connolly (2003), Dewey (1916), Elenes (2002), Mandela (1994) and Noble (2003).

This introductory chapter conceptualises and contextualises this research project. It outlines the research project's aims and poses the study's research questions. It also provides a rationale for the research project, highlights gaps in the current body of knowledge that this study intended to address and presents a brief outline of the research project. In addition, an overview of the dissertation is put forward, giving a concise summation of each section. The importance of and respect for each participant's voice (her/his knowledge, opinions, views and understandings) are imperative and apparent in this dissertation; therefore the voice and presence of the researcher could not go unnoticed or undeclared. It is for this reason that this dissertation is written in the first person. I did not separate my mind, body or spirit from this research project; therefore I cannot, nor would I wish to, divorce my physical, emotional or spiritual self from this dissertation.

PERSONAL CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The concept of this study was inextricably linked with my own story: my childhood and adolescent milieu, my background in early childhood education, my interest in teaching for social justice and a burgeoning interest in children's literature as a means to assist teaching for social justice. One's history informs one's consciousness, which in turn shapes one's research perspective (Kincheloe, 2003). Therefore my individual biography, the story "through which there is an 'I' with something to tell" (Davies, 1999, p. 31), is of significance to this research project. Guided by this assertion, that one's history informs one's research, and in keeping with the importance of children's literature (picture books) to this research project, yet with some trepidation, I present my personal history as a picture book:

Karen's Story

Karen was a very, very little girl with very, very dark hair and very, very hairy legs. Her last name came from a different country and rhymed with "poo". The other kids made up awful rhymes with her last name and laughed at her. Karen pushed the hurt way down, and tried to laugh with them.

Karen had a friend called Maria. Maria had red hair and freckles. Maria always came last in every Friday test and she came last in every race. The other kids laughed at Maria, too. Karen couldn't understand why they had to laugh AND she couldn't understand why, when Maria called out in a really loud voice: **"YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND, KAREN!"** she felt really, really embarrassed.

Karen's Mum and Dad were always concerned and rallying neighbours.

"Vern, I'm voting 'yes' and I've rallied all the neighbours. Finally, the Aboriginal people will have a say. I'm so ashamed when I think what we've done to these people!"

"Barb, it's gut-wrenching what's going on in Vietnam!" Then he'd turn to me and tell me the story about the cobbler... again! (You know the one: if it weren't for cobblers there'd be no wars because the soldiers would have no boots so they couldn't go to war...)

But one night Karen saw something on the telly that changed her life...

"How could this happen? How could adults do this to children? How could I stop this?" Karen cried.[1] Karen decided that if she helped kids understand love, respect, care, compassion, empathy and justice then the kids would grow up and there'd be no wars.

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[1] Permission to use the photograph may be found in Appendix A.

So she grew up and became a teacher

Karen wanted to guide kids to respect one another, even if they looked and acted differently.

Now Karen is much, much, much older but she is still looking for ways to help kids understand love, care, respect, compassion, empathy and justice. She is still looking for ways to celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity and she is still looking for ways to help kids stand against injustice.
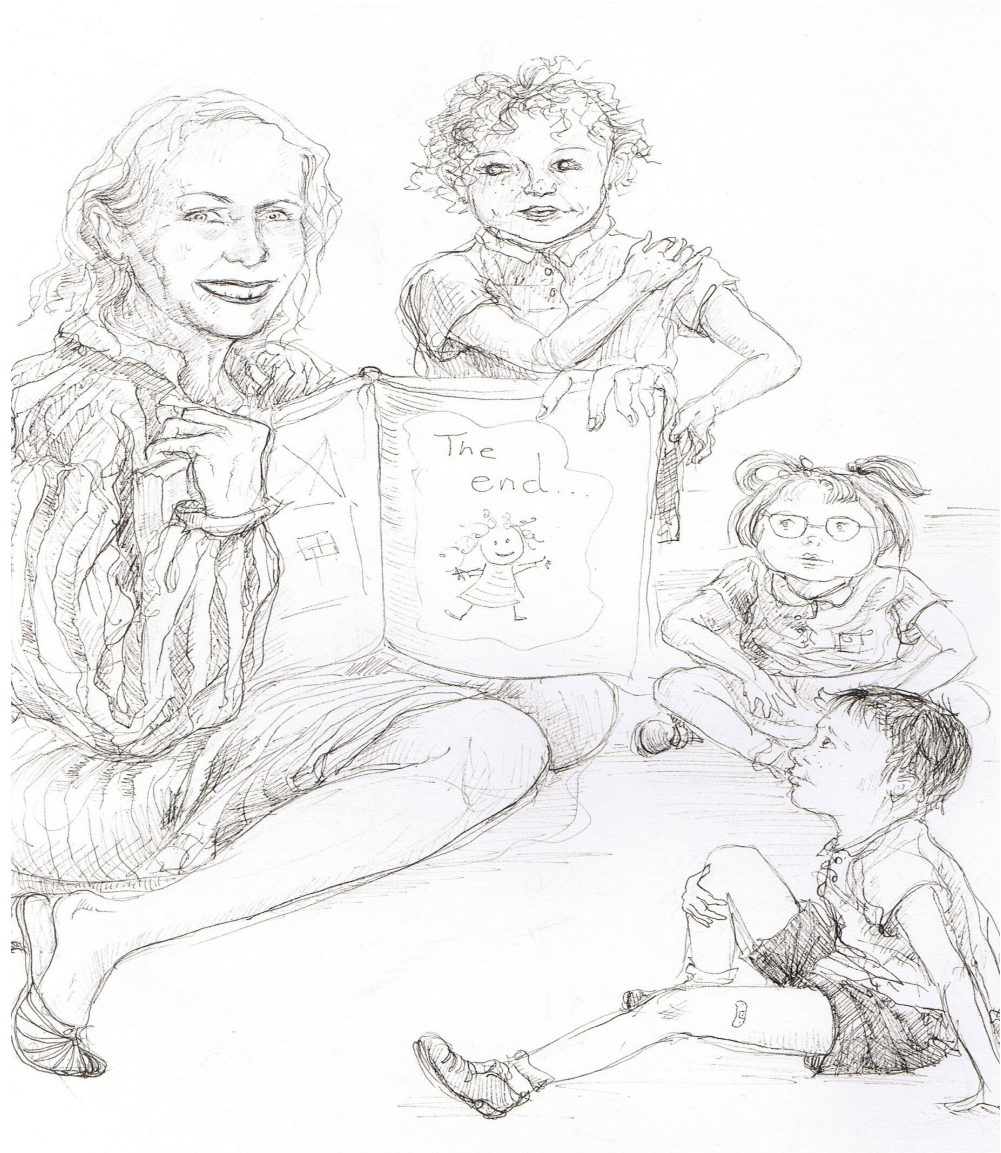
Although it was a happy childhood, it was marred by other children's prejudice against my non-Anglo surname and my ethnic appearance. I also experienced (second-hand) the prejudice against (dis)ability and had to examine my own conscience of wanting to stand against this injustice yet wanting to be accepted by the group. However, despite childhood taunts regarding my European heritage, I feel that my life was, and shamefully still is, surrounded by white privilege (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Kendall, 2006; for an extended discussion see Chapter Two pp. 46-50 of this dissertation). My parents always held views that were considered "left of centre" and were not afraid to voice their opinions to anyone who would listen. Therefore I grew up in a household that challenged the status quo, encouraged open debate and was constantly concerned about injustices happening in the troubled world.

However, apart from this open debate and rallying neighbours to take action, I always felt that more could be done. Through my teaching experiences I have grown to believe that the most effective way that we can challenge and change the ills and injustices of this world is to inform and guide the children of today. To this end I continue to search for specific strategies to assist this belief in practical classroom situations.

This research project began to germinate during my postgraduate studies in special needs education and a masters degree majoring in children's literature. From personal observations of my own and others' teaching practices in preschool settings I had noted that storytime (when a picture book is read by the teacher to the preschool group) was used, at best, to teach literacy skills (e.g., reading directionality, comprehension, word recognition) or, at worst, as a transition exercise to fill in five minutes between the end of the school day and the collection of the children by their parents or guardians. Using children's literature for social agency in preschool settings (facilities providing non-compulsory, before formal school years care with an educational purpose) was, as far as I could research, untapped.[2] The outcome of my postgraduate studies and personal observations was a desire to investigate the possibility of using children's literature in preschool settings to

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[2] A number of scholars have explored this notion of using children's literature for social agency and philosophical thinking in formal school settings (Greene, 1995; Lipman, 2003; Noddings, 1998, 2005).

heighten young children's awareness and understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity.

RESEARCH AIMS

The aims of this research project began to develop during my postgraduate studies and arose from my background as an early childhood educator with a passion for children's literature and teaching for social justice. They emanated from my personal and professional background, and addressed gaps in the current body of knowledge (outlined in this chapter on pp. 16-18):

- to identify appropriate pedagogical strategies to teach for social justice in early childhood classrooms;

- to investigate ways in which children's literature could help preschoolers to reflect upon, clarify and articulate their awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues and promote positive attitudes towards difference and diversity;

- to explore how preschoolers could critically examine children's literature to identify and challenge social injustices and stereotypes;

- to conduct this research project through a collaborative, caring and socially just mode of inquiry where the voices of all participants were valued, trusted and acted upon.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this study were formulated to address the above aims and also the challenges posed by Noble (2003), Mandela (1994), Elenes (2002), Apple (2004) and Connolly (2003):

How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the first research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

These research questions are positive inquiries that allow for an exploration of strengths, as opposed to deficits. They anticipate that through the examination of children's literature preschool children may gain heightened awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues related to difference, diversity and dignity.[3] However, when the questions were posed, the answer of **how** was the unknown. Posing the questions for this study was encouraged by Ludema, Cooperrider and Barret (2006), who contend that possibly the most significant task of action researchers

> is continuously to craft the unconditional positive question that allows the whole system to discover, amplify and multiply the alignment of strengths in such a way that weaknesses and deficiencies become increasingly irrelevant. For the questions we ask set the stage for what we 'find', and what we find becomes the knowledge out of which the future is conceived, conversed about and constructed. (p. 165)

The positive research questions posed by this research project allowed five early childhood educators and me (as co-researchers in this participatory action research project) to explore how children's literature could provide strategies to teach for social justice in preschool settings. The above discussion has indicated that action research is of significance to this study. Indeed, how the co-researchers became a research team and utilised participatory action research is explored in the second research question in this dissertation.

RATIONALE CONCEPTUALISING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

It is interesting to note that Derrida (1994) "calls" for justice (p. 56) and Levinas (1974) "cries out" for justice (p. 201). The title of this study also implores "a cry". A cry implies that someone is calling out in urgency. This urgency is driven by an ever shrinking world owing to globalisation yet also by ever increasing incidents

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[3] Difference, diversity and dignity constitute social justice for this research project because it was framed by the recognition paradigm of social justice (discussed in Chapter Two) that asserts that marginalisation and exploitation result from inequitable and inadequate recognition of difference and diversity. Dignity is also important to this project's understanding of social justice as I believe in the sacredness of humanity. This spiritual aspect permeates this dissertation.

of xenophobia, hatred, violence and intolerance (Milanovic, 2003; Mittelman, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Sachs, 2002). To address this duality this study embraced the notion of teaching for social justice. The cry to teach for social justice that is mirrored in the research project's title implies that there is an urgency to facilitate preschoolers' awareness of and sensitivity to social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity.

Many researchers, academics and writers use and often interweave terms such as civics education, citizenship education, character education, values teaching, anti-bias education, teaching for democracy, social justice education and teaching for social justice (Adams, 2007; Arthur, Davison & Stow, 2000; Dau, 2001; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2007; Noddings, 2005). These terms are inextricably linked (Global Education Project, 2002). However, the term "teaching for social justice" was chosen for use in this research project as it encapsulates the spirit of this study: to guide young children to a sensitive awareness and positive recognition of difference, diversity and human dignity in the hope of shaping socially just citizens in a global context. Teaching for social justice is situated under the banner of transformational learning (Ayres, 2004).

Transformational learning concerns the repositioning of one's frame of reference regarding how one perceives the world and one's assumptions, feelings and cognitions regarding self, others and the planet (Mezirow, 2000). Transformational learning encourages critical reflection on taken for granted assumptions. Therefore, transformative pedagogies, such as teaching for social justice, develop in both teachers and students a critical and dynamic view of the world, where their frames of reference and the status quo are challenged and reflected upon (Mack, 2002). Transformative pedagogies highlight a shared view of the teaching/learning process where both teachers and students are guided, challenged and supported by one another. Transformative pedagogies engage teachers and learners "in processes that enable them to construct new knowledge that will enhance the quality of their personal lives, their communities and their worlds" (Crowther, personal communication, 6 September, 2005).

Transformative learning environments are evolving forms of life, as Discourse (Gee, 1990), and also as the discourse practices (Gee, 1990) that animate teachers and learners in a coherent community of practice (Michaels, 1997). Transformative teaching/learning might be regarded as a theory in process which highlights the need for further research into this topical subject (Mezirow, 2000). Therefore it may be said that investigating strategies to support and promote teaching for social justice is of current research interest.

Social justice in education is of great significance. "In fact, [social justice] remains the central debate in education and should remain the central pursuit of educators at all levels of education" (Sturman, 1997, p. xiii). It follows that examining strategies to enhance teaching for social justice and how these strategies raise critical consciousness in both students and educators should be of great consequence to educational researchers. Indeed, exploring critical consciousness in education is important and should be pursued in educational research (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994). Scholars, critical thinkers and research philosophers have called for research into new pedagogies that will inform policy and teacher development regarding anti-bias in the classroom and teaching for social justice (Connolly, 2003; Denman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Elenes, 2002; Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003a; Noddings, 1995).

In particular, this area of research has attracted considerable attention in the upper primary, secondary and post secondary levels of education (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). However, while there is a large amount of research regarding young children's physical and intellectual development, there is much less research focusing on their development of critical consciousness and social justice understandings regarding difference, diversity and human dignity (Glover, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003a, 2003b). This is rather surprising given that the preschool years are critical in forming attitudes towards diversity and difference (Dau, 2001; Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005; Connolly, 2003; Mac Naughton, 2003b; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003).

A submission prepared for the Vinson Inquiry into the provision of public education in New South Wales stated that for Australian society "to develop

participatory, critically minded and just citizens, research … has demonstrated that the target group with whom to initiate this educational process would be young children, beginning at the early childhood and preschool level" (Bonnor, Dhanji & Pavia, 2001, p. 6). To build a just society we must challenge bias, prejudice and stereotyping where it could begin – early childhood (Dau, 2001). Prejudice in any form, be it racism, sexism, able-ism, ageism or homophobia, "is a major threat to minorities, to democracy, to human rights, and to public order and harmony" (Glover, 2001, p. 12). If Australia, and indeed any nation, is to become a democratic, strong and harmonious nation where all citizens are treated fairly, we must educate our young children to accept, respect and appreciate difference, diversity and human dignity; to recognise and challenge bias, prejudice and stereotyping; and to take action against bias and discrimination (Bonnor et al., 2001; Dau, 2001; Glover, 2001).

However, young children's thoughts and understandings of social diversity upon which anti-bias curricula are based remain poorly theorised (Mac Naughton, 2003a). It appears that when gathering data many researchers overlook children's voices (Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993). To address this there is a growing international movement in research that aims to foreground children's perceptions and conceptions of their life experiences (Kinash & Kinash, 2008; Potter, 2004). Furthermore, it is not only children's voices that are ignored in research circles, but also the voices of teachers which are often devalued or silenced (Cooper & White, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003; Walsh et al., 1993). The most obvious response to critical concerns regarding representation and voice is empowerment research, and participatory action research has been cited as the most developed genre of this type (Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Martin, lisahunter & McLaren, 2006).

While teaching for social justice and anti-bias curricula are of definite concern in educational circles, it is alarming to note that, at the time of this research project, many educators were struggling to promote such curricula in their classrooms because they were not equipped with appropriate pedagogical strategies (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Lingard et al., 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). However, the judicious use of literature may be a powerful tool to assist educators to raise critical consciousness in their classrooms (Greene, 1995; Lipman,

2003; Noddings, 1998, 2005). Noddings (1998) argues for the use of stories on two counts. Firstly, stories may be used as a starting point to encourage critical thinking and the theoretical study of morality and ethics. Secondly, the use of particular stories may encourage reflection and self-examination on specific social, ethical and/or moral issues.[4]

GAPS IN THE CURRENT BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

It can be seen from the above discussion that there were three main gaps in the current body of knowledge relating to teaching for social justice and early childhood education (explained further in Chapter Two). Firstly, very little research involving teaching for social justice and anti-bias curricula has been undertaken in preschool settings. Furthermore, such issues have seen little investigation in Australia. This may be owing to the fact that psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1969, 1984), when proposing his stages of moral development, concluded that young children did not act out of moral convictions but rather for reward or fear of punishment. Previously researchers may have considered preschoolers incapable of moral reasoning and understanding; therefore investigating their understandings of social justice issues would be a waste of time. However, this study aligns with research that shows that preschool children *are* capable of making moral judgments, of understanding another's point of view and of displaying empathy towards others (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2000; Barglow, Contreras, Kavesh & Vaughn, 1998; Bartsch & Wellman, 1995; Hoffman, 1975, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Lindon, 1998; Smith & Cowie, 1994; Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberle & Wahl, 2000; Turliel, 1983; Vestal & Jones, 2004; Youngstrom et al., 2000).

Secondly, transformative and productive ways of sharing the teaching/learning experience that facilitate preschoolers' understandings of social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity have seen little exploration. Many educators have struggled to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to promote and support teaching for social justice and an anti-bias

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[4] Noddings (1998, 2005) makes clear connections to Lipman's (2003) *Philosophy for Children*, which asserts that children have the ability to reason about moral and ethical concepts through engagement with narratives.

curriculum. This could be owing to insufficient professional training in the areas of teaching for social justice and anti-bias/multicultural education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) propose that add-on courses at university level and a few in-service workshops are insufficient preparation to raise and explore these issues genuinely in early childhood contexts. However, they add that "The children won't wait; teachers need to avoid becoming paralysed and must risk acting, even before they feel totally ready" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 13). Hence, I sought to establish a research team of early childhood educators to explore strategies that would help them support and promote teaching for social justice in their preschool settings.

Thirdly, it is clear that research often overlooks the voices of participants, especially children. This may be owing to a misguided perception that children make unreliable and inadequate research respondents (Breakwell, 1995; Brooker, 2001; David, 1992; Powney & Watts, 1987). However, the current research project is greatly influenced by the new sociology of childhood that asserts that children are capable and competent participants who actively shape their lives (Corsaro, 2005; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005). This study intended to be part of the international movement in research that aims to give children a voice. There is also a forward move in contemporary research circles to empower all participants and attend to social inclusion, cohesion and justice in the research process (Grace, 2008). Consequently this research project aimed to align with this research movement and give the early childhood educators, as co-researchers, a valued voice through implementing the research design of participatory action research.

The research project outlined in this dissertation addresses the above gaps in the current body of knowledge and heeds Greene's (1995) and Nodding's (1998, 2005) suggestions. It does so by examining the use of children's literature in two Australian preschool settings and how this might heighten preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity. Through the course of the action research the preschoolers' articulated understandings drove the direction of the study; and the knowledge, skills and expertise of the early childhood educators were valued and acted upon.

This study emerged from the above discussions and was foregrounded by the urgent need to advance the understanding that teaching for social justice, highlighting an anti-bias curriculum, should begin in the early years. It also sought to assist the early childhood educators involved in this research project with strategies to teach for social justice and raise critical consciousness regarding difference and diversity in their classrooms. Crucial to this study was the valuing of the expressed thoughts, opinions, theories and understandings of the preschool children and the early childhood educators.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The research project outlined in this dissertation was founded on a profound belief that the world is shaped by participation and collaboration with one another (a participatory worldview) and it was underpinned by a deep interest in and concern for social justice. Therefore I investigated collaborative methodological practices that would promote a socially just mode of inquiry and would value and uphold the integrity of each participant involved in the study (myself included) and give each a valued voice. This research project is set in what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) refer to as "the eighth moment of qualitative research", which is "concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities" and where "social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community" (p. 3).

However, the current study gravitates towards the ninth qualitative research moment whereby it was marked by "concerns for social justice, moral purpose, and 'liberation methodology'" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 1123). To this end this study adopted the collaborative design of participatory action research, a comparatively new approach to research (Torres, 2004). The application of participatory action research was appropriate for this study because it was an approach that produced knowledge and improved practice through its collaborative nature: the direct involvement of participants in setting the schedule, data collection and analysis, and use of findings (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001). Figure 1.1 depicts the cyclical, spiralling nature of action research that this study embraced: reflection (on a problem), planning, collaborative observation and action (Bell, 2000;

Dick, 2002; Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001; McIntyre, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Torres, 2004).
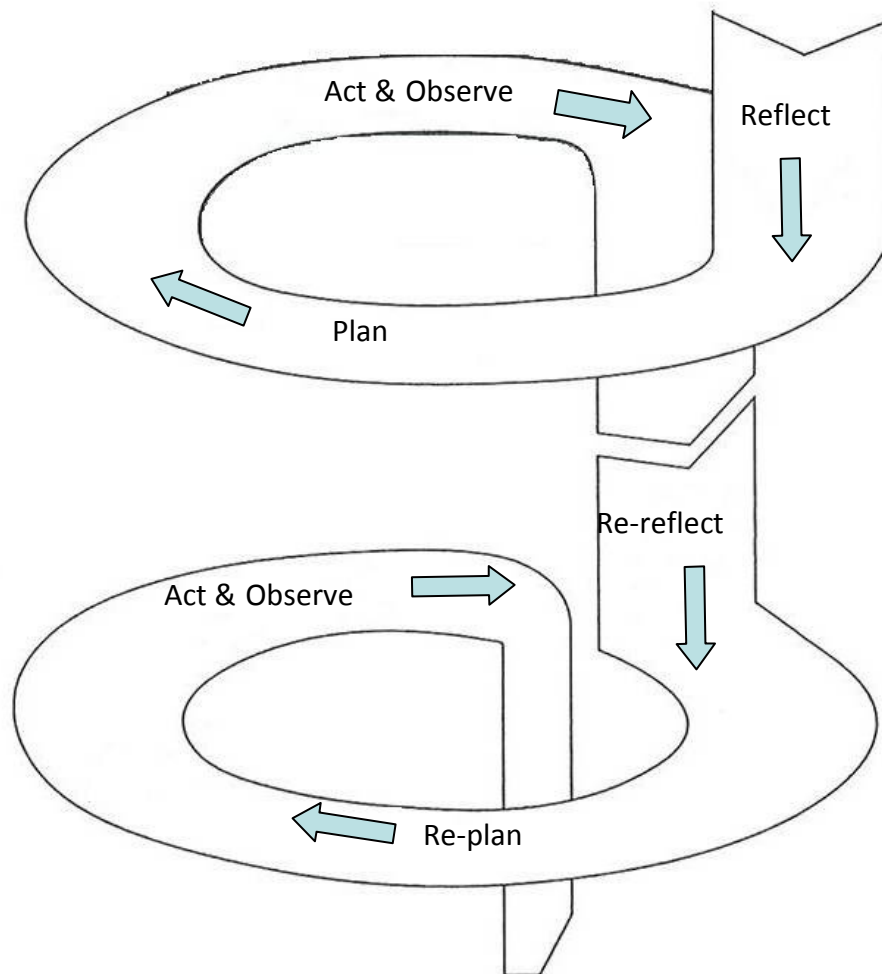
Figure 1.1 The Cyclical Spiralling Nature of Participatory Action Research
(Adapted from Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p. 22)

Figure 1.1 represents how different aspects of the participatory action research process are fluidly interwoven with one another in a spiral of reflection on a problem; planning; action; observation; and reflection on the planning, action and observation; further planning; further action; further observation; and still more reflection. This spiral can take many cycles before reaching clear understandings and drawing conclusions.

The study was set in the 2006 school year in South East Queensland, Australia. The participatory action research team was established in term one, the orientation phase took place during term two, the action research phase was completed at the end of term three and data analysis continued during term four. Two

preschool centres, involving 48 preschoolers, participated in the study, with the research team consisting of five early childhood educators, who taught at the centres, and me. Research meetings, involving research team members, were held fortnightly during the orientation phase to discuss philosophies, methodology, pedagogy, children's literature and social justice.

During the action research phase weekly meetings were held to analyse videotaped storytime sessions regarding children's responses to children's literature read by the preschool teacher to the preschool group. Data analysis was cyclical and ongoing. The action research cycle of reflection, collaborative planning, action and observation was implemented over 10 weekly cycles of the action research phase.

The research design's participatory nature and transformative action encouraged educators and preschoolers to explore critically their understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues related to difference and diversity. Educators and preschoolers actively and collectively shaped and reshaped their understandings through engagement with, and discussion of, social justice issues that were highlighted in children's literature read during storytime sessions.

UNIFYING THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation is unified by paralleling the dimensions of a participatory worldview with the characteristics of action research and linking these with issues of quality and validity (see Part One of this dissertation). Validity is a complex and vexed issue for qualitative researchers, with the term "trustworthiness" usually employed to assess the validity of the research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mac Naughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Stake, 1995; Wiersma, 2001). Chapter Four enters this debate and concludes that this dialogue should shift from concerns of idealist questions seeking "Truth" to concerns regarding "engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 343). To this end this research project was informed by Reason and Bradbury's (2006) five broad issues of quality and validity which are explained in Chapter Four. Table 1.1 may assist the reader to review briefly how issues of quality and validity are linked to the dimensions of a participatory worldview and the characteristics of action research, which this study embraced. Table 1.1 is similar to a

table proposed by Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 58), which also summarises this linkage.

Table 1.1 Linking a Participatory Worldview: Action Research and Quality and Validity

Dimensions of a Participatory Worldview	Characteristics of Action Research	Questions of Quality and Validity
Participatory evolutionary reality	Emergent developmental form	Questions of emergence and enduring consequence
Practical being and acting	Practical issues	Questions of outcomes and practice
Meaning and purpose	Human flourishing	Questions about significance
Relational ecological form	Participation and democracy	Questions of relational practice
Extended epistemology	Knowledge-in-action	Questions about plural ways of knowing

(Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2006)

The linkage among the dimensions of a participatory worldview, the characteristics of action research and issues of quality and validity underpins this research project. To orientate the reader further this chapter will now offer a brief overview of each chapter included in this dissertation.

STRUCTURE AND OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Because participatory action research is crucial to the study this dissertation is organised in such a way as to mirror the structure of action research: reflection, planning, action and observation, reflection. Usually reflection is completed at the conclusion of an activity; however, to undertake action research, reflection must be undertaken at the beginning of a project to help understand the underlying problem. To this end Part One of the dissertation examines the *reflection* that framed the research project; Part Two discusses the *planning* that set the foundation for the research project; Part Three investigates the *action and observation* involved in this study; and Part Four returns to *reflection* and critically reflects on the research project as a whole.

Part One: Initial Reflections is a review of relevant literature that examines the theoretical underpinnings of this research project. Chapter Two: Issues

Confronting Teaching for Social Justice embarks on a review of the literature that defines social justice, outlines the challenges that face teaching for social justice and discusses contemporary perspectives of childhood. Chapter Three: Theoretical Frameworks of a Participatory Worldview delves deeply into the theorisations, epistemologies and philosophies that support this investigation. Chapter Four: Praxis of Action Research explores the theory and practice of action research, particularly the design of participatory action research which was embraced by this research project. It also elucidates the research project's methods and data analysis procedures.

Part Two: Planning explains the initial planning that set the foundations for this investigation. Chapter Five: Setting the Scene explains how the research team was established, places the preschools in context and outlines ethical considerations. Chapter Six: Orientation explains the orientation phase of the participatory action research project. It reports on initial meetings with co-researchers and highlights critical moments that were of significance to the project's development and evolution. It also examines initial conversations held with each preschool child regarding a critical text read to the preschool group. In this way this chapter begins to address both research questions.

Part Three: Action and Observation reports on the action research phase of the study and considers how the research team analysed children's responses to storytime sessions and how their responses moved the study forward. It also explores how the co-researchers developed their research team. Chapter Seven: From Exclusivity to Inclusivity addresses the first research question and reports on and analyses by using a themed approach the preschoolers' emerging understandings of social justice issues that were raised during storytime sessions. The chapter also discusses concluding conversations held with each preschool child regarding a critical text and offers a comparative analysis between the initial and concluding conversations. Chapter Eight: From Shaky Beginnings to Solid Team Work addresses the second research question and highlights how the early childhood educators and I developed a strong research team and how we reflected on our own practice.

Part Four: Final Reflections sums up and reflects upon the participatory action research project. Chapter Nine: Reflections addresses both research questions and discusses and reflects on the entire study through the team's reflections on its own practice and through my own critical self-reflection as research facilitator. Chapter Ten: Looking Forward, Looking Back brings this dissertation to a close by encapsulating this participatory action research project. I have struggled with the title of this chapter. I could not title it "Conclusion" as there is never actually a conclusion to action research such as this; it continues in the lives of those involved in this study.

Writing a participatory action research dissertation such as this is not an easy task and its structure may appear unconventional (Maguire, 1993). Owing to the nature of action research, description, analysis and interpretation usually occur concurrently and often employ a narrative form (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Such is the case with this dissertation. Indeed, this dissertation is organised in an unconventional way whereby reflection on theories and philosophies is examined followed by an explanation of the planning and orientation phase that prefaced the research project. The action research phase is then explored using thick narrative description (Geertz, 1983). Data are presented as illustrations of what took place and written as vignettes (McIntyre, 1995) and critical reflection is employed as a data analysis tool (Hughes, 2008; Moon, 2004). The final section of the dissertation provides the reader with an analysis of the analysis that was undertaken during the action research phase and offers final reflections on the participatory action research as an entirety.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research project reported in this dissertation: *A cry to teach for social justice: Linking early childhood education, participatory action research and children's literature*. It began by offering a personal background in which the research project was conceptualised. It then established the study's aims and the research questions. The chapter then put forward a rationale conceptualising the research project which highlighted gaps in the current body of knowledge in relation to early childhood education and teaching for social

justice. A brief summary of the research project was outlined highlighting that participatory action research was adopted as the research design and that data analysis of storytime sessions was cyclical and ongoing. The chapter concluded by explaining how the dissertation was unified and offered an explanation of the structure of the dissertation and an overview of the sections that follow.

Although only briefly mentioned in this chapter my participatory worldview, which frames this research project, is of paramount importance to this study and permeates this dissertation. It is hoped that my worldview is transparent throughout this dissertation.

Teaching for social justice is at the core of democratic education. It serves as a reminder not only of the inequities and biases that continue to wear away at the foundation of democratic values (equality, freedom and power to the people) but also of powerful stories which inspire us to work towards change, to make the world a better place (Dewey, 1919, 1938; Hunt, 1998). This dissertation is not only my story but also the story of a group of passionate people working towards change in their individual settings in the hope of making the world a better place.

The following chapter begins *Part One: Initial Reflections* by examining relevant literature regarding teaching for social justice. It begins by explaining how social justice is defined for the purposes of the study. The chapter then reflects on literature that became the catalyst and the foundation for this research project.

PART ONE:

INITIAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER TWO: ISSUES CONFRONTING TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

> *In direct opposition to the current emphasis on academic standards, a national curriculum, and national assessment, I have argued that our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people. . . . All children must learn to care for other human beings, and all must find an ultimate concern in some center of care: care of self, for intimate others, for associates and acquaintances, for distant others.* (Noddings, 1995, p. 365)

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an introduction to the research project reported in this dissertation that links early childhood education, participatory action and children's literature with teaching for social justice. It began by outlining the main research questions and aims and provided a rationale as a justification for the study. It then conceptualised and contextualised the research project. The introductory chapter highlighted the importance of my participatory worldview to this research project which underpinned the choice of the research design: participatory action research. The chapter concluded by explaining the structure of this dissertation and offered an overview of each section.

This chapter begins *Part One: Initial Reflections* that aims to highlight the theoretical underpinnings of this research project. It begins by explaining how social justice is defined for the purposes of this study. The chapter then reflects on literature that became the catalyst and the foundation for this research project and reflects Noddings' (1995) concern that as educators we should be about encouraging the development of a loving, caring humanity. Along these lines King (1963; 1994) asserts that injustice of any and every kind (for example racism, sexism, able-ism, heterosexism, classism) is a threat to a loving, caring humanity on a global scale and must be challenged. This chapter outlines literature which emphasises Noddings' and King's concerns and argues that social justice is an important educational issue in the 21st Century. It upholds that teaching for social justice is an imperative which must begin in the early years. However, it is revealed that this is not always an easy task as

research has shown that many teachers struggle for appropriate pedagogical strategies to implement such a curriculum (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clark, 2000) which is often made more difficult when their student population is "all white" (Banks, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). With the latter complexity in mind "white privilege" is examined. The chapter then discusses the strategy of employing children's literature as a vicarious experience to initiate critical discussion regarding social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity. The chapter draws attention to the gaps in this literature review which supported the necessity for this research project to be undertaken. The chapter concludes by highlighting the sociocultural and postmodern views of children and childhood and how these views informed the study.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice is a very difficult concept to define and means different things to different people.

> The trouble with "social justice" begins with the very meaning of the term…
> (W)hole books and treatises have been written about social justice without
> ever offering a definition of it. It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone
> will recognise an instance of it when it appears. This vagueness seems
> indispensable. The minute one begins to define social justice one runs into
> embarrassing intellectual difficulties. (Novak, 2000, p. 1)

So how does one define the amorphous term of social justice? Volumes of individual and edited texts have been devoted to the topic. Since Rawls put forward *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, contemporary theorists on social justice have been in constant debate. There seems to be no definitive answer to the meaning of social justice. Nevertheless, and not withstanding Novak's caution, some attempt must be made to explain the term "social justice" for this study. Initially a few thoughts regarding social justice are proposed to highlight the "slipperiness" of the term. This section then highlights definitions that support this current study, followed by a statement on how social justice is defined for the purposes of the research project outlined in this dissertation.

Social justice has a temporal and spatial aspect (Rizvi, 1998; Vincent, 2003). What is considered as just at one point in time, or in one place, or among one social

group, is not necessarily considered so in another. Indeed, there can be different traditions of thinking about social justice in the one sector of society (Rizvi, 1998). Social justice can be seen in terms of fairness (Rawls, 1971), entitlement (Nozick, 1974) and democracy (Beilharz, 1989). These traditions look to the distribution of goods and resources. However, this distributive paradigm that highlights material inequality is no longer adequate in capturing the complexities of injustice (Rizvi, 1998). As Kuhn (1970) suggests, such a shift involves

> a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications. . . . When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods and its goals. (pp. 84–85)

The recognition paradigm of social justice

A new paradigm of social justice is emerging that not only focuses on exploitation, interest and redistribution (on which the distributive paradigm was centred) but also focuses on issues of cultural domination, identity, difference and recognition (Fraser, 1995; Rizvi, 1998; Young, 1990).

> The struggle for recognition is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Heterogeneity and pluralism are now regarded as the norms against which demands for justice are now articulated. Demands for "recognition of difference" fuel struggles for groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality. Group identity has supplanted class conflict as the chief medium of political mobilisation. Cultural domination has supplanted economic exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition has displaced social-economic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle. (Fraser, 1995, p. 68)

While this new recognition paradigm sees injustice as being entrenched in the political/economic construction of society that results in economic exploitation and marginalisation which leads to inequitable and inadequate material standards of living; it also sees injustice resulting from cultural disrespect (Fraser, 1995; Rizvi, 1998; Young, 1990). The recognition paradigm argues that marginalisation and exploitation result not only from inadequate distribution of goods and services but also from inequitable and inadequate recognition of difference.

There are still further debates within this relatively new paradigm of recognition. Social justice gains its authority from the codes of morality established

in each culture. There are many different cultural communities in the world, which implies that there are many different moral systems or social justice systems in the world. However, should one moral system be given more credence than another?

A society would be intolerant and, indeed, narrow-minded to presume that other societies with different histories and cultures to its own should share the notion of rights particular to its own appreciation of domestic justice (Kelly, 2004). Conceptions of social justice vary from culture to culture and there is no such thing as an absolute moral code (Levy, 2002). A moral relativist examines the culture from which an act may occur.

Degan and Disman (2003) appear to uphold this pluralist position. They argue that the concept of social justice is founded on the understanding that individuals and groups within a particular society have a right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, fairness and participation in the economic, educational, institutional, moral and social freedoms and responsibilities esteemed by that community.

This leads to the argument between equality and equity. Social justice is "a belief system that is based on equity, human rights and fairness for all" (Foreman, 2005, p. 532). Equality suggests that all are equal and must be treated in the same way; however, equity is about recognising that all people have the same rights and should be provided with opportunities for equal outcomes (Foreman, 2005; Secada, 1989). For example, equality would propose that a student with visual impairment should be educated in the same way, using the same resources and curriculum as a student who has no visual impairment. However, equity would stipulate that both the student with visual impairment and the student without visual impairment be educated in such a way that both students have the opportunity to achieve the same life outcomes - that is, the same social, academic and vocational goals appropriate to their interests and abilities. The recognition paradigm argues that social justice is about *equity* as opposed to equality.

Much of the above discussion implies that social justice is quite segmented. However, a further position within the recognition paradigm of social justice believes that social justice should be upheld not only among people within society (internally

to each social group) but also across societies in a global sense (Hurrell, 2003). Social justice involves people who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility and accountability towards and with others not only in their society, but also in the broader world in which they live (Bell, 2007). Kikuchi (2004) compiled a collection of social justice definitions from notable individuals who support this global sense of social justice and who assert that social justice is inextricably linked to the worldwide equitable distribution of resources, human rights, sustainability for the environment, democracy and space for the human spirit to survive globally.

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THIS PROJECT

Mindful of the preceding debates and definitions regarding social justice the following statements delineate what social justice means for this research project:
The meaning of social justice is dynamic and ever changing. It means different things to different people and these different views have the right to exist and be respected. However, this study embraced the recognition paradigm of social justice to uphold and celebrate recognition of difference and diversity. Indeed, all people are entitled to social justice and basic needs, regardless of differences such as economic disparity, class, gender, colour, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or health (The Charter of the Global Greens, 2001). These conditions are wished not only for members of our own society but also for members of every society in our interdependent, participatory global community (Bell, 2007). This very much mirrors my participatory worldview that underpins this study (further explained in Chapter Three). This participatory worldview sees social justice embracing a vision of society where difference and diversity are celebrated; where human dignity is respected; where the distribution of resources is equitable; where all members are safe; where individuals are equally self-determining, therefore able to develop their full capabilities, and are interdependent, hence capable of interacting peacefully and democratically with others (Bell, 2007).

For this study, in a very broad sense, social justice means to uphold the dignity, rights and freedoms of all individuals and communities, especially those who are disadvantaged, oppressed and/or discriminated against. Social justice will reject

any attempt to dominate, oppress and subjugate any individual or group. Social justice will oppose oppression, discrimination and prejudice against gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economic status, age and/or (dis)ability. Social justice will strive to give voice to the vulnerable, often "silenced", minority groups (e.g. refugees, [dis]abled, poorly educated, young children). Social justice is both a process and a goal (Bell, 2007). Thus, social justice is not only theorising on the concept but also acting on it to achieve it. Leistyna (2005) asks, "How can theorising be used as a social practice that inspires people to not only read the world critically, but to also act within it?" (p. 14). This study addressed Leistyna's problem by encouraging early childhood educators and their preschoolers to theorise critically on social justice issues related to difference, diversity and dignity (underpinned by the recognition paradigm of social justice) highlighted in picture books and discuss how this theorising shaped their interactions within their preschool settings and the broader community.

Key features of social justice that underpinned this research project

From the above discussion the following key features of social justice were formulated to shape the study's position on teaching for social justice. Social justice:

1. values and upholds the dignity, freedom and human rights of each individual and/or cultural group through inclusion, acceptance and respect. Therefore teaching for social justice guides children to identify and challenge prejudice and discrimination and aims to counter stereotypes;

2. values and upholds the rights of individuals and groups to practice their religion, traditions, relationships and such like. Therefore teaching for social justice guides children to identify and challenge any form of oppression;

3. respects freedom of speech and ensures that each person's voice (opinion) is valued. Social justice gives voice to minority groups and upholds the concept of multiple truths. Therefore teaching for social justice guides children to listen respectfully to others while understanding that opinions may not be the same as their own. Constructively critical dialogue and debate are encouraged;

4. promotes peaceful practices. Therefore teaching for social justice guides children to employ peaceful practices to resolve disputes and maintain harmony.

As shown in Table 2.1 these key features of social justice provided a framework when examining social justice issues treated in storytime sessions in the preschool classroom. The first key feature highlights the need to value not only each member of the class group but also those who may be considered outside the group; for example, diverse cultures and races. By valuing the dignity of each individual the preschool class is valuing the dignity of diversity, celebrating similarities and differences and breaking down the barrier of "them" versus "us". This first feature also aims to counter stereotypes. The second challenges any form of oppression, not only in the preschool classroom where a child may be ostracised or bullied for wearing glasses, but also on a more global scale where people live in poverty and degradation. The third promotes freedom of speech where everyone is entitled to voice an opinion in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect, even though it may not be the view held by the majority. This feature also explores the concept of multiple truths and encourages constructive, peaceful debate. The fourth promotes peace and harmony in the preschool classroom and beyond. It can positively influence concepts of sharing, communicating, cooperating and nonviolent play, all aspects needed on a global scale to promote peace and harmony among nations. Peace is not simply the absence of conflict and hostilities, "but a positive human security founded in equity" (al-Hussein, 2000, p. 162).

Table 2.1 Examples of Key Features of Social Justice in Context

KEY FEATURE	PRESCHOOL CONTEXT	GLOBAL CONTEXT	CHILDREN'S LITERATURE [1]
Challenges prejudice/discrimination/ stereotypes	Ensuring play equipment is shared equally among all preschoolers	Dignity in diversity. Celebrating differences - e.g., colour, culture, gender, ability, class, sexuality, ethnicity	*Princess Smartypants.* *Grandpa and Ah Gong.* *Turtle Bay.*
Challenges oppression	Countering bullying and exclusion	Boycotting goods made in 'sweatshops'	*Once Upon a Time.* *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue.* *The Rabbits.*
Upholds freedom of speech	Ensuring that everyone's opinion	Studying and respecting a	*Voices in the Park.* *My Gran's*

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[1] For ease of reference the complete bibliographic information for all children's literature used in the research project and cited in this dissertation may be found in Appendix B. This information is also included within the reference section.

	is heard and valued	diversity of religious and cultural beliefs. Being involved in these celebrations	*Different. Is it True Grandfather?*
Promotes peaceful practices	Implementing a *peaceful plan of action* for resolving disputes and conflict using dialogue and role play	Active participation in *World Peace Day*	*Peace Crane We Share One World. What Does Peace Feel Like?*

Table 2.1 displays the key features of social justice that underpinned this study, places them in a preschool and global context, and suggests children's literature that addresses these features. Using the above key features, this study analysed preschool storytime sessions to determine how children's literature might assist preschoolers' awareness and understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity.

One of the most thought-provoking failures of 21st Century discourse regarding teaching and education involves the inability to create a democratic vision of educational purpose (Kincheloe, 2003). Without such a vision educators are incapable of imagining what kinds of students they wish to cultivate, what kinds of abilities and skills they would need to acquire and what kind of world they would wish to create (Kincheloe, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). However, this research project and the participants involved in it envisioned the purpose of early childhood education as guiding young children to celebrate difference and diversity and to challenge injustice. A vision such as this "respects the untapped capacities of human beings and the role that education can play in producing a just, inclusive, democratic, and imaginative future" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 111). The term *inclusive* became quite pertinent to the research project reported in this dissertation. It was found that the preschool children involved in the study used exclusivist language when discussing difference and diversity at the beginning of the study. However, at the conclusion of the study the preschoolers were using inclusivist language when discussing these issues (see Chapter Seven).

SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL ISSUE IN THE 21st CENTURY

Owing to improved telecommunications and transport the planet is becoming increasingly "smaller" (Milanovic, 2003; Mittelman, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Sachs, 2002). Hence the need increases to examine global perspectives on a local scale to appreciate diversity, difference and human dignity through inclusion, understanding, compassion and the valuing of human rights. Racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and language diversity is increasing in schools throughout the Western world (Banks, 2004). Indeed 21st Century Australian students are members of a global community in a localised setting (Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003). Classrooms may be shared among Indigenous Australian, Anglo Australian, European Australian and Asian Australian classmates from varying religious, political, cultural and economic backgrounds. An optimist may claim that these classrooms are a rich source of cultural exchange. Yet this "melting pot" often breeds severe discontent. Siraj-Blatchford (1995) gives the example of 13 year old Ahmed Ullah who was stabbed to death in an English school playground because he had dark coloured skin. In all such abhorrent tragedies there are two victims: "the victim of racism and the dehumanised racist as a victim of a racist society" (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995 p. 10). Numerous academics, researchers, liberationists and educationalists (Freire, 1993; Greene, 1995; Klein, 1990; Mandela, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995) highlight the dehumanising effect that prejudice has, not only on the victims, but also on the perpetrators. Racism thwarts both from a fully human experience. The victims of racism, either dominant or dominated, "cannot have a normal relationship with themselves or with others. Racism destroys both parties; it dehumanises" (Klein, 1990, p. 17).

Racism, sexism and prejudice are problems in today's society (Baird & Rosenbaum, 1999; Chin, 2004; Sachs, 2002). Omeima Sukkarieh (2004), community liaison officer for the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), reported on the findings of research conducted nationally by the HREOC: "since 11 September 2001 in particular, Muslims and Arabs around Australia have reported increased levels of prejudice, discrimination and vilification and community leaders say these attitudes have caused fear, isolation and uncertainty within their communities" (p. 1). This research reports stories of harassment and abuse. It also

found that discrimination against other minorities - including Sikhs, Jews, Christina Arabs and non-Arab Muslims - was prevalent. Tom Calma (2007a; 2007b), Australian Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner, attests that race and racism are burning issues in Australian society.

These concerns highlight the need to educate children against racism, prejudice and violence; and to celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity. Many researchers and scholars, including Apple (2004), Connolly (2003), Darling-Hammond and Ancess (1996), Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006), Elenes (2002), Freire (1993), Giroux (1993, 1994) and Shannon (1989), have challenged educators to create classrooms and schools that are inclusive, give space for all voices and respect and recognition to all personal and cultural narratives. Indeed, education is a priority in combating the social ills of racism and prejudice (al-Hussein, 2000; Calma, 2007a, 2007b; Hollinsworth, 2006; Sukkarieh, 2004). A specific goal of the Australian HREOC is to help educate people to understand their rights as well as their responsibility to respect the rights of others (Sukkarieh, 2004). Gammage (1999) warns

> burying one's head in the sand is no solution. If one is aware then one can respond, can plan, can reflect. Humans do have choices; and noticing, documenting and being aware . . . does help. Knowledge is power; and with that knowledge comes the ability to project, hypothesis, to change, to adapt, to replan, to alter. (p. xii)

Therefore, bringing to light and discussing social justice issues regarding difference and diversity with young children gives them the knowledge and power to reflect and position themselves accordingly. In times of escalating intolerance, prejudice and violence, educators must "put the tools of inquiry into the hands of learners" (Lowe, 2002, p. 3). However, while children more than ever before need an education that equips them with awareness, understanding and skills to live harmoniously in a multicultural global society, today's schools are increasingly driven by standards, tests and accountability (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005). Will researchers and educators be remembered

> by the glitz, style, and banality of too much of our culture in McLuhan's electronic global village or by the substance of our efforts to rekindle an ethic of caring, community, and justice in a world driven too much by money, technology and weaponry? (Edelman, 2000, p. 33)

These concerns were echoed in an international study, consisting of 267 global philosophers and thinkers representing a range of political, religious, cultural and spiritual perspectives, which found five common values that were seen as fundamental and critical to effective functioning in daily life: respect, compassion, fairness, responsibility and honesty (Loges & Kidder, 1997). Yet, educators have little to assist them in how these values could be taught or promoted in everyday classroom situations (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005).

As we begin the 21st Century it is important that people of every race, religion, and nation unite to develop a shared vision of a world bound in justice, peace, and harmony (Scott King, 2000). Twenty-five Nobel Peace Prize laureates affirmed that the first decade of this new century be dedicated to peace and nonviolence. Sadly, at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, there does not seem to be much headway towards world peace (Singer, 2009). The year 2001, which saw the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on September 11 and instigated an insidious "war on terror", was devoted to nonviolence training and education (Scott King, 2000). It is obvious that education addressing peace, justice and harmony must be developed and continued. The queen of Jordan, Her Majesty Queen Noor al-Hussein (2000), states "in recent years we have witnessed in our region and elsewhere that with education and opportunity, even children can be a force for peace out of proportion to their years, breaking down the barriers of ignorance and prejudice through mutual respect and understanding" (p. 163). Education for peace and justice, that challenges injustice and inhumanity, is of paramount importance for not only future world harmony but also for human dignity on a global scale.

At the turn of the 20th Century it was recognised that education was a fruitful site to sow the seeds for a much needed just and peaceful world. The Global Campaign for Peace urges

> A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflicts constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity and respect the integrity of the Earth. Such learning cannot be achieved without intentional, sustained and systematic education for peace. (Hague Appeal for Peace, 2001, p. 1)

The Earth Charter Commission met at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Headquarters in Paris in 2000 and, through a process of worldwide dialogue (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005), drew up a framework for educating global citizens to nurture the protection of human dignity and to build a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. *The Earth Charter* calls for people to look for common ground while celebrating difference and diversity. It is underpinned by four themes: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence, and peace (Earth Council, 2002).

In *Global Perspectives: A statement on global education for Australian schools* (Global Education Project, 2002) social justice is inextricably linked to issues of global poverty and development, human rights, peace and conflict. It suggests a curriculum that is focused on the future must stress an approach that acknowledges these interconnections and promotes knowledge, skills and values that prepare young people to become involved in constructing solutions. Similarly, educators and policy makers must design an education curriculum that opposes social inequalities and helps students to examine their world critically to bring about substantive changes (Apple, 2004). Care of self, others and the planet should be "embraced as the main goal of education. Such an aim does not work against intellectual development or academic achievement. Rather, it supplies a firm foundation for both" (Noddings, 1995, p. 368). The greatest hope for humanity is to wholly engage young people with the global reality that we are all one in ways that interest, inspire and motivate them to understand and appreciate themselves, others, and the interdependent world in which they live; to move toward a belief in and love of justice and peace; and to take truly active strides in their own lives to help create a better world (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005).

It is quite obvious that social justice should be of paramount concern to researchers, academics and educators in the beginning of the 21st Century. The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that the aim of educators should be to prepare

> the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic,

national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. (Save the Children, 1997, Article 29. 1d, p. 109)

To address the United Nations' challenge to prepare children for responsible life in a multicultural society a curriculum that supports and promotes teaching for social justice must be implemented. Embracing a curriculum that supports and promotes teaching for social justice is not an easy task but an imperative one for a harmonious, just and peaceful future.

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Teaching for social justice is about educating students to value and care for themselves and others (intimate, close or distant) in an atmosphere of compassion, understanding and respect (Greene, 1995). It celebrates and positively recognises difference, diversity and human dignity while encouraging unity and solidarity (Greene, 1998; Rorty, 1989). Teaching for social justice challenges and counters stereotypes and upholds the dignity of each individual and/or group and it promotes freedom and peaceful practices in the classroom and beyond (Burns, 2004).

There are two essential beliefs that relate to and underpin teaching for social justice. The first belief is that there is injustice in the world where some people are consistently and undeservedly privileged while others are consistently and undeservedly disadvantaged (a discussion on white privilege follows later in this chapter). The second belief is that educators can be agents for change and interrupt (or challenge) the cycles of oppression of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, religion and others. Therefore, teaching for social justice means identifying oppression in its numerous forms and taking action in the classroom to challenge oppression (Russo, 2006; Bell, 2007).

Teaching for social justice may be conceptualized in two different, yet complementary ways (Hutchinson & Romano, 1998). One way is to employ strategies that afford students opportunities to experience and practice the traits and attributes that enable social justice to flourish. This may be achieved by allowing students real life opportunities in the classroom to handle conflict, trust one another and build a democratic community. Another way to view teaching for social justice, as conducted in this study, is to address specific topics relevant to social justice

issues as a class group. This can be done by examining social justice issues in the media and literature.

Social justice educators must be mindful that there are principles of practice in the teaching for social justice (Adams, 2007). These principles revolve around the upholding of all students and foregrounding this in classroom norms and guidelines for group behaviour. Importantly teaching for social justice must begin with "the students' worldview and experience as the starting point for dialogue or problem solving" (Adams, 2007, p. 33) and value, as outcomes of the learning process, personal awareness, growth and change.

The goals of teaching for social justice are to facilitate students' development of critical analytical tools, skills and attitudes necessary to understand oppression and their own socialisation within oppressive systems, and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to disrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviours in themselves and in the organisations and communities of which they are a part (Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998; Bell, 2007; Noddings, 2005). No one form of oppression, whether it be racism, sexism, classism, able-ism, heterosexism, ageism or religious oppression, is the base for all others and therefore all forms of oppression must be challenged and eradicated (Bell, 2007; Young, 1993). Teaching for social justice seeks to expose, critique, challenge and transform ideas and actions that oppress and/or subjugate any individual or group. Therefore, teaching for social justice is

> teaching what we believe ought to be – not merely where moral frameworks are concerned, but in material arrangements for people in all spheres of society. Moreover teaching for social justice is teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice means and what it might demand. (Greene, 1998, pp. xxix – xxx)

Teaching for social justice is a form of conscience raising (Adams, 2007; Freire, 1993; Greene, 1998) that encourages students to explore social justice issues where sensitivities are raised to the point that make injustices intolerable. This raising of consciousness and sensitivity does not separate principled action from sympathetic identification, rational judgment from emotion, and logical projection from care (Greene, 1998) as does Kant (1959) and, perhaps to an extent, Rawls (1971).

Teaching for social justice encourages students to not only engage with issues of social justice on a cognitive level but also on a sensitive and personal level.

Reflection and action

Teaching for social justice requires of the teacher and the students *reflection* and *action* (Freire, 1993; Greene, 1995, 1998; Torres, 2004). If social justice is only talked about, it is merely rhetoric; and if action is taken without reflection it becomes reactionary (Greene, 1995). Social justice educators make connections between reflection, awareness and action by helping students recognise a range of areas of influence in their daily lives, analyse the comparative risk factors in challenging discrimination and/or oppression in their network of relationships, and identify personal or group actions for change (Adams, 2007). A good starting point for reflection, awareness and action is classroom discussion. Although not directed to *classroom* discussion both Habermas (1979) and Young (1993) agree that discussion helps to alter people's preferences and perceptions relating to social justice issues. They refer to this as "communicative democracy". In classroom situations, then, discussion may help students challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, refine their perceptions of the interests and needs of others, understand their relations to others and process collective problems, aims and resolutions (Greene, 1998; Young, 1993). Classroom discussion encourages the student to clarify and justify her/his preferences, ideas and beliefs with a group that may or may not agree.

> By listening to others and trying to understand their experience and claims, persons or groups gain broader knowledge of the special relations in which they are embedded and of the implications of their proposals. These circumstances of a mutual requirement of openness to persuasion often transform the motives, opinions, and preferences of the participants. The transformation often takes the form of moving from being motivated by self-interest to being concerned with justice. (Young, 1993, p. 230)

These communicative spaces must be encouraged in classrooms where honest, open debate and multiple voices are heard. Educators can bring warmth and motivation into the classroom lives of young children: "we can bring in the dialogues and laughter that threaten monologues and rigidity. And surely we can affirm and reaffirm the principles that center around belief in justice and freedom and respect for human rights" (Greene, 1995, p. 43). Teaching for social justice can be used to motivate and incite creativity and imagination "so that the young may be awakened

to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds" (Greene, 1998, p. xiv). Therefore teaching for social justice is not simply an awareness of the existence of injustices and the respect and acknowledgement of diversity; it is an active engagement in, and commitment to, social transformation. This is reflected in the ideals of critical pedagogy and, because teaching for social justice aligns with critical pedagogy, it is appropriate to discuss this relationship.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy has a dual purpose: to empower teachers and to teach for empowerment (McLaren, 2003, p. xxxiv). Like teaching for social justice, critical pedagogy is about promoting social justice. It is based in the call for educators to become agents for positive social change and to transform existing social structures that oppress (Cooper & White, 2006; McLaren, 2003; Parker & Stovall, 2005). Critical pedagogy reaches beyond the basic distinction between process and content (the how and the what). It becomes a "metaphor for the process of interrogation, inquiry and action especially as applied to the scholarship that examines links between racism and schooling, and the socioeconomic frameworks for liberatory education" (Adams, 2007, p. 31). While some may debate that preschoolers do not have the power to transform existing social structures, the educators who participated in this research project asserted that, by exploring social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity, these preschoolers will begin to understand that there is a need for change, beginning with their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes.

Critical pedagogy involves critical thinking that requires engagement with morality and empathy, "and most episodes of critical thinking should be liberally sprinkled with turning points – points at which the thinker reaches toward the living other with feeling that responds to the other's condition" (Noddings, 1998, p. 161). It is understood that critical thinking must begin with the provocation of feelings if moral outcomes are a concern, and that we must care about the people, the causes and the problems to whom and to which we direct our thinking skills (Noddings, 1998, 2005). The use of stories may be a valuable starting point for critical thinking and moral and ethical study (Greene, 1995; Noddings, 1998, 2005). Certain stories may promote deep reflection and self-examination on specific social justice and/or

ethical issues. Stories may prompt self-examination of deep existential questions proposed by Weil (1977) and Noddings (1998): What is the "other" going through? Why do we ignore another's plight? Why do we harm others? Can we imagine ourselves as the other? For literature to be helpful in the shaping and influencing of moral and social attitudes "it has to affect readers – make them feel something. And it is those feelings that lead to lively discussion and reflection" (Noddings, 2005, pp. 133-34).

Upon reading the above discussion regarding the use of literature to inspire critical thinking one may consider that this research fits into what may be termed *critical literacy*. I have resisted this temptation and do not consider that what ensued during this research project was critical literacy but *was* indeed critical pedagogy with a balance of care. Eldersky and Cherland (2006) have voiced concern that critical literacy has become a "buzz term", and I tend to agree with them. They contend that many educators are simply using the term without thorough knowledge of, and commitment to critical literacy. Critical literacy instruction "includes the critique of social systems of dominance, injustice, and privilege, and it calls for systemic change" (Eldersky & Cherland, 2006, p. 17). While it may be said that, to a certain extent, this study was *grounded* in a critical literacy *approach* in that the stories and discussions encouraged critical thinking on the part of the educators and preschoolers regarding social justice issues, systemic change was not in the forefront of this critical thinking. The main aim was to raise awareness and sensitivities to social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity. It is hoped that the seeds of systemic change were planted in the minds of these very young children; however, it is beyond the scope of this study to make any claims that this did occur.

It may be asked: why focus a study that explores strategies to assist teaching for social justice (underpinned by the recognition paradigm) and is grounded in a critical approach in the early years? Authoritative literature (Dau, 2001; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2006; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002) points to the importance of the early years when teaching for social justice.

AN IMPERATIVE: TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS

Today's preschoolers are tomorrow's parents, citizens, leaders and decision makers (Connolly, 2003; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003; Noddings, 2005) and early childhood education sets the foundation for lifelong learning and participating productively in a multicultural society (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003).

> Current theorists, based on research on the affective and cognitive development of the young child, place an emphasis on the importance of beginning the study of global education during the earliest years of childhood. . . . To resolve world issues, protect the environment, seek viable means of employment, and ensure peace and tranquility within and between nations, tomorrow's citizen will need to be comfortable working cooperatively in settings with a diverse membership. (Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003, p. 18)

There is no doubt that throughout the preschool years children are not only becoming more conscious of their world and how to act in it but they are also developing their moral structures by absorbing the attitudes and values of their family, culture and society (Dau, 2001; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005). Children develop an understanding of the social world through a lengthy process of construction and they utilise what they see, hear and experience in their lives as a foundation for building an understanding of how people treat each other (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005). Therefore the preschool years are crucial in shaping cultural and racial understandings and are critical in forming attitudes toward diversity and difference (Mac Naughton, 2003a). However, prejudices form very early in life (Brown, 1998; Dau, 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003). The most common form of prejudice young children experience is through name-calling and/or through negative references to their gender, dress, appearance, skin colour, language or culture (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Name-calling, insulting, teasing and disrespectful behaviour are forms of passive violence and they should not be tolerated (Gandhi, 2000); yet these injustices are happening in schools every day (Quisenberry, McIntyre & Duhon, 2002).

Research has demonstrated that by the time children reach preschool age they have already become socially proficient in the ways they appropriate and manipulate racist discourses (Connolly 2003; Mundine & Giugni, 2006; Palmer, 1986; Van

Ausdale & Feagin, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). Numerous investigations initially pioneered in the early 1900s and repeated in a multiplicity of forms since then have revealed that children have the capability to distinguish racial differences and to develop negative attitudes and prejudices towards particular groups from the age of three (Ayers, 2004; Connolly, 2003; Ehrlich, 1973). An Australian study by Harper and Bonanno (1993) clearly shows Anglo-Australian preschoolers verbalising their negative bias against Indigenous Australian children. Observers documented comments such as "*You're the colour of poo*" and "*Rack off, wog; we don't want to play with you.*" Attitudes regarding race and sex roles "are manifesting themselves by the age of three, and may have formed earlier even than that" (Klein, 1990, p. 25).

Thus, early childhood educators share a major responsibility in teaching for social justice and fostering an anti-bias pedagogy that challenges racism and prejudice and upholds equity, justice and human dignity. Without intervention by teachers, "the racial attitudes and behaviours of students become more negative and harder to change as they grow older" (Banks, 2006, p. 145). However, many educators feel that only older children and adolescents are "those worthy of teaching important concepts as justice and equality; yet it is during the early years that the foundations of these attitudes are laid" (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995, p. xiii-xiv).

Of grave concern, however, is that a number of researchers discovered that many educators struggle to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to support and promote an anti-bias multicultural curriculum in their classrooms (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2006; Lingard, et al., 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2000). The Queensland Schools Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) identified "recognition of difference" as one of its four dimensions of productive pedagogies (Lingard, et al., 2001, p. 22). Very briefly, this dimension examines the degree to which non-dominant cultures are valued, upheld and included in actual classroom practice. A major discovery of the longitudinal study highlighted the inadequate recognition of difference in classroom practices. Analysis of data gathered by the QSRLS indicated that teachers, although committed to diversity, did not employ specific pedagogical strategies that would support recognition of difference in their classrooms (Lingard, et al., 2001).

How then, without specific strategies and appropriate attitudes, are educators supposed to implement interventions, as Banks (2006) has suggested, promoting positive recognition of difference and upholding human dignity? These educators should be assisted with and encouraged to implement a curriculum that "becomes a practice of freedom" (Shaull, 1996, p. 16) where children are guided towards an appreciation of difference and diversity while honouring peaceful and just practices and taking a stand against injustice. Such a curriculum, using appropriate pedagogical strategies, will prepare future global citizens to participate in an inclusive and respectful multicultural society and will go far towards creating a peaceful and just world. However, could a problem arise for such teaching if all the students share the one cultural, racial and homogeneous background?

WHAT IF ALL THE KIDS ARE WHITE?

This question became quite pertinent to this research project as most of the children involved in this study were of Anglo-Australian background and all children were from middle class families. Of the two children who were from non-Anglo backgrounds, one child was third generation Italian-Australian with fair complexion and blue eyes and one child was New Zealand Maori with darker skin and dark hair, whose family had recently emigrated from New Zealand.

Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) ask the above question when discussing anti-bias multicultural education. The term *anti-bias multicultural education* was used by Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) to describe their work and similarly the term could be used to describe the work of this study. This research project engaged in work that exposed prejudice and stereotypical beliefs among preschool children and set about challenging, with the aim of transforming, these beliefs through critical pedagogy regarding difference and diversity, and also upholding empathy, care and compassion for "others". Multicultural and anti-bias education "has broadened its scope and has shifted from a focus on cultural pluralism to critical thinking" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 3). The focus has moved from "appreciating diversity" to working toward social justice. The term *anti-bias multicultural education* is used to "embrace the 30-year history [of multicultural education] and to

emphasise the struggle towards social, economic and cultural equity" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 3).

As discussed previously researchers discovered that many teachers struggle to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to support and promote a curriculum that focuses on teaching for social justice. However, anti-bias multicultural education is even more problematic for teachers when the classroom consists of a homogeneous population of all white children (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Banks (2006), while calling for school-based reforms that might assist children to learn how to live together in civic, moral and just communities that respect and value the rights of all cultures, admits that "such efforts are made more difficult because a large percentage of students attend single-race schools" (p. 146). Therefore how can young children begin to understand other cultures and perspectives if they have never come into contact with such cultures and perspectives? Indeed, as stated previously, prejudices may have already formed before entering preschool (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Siraj-Blatchford (1995) cites examples of prejudice among children as young as three years of age against people with dark coloured skin. These children lived in exclusively white communities and adopted negative or stereotypical views of people with dark skin because they had no opportunity in the home or care/educational setting to come into contact with these people in a genuine sense. Educators need to give their students "the relevant experiences through images and activities which allow them to explore racial difference and be willing to deal with racial prejudice when it arises" (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995, p. 65). Very possibly these children, and those involved in this research project, were absorbing the societal assumption of white supremacy and were already experiencing white privilege.

White privilege

Although this study did not concentrate solely on ethnicity it is beneficial to explore a discussion on "whiteness" and white privilege owing to the fact that almost all the participants in this study (only one child in the research project would not experience white privilege) have and are experiencing white advantage, albeit, for some, at a subliminal level. The insidiousness of white privilege is indeed hard to fathom for a person who has been born into white privilege and has lived this privilege all her/his life. For white people it may be confronting to realise that the

unfair and cruel treatment of people with differently coloured skin has served their interest: the interest of the privileged – ordinarily the white, the male and the educated (Greene, 1998). Injustice and cruelty have perpetuated white privilege and dominance. Kozol (1991) goes so far as to say that in the areas of education and health care "we want the game to be unfair and we have made it so" (p. 223). In other words, at the expense of the dignity and status of others, white people choose to continue this privilege, this unfair advantage, this domination, to maintain our top position on the socioeconomic, cultural, hierarchical ladder which we ourselves have created.

In the contemporary western world, the recognition of difference and diversity seems indivisible from asymmetric dualisms and relationships of domination. Within contemporary western culture differences often generate and are used to validate hierarchies and relations of domination and power (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Children receive hierarchical messages from society with white at the top and black at the bottom (Brown, 1998). The message received indicates that people who do not have white skin are inferior. This evaluation is also made by white children "because they grow up in a society which socialises them into thinking in racist stereotypes, into believing that they are physically, mentally and culturally superior" (Brown, 1998, p. 13). Children as young as three have an understanding of systemic racial oppression and can create those patterns (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). From their observations Van Ausdale and Feagin (2002) explain that white children told Black and Asian children that they could not be leaders because only white people could be leaders. They noted that white children excluded children who did not have white skin from play and used racial epithets against them. However, no child with non-white skin treated a white child in this way.

Whiteness *is* an advantage for white people. Being white "enables us to assume we are the centre, the standard for what it means to be human, and releases us from careful thinking about the reality and consequences of racial discrimination" (Cooks & Simpson, 2007, p. 4). However, privilege, particularly white and/or male privilege, is difficult to see and understand for those who were born with access to resources and power (Kendall, 2006). Many white people struggle with their daily

lives and do not feel that they have advantage over or dominate anyone. Moreover, some people strongly deny the existence of white advantage. For those who enjoy privilege based on ethnicity, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation and/or class, it is normal – just how life is (Kendall, 2006).

However, even the poorest white person does not bear the additional stresses of racial discrimination that shape and determine the lives and expectations of people who do not have white skin (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). The reality is that white people do benefit from a system of unearned racial privilege (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 2005). The polemic is that other racial groups endure undeserved racial penalties (Howard, 1999). Middle class white Australians see *themselves* and hear *their* language on television shows, in movies, in advertisements, on birthday cards and in literature (Jones & Mules, 2001). It is quite a comfortable existence. However, consider Indigenous Australians: how often do they see themselves or hear their language on television shows, in movies, in advertisements, on birthday cards and in literature? It is clear that much of their everyday lived experience reinforces the fact that they are marginalised. Therefore, it must be considered that

> all whites, be they male or female, rich or poor, live in a protective racial bubble that gives them a sense of belonging and access to resources that are denied people of colour. Regardless of personal intentions, lifestyles, or political and social beliefs, all whites must confront the fact that they benefit from belonging to the group that currently dominates and defines the national and global economic, cultural, and political infrastructures. (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 35)

Many white people, even those who disapprove of racist practices, unconsciously believe that they are inherently superior and warrant holding power (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Kendall, 2006). Straus (2005), reporting on the 2003 Global Attitudes Study, stated that six in ten white people in the United States believed that their culture was superior to any other. This belief filters through to very young children who develop a sense of white superiority and an understanding of racial power codes early in life (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). Indeed, research conducted in the United States and Australia revealed that young children equated whiteness to national identity (Glover, 1996; Mac Naughton, 2004; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2002). Numerous studies carried out

in the mid 20th Century found that Anglo-American children never expressed a desire to be dark-skinned, while African American children did wish to be white-skinned (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). The conclusions of these studies were that children with dark skin saw themselves as deficient owing to the negative effects of racism and it was put forward by the US government that schools should be integrated. These conclusions, however, are problematic in that there was no concern regarding the pattern that white children displayed showing strong preference for own-race. This mirrored the widely held assumption that integration meant that black people must adapt to white society and not vice versa, positioning white society as superior (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Zora Neale Hurston (as cited in Fine et al., 2004a) wrote in her famous letter to the editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* following the United States Supreme Court's decision to end segregated public schools in the south, "there has been current belief that there is no greater delight to us [African Americans] than physical association with whites" (p. 3). This letter was written over 50 years ago yet it echoes in the struggles of the marginalised of today (Enns & Sinnacore, 2005; Freire, 1993; O'Donnell, Pruyn & Chavez Chavez, 2004; Weis & Fine, 2004). As Fine et al. (2004a) state that

> the struggle for academic racial justice has, indeed, been 'hijacked' by the better funded movement for White and elite privilege that founded, and currently governs, America. The public sector of public education has been fiscally hollowed, with the demand for equal resources trivialized into a (denied) quest to sit beside a White child. (p. 6)

This white supremacist arrogance perpetuates white privilege. In the United States (and the same can be said for most western countries), "while any racial group might view itself as superior, only the white group has the power to institutionalise that belief into laws, policies, practices and culture and to subordinate other groups based on that institutionally held power" (Kendall, 2006, p. 21). Problems are apparent when concepts of equality and equity are implemented. Equality implies sameness in treatment. However, if one embraces recognition and celebration of difference, then the concept of equality is challenged. The insidious claim of "reverse discrimination" or the "colour blind" approach implies that the "playing field is level." The colour blind phenomenon is yet another manifestation of racism that perpetuates the privilege of white supremacy (O'Donnell, et al., 2004; Parker & Stovall, 2005).

Many white people state that they do not "see" people's skin colour and that we are all equal. However, from the above discussions it is clear that we are not "all equal" and the playing field is not level.

Equality and equity issues regarding the recognition of difference are important issues as the world becomes "smaller" owing to globalisation and the aim of protecting human rights and upholding social justice should be shared globally (Kelly, 2004). Globalisation highlights social justice as important in a world wide sense. However, Amin (2005) asserts that globalisation is yet another expression of white Western supremacy and "is nothing but a new way in which the inherently imperialist nature of the system asserts itself. In this sense it can be said that 'globalisation' is a euphemism for that forbidden word, imperialism" (p. 28). Thus, there is strong debate that globalisation may perpetuate white privilege and social injustice. Notwithstanding this debate regarding the power of globalisation, it is clear – regardless of whether one observes globalisation as a guise for imperialist activities or as a "Global Village" concept - that the idea of white hegemonic privilege and supremacy must be challenged.

Many contend that the fight against white privilege and white supremacy must begin with educating the young children of white society (Apple, 2004; Brown, 1998; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Noddings, 2005). Teaching about whiteness "is about exposing contradictions, about pulling away the layers of rhetoric and sense-making that have maintained white privilege. . . . racism exists, social structures and individuals with power in these structures carry and dispense racial privilege and discrimination" (Simpson, 2007, p. 14). However, teaching about white privilege also stresses that simultaneously there must be the message of hope, possibility and transformation: "to take on the knowledge of racism and whiteness, how they work and their consequences, is to simultaneously reach for a different kind of reality" (Simpson, 2007, p. 14). This is critical education; this is teaching for social justice.

From the above discussions it is clear that social justice is an important issue in the 21st Century and that teaching for social justice is of paramount importance to educators as we begin this new millennium. It is also clear that teaching for social

justice must begin in the early years; however, this is made more difficult if students are enmeshed in all white classrooms. Herein lies the importance of investigating strategies that will assist early childhood educators to implement a curriculum that supports and promotes teaching for social justice regarding issues of difference, diversity and human dignity.

EXPLORING SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Many researchers and academics (Klein, 1990; Kroll, 2002; Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Machet, 2002; Saxby & Winch, 1991; Sheahan-Bright, 2002; Stephens, 1992) concur that texts represent cultural, social, political and economic ideologies, values and attitudes which represent certain readings of the world, thus socialising their readers. Indeed, "as children listen to stories, as they take down the books from the library shelves, they may, as Graham Greene suggests in *The Lost Children,* be choosing their future and the values that will dominate it" (The Plowden Report, 1967, Sec. 595). Although this was written over 40 years ago its message is still pertinent today. Moreover, the reader may be left ineffectual, impressionable and vulnerable if a text is blindly accepted (Luke & Freebody, 1997).

Young readers subliminally absorb the attitudes, values and beliefs of the author (Klein, 1990, p. 14). The following reflection of a Jamaican student's experience in an English school, cited in Klein (1990), explains how readers may be left vulnerable and powerless if underlying values and attitudes are not challenged:

> The teacher read a book called *The Little Piccaninny* which I thought was ridiculous. It put across a picture of little black girls being really dim and stupid. She looked at me and said, "We have a little Piccaninny in our class, haven't we?" I was very upset as I felt I was thought of as being as stupid as this little girl. These sorts of books are damaging to the black child and other children. This was the only black book I came across at school. (p. 26)

Indeed, children shape their attitudes regarding themselves and others from what they hear and see around them (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). These attitudes are formed from their families, their friends, the *books* that they read or listen to, and the media to which they are exposed. For many children this incorporates racial attitudes, with children as young as three feeling discriminated against (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995).

It is often not the characters *in* the books who are of concern to teachers who are trying to heighten students' awareness of social justice issues but the ones left *out* of books: people with disabilities, those of differing ethnic backgrounds and adventurous female heroines, to name but a few, whose absence from texts conditions readers subliminally that these people are unimportant. A critical approach to literacy and reading, remembering that this research project is not actually referring to critical literacy, assists the reader in exposing whose voice is dominant, whose is silent and what injustices are being depicted as the norm.

The critical approach to reading asks readers to examine the systems of meaning that run both consciously and unconsciously in texts, as well as in mainstream culture, to privilege some and marginalise others. This approach

> includes a focus on social justice and the role that each of us plays in challenging or helping to perpetuate the injustices we identify in our world. . . To prepare literate individuals for the 21st century, we need to do more than to teach them how to decode and comprehend texts. (Leland et al., 2005, p. 259-260)

What is needed now is for children to understand critically the ideologies of texts and how texts position certain people and, indeed, the reader.

Books that authentically, respectfully and sympathetically treat a diversity of cultures, beliefs and perspectives demonstrate to the reader that other realities, apart from one's own, exist and have the right to do so. Nodelman (1988) cautions:

> If we are not conscious that other cultures offer different and, for those who live within them, equally satisfactory definitions of meaning and value, and that consequently, these cultures postulate quite different but equally satisfactory realities, then we are doomed to a dangerous solitude, a blindness that amounts to an unconscious form of arrogance. (p. 232)

Picture books have undergone a profound transformation over the past few years, with authors respectfully exploring social justice issues such as sexuality, gender, culture, ethnicity, colour and social responsibility (Wolk, 2004). The vicarious experience of reading/listening that exposes children to other cultures, races and viewpoints is of great significance to guiding children to an appreciation of difference and diversity (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995). A story is not simply an arid bit of information, nor is it merely a set of entertaining circumstances (Lowe, 2002). A genuine story is a powerful human experience sharing universal truths that can

impact on readers' lives. It can take the reader to a distant objective viewpoint and simultaneously take her/him close to the emotion of the human character in the drama. The reader safely shares the experience. This vicarious experience can be further extended in the preschool setting by conducting group discussion of the story immediately after it is read.

It is well documented (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hansen, 2004; Rosenhouse, 1997; Short, 1995; Sipe, 2000; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman and Owocki, 2005) that discussion following storytime gives children the opportunity to extend their experiences vicariously. This may allow them to engage actively in rethinking how they view their world. This is particularly beneficial in classrooms where the student population is homogeneous. Hansen (2004) suggests that the most important feature of discussion after storytime is that "children talk through ideas, emotions, understandings and reactions beyond their immediate experiences. Ideas filter through the opinions and responses of others, engaging children in actively rethinking how they view the world" (p. 117). Could reading and discussing stories that confront social justice issues help young children to reflect upon and clarify their own conceptions of social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity? By exposing students to a variety of literature educators can "help them to understand the similarities and differences among different religions, cultures and languages. Most importantly, books allow issues to be raised and false notions can be challenged sensitively" (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995, p. 76).

Stories have an effect on people (Protherough, 1983). Didactic, overtly revolutionary or doctrinal literature is not necessary "when literary works of art have the capacity to move readers to imagine alternative ways of being alive" (Greene, 1995, p. 101). Thus, literature may have a transformative effect on readers encouraging them to explore possible alternatives to the present situation. Masterful, significant and inspiring literary works have lifted the imaginations of adults for many decades (Greene, 1995). This research project supported this idea and extended this notion to include very young children.

Literature provides a possible starting point for critical thinking and the philosophical examination of ethics and morality and "through it students may come to question the 'givenness' of their own lives" (Noddings, 1998, p. 160). Therefore the judicious use of literature may not only encourage the reader's empathy and compassion for another's plight and history, but it may also deepen self-understanding. Indeed, the teaching of literacy (which includes examining children's literature) should serve to promote democracy and an appreciation for diversity, empower marginalised groups and enhance reader self-esteem (Meredith, Steele & Kikusova, 2001).

Research considering social justice and children's literature

Over the last few years there has been a growing research interest in teaching for social justice. Yet it is noted with some concern that most of the literature emanating from this research regarding ethnicity, gender, class and agency in education has mainly focused on older children or students in higher education (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). However, recent studies in the United States and the United Kingdom (Arizpe & Styles, 2002; Burns, 2004; Damico & Riddle, 2004; Galda & Beach, 2001; Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005; Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe & Waugh, 2004; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005; Wolk, 2004) attest to the successful use of children's literature to initiate critical discussion regarding unjust practices and teach for social justice in the *primary school* classroom.

Whitmore et al. (2005) synthesised critical lessons from research during the past several decades to share a transactional view of early literacy development. They reported that listening and responding to shared book experiences (storytime) allowed group members to push one another to think more critically and glean deeper understandings of the text. Whitmore et al. (2005) contended that critical texts, addressing social justice issues such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability and socioeconomic status, led children to search for answers to powerful questions about these issues. They found that, by raising and resolving questions through critical social texts, children were presented with intellectual challenges that connected new ideas to their personal understandings of the world.

Leland et al. (2005) found that undertaking a critical approach to storytime heightened first grade students' awareness of social justice issues and created a harmonious classroom atmosphere. Arizpe and Styles (2003) examined British children's responses to the picture book *Lily Takes a Walk* (Kitamura, 1998) and found that group discussions (usually teacher-led) helped readers work together to arrive at more complex interpretations of the pictorial text. The researchers were struck by the intellectual seriousness, as well as the enjoyment, with which the children viewed the book. These children were engrossed by the task and reacted strongly to the pictorial text, articulating not only likes and dislikes but also ethical and moral perceptions.

All the above studies were undertaken in formal school settings. Little investigation has occurred at the preschool level. Furthermore, although anti-bias curricula that aim to foster children's development through addressing social diversity and equity issues have considerable currency in Australia, "the child's understandings of social diversity and equity upon which they are based remain poorly theorised" (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 1). It appears then, that the voices, opinions, theories and ideas of children regarding their conceptions and understandings of social justice issues have not been considered to any great extent in previous studies.

A SOCIALLY JUST MODE OF INQUIRY?

Not only are children's voices often unheard in research endeavours but also those of teacher participants are often devalued or silenced (Walsh et al., 1993). Indeed, some commentators insist that for too long educational researchers have disengaged from the field of practice (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006; Tate, 2006), thus ignoring the positives that practitioners can bring to educational research. Ignoring the knowledge, skills and expertise of research participants seems, to me, inequitable and socially unjust. However, Grace (2008) suggests that there is a contemporary research movement that is designed to enhance "social inclusion, social cohesion and social justice in the research process" (p. 224). Many cite participatory action research as a socially just mode of inquiry where all participants' knowledge, skills and expertise are valued and represented throughout the research project (Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001). In participatory

action research participants become co-researchers by setting the schedule, collecting and analysing data and using the findings to improve their situations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Through the exploration of literature and research regarding teaching for social justice, wide gaps in the current body of knowledge have been revealed. Firstly, although it is clear that social justice is an important educational issue in the 21st Century, many educators believe that these concerns should be explored in the upper primary to tertiary levels. Although such research is beginning to be carried out in the US and the UK in lower primary/elementary classrooms, there has been little research undertaken in preschool settings. However, research has shown that the most advantageous years to begin such study are the early years. Therefore, this study was positioned in preschool settings before formal schooling.

Secondly, although early childhood educators understood that positive recognition of difference (which underpins teaching for social justice) was important they were not employing appropriate pedagogical strategies to support and promote such a curriculum (Lingard, et al., 2001). As explained briefly in Chapter One, transformative and productive ways of sharing the teaching/learning experience that facilitate preschoolers' understandings of social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity had seen little exploration. For this reason this study examined specific pedagogical strategies that would assist the early childhood educators participating in the research project to teach for social justice.

Thirdly, in traditional research paradigms, a problem of representation has become apparent. It was revealed that when research examined pedagogies to assist in teaching for social justice the ideas, opinions, thoughts and beliefs of children regarding social justice issues were not taken into account. Their voices were not heard. As also elucidated in Chapter One, this research project is greatly influenced by the new sociology of childhood that argued that children are capable and competent participants who actively shape their lives (Corsaro, 2005; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005). Therefore, this study aimed to listen carefully to what the children were saying regarding social justice issues raised during storytime sessions and through action research act upon the preschoolers' articulated understandings.

Another problem regarding representation in traditional research was that teacher participants' knowledge, skills and expertise have not been valued. The above indicated that such research did not place importance on a socially just mode of inquiry. For this reason I sought a socially just mode of inquiry that would value the teacher participants as well as the preschoolers, giving them a voice.

At this point it is advantageous to examine the literature that impacted on how this study viewed children and childhood. This view also has implications for the study in that children were understood to be competent research participants who had ideas worthy of respect and attention.

THE SOCIOCULTURAL VIEW OF CHILDHOOD

Most theorists acknowledge the great importance of older members of a society in guiding the assimilation of the younger members into that society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Corsaro, 2005; Piaget, 1968a, 1968b; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Indeed human growth and development is a cultural process whereby "people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in the light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities" (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 3-4). The values and ways of behaving within a community or society are transmitted through the behaviours modelled by older members of a society (Bandura, 1986) and also through the dialogues between older and younger members within that society (Vygotsky, 1978).

> As a biological species, humans are defined in terms of our cultural participation. We are prepared by both our culture and biological heritage to use language and other cultural tools and to learn from each other. Using such means as language and literacy, we can collectively remember events that we have not personally experienced – becoming involved vicariously in other people's experience over many generations. (Rogoff, 2003, p. 3)

Language plays a large role in facilitating thought (Bruner, 1990; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Studies highlight the essential two-way relationship between language development and the social context in supporting interaction in the early years (Bruner, 1990; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Social constructivist theory is founded on the basic principle that development occurs on the social level within a cultural context, and language is the main tool by which adults educate young children into a specific view of the world (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Social

experiences shape the way individuals think and understand the world (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Thus the significant adults in a child's life and the experiences that these adults bring to that child's life influence how this child views him/herself and others.

Language is not simply a form of expression but also a basic tool for constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962). Therefore, when teachers use language and encourage children to do the same and engage in open discussion, they are promoting and supporting thought as well as speech (Trawick-Smith, 2006). The educators involved in this research project used language as a tool to enhance critical reflection on social justice issues in children's literature read to their preschoolers. They also used language and the social interaction of storytime to guide their preschoolers' learning and thinking regarding these social justice issues to uphold difference, diversity and human dignity. This is referred to as scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1962).

Vygotsky's theory is one of the few that values the influence of culture on development, which indicates that individual learners can, in turn, have an impact on culture (Trawick-Smith, 2006). This is of great consequence to this research project. If we can guide children to appreciate difference, diversity and human dignity we may be building a culture that upholds and celebrates these traits.

THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDHOOD

This study is also greatly influenced by the new sociology of childhood that believes children are active participants in their lives and instead of viewing children as "becoming adults," childhood is seen as a valid stage of being in its own right (Corsaro, 2005; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005). Childhood, as a structural form, is a permanent category of society that does not disappear, even though its membership changes continuously and its nature and the understanding of it vary historically and culturally (Corsaro, 2005). It may be difficult to acknowledge childhood as a structural form because traditional theories tell us that childhood is exclusively seen as a period when children are primed and socialised for entry into society. However, "children are already a part of society from their births, as childhood is part and parcel of society" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 3).

Therefore, while children's opinions may be influenced by the significant adults in their lives, these opinions are considered important, valid and trustworthy. This new way of conceptualising childhood stems from the growth of constructivist and interpretive perspectives in sociology (Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). These perspectives see childhood and indeed all social constructs (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender and class) as being defined, interpreted,and debated in processes of social action (Corsaro, 2005). Constructivist and interpretive perspectives, when applied to the sociology of childhood, argue that "children and adults alike are active participants in the social construction of childhood and in the interpretive reproduction of their shared culture. In contrast, traditional theories view children as 'consumers' of the culture established by adults" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 7). Thus the constructivist model of childhood socialisation views children as agents and eager learners. This perspective, which underpins this research project, sees the child as actively constructing her/his social world and her/his place in it (Corsaro, 2005).

Young children interact and actively gather information not only from adults but also from the environment in which they live: from what they view on television, from what they hear and see in their community and from their relationships with other children. Through this interactive process of not only internalising opinions and ethics of family, culture and society, but also interpreting and reproducing (Corsaro, 2005) these opinions and ethics "children develop their own moral structures" (Nixon & Aldwinckle, 2005, p. 90).

MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG CHILD

Moral values have been defined quite differently by various theorists over many years: Maccoby (1968, p. 229) describes moral values as beliefs "shared in a social group about what is good or right"; Piaget (1968) understood morality as the respect the individual has for rules; Kohlberg (1984) identified it as the development of a sense of justice; and Siegel (1982) saw moral values as simply the development of a sense of *fairness*. Numerous studies into the moral development of young children in contemporary western society have been carried out over the last century (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Kohlberg, 1969, 1984; Piaget, 1968; Turliel, 1983).

Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1969,1984), using Piaget's (1950) theory of cognitive development, proposed six progressive stages of moral development which were then divided into three broad levels. He set preschool age children at the first (Preconventional) level and concluded that young children did not act out of moral convictions but for reward or fear of punishment. However, his studies are coming under criticism. One criticism is that Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral decision making (used in his studies to determine moral reasoning) was biased towards boys and against girls (Gilligan, 1982). Kohlberg placed logical, rule-based moral reasoning above that of caring and empathy.

Gilligan (1982) proposed the theory that at some stage in development boys are encouraged to see themselves as separate from others, while girls are encouraged to relate in a caring way to others. This then would explain the "moral deficiency" of females when exposed to Kohlberg's test. Another criticism of Kohlberg's research is that he did not devote very much research time and energy to children under the age of ten (Cohen, 2002). Yet a further criticism of Kohlberg's research is that it does not readily transfer to all cultures (Nixon & Aldwinckle, 2005).

Both Piaget's (1950) and Kohlberg's (1969, 1984) studies could be considered naïve (Cohen, 2002). "Part of the naiveté stems from the fact that Piaget's Switzerland in the 1920s either was a very different society or was perceived as such" (Cohen, 2002, p. 75). Exposure to the media and social changes (e.g., single parent families, divorce, second marriages, dual incomes, technology, globalisation and multicultural societies) may have far-reaching effects on children's development, especially moral development (Cohen, 2002; Nixon & Aldwinckle, 2005). This may, in part, account for the disparity between findings of recent investigations into the moral development of young children today and those of Piaget and Kohlberg.

Research conducted towards the latter half of last century and into the 21st Century (Arthur, Davison & Stow, 2000; Connolly, 2003; Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Dunn, 1988; Corsaro, 2005; Fein, 1984) contradict and reshape the ideas of Piaget and Kohlberg, who argued that very young children had little capacity for developing social understandings and competencies, and therefore social justice awareness. These recent studies reflect Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) argument that children develop

as social beings from birth - and are not egocentric as Piaget (1950, 1968a) and Kohlberg (1984) would claim.

Some theorists and researchers (Nicholls, 1978; Selman, 1980, 1981), agreeing with Piaget and Kohlberg, have suggested that preschool children are not capable of taking the perspective of another within a conflict to arrive at a mutually satisfying outcome. However, more recent empirical inquiries (Barglow, Contreras, Kavesh & Vaughn, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberle & Wahl, 2000; Vestal and Jones, 2004; Youngstrom, et al., 2000) challenge this view and argue that young children are capable of learning the foundational skills for solving conflicts. Research has shown that children as young as four years of age have a natural sense of justice (Turliel, 1983) and they can understand that others have opinions that conflict with their own (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995). Moreover, research has found that four year olds can and do see things from the perspective of others (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995).

Indeed, researchers have observed children as young as two years of age demonstrating empathetic behaviour (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2000; Hoffman, 1975, 1991; Lindon, 1998; Smith & Cowie, 1994). The combination of empathy and altruism is referred to as prosocial behaviour (Lindon, 1998). The key features of prosocial behaviour are that "children show intentional, voluntary behaviour which is intended to benefit someone else" (Lindon, 1998, p. 156). Hoffman's (1975, 1991) research has identified four stages in the development of empathy, or showing concern and care for others: Firstly, babies show sympathy for other babies who are crying by crying themselves; secondly, in the second year of life, children will comfort other children who are upset by offering items that they themselves find comforting (e.g., a teddy bear); thirdly, preschool children will feel empathy with people whom they have never met (e.g., a child may appear visibly distressed by the death of the father in the movie *The Lion King*); lastly, during the middle childhood period children will relate to the individual human suffering caused by larger social problems (e.g., war or poverty). It is clear that young children extend themselves to understand, appreciate and care about others (Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003).

From the above smorgasbord of research into the young child's moral development this study embraced the following position:

Preschool children *are* capable of making moral judgments. Preschool children are capable of understanding another's point of view. They are also capable of displaying empathy towards others. Preschool children can be encouraged and scaffolded to enter into Hoffman's (1995, 1991) last stage of empathy development whereby they understand and are sensitive to the "bigger picture" of human suffering. Preschool children are developing ideas of what it means to belong to a society and how to act in that society. They are also developing conceptions of social justice that belong to their society. Therefore, it is of importance that this research project examines these burgeoning conceptions of social justice and investigates ways that will assist young children's awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity to promote a just and peaceful world. To do this, this research project addressed the gaps that have been previously highlighted on pages 56–57 of this chapter.

The study was set in the early years involving preschool children between the ages of three and five years of age. The specific strategy of exploring social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity through children's literature (which had proved successful overseas in primary/elementary classrooms) was explored to help the early childhood educators involved in the study implement, support and promote teaching for social justice in their preschool classrooms. Using action research cycles the children's voices moved the study forward (see Chapter Seven). Over the 10 week action research project their ideas, beliefs, theories and understandings regarding the social justice issues highlighted in the picture books were continually built upon to raise their awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity. The employment of participatory action research gave the early childhood educators co-researcher status that valued their knowledge, skills and expertise; gave each a valued voice; and allowed them to set the research schedule, collect and analyse data and use the findings.

SUMMARY

This chapter began *Part One: Initial Reflections* and proposed a working definition of social justice for this study and critiqued literature regarding the importance of social justice as an educational issue in the 21st Century. It outlined teaching for social justice and put forward the idea that teaching for social justice must begin in the early years. The chapter discussed that this undertaking falls under the umbrella of critical pedagogy and within the concept of care. It was discussed, however, that educators struggle to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to implement such a curriculum. Furthermore, it was explained that this difficulty is compounded if all the children are white and a discussion regarding white privilege followed. The strategy of employing children's literature as a vicarious experience to initiate critical discussion regarding social justice issues was discussed with reference to successful research carried out in elementary schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. The chapter then exposed the gaps in the current body of literature that this research project addressed. The chapter concluded by highlighting literature that informed the study's view of children and childhood.

The next chapter continues to set the theoretical and conceptual framework for this research project. It highlights that the study was framed by a participatory worldview that identifies human beings as co-creating their world. The dimensions of a participatory worldview are outlined. The chapter also highlights that critical theory helped frame this research project. The philosophies that underpin my worldview for this research project are examined. It is explained that the thinking of Levinas, existential thought, an ethic of care and feminist perspectives permeated the research project with the aim of building caring, trusting, collaborative and empathetic relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF A PARTICIPATORY WORLDVIEW

> *Too often, we who do empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect how we do research to our theoretical and political commitments. Yet if critical inquirers are to develop a "praxis of the present", we must practice in our empirical endeavours what we preach in our theoretical formulations. Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of 'developing progressive groups' requires research designs that allow us as researchers to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work. Our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail.* (Lather, 1991, p. 80)

INTRODUCTION

It is the intention of this chapter, and also the following chapter in *Part One: Initial Reflections* to address Patti Lather's (1991) concerns and examine my own "frameworks of understanding" (p. 80) about this research project. These frameworks helped develop "a praxis of the present" (Lather, 1991, p. 80) which will be discussed in the remainder of *Part One: Initial Reflections*. By examining the frameworks and value commitments that underpin the current research project this chapter, and the ones that follow, will facilitate an understanding of how these frameworks and value commitments have, to use Lather's terms, inserted themselves into my empirical work.

Previous chapters reflected on and stressed the imperative to undertake research that examines strategies to assist early childhood educators in supporting and promoting teaching for social justice. Chapter One introduced this dissertation and outlined the research questions and the purpose of the research project. Chapter Two provided a working definition of social justice and reviewed relevant literature regarding teaching for social justice. It highlighted the fact that when investigating strategies to support and promote teaching for social justice in primary/elementary classrooms in Britain and the United States children's literature was found to be very useful.

This chapter continues outlining the theory and philosophies that underpin the research project. Kincheloe (2003) asserts that "Our understanding of an educational situation depends on the context within which we encounter it and the theoretical frames which the researcher brings to the observation. These ideological frames are the glasses through which we see the world" (p. 84-85). Consequently the lens through which I view the world and, indeed, this research project, is of paramount importance to, not only this chapter but to the dissertation as a whole. Therefore, this chapter firstly discusses the participatory worldview through which I perceive the world and this study. This worldview emphasises participation, relationships, interrelationships and has a deeply spiritual aspect. My participatory worldview complements this research project's methodology and how data were collected and analysed (see Chapter Four). This chapter then highlights that critical theory, also, forms part of this research project's framework. The chapter concludes by discussing the philosophical thinking that sustains and supports my participatory worldview and underpins this research project.

THE PARTICIPATORY WORLDVIEW

A challenge to change our worldview is central to our times (Heron, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Sachs, 2002; Skrbina, 2001; Tarnas, 1991). Indeed, nearly three decades ago Berman (1981) argued that a new, holistic and ecological worldview was needed before we destroy our society and our environment. Not long after, Harding (1986) suggested that "the categories of Western thought need destabilisation" (p. 245). Later in this chapter it is suggested that philosophers of ethics have struggled (and are still struggling) for a new ethical way of thinking to address the problems of modernity: social fragmentation, ecological ruin and spiritual impoverishment (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003). It is also clear that there is a need to address the epistemological errors (the understandings that propel individualism, capitalism and consumerism) built into our thinking by this modernity, that have consequences for justice and ecological sustainability (Bateson, 1972). The 20th Century's substantial and far-reaching breakdown of so many structures (e.g., cultural, philosophical, scientific, religious, moral, social, economic, political, ecological) suggests that this deconstruction is necessary prior to a new worldview (Tarnas, 1991). There is now evident a widespread and constantly growing collective impetus in the Western mind to articulate a holistic and participatory worldview and

this is visible in virtually every field (Skolimowski, 1994; Tarnas, 1991). This collective consciousness appears to be "in the grip of a powerful archetypal dynamic in which the long-alienated modern mind is breaking through… to rediscover its intimate relationship with nature and the larger cosmos" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 440). This shift in consciousness has strongly influenced my worldview and research philosophy which, consequently, has greatly impacted on this doctoral research project: from the choice of research design through to how the co-researchers and I viewed ways of knowing and data collection and analysis (discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter Four). My worldview is a participatory one.

The positivist worldview, that has been considered the gold standard of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), sees science as disconnected from everyday life and the researcher as subject (who remains objective) in a world of separate objects; mind and reality are divided; knowledge is not connected to power. Although it may be said that worldviews do co-exist rather than replace one another, with others I argue that this secular, dualistic, reductionist worldview, often referred to as a mechanistic worldview, may no longer be helpful (Heron, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skolimowski, 1994; Skrbina, 2001; Tarnas, 1991). The new, emergent worldview is described as

> systemic, holistic, relational, feminine, experiential, but its defining characteristic is that it is participatory: our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author. We participate in our world, so that the "reality" that we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing. The participative metaphor is particularly apt for action research, because as we participate in creating our world we are already embodied and breathing beings *who are necessarily acting* – and this draws us to consider how to judge the *quality* of our acting. (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 7)

A participatory worldview sees human beings (along with their environment) as co-creating their world. To do this we must be situated and reflexive. We must be "explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 7). A participatory worldview competes with positivism and the deconstructive postmodern or poststructural alternatives; however, simultaneously, the participatory worldview draws on these paradigms. It argues, as positivists do, that there is a "reality" (a primal givenness of being which

we participate in and contribute to) and realises that as soon as we endeavour to articulate this we enter a world of language and expression that is culturally framed. This articulation draws on deconstructionist perspectives.

However, from the action researcher's perspective it is argued that the importance that "deconstructive and poststructuralist perspectives place on the metaphor as 'text' is limiting. There is a lot of concern with discourse, text, narrative, with the crisis of representation, but little concern for the relationship of all this to knowledge and action" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 6). The issue of action remains basically under-addressed in postmodern research discourse (Lather, 1991). Postmodern perspectives have analysed the modernist world and have exposed the crisis it is in but have not moved beyond the problems to examine possible solutions.

The "linguistic turn" in research practice, taken up by poststructuralists, influenced our understanding that knowledge is socially constructed. However, philosophy and theoretical frameworks are struggling to keep up with today's world (Braidotti, 2003). This current historical research moment (to use Denzin and Lincoln's [2005] term for grouping certain trends in qualitative research history) is concerned with the "action turn" which builds upon the linguistic turn by considering how we might "act in an intelligent and informed way in a socially constructed world" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2). The linguistic turn examined our ailing world through the metaphor of the world as "text"; however, the need to pay attention to the deeper structures of reality that lie under and behind scientific and linguistic phenomena (for an extended discussion see Berry, 1999) calls for a more creative and constructive worldview. This new worldview "can be based on the metaphor of participation" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 7). Figure 3.1 shows the characteristics or dimensions of this participatory worldview which are interrelated: the participatory and evolutionary nature of the given cosmos; the practical being and acting in the cosmos; the relational and ecological form of the cosmos; the meaning and purpose we place on our being, acting and knowledge; and the extended epistemologies that inform our acting.
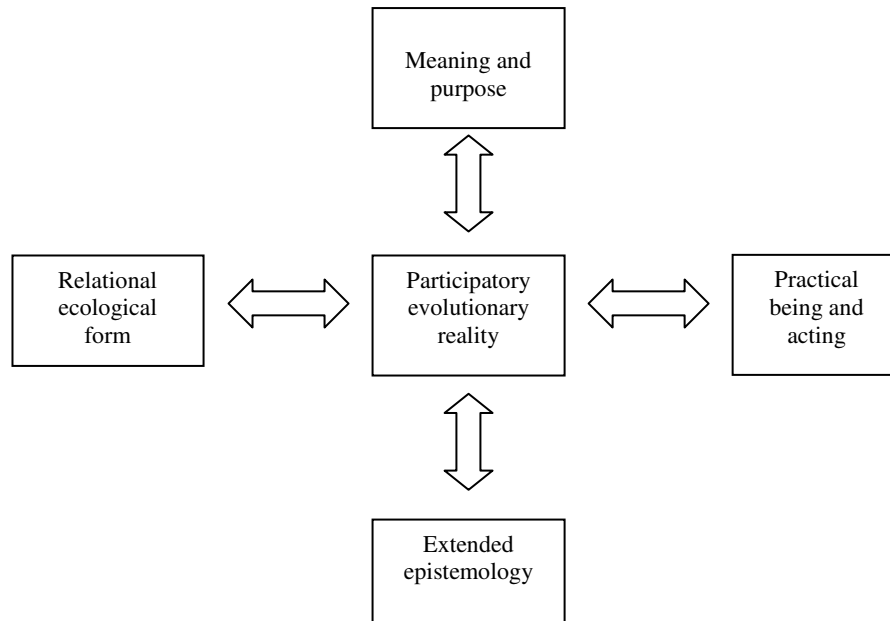
Figure 3.1 Characteristics/Dimensions of a Participatory Worldview
(Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 7)

Participatory evolutionary reality (Figure 3.1)

Participatory evolutionary reality is at the centre of a participatory worldview which understands the nature of the cosmos that we co-habit and co-create. It is founded on the assumption that we are not acting as independent parts but as an integrated, interconnected and interacting whole (Laszlo, 1996, 2003). Every human being is interconnected with one another and the environment, acting and co-evolving as a whole. Continuing from this assumption is the argument that opposes modernist and, perhaps to some extent, postmodernist ontological thinking that matter and mind are distinct substances.

> Mind and matter are not distinct substances. The Cartesian error was to identify both matter and consciousness as kinds of substances and not to recognise them as phases; that mind is the dynamic form inherent in the matter itself. Mind is the self-becoming, the self-organisation – the *self-creation* – of matter. Without this, matter could never produce mind. Consciousness and matter, mind and body, subject and object, process and substance . . . always go together. They are a unity, a nondual duality. (de Quincey, 1999, p. 23)

Additionally all things in the universe are in constant and enduring communication with one another (Laszlo, 2003). Such a worldview discounts an analytic paradigm and looks to an evolutionary, emergent and reflexive one in which the universe is continually self-ordering and self-creating (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Tarnas,

1991). This perspective highlights the fact that human beings are centres of consciousness simultaneously independent of and connected to, in and with the rest of creation (both human and more-than-human) through constant communion.

Our realities are co-created through participation with our world (Heron, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skolimowski, 1994; Skrbina, 2001; Tarnas, 1991). So our spiritual, emotional consciousness and our physical body (our *bodymind*) craft with the whole of creation the realities that we experience. There is a binding relationship as "Subject and object are interdependent. Thus participation is fundamental to the nature of our being, an *ontological given*" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 8). This leads us to examine how, as participants in this interdependent co-creating cosmos, we engage with, and act in, our world.

The practical being and acting in the cosmos (Figure 3.1)

The human being acts in a participatory universe. The baby cries and the parent feeds her; the toddler takes her first tentative steps while holding a sibling's hand; the child kicks a ball to her friends; the teenager parties well into the night; the adult finds a partner. In all these everyday occurrences the human person is engaged in activity that depends on the participation of another and ways of knowing support this activity. Our ways of knowing encourage us to think about our relationships and consider what is worthwhile and what we deem as worthy of pursuit. The following three sections, which further outline the characteristics of a participatory worldview, elaborate this point.

Meaning and purpose (Figure 3.1)

There is agreement among various researchers that the function of human inquiry is to promote the flourishing of life (Fals Borda, 1988; Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Heron, 1996; Maguire, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). A participatory worldview demands that researchers examine what this means for them and participants in their studies and what the purposes and meanings of their research efforts are. This may require the researcher to examine her/his own conscience and what meaning s/he brings to the world.

> Participative consciousness is part of a re-sacralisation of the world, the re-enchantment of the world. . . . Sacred experience is based on reverence, in

awe and love for creation, valuing it for its own sake, in its own right as a living presence. To deny participation not only offends against human justice, not only leads to errors in epistemology, not only strains the limits of the natural world, but is also troublesome for human souls and for the *anima mundi*. Given the condition of our times, a primary purpose of human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to *heal*, and above all to heal the alienation, the split that characterises modern experience. (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 11)

This participative worldview, for me, is not only a physical and scholarly perspective, but also a spiritual one. A characteristic of the participatory worldview is that mystery and meaning are re-established and we experience the world as a sacred place (Reason, 1994; Tarnas, 1991). However, the notion of the spiritual need not be inflated to a sense that it is almost unattainable, nor that it is only to concern *inner work* (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The idea of the spiritual can be experienced in our everyday lived experiences and our inner work can ground our outer work that involves our actions in the world. The grounding of this participatory action research project was based on the assumption that every individual is sacred and as such all participants (educators, preschoolers and parents) were perceived as beautiful and wonderful in the philosophical and theological sense. This belief was held by the research team who were fervent about guiding their preschoolers to see the beauty and wonder in all people.

Much of the eighth historical moment of qualitative research is "concerned with moral discourse (and) the development of sacred textualities" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This study aligned with Denzin and Lincoln's eighth moment as it concerned itself with discourse into social justice issues and upheld humanity as sacred. This idea permeates this dissertation. This research project fits Reason and Bradbury's (2006) definition of the practical inquiry of human persons: "(It) is a spiritual expression, a celebration of the flowering of humanity and of the co-creating cosmos, and as part of a sacred science is an expression of the beauty and joy of active existence" (p. 12). The study, being a practical inquiry of human persons, as a spiritual expression, asserts that human beings have a connection between one another and the ecology in which we exist and that these relationships are interrelated.

Relational and ecological form (Figure 3.1)

Any worldview is a political statement and a participatory worldview is no exception. It is also "a theory of knowledge (and) . . . implies democratic, peer relationships as the political form of inquiry" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 10). This political aspect insists on people's right and ability in contributing to, and voicing a powerful and heeded say in, decisions that affect them. A participatory worldview sees a strong connection between power and knowledge. Such emphasis underpinned this research project in that it saw the early childhood educators and preschoolers as holding the knowledge and having the power to change their situation for the better. However, "the political imperative is not just a matter of researchers being considerate about their research subjects or acting ethically: it is about the democratic foundation of inquiry and of society" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 10). This imperative had a great impact on the research project as it aimed not only to conduct democratic and participatory research, but also to facilitate preschoolers' awareness of, and sensitivity to social justice issues such as the positive recognition of race, gender, culture, ability, class and sexuality. A positive understanding of these social justice issues, which are related to difference, diversity and human dignity, will go a long way in building a democratic society. The research was concerned with the production of knowledge and action directly useful to the preschool situations; however, participation in the research project also empowered the co-researchers (early childhood educators) and preschoolers at a deeper level to challenge their perceptions of the world and how they act in it.

Another aspect of this relational ecological form as a characteristic of a participatory worldview is the human relationship with the more-than-human world. Although this study confined itself to examining the human side of social justice owing to constraints of time and management, the ecological side is worthy of examination and two excellent education based research projects undertaken as doctoral inquiries have been conducted in this area (see Davis, 2003; Wooltorton, 2003).

Extended epistemology (Figure 3.1)

We have moved away from a view of knowledge as disinterested and have moved towards "a conceptualisation of knowledge as constructed, contested,

incessantly perspectival and polyphonic" (Lather, 1991, p. xx). This understanding of knowledge appears to combine many ways of knowing. A participatory worldview, with its concept of reality as subjective-objective, entails an extended epistemology, which means that we draw on various forms of knowing as we engage with others and act in our world (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skolimowski, 1995). To frame this study a number of epistemologies were drawn upon and are outlined below. Firstly, Park's (2006) epistemological framework is explained; secondly, a sacred existential epistemology is presented; thirdly, feminist epistemology is highlighted; and finally, critical social constructivism is discussed.

Park's (2006) epistemological framework which highlights relational, reflective and representational forms of knowledge was extremely helpful as he contextualised his framework in participatory research. Representational knowledge is divided into two subtypes: functional and interpretive. The functional subtype of representational knowledge is usually generated by more positivist methods of enquiry (for example: questionaries and standardised interviews) and separates the knower from the known; it has technical efficiency. This subtype was not used in this study.

The interpretive subtype of representative knowledge with its origins in hermeneutics (a philosophy and science of interpretation originally used to study theology and law) was more useful to this study as it requires the knower to come as close as possible to the to-be-known. It necessitates "an attitude of openness and willingness to listen to the messages emanating from the object of interpretation. The knower and the known thus participate in the process of knowing, in which what they bring to the encounter merges together" (Park, 2006, p. 85). This type of knowledge is not analytic and reductive, but it is synthetic and integrative. To a certain extent the co-researchers involved in this study gleaned this type of knowledge from examining children's literature and preschoolers' responses to this literature.

When applied to human situations, interpretive knowledge, has the potential for uniting people "in empathy and making it possible for them to know one another as human beings affectively, as well as cognitively, which constitutes relational knowledge" (Park, 2006, p. 86). This relational knowledge sits quite well with a

sacred existential epistemology. Park theoretically grounds his idea of relational knowledge in Habermas' (1979) critical theory of communicative action which is based on linguistics and the interplay of semantic action, semantic meaning, and sincerity. However, in Habermas' theory relationship is made up of communicative exchanges and not built on the sharing of feelings and experiences but rather on discursive consensus between the speakers concerning the reasonableness of claims of sincerity (Park, 2006). During the course of this research project the co-researchers grew to know, respect, empathise with and honour one another on a level which I did not anticipate at the beginning of this study.

Relational knowledge involves communicative exchanges but so much more. It involves a reciprocal interaction of touching, connecting, conversing, sharing and experiencing common events. The traits that facilitate this sort of interaction that leads to the possibility of relational knowledge are respect, trust, sincerity, caring and authenticity (Park, 2006). This parallels closely with feminist communitarianism. The most beneficial attitude that encourages these traits in conversations "is that of listening, for it is in listening that we come close to someone and we are with that person, as in putting our ear to someone's heart" (Park, 2006, p. 88). Indeed, listening and responding are at the heart of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005). Our research team developed deep care and respect for and trust in one another. We listened to one another, the preschoolers and the parents with sincerity and authenticity, and with the aim to improve not only our practice but also our personal and interpersonal relationships. From this it can be seen that perhaps a deeper, more reflective knowledge can evolve.

The idea of reflective knowledge draws from critical theory that contends that meaningful human knowledge must not simply understand the world in which we live but also look to change it. Reflective knowledge engages "actors themselves critically analysing and evaluating questions of morality and values relating to their life conditions and the proper actions to take" (Park, 2006, p. 89). Reflective knowledge is visionary and takes place when actors go through a process of "consciousness-raising" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 9). Freire (1996) referred to

this consciousness-raising as *conscientization*.[1] To generate reflective knowledge for this study the co-researchers were required to be autonomous in a social sense with the capability to act with confidence, determination and resourcefulness made possible by, and communicated in, the interaction and interdependence entrenched in our own small research community and the communities of the preschools. Reflective knowledge generates "collective autonomy and responsibility" (Park, 2006, p. 89).

Action is an essential component of reflective knowledge (Park, 2006). Through action we gain knowledge of how the world works and what we might do to make it a better place; we learn with and through body, mind and spirit. This notion is mirrored in a sacred existential epistemology, critical socio constructivism and feminist thinking.

A sacred existential epistemology (Ayers, 2006; Christians, 2003, 2005; Rowan, 2006) supports my philosophical underpinnings and my participatory worldview. This epistemology identifies, questions and challenges the ways in which gender, race and class operate as significant systems of oppression in today's world (Christians, 1997, 2003, 2005). This sits well with this research project. Sacred existential epistemology is based on a philosophical anthropology affirming that "all humans are worthy of dignity and sacred status without exception for class or ethnicity" (Christians, 1995, p. 29). This epistemology supports a community with common moral values grounded in concepts of care, kindness, solidarity, empowerment, shared governance, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers and civic transformation (Christians, 2003).

Sacred existential epistemology underpins a feminist, communitarian ethic that Denzin and Lincoln (2003) endorsed and that our research team embraced (see Chapter Six). This epistemology aligns well with the epistemology of participatory action research (see Chapter Four) and also with the research team's philosophies borrowed from such thinkers as Greene (1995), Noddings (1995) and Nussbaum (1990) who advocated the importance of an *ethic of care*. Sacred existential

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[1] The concept of *conscientization* implies both conscience and consciousness and so captures the normative and cognitive processes that constitute reflective knowledge (Park, 2006).

epistemology is underpinned by the belief that knowledge is constructed through the sociocultural contexts with which one engages.

Feminist epistemology highlights "the linkage of gaining voice to the recognition of knowledge as a social construction in the context of human relations (and) is critical to feminist-ground research" (Maguire, 2006, p. 65). This research project strove to give voice to educators and students who are often silenced or at the very best whose ideas and opinions are considered unimportant in scientific research paradigms (Cooper & White, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003; Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993). Feminist and action research problematise and challenge systematic relations of power in the social construction of knowledge. Feminist *grounded* research is not limited to the "struggle against gender oppression alone" (Maguire, 2006, p. 63). Feminist grounded research, like this current study, seeks to expose and critique all forms of oppression, subjugation, prejudice and discrimination highlighting the dehumanising effects of bias against gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, class and ability. Indeed, the aim of such research is to change the world, not simply to examine it (Stanley, 1990). Like all feminist grounded research this research project was overtly political (Harding, 1986; Lather, 1991, 1992, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2001; Olesen, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000) and the values of antiracism, antisexism and anticlassism permeated the study.

Feminist grounded research seeks to give voice to those who are often muted. Passionate knowing is embedded in feminist notions of knowledge or women's ways of knowing (Kincheloe, 2003). Therefore, "feminist inspired action research challenges us to consider how we create spaces for all voices to be heard, as well as how we use our voices to unsettle power differentials wherever encountered" (Maguire, 2006, p. 66). It was important to this study that the voices of both the educators and the preschoolers were heard. Indeed their ideas, opinions, reflections and decisions drove the study and it was their choice how the results of the study would be used.

We are at the beginning of a new era in feminist thought which requires a "redefinition of the relationship of power to knowledge within feminism . . . As women of ideas devoted to the elaboration of the theory and practice of sexual

difference, we are responsible for the very notions that we enact and empower" (Braidotti, 1992, p. 189). This has implications for this study. As a researcher embracing feminist perspectives I am responsible for the creation of knowledge in this research project, as are the early childhood education co-researchers/participants. I/we have a responsibility to empower one another in our small research community and the members of the preschool communities through this knowledge. As a research team we needed to think and act justly.

> Thinking justly – of justness and not only of justice – is a top item on our agenda. Feminist thinking cannot be purely strategic, that is, be the expression of a political will; it must rather attempt to be adequate as a representation of experience. Feminist theorising must be adequate conceptually, as well as being suitable politically; one's relationship to thinking is the prototype of a different relationship to alterity altogether. (Braidotti, 1992, p. 189)

This is an ethical, relational basis of thinking and aligns well with an ethic of care and communitarianism (explained later in this chapter) and with the philosophies and epistemologies that underpin participatory action research.

Critical socio constructivism assumes that it is impossible to conceive knowledge without thinking of a knower (Kincheloe, 2003). This research project is underpinned by the understanding that the knowers (the early childhood educators and preschoolers involved in this study) had the capability to construct knowledge that was pertinent to their contexts and to make positive change in their public and private domains. Social constructivists take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge and see knowledge embedded in one's history and culture (Burr, 2003). The ways in which we view the world, the concepts and categories we use to make sense of it, are culturally and historically specific. Social constructivists also believe that knowledge and social action go together. It is through the daily interactions among people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge are created (Bryman, 2008). Therefore social interactions of all kinds, particularly language, are of great significance to social constructivists. The exchanges among people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices through which their shared visions of knowledge are constructed (Bryman, 2008; Burr, 2003).

Constructivism upholds that human thought cannot be meaningfully disconnected from human feeling and action (Burr, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003). Thought, feeling and action go together and contribute to one another. When feeling, empathy and the body are infused into the research process, and "as the distinction between the knower and the known is blurred, as truth is viewed as a *process* of construction in which knowers play an active role, passion is injected into inquiry" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 64). As a research team we endeavoured to construct meaning actively through the process of participatory action research to attain knowledge that was meaningful and useful to the context of each team member with a view to initiate positive change.

CRITICAL THEORY

The above epistemologies are embedded in critical theory that has also helped frame this research project. Critical theory emerged from the work of the Frankfurt School in post World War 1 Germany and helped address the dissatisfaction and frustration created by positivist methods for studying cultural, social, economic, political, psychological and educational phenomena and the oppression caused by unchecked capitalism. The term "critical" (as it occurs in "critical theory") was employed to refer to social theory that was authentically self-reflexive (Peters, Olssen & Lankshear, 2003). It appears, then, that critical theory has a twofold undertaking: it strives to be educative by guiding its advocates to explore conditions of possibility; and it strives to be emancipatory by providing potentially transformative outcomes for these advocates. Indeed, the area of education is a fertile field in which to sow critical theory as teaching involves a sense of the possible, of considering alternatives and of developing new landscapes (Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995).

Other features of critical theory that helped frame this study are that critical theory has explanatory, normative and practical dimensions – it must offer empirical accounts of a social condition; critical theory must aim towards change for the better; and critical theory must provide an improved self-understanding of the social agents who desire transformation (Peters et al., 2003). Therefore critical theory assisted this research project firstly, by driving the research team to explore conditions of possibility regarding how storytime could be utilised to teach for social justice;

secondly, by assisting the early childhood educators and the preschoolers to examine critically children's literature regarding social justice issues and transform their thinking; and thirdly, through empirical accounts of storytime sessions and self-reflection of the early childhood educators (as co-researchers) each preschool setting changed for the better (as discussed in Part Three and Chapter Ten).

In Australia, anti-bias education within the early childhood arena has been greatly influenced by the United States anti-bias curriculum outlined by Derman-Sparks and the Anti-bias Curriculum Task Force (1989) which links to teaching for social justice. This curriculum calls for children and, indeed, early childhood education as a whole to develop critical thinking skills (see Chapter Two) and the skills to stand against injustice such as stereotyping, bias and prejudice (Derman-Sparks et al., 1989). Critical theory underpins the critical examination of social justice issues such as stereotyping, bias and prejudice. Critical theory argues that "society is structured so that powerful groups maintain and renew domination and power over the oppressed; that normative standards inherent within society and the language within that society uphold these power relations" (Davis, Gunn, Purowing & Smith, 2007, p. 101). Critical theory helped frame this research project because it provided a way of thinking about society that assisted in exposing and challenging negative notions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class and ethnicity.

Critical theory offers a philosophy through which action, rather than a set of procedures, may be discussed (Kincheloe, 2003). It helped frame this study and opened up space for discussion because it "is particularly concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that … matters of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and other forces shape both educational institutions and individual consciousness" (Villaverde, Kincheloe & Helyar, 2006, p. 319). This study also aligned with the assumptions underlying critical theory that human beings are able to act and think rationally, are capable of being self-reflexive and have the capacity to be self-determining. This assumption applies not only to adults, but also to young children as well.

This research project was influenced by the new sociology of childhood, the postmodern view of children and childhood, and the children's rights movement.

From a sociological viewpoint, childhood is understood as a social construction and children are seen as competent social actors co-creating their reality (Corsaro, 2005; James & Prout, 1990; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Qvortrup, 1994). From the postmodern view, children are perceived as knowledgeable, competent and powerful members of society (Bruner, 1996; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999) capable of expressing and sharing their ideas, opinions and perspectives (Brooker, 2001; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003). The contemporary rights of the child movement stresses the importance of seriously and conscientiously upholding children's right to express her/his own beliefs in an atmosphere of respect and acceptance (Freeman, 1998; Garbarino, Scott & Faculty of the Erickson Institute, 1992).

While it is believed that educators of young children and, indeed, young children themselves, are capable and knowledgeable and have the capacity to be self-determining, it is not always the case in research projects that their voices and ideas are heard or respected (Cooper & White, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003; Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993). In this study I wished to value the expert knowledge of the educators and children involved in this research project and ensure that their voices, opinions and ideas were heard, respected, trusted and acted upon. What underlines critical theory is the urge to give voice to those who are silenced (Freire, 1993).

Critical theory is an inherently pluralist exercise and, as such, presents theorists and researchers with a range of possible methods and perspectives by which to analyse not only cultural artefacts but also their contexts (Sim, 2001). Indeed, pluralism is very much the present cultural paradigm in Western culture and critical theory helps to strengthen this by advancing the debate between diverse readings and multiple interpretations (Sim, 2001). In that sense, critical theory helps to support the cause of democratic pluralism, and as a result is a vital element of the current political scene. The aim of critical theory is to examine our culture intently.

The above section has explained the theories that have informed my participatory worldview. The following section expounds the philosophy that complements and supports this worldview.

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophies upon which I base my appreciation of a participatory worldview are influenced by Emmanuel Levinas' (1999) concepts of ethics, justice and the "Other"; by existential philosophy (Ayers, 2006; Christians, 2005; Greene, 1995; Rowan, 2006); by an ethic of care (Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995; Held, 1995, 2001, 2005; Noddings, 1995, 2005; Nussbaum, 1990, 1999) and by communitarianism (Christians, 2003, 2005, 2006; Christians, Frerre & Fackler, 1993; Held, 2005; Maguire, 2006; Stocker & Pollard, 1994). These philosophies may at times seem at odds with one another; however, I will outline each and then draw them together as a coherent whole to propose my own philosophy that underpins this research project. I will begin by introducing Levinas' thinking, followed by the existential stance, the ethic of care and finally feminist philosophy.

Levinas' philosophy

Much of Levinas' writings on ethics and justice were developed in the context of a renewed interest in contemporary religious thought and concerned ethicopolitical issues (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003). Levinas' (1974, 1985, 1987, 1990, 1999) works were published in the second half of the 20th Century while sciences, and the techniques and technology they produced, grew (and are still growing) at a powerful rate. However, just as many questions of ethics were (and are still) becoming increasingly urgent for consumers and philosophers alike. Serres (1992, as cited in Egéa-Kuehne, 2003) states:

> The history of Western humanity, so advanced in its scientific and cultural achievements, had probably never gone so far into abomination . . . no other moment in history, perhaps, has had so many losers and so few winners as the present time, a time in which, as sciences advance, the number of losers is "exponentially increased" and the "club" of the privileged is more exclusive and inaccessible than ever. (p. 105)

A regression and degradation of education and culture, and a proliferation of ignorance, prejudice and illiteracy, parallel the apparent triumph of the sciences (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003). Therefore new ethics were, and are still, needed (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003). Indeed, the new knowledge brought about through new technologies must be tamed with "the ideals of justice, caring and compassion summoned from our common human spiritual and moral heritage, if we are to live in peace and serenity in the twenty-first century" (Afkhami, 2000, p. 164).

During the latter half of the 20ᵗʰ Century many critical theorists proposed new ethical theories. Some explored a "wisdom of immanence" devoid of religious overtones and attached to the earth (e.g., Deleuze, 1983; Rosset, 1993); some positioned their thinking around the Greek or Latin heritage (e.g. Foucault, 1997; Hadot, 1995); Jonas (1984) was guided by the responsibility principle and Habermas (1979, 1987) by communication. Indeed, some thinkers believe it is necessary to develop an "immanent, materialist ethics based on the respect for *terrestrial* life . . . together with a new global politics that is produced by . . . *heterogenesis*, that is, processes of continuous resingularisation that help us to become both more unified and also increasingly different" (Peters, 2003, p. 284). This ethic is opposed to religious beliefs. However, Levinas saw ethics as a response to the call of infinity and transcendence guided by the grace of God. His thinking has definite religious overtones, yet Levinas' model of ethics and justice might go a long way towards addressing the challenge of materialistic ethics. He drew much of his thinking from the Christian, Jewish and Islamic religious traditions and from studying the Bible and the Talmud.

It should be noted that Levinas saw no contradiction between seeking the knowledge of science and technology and acquiescence to a religious faith that, to him, evaded reason and logic. What concerned him was the void of ethics and moral consciousness (or morality) that would support and guide this new scientific knowledge. Levinas (as cited in Kearney, 1986) explains:

> By morality I mean a series of rules relating to social behaviour and civic duty. But while morality thus operates in the socio-political order of organising and improving our human survival, it is ultimately founded on an ethical responsibility toward the other. As *prima philosopher*, ethics cannot itself legislate for society or produce rules of conduct whereby society might be revolutionised or transformed. (pp. 29–30)

Levinas (1985) links the "ethical plenitude" (p. 18) he found in the Bible to the Hebraic tradition and to the wisdom of the eternal. His theses (1985, 1987, 1990, 1999) have obvious biblical and Talmud underpinnings and reference points and, although his thinking is philosophical and phenomenological (he did not consider himself a theologian), the biblical message is significant in that it lays the foundation of the idea of the Other: "The Other is what I myself am not" (Levinas, 1987, p. 75).

Levinas (1985, 1999) developed a *phenomenology of the face* as a presence signifying a prohibition of violence, through the infinity of which it is a trace and a sign – the face signifies Infinity. The Face of God is an image often referred to in the Bible and its teaching asks the reader to find the face of God in the people on Earth. What Levinas calls *the face of the Other* "means the first relation to ethics. In the face-to-face encounter, he sees, beyond all knowledge, an 'elevation' of the ethical order, an indirect encounter with a transcendental God, a relation to Infinity" (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003, pp. 109–110). It is before the face of the Other that one can have the pure experience of the Other. Levinas (1999) sees this as one and the same with ethics, in as much as one is *conscious* that one is responsible for the Other, that the existence of the Other is more important than one's own. Levinas (1999) concludes that to recognise that we come after an Other, whoever s/he may be, is ethics. Moral consciousness is developed through the face-to-face encounter with the Other, in the course of an interpersonal relationship and through the responsibility and the respect for the Other (Levinas, 1999). The epiphany of the face-to-face encounter with the Other is a phenomenon in which the Other's proximity and distance are both powerfully felt. However, thus far this discussion has consisted of only two entities and humanity cannot be condensed to two individuals.

Levinas (1999) suggests that the third party – the reality of society – disrupts the simplicity of the one-to-one encounter. Such plurality is problematic: which one comes before the other in one's responsibility? This becomes a question of justice. Thus the entrance of the third party into the intersubjective relation triggers a move from ethics to justice. Levinas (1985) states "This is the fact of the multiplicity of human beings, the presence of a third party next to the Other, which conditions the laws and establishes justice" (p. 94). Levinas' search for justice goes back to the face of the Other, the source of responsibility and ethics. This initial obligation (responsibility and respect for the Other), placed before the multiplicity of human beings, becomes justice (Levinas, 1999). The individual's choice to acknowledge the Other as other can be considered an ethical decision and it is this acknowledgement which is called justice (Levinas, 1999). Levinas' concept of justice seems "to be conceived in a biblical sense, as a synthesis of moral behaviours" (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003, p. 115) where the uniqueness and primacy of the Other must not be forgotten.

In Levinas' model of ethics and justice the Other and the others manifest simultaneously. In reality there never was just one Other and *I*. There has always been the Other, others and I in a "fraternity" based on responsibility (Levinas, 1974, p. 202). Egéa-Kuehne (2003) comments on Levinas' works and also quotes from him:

> The concept of "fraternity" renders justice accessible to all, which is the essence of justice – if justice is to be just – in the fact that "I am another of the Other. . . . The reciprocal relationship binds me to the other . . . in the trace of transcendence, in illeity" [Levinas, 1974, p. 158]. A few pages down Levinas [1974, p. 187] confirms that "justice can only be established if I, always evaded from the concept of the ego, always desituated and divested of being, always in non-reciprocatable relationship with the other, always for the other, can become an other like the others." The importance for justice of this "fraternity" cannot be overlooked since it is thanks to this fraternity that there can also be justice for "I". (p. 116)

In his model of ethics and justice Levinas (1999) contends that responsibility to the Other involves responsibility to all others, which leads to responsibility for social justice and world peace. However, Levinas (1999, p. 89) did not believe he had the "solutions to insoluble problems" such as achieving social justice and world peace, and confessed: "I have no idea other than an idea of the idea that one should have…" He implied that the impossible could become a possibility.

Derrida (1994) contributes to this discussion and indicates that for justice to occur there must be a disruption, a gap between the present state of justice and the possibility of an ideal of justice. The time is ripe to challenge the concept of justice because a gap certainly exists between the state of justice and the ideal of justice (Derrida, 1994; Egéa-Kuehne, 2003; Levinas, 1999). If the concept of justice is not challenged then "justice may simply believe, in all good conscience, that it has succeeded" (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003, p. 118). Therefore justice "may miss its chance for the future, for the promise or the call … (in other words, for its very possibility)" (Derrida, 1994, p. 56).

The current research project began with the belief that there was a great need for improvement in the teaching of social justice in early childhood education - that there was, indeed a gap between the state of justice and the ideal of justice. Early childhood educators ideally wanted to teach for social justice and celebrate

difference and diversity but in reality this was not happening owing to the fact that they did not have the pedagogical strategies to do so (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). This project also began with a firm belief in Levinas' model of ethics and justice as outlined above. However…

A slight philosophical shift

At the beginning of the research project I felt that I had a total commitment and responsibility to and for each co-researcher as philosophised by Levinas. However, during the early stages of the research project I began to problematise this commitment. If I had total responsibility for the Other in a non-reciprocatable relationship, was I denying the Other a true identity and self-determination and, indeed, the chance of experiencing an equal, mutual relationship? Although I deeply respected Levinas' philosophy (and still do), I wanted to build on his philosophy by adding to it the notion of reciprocity. My philosophy began to shift during the orientation phase of this research project (see Chapter Six) as the research team examined philosophies regarding existential thought (Ayers, 2006; Christians, 2003, 2005; Greene, 1978, 1988; Rowan, 2006); an ethic of care (Greene, 1995; Held, 1995, 2001, 2005; Noddings, 1995, 2005; Nussbaum, 1990, 1999) and communitarianism (Christians, 1993, 2003, 2005, 2006; Stocker & Pollard, 1994). These philosophies are outlined below and further explained from the perspective of the research team in Chapter Six. They shift the focus from caring *for* to caring *with* others. This is pertinent to this study as it embraced participatory action research that is designed to research *with* and *by* instead of research *on* and *for* participants.

Existential philosophy

The classic existential insight is that we have a deep responsibility for being ourselves (Vale, 1998). By taking responsibility for ourselves "we are fully human" (Rowan, 2006, p. 108). This is a vital step in psychospiritual development, "because it is a gateway to the realisation that we *must have spiritual experiences for ourselves*" (Rowan, 2006, p. 108). We cannot get these spiritual experiences from anyone else. This is the basic premise regarding the mystic in all religious traditions – a personal experience or face-to-face encounter with God. Levinas, perhaps, would not have had a problem with this assertion, although he may have had one with the premise of placing one's self first, before others. A sacred existential epistemology,

which connects with existential philosophy, does not place one above or before others but *with* others (Christians, 2003).

The purpose of existential thinking and reflection re-establishes and supports a true sense of self and personal legitimacy, "personal awareness, depth of real feeling, and above all, the conviction that one can use one's powers, that one has the courage to be and use all one's essence in the praxis of being" (Friedenberg, 1973, pp. 93–94). There is a differentiation between this newly found power and that of the old mental-egocentric power that promoted power over others. This newly found power is power from within and is power *with* others (Rowan, 2006). According to general existential thought, when an individual's *real self* is fully autonomous, s/he assumes responsibility for being in and interacting with the world (Rowan, 2006). Frances E. Kendall may not have consciously embarked on an existential journey when she began her "inner" work to become "whole" and "the best me I could possibly be" (Kendal, 2006, p. 11); however, this inner work, to find her "authentic real self", has resulted in a life's work championing an anti-racist cause and highlighting the insidiousness of white privilege. "Doing the personal work required to understand what it means to be white is the foundation for me of striving to build a just world" (Kendall, 2006, p. 18). The *inner work* of deep personal awareness must precede the *outer work* of action to change the world positively (Kendall, 2006). Therefore, the groundwork of any inquiry should begin with and value this inner work.

This view of existential philosophy had ramifications for how this research was to begin, with each team member deeply exploring her personal journey and why and how each one of us had arrived, at this juncture in time, to become involved in this research project. It encouraged us to examine and challenge our deep philosophies (further discussion may be found in Chapter Six). Social inquiry that embraces an existential philosophy is underpinned by a humanistic approach (Rowan, 2006) which calls for a trust in experience, the desire to observe and reflect and an interest in the diversity of humanity (Toulmin, 1990).

I do not wish the humanistic approach, which this research project upheld, to be confused with humanism that rejects spirituality. In this section I am examining

the humanistic approach and certainly not humanism. It may be said that there are two strands of humanism, one spiritual and the other agnostic/atheist. If this is true then this research project aligns with the former. However, I am using the term *humanistic* to separate this research from humanism. The humanistic approach, which has its roots in humanistic psychology, argues that an individual is incapable of understanding her/his own behavior and the meaning of this behavior is essentially personal and subjective. This thought is not unscientific, because ultimately all individuals are subjective: what makes science reliable is not that scientists are totally objective, but that the nature of observed events may be agreed upon by different observers (Rogers, 1978). Therefore, the humanistic researcher draws on the spirit of co-operation, sharing and collaboration (Ayers, 2006) which is reflected in this research project's design: participatory action research. Research that is grounded in the humanistic approach is a participatory pursuit perpetually asking new questions, continuously unveiling new discoveries and reformulating and revising revelations (Ayers, 2006). This closely mirrors action research, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

Such exploration requires the researcher simultaneously to look outward to the concerns of others and inwards towards self-knowledge (Ayers, 2006; Rowan, 2006). This outwards and inwards exploration is necessary, indeed obligatory, for the humanistic researcher because

> going inward without consciously connecting to a larger world leads to self-referencing and worse, narcissism as truth; travelling outward without noting your own embodied heart and mind can lead to ethical astigmatism, to seeing other three-dimensional human beings as case studies or data, their lived situations reduced to the field. (Ayers, 2006, p. 84)

The humanistic approach to research struck a chord with my participatory worldview and my growing interest in action research, as it perceives all participants as experts about their lived experiences and as active meaning-makers and knowledge-creators (Ayers, 2006).

Research conducted within the humanistic approach is holistic, values experiential knowledge over spectator knowledge, places importance on values, sees the sacredness of those participating in the study as significant, is comprehensive and inclusive and authentically engaged (Rowan, 2006). However, social constructivism,

which forms part of my epistemological thinking, challenges humanistic thinking, especially in relation to the question (or situation) of the *real self* or *self-actualisation*, terms coined by Maslow (1987). Because social constructivism forms part of my epistemological thinking, I needed to be quite clear about how existential thought and a humanistic approach could fit comfortably with an epistemology that upheld the social construction of knowledge. Social constructivists propose that there is no real self in the sense usually projected by humanistic psychology. However, the following argument, although not put forward in defence of humanistic thinking, does support its insistence on the existence of self:

> certain post-modern deconstructors of the self are merely the latest in a long line of philosophic strategies motivated by a need to evade, deny or regress the importance of early childhood experiences, especially mother-child relationships, in the constitution of the self and the culture more generally. Perhaps it is less threatening to have no self than to have one pervaded by memories of, longing for, suppressed identification with or terror of the powerful mother of infancy. (Lather, 1992, p. 203)

If there is no real self then there is no such thing as being authentic (being true to oneself), or autonomous (taking charge of one's life), or self-actualising (being all that one has in oneself to be) (Rowan, 2006). If this was the case why then do action researchers (many of whom consider themselves to be social constructivists) endeavour to carry out research with others with the aim that all participants act authentically leading to autonomy and self-actualisation? Even if the research is carried out in a community context with the focus being on community transformation, usually the individual also benefits from the research in achieving authenticity, self-determination and self-actualisation (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007; Keyes, 2000; McTaggart, 1991; Stremmel, 2002). Indeed, "not only do we learn about the educational world surrounding us, but we gain new insights into the private world within us" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 54). This mirrors the humanistic approach to research which sees the researcher as a "work-in-progress": incomplete and provisional.

A few lines of thought regarding the real self, which may afford social constructivists and postmodernists some piece of mind when contemplating the usefulness of humanistic thinking, follows: The real self is simply the way the self appears in certain contexts and has a series of layered truths, each of which depends

on other layers. It is at the same time a unit in itself and a function of a larger field. The real self is not a theoretical creation or concept but an experience and is ineffable going beyond the categories of ordinary discourse (Rowan, 2006).

Existential thought and the humanistic approach can be viewed as reinventing our lives and as a natural way of seeing and doing things (Greene, 1992). Living persons create identities by means of their projects which are ongoing and never ending. As an example I quote, Greene (1992) writing about teacher renewal: "Teachers' renewal is equally, wonderfully incomplete; there is always, always more. Like feminist thinking too, it refuses systematisation, monologism, insularity" (p. viii). Like Greene (1995), as one influenced by existential thought, I too look to the future, to encourage and promote hope for a better time, to explore ways to reach the next possibility, that which is not yet.

What drew me to existential philosophy and the humanistic approach is twofold. Firstly, its rejection of roles in society, especially the gender roles of hegemonic masculinity and contemporary forms of femininity, aligned with this study's examination and challenge of stereotypes. Secondly, humanistic psychology promotes a standpoint of research that necessitates treating people with dignity in their human status. This means that researchers are not concealed behind roles, and reflexivity is of great significance. "By this we mean that what we find out in research may be applied to us too. It also means that we do not exclude ourselves from the research process. We refuse to be alienated" (Rowan, 2006, p. 114). Action researchers emphasise this approach to research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kincheloe, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Because the above blurs the delineation between researcher and researched (in the case of this study participants were considered co-researchers), there are critical ethical issues. Indeed,

> In research where the researcher and the other participants come much closer, and more deeply involved with one another, the personal and social implications become far more complex. Ethical statements by people concerned with such areas of research start to talk about interpersonal ethics – the care with which one treats another. . . . The issue of self and others turns out to be central to all of this. (Rowan, 2006, p. 115)

So, after exploring and realising the importance of the "real self" in "authentically" contributing to society and participating with others, I found myself turning back to Levinas' (1985, 1987, 1990, 1999) thoughts on ethics and justice to help understand how others should be dignified and respected during this research project. Although I felt an undertone of the patriarchal in Levinas' ideas, his philosophy exuded a caring approach to ethics and justice. I found that the philosophies of Nel Noddings (1995, 2005), Virginia Held (1995, 2001, 2005), Maxine Greene (1978, 1988, 1995) and Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1999) resonated with Levinas' thinking with, however, a difference. They discuss an ethic of care towards others. This ethic of care is be upheld not only in one-to-one, face-to-face encounters but also in a community context and it has a distinctly feminine/feminist spirit.

An ethic of care

An ethic of care is based on taking into account the perspectives of others (Greene, 1995), as opposed to an ethic of justice which predicates that there is one right view of any situation (for extended discussions see Held, 1995, 2001). Every person is entitled to "care and concern and everyone is ethically obliged to give it their attention" (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007, p. 169). Caring requires one to believe in and work continuously towards one's competence and capability so that the recipients of one's care – people, animals, objects, ideas – are enhanced (Greene, 1995). "There is nothing mushy about caring. It is the strong, resilient backbone of human life" (Noddings, 1995, p. 368). Indeed, human beings cannot flourish or survive without caring relations (Held, 2001). However, taking care "of" and caring "about" can become problematic as this type of caring tends to be unidimensional and conditional. The concept of care needs to be reconceptualised to better support leaders in activism, pedagogical social justice work and to genuinely build relations of respect and care that would enhance relationships in collaborative research situations (Woodrow, 2001).

Caring needs to be democratised and universalised so that individuals, families, communities, agencies and governments understand that we all have multifaceted systems of care responsibility to those with whom we work and to more distant others (Tronto, 1999). Therefore, a framework and definition of care

characterised by interdependence and reciprocity is required. According to Tronto (1993), care

> is a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world", so that we can live as well as possible. Care itself consists of four elements: caring about, taking care of, care giving and care receiving. An ethic of care has further four elements – responsibility, competence, integrity and responsiveness. (p. 40)

However, care must focus on "the universal importance of protecting spheres of choice and freedom within which people with diverse views on what matters in life can pursue flourishing according to their own light" (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 9). History shows that the attitude of the Australian government towards caring for the Aboriginal people has been polemic to Nussbaum's caring focus.

An abomination in the name of care can be seen in the atrocities caused by the Australian government to the Aboriginal people during a shameful one hundred year period (1860-1960) of Australian history. Of course, this is not the only instance of atrocity perpetrated upon Aboriginal people by European settlers; however, this historical period is pertinent to this argument. Painful legacies remain with the Aboriginal people today. Between 1860 and 1960 Australian government agencies forcibly removed over 13,000 Aboriginal children from their families - the stolen generation. These children were sent to orphanages or white families to "breed out the Aboriginality from their physical and mental lives" (Rudd, 2008, p. 2). This was believed to be in the children's best interests and to "protect" the Aboriginal race from dying out. In the late 1800s Aboriginal people were confined to reserves without rights to work or live independently on their own lands. This caused untold hardships to the Aboriginal people culminating in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual disease; alcoholism; low self esteem and became

> the origins of the Australian Aboriginal welfare ghetto which many ignorant people claim as a result of Indigenous culture. But I say to you, it was not Aboriginal people who created the reserves, who took away rights, who created dependency. It was Australian governments and they have been doing so for over 100 years. (Rudd, 2008, p. 4)

These "crimes" of the Australian government were committed "on the base of a supposedly scientific principle of the superiority of one race over another" (Rudd, 2008, p. 2). In 1967 Indigenous people were recognised as independent citizens. The

Aboriginal people have fought hard and long for equality and Aboriginal rights, but still the legacies of attempted genocide, oppression, prejudice and racism remain.

On 13 February 2008 the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, formally apologised on behalf of the government through an Apology Statement tabled at a parliamentary sitting and is attempting to bring equity to this abomination in the name of care by implementing the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home Report* tabled in 1996 that was ignored by the previous government. These recommendations seek to empower Aboriginal communities, not through government projects (which have failed miserably in the past) but through Indigenous leaders and communities. Indeed, "the goal should be to put people into a position of agency and choice, not to push them into functioning in ways deemed desirable" (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 9). An ethic of care underpinned by agency and choice "has its roots all over the world; it expresses the joy most people have in using their own bodies and minds" (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 11). Therefore, an ethic of care is not simply caring *for* and/or *about* others but *with* others: working with others in a caring, supportive environment that encourages them to explore possibilities that best cater for their needs and their own caring.

This aspect of caring gives power to the "other", values the other's agency and respects the right to decide how she/he/they may thrive and flourish as individuals or as communities. For this agency and flourishing to be achieved during this study the research team, as individuals and as team members, needed to be comfortable with and value diversity and ambiguity; advocate when injustice and prejudice were apparent; confront issues and address hidden tensions or taken-for-granted assumptions and practices; examine and be attentive to the difference between being *an authority with* the right to speak as an expert in any given field and the idea of having *authority over* others; use responsive listening focused on how the other expresses her/his/their position/s, ideas, feelings in relation to my/our practices (Aitken and Kennedy, 2007; Nussbaum, 1999; Tronto, 1999).

It is well documented that early childhood professionals have a strong sense of caring for others: children, families and colleagues (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Cherrington, 2001; Kennedy, 2003; Woodrow, 2001). The early childhood

professionals involved in this research project were no exception. They collaborated with this study because they cared: they cared about "better practice", they cared about the children in their settings, they cared about the parents and they cared about teaching for social justice. Therefore, this research project was fortunate to begin with people who knew the essence of care: shared consideration, sensitivity and trust (Held, 2005). What was then needed was for the research team to continue in an ethic of care with a sense of community. This encouraged the team to explore literature on communitarianism.

A feminist communitarian ethic

Many feminist thinkers believe that the values of caring, trust and solidarity can extend beyond personal friendships to the political and social arenas (Held, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Nussbaum, 1999; Tronto, 1999). A feminist, communitarian ethic calls for caring, trusting, collaborative, non-oppressive relationships between researchers and participants (Christians, 2005). This ethic assumes "that investigators are committed to recognising personal accountability, the value of individual expressiveness and caring, the capacity for empathy, and the sharing of emotionality" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 52). In the communitarian sense we are "persons-in-community" and bonding is the foundation of, rather than simply being influential to social action (Barnes, 1997, p. 30).

There are tensions in understanding the term *communitarianism*, as some accept the liberal, fundamentalists' stance that communitarians defend the *common good* at the expense of *individual rights* (Sandel 1998). My use of the term communitarianism is broader, based on an eclectic, personal recognition of community as the trajectory of a participatory worldview. Communitarianism is an approach that highlights the importance of a sense of community to that of human wholeness and selfhood which arcs back to existentialist thought (Stocker & Pollard, 1994). Communitarianism is not liberal individualism nor is it collectivism (as Merrill, [2006] would have it). It is a third social theory whereby it "integrates human beings into the social organism" and sees "humans-in-relation" (Christians, 2006, p. 1).

However, what constitutes a community can be problematic as definitions are many and quite general. There are four descriptive categories of community: geographic proximity, coincidence of interests, sense of identity and shared cultural values (Stocker & Pollard, 1994). Fitting into all these categories is not necessarily needed to be regarded as a community. Indeed, an on-line community is probably not in geographic proximity; nevertheless, it would have coincidence of interests. However, this project's research team fits into these categories: geographic proximity – we all belonged to the same rural coastal township of South East Queensland; coincidence of interests - we were all early childhood professionals; sense of identity – we were all women who thought that there was something lacking in the status quo; shared cultural values – we all had a burning desire to explore strategies that would support and promote teaching for social justice. Indeed, our research team had a clear sense of community and we regarded this small research community as an integral part of our lives, not only during the orientation and data gathering phase of the project, but still our community continues to meet and discuss children's literature and strategies for teaching for social justice and to support one another.

Face-to-face communication is the crux in building a community that upholds forming relationships with authenticity, respect and warmth (Croft, 1996). Indeed, as Christians (2005) contends

> Our widely shared moral convictions are developed through discourse within a community. These communities where moral discourse is nurtured and shared are a radical alternative to the utilitarian individualism of modernity. But in feminist communitarianism, communities are entered from the universal. The total opposite from an ethics of individual autonomy is universal human solidarity. Our obligation to sustain one another defines our existence. The primal sacredness of all without exception is the heart of the moral order and the new starting point for our theorising. (p. 154)

This ethical theory presumes that the understanding of self and others is constructed through the sociocultural contexts with which one engages and where moral commitments, values and existential understandings are negotiated through communication.

Communication processes (e.g., dialogue, participatory inquiry, defusing personal agendas, mediation, strategies for promoting harmony and co-operation) within a community are strengthened and supported by the ontological assumption of

the spirit of peace (Boyd, 1996; Brown & Brown, 1996; Gastil, 1993). Such a community is contrasted to collectivity because it has a depth of being for and with.

> Community . . . is the being no longer side by side but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it also moves towards one goal, yet experiences a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou. Community is where community happens. Collectivity is based on an organised atrophy of personal existence, community on its increase and confirmation in life lived towards one another. The modern zeal for collectivity is a flight from community's testing and consecration of the person, a flight from the vital dialogic, demanding the staking of the self, which is in the heart of the world. (Buber, 1960, p. 51)

The quality and nature of genuine community are the communion among community members. This communion is underpinned by kinship, respect and empathy (Buber, 1960). This also means that community members, whether in the private or public spheres treat one another with the same kinship, respect and empathy afforded to the whole community (Croft, 1996). A community becomes a dynamic whole when a group of people participate in common practices, depend on one another, make decisions together, identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships and commit themselves for the long term to their own, one another's and the group's well-being (Forster, 1995; Metcalf, 1996). During this "long term" conflicts will arise that must be attended to with an ethic of care. Indeed, "communities which avoid conflict not only fail to resolve differences satisfactorily, they deprive themselves of a major course of creativity and vitality" (Forster, 1995, p. 9). Also here must be a balance of freedom and responsibility with individuality and community responsibility intertwined (Foster, 1995).

Community values can be best expressed and action taken when there is acceptance of both personal and shared responsibility and that this sense of responsibility and commitment leads to personal and community empowerment (Stocker & Pollard, 1994). However, maintaining a community is not an easy task (Barnes, 1997; Peck, 1987). There is a necessity for a community simultaneously to uphold its members and build its community status through communication and to work towards empowerment through action. When a community places more emphasis on *doing* through community projects, members become closer, which in turn encourages their sense of *being* (Metcalf, 1996). Thus, to create a vibrant,

inclusive, empowered, communicative community it must work towards active engagement.

Research supported by this philosophy should be "collaborative in its design and participatory in its execution" (Christians, 2003, p. 227), where participants are given a forum, enabling them to come to mutually held conclusions leading to community transformation. During the course of this collaborative project the research team, who considered themselves a small research community, actively engaged in all research practices and processes to bring about empowerment and transformation in both our research community and the preschool communities in which they worked. There were spaces of disagreement; however, the research team became a dynamic whole where co-researchers participated in active engagement, depended on one another, made decisions together and were committed to the research project. The importance of community and communitarianism to this research project cannot be underestimated and will be discussed further in Chapter Six. We believed that the philosophy of feminist communitarianism and an ethic of care assisted the team to build an ethical framework and achieve the above.

A collaborative philosophy built on care

My research philosophy, borrowed from Levinas (1985, 1987, 1990, 1999), existential thought, an ethic of care and feminist communitarian philosophy, complemented my participatory worldview and strongly influenced how this research project was conducted. I will now draw these diverse philosophies into my own personal philosophy that has greatly impacted on this research project. This study is inspired by Levinas' (1985, 1999) phenomenology of the face. It is through the face-to-face encounter that we are conscious of the closeness and the distance between one another. It is through this encounter that we experience one another and are conscious of our responsibility to one another. The face-to-face encounter is of great importance to this research project. Many people were touched by this study: early childhood educators (as co-researchers), preschool children (as our "teachers"), the parents of the preschoolers, university doctoral supervisors and conference audiences. In each research meeting, storytime session, supervisory meeting and conference presentation every face that met mine had a story to tell, an idea to present, a feeling to express and in each of these stories, ideas and feelings were

personal values either overtly or covertly communicated. Through the phenomenology of face I was able to listen, absorb and respond with utmost humility and respect owing to the desire to truly experience the Other and be responsible for this relationship.

To understand this responsibility I felt the need to do much inner work to discover my real self, as in existential philosophy, and what sort of person and researcher I was and wanted to become. This work resulted in the understanding that by the arbitrary nature of my birth I encounter white privilege (see Chapter Two), which both shames me and highlights my responsibility to challenge this taken-for-granted assumption wherever I can, especially in classrooms. This is a difficult concept for children to understand. However, I believe that we can begin in the early years to teach for social justice highlighting the realities of others as true but often unjust because of our taken-for-granted assumptions. Hence, this study is very close to my inner work underpinned by existential philosophy.

This philosophy also stresses the importance of following inner work with outer work involving empowerment with others. Such emphasis has impacted on my philosophy about how research should be conducted. I believed in an holistic approach to this research project whereby participant knowledge and experiential knowledge were valued and where those involved in the study were actively engaged. I wished the early childhood educators and myself to be regarded as co-researchers with equal status. Therefore, because I already saw these co-researchers (and all involved in the study) through the phenomenology of the face, an appropriate research ethic needed to be considered.

A feminist communitarian philosophy underpinned by an ethic of care became the foundation on which this collaborative study was built. I believed that, as our research community relied on participant knowledge and expertise, much could be done to support and promote teaching for social justice in each co-researcher's individual preschool community. The research team forged caring, trusting, empathetic, respectful and collaborative relationships. Our weekly meetings upheld care, equality, shared governance, harmony, respect and trust. It is my endeavour to

infuse these qualities throughout this document as a respect to those who gave so generously of themselves to make this dissertation a reality.

SUMMARY

This chapter has set the theoretical and conceptual framework for this research project. It highlighted that the study was framed by a participatory worldview that sees human beings as co-creating their world. The dimensions of a participatory worldview were outlined which may be paralleled with the characteristics of action research (see Chapter Four) and superimposed over issues of quality and validity (see Chapters Eight and Nine). This chapter then explained how critical theory also helped frame the study. The chapter concluded by examining the philosophies that underpin my worldview for this research project. It explained that the thinking of Levinas (1985, 1987, 1990, 1999), existential thought, an ethic of care and feminist perspectives permeated the research project with the aim of creating caring, trusting, collaborative and empathetic relationships.

The following chapter brings *Part One: Initial Reflections* to a close by examining the research project's methodology and design that is underpinned by the conceptual framework outlined in this chapter. It supplies a literature review outlining action research before leading into a discussion of participatory action research. The following chapter discusses the characteristics of action research. Superimposing the characteristics of action research, the dimensions of a participatory worldview, and issues of quality and validity unifies the dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRAXIS OF ACTION RESEARCH

> *Action research is a systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflexive, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice.* (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, p. 148)

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three provided the conceptual and theoretical frameworks on which this research project was based. It discussed the participatory worldview as the lens through which I view the world and this research project. It also discussed my collaborative research philosophy that was based on Levinas' (1999) philosophical model of ethics, justice and the Other; an ethic of care (Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995; Held, 1995, 2001, 2005; Noddings, 1995, 2005; Nussbaum, 1990, 1999); and feminist communitarianism (Christians, 2003, 2005, 2006; Christians, Frerre & Fackler, 1993; Held, 2005; Maguire, 2006; Stocker & Pollard, 1994). These conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpin the choice of the research project's methodology. The focus will now turn to the methodology that framed this research project and the design that propelled it.

This action research project embraced McCutcheon and Jung's (1990) definition of action research, as outlined in this chapter's introductory quotation. Indeed, the study discussed in this dissertation was collective, collaborative, self-reflexive, critical and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. This chapter concludes *Part One: Initial Reflections* by highlighting the characteristics of action research which may be parallelled with the dimensions of a participatory worldview (see Chapter Three) and superimposed over issues of quality and validity (discussed later in this chapter; see also Chapters Eight and Nine). This chapter highlights the tensions of this challenge, which confronted the current research project, by discussing action research with special attention to participatory action research that was adopted for the study. The chapter concludes by explaining how data were collected, managed and analysed.

ACTION RESEARCH

The objective of education research should not stop at deconstructing the obvious and simply unpacking reality, but must produce analyses that possess a certain strategic edge to recognise those elements that have the potential to change or oppose the social reality (Troyna, 1994). Through action research this objective may be realised. The methodology of action research was chosen for this study based on three considerations. Firstly, action research reflects a participatory worldview by which this action research project was framed. Secondly, action research is a collaborative inquiry method that values participant knowledge, skills and expertise and seeks to empower and give voice to those involved in the study and to those who will use the findings. Lastly, action research engages an ethical commitment to improving society and making it more just; to improving ourselves so that we may become more conscious of our responsibility as members of a democratic society; and improving our lives together as we build community (Jones, 2006). The last two considerations are underpinned by critical theory.

In opposition to the Cartesian tradition, to which positivists adhere, action research privileges knowing through *doing* over knowing through *thinking*, although in actuality the two go hand-in-hand. The schools of critical theory and pragmatism (Dewey, 1938; Habermas, 1972; James, 1978; Rorty, 1999) privilege experience and action over sterile and distanced observation. These schools of thought "draw attention to knowing through doing (rather than doubting) and emphasise the social nature of all experience and action" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006a, p. xxv). Furthermore, action researchers argue that objective knowledge is impossible because the researcher is constantly part of the world s/he examines, and they point out that knowledge construction can never be neutral and disinterested as it is a political process dealing with particular purposes (Kincheloe, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Tobin & Kincheloe, 2006).

A participatory worldview, with its belief in reality as subjective-objective, engages an extended epistemology. As Reason and Bradbury (2006) explain,

> We draw on diverse forms of knowing as we encounter and act in our world. As Eikeland points out this notion goes right back to Aristotle, while in modern times Polanyi (1962) described clearly his concept of tacit knowledge,

> a type of embodied know-how that is the foundation of all cognitive action. He rejected the notion of the objective observer in science or in any other area of inquiry, expressing his belief in engaged practice that necessarily joins facts and values in a participatory mode of understanding. (p. 9)

Indeed the objective, aloof observer has lost favour in most qualitative research circles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The methodology and design of this action research project are very similar to qualitative designs in that it was field based, conducted over an extended period of time and employed the qualitative research techniques of conversation, journal entries and videotaping. Undeniably, qualitative action research, if underpinned by critical theory, seeks to empower research participants with the aim that they help construct a "better world" for themselves. Qualitative action research is directed towards social justice and recognises a deviation from traditional divisions of objectivity and subjectivity. Contemporary qualitative research "asks that the social sciences and humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

However, it is argued that action research, while overlapping significantly with the qualitative paradigm, has distinct differences in the way in which action researchers work with others and that the distinction between researcher and participants becomes blurred during the collaborative relationship (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Rowan, 2006). In the case of this study the early childhood professionals were co-researchers. In this context knowledge generation and knowledge application were inextricably intertwined. As explained in the previous chapter, this study was carried out *with* and *by*, as opposed to *on* practitioners and preschoolers; therefore, it "bypassed the traditional, constructed separation between research and application" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006a, p. xxv).

Action research is a participatory, collaborative, democratic process involving the development of practical knowing in the quest of worthwhile human purposes, underpinned by a participatory worldview (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It seeks to merge reflection and action and, theory and practice in collaboration and participation

with others. It investigates practical solutions to issues of significant concern to people, and encourages the *flourishing* of individuals and their communities. While the field of action research is extremely varied, there are five widely shared characteristics of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), as shown in Figure 4.1. These characteristics are mirrored in this research project.
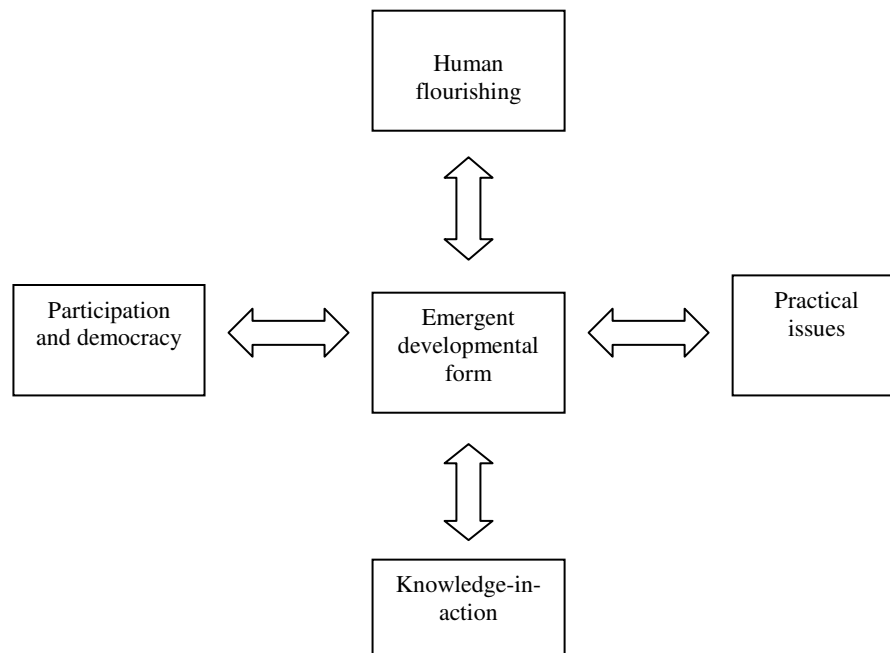
Figure 4.1 Characteristics of Action Research
(Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2)

Emergent developmental form (Figure 4.1)

This characteristic is related to participatory evolutionary reality, which is a dimension of a participatory worldview that was discussed in Chapter Three. Good action research emerges and develops over time in an evolutionary process (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), "as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2). Action research is transformative and emancipatory as it leads not only to new knowledge but also to new ways of creating and using knowledge. It "is a living, emergent process which cannot be pre-determined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers both individually and collectively" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006a, p. xxii). The cyclical, spiralling nature of participatory action research in this

study allowed for the evolutionary and developmental process of knowledge to be generated over time and encouraged creative ways of using this new knowledge (see Part Three).

Practical issues (Figure 4.1)

This characteristic is related to practical being and acting, which is a dimension of a participatory worldview that was discussed in Chapter Three. A main purpose of action research is to generate and construct practical knowledge that people can use in everyday lived situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Wadsworth, 2006; Whitmore & McKee, 2006). This purpose broadens to produce knowledge that will increase the economic, political, psychological and spiritual well-being of individuals and their communities; as typically, the people with the problems are also the people who hold the solutions (Ayers, 1998). This participatory action research examined the everyday experience of storytime in preschool settings to discover how it could be better used to teach for social justice. However, and of equal importance, it encouraged the early childhood educators, as research team members, and also the preschoolers to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, thus extending cognitive and emotive processes leading to self-reflexivity (see Part Three).

Human flourishing (Figure 4.1)

This characteristic is related to meaning and purpose, which is a dimension of a participatory worldview that was discussed in Chapter Three. Action research is about generating new forms of understanding through reflection. Action research contributes to the emancipation of humans and to the "flourishing of community, which helps us reflect on our place within the ecology of the planet and contemplate our spiritual purposes" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2). It can lead us to different ways of being together, as well as offering significant guidance, encouragement and inspiration for practice (Davis & Cooke, 1998). Through participatory action research this study developed an understanding of how best to use storytime sessions in each preschool setting to teach for social justice. However, a further outcome, which was initially unexpected, was the close bond created within the research team. We became a flourishing community, not only providing inspiration for practice but also

supporting one another as individuals in a very physical, emotional and spiritual way (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

Participation and democracy (Figure 4.1)

This characteristic is related to relational ecological form, which is a dimension of a participatory worldview that was discussed in Chapter Three. Action research, and indeed feminist based research, acknowledges a strong objective to work in support of social justice and democratisation (Atweh, Kemmis & Weeks, 1998; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Lather, 1991; Maguire, 2006). Action research involves people seeking practical knowledge and liberating ways of knowing. Therefore, it must be not only liberating but also participatory. Indeed, "in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants" (Habermas, 1974, p. 40). This involves mutual sense-making and collective action. Therefore action research is only possible *with*, *for* and *by* people and their communities, preferably involving all stakeholders, during both the questioning and reflection that informs the research and in the action that follows (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). This participatory action research was both participatory and democratic as it was conducted with, for and by the people who could use the findings or outcomes (see Part Three).

Knowledge-in-action (Figure 4.1)

This characteristic is related to extended epistemology, which is a dimension of a participatory worldview that was discussed in Chapter Three. Action research begins with the everyday lived experiences of its participants and is concerned with the growth of a living, evolving knowledge (McIntyre, 2008). The process of action research is often just as significant as overall outcomes. Knowledge generated in action research is emergent and builds on itself. The action research may create many different ways of knowing as the action research progresses. It was the process of this participatory action research that forged the close bond that the research team enjoyed. Therefore, the knowledge-in-action produced both flourishing preschool storytime sessions and a flourishing research community (see Part Three).

However, the main purpose of action research is not to produce academic theories based on action; nor is it to construct theories about action. It is not even to

produce theoretical or empirical knowledge and understandings that can be applied in action. Rather, it is to free the human body, mind and spirit in the quest for a better, freer world (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2).

It is hoped that the preschoolers involved in this research project will, in the future, stand against injustice and help create a better and freer world that values difference, diversity and human dignity through respect, care, acceptance, and understanding. However, and this is a limitation of the study (see Chapter Nine), this study cannot confirm this. What it can substantiate is that it has liberated the early childhood educators (co-researchers) from their mundane acceptance of storytime as a "filler exercise" to seek out and examine literature that upholds social justice and to teach for social justice. Of equal importance, this research project has infused each team member with a communitarian ethic of care that spills over into our everyday lives (see Chapters Eight and Nine).

THE JOURNEY TO PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Action research is a research design that has become attractive to educators because of its practical, problem-solving emphasis, because practitioners carry out the research and because the research is directed towards greater understanding of and improvement to their own practice (Bell, 2000). Action research involves "researching with people to create and study change in and through the research process. In early childhood settings it can produce changed ways of doing things and changed ways of understanding why we do what we do" (Mac Naughton, 2001, p. 208). Action research appealed to me as a research design; however, I did not fully understand how I (as a researcher) could fit into this type of research. I found reassurance in the insistence that researchers must recognise that the co-construction of knowledge and the material gathered from, with and by any community – including a preschool – constitutes a participatory process (Fine et al., 2004b). The term *participatory process* emphasised the fact that research need not be *done on* participants as objects but can be a collaborative practice. Indeed "action, participatory, and activist-orientated research is on the horizon" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 29). My philosophy and worldview aligned with this new direction of qualitative research where together stakeholders and researchers co-create knowledge

that is realistic and pragmatically useful and is rooted in local understandings (Greenwood & Levin, 2005).

An aim of this research project was to empower and enable all participants. This meant that all participants would be afforded a valued voice, debate and discussion would be encouraged, action agreed upon collaboratively would be promoted and each participant would be represented in every stage of the project. I was looking for a research design that would in itself become a social practice. Therefore, I sought a research design that would encourage a social process of collaborative learning and transformation, open communicative space (Habermas, 1996), uphold prior knowledge, and listen to and value the voice of all participants (educators and preschoolers alike). The most obvious response to critical concerns regarding representation is empowerment research and participatory action research has been cited as the most developed genre of this type (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Martin, lisahunter and McLaren (2006) contend that, "while notions of 'voice' or representation are problematic . . . it is the intention of PART [participatory action research teams] to explicitly deal with this to ensure agency, as participants act in the framing and intervention practices of the issue" (p. 176). Indeed, we (the educators and I) formed the participatory action research team; however, we were ever vigilant that the voices of the preschoolers informed the study and moved it forward.

DESIGN: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory research requires those involved to form empathetic and compassionate ties that cement the research project together. A difference between objective research and participatory research is that the former is underpinned by objective consciousness while the latter is underpinned by compassionate consciousness (Skolimowski, 1995). Therefore, participatory research

> is the art of dwelling in the other, is the art of penetrating from within, is the art of learning to use the language of the other; in short, is the art of empathy. . . . What clinical detachment is to objective methodology, empathy is to the methodology of participation. (Skolimowski, 1995, p. 182)

To this end, participatory action research encourages and opens communicative space between those involved. The process of participatory action research is one of mutual and collaborative inquiry that is

aimed at reaching intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding of a situation, unforced consensus about what to do, and a sense that what people achieve together will be *legitimate* not only for themselves but also for every reasonable person (a universal claim). Participatory action research aims to create circumstances in which people can search together collaboratively for more comprehensible, true, authentic, and morally right and appropriate ways of understanding and acting in the world. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 578)

Informed by Skolimowski (1995) and Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), I anticipated that this research project would be a compassionate, communal inquiry attracting like-minded people who wanted to investigate collaboratively more understandable, accurate, reliable, and ethically right and suitable ways of exploring children's literature during storytime sessions to promote their students' awareness of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues. Participatory action research involves reflection, decision, discussion and action (discussed and elaborated in the following chapters) as like people participate in research concerning problems that influence and interest them (Torres, 2004). Therefore, because of its collaborative strength, the design of participatory action research was adopted as the design of this research project.

Participatory action research is a relatively new and collaborative approach to action research (Torres, 2004). A brief examination of the history of action research delineates the research design's evolution. The history of action research can be traced in terms of its "generation" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Kurt Lewin's earliest writings on action research in the 1940s outlined community action research projects in the United States; however, positivistic principles dominated US research at the time which influenced a temporary decline in action research studies (Kemmis, 1981). A second generation of action research involving organisational development began in Britain around the early 1970s. However, a third generation of action researchers from Australia and Europe raised the initiative to develop more overtly "critical" and "emancipatory" action research (Carr & Kemmis 1986). A fourth generation of action research emerged through social movements in the developing world supported by such notable activists as Paulo Freire (1996) and Orlando Fals Borda (1988). Fourth generation action research practitioners assert that research must represent "educational transformation and emancipation by working with others to change existing social practices and by using critical reflection and social criticism

as key research processes" (Mac Naughton, 2001, p. 210). Such research is necessarily collaborative, orientated to change and visibly political.

This research project easily aligns itself with the fourth generation of action research. However, it also aligns with a new generation of critical participatory action research that emerged during the 1990s as part of a dialogue aimed at critiquing itself and providing a frame of reference for understanding its own research journey (Kimmis & McTaggart, 2005). This research project aspired to become part of this international dialogue by critiquing its own process and journey through collaborative discussions, reflection and reflexivity, and this dissertation's final analysis of the action research project.

The application of participatory action research is appropriate for this study because it is a means that produces knowledge and improves practice through its collaborative nature: the direct involvement of participants in setting the schedule, data collection and analysis, and use of findings (Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001). Participatory action research is influential in the social justice movement (Torres, 2004) and therefore quite appropriate to this study, because its participative nature and transformative action allowed teachers and children to scrutinise critically their understandings of, and appreciation for, justice, difference, diversity and human dignity. By actively and collectively shaping and reshaping these understandings through storytime sessions, children became more sensitive to and aware of social justice issues, and teachers developed strategies for teaching for social justice (see Part Three).

Participatory action research signifies a position within qualitative research methods, an epistemology that aligns well with a participatory worldview and that argues that knowledge is embedded in social relationships and most influential when produced collaboratively through action (Fine et al., 2004a, 2004b). To this end the research team undertook the cyclical, spiralling action research process that was briefly outlined in Chapter One: reflection, collaborative planning, implementation of planned action; observation; re-reflection, re-collaborative planning, re-implementation; and re-observation - and the cycle continued (Bell, 2000; Dick,

2002; Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001; McIntyre, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Torres, 2004).

The cyclical spiral is obviously the central feature of action research; however seven further key features of participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, pp. 566–568) have been identified that warrant an understanding as they are couched in this research project:

1. Participatory action research is a social practice: It identifies that "no individuation is possible without socialisation, and no socialisation is possible without individuation" (Habermas, 1992, p. 26). Therefore the processes of individuation and socialisation persist in shaping individuals, social relationships and social practices. Participatory action research is a process whereby people endeavour to understand their situations and continually examine and re-examine their situations with the aim of improvement. Participatory action research is not simply a quest for knowledge but is also "a transformation of individual attitudes and values, personality and culture, an altruistic process" (Fals Borda, 2006, p. 32). In this study co-researchers worked together (with the preschoolers) to investigate the processes of teaching and learning in the preschool classroom to improve and transform understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues.

2. Participatory action research is *participatory*: It is not research done "on" someone else. It is collaborative and engages participants in examining their own understandings, skills and values (their knowledge) and the ways in which they construe themselves and their actions in their social worlds and practices. Participatory action research encourages participants to reflect critically on how their current knowledge structures and limits their action. This participatory action research project supported us, as co-researchers, to reflect on ourselves as individuals and as a group to explore our prior knowledge and philosophies and make explicit how the frames of reference underpinned our pedagogy, classroom and research practices.

3. Participatory action research is practical and collaborative: It is a process in which participants investigate practices which are often taken for granted with the intent of exposing any part of these practices that may be unproductive,

dissatisfying and/or unjust with the further aim of improvement. This study used participatory action research to examine storytime in preschool settings (an often taken for granted social practice) with the aim of reconstructing this practice for the advancement of teaching for social justice.

4. Participatory action research is emancipatory: It "aims to help people recover, and release themselves from, the constraints of irrational, unproductive, unjust, and unsatisfying *social structures* that limit self-development and self-determination" (Kimmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 567). The social practice of storytime in each preschool classroom was indeed in need of improvement. In both preschool settings there was no rationale for storytime and it had become an unproductive filler exercise that was proving to be dissatisfying for the early childhood educators and at best a habit for the preschool children. The co-researchers involved in this study wished to intervene to release themselves from the constraints of this social practice with a view to improving the practice for themselves and the preschool children in their settings.

5. Participatory action research is critical: It is a means of critically examining the social world deliberately to uncover, contest and reconstitute unjust, dissatisfying and unproductive practices. The research design itself is critical in that it is continually examining itself to encourage just practice; and at the same time it investigates ways in which language and social relationships - in this instance the use of children's picture books during storytime sessions in the preschool classroom - can contest and reconstitute unjust and unproductive practices.

6. Participatory action research is reflexive: It is a conscious process through which people aim to transform their practices through a cyclical, spiralling process of critical self and group reflection. This research project embraced the cyclical, spiralling nature of participatory action research to reflect upon and examine how storytime and children's literature might raise awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues, thus transforming both practice and personal lives (see Part Three).

7. Participatory action research aims to be transformative in both theory and practice. It entails going beyond the specifics of certain situations, as understood by those involved in them, to explore the potential and

possibilities of different perspectives, theories and dialogues that might help to highlight particular practices and/or practical situations as a starting point for initiating critical understandings and ideas about how these situations may be transformed. In the same way it entails looking in from the perspectives provided by different standpoints, theories, and dialogues to discover the degree to which they offer practitioners themselves a critical understanding of the challenges and issues they meet in specific local situations. Thus, participatory action research "aims to transform both practitioners' theories and practices and the theories and practices of others whose perspectives and practices may help to shape the conditions of life and work in particular local settings" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 568).

This last feature of participatory action research is particularly pertinent to this research project. It called for co-researchers to examine their own theories and practices, to look to other theories and practices (e.g., critical theory and pedagogy) that may help them with their endeavours to improve practice and to examine the theories, thoughts and opinions of the preschoolers who inform this practice. Looking inwards and looking outwards have helped move this participatory action research forward.

The characteristics of action research and the cyclical, spiralling nature of participatory action research, with the above seven key features, became the methodological framework on which this research project was constructed. Inquiries conducted in this way endeavour "to make qualitative research more humanistic, holistic, and relevant to the lives of human beings. This worldview sees human beings as co-creating their reality through participation, experience and action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 384). By employing participatory action research as a research design, which aligns well with a participatory worldview (outlined in the previous chapter), this research encouraged collaborative action and was relevant to all participants' lived experiences.

THE PROBLEMATIC OF THE FACILITATOR OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

My philosophy and my participatory worldview encourage me to value participatory collaborative research; however, it is not an easy task and fraught with many challenges for all participants. The concerns of power and privilege are ever present in collaborative research (Ryan & Campbell, 2001). However, I believe that these concerns were managed quite well in this research project through the employment of communitarianism and an ethic of care (discussed further in Chapter Six). In this section I wish to raise quandaries regarding my own position in this research project and the "I/thou" dichotomy (Buber, 1960).

I was a Doctor of Philosophy candidate/university researcher inviting participants into what I initially described as "my study". However, as time went on I began to problematise my own position in the research project. I related to Wadsworth (2006) when she comments on the unease that she felt when writing about her own experiences in *facilitating* participatory action research (for want of a better term – Kemmis and McTaggart [2005] and McIntyre [2008] have also struggled to find an appropriate term for the university researcher involved in participatory action research). Wadsworth (2006, p. 323) writes that "the presumptuous claims of the immodest Royal 'I' (as in 'I did this' and 'I did that') sit uncomfortably with a hard-won 'we'". I too felt this anxiety. Although I instigated the research project it was indeed the educators and preschoolers who took ownership of the evolving findings. Therefore, this research project was as much theirs as it was mine; which is exactly how collaborative action research is intended.

The initiating or facilitating researcher has, from the beginning of the research project, three fundamental and interdependent issues to consider (Heron & Reason, 2006). Firstly, it is imperative that group members are thoroughly orientated and inducted into the methodology so that they can accept it as their own. Therefore, an orientation phase that addressed this imperative was built into the research project. This consideration empowers participants cognitively and methodologically. Secondly, the initiator, or facilitator, must strive for emergent participatory decision-making and collaboration so that the inquiry becomes co-operative. To this end all

research meetings were a participatory endeavour where decisions were democratically collaborated upon. This consideration empowers participants politically. Thirdly, a climate of mutual respect, warmth and trust must be created to allow open and free expression. This consideration was largely addressed during the orientation phase and will be discussed in Chapter Six. This last consideration empowers participants emotionally and interpersonally. Indeed getting these issues clear, from the outset, "makes for good practice" (Heron & Reason, 2006, p. 151).

I also acknowledge Wadsworth's (2006) ideas that assisted my understanding of my position in this research project. The research project was "more or less" the participants' inquiry and they became co-researchers with me as facilitator. As facilitator I assisted an iterative, emergent inquiry that was continuous, responsive and carried out over time. As facilitator I involved and worked with the co-researchers to choose the methods and questions to be asked, facilitated meetings and circulated the responses among them. Together we interpreted, analysed and drew conclusions and decided on new actions, and then experimented with these and monitored them continuously and over time. Disparities of power required me as the facilitator to encourage the research team to devise strategies that empowered all involved to speak and be heard accurately and with respect. The facilitator enters into an engaged, intersubjective process with participants, and together they hold up "mirrors and magnifying glasses" to themselves and one another over a sequence of cycles so that more and more desirable changes may be a result of the inquiry (Wadsworth, 2006, p. 333). As facilitator I desired the best possible results revealing that new insights were gained by all the relevant players and were applied in practice without need for executive direction.

Thus, one can see that the facilitator of participatory action research has a responsibility not only to produce rigorous research (as in traditional research methods) but accountability and responsibility to those co-researchers and participants involved in the study. Therefore, from the beginning of this research project I endeavoured to address Heron and Reason's (2006) three fundamental issues for the facilitator of action research. I was also attentive to Wadsworth's (2006)

explanation regarding the standpoints of the facilitator of participatory action research and incorporated them into this research project.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research project is based in the belief that young children are different from adults and to gain understandings of their views, ideas, opinions and feelings it is important to use methods that suit their competence, knowledge, interest and context (Einarsdottir, 2007). Therefore, the research was conducted in the familiar settings of their preschools with and by their educators. From discussions with these educators it was realised that the preschoolers enjoyed being videotaped and having photographs taken. According to their teachers (who were co-researchers) the preschoolers had previously enjoyed experiences with video and audio tapes and revelled in the outcomes.

Therefore, the research methods employed by this research project included: research meeting minutes; audio taped conversations; observations of storytime sessions using videotaped footage; an observational proforma and a "Preschooler Response Sheet"; field notes and journal entries; photographs; and informal conversations. These research methods are outlined below; however a full analysis may be found in Part Three.

Weekly participatory action research team meetings

Guided by the action research framework, previously outlined, the research team met to reflect, analyse, discuss and plan. Each week the team examined data gathered from videotaped storytime sessions with the aid of the proforma and Preschooler Response Sheet (usually four storytime sessions were examined at each meeting); photographs of children's work relating to literature read; and team members' fieldnotes and journals.

Each week the research team reflected upon questions that were couched in Fairclough's (1992) social theory of discourse and discourse analysis. Also the team regularly reflected upon issues of quality and validity (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). These modes of analysis are discussed later in this chapter. Through observation, reflection and analysis of what the teachers and children were saying and doing,

picture books for the next week were chosen and a plan of action constructed. Meeting minutes were written each week and issued to co-researchers for verification the following week. This has aided the writing up of this dissertation as it portrays an authentic account of what was said and what eventuated as verified by the research team members.

Methods of obsrvation

Videotaping: 35 storytime sessions and two role-playing sessions were videotaped, transcribed and analysed by the participatory action research team.

Observational proforma and preschooler response sheet: An observational proforma assisted the team's observations and analysis of the video footage. However, it became apparent very early during the action research phase that it would be advantageous to this research project to investigate more deeply those students who were engaged with the story and discussion, those who were disengaged, those who were being "left out", those who were silenced and those who were dominating. The team felt that such an investigation might clarify specific students' interests to social justice issues; however, more importantly it may highlight socially unjust practices occurring during storytime sessions. The team asked: are any children being ignored? Is any child continually silenced? Does one child's opinion dominate? These questions were thought difficult to answer using the observational proforma, so the research team devised a Preschooler Response Sheet which was also analysed at meetings.

Initial and concluding conversations

Crucial to this research were two sets of conversations held with each preschool child regarding a critical text. One set of conversations was held at the end of the orientation phase. These are referred to as initial conversations. The second set of conversations was conducted at the end of the action research phase. These are referred to as concluding conversations. Both sets of conversations were audio recorded for transcription and comparison. Mindful of the challenges regarding researching with young children this research heeded ethical considerations (previously outlined) for interacting with young children during all conversations.

Photographs

It was important to this study not only that verbal responses to children's literature were noted and analysed, but also artistic responses and socio-dramatic play were recorded and analysed. Although they were not articulated responses, creative responses may have allowed certain children a voice otherwise missed in the research (Sipe, 2000).

Informal conversations

Each child was invited to share and articulate her/his creative responses. These responses were written down as field notes. Conversations were always child directed, allowing the children to talk freely.

Photographs and informal conversations were examined to discover if the creative responses of children were displaying a developing awareness and deeper understanding of social justice issues; if so, how and in what way? The study was not looking for artistic merit but examined the impact that the theme of the book had on the artist. Art is a useful sign system for helping to understand and develop children's critical awareness (Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005). Art, in the context of this research project, meant any creative expression, for example: dramatic play, collage, painting, clay or playdough sculpting, music, song, dance, mime and/or puppetry.

Fieldnotes and journals

Observations were cross-referenced with, and supplemented by, on-the-spot field notes and journals kept by all team members and shared, on a voluntary basis, during research meetings.

RECORDING AND STORING THE DATA

Because this research project generated such a large amount of data arising from documents, meeting notes and minutes, videotapes, audiotapes, transcripts, photographs and journal entries, I needed to develop an efficient and comprehensive way of managing, organising and documenting those data. Owing to the nature of action research, data collection was continual and emergent. A systematic and coherent process of data gathering, storage and retrieval was necessary and assisted

data analysis, interpretation and report writing (Huberman & Miles, 1998). To this end data folios were used to collate documents, meeting notes and minutes, transcripts and journal entries. Raw footage of videotaped storytime sessions has been stored in a locked filing cabinet; and digital photographs were stored in my personal notebook computer.

Data Folios

Because data were gathered sequentially and continually they were organised and stored chronologically, arranged by date of collection, in six large folios. Each preschool had its own folio divided into sections containing letters, class lists, consent forms, initial interview transcripts, and concluding interview transcripts. Two extremely large folios stored the videotaped storytime session transcripts for each preschool. Another folio contained participatory action research meeting notes and minutes, proformas of observations from videotaped storytime sessions, preschoolers' response sheets, text summary forms, and team reflections regarding issues of quality and validity. The last folio contained handwritten journal entries. All the above (except those contained in the journal folio) have been word-processed from which a hard copy was produced, and all have been recorded on computer disc. All copies (both electronic and hard copies) were stored in locked filing cabinets in my home.

Raw footage

Each individual videotaped storytime session has been stored onto a videotape and also DVD. These videotapes and DVDs have been separated into two groups (Preschool A; Preschool B) and chronologically labeled, also displaying the title of the texts read and then stored in filing cabinets in my home. Photographs are stored in my personal notebook computer. No child's name labels any photograph.

The very large sizes of the data sets prevented their inclusion with this dissertation. However, Appendices B-H provide thorough bibliographic information on the children's literature used in the research project, a table summary of the weekly action research cycles, ethical clearance information, consent forms, and a letter drafted by Preschool A children asking for parental help with donating clothing and toys.

REFLECTING ON, ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING THE DATA

The previous section discussed how data were collected and stored. This section highlights the emergent nature of action research and examines how observations, ideas, reflections, interpretations and resultant actions were developed. Data were processed naturalistically and collaboratively as events unfolded (Elliot, 1994). Data analysis in action research is not separate to data collection and does not occur as an end result of data gathering. Interpretations develop in conjunction with data collection and take place gradually. In this research project interpretations were negotiated with all co-researchers and constructed as a team during the research meetings over the course of the research project. Observations, reflections and weekly analyses converged towards final interpretations over the research project's multiple cycles.

There were four distinct stages of this research project which are pertinent to addressing the research questions and data analysis and which will be expanded upon in the following chapters: the orientation phase; the action research phase comprising the preschoolers' responses during initial conversations, storytime sessions and concluding conversations; the action research phase comprising the co-researchers' responses during research meetings; and the final self-reflective phase that allowed for my own reflections as the facilitator and doctoral researcher.

Reflecting on and analysing the four stages of this research project which are embedded in the research questions required deep, critical reflection. To assist critical reflection on preschoolers' responses and address and analyse data that were pertinent to the first research question, a framework to analyse knowledge in action was needed. To this end, Fairclough's (1992) understanding of the three aspects of discourse (the construction of the self; the construction of social relationships; the construction of systems of belief and knowledge) and the three functions of language (identity, relational and ideational) were used as a guide and adapted as a framework to assist with data analysis. To support the research team's critical reflective analysis of its own practice and to address specifically the second research question Reason and Bradbury's (2006) five broad issues of quality and validity in action research were regularly discussed. These may be superimposed on the dimensions of a

participatory worldview (discussed in Chapter Three) and the characteristics of action research (discussed earlier in this chapter) and offer a unifying dimension to this dissertation. They also assisted my own self-reflective analysis. The following section explains further the data analysis techniques mentioned above.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

One of the greatest barriers to creating a more just world is the power of the dominant hegemony and ideology that shapes the way people think (Selener, 1997). It is this hegemony that has, and is, shaping preschool children's thoughts on social justice issues through family, friends, the preschool, the media and children's literature. This research project examined how this hegemony and ideology might be challenged. Such analysis required critical reflection by the research team.

Reflection is of importance to action research data analysis as it is contextualised by an individual's or group's thoughts, feelings, existing knowledge and prior experiences (Hughes, 2008) in order to attain additional insights (Moon, 2004). Therefore, reflection was an essential element of this research project. Moon (2004) argued that

> Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we may use to fulfill a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome or we may simply 'be reflective' and then an outcome can be unexpected. Reflection is applied to relatively complicated, ill-structured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding that we already possess. (p. 82)

Particular outcomes can result from reflective practice (Moon, 2004). The outcomes of reflection that are pertinent to this research project were learning, knowledge and understanding; action; critical review; continuing personal and professional development; building theory from observations in practical situations; making decisions, solving problems, empowerment and emancipation; and the recognition that there is need for further reflection. Indeed, "few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 24).

An important dimension of reflection that affects outcomes is *depth*. Depth of reflection can range from superficial description to deep reflection characterised by

perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991); transformatory critique (Barnett, 1997); and/or transformative learning (Moon, 1999). From this it can be understood that there are levels of reflection involving a hierarchical model of reflective activity (Hatton & Smith, 1995). At the lower level purely descriptive writing and reflection occur where there is no discussion beyond the description of events usually taken from one perspective. Dialogic reflection transpires at a higher level where those reflecting "step back" from events and actions and begin to contemplate the discourse of events and actions. At this level there is a recognition that different judgments and alternative explanations may co-exist for the same event or action. The reflection is necessarily analytical and integrative. The highest level requires critical reflection that is underpinned by an understanding that actions and events are not only located within and explainable by multiple perspectives, but also situated in and influenced and manipulated by multiple historical and socio-political contexts.

It was the latter two levels of reflection in which this research project was typically involved. However, it must be noted that some descriptive work was necessary in this study to provide the backgrounds for the reflections. For the research project depth in reflection was characterised by our increasing ability as a team to frame and reframe internal and external experience with openness and flexibility and our understanding of the structure of knowledge and how knowledge was constructed. Deep reflection undertaken by the research team required that we managed emotion, and where appropriate worked with it, understanding also the manner in which it was related to our context of the reflective and learning process. These characteristics support most deep reflection (Moon, 2004).

Critical reflection is a vital element of this research project and critical moments provide a useful reflective focus. The word *critical* is used in this dissertation in the following ways. Firstly, critical implies thoughtful "consideration and evaluation" (reflection); secondly, it implies "significant" as in critical moment, where critical moments are understood as significant incidents or happenings that add understanding or knowledge concerning particular events or activities (Hughes, 2008).

How critical reflection is employed in this dissertation

Critical reflection and analysis can be unpredictable and have a transformative character (Kincheloe, 2003). During this research project critical reflection and analysis of videotaped storytime sessions was ongoing and undertaken during weekly meetings by the research team as part of our action research. The preschoolers' responses were, indeed, unpredictable. In the responses of preschoolers' to the children's literature that was read we searched for key words, phrases, patterns and underlying themes as part of our analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Stake, 1995). However, and as equally important, we looked for silences, facial expressions and gestures and we noted critical moments (see Part Three; also Appendix C). This reflection and analysis ultimately transformed the way the educators (co-researchers) viewed storytime and the action research project transformed many preschoolers' understandings of, and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference diversity and human dignity (this is discussed in Part Three).

Freire (1970) used *generative themes*, issues that became vitally important to those involved in the research project, to explore how to help adults acquire literacy and how to assist them to engage in social critique and social action. To a certain extent Freire's aims are mirrored in the aims of this participatory action research project and so the idea of using themes that emerged through the data to report on and analyse the project became appealing. Other researchers (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999; Maguire, 2006; Stake, 1995; Whitmore & McKee, 2006) have also employed a themed approach when discussing and analysing qualitative data. Following these examples, therefore, Part Three, Chapter Eight, highlights the preschoolers' voices and analyses their responses to storytime sessions using a themed approach.

Part Three, Chapter Eight, focuses on the co-researchers' voices and analyses critical moments and critical meetings using a narrative approach which is explained later in this chapter. The vast amount of data gathered over the eleven week term that encompassed the action research phase precludes me from reporting on and analysing every meeting. Nevertheless, there were critical meetings and critical moments that

heralded turning points for the research project which invite in-depth analysis. What I judged to be critical meetings and critical moments is explained in Chapter Eight.

ANALYSING KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

To assist in critical reflection and because this research project embraced the methodology of action research it is of significance that data analysis examines knowledge in action. Language and literacy are social practices (Beecher & Arthur, 2001; Campbell & Green, 2006; Fairclough, 1992) and, therefore, modes of action: ways in which people may act with and on the world and one another, and ways of representation. This understanding of discourse fits well with a participatory worldview. There is a distinction between Discourse (with a capital D) as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee, 1990, p. 143); and discourse (with a lower case d): the language used in this social construction. This definition of Discourse is important to this discussion as Discourse is of greater significance than language (discourse) because it includes values, beliefs and ways of acting in the world and ways of using and manipulating language (Arthur, Davison & Stow, 2000).

Also Discourse and discourse are formed and inhibited by social structure in the broadest sense and at all levels: race, class, gender, culture; and by institutions (e.g., education). This understanding fits with critical theory. "Discourse is socially constitutive… Discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). These dimensions of social structure are the very conventions and norms that underpin discourse and also the identities, organisations and establishments that support it.

Three aspects of discourse are identified that have a constructive effect: Firstly, the construction of the self; secondly, the construction of social relationships and thirdly the construction of systems of belief and knowledge (Fairclough, 1992). These three aspects correspond to three functions of language and meaning: identity, relational and ideational. Fairclough (1992) contends that

> The identity function relates to the ways in which social identities are set up in discourse, the relational function to how social relationships between discourse participants are enacted and negotiated, the ideational function to ways in which texts signify the world and its processes, entities and relations. (p. 64)

The identity and relational functions of language are grouped together as interpersonal (Halliday, 1978). However, it is discourse as a means of ideological practice that is most relevant and useful to this dissertation and its data analysis. It must be remembered that the three aspects of discourse and the three functions of language and meaning co-exist and interact with one another.

Discursive practices are defined as a set of tacit rules that regulate and control what can be said and what cannot, who can speak with authority and who must listen, whose socio constructions are considered significant and valid and whose are considered invalid and unimportant (Lemke, 1995). Discursive practice can comprise both conformist and imaginative modes: it can contribute to reproducing, duplicating and replicating society whereby the status quo is maintained and it can contribute to transforming society. Discourse, as a political practice can create, maintain or change power relations; and discourse as an ideological practice can form, establish, continue or challenge and change meanings and constructions of the world from diverse situations in power relations (Fairclough, 1992). Political and ideological practices are interdependent.

The previous chapter discussed that all texts are created through an ideology and much of what Fairclough has to say regarding ideology is mirrored in this. Discursive practices can be used in an ideological struggle to reshape these discursive practices (and the ideologies built into them) "in the context of restructuring and transformation of relations of power" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 88). He espouses that although people are ideologically positioned they are capable of challenging these ideologies and restructuring taken-for-granted assumptions. They are capable of transcending their ideologies.

> A discursive event may be either a contribution to preserving and reproducing traditional gender relations and hegemonies and may therefore draw upon problematised conventions, or it may be a contribution to transforming those relations through hegemonic struggle and may therefore try to resolve the

dilemmas through innovation. Discursive events themselves have cumulative effects upon social contradictions and the struggles around them. To sum up, then, sociocognitive processes will or will not be innovatory and contribute to the discursive change depending upon the nature of the social practice. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 97)

Discourse, on the one hand, constrains people to the status quo; and on the other hand has the ability to liberate people from this thinking by challenging taken-for-granted ideologies (Fairclough, 1992). The research team analysed what the preschoolers and teachers were doing and saying during storytime sessions to investigate how children's literature could be used to facilitate preschoolers' awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues and challenge injustices and stereotypes.

It should be noted here that, although Fairclough's work is closely associated with discourse analysis, this participatory action research project resisted the temptation to undertake such analysis. As explained in Chapter Three this study is underpinned by a participatory worldview that does not align with the deconstructive postmodern/poststructural paradigm that concerns itself with discourse, text, narrative and the crisis of representation. This research project is concerned about the relationship of all this to knowledge in action. It moves away from the poststructuralist linguistic turn, which has exposed the crisis that the modern world is in, to the "action turn" that progresses beyond the problems to explore possible solutions. However, this research project did use Fairclough's (1992) three aspects of discourse (the construction of the self; the construction of social relationships; the construction of systems of belief and knowledge) and the three functions of language (identity, relational and ideational) as a guide to construct a framework to assist with data analysis. As a research team we analysed discursive practices at the micro level that focused on how preschoolers and teachers interpreted the children's literature and how we as a research team interpreted these interpretations. We also analysed discursive practices at the macro level, focusing on intertextuality: how one storytime session and one research team meeting built on the last and also looked to the future. Macro-analysis examines the interplay of participants and what they drew upon (including one another) to produce and interpret texts (meaning both literature and discourse – the written and the spoken), and if this production and interpretation were

being created in normative or transformative ways. We therefore analysed the social practice of storytime.

Fairclough (1992, pp. 234-238) offered questions at the micro and macro levels that our research team adapted to assist with analysis of videotaped storytime sessions and audio-taped conversations:

The micro level:

Is any child being ignored?

Is any child continually silenced?

Does one child's opinion dominate?

What are the children's gestures, body movements and voice intonations telling us?

What is the thematic structure of the children's literature and the discursive practices regarding children's literature and what assumptions underlie it?

Are marked themes frequent, and if so what motivations for them are there?

What keywords have been put forward?

Are new lexical items becoming apparent, and if so what theoretical, cultural or ideological significance do they have?

The macro level:

How are assumptions and stereotypical responses cued in the discourse of each storytime session?

Are these assumptions linked to the prior opinions of those of the preschoolers' and others?

Are they sincere or manipulative/manipulated?

Are they polemic (e.g., negative sentences)?

Social practice, however, is too complicated and difficult to condense to a checklist (Fairclough, 1992). The general aim is, firstly, to identify the nature of the social practice of which the discourse practice is part and secondly, to specify the consequences of the discursive practices upon the social practice. The social practice of storytime was analysed by the research team during the orientation phase of the research project and is discussed in the next chapter.

In the light of Fairclough's (1992) three dimensional framework for the social theory of discourse the research team analysed each group's storytime by examining the above questions and by investigating emergent themes; engagement; teacher questioning techniques; keywords and phrases; and critical moments. Through analysing of storytime sessions this study examined what texts and how their treatment inspired deeper awareness and understanding of, and sensitivity to, social justice issues, encouraged more critical thinking and motivated more action. It investigated how the teacher facilitated, encouraged, scaffolded and extended this awareness, sensitivity, critical thinking and action. As the action research phase progressed it also examined how the children were developing language and tools needed to articulate their awareness and understanding of social justice issues (see Part Three). To assist with analysis the following questions were added to Fairclough's lists and investigated:

- Did children voluntarily identify the social justice issue/s raised in the text? Who identified the issue/s? Was teacher help and/or scaffolding needed?

- Were social injustices identified and/or challenged? Who identified the issue/s? Was teacher help and/or scaffolding needed?

- Was any follow up action suggested and/or planned and by whom (e.g., drawing pictures for the elderly, challenging stereotypes in the preschool play areas)?

- Were any unforeseen critical/social justice issues raised by individuals and/or the group?

- Is there evidence that children are developing social justice awareness (e.g., frequency of children's analytic comments; increased sensitivity to social justice issues)?

- Is there evidence that children are developing skills to articulate this awareness?

- What could be included to facilitate the preschoolers' better understanding of social justice issues?

- Are all children involved? Is any child silenced? Is any child dominating?

- Is there evidence of positive recognition of difference?

- Is there evidence of transformational learning?

- How can we better teach for social justice?

- What has been discovered?

- What themes are emerging?
- Where do we go from here?

The preceding data analysis technique and questions mainly focused the research team in exploring and analysing data to address the first research question: *How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?*

The following section explores how, as a research team, we analysed data to address the second research question: *How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?*

QUALITY AND VALIDITY IN ACTION RESEARCH

According to many writers on qualitative research validity is an irritating issue, with the term *trustworthiness* usually employed to assess the validity of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mac Naughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Stake, 1995; Wiersma, 2001). The problem lies in the opposing ways validity is understood within different research paradigms. In qualitative research

> the meaning of validity is close to that commonly found in philosophy, that is, the truth-value in a statement . . . a statement about the validity of a study is a judgment about the extent to which it can be said that the research has captured important features of the field and has analysed them with integrity. (Edwards, 2001, p. 124)

Neither term, trustworthiness nor validity, is adequate when applied to action research because neither acknowledge its action-orientated practical outcomes (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Nonetheless, when analysing and reflecting on our own participatory action research and exploring what constitutes "good" action research, the team turned to Reason and Bradbury (2006), who contend that there needs to be a broadening of the bandwidth of validity for action research. In research circles there is an obsession regarding validity (Lather, 1993, 2001). As noted, the issue of validity is quite vexed for action researchers. The traditional understandings of validity,

couched in positivism, do not fit the qualities of action research (Kvale, 1989; Woolcot, 1990). Indeed, there are schools of thought that are considering shifting the frame of validity from discourse regarding quality as normative to a relational exercise (Lather, 2001). Reason and Bradbury (2006c) have transferred the dialogue regarding concerns of idealist questions seeking "Truth" to concerns regarding "engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important" (p. 343). Pragmatic truth is what participatory action researchers seek as it impacts on, and is authentic to, their situations and contexts.

Because this study was underpinned by a participatory worldview attention must be drawn to the features of the participative-relational practices of our participatory action research. As action researchers "we must pay attention to the congruence between qualities of participation which we espouse and the actual work we accomplish, especially as our work involves us in networks of power dynamics which both limit and enable our work" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 344). Figure 4.2 outlines five issues addressing quality and validity in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). These issues emerged from the five dimensions of a participatory worldview discussed in Chapter Three and the five characteristics of action research discussed previously in this chapter. The research team regularly reflected upon these issues as a way of examining the research's quality and validity (see Chapters Eight and Nine). As a self-reflexive practice I also contemplated these five issues, and the eight choice-points that emanated from them, in Chapter Nine
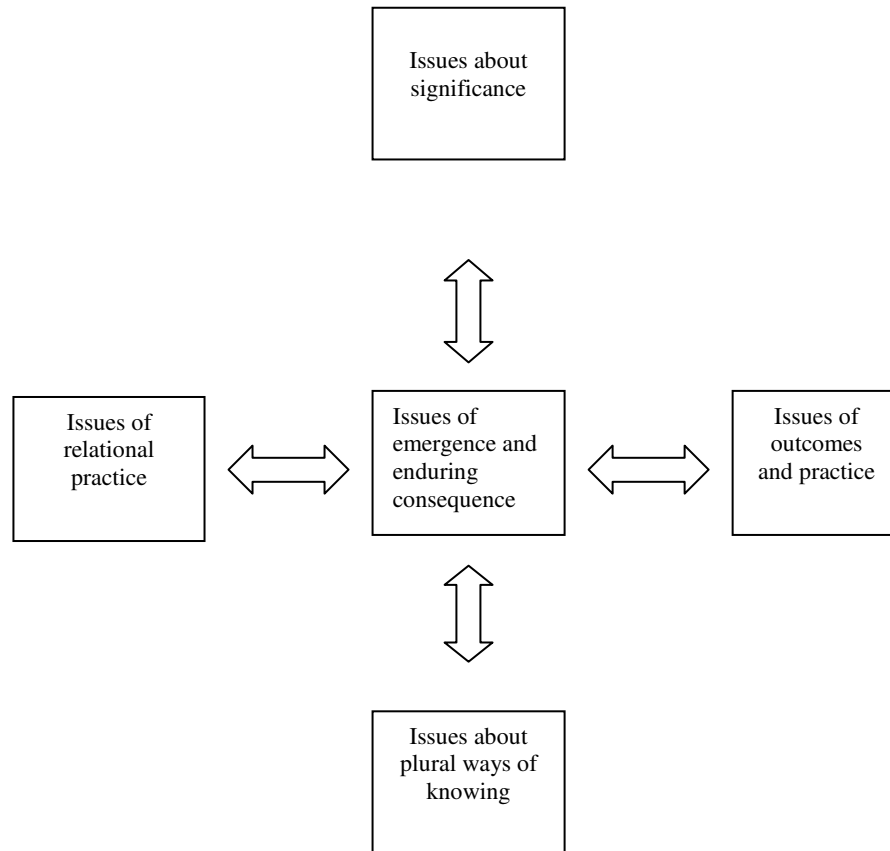
Figure 4.2 Issues for Validity and Quality in Action Research
(Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 12)

Issues of emergence and enduring consequence (Figure 4.2)

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence relate to *participatory evolutionary reality* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *emergent developmental form* (a characteristic of action research), both of which have impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapter Three and previously in this chapter. This issue examines the quality of the action research project through its history, how it impacts in the present and how it might impact on the future. It corresponds with issues relating to first, second and third person research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). First person research, in this participatory action research project, examines how each team member became involved with this research and the underpinnings on which this study was based. Second person research examines how the research project was developed over time. Participatory action research, such as this inquiry, is emergent and evolutionary. Third person research, which is closely tied to enduring consequence, examines whether the action research was sown in such

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a manner that participation could be sustained and continued in the absence of the initiating researcher (Torbert, 2006). The significance of action research is its ability to meld the three expressions of research into one that produces "a logic of continuous change" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 345): Change for one-self (first person research); change for co-researchers (second person research); and possible change for people in the wider context (third person research). This participatory action research managed to meld the three expressions of research and may be re-worked in other participatory inquiries that could have enduring consequences for other settings (this is explained further in Chapter Nine).

Issues of outcomes and practice (Figure 4.2)

Issues of outcomes and practice relate to *practical being and acting* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *practical issues* (a characteristic of action research), both of which have impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapter Three and previously in this chapter. The practical outcomes for action researchers are important. The research must be useful to those involved in the inquiry. There is a distinction among technical, practical and emancipatory outcomes (Habermas, 1972; Kemmis, 2006). This research project involved mostly practical and emancipatory outcomes. Practical outcomes aim not only to improve practice in functional terms "but also to see how their goals, and the categories in which they evaluate their work, are shaped by their ways of seeing and understanding themselves in context" (Kemmis, 2006, p. 95). Therefore, the process of action research is one of self-education for the practitioners involved. An emancipatory outcome is about improving the work, the worker and the workplace. Emancipatory action research "aims towards helping practitioners to develop a critical and self-critical understanding of their situation – which is to say, an understanding of the way both particular people and particular settings are shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically" (Kemmis, 2006, p. 96). Exploring the practical and emancipatory outcomes of this action research project informed the significance of the research project and relational process.

Issues about significance (Figure 4.2)

Issues of significance relate to *meaning and purpose* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *human flourishing* (a characteristic of action research),

both of which have impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapter Three and previously in this chapter. This issue raises questions regarding the research project's purpose and meaning. "It is not enough to do good work, if the work itself is not of real importance" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 345). The research project must be of significance to the people who will use the findings; and the findings must be of significance to the people who were involved in the research. Questions about significance should not be left as a reflexive exercise at the conclusion of the research project. This reflection should be ongoing and involve the whole team as a relational practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Issues of relational practice (Figure 4.2)

Issues of relational practice relate to *ecological form* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *participation and democracy* (a characteristic of action research) both of which have impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapter Three and previously in this chapter. A mark of quality in action research is that those involved become invigorated and empowered. A relational dimension is that those involved in the research project may develop critical consciousness that engenders new insights into their situations.

Issues about plural ways of knowing (Figure 4.2)

Issues of plural ways of knowing relate to *extended epistemology* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *knowledge-in-action* (a characteristic of action research), both of which have impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapter Three and previously in this chapter. Conceptual knowledge is of importance to action research. However, of equal importance is the fact that we engage in extended forms of epistemologies (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The spiralling and cyclical nature of participatory action research ensures the development of both understanding and practice as the cycle develops (Dick, 2002; Heron & Reason, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Marshall, 2006). This leads us to explore if the research method chosen was congruent with the participatory direction that the action research intended and how well it was conducted (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

A participatory inquiry, such as this action research project which emphasised researching *with* and more importantly *by* people, stresses that the responsibility for

exploring the above issues rests with the research community as a whole. Without doubt "it is important for the action research team or community of inquiry as a whole to take time regularly for reflection of the choice-points made along the way and the possible need for re-orientation from time to time" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 346). It is for these reasons that the participatory action research team often reflected on the issues of quality in action research as outlined above (see Chapters Nine and Ten). The key dimension of quality in action research is to be aware of the choices one has made and to articulate these choices clearly and transparently. This type of activity has been referred to as *crafting* (Kvale, 1995) and, instead of validity being perceived as policing, it is more a move towards "incitement to dialogue" (Lather, 2001, p. 241).

REPORTING ON THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

The data reflection and analysis processes described in the preceding sections emphasise that action research is a continuously transforming inquiry, with the understandings that are produced and the actions that are generated being always provisional (Davis, 2003). Because action research is collaborative and action-orientated the writing of the dissertation demands that it accounts for its iterative, provisional and collaborative nature (Dick, 1993; Winter, 1996). Winter (1996) views the text of an action research report in pluralistic terms and suggests that it is more like a collage than a description. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) agree with Winter and describe this "new" paradigm researcher as a *bricoleur* or *quiltmaker*.

The term *portrayal* has been proposed as being a preferable term to *reportage* for describing the research emanating from the action paradigm (Lincoln, 1997). This portrayal implies that the author of the action research report possesses "the ability to craft compelling narratives which give outsiders a vicarious experience of the community and which give insiders both a deeper understanding of themselves, and the power to act" (Lincoln, 1997, p. 23).

Therefore, taking into account these views regarding report writing in action research, it can be understood that writing the dissertation about an action research project is not an easy task and one with which I have struggled greatly. I needed to

make sense of the masses of meeting minutes, video and audio transcriptions, observational proformas, journal entries and notes jotted down on pieces of scrap paper. However, and very importantly, I wished to foreground the voices of the preschoolers and my co-researchers and portray accurately each phase of the action research and the action research cycles. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) contend that "experience has shown that the writing up period is a whole new learning experience. It is where synthesis and integration take place… Writing the story is [the] key to synthesis" (p. 128).

To this end I have chosen to adopt a critical narrative approach to piece together a collage of the action research cycles that emanated from this research project. A critical narrative approach complements critical reflection whereby description and critique occur (Brodkey, 1987). The description is essentially a narrative that recounts the research story, whereas the critique (which in this dissertation utilises critical reflection, analysis of knowledge in action and reflections on issues of quality and validity) may provide fundamental and valuable transformative tools that encourage understanding of the world in new ways and assist in the communication of new ideas (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). Narratives provide insights for both writers and readers by assisting reflection and supporting the recognition and management of emergent themes, concerns and problems (Burchell & Dyson, 2000). Therefore, critical narrative, which highlighted the voices of those involved in the study, was embraced as a powerful writing tool for reporting on, or rather portraying, the emergent processes and outcomes of this participatory action research project.

SUMMARY

This chapter concludes *Part One: Initial Reflections*. It discussed how my participatory worldview influenced the decision to implement the action research design of participatory action research for this study, which highlights the importance of collaborative inquiry as a process of education and emancipation. It outlined the characteristics of action research and explained that action research, especially participatory action research, is carried out *with* and *by* those who will use the findings. The chapter then discussed how the characteristics of action research, the

cyclical, spiralling nature of participatory action research and the seven key features of participatory action research became the framework for conducting this research project. It also exposed the challenges that confronted me as the facilitator of this participatory action research. The chapter concluded by elucidating how data were collected, managed and analysed.

Part Two: Planning is detailed in Chapters Five and Six and sets the scene for the participatory action research project. Chapter Five discusses contemporary perspectives of childhood, how the research team was established, places the preschools involved in the study in context and expounds ethical considerations (especially when conducting research with young children). Chapter Six highlights the orientation phase of the research project.

PART TWO:

PLANNING

CHAPTER FIVE: SETTING THE SCENE

> *Action research is only possible* with, for *and* by *persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research,* and *in the action which is its focus.* (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 2)

INTRODUCTION

The preceding section, *Part One: Initial Reflections*, explained the theoretical underpinnings of this research project. It reflected and reported on relevant literature that became the catalyst and the foundation for the project and explained the theoretical concepts that underpinned this study. It discussed the imperatives and challenges of teaching for social justice. It delved deeply into the theory of a participatory worldview and the philosophies that also underpinned the project, and examined the epistemologies that support a participatory worldview and value the co-construction of knowledge in a social context. The section concluded by exploring the theory and practice of action research, particularly the design of participatory action research which was embraced by this research project, exposed the challenges of my position in the participatory action research process and outlined how data were gathered, managed and analysed.

This chapter introduces *Part Two: Planning*, by setting the scene for the action research project. This chapter is of significance as it underpins how the research questions were addressed. Firstly, an overview of the research project that outlines its processes and stages is presented. The chapter then discusses the establishment of the research team and ethical considerations, particularly those necessary when research involves young children. The chapter concludes by highlighting initial meetings with parents and examining two critical moments.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the current research project by way of a school term timeline. The study was set in the 2006 school year in South East Queensland, Australia. The participatory action research team was established in

term one, the orientation phase took place during term two, the action research phase was completed at the end of term three and data analysis continued during term four. Two preschool centres, involving 48 preschoolers, participated in the study with the research team consisting of five early childhood educators, who taught at the centres, and me. Research meetings, involving research team members, were held fortnightly during the orientation phase (examined in the following chapter) to discuss philosophies, methodology, pedagogy, children's literature and social justice. Initial conversations with each preschool child regarding a critical text, were held at the end of the orientation phase.

During the action research phase weekly meetings were held to analyse videotaped storytime sessions regarding children's responses to children's literature read by the preschool teacher to the preschool group. Data analysis was cyclical and ongoing. The action research cycle of reflection, collaborative planning, action and observation was implemented. Concluding conversations with each preschool child regarding the same critical text involved in the initial conversations were held at the end of the action phase. During term four research meetings were held fortnightly to clarify the analysis of the data and for continuing support of team members to promote teaching for social justice in their preschool settings.

Table 5.1 Timeline/Overview of the Research Project

The 2006 school year	Activity
Term 1	Participatory Action Research Team established. Initial meetings with participants. Parent letters distributed.
Term 2	Orientation Phase: Each preschool visited one day per week. Parent meetings (week 1) and parental consent forms issued. Participatory action research team meetings held fortnightly. A proforma was devised that enabled ease of recording story and verbal responses; teacher scaffolding; creative responses (e.g., art, craft, socio-dramatic play). Proforma trialled. Child-friendly consent forms explained to each child. Last week of term 2: Critical texts read by teachers to both preschool groups. Initial conversations with preschoolers regarding critical texts.
Term 3	Action research phase: Each preschool visited twice weekly to collect data during storytime sessions. Participatory action research team meetings held weekly for ongoing data

	analysis: analysis of video and conversation data; analysis of creative responses. During the last week of term 3: Critical texts read by teachers to both preschool groups. Concluding conversations with preschoolers regarding critical texts.
Terms 4	Data Analysis continues Participatory action research team meetings fortnightly for ongoing data analysis, support and encouragement.

ESTABLISHING THE RESEARCH TEAM

The underlying assumption of participatory action research is that the entire research process benefits those who will use the findings (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Therefore, I searched for at least two preschool teachers who were sensitive to teaching for social justice and wished to explore strategies to improve its practice, who were conversant with critical pedagogy approaches, and who would be willing to embrace a collaborative role in the research project for almost the full school year of 2006. It was anticipated that participatory action research would give those people who would use the findings a voice.

The search to establish the participatory action research team took place during term one of the 2006 school year in the region of South East Queensland, Australia. After gaining ethical clearance from governing bodies such as the University of Southern Queensland, Education Queensland and Catholic Education (see Appendix D), I approached Early Childhood Teacher Association groups and Early Childhood Australia to help encourage participants. Also letters of introduction were sent to Education Queensland, Catholic and independent schools to which a preschool were connected.

When this participatory action research was undertaken, the preschool year for five year olds in Queensland had not been formalised. However, this study was set in a time of change for Queensland education. A longitudinal study was nearing completion which laid the foundation for a formal Preparatory Year (for five year olds) to commence in 2007 (Thorpe, et al., 2004). All preschools connected to formal institutions (that is Education Queensland schools, Catholic Education schools and independent schools) were in a state of flux. Many of these preschools were involved in the longitudinal study; those not directly involved were intensely preparing for the

Preparatory Year to begin the following year. This meant not only changes in curriculum, school structure, teacher mind sets and the physical materials needed by the preschool classrooms, but more often than not structural changes were required for existing buildings.

Although this research project was well received by most teachers as potential participants, many were already involved in research and impending change, and realised the great commitment that would be asked of them by this research project to participate as co-researchers. It became quite clear that anyone who engaged in this research project would be a committed and dedicated professional who had an enthusiastic and vested interest in teaching for social justice, would be willing to devote a considerable amount of personal time to the research project, and would not only reflect upon and analyse her/his own teaching practices but also engage with others in this reflection and analysis. These requirements (especially the latter) became issues for many potential participants. It became very apparent that I was not selecting participants as much as the participants were selecting the research project and me as a co-researcher. It was also understood that each participant co-researcher would have not only interest in the research project but also interest in the others as research partners. All this compounded in the difficulty of establishing a research team; however, because the above was made explicitly clear to potential participants from the beginning, I felt that when this research project was embraced by participants, they would be doing so well informed and prepared to commit themselves to the project.

Personnel from two community based preschools (Preschool A and Preschool B) affiliated with the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland from a regional centre on the Queensland south coast expressed interest. This region has a very strong and supportive Early Childhood Teacher Association group. Meetings were set in place to explain the research and its design further to the two teaching preschool directors.

It was at the first meeting with Kate and Shelley[1] from Preschool B that I realised I had much to learn from these dedicated professionals. Kate had assumed that if this research project was to be undertaken and conducted at their preschool then Shelley, her teaching assistant, would be equally involved. Kate (personal communication, 23 March, 2006) asserted that "*Shelley is a co-educator at this preschool and as such would be invaluable as a co-researcher*". Kate had invited Shelley into the research project from the outset and Shelley unequivocally accepted the invitation. I felt troubled that I had not considered that teacher assistants might want to be included as co-researchers in this demanding research project, and I felt more troubled that I had not extended to these educators an invitation to participate; after all my worldview was an inclusive one.

My early misconceptions had almost impacted negatively on a research project that was meant to uphold collaboration of *all* stakeholders and give each a valued voice. Thankfully Kate and Shelley's educational and socially just ideals set this research project on the collaborative path it needed to take. Consequently, teacher assistants were invited to initial meetings and to become co-researchers. These meetings further outlined the nature of the research project and highlighted the amount of personal time and energy that this research project required. Therefore, when each of these early childhood professionals granted written consent (see Appendix E) to participate in the study as co-researchers it was both well-considered and well-informed. From these initial meetings this study's participatory action research team was established. Table 5.2 shows that two teaching preschool directors, a preschool teacher, two teacher assistants and I became co-researchers in the participatory action research team.

Table 5.2: The Participatory Action Research Team

Position	Preschool A	Preschool B
Preschool Director/Teacher Researchers	Sandra	Kate
Teacher Researcher	Lisa	
Teacher Assistant Researchers	Pippa	Shelley
Facilitator	Karen	Karen

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[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation

Action research can involve large organisations in systems change and/or it can involve one person creating change by reflecting on personal practice (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). This research project, however, involved six people reflecting and co-creating knowledge for positive change in their settings. These early childhood professionals had a declared interest in teaching for social justice and exploring strategies that would work to enhance their students' understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues. They also wanted to investigate children's literature critically to discover which texts worked best to enhance young children's interest in, reflection on and understanding of social justice issues.

THE PRESCHOOLS IN CONTEXT

Both participating preschools were located in the same regional centre on the Queensland coast of Australia. The regional centre has a population of over 52,000 with the main economy supported by tourism, fishing and agriculture (sugar cane). It is one of the fastest growing centres in Australia owing to its subtropical climate and coastal position (Harmony Bay City Council, 2006). Each year the region supports two major festivals with both preschools participating in street parades and stalls.

Preschool A and Preschool B were associated with the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland and each was governed by its own parent body. Both parent bodies sanctioned this research project and approved that it be conducted in their preschools. The two preschools embraced a play-based, child-centred and emergent curriculum.

Firstly, a play-based curriculum values self-discovery through play. Play is child-initiated and pleasurable; therefore during play children are motivated to learn and develop positive attitudes towards learning (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2005). Secondly, a child-centred curriculum is underpinned by the importance of creating authentic learning environments that are real to the child and flow naturally from the contexts of her/his daily life experiences (Follari, 2007). A child-centred approach encourages experiences that are child-initiated and child-directed where the educator provides resources and support so that the child is in

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control of her/his own learning (Arthur et al., 2005). Finally, an emergent curriculum draws on children's interests, emphasises the significance of collaboration, and understands the importance of providing learning activities with multiple opportunities for diverse learners (Follari, 2007; New, 2000). An emergent curriculum does not place emphasis on preplanned experiences, but instead the planning is negotiated and shared with the learners (Jones, Evans & Rencken, 2001).

However, each preschool adopted a very different approach from the curriculum model outlined above. Preschool A adopted a socially constructivist approach, while Preschool B adapted the Reggio Emilia approach to suit the setting. There are similarities and differences between these two approaches.

Preschool A

Preschool A was part of an early childhood educational facility that adopted a socially constructivist curriculum and consisted of three classrooms: two kindergarten rooms (children aged between two and three years) with 20 children in each; and a preschool room (children aged between four and five years) with 25 children. It was staffed by a teaching director, three early childhood teachers, three teacher assistants and one occasional assistant. Preschool A followed a fairly traditional curriculum model of education where preschool children attended a full day program. The group of 25 children involved in this research project attended three days a week (Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday).

The preschool teacher, Lisa, was in her second year of teaching and her assistant, Pippa, had 12 years experience in early childhood settings. Sandra, the teacher/director of the educational facility who taught in one of the kindergarten classrooms, had been involved in early childhood education for 25 years. She was not directly involved with data gathering; however, as the director of Preschool A, she wished to be kept informed. Sandra was unable to attend many meetings owing to work commitments; however, she was kept up-to-date via meeting minutes and personal meetings with Lisa, Pippa and me at times convenient to her.

Besides wishing to explore strategies to teach for social justice Sandra, Lisa and Pippa joined the participatory action research team owing to the fact that unlike the two kindergarten groups at their centre, Lisa and Pippa's Monday to Wednesday preschool group of 25 children was homogeneous, coming from mostly middle class families of Anglo Australian backgrounds. They had noticed gender stereotyping which had led to exclusion occurring during play. Sandra, Lisa and Pippa wanted to explore how this action research could impact positively on this homogenous group to value difference and diversity and challenge stereotypes. The pseudonyms used in this dissertation for the children in Preschool A are displayed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Pseudonyms for Preschool A children

BOYS:		GIRLS:	
Adam	Jack	Alice	Kelly
Bailey	Logan	Carryn	Madelyn
Colin	Max	Chanel	Mary
Darren	Reggie	Ella	Melinda
Dave	Rick	Gabby	Tia
Dustin	Ziek	Heidi	Trixi
Harley		Jane	Verity

Sandra, Lisa and Pippa believed that children were capable, active and enthusiastic participants in their own learning which was collaborative in nature and, therefore, co-construction was an effective teaching strategy. Early childhood educators can co-construct knowledge with preschoolers through accentuating the study of meaning rather than the acquisition of facts (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2004). Mac Naughton and Williams (2004), assert that "meaning is how we make sense of, understand, interpret or give significance to our world. To study meaning involves studying the process" (p. 214). Documentation of these processes was extremely important to Sandra, Lisa and Pippa. Therefore, each preschooler had her/his own folio where work samples, observations and analysis were kept. As with socially constructivist theory Sandra, Lisa and Pippa asserted that knowledge was constructed through an active process in which the learner engages in exploration, inner reasoning, and interaction (Arthur et al., 2005) and that this process of knowledge construction is shaped by prior experience, learning and beliefs. They

engaged preschoolers in asking and answering questions (posed by individuals, teachers, parents and groups), making hypotheses, testing hypotheses, interacting with teachers and peers, confronting challenges to their own and others' thinking, and reflecting on results.

Although Preschool A embraced a play-based curriculum, its foregrounding of the importance of co-construction meant that the importance of self discovery became a little less significant. This is because Sandra, Lisa and Pippa believed in assisting and scaffolding children to problem-pose and problem-solve with others. From this, Sandra pointed out that, "*the preschoolers begin to understand that there are multiple ways of examining and explaining the world*" (Sandra, personal communication, 21 March, 2006).

Preschool A delivered a more structured approach than that of Preschool B (outlined below). The preschool day began with whole group circle time where the preschoolers could discuss their aspirations for their learning for that particular day. The preschool day was then divided between inside time and outside time. Inside time included engagement with blocks, home corner, library, dress ups, construction, collage, playdough, computer, puzzles, games, manipulatives and "shop." Outside time included engagement with the preschool guinea pigs, the "fort" area, painting easels, car track, swings, sandpit, water tray and the garden. Inside/outside time was separated by morning tea and storytime where the whole group came together. Lunch was positioned prior to whole group rest time.

Preschool A's atmosphere was welcoming, accepting and bright. Preschooler art work and photographs were attractively displayed and furniture was positioned effectively. The preschool was extremely well resourced with, for example, child sized implements, furnishings, games, puzzles and a computer that was always accessible by the preschoolers.

Preschool B

Kate (the teacher/director of Preschool B and co-researcher) explained that the preschool had adapted the philosophy of Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and she

mirrored New's (2000) understanding of the approach by saying that "It's not an approach; it's more an attitude" (Kate, personal communication, 23 March, 2006). This attitude is underpinned by the belief that all children are competent, resourceful and curious (Gandini, 2002). Kate and Shelley (Kate's assistant and also co-researcher) shared an immense respect for, and appreciation of their preschoolers' potential to interact with their world (people, events, the environment, and materials); develop personal, meaningful relationships; and construct new, complex meanings and knowledge. They asserted that they were partners in the children's learning and therefore, although always there to support and guide, interfered as little as possible in this learning. Like all Reggio-inspired teachers, Kate and Shelley provoked their preschoolers' thoughts, asked open-ended questions, displayed materials that satisfied their requests and/or extended their thinking, and continuously observed their preschoolers' progress (Follari, 2007). However, the fundamental premise was that of self-discovery.

Kate and Shelley understood that children are social beings and that their learning is developed mainly through language, representations (free play, dance, music, art, craft, and drawing) and relationships. They asserted that the preschoolers' learning must focus on their social world. Therefore, the preschool group included mixed age preschoolers from three to five years of age. Interaction with peers, family, the community and, Kate and Shelley as their "teachers" shaped the preschoolers' learning. As natural occurrences, dialogues and conversations with one another, with Kate and Shelley, with parents and with visitors were encouraged throughout the preschool day. Preschoolers were encouraged to talk about their representations and relationships (as relationships spring from interaction).

Kate and Shelley took particular interest in the preschool's physical environment to ensure it aroused sensory, hands-on experiences and encouraged learning. Attention to the physical environment to support and promote learning is a tenet of Reggio philosophy (Follari, 2007; Gandini, 2002; New, 2000). The preschool was extremely welcoming and bright with large windows allowing plenty of natural light. Owing to their belief in the importance of the child's social world, Kate and Shelley displayed photographs (all captioned) of preschoolers' families,

pets, siblings, holidays, grandparents, birthdays, and home visits; parents were encouraged to stay and become involved with the preschool day; gardens were tended by preschoolers' and their families; preschoolers' art and craft works were attractively displayed; and upcoming events were colourfully displayed. Children were encouraged and supported to climb and swing on, and engage with the outdoor equipment: a permanent "fort" structure, tyre swings, sandpit, water tray, car track and painting easels. The inside area included a collage table, sculpting table, box construction, library, listening post, science and mathematics corner, block construction, home corner, dress ups, puzzles, and games. The preschool day was fluid and unstructured in that inside and outside time occurred concurrently. Each preschooler decided upon the time which s/he would have morning tea. Consequently, a small group of preschoolers could usually be found in the eating area having their own "picnic" morning tea. The preschoolers came together as a group for storytime and lunch. Therefore, activities for the day were chosen by individual children. However, small group work, usually organised by the preschoolers, was supported and encouraged. The preschool was well resourced with, for example, child sized implements, furnishings, games and puzzles.

It is little wonder that Kate and Shelley embraced this research project as they already considered themselves researchers with their preschoolers. Like most Reggio-inspired educators, Kate and Shelley were continually gathering data (as they observed their preschoolers' dialogues, creative art, play and interactions); documenting and analysing these data; reflecting on them in collaboration with one another, the parents and the preschoolers themselves; and, from this, planning the future learning journeys of their preschoolers (Gandini, 2002).

Preschool B combined kindergarten and preschool children aged three to five years. This early childhood educational facility consisted of one large classroom that ran two preschool groups: one group attended for three full days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday; while the other group (who participated in the research project) attended a half day program for two days a week on Thursday and Friday. Similar to Preschool A, Preschool B's Thursday/Friday group had a mostly

homogeneous population with only one child (Alicia) from the group of 20 coming from a non-Anglo Australian background with Maori heritage.

Preschool B, like Preschool A, was run by a parent body and likewise this parent body approved this research being conducted in its preschool. The preschool employed only Kate and Shelley who were assisted by occasional volunteer parent helpers during the preschool day. Kate had been an early childhood educator for nine years and previously taught in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Both she and Shelley (who had 14 years' experience in early childhood settings) were interested in exploring strategies that would empower young children to celebrate cultural diversity. Kate and Shelley also wished to investigate the quality provided in children's literature when exploring texts. The pseudonyms used in this dissertation for the children in Preschool B are displayed in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Pseudonyms for Preschool B children

BOYS:		GIRLS:	
Don	Mark	Alicia	Ally
Edward	Michael	Caddy	Calissa
Ellery	Murray	Jedda	Kirra
Isaiah	Ryan	Laura	Tilly
James	Jerry		
Kurt			

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Like all research involving human beings, it was imperative for this study to gain informed written consent. This was granted from governing bodies such as the University of Southern Queensland's Office of Research and Higher Degrees, Education Queensland, and Catholic Education. Also informed written consent was sought from all participants. This meant that all participants and co-researchers entered the research project voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and what was required of them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Therefore, it was important that these issues were explained to everyone involved in the study using language that s/he understood.

Prior to the orientation phase of the research project, parent meetings were held in both preschools where the research project was explained, questions answered and consent forms dispersed (these meetings are highlighted later in this chapter; consent forms may be found in Appendix F). All parents returned the consent forms and all agreed that their children could participate in the research project. It was made clear that parents could contact the teachers, assistants or me personally at any time during the project to answer questions, discuss the project's progress and become as involved as they would like. Dialogues and conversations about all aspects of the project (retaining confidentiality and anonymity) were encouraged. Parent newsletters were sent home on a regular basis to keep the parents informed.

As indicated, informed consent was important not only for the participatory action research team members and parents but also for the children. It is good research practice, and in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ask the children also to give consent, or "assent" as it is known in such circumstances (Coady, 2001). The participation and voice of children in this research was very important. Therefore the challenge to this study was to gain children's assent (written consent was problematic given their literacy capabilities). Bone (2005), in her research on spirituality in early childhood settings, employed the use of a child-friendly consent form. Taking Bone's lead, a similar child-friendly consent form was devised and explained to each individual child (see Appendix G). However, because it was important to this study to have the children's continuing assent, understanding that they could withdraw at any time (Booker, 2001; Davis, 1998; Einarsdottir, 2007), they were often asked at the start of the day if they wished to be videotaped during storytime. Only one time did a child decline to be videotaped; however, he was a little disappointed when he asked to view the videotaped storytime and found he was not on the tape. Before any child was photographed permission was sought and respected.

All consent forms outlined the fact that confidentiality and anonymity would be assured, that videotaping, audio taping and photography would be used and may be displayed in the final dissertation and that consent may be withdrawn at any time

during the study with no reprisal. In line with ethical considerations, no data collection was begun until all consent forms had been returned.

This study employed the use of observation, videotaping, photography and conversations (at times audio-taped) with a view to examining the research questions. Because videotapes and photographs are sources of establishing identity, and because this study was committed to anonymity, confidentiality and ethical concerns, security was of great importance. Anything of an identifying nature was secured in locked areas at my home and codes were secured away from the main data.

A further ethical consideration, and one that has been explored in Chapter Three, pertains to an ethical framework on which to base the collaborative, participatory research. I have explained at length that communitarianism underpinned by an ethic of care philosophically framed this participatory action research. However, I reiterate here that action research cannot be adequately conducted if there is no trust based on loyalty to a mutually accepted framework that oversees data collection and communication (Elliot, 1991). Chapter Three outlined the philosophical framework that supported this study and the following chapter explains how the team used this philosophical framework to build an ethical framework through which this study was conducted.

It is important to note that ethics in any research involving human participants is of great significance. The key to ethical research is the informed consent of participants (Coady, 2001). However, ethical considerations such as respect and care for all participants, deference to confidentiality and anonymity, and the valuing of participant knowledge and voice remained essential to this study. Also of paramount importance to the research team were the well-being and "best interest" of each preschool child.

Ethical considerations: Researching with young children

This research project was informed by a socio constructivist view that assumes children are active participants in the construction of their own socio-

cultures (Amos Hatch, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). This study upheld the four core principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations Children's Fund, 2008): "non-discrimination; devotion to the best interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child" (p. 1).

Children were viewed as autonomous individuals and afforded dignity and respect at every stage of this research project. As previously explained, the participation and voices of children to this research were very important. The issue of informed assent of each preschooler in this research project has been outlined in the previous section. This following discussion highlights such issues as rapport building, relations and interactions and conversation techniques.

When research involves children special consideration needs to be given to the early establishment of rapport. Indeed, participant perspectives should be the essence of the studies of childhood as a social construction, therefore careful communication and rapport building must be emphasised early in the process (Amos Hatch, 1995). To this end an orientation phase was incorporated into this research project. Indeed, a familiarisation or "getting-to-know-you" phase should be built into any research involving young children.

This research project was seeking the ideas, views and opinions of the preschoolers regarding social justice issues. However, some children may be unaccustomed to adults who are interested in their views and who seek their opinions (Einarsdottir, 2007). Children, in this case, may see the adult as an authority figure, and as a result may try to please her for fear of receiving a negative reaction (Flewitt, 2005; Hill, 2005; Punch, 2002; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Many researchers have proposed methods to try to reduce the unequal power relations between the child and the adult researcher (Baker & Weller, 2003; Brooker, 2001; Davis, 1998; Einarsdottir, 2007; Gollop, 2000; Graue & Walsh, 1998). The current study borrowed from these researchers in an attempt to empower the preschoolers and reduce the power differential by using child-friendly techniques that built on the preschoolers' capabilities and interests. The preschoolers always had support from

one another as the research was conducted in the familiar surroundings of their preschool settings with and by their preschool teachers and the preschool assistants. The one-to-one conversations between individual preschool children and me were not conducted until each preschool child was familiar with me and these conversations were always held within the space of the preschool classroom.

Some researchers believe that data gathered during conversations with young children are unreliable and inadequate (Breakwell, 1995; Powney & Watts, 1987). However, others give credence to data gathered from conversing with young children (Einarsdottir, 2007; Spencer & Flin, 1995). When responding to the assumption that very young children's emotional frame of reference is egocentric, Spencer et al. (1995) assert that "the real danger of egocentrism may be the egocentricity of the adult who is unable to appreciate fully the child's perspective" (p. 252). However, research shows that children's remarks are superior in every way when they are in familiar surroundings and with familiar adults (Brooker, 2001). Moreover, a child's communicative competence and confidence improve when s/he is allowed control over the content and direction of the conversation; and indirect discussion is the basis for communication (Brooker, 2001; Einarsdottir, 2007).

The research team members were mindful of the above; therefore incorporated the following measures to ensure sensitive and ethical interactions with the young children involved in this study. We planned questioning to be appropriate and acceptable for the preschoolers, taking into consideration their emotional and social maturity, and their family and cultural backgrounds. Any interaction or conversation that caused distress of any kind to a preschool child was quickly and sensitively ended. All conversations were concluded by recapping, reassuring, praising and thanking each preschool child. It was an undertaking of this research project that each preschool child left every interaction and conversation with the knowledge that her/his contribution was valued. To implement the above successfully it was imperative that I had an accurate knowledge of each preschool child, which highlights the importance of establishing a good rapport before actual data collection begins.

In summation this research project incorporated the following considerations for the preschoolers involved in this study. The research project was seen as *with* rather than *on* the preschoolers (Amos Hatch, 1995; Brooker, 2001; Hood, Kelley & Mayall, 1996; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke & Craig, 1996; Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 1998). It incorporated an orientation phase so that I, as a new figure in the preschool community, might become a trusted adult within each preschool setting before data gathering and prior to eliciting information from any preschool child (Booker, 2001; Flewitt, 2005; Green & Hogan, 2005). Each member of the research team was honest and open with the children (Brooker, 2001; Bone, 2005; Sumison, 2005). Therefore, as researchers we gave the preschoolers, at an appropriate level of understanding, a truthful account of what the study was trying to learn from them and we sought informed and continuing consent from each preschool child (Bone, 2005; Sumison, 2005). Each research team member was aware of power relations in the research situation and we were mindful that, as researchers, we did not abuse the adult role in the way information was obtained (Bone, 2005; Kellett, 2004; Sumison, 2005). To this end, as explained above, we employed child centered and child directed activities for encouraging children's views. Not only did this enhance the validity of the study's findings but it also circumvented the preschoolers' anxiety (Barker & Weller, 2003; Brooker, 2001). As a research team we were sensitive to all preschoolers' backgrounds (Barker & Weller, 2003; Brooker, 2001; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000) and valued their voices and knowledge (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2003a). Their ideas, feelings, views, opinions and beliefs moved the research project forward.

INITIAL MEETINGS WITH PARENTS

Letters were sent out to families from both preschools at the end of term one briefly outlining the research and inviting parents to initial meetings to explain the research project further. The parent committee that governed each preschool had already given its consent for the research to be conducted at its preschool on the preschool directors' recommendations. However, the initial meetings with parents were critical to the study as without informed parental consent the research project could not be conducted.

During these initial meetings two critical moments (or issues) resulted in group discussion and allowed me to clarify the basis of the research project:

Critical moment number one. Preschool B, 24 April, 2006:

Bob (father of Michael, a child from Preschool B): *My boy doesn't even know about black, white or yellow. If you start confronting the kids with this it might start them thinking about difference* [pause]. *It might make them look for difference* [pause] *and I don't want him to feel uncomfortable at this young age.*

Bob's comment alerted me to the fact that he felt "difference" was confronting and uncomfortable and that this message was, perhaps subliminally, being projected onto his son. This sparked a debate and discussion among the parents in attendance on celebrating difference. This discussion gave me an opportunity to elaborate on Derman-Sparks and Ramsey's (2006) work *What if all the kids are white?* and to point out that this study was to be neither confronting nor uncomfortable. Bob conceded and the meeting concluded that young children have the right to understand that there are others in the world who are different from themselves and that all people deserve the same rights, inclusion and respect.

Critical moment number two. Preschool A, 26 April, 2006:

Carol (mother of Trixi, a child from Preschool A): *Trixi is pretty sensitive and she hasn't had any contact with umm* [pause] *anyone who has different coloured skin. She might say something inappropriate and I'd hate that she was put down or felt silly. She's just a baby and the sort of stuff you're talking about is quite adult.*

It was quite understandable for Carol, and indeed any parent, to feel protective of her child and this allowed me to acknowledge her concern and explain that the children's opinions, views and understandings would be respected and valued at all times. There would be no right or wrong answers and no child would be made to feel anxious or uncomfortable because of this research project. It was explained that the research was examining how children's literature could be used to guide children to

celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity; not to tell children how to feel or think. I also reported on research carried out overseas highlighting that children have great capacity to engage in conversations regarding moral perceptions (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Burns, 2004; Damico & Riddle, 2004; Galda & Beach, 2001; Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005; Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe & Waugh, 2004; Wolk, 2004).

Further discussion allowed me to explain to the parents that they may withdraw their consent at any time without reprisal and that there were avenues at the university through which they may go to lodge complaint. It was also explained that the children were to be asked for their consent and that they could withdraw this consent at any time without reprisal. I encouraged the parents to talk with their preschoolers about the research and how it was making them feel. I advised them that I was always open and ready to discuss any concerns, problems or joys that this research was generating for them, their children and/or their families. I explained to the parents which days I would attend each preschool and also provided them with my contact details. These initial meetings resulted in unanimous acceptance from both the parent groups for the research project to be conducted at their preschools. All informed parental consent forms were signed.

SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced *Part Two: Planning* by setting the scene for the participatory action research project. It explained participant recruitment, positioned the preschools in their contexts, delineated ethical considerations and reported parent meetings.

The following chapter explains the orientation phase of the participatory action research project. It reports initial meetings with co-researchers and highlights critical moments that were significant to the project's development and evolution. It also explains how the research team came to embrace feminist communitarianism underpinned by an ethic of care. The following chapter concludes by examining initial conversations held with each preschool child regarding a critical text read to the preschool group. These conversations gave direction for the action research phase

of the project. This chapter is significant to this dissertation as it continues to highlight how the research questions were beginning to be addressed.

CHAPTER SIX: ORIENTATION

Participatory research is the art of dwelling in the other, is the art of penetrating from within, it is the art of learning to use the language of the other, in short, is the art of empathy. When empathy is writ large and systematically explored and applied, it becomes a new methodology, a set of new intellectual strategies. What clinical detachment is for objective methodology, empathy is for the methodology of participation. Just as we need to create right conditions for conducting research within objectivist methodology, so we need to create right conditions for doing participatory research. (Skolimowski, 1994, pp. 182–183)

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter began *Part Two: Planning* and discussed contemporary perspectives of childhood, explained the establishment of the research team and placed the preschool sites into context. The chapter examined ethical considerations, particularly those necessary when research involves young children. It also reported meetings with parents that explained the research project.

This chapter reports the orientation phase of this participatory action research project. As Skolimowski (1994) highlights, in the quotation that introduces this chapter, the orientation phase of participatory research was of great significance. This phase was undertaken by the co-researchers of this research project to "create right conditions" (Skolimowski, 1994, p. 183) for this study strengthened by empathy. This chapter, like the previous chapter, outlines how both research questions were addressed and begins analysis in earnest. It examines three critical discussions with the teachers as co-researchers that extended over the course of the orientation phase of the study (a period of one school term comprising ten weeks).

This chapter presents and analyses data collected during the orientation phase and much of those data are embedded in the research question that asks: *How might teachers take on a collaborative role in this research project and develop as a research team?* The first discussion reveals how the research team drew on an ethic of care and feminist communitarianism to build ethical, trusting, collaborative and empathetic relationships. The second discussion relates to the research project's design of action research. The third discussion scrutinises how storytime was positioned by the preschool teachers. This last discussion is embedded in the first

research questions that asks: *How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity?* Finally the chapter examines initial conversations with each preschool child regarding a critical text read to each preschool group at the end of the orientation phase. These initial conversations helped to orientate the action research phase of the research project which addressed the first research question.

ORIENTATION PHASE

This section firstly outlines the significance of the orientation phase to this research project. It then examines three critical issues that developed and were discussed during the orientation phase and impacted on the study. The first critical discussion explored a philosophical model that informed how the study would be ethically conducted. The second critical discussion revolved around the research design and the third critical discussion highlighted how the practice of storytime was perceived at each preschool setting.

Significance of the orientation phase

During the orientation phase conducted over the 10 weeks of term two, 2006, I visited each preschool for one day each week as a "getting-to-know-you" exercise. It was important for the preschoolers to feel comfortable with, not only my presence in their preschool, but also that of the video camera. When it became time for data gathering by way of videotaping storytime sessions I wished the preschoolers to feel that videotaping was an accepted activity and for them to feel natural and comfortable with the camera's presence. When requested, I would videotape their "work" and play the tape back to them. These tapes were deleted and not analysed as data.

At first I spent most of the day videotaping games, paintings and dramatic play; however as the term wore on the children became less interested in the video camera and I spent more time being actually involved in their games, paintings and dramatic play. I did not videotape storytime sessions during this orientation phase, but sat in as part of the preschool group listening to the stories read. I became another person involved in the preschoolers' day: I tied shoe laces, played games, helped put

beds out, read stories to individuals and small groups, talked with parents, helped set up and helped pack away. Consequently, prior to data collection the children and I had built a warm rapport.

I had always understood that the orientation phase was important to rapport building and that young children needed to feel comfortable with a new person in their midst before data collection to encourage authentic and natural responses. What I learned from this experience was that this orientation phase was just as important to parents, siblings, occasional helpers and me. It was a very comfortable feeling to be greeted warmly by name and engaged in conversations about the "new house" or the "surprise birthday party". Feeling welcomed and accepted *is* important to the university co-researcher. Therefore, allowing ample time for a getting-to-know-you phase is valuable to any research project.

During the orientation phase the research team consisting of Sandra, Lisa and Pippa, from Preschool A; Kate and Shelley from Preschool B and myself met fortnightly to discuss storytime, the research design, children's literature, social justice issues, our philosophies that underpinned our personal and professional lives and a framework that we could refer to when conducting our collaborative research project. The latter involved defining the characteristics of how our research group would function. This collaborative compilation of a "group constitution" (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000, p. 72) is a very important component of collaborative research and sustains collegiality, solidarity and support (Bray et al., 2000; Whitmore & McKee, 2006). In this way, the orientation phase was invaluable in building a strong, collaborative, caring research team.

CRITCIAL DISCUSSION NUMBER ONE: A philosophical framework

Conversations, dialogues and reflections during this orientation phase of the inquiry encouraged us to delve deeply into our philosophical and epistemological positions. Like most action research it was not only the research questions that were investigated but also our philosophies and the way partnerships and relationships were supported and maintained (Goldstein, 2000; Ryan & Campbell, 2001). During the orientation phase we reflected upon what was driving us, both collectively and individually.

During initial meetings to discuss and develop our research it became apparent that we were privileging the standpoint of an ethic of care over other perspectives. This is evidenced in the following vignette.

Research meeting minutes 26 April 2006:

Pippa: *I'm not sure how much benefit I'm going to be to this research. I don't have any qualifications like you guys.*

Shelley: *Mmm, I feel a bit the same.*

Lisa: *No way, you both have so much to bring to this. The way you care about the kids and how you observe them is amazing. I learn so much from you, Pip.*

Kate: *And you know you're my co-educator, Shell. It's not about the pieces of paper that we bring to this table. It's about how much we care about the kids and about how much we care about shaping them into just and caring people who'll stand against umm stereotyping, racism umm what do I mean?*

Shelley: *Social injustice.*

Kate: *Yeah. And I guess it also means how we care about one another and how we support one another.*

Karen: *Y' know, we've all spoken a fair bit about caring. It's interesting because I've been wondering over the holidays how we could build up a caring, collaborative research relationship. I thought we might thrash out some ideas over the coming weeks but you've beaten me to the punch. So, we could talk about this now if you like?*

Sandra: *How do you mean, Karen?*

Karen: *Well, I know that you and Pip and Lisa know one another very well. And Kate and Shelley know one another very well. And I'm getting to know you all. But we need to build up a team that trusts one another and cares about one another so that we can speak openly and frankly, knowing that we'll be valued and upheld.*

Kate: *I think we're on the way there already. And it's only our first meeting.*

Karen: *I agree, Kate, but maybe we could build on this and talk about our personal and professional philosophies on team building. Get it all out in the open?*

Kate: *Okay, let's do this thing right. Let's make this thing work; and work well!*

We each talked about these philosophies and without exception the words caring, empathy, trust, honesty, solidarity and open communication were articulated by every team member. I felt that we were talking about building a collaborative team on an ethic of care and shared this with the team. Both Kate and Sandra had read information on an ethic of care related to early childhood education and volunteered to share these readings with the team at the next meeting. I, too, had information about an ethic of care and also shared this information at the next meeting. These readings encouraged us to read further, and so the ideas of how we might build a collaborative, participatory research team began to germinate and grow over the last few meetings of the orientation phase.

We found the work of Clifford Christians (1995, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2005), Nel Noddings (1995, 2005) and Maxine Greene (1995) illuminating. Noddings and Greene alluded to, and Christians expounded, the term *feminist communitarianism* that emphasises an ethic of care. Therefore we explored feminist communitarianism as a model to continue research prior to data collection. Although the team felt that we were indeed already employing most of the features of this model, the term afforded us a firm foundation to base our inquiry in an ethic of care (see Chapter Three).

The feminist communitarian model for conducting research is underpinned by an ethic of care. It calls for trusting, collaborative, non-oppressive relationships among co-researchers. Denzin and Lincoln (2003), contend that "such an ethic presumes that investigators are committed to recognising personal accountability, the value of individual expressiveness and caring, the capacity for empathy, and the sharing of emotionality" (p. 52). Although much of the research that aligns with feminist communitarianism investigates the plight of the oppressed, we felt that it also fitted our inquiry in that we were a community with common moral values who wished to uphold these values in the wider community of each individual classroom and preschool. We wished to challenge the stereotyping of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class and (dis)ability. We wanted each preschool community to share

the moral conviction that upholds and celebrates difference, diversity and human dignity. As a research team we understood that

> Our widely shared moral convictions are developed through discourse within a community. These communities where moral discourse is nurtured and shared are a radical alternative to the utilitarian individualism of modernity. But in feminist communitarianism, communities are entered from the universal. The total opposite from an ethics of individual autonomy is universal human solidarity. Our obligation to sustain one another defines our existence. The primal sacredness of all without exception is the heart of the moral order and the new starting point for our theorising. (Christians, 2005, p. 154)

This ethical theory presumes that human identity is constructed through the sociocultural contexts with which one engages and where moral commitments, values and existential understandings are negotiated through communication. Research (such as this research project) supported by this theory should be "collaborative in its design and participatory in its execution" (Christians, 2003, p. 227). Such research affords participants a forum that enables them to come to mutually held conclusions leading to community transformation. The research team recognised that the design of participatory action research aligned well with the ethical theory underpinning feminist communitarianism and an ethic of care.

Because the team privileged the standpoint of an "ethic of care" over other perspectives we found ourselves embracing feminist communitarianism and moving towards a sacred existential epistemology which underpins research undertaken through an ethic of care (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2005). This epistemology helped us understand that we were a small research community with common moral values, and that the research needed to be grounded in concepts of care, kindness, solidarity, empowerment, shared governance, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers and civic transformation (Christians, 2003). Sacred existential epistemology aligned well with the epistemology of participatory action research and a participatory worldview and also with our philosophies borrowed from such thinkers as Greene (1995), Noddings (1995, 2005) and Nussbaum (1990) who emphasised the importance of an ethic of care. However, owing to the fact that the term *sacred* had religious overtones, two team members were troubled. Consensus was met by the research team's definition of sacred to mean *respect* and *reverence*.

Therefore the team upheld and worked towards this sacred epistemology based on a philosophical anthropology affirming that "all humans are worthy of dignity and sacred status without exception for class or ethnicity" (Christians, 1995, p. 29). The research team added race, gender, sexual orientation and (dis)ability to Christians' affirmation. Hence the team revised its aim of encouraging the celebration of difference and diversity to include human dignity. It was as if Denzin and Lincoln (2005) had predicted our direction by stating "a postmodern, feminist, poststructural communitarian science will move closer to a sacred science of the moral universe" (p. 1087). As explained in Chapter Three a sacred epistemology identifies, questions and challenges the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability and class operate as significant systems of oppression in today's world (Christians, 1997, 2003, 2005). This sat well with our inquiry.

Multiple moral and social spaces existed within the preschool communities and were examined against our ideals of a universal respect and reverence for the dignity of every human being regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age, culture or class (Christians, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2005; Denzin, 1997). Therefore our research team resisted those social values that were divisive and exclusivist (Christians, 2003) in order to uphold the sacredness of human dignity.

If a main educational aim is to "encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people" (Noddings, 1995, p. 365) then the research team felt that our educational research should be conducted in such a manner. Much contemporary qualitative research in education is indeed concerned with moral and ethical discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2005).

After much research, reflection and discussion, the research team adopted the feminist communitarian model through which to conduct this inquiry. This model is underpinned by an ethic of care and a sacred existential epistemology. From our understandings of an ethic of care, a sacred existential epistemology and feminist communitarianism we based our research approach on seven principles (similar to Whitmore and McKee's [2006] six principles) that guided our research team through the inevitable "ups and downs" of this collaborative research endeavour. Our research team's "constitution" involved:

1. *Non-invasive collaboration*. All ideas, opinions and verbalisations, however different from one's own, must be respected and collaborative resolutions considerately decided upon. Honesty must be combined with respect and accord. We respectfully and sensitively give constructive feedback.

2. *Solidarity*. All humanity without exception is sacred, connected, interdependent and interrelated in a shared common journey. We are one in support.

3. *Mutual trust*. Everyone has the capability to understand and create her/his own realities. We trust each person to do this and still remain an integral part of a team.

4. *Genuine respect*. This mutual trust can be built among all people irrespective of class, race, age, gender, ability, sexuality or background. This trust and respect takes concerted time, patience and perseverance which we are prepared to give.

5. *Equality*. All are considered equal, as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states. We are equal team members.

6. *Mutuality*. Transparency is important to our collaboration; therefore, we must make our agendas, interests and goals explicit.

7. *The importance of process*. Collaborative partnerships necessitate emotional as well as intellectual involvement. This involvement goes beyond a detached working relationship to one of personal and shared emotionality and connectivity. We are empathetic about the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs or our co-researchers.

The philosophical and ethical frameworks for our research project were established by the research team before the completion of the orientation phase.

Team members saw the importance of this investigation to their community, and just as importantly we understood the importance of each team member to this investigation. We valued, cared for and trusted one another. This was brought about through much open debate, discussion, clarification and reflection on the part of each member of the participatory action research team. There were spaces for disagreement and simultaneously our discourse aimed for mutual understanding and the honouring of moral commitments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It was important

that each team member understood how one another was thinking and feeling and was cognisant of what was "going on" in the research process. It was not an easy task for any of the team members (myself included) to reach this point and it took the entire orientation phase of the research project to form our research constitution. Pippa probably summed up the research teams' feelings when she commented at the final meeting of the orientation phase: *I've never done anything like this. I can see the merits; but it hurts my brain sometimes!*

CRITICAL DISCUSSION NUMBER TWO: The research design

It is interesting to note that many early childhood educators already incorporate the basic elements of action research into their everyday and overall planning. To implement a child-centred program they must observe their students, reflect upon these observations, plan accordingly and then put those plans into action (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2005; Berk, 2005; Fleer & Richardson, 2004; Mac Naughton & Williams, 2004). I believe that, for this reason, the early childhood educators as co-researchers involved in this research project easily embraced the research design of participatory action research. When the research design was clarified with the research team during the first team meeting there was consensus that each co-researcher adopted action research when planning her curriculum.

Research meeting minutes 26 April 2006:

> Kate: *Well, Karen, we* [Shelley and Kate] *plan exactly how you've described participatory action research* [others in the team agreed]. *This'll be a snack!* [laughter].
>
> Sandra: *Every teacher and aide at our centre plans according to our observations. And we encourage collaboration at every level. This means not only with aides and other teachers but also children and parents. We're very used to collaboration and, like you've explained with action research, it's cyclical and ongoing.*

CRITICAL DISCUSSION NUMBER THREE: Storytime

However, when I asked if storytime had been planned in this way all co-researchers stated that this was not the case:

Research meeting minutes 26 April 2006:

> Lisa: *Because the day is so busy and we have to observe and write on every child's developmental progress, storytime is just a bit of a "breather" I usually just grab a book and off we go.*

We discussed how each preschool used storytime and it was discovered that both preschools used storytime as a "filler" exercise. For preschool A storytime was a transition activity between outside time and inside time. It was situated before morning tea after packing away the outside equipment. The children sat on a rug under an awning outside to listen to the story. A busy main road fronted the preschool where storytime took place. Preschool B used storytime as a "wind down" activity after packing everything away and before home time. It was often interrupted by parents and younger siblings moving about the preschool collecting paintings and sculptures created by their preschooler to take home. Quite often the story was not read to the end owing to the unrest of preschoolers eager to go home. Like Lisa, Kate also just "*grabbed a book from the library shelf.*"

It was clear that not a great deal of thought and reflection had gone into the planning of storytime at either preschool. All co-researchers voiced their discomfort at this disclosure. After a bit of justification such as "*We just haven't had the time*" and "*The books on our shelves are all pretty good*", Sandra spoke up:

> Sandra: *Okay, we know we're run off our feet all day. We've treated storytime as a "breather", as Lisa said, but we're here now to make it better. We wouldn't have joined this research team if we thought we were going to coast along as we were. Seems to me we've got this term to iron things out before we start on the nitty gritty stuff. Maybe we could start to plan storytime a bit more? What does everyone think?*

All agreed that they would begin to plan storytime according to children's interests and Shelley suggested that we might look for books about social justice issues and asked if I had any suggestions. I had brought along a selection of books that highlighted race, gender stereotyping and oppression that I thought we might share as a group if time allowed. We spent the rest of the meeting discussing these

books and suggesting appropriate children's literature. However, I was surprised that no-one suggested moving storytime to a more conducive time slot that might encourage class discussion. Seeing that this was our first meeting I decided to "wait and see".

Towards the end of the term Pippa (Preschool A) commented that the noise of the main road was becoming uncomfortable during storytime:

Research meeting minutes 20 June 2006:

>Pippa: *I've noticed that the kids who sit at the back of the group seem to lose interest in the story. I sat with them today, just to keep them focused but I couldn't hear everything you were reading Lisa. The noise from the road and Sandra's group coming out for outside time really makes it hard.*

This sparked a discussion about storytime that Kate summed up very well:

>Kate: *Y' know, we've been so engrossed in our philosophies and all the heavy stuff that goes with that, all the reading and teasing out how we're going to make this work as a practice of research that I think we've forgotten our actual study and how it's going to work to get the best results for the kids in the classroom. Don't get me wrong; I've loved all this. It's helped me clarify who I am and how we fit together as a team. But it seems to me that our storytime time slots and situations, the way they are now, aren't going to create a heap of discussion and interaction with the kids.*

From Pippa's observation and Kate's reflection it was realised that storytime, in its present state, was not really a socially interactive practice but simply a monologue of teacher practice. The preschoolers sat while the teacher read without much interaction or discussion. The preschoolers in both preschools were disengaged: Preschool A preschoolers were hungry and wanting morning tea; Preschool B preschoolers were anticipating home time.

>Sandra: *I think we need to elevate the status of storytime so that the children and the parents can see that what we're reading, you know* [pause], *the*

stories that are going to help us talk about race and gender and such [pause] *are really important and that we need to hear what the children have to say about these important issues.*

So it was decided that Preschool A would situate storytime after outside time on the inside mat in a quiet area of the preschool room to encourage discussion of the texts at morning tea and allow creative response during inside play. Preschool B would situate storytime at the beginning of the preschool day after all parents and siblings had left the preschool. Both these new storytime situations allowed extended discussions and conversations and creative responses to the stories read. These strategies were put into practice just prior to the action research phase that began in term three.

Throughout the orientation phase a child-friendly consent form was explained to each preschool child (as explained in Chapter Five). Therefore before the action research phase of the project began all involved in the study (co-researchers, parents and preschoolers) had given informed written consent.

INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

During the last week of the orientation phase a critical text was read to each preschool group by the preschool teacher. Sandra, Lisa and Pippa had noticed a slight amount of bullying from a small group of boys in Preschool A who were insisting that their way was the "*right and only way to play on the fort*" (Colin). They chose to read *Bunyips Don't* (Odgers, 2004) to the preschool group as the text highlights bullying and unfair behaviour. Kate and Shelley had noticed gender stereotyping occurring during play with boys ostracising girls from their play and a small number of girls stating that boys should not dress up in the "home corner". They chose to read *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 2006), a book that highlights gender issues.

Immediately following both storytime sessions an individual conversation was held between each preschool child and me. There was no group discussion regarding these texts as the research team wished to ensure that individual understandings and sensitivities to the social justice issues raised in the texts were not influenced by the group. Each conversation began in the same way by the child

being greeted by name and then asked to share her/his thoughts regarding the text; however, for the most part the conversations were child led. This meant that each child could take the conversation where s/he wished it to go. This technique lessened stress on the preschoolers, promoted individuality and creativity, and encouraged candid dialogue.

The data presented and analysed below were taken from audio-recorded conversations with the preschoolers. These conversations were transcribed verbatim.

Preschool A (Date: Monday 19 June, 2006)

Critical text: *Bunyips Don't*. Author/Illustrator: Sally Ogders Farrell.

Bunyips Don't is a picture book relating the story of two bunyips living on the dark side of the creek. Old Bunyip tells Young Bunyip that bunyips do not sing, dance, play, go to parties or have fun. And although Young Bunyip loves to do these things he tries to suppress these impulses, believing that he must follow Old Bunyip's rules. Old Bunyip ridicules Young Bunyip for being different. Finally Old Bunyip, convinced that Young Bunyip will bend to the "bunyip code", leaves him to find a quieter creek. However, Young Bunyip discovers a group of children who teach him that it is fair and good to have fun and be yourself.

Introduction to each conversation:

Karen: *Hi* [child's name] *Miss Lisa just read the story* Bunyips Don't. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Summary of children's responses (see also Table 6.1):

Twenty two children participated in these initial conversations (three children were away from preschool during the last week of the term owing to illness or family holidays: Colin, Madelyn and Jack). Every child happily agreed to participate in these conversations.

Eight of the 22 children responded with "*I don't know*", "*I can't remember*" or with responses unrelated to the story. An excerpt from Adam's initial conversation transcript is presented here as an example:

Karen: *Hi Adam. Miss Lisa just read to you the book called* Bunyips Don't. *I'd love to hear about your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Adam: *Oh, yeah. So* [pause] *I don't know the favourite page, but I'm trying to find it. Oh, this one.*

Karen: *Yeah. What* [pause] *what happened here?*

Adam: *Ah, he's* [pause] *he said, "Why do they don't" and he said, "Mud eye". I don't know what it is.*

Karen: *So why was Old Bunyip calling Young Bunyip "mud eye" and "bark brain"?*

Adam: *I don't know. I don't know. Because I think so, but it* [pause] *but* [pause] *yes, it does look* [indistinct], *I don't know what it* [pause] *I don't know what the teachers will talk about when – when they're reading the book so fast.*

Karen: *Oh, I see. So, can you tell me anything about Young Bunyip?*

Adam: *Nope. I don't know.*

Karen: *Okay. And what do you think of the old, Old Bunyip?*

Adam: *What? I really don't know. But it's* [pause] *teachers read the book too fast. I don't know what they're talking about.*

Ten of the 22 children identified Old Bunyip as an authority figure who suppressed Young Bunyip but they said that is how things should be – for example, "*All bunyips should be the same 'cos Old Bunyip says so*" and "*Bunyips should do what their told*". An excerpt from Ella's initial conversation transcript is presented as an example:

Karen: *What do you think of Old Bunyip?*

Ella: *He's mean.*

Karen: *Why do you think he's mean?*

Ella: *He said that bunyip couldn't do all these stuff.*

Karen: *And what was Young Bunyip like?*

Ella: *He was different to the other bunyips.*

Karen: *And what did Old Bunyip say to Young Bunyip?*

Ella: *Can't remember now.*

Karen: *Oh, did he say, "Bunyips don't sing"?*

Ella: *Yeah.*

Karen: *Okay.*

Ella: *"Bunyips don't dance" and "Bunyips don't go to parties."*

Karen: *And what did Young Bunyip do?*

Ella: *He went to that party.*

Karen: *Do you think he should have?*

Ella: *Nope.*

Karen: *Even though he liked parties?*

Ella: *He should do what Old Bunyip tells him 'cos that's what bunyips have to do.*

Karen: *Even though, like you said, Old Bunyip is mean?*

Ella: *Ah-huh.*

Karen: *What do you think he should do?*

Ella: *He should be like all the other bunyips* [pause] *umm* [pause] *bunyips should be the same. It's good to be the same as everybody else.*

Dustin (who left the preschool and therefore was not involved in the action research phase), made an interesting and existential comment: "*In the end Old Bunyip is happy 'cos he's doing what he wants and Young Bunyip is happy 'cos he's got to do what he wants when Old Bunyip went away* [pause] *and that's good.*"

Dave's response was interesting: "*Kids made fun of Young Bunyip because he was big and fat so he wouldn't sing or dance or play ever again.*" This was not evident in the written or the illustrative text and indeed the children in the story encouraged Young Bunyip to be himself. This is a very interesting interpretation as both the pictorial text and the written text support the fact that Young Bunyip was welcomed by the children. Perhaps Dave's response reflects what he expected to happen because of the Bunyip's physical appearance.

Only two children, Tia and Jane, challenged the right of Old Bunyip to suppress Young Bunyip. "*Young Bunyip should stand up for himself*" (Tia); "*Old Bunyip shouldn't treat Young Bunyip like that*" (Jane).

Table 6.1 summarises the responses of Preschool A children as categories that emerged from the initial conversations. These categories include: non-related

responses; maintain the status quo; rebel against bullying; individual happiness; and ridicule of physical appearance. The names of the children who gave these responses are included in the table above each category.

Table 6.1 Preschool A: Summary of Initial Conversations

	Ella			
	Darren			
Reggie	Trixi			
Rick	Verity			
Bailey	Alice			
Melinda	Harley			
Max	Mary			
Logan	Ziek			
Kelly	Chanel	Tia		
Adam	Gabby	Jane	Dustin	Dave
Non-related	**Maintain the status quo: "We/bunyips should all be the same"**	**Rebel against unjust demands & bullying: "We/bunyips should be allowed to be different"**	**Individual happiness important**	**Ridicule of physical appearance causes withdrawal**

From the above summary and table it can be said that only two children, Tia and Jane, responded to the injustice in the text. Dustin appears to be the optimist wishing for the holistic, traditional "happy ending". Nine children (including Dave) did not grasp the story, or were unable to verbalise their ideas. The other nine children identified Old Bunyip as the authority figure to whom Young Bunyip must submit, even though he acted in a bullying, rude and unjust manner.

From these responses the research team identified that preschoolers from Preschool A would benefit by exploring texts that highlighted an individual's right to express her/himself and texts that would challenge suppression.

Preschool B (Date: Thursday 22 June, 2006)

Critical text: *The Paper Bag Princess*. Author/Illustrator: Babette Cole.

The Paper Bag Princess is a picture book telling the story of a beautiful princess, Elizabeth, who is to marry handsome Prince Ronald. However, a dragon burns down her castle and all her clothes and carries off Prince Ronald. She sets about rescuing her prince clad only in a dirty old paper bag. She cleverly and bravely tricks the dragon and finally saves her prince only to be told that she looks a disgrace and to come back to him when she is more presentable. She decides not to marry Ronald.

Introduction to each conversation:

Karen: *Hi* [child's name] *Miss Kate just read the story* The Paper Bag Princess. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Summary of children's responses (see also Table 6.2):

Fourteen children participated in these initial conversations (four children were away from preschool during the last week of the term owing to illness or family holidays: Mark, Ellery, Henry, Kurt). Every child happily agreed to participate in these conversations; however, three of the 14 children became very shy and almost non-verbal during the course of the conversation (Kirra, Tilly and Ally). When this occurred the conversation was immediately and sensitively ended so that the preschooler involved did not feel uncomfortable.

No child identified the bravery or resourcefulness of Princess Elizabeth. All (verbal) children concentrated on the lack of cleanliness of Princess Elizabeth as the "Paper Bag Princess" in a negative way. Jedda commented that the Paper Bag Princess was "*yucky and different*" and when asked what she thought of Prince Ronald she commented that he was "*nice*". When asked why she thought this her response was "*He's nice* [pause] *nice and clean.*" An excerpt from Jedda's initial conversation transcript is presented as further example:

Karen: *Is she different to other princesses?* [Jedda nods] *How is she different?*

Jedda: *Yucky and different.*

Karen: *She's yucky and different is she? And do you think that's okay or what do you think?*

Jedda: *Not good.*

Karen: *Not good. Okay. How is she different?*

Jedda: *She's all dirty. She's yucky.*

Karen: *Would you play with Princess Elizabeth?* [Jedda shakes her head] *Why not?*

Jedda: *She's dirty.*

Five children stated that it was "*Okay for boys to save girls but not okay for girls to save boys.*" Murray commented, "*I'd save her* [pointing to the picture of the neat and clean princess in a regal gown adopting a submissive stance to the prince] *but I wouldn't save her in that paper bag - she's all dirty*" [pointing to the illustration of a dirty, scrappy princess adopting an aggressive stance to the prince]. When asked why she thought girls should not save boys Caddy responded, "*Because boys might get angry* [pause] *and girls get happy to be saved.*" An excerpt from Michael's initial conversation transcript is presented as a further example:

Michael: *Because he's angry to her.*

Karen: *And he's angry to her so she's angry back to him? Do you think he was nice to Elizabeth?*

Michael: *No, but she* [pause] *he's nice to* [pause] *when she's like this. He's nice when she's like this.*

Karen: *Oh, he likes her when she's all clean.*

Michael: *Yeah, he liked her when she was like that. So she should stay clean.*

Karen: *But she might not have been able to save him if she was in her princess dress.*

Michael: *She shouldn't save him 'cos only boys can save.*

Karen: *Oh, only boys can save and do you think that's why he might've been angry with her?*

Michael: *Yeah and she's dirty.*

No child identified that Prince Ronald acted unjustly. Even though Prince Ronald was rude and thankless when Princess Elizabeth saved him six children said

that she should marry him *"but only when she gets cleaned up."* Three children stated that *"Prince Ronald shouldn't ever marry her 'cos she's dirty"*. Five children were non-committal about the royal marriage saying, for example *"Um, I don't know."*

Each child was asked if s/he would play with the princess firstly wearing her paper bag and secondly wearing her regal gown. Three children were non-committal. Six children said that they would not play with the princess in her paper bag because she was dirty. Caddy volunteered *"I don't like shabby people"* (an interesting adjective for a four year old). Five children said they would play with the princess only when she was dressed in the regal gown. Ashley volunteered: *"She looks beautiful"*.

When comparing the two illustrations of Princess Elizabeth, one in her regal gown the other in a dirty paper bag, every (verbal) child said that she would be a better, kinder and more likeable person when she was wearing her regal gown and crown to when she was dirty in a paper bag. Ally, who became almost non-verbal during the initial conversations, pointed to the illustration of the regal looking princess being the "better person". An excerpt from Jerry's initial conversation transcript is presented as an example:

> Karen: *Jerry, when do you think the princess would be nicer and kinder and cleverer and a better person. When she's wearing her princess dress or when she's in the paper bag?*
>
> Jerry: *That one* [pointing to the illustration of Princess Elizabeth in her regal gown].
>
> Karen: *When she's in her princess clothes. Why do you think she's a better person here?*
>
> Jerry: *Because she is.*
>
> Karen: *Do you think she'd be a nicer person to play with?*
>
> Jerry: *Yes.*
>
> Karen: *When would you rather play with her in her princess dress or when she's in the paper bag?*
>
> Jerry: *Her dress.*

Karen: *The one in the regal, beautiful clothes. What do you think about this one here in the paper bag?*

Jerry: *I don't like her.*

Karen: *You don't like her?*

Jerry: *No.*

Karen: *Why not?*

Jerry: 'Cos she's dirty.

Table 6.2 summarises the responses of Preschool B children, as categories, which emerged from the initial conversations. These categories include: physical appearance; girls should not save boys; the paper bag princess as a play-mate; the royal marriage; and non-verbal. The names of the children who gave these responses are included in the table above each category.

Table 6.2 Preschool B: Summary of Initial Conversations.

Jedda						
Caddy						
Laura						
Ally						
Michael				Michael		
Ron	Murray	Jedda		Murray		
Ryan	Ron	Ryan		Ryan		
Murray	Kurt	Murray		Caddy	Jerry	Kirra
Alicia	Michael	Alicia		Alicia	Jedda	Tilly
Jerry	Caddy	Jerry		Laura	Ron	Ally
Physical beauty & cleanliness reflects kindness, fairness & friendliness	**Girls should never rescue boys**	**Would play with her only when she was Princess Elizabeth**	**Would play with her when she was the "Paper Bag Princess"**	**She should marry Prince Ronald "only when she gets cleaned up"**	**She should not marry Prince Ronald because "she's dirty"**	**Non-verbal or extremely shy**

From the above responses the research team identified that the preschoolers in Preschool B would benefit from exploring texts that challenged stereotyping by physical appearance (especially gender orientated).

The research team analysed and reflected upon the initial conversations which supported their assumptions that children in both preschool groups held stereotypical ideas regarding gender and that these children placed importance on maintaining a status quo that upheld the dominant discourse and culture (even though prejudice, suppression and bullying were employed by characters in the picture books who held power in the dominant tradition). The team, however, was surprised by the preschoolers rather exclusivist language; for example *"All bunyips should act the same"* (Ella, Gabby)*; "Kids made fun of Young Bunyip because he was big and fat* (different) *so he wouldn't sing or dance or play ever again"* (Dave); *"She's yucky and different"* (Jedda); *"I don't like shabby people"* (Caddy); *"I'd save her* [pointing to the picture of the neat and clean princess in a regal gown adopting a submissive stance to the prince] *but I wouldn't save her in that paper bag - she's all dirty* [pointing to the illustration of a dirty, scrappy princess adopting an aggressive stance to the prince]. These examples highlight that the preschoolers were using the language of a hegemony that upheld the importance of physical appearance and negated difference and diversity. The research team wished to guide the children to challenge and counter these stereotypical views to celebrate and uphold difference, diversity and human dignity. Thus ended the orientation phase of our study and set the scene for the next part of our research journey: the action research phase.

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

Before moving on to the next chapter which begins the presentation and analysis of data gathered during the action research phase of this study it is advantageous to orientate the reader(s) to the action research cycles that took place during the action research phase. The action research phase was situated during term three of the 2006 school year. It encompassed an 11 week period in which there were 10 research cycles (weeks one to ten) followed by concluding conversations with each preschool child (week 11). Table 6.3 displays the texts read to each preschool group during the action research cycles. Each week at research meetings the team used critical reflection to analyse the two videotaped storytime sessions from

Preschool A and the two videotaped storytime sessions from Preschool B for that week. From this analysis strategies and texts were planned for the following weekly cycle.

Table 6.3: Participatory Action Research Cycles Displaying Texts Examined[1]

Weekly cycles	Monday: Preschool A	Tuesday: Preschool A	Thursday: Preschool B	Friday: Preschool B
1		*Princess Smartypants* (C)		*Caps for Sale* (NC/C)
2	*Snow White (NC/C)*	*The Paper Bag Princess* (C)	*Marty and Mei Ling* (C)	*The Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear* (NC/C)
3	*Cinderella* (NC/C)	Discussion following children's assertion of the importance of appearance.	*Nickety Nackety Noo Noo Noo* (NC/C)	*Let's Eat* (C)
4	*Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* (C)	Role play on stereotyping (C)	*Bush Tucker* (C)	*Whitefellers Are Like Traffic Lights* (C)
5	*Nini at the Carnival* (C)	*Cleversticks* (C)	*Enora and the Black Crane* (C)	*Fish Out of Water* (NC/C)
6	*Let's Eat* (C)	*Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* (C)	*I Like Myself* (cancelled) (C)	*I Like Myself* (C)
7	*A Piece of String* (C)	*Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* (C)	*Prince Cinders* (C)	*Princess Smartypants* (C)
8	*The Kuia and the Spider* (C)	*I Like Myself* (C)	*A Bit of Company* (C)	Preschool Excursion
9	*Milly and Molly and Different Dads* (C)	*Mumma Zooms* (C)	*The Sad Little Monster and the Jellybean Queen* (C)	*Big Al* (C)
10	*The Race* (C)	*Whoever You Are* (C)	*Arnold the Prickly Teddy* (C)	*Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* (C)
11	Concluding conversations: *Bunyips Don't*	Concluding conversations: *Bunyips Don't*	Concluding conversations: *The Paper Bag Princess*	Concluding conversations: *The Paper Bag Princess*

Key:

(C) - Critical texts

(NC/C) - Initially identified as non-critical; however, on reflection reconsidered as critical texts.

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[1] For ease of reference the bibliographic information for all children's literature used in the research project and cited in this dissertation may be found in Appendix B. This information is also included within the reference section.

SUMMARY

This chapter concludes *Part Two: Planning* which has outlined the planning stage of this research project and incorporated Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five: Setting the Scene, discussed participant recruitment, placed the preschools in context and outlined ethical considerations. This chapter, Chapter Six, explained the orientation phase of the participatory action research project. It reported on meetings with co-researchers and highlighted critical moments that were of significance to the project's development and evolution. It also explained how the research team came to embrace feminist communitarianism underpinned by an ethic of care. The chapter then highlighted parent meetings. It also examined initial conversations held with each preschool child regarding a critical text read to the preschool group that highlighted the need to challenge gender stereotyping and the preschoolers' hegemonic understandings.

The following section, *Part Three: Action and Observation*, reports on the action research phase of this participatory action research project. Chapter Seven examines the children's responses to storytime sessions using a themed approach. It then discusses and analyses conversations held with each preschool child at the conclusion of the action research phase of the project. The chapter concludes by offering a comparative analysis between the initial conversations held with each preschooler (outlined in this chapter) and these concluding conversations. Chapter Eight focuses on the co-researchers' voices and highlights critical meetings that impacted significantly on the research project.

PART THREE:

ACTION AND OBSERVATION

CHAPTER SEVEN: FROM EXCLUSIVITY TO INCLUSIVITY

Is it possible for a kindergarten class to pursue such an intensely literary and, yes, long-term intellectual activity, one that demands powers of analysis and introspection expected of much older students?
(Paley, 1997, p. 18)

INTRODUCTION

The preceding section, *Part Two: Planning*, set the scene for the participatory action research project and discussed the orientation phase that laid the foundation for the action research phase of this study. This chapter introduces *Part Three: Action and Observation* that focuses on the action research phase of the project. Similar to the preceding chapter, both this chapter and the ones that follow present data as illustrations (McIntrye, 1995) and employ the data analysis tools of critical reflection and analysis of knowledge in action adapting Fairclough's (1992) framework as described in Chapter Four. The chapter highlights that the answer to Paley's (1997) question that introduces this chapter is a resounding "*yes*". However, both this chapter and the next extend this issue by also asking *how* is it possible for very young children to pursue such an intensely literary and long-term intellectual activity as required by the first research question:

How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?

This chapter employs a themed approach that analyses preschoolers' responses to storytime sessions. It also outlines the picture books that were examined and the discussions and actions that these storytime sessions encouraged. The chapter concludes by presenting the findings of the concluding conversations held with each preschool child and offers a comparative analysis between the initial conversations, reported on in the preceding chapter, and the concluding conversations.

THE ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: **THEMES**

A themed approach is a helpful tool for portraying and analysing qualitative data (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999; Maguire, 2006; Stake, 1995; Whitmore & McKee, 2006). Therefore, a themed approach is employed here to explore the preschoolers' developing ideas regarding issues of difference, diversity and human dignity that occurred over the course of the action research phase of this project. The themes emerged from the data in the video transcripts of storytime sessions and journal entries. These themes highlight issues that were important and significant to the preschoolers as evidenced through their reflective and on-going discussions. They include the importance placed on outward physical appearance, skin colour, Indigenous issues, gender issues, issues of integrity and self worth, (dis)ability, poverty and loneliness. Each of these themes was chosen because the issue was continually or often raised during different cycles of the action research phase; or because the issue generated deep reflective discussion on the part of the preschoolers.

Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) assert that the fundamental intent of anti-bias education, and therefore teaching for social justice, "is to foster the development of children and adults who have the personal strength, critical-thinking ability, and activist skills to work with others to build caring, just, diverse communities and societies for all" (p. 5). They proposed four goals of such an education into which the eight themes that emerged from this research project's data may fall. Both Derman-Sparks and Ramsey's (2006) goals and the research project's themes may be linked with the study's key features that were highlighted in Chapter Two. This linkage is outlined in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Linking Teaching for Social Justice Goals, Themes that Emerged from this Research Project and the Research Project's Key Features

Teaching for social justice goals	Emergent themes of this research project	Research project's key features
Goal 1: Nurture each child's construction of a knowledge-able, confident self-concept and group identity	The importance placed on outward appearance; gender issues; issues of integrity and self worth; loneliness	Upholds freedom of speech; Promotes peaceful practices
Goal 2: Promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds	Skin colour; Indigenous issues; (dis)ability; poverty	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes; Promotes peaceful practices
Goal 3: Foster each child's critical thinking about bias	Skin colour; Indigenous issues; (dis)ability; gender issues; issues of integrity and self worth; poverty; loneliness	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes; Challenges oppression; Promotes peaceful practices
Goal 4: Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias	The importance placed on outward appearance; skin colour; Indigenous issues; (dis)ability; gender issues; issues of integrity and self worth; poverty; loneliness	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes; Challenges oppression; Upholds freedom of speech;

THE IMPORTANCE PLACED ON OUTWARD PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This theme actually emerged from the initial conversations whereby many children from Preschool B equated goodness with physical beauty when discussing *The Paper Bag Princess*. Interestingly however, this theme was not a major issue for Preschool B preschoolers during the action research phase. The reasons for this are unclear. Yet, this stereotypical assumption was upheld by many children from Preschool A during the initial research cycles; however, as the action research phase progressed, for most children, this diminished.

During cycle two and discussion on *The Paper Bag Princess* most Preschool A children focused their comments on the princess' lack of cleanliness. No child highlighted her bravery.

Trixi: *She's angry and sad 'cos she's wearing a paper bag. She's dirty. Yuck!*

In fact the story indicates that the princess was angry because the dragon had carried off her betrothed. In her resourcefulness she found a paper bag to wear while

rescuing her prince. However, the preschoolers decided that it was more important to have nice, clean clothes.

> Melinda: *She's not nice. She's dirty. She's got a paper bag on. She yucky!*
>
> A number of preschoolers: *Yeah! She's yucky!*
>
> Lisa: *Hang on. Why? Why is she yucky? Tia?*
>
> Tia: *'Cos she's dirty and she doesn't have nice clothes.*
>
> Carryn: *She's gotta have clothes like us.*
>
> Melinda: *Yeah an' you gotta have nice clean clothes.*
>
> Trixi: *Yeah, I wouldn't play with her with not nice clothes.*
>
> Lisa: *Why Trixi?*
>
> Trixi: *'Cos I just like people with nice clothes. I don't like people with not nice clothes.*
>
> Lisa: *If the princess had nice clean clothes do you think she would be a nicer person?*
>
> Unison response: *Yeah*
>
> Lisa: *How would she be a nicer person if she had clean nice clothes? Colin…*
>
> Colin: *Umm. Well she'd look better and people would like her.*
>
> Tia: *And then they could get married.*
>
> Lisa: *So you don't think the prince likes her in the paper bag?*
>
> Unison response: *No!* [Laughter].
>
> Lisa: *Even though she saved him from the dragon?*
>
> Aaron: *She's gotta get cleaned up then he'll like her.*
>
> Ella: *No-one would like her like **that**!*

These responses are very similar to those of Preschool B children during the initial conversations. Outward appearance and nice, clean clothes are important. Judging by the laughter of many preschoolers it seems ridiculous that the prince would approve of the princess in her paper bag (even though she had just rescued him). Their language is quite exclusivist: "*You gotta have nice clean clothes*"; "*She's gotta have clothes like us*"; "*I wouldn't play with her with not nice clothes*"; "*I don't like people with not nice clothes*". It can be seen by the unison responses that there is consensus that nice, clean clothes create a nicer, "better" person. No child identified

the princess' resourcefulness or bravery. Chapter Eight reports that Lisa was disappointed that she did not directly challenge the preschoolers' assumptions.

The research team decided to counter the preschoolers' stereotypical responses regarding outward appearance during cycle three and read and discuss the story *Cinderella* and *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door*. The preschoolers' responses to *Cinderella* highlighted their understanding that physical beauty equates to goodness.

> Melinda: *I like her in her beautiful clothes. Beautiful clothes are important.*
> Lisa: *Do you think she would be just as nice a person in her old rags?*
> Unison response: *No!*
> Lisa: *Why not? Heidi?*
> Heidi: *'Cos she's pretty in her beautiful dress an' she's not pretty in her old dress.*
> Lisa: *But does wearing her old raggy dress make her a different sort of person? Jack?*
> Jack: *Well. Ummm* [pause]. *She wouldn't be nice in her raggy dress 'cos she feels sad.*
> Lisa: *Why do you think she feels sad?*
> Jack: *'Cos she hasn't got nice things.*

Jack's final comment in this vignette shows that he feels that Cinderella may feel sad because she does not have "*nice things*". Thereby Jack may be confusing the question of niceness with happiness. However, this does show that Jack is equating a "*pretty*" outward appearance with happiness which reflects the majority of responses that outward appearance equates to the inner personality. Lisa was quite concerned by these responses and so on consultation with Pippa, Sandra and me it was decided that the following day the preschoolers would revisit the picture books that had been read (*Snow White*; *The Paper Bag Princess*; *Princess Smartypants*; *Cinderella*). However, the discussion of previous books would have a "twist". We decided that we would "dress down" for the day (without forewarning the preschoolers) to gauge their reactions. Naturally most preschoolers were confused and many avoided us initially which prompted Lisa to ask:

Preschoolers have you noticed anything different about Miss Pippa, Miss Karen and Miss Lisa today? Ziek?

Ziek: *Yeah, you're all, umm. You're all messy.*

Ella: *Yeah, you're all dressed funny.*

Harley: *You're in daggy clothes* [laughter]

Lisa: *Hmm. You know what? When I got to preschool today you guys acted a bit differently to me and Miss Pippa and Miss Karen. Some of you didn't even come over to say "good morning". Why do you think that happened? Dave?*

Dave: *'Cos you're dressed different.*

Lisa: *Oh, I see. So you treated us differently because we were dressed differently?*

Unison response: *Yeah* [some laughter].

Lisa: *But have we really changed?*

Jane: *Just your clothes.*

Lisa: *Just our clothes have changed. That's right Janie. So are we still the same people underneath our clothes.*

Unison response: *Yeah* [laughter].

Colin: *You're still the same people.*

Lisa: *And do we still care about our preschoolers?*

Unison response: *Yeah*

Lisa: *Are we still kind to you?*

Unison response: *Yeah*

Lisa: *So just because we dress differently does that make us sad or bad?*

Unison response: *Noooo*

Lisa: *But you guys thought that the Paper Bag Princess and Cinderella were sad because they didn't have nice clothes and people wouldn't like them.*

Ella: *Yeah but it doesn't matter what you look like, it's what's in your heart that matters.*

Lisa: *Wow. Ella I like your thinking. What do you think would be in your heart?*

Ella: *Being kind*

Colin: *Playing, sharing*

Tia: *Being nice to people*

This discussion went on for some time about what could be "in your heart" and the importance of inner qualities. It seemed to be a turning point for the stereotypical responses of many of the preschoolers to the importance of outward appearance. This could be due to Lisa's obvious approval of Ella's comment, "*It doesn't matter what you look like, it's what's in your heart that matters*" and the other preschoolers also wanting such approval. Also, Lisa adopted a direct teaching approach by highlighting that the preschoolers had previously stated that the characters in the books read earlier were considered deficit due to their appearance.

Was this "transformational" teaching or indoctrination? This question, interestingly, was not asked by any member of the team during the action research project. Only as this dissertation is being written has the notion surfaced. Nonetheless, following this cycle many children began to challenge the view of the importance of outward appearance and their exclusivist language began to change. Does this show that the preschoolers are now beginning to intrinsically challenge their pre-conceived assumptions, or are they wishing to please their teacher and therefore conform to her standards? A further deliberation that the research team did not attend to was the fact that to challenge the preschoolers' stereotypical responses regarding outward appearance the team, although building upon the literature read to the preschoolers, went beyond the story. Rather than relying on language alone to challenge stereotypical responses we looked to action. Therefore, action and dialogue helped challenge the preschoolers' taken-for-granted notions of the importance of outward appearance.

During cycle four most children showed sympathy towards Esmeralda, the main character in the picture book *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door*:

Ella: *Those kids next door are mean. Just 'cos she's big. She was nice to them. They shoulda let her play.*

Trixi: *Maybe if she changes her clothes the kids will play with her.*

Carryn: *Her clothes are a bit weird looking. But she's a nice person. Those kids shoulda played with her.*

Both of these responses demonstrate sympathy towards a child who was being treated unjustly and excluded because of her appearance. Ella explains that, although Esmeralda's appearance may be different, others should treat her fairly. However, Trixi still concentrates on outward appearance as being the issue by explaining that circumstances might be different if Esmeralda conforms to expected clothing. It is difficult to challenge ingrained taken-for-granted stereotypical notions (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Salinas, 2003). Trixi, who previously declared "*I don't like people with not nice clothes*" is now sympathising with Esmeralda. Clearly she feels that Esmeralda is being treated unfairly; however Trixi's solution is for Esmeralda to conform.

Carryn is beginning to challenge her preconceived ideas regarding outward appearance. During cycle two Carryn was convinced that the Paper Bag Princess should "*have clothes like us*"; however, she now acknowledges that, although Esmeralda's clothing may appear "*a bit weird*" she still should be treated fairly.

Cycle five revealed that still a few children held negative feelings towards others whose outward appearance was different to theirs. On reading the story *Nini at the Carnival* the children were asked if they would play with the children in the story, all of whom had dark coloured skin and wore traditional African costume, and to give their reasons for their decisions. Many responses focused on appearance:

Dave: *I wouldn't play with 'em 'cos they got different clothes.*

Lisa: *Oh okay. So how does it make you feel when people are different to you? Dave?*

Dave: *I feel sad.*

Kelly: *Yeah, I feel bad 'cos their clothes are different. No. No I wouldn't play.*

Adam: *Me too. Their clothes are yucky.*

Lisa: *How do you feel about that Adam?*

Adam: *Yucky.*

Mary: *They don't look pretty. I don't want them at preschool.*

This cycle marked the half way point for the action research and the above vignette confirms that some preschoolers are still using quite exclusivist language. Difference makes them feel "*sad*", "*bad*"; and "*yucky*". These children said that they would not play with children who dressed differently to themselves. Mary would even have children who did not "*look pretty*" excluded from her preschool. Many children, although saying that they would play with the children from the story, focused on the characters' outward appearances because they "*looked nice*" or "*looked pretty*". However, a few children responded more reflectively:

Ella: *I'd play with them 'cos they're the same as us really. They look a bit different, but they like to dress up and have fun like us.*

Jane: *I'd play with them 'cos they look happy and kind.*

Ziek: *Yeah and they're the same as us on the insides.*

Lisa: *How do you mean, Ziek?*

Ziek: *Mum said we're all the same on the insides. Like everyone has a heart and stuff.*

Darren: *Yeah, I'd play with them 'cos we're the same. I'd like to go to that carnival.*

Max: *I'd play with them kids 'cos they're beautiful.*

Karen: *Max, do you think they're beautiful because they look pretty?*

Max: *Them kids are kind to each other. The girl made the other girl happy.*

This vignette highlights that a few preschoolers were beginning to look beyond the physical and examining inner qualities. Their language was becoming more inclusivist: "*I'd play with them.*" Note also Ziek's response "*Mum said . . .*" which demonstrates that the understandings of the family to difference and diversity impact on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Corsaro, 2005; Piaget, 1968a, 1968b; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). This became quite pertinent to the study as a few preschoolers' parents were not as inclusive as Ziek's mother and, therefore, the study was challenging what was being imparted on the preschoolers in their home environments.

It is very interesting to note Carryn's creative response to this storytime session. Her response during cycle two indicated that she believed that everyone

"should have clothes like us." Her response during cycle four indicated that she was beginning to challenge this assumption. As can be seen in the Photograph 7.1, Carryn is now designing costumes and jewellery that Nini might wear to the carnival and proudly modelling her creations.

Photograph 7.1
Carryn modelling the jewellery and costume that she created for Nini to wear to the carnival

From 21 children, 16 said that they would play with the children from the story; five said that they would not play with them based on appearance. At this point in the action research phase, cycle five, the research team identified that we still had a long way to go in countering the stereotype that outward appearance equated to the quality of the person, and to uphold and celebrate difference and diversity. The team asserted that Lisa's strategy of conversing with each child after the story was read was a very worthwhile endeavour and allowed the team a glimpse into how each individual child was developing in her/his understandings of and sensitivities to difference and diversity.

During the reading of *Cleversticks*, Trixi again commented that she would not play with the children in the story because they were different.

Trixi: *I wouldn't play with them kids 'cos they is different. It makes me sad.*

However, an opportunity for discussion was lost here as no-one discussed with Trixi why this made her sad. Was it because she could see that most of her preschool friends said that they would play with the children who were considered different and

she did not wish to? Or was she sad because she felt everyone should be the same yet was being "confronted" by difference in picture books?

During cycle six and the reading of *Let's Eat* many children began focusing on the positives of difference and the similarities between people of different cultures.

Colin: *They eat the same stuff like us. They just call it different.*
Dave: *Yeah. They're like my family and my mum's having a baby too.*
Heidi: *An' my grandpa lives with us.*

When asked if the children would play with the main character, Antonio, and his family, most children said that they would and gave reasons such as "*they're friendly*" (Kelly); "*They eat lots of different things*" (Carryn); "*They could teach me Spanish*" (Ella, Jack, Reggie, Colin). The children did not base their reasons for wishing to play with Antonio's family on physical appearance. Following the reading of *Let's Eat* children who had previously held the assumption that difference is "*sad*", "*bad*" and "*yucky*" in cycle five were found at the playdough table creating a Spanish feast and were pretending to invite Antonio's family (see Photograph 7.2).

Photograph 7.2
Adam, Kelly, Carryn and Dave creating a Spanish feast for Antonio's family. Colin in background designing decorations for the feast.

However, four children said they would not play with the family. Alice and Melinda could give no reason for their response; Mary said she would not play with them because "*they had different coloured skin*" (which will be discussed later) and Trixi said "*because they're just different.*"

Before reading *A Piece of String* during cycle seven Lisa used the guided question: *"Think about the little man in the story and what sort of person you think he is…"* at which point Rick stated *"He's ugly."* However, at the end of the reading Rick identified the personal characteristics of the little man as *"nice and kind."* This text generated discussion on the importance of caring and sharing as opposed to attractive physical appearance and material possessions. Most of the children upheld the virtues of kindness, care, helpfulness and sharing in the discussions.

Chanel: *That little man was kind and helped everyone*

Logan: *Yeah he was* [pause] *he shared.*

Lisa: *Do you think it's a good thing to be kind and share?*

Unison response: *Yeah*

Lisa: *Why's that? Madelyn?*

Madelyn: *'Cos if someone doesn't have food you should share. 'Cos* [pause] *'cos it's not nice to be hungry.*

Lisa: *So if someone needs help we should help?*

Unison response: *Yeah*

Lisa: *How? How could we help people? Dave?*

Dave: *We could share our toys and my bike. I share my bike with Billy 'cos he doesn't got one.*

Lisa: *Nice one Dave. And caring? How can we show we care for other people like the little man did? Gabby?*

Gabby: *Well* [pause] *when you're sick* [pause] *if someone's sick* [pause] *Like Mummy looked after Nanny when she got sick and she come to live with us.*

Through scaffolding and placing the social justice issues highlighted in the text into the preschoolers' contexts these issues were more easily understood by the preschoolers. However, Trixi continued to put value on outward appearance:

Trixi: *He's bad 'cos he got ugly clothes.*

Lisa: *He's a bad person because he is wearing different clothes?*

Unison response: *Noooo.*

Alice: *But* [pause] *But* [pause] *But he's not nice 'cos he's different.*

Lisa: *How is the little man different, Alice?*

Alice: *He looks different. I don't know.*

Lisa: *And that makes him not nice?*

Alice: *I don't know.*

It is obvious that Alice was uncomfortable with *difference* yet could not articulate what this difference was. It just made the little man "*not nice*" in her thinking. Lisa and Pippa wished to counter Trixi's and Alice's focus on outward appearance by reading *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* during the next storytime session. Lisa orientated the session by initially asking the children to look at the front cover and imagine how they would feel if they were the little stripy fish:

Mary: *I'd be frightened of the other fish because they looked different to me.*

Mary has revealed that difference is frightening to her. Lisa then asked: *If you were one of the fish who had a sparkle how would you treat the little stripy fish?*

Kelly: *I'd play with it.*

Mary: *Me too; I'd play with him.*

Lisa: *You'd play with him even though he looks different to you, Mary?*

Mary: *Yeah, he's only a bit different he's still a fish* [pause] *and he's lonely and scared.*

Ziek: *Yeah and it's not nice to feel left out.*

Jane: *Yeah, it's sad to be left out.*

After reading some way into the text Lisa asked: *I wonder why he feels so left out and sad? Mary?*

Mary: *'Cos he's different to those big fish.*

Lisa: *Yeah. How is he different? You said before that he was only a little bit different.*

Mary: *Yeah but he doesn't got* [pause] *he hasn't got a shiny thing like the others and he's little.*

Lisa: *I see so he **is** a little bit different. So what does he want to do? Darren?*

Darren: *He wants to play with the other fish.*

Lisa: *Okay. Do you think the other fish should let him play? Mary?*

Mary: *Yeah.*

Lisa: *Yeah. Why? He is a bit different.*

Mary: *Mmm* [pause] *but they shouldn't be mean just 'cos he's different.*

Lisa: *Okay. So if a little boy or girl who looked a bit different to you came to our preschool what would you do? Ella?*

Ella: *I'd say come and play with me.*

Colin: *Yeah, yeah I'd play with them so they wouldn't feel left out.*

Lisa: *Yeah. Yes Mary?*

Mary: *I'd, I'd* [shrugs shoulders]. *That's okay.*

Lisa: *So you'd be happy for someone who looked different to you to be a new friend in our preschool?*

Mary: *Yeah.*

This was a critical moment for Mary as previously she has indicated that she did not wish people who were different to attend preschool (cycle six: "*They don't look pretty. I don't want them at preschool*"). She has now stated that it is "*okay*" for children who are different to attend her preschool (although she did not volunteer that she would play with these children). *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* is a text which assisted in discussions on exclusion, inclusion and standing against injustice. This text really engaged the children, especially the younger children (e.g., Mary) who listened attentively, commented and answered and asked questions. They commented on both the illustrative and written text and understood that at the end of the story the little stripy fish did not have a shiny scale however,

Heidi: *The other fish changed the game so that the little fish could play.*

Lisa made good use of guided, higher order and open-ended questioning which stimulated rich discussion. She scaffolded the discussions in such a way as to guide the children to realise the messages in both texts in this cycle. From Mary's comment's regarding the little stripy fish it can be seen that she fears others who are different but would like to still be valued and included. *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* is a simple text yet overt in its encouragement of acceptance and inclusion. This text has engaged Mary more than any other text and has encouraged her to express, for

the first time that she would like to play with someone who was different from the group (albeit this thought was extrapolated into the world of the fish in the story). Therefore, using particularly simple yet overt texts that encourage acceptance and inclusion may be a positive tact to encourage Mary to celebrate difference and diversity.

Through cycles eight, nine and ten the preschoolers of Preschool A continued to develop their understandings on the significance (or otherwise) of outward appearance. However, Mary still tended to focus on outward appearance as important. During the reading of *I Like Myself* in cycle eight when the children were asked why they thought the little girl on the front cover was so happy, Mary commented that "*she's happy 'cos she's in a pretty dress*". Nevertheless most children during these later cycles were displaying an understanding that outward appearance does not define the inner qualities of a person. During the reading of *I Like Myself* (cycle eight) a discussion on inner qualities resulted:

Colin: *I think he looks like a super person.*

Lisa: *Really? How would you be a super person? Col?*

Colin: *You'd be all muscley.*

Lisa: *Oh so big muscles make a super person?*

Colin: *Yeah. No. You gotta help people. Muscles aren't that important. Yeah, no, it doesn't really matter what you look like.*

Ella: *You gotta use your manners.*

Tia: *And be nice to people.*

Kelly: *And do good.*

Lisa: *Wow, anything else to be a super person? Yes, Jack.*

Jack: *Take care of people.*

Lisa: *Would a super person take care of people who looked different and acted different?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Lisa: *Yes, Gabby.*

Gabby: *A super person would say to people who are different "I'll play with you."*

Harley: *And share stuff.*

Carryn: *Yeah, yeah and talk nice; no rude words and don't yell.*

Lisa: *Wow. I think we have a room full of super preschoolers!*

The above vignette confirms that Preschool A preschoolers were placing more emphasis on the inner qualities of a "super person" than the outward appearance. They are using inclusive language: "*A super person would say to people who are different 'I'll play with you'.*" However, Ella's final comment of the action research phase for Preschool A epitomised the understandings of most of the preschoolers:

Ella: *It's sad if we were all the same* [pause] *looked all the same. 'Cos that's pretty mean and that's pretty boring.*

Interestingly, it was these later cycles that Preschool B children began to discuss outward appearance; however, it was in a very empathetic response to characters who were treated unjustly in the picture books. During the reading of *Big Al* in cycle nine Kate asked the preschoolers

Why do you think the little fish went away from Big Al?

Tilly: *'Cos he's big and scary looking.*

Don: *Just 'cos he's big doesn't mean he's bad.*

Henry: *Yeah, he's brave.*

Jerry: *Yeah them little fish should help him* [pause]. *He helped them.*

Tilly: *Yeah, I didn't mean he **was** scary. He just looked that way. He was kind and nice. Them little fish were a bit silly.*

Kate: *How do you mean the little fish were a bit silly, Tilly?*

Tilly: *Well, they didn't get to know him before they ran way. And he was real nice.*

Tilly's insightful final comment may reflect back to cycle three where a discussion following Preschool B's reading of *Let's Eat* focused on getting to know something (food, places and people) before making hasty decisions. Nonetheless, the comment and the above vignette highlight how these preschoolers were focusing on inward qualities and not on outward appearance. This focus may have been building

during the course of the action research phase and especially through the later cycles when Preschool B treated many picture books on poverty and loneliness (which will be discussed later in this chapter).

During the reading of the final picture book of the action research phase *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* the children of Preschool B readily identified the bravery of Esmeralda. Unlike a few children from Preschool A who stated in cycle four that Esmeralda should conform so that the children next door would play with her, all Preschool B children upheld that Esmeralda should be valued for the person whom she was:

> Kirra: *Hey, Esmeralda saved that baby. She's brave. They should play with her.*
> Jedda: *Yeah, they should play with her.*
> Calissa: *It doesn't matter if she's big. She's just nice and kind*
> Kate: *So what do you think of the children next door?*
> Caddy: *No fair. They're not fair. They shouldn't be mean.*
> Jerry: *They're not nice!*
> Ron: *Yeah, I'd say to them kids* [the children next door]*: Don't you get mad at me girly!*

This vignette shows the preschoolers empathising with Esmeralda and rising to her defense. Ron's comment was particularly interesting in a few ways. Firstly, he was taking Esmeralda's perspective and placing himself in her position ("*Don't you get mad at **me** girly!*"). Secondly, by using the term "*girly*" was he insinuating that the children next door were all girls (in which case this was incorrect as the illustrations depict a girl and a boy)? Or by using the term was he insinuating that girls usually act in nasty ways? Or had he simply heard the term and enjoyed its impact? Embedded in this theme of the importance of outward apparance are the other themes that emerged from the data. These will now be discussed.

SKIN COLOUR, RACE AND ETHNICITY

This theme emerged during cycle four for both preschool groups. Following a discussion on inclusive play practices after reading *Esmeralda and the Children Next*

Door Preschool A preschoolers discussed photographs of different children from the text *We, the Children*:

> Karen: *Why do you think this little boy looks sad?*
> Harley: *He's Black!*
> Ella: *Naa, it's because kids won't play with him. I'd say "you can play with me."*
> Karen: *I'm sure that would put a smile on his face, Ella. Harley, you said that this little boy could be sad because he's black? Why would that make him sad?*
> Harely: *He's got black skin.*
> Karen: *Yeah, but why would that make him sad?*
> Harely: *'Cos* [pause] [shrugs shoulders].
> Ziek: *It doesn't matter that he's black 'cos it's what's in your heart that's important.*
> Karen: *So what do you think would be in this little boy's heart, Ziek?*
> Ziek: *Umm* [pause] *being kind?*
> Jack: *Well, umm, he looks a bit sad.*
> Ella: *He needs some friends to play with then he'd be happy.*
> Karen: *Who thinks he needs a friend to play with? Who would play with this little boy?* [Most hands raised].
> Jane: *I'd play with him.*
> Unison response: *Me too.*

On reflection Harley's comment that the boy was sad because "*he's Black*" could have been drawn out further; however, it was clear that Harley was having difficulty articulating his thoughts by his shrug when he was asked to clarify his thoughts. Ziek turned the discussion around to become more reflective by saying that outward appearance (skin colour) was unimportant. This led to a discussion on inclusive practices.

> Lisa: *Do you think this little boy would play the same games as you do? Darren?*
> Darren: *I think he'd play different games.*

Lisa: *Why?*

Darren: *Because he comes from a different country.*

Lisa: *Oh, he comes from a different country so he'd play different games to you? Tia?*

Tia: *But we could teach him our games.*

Lisa: *Okay.*

Colin: *And he could teach us his games.*

Most of the preschoolers said that they would engage in play with children whom they considered different. However, six children said quite frankly that they would definitely not play with children who were different:

Trixi: *I wouldn't play with him 'cos he's got different skin*

Mary: *He's skin is black. I wouldn't play with him.*

Melinda: *I won't play with any kids with black skin.*

Alice and Verity: *Me either*

Gabby: *Nope. I wouldn't play with them.*

The above vignette displays a group of preschoolers using negative language to distance themselves from children of different skin colour: "*I wouldn't play*"; "*I won't play*". The responses of Trixi, Mary, Melinda, Alice and Verity are not surprising as their responses in this vignette are consistent with their previous responses. Gabby's response, however, may indicate that she may want to be seen as part of the group to which she had recently aligned. Therefore, Gabby may just wish to agree with her friends at this point in time (note Gabby's change of opinion on page 228).

Max said in an apprehensive voice "*I won't play with them if they're naked.*" It was clear in cycle four, that some children still retained stereotypical notions regarding skin colour, race and ethnicity. However, the idea of the importance of kindness, caring, compassion and friendship over outward appearance is becoming a recurring theme in the comments of children from Preschool A as can be seen by Ziek's comment (which matches Ella's comment in cycle three): "*It's what's in your heart that counts.*"

The theme of skin colour, race and ethnicity emerged in cycle four when Preschool B read *Whitefellers are Like Traffic Lights*.

Calissa: *Those kids can't play together.*

Shelley: *Why do you think they can't play together, Calissa?*

Calissa: *'Cos you need a white friend*

Shelley: *Oh so you think because this boy is white he should only play with white kids?*

Calissa: *Mmm*

Tilly: *No. It doesn't make any difference what colour your skin is; you can still play together.*

Don: *Well, I only have white friends*

Shelley: *Do you know anyone with black skin?*

Don: *Nope.*

Shelley: *Would you like to have a friend with black skin like in this book?*

Don: *Yeah.*

Unison response: *Me too.*

Don: *That'd be cool!*

Shelley: *Why would that be cool, Donny?*

Don: *'Cos he could show me how to find bush tucker!*

Calissa: *And I could come too* [pause] *to find bush tucker.*

Shelley: *Oh, okay Calissa, so you'd like a friend with black coloured skin?*

Calissa: *Yeah.*

Shelley: *So what else could you do with your new friend who has black coloured skin?*

Calissa: *Playdough.*

Jedda: *Home corner.*

Harry: *Naa, trucks in the sandpit.*

This vignette demonstrates a fairly stereotypical response being challenged by another preschooler. Calissa declared that only people of the same skin colour should be friends; however, Tilly challenged this notion. Don, who is Calissa's twin brother, initially endeavoured to support his sister; however, he decided that it would be "cool" to have a friend with black skin. His response reveals a rather stereotypical notion of people of black skin colour. Firstly, his notion of a person with black skin

was narrowed to Indigenous Australians. Secondly, he assumed that all Indigenous Australians know how to find "bush tucker". Nevertheless, the research team regarded Don's response to be sincere in his willingness to have a friend with black coloured skin. Interestingly the friend would be male: *". . . **he** could show me how to find bush tucker."* This is probably a subconscious gendered response and quite acceptable for a four year old boy (Ashman & Elkin, 2009).

The above vignette reveals that group discussion has guided Calissa to revise her initial belief that children of the same colour should play together. At the conclusion of the vignette she states that she would like a friend with black coloured skin to help her find bush tucker and play with on the playdough table. This vignette began with exclusivist language: *"Those kids can't play together. . . . 'Cos you need a white friend"*. However, through Tilly's insistence this exclusivist language quickly developed into inclusivist language: *"It doesn't make any difference what colour your skin is; you can still play together."*

Cycles five, six, seven and eight revealed the preschoolers' developing ideas regarding skin colour, race and ethnicity. During the reading of two different picture books two different Preschool A preschoolers voiced the opinion that they would not like to play with children who had different skin colours. While reading *Nini at the Carnival* Trixi stated *"I wouldn't play with them 'cos they got different skin"*; and during the reading of *Let's Eat* Mary stated *"I wouldn't play with them 'cos they had different coloured skin"*.

Mary and Trixi constantly held these views throughout the action research phase of the project. These views were possibly deeply ingrained which highlights the fact that it is difficult to challenge such assumptions. However, Trixi volunteered an interesting glimpse into her deep held beliefs following the reading of *I Like Myself*:

> Colin: *There's lots of different skin colours. He's blue* [laughing].
> Lisa: *Do you think he'd be an interesting person to know?*
> Unison response: *Yes!* [laughter].
> Lisa: *I wonder how many skin colours are in this book?*

Ella: *Lots!*

Reggie: *I love 'em all* [laughing].

Trixi: *I like people from Fiji with black skin; but I don't like them in the poster* [pause] *'Cos I don't know 'em.*

Colin: *They're from Africa. Aren't they Miss Lisa?*

Lisa: *Yes they are, Col.*

Colin: *I like them.*

Many students: *Me too!*

Over the course of the action research phase Lisa and Pippa had been keeping a watchful eye on Trixi due to concerns regarding her negative responses to difference and diversity. However, Trixi's apprehension may have been towards strangers and not skin colour as first thought. Trixi confided that she liked people from Fiji because she had met them on a recent family holiday, but not the "*people in the poster*" from Africa because she "*doesn't know 'em.*" Kate and Shelley suggested that Trixi and the children from Preschool A be exposed to other posters of families of differing skin colours and cultures to further examine if Trixi was indeed apprehensive to strangers or darker skinned people. The results of these observations were inconclusive as they began after cycle eight of the action research phase and I had ethical clearance to conduct the research project only until the culmination of the research project which ended after cycle 11. This afforded only two weeks of observations; however, Lisa and Pippa continued their own observations of Trixi (which, owing to ethical considerations, I am not at liberty to divulge in this dissertation).

During cycle six and the reading of *Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* Preschool A discussed skin colour:

Adam: *Hey that kid, umm, that kid* [pointing to the page Pippa was showing] *umm, he's Aborigine.*

Pippa: *Mmm. How do you know that, Adam?*

Adam: *'Cos he's black.*

Colin: *He's not actually black; I think he's brown.*

A number of students talking at once: *He's black. He's brown. He's dark*

brown.

Pippa: *Mmm. He does have a different skin colour to us. But hey Miss Karen has different skin to me.*

Karen: *Yeah, I've sort of got a darker skin than Miss Pippa.*

Pippa: *And I've got a darker skin than Miss Lisa.*

Colin: *It's called skin shades. My dad told me.*

Jack: *I get real brown skin in Summer.*

Pippa: *Wow there seems to be lots of shades of skin colours. Yes, Dave?*

Dave: *It's okay to have different coloured skin. That's just the way it is.*

Pippa: *That's just the way it is. Yeah.*

This vignette confirms that the preschoolers are becoming very comfortable discussing skin colour and are quite open with their opinions. Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) emphasise the fact that social justice issues regarding diversity such as race, colour, sexuality, gender, are often ignored by teachers who feel ill-equipped to handle such conversations. Indeed educators may lack

> role models who openly and directly talk about race and racism (or other forms of diversity and inequalities) with adults or children. Indeed, most whites are raised with silence on these topics, with the tacit message that such conversations are neither appropriate nor polite. So when children make comments that require direct responses, teachers often panic and are unable to use the knowledge and skills they do have. (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 12)

At the beginning of the study we struggled to encourage open and direct discussion on social justice issues. However, we realised the imperative to face this challenge and were now speaking openly and directly with the preschoolers about such issues. It appeared that the more the educators were open about discussing social justice issues the more the preschoolers responded.

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

The theme of Indigenous issues was raised during cycle three in Preschool A during the discussion regarding the importance (or otherwise) of outward appearance.

Rick: *She'd* [Cinderella] *be sad because she didn't have nice clothes like*

other people.

Adam: *Yeah, she's poor.*

Lisa: *She's poor?*

Adam: *Yeah, she don't,*[pause] *she doesn't have much money.*

Heidi: *She doesn't have **any** money. She's really really poor.*

Jack: *Aborigines are poor.*

Lisa: *Well, maybe **some** Aboriginal people are poor, Jack, but people from all different cultures can be poor.*

Jack: *Aborigines don't have houses, they live in the desert and they're poor*

Harley: *Yeah, they just eat grubs* [laughs].

Reggie: *Yeah, yeah an' ants.*

Unison response: *Yuck!*

Indigenous issues were again raised during cycle six and the reading of *Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* with Preschool A preschoolers. The preschoolers still held quite stereotypical views of Aboriginal people.

Harley: ***See*** *Aborigines don't have houses.*

Pippa: *Well, Harley, this is an old book. It was mine when I was a little girl. Most Aboriginal people do live in houses now. But some Aboriginal people chose not to live in houses; but that's their choice. They prefer to live like you do when you go camping.*

Harley: *I love camping*

Many preschoolers talking at once: *Me too.*

Pippa: *Well some Aboriginal people love camping and living like that and finding food in the bush.*

Colin: *I know what it's called.*

Reggie: *Bush tucker. It's called bush tucker.*

Colin: *I knew that. Humph!*

Harley: *It's yuck!*

Pippa: *Why do you say it's yuck, Harley?*

Harley: *'Cos they eat grubs.*

Unison: *Yuck!*

Pippa: *Yes, Jack, you have your hand up…*

Jack: *Well, I saw on the TV how they find all sorts of food in the desert and other places. But he* [the presenter] *lived in a house but he could still find bush tucker.*

Pippa: *Yeah, it's pretty clever how they can find food. Yes, Ella?*

Ella: *Well Pumpkin Paddy is planting pumpkins for them; but I don't reckon they need 'em, 'cos they find their own food.*

Pippa: *Good thinking Ella. Of course they could find their own food!*

This vignette provides evidence that the preschoolers are developing their understandings of Indigenous Australians. During cycle three consensus was that *"Aborigines don't have houses, they live in the desert and they're poor"* (Jack). Jack and Ella now testified to Indigenous Australians' resourcefulness. Jack's development was assisted through a documentary viewed at home; while Ella's development was assisted by her cognitive processes of deducing that Pumpkin Paddy's "help" was not needed because the Aboriginal people could fend for themselves. This picture book is quite dated and, on reflection, was ill-advised to be included in this research (an extended discussion on this can be found in the following chapter, pp. 303 - 305). However, through discussion prompted by Ella's deduction, the preschoolers concurred that the Aboriginal characters in the story did not need the help of a white man; but that the Aboriginal characters could help him.

Pippa: *Hmm, Pumpkin Paddy sure must like pumpkins. That's all he eats.*

Darren: *I hate pumpkin.*

Many children talking at once (inaudible).

Pippa: *Yes, Ziek.*

Ziek: *I reckon Pumpkin Paddy would get sick of pumpkins all the time.*

Pippa: *I think you're right Ziek. What do you think he could do?*

Jane: *The Aborigines should show him how to find bush tucker.*

Ziek: *Yeah, I reckon they could show him how to find better food.*

Pippa: *With more variety you think?*

Unison response: *Yeah!*

Pippa: *What do you think Pumpkin Paddy would think of bush tucker? Tia?*

Tia: *I think he'd say "this is great, I'm sick of old pumpkins."*

Pippa: *Yeah? Yes, Ella?*

Ella: *I think he'd say "thanks for helping me."*

Although this vignette demonstrates that the preschoolers were still discussing Indigenous Australians quite stereotypically (being Aboriginal equates to the ability to find bush tucker) this discussion is being held in a much more respectful manner to that found in cycle three. Instead of seeing Indigenous Australians as deficit: *"Aborigines don't have houses, they live in the desert and they're poor"* (Jack); *"Yeah, they just eat grubs"* (Harley); the preschoolers are understanding that Indigenous Australians are resourceful and are able to assist a white man: *"Yeah, I reckon they could show him how to find better food"* (Ziek); *"I think he'd say 'thanks for helping me'"* (Ella).

A similar development was observed among Preschool B children when reading *Bush Tucker* during cycle four:

Shelley: *The Aboriginal people gathered bush tucker like in this picture.*

Henry: *That's not bush tucker. It's in a creek, an', an' anyways if they carry them fish like that they'll get all stinky. They need an Esky.*

Don: *They don't have Eskys 'cos they don't have any money. Aborigines are poor an' their food is yuck.*

Isaiah: *Yeah an' all they eat is grubs.*

Unison response: *Yuck!*

These vignettes highlight the assumptions that many in society believe of the Indigenous people of Australia: they are homeless and eat grubs and insects (Scutter, 2006). How did these children acquire such notions and from where? It is suggested that such pre-conceived ideas are subliminally absorbed from the family and the media (Dau, 2001; Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2005; Swiniarski & Breitborde, 2003). These assumptions need to be challenged (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Lisa, Pippa and Shelley explained to the preschoolers that many of their ideas regarding Indigenous Australians were founded on "*old ways of thinking.*"

Shelley: *This book* [Bush Tucker] *explains how Aboriginal people used to gather and hunt their food. Some people think that Aboriginal people all still*

live this way. Some do still live this way but they're very proud of this. Some
Aboriginal people now live in houses just like you and go to supermarkets,
just like you do. And Henry, the fish didn't get stinky because they had very
clever ways of keeping food and fish fresh without using an Esky like you and
your dad use when you go fishing.

Don: *I reckon it's cool; I'm huntin' bush tucker.*

Many students (unable to identify speakers): *Yeah, me too.*

This vignette illustrates that Don very quickly reversed his opinion on Indigenous Australians from "*Aborigines are poor an' their food is yuck…*" to "*I reckon it's cool; I'm huntin' bush tucker*" in the space of a few minutes. It is not entirely clear what changed Don's opinion or the thought processes that occurred. Was it Shelley's direct teaching (which to some may seem didactic): "*Some people think that Aboriginal people all still live this way. Some do still live this way but they're very proud of this. . . . And Henry, the fish didn't get stinky because they had very clever ways of keeping food and fish fresh without using an Esky like you and your dad use when you go fishing?*" Was Don impressed by Shelley's opinion that Aboriginal people are *"proud"* and *"clever"*? The answers to these questions are unresolved however, following this storytime, and for a few weeks after, Don and a small group of preschoolers (the group members changed over the course of time, however, their "leader" remained the same) became engrossed in playing "bush tucker" insisting that they were "*Aborigines hunting for food*" (Don) with sincerity and respect (see photographs 7.3a and 7.3b). Therefore, the preschoolers were not only articulating new thoughts but they were also acting on those new understandings.

Photograph 7.3a   Photograph 7.3b
Photographs showing Don "leading" bush tucker expeditions

Preschool B's following storytime session focused on the book *Whitefellers are Like Traffic Lights* which highlights the absurdity in referring to people with Anglo backgrounds as "white". During this reading the preschoolers displayed far more respect for and interest in Indigenous people.

> Henry: *That kid's talking about bush tucker like what Don and me are doing.*
>
> Don: *Yeah, that kid's going to eat some bush tucker.*
>
> Isaiah: *Naa.*
>
> Don: *Yeah, I reckon he will.*
>
> Shelley: *Would you try the witchetty grub, Don?*
>
> Don: *Yeah. I reckon.*
>
> Unison response: *Yuck!*
>
> Don: *Yeah I could. I'm brave.*
>
> A number of preschoolers: *Yeah me too; yeah I would.*
>
> Shelley: *Why would you have to be brave to eat witchetty grubs, Don?*
>
> Don: *Umm, 'cos it might be yucky* [pause] *it might be different* [pause] *it sounds gross but it might be okay. Aborigines are brave.*
>
> Ron: *Yeah Aborigines are brave. I play Aborigines with Don.*
>
> Don: *Yeah. I could eat 'em* [witchetty grubs] *but I don't think girls could.*
>
> Calissa: *Don! Yes I could. I could too!*

This vignette reveals that Don was becoming quite a leader of the preschool group (especially the boys) and through his leadership the children were becoming respectful of Indigenous Australians' bravery and resourcefulness. It may have been quite the opposite if Don's initial negative perceptions of Indigenous Australians had not been challenged. This vignette also highlights a gender issue. Mindful that Calissa is Don's twin sister, it may be that she is used to dealing with gender issues prompted by her brother. However, it is interesting to note that Calissa was the only girl to challenge Don's assumption that girls could not eat witchetty grubs. Also interesting is the fact that Shelley did not appear to notice the gender slur nor did Tilly, who was usually quite open with her opinions.

GENDER ISSUES

The issue of gender was raised during cycle two when *Princess Smartypants*

was read to Preschool A. Remembering that this was only the second week of the action research phase and, as noted in Chapter Eight, the co-researchers (especially Lisa in this instance) were initially experiencing difficulty generating discussion that upheld social justice issues, this vignette is put forward to highlight the importance of challenging gender stereotyping and assumptions and the complexity that this can present.

> Lisa: *Hmmm. What do you think of Princess Smartypants? Heidi?*
>
> Heidi: *Well* [pause] *I think she should marry Prince umm. Turn back. Yeah him* [Prince Swashbuckle].
>
> Lisa: *Okay, why do you think she should marry Prince Swashbuckle?*
>
> Heidi: *'Cos he did good things for her.*
>
> Lisa: *Okay. Yes, Reggie?*
>
> Reggie: *I think she should turn him into a knight then he could save her.*
>
> Lisa: *Oh, okay. Can princesses save knights?*
>
> Unison response: *No!* [shouted].
>
> Colin: *They can't save 'cos princesses are not brave. Um, 'cos they're girls.*
>
> Harley: *Yeah, only boys can save.*

Thus ended the first storytime of cycle two: "*only boys can save*". Due to initial nerves, Lisa admitted that she missed critical moments for deeper discussion. Could a discussion on self-worth be raised by Heidi's comment that she should marry Prince Swashbuckle, even though she did not wish to get married, simply because "*he did good things for her*"? Why did Reggie believe that Princess Smartypants needed rescuing when the text explicitly revealed an independent character who could look after herself? Why did the discussion end with the notion that girls are not brave and only boys can save? What does the girls' passive silence tell us? The hegemonic ideology of gender in fairytales is well noted: women are passive, submissive, foolish and need rescuing as opposed to men who are active, dominant, resourceful and brave (Arendt, 2002; Levarato, 2003; Zipes, 1991). Thus, perhaps, the preschoolers were calling on their understandings (subliminal or conscious) of the genre of the fairytale whereby princesses are the characters who need rescuing; princesses have very little depth and do not possess attributes such as bravery and resourcefulness; and consistently the male saves the female.

Nevertheless, this vignette did establish that these assumptions needed to be challenged.

The following storytime focused on the story *The Paper Bag Princess* which was read to Preschool B before the initial conversations. Responses of Preschool A children were very similar to those of Preschool B children whereby most concentrated on the princess' lack of cleanliness and no child identified her bravery (this has been discussed previously in this chapter).

Lisa: *But don't you think she was brave? Dave?*
Dave: *Boys are brave. Boys can't be scared. Girls are scared.*
Colin: *Yeah, girls are scared. Boys are brave.*

Again the storytime session ended in a rather abrupt and hegemonic fashion. It seemed the boys' understandings of who was brave and who was scared was just the way it was and no discussion was necessary. Again the girls' passive silence indicated that they believed this to be true. However, the conversation at morning tea presented quite differently. The data presented below is taken from my journal.

Journal entry (Wednesday, week two action research phase): I was shocked again today by the girls' passive silence when the boys insisted that only boys are brave and girls are scared! However, I think the girls have been "brewing" over the past couple of days and it all erupted at morning tea following storytime. Colin must have been feeling particularly empowered by the morning's storytime and loudly announced as he sat down "*Boys are the best; chuck out the rest!*" Whereupon Ella announced, equally as loudly: "*Girls are better than boys! Chuck out the **boys**!*" A rather heated debate ensued with the girls adamant that they were equally as brave, clever and strong as boys. Dave conceded with "*Yeah, okay, girls can be brave but boys can't be scared.*" Jane countered with "*Yes they can; my brother's nine and he's scared of spiders. So boys can too be scared.*" Lisa stepped in to ask for "*inside voices*"; however I was very pleased to see that the girls had found their voice!

It was quite evident that by cycle four the gender issue of boys being stronger and braver than girls had wavered. After reading *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* consensus was that it is good for girls to be strong:

Colin: *Yeah, girls can be strong. It's good. 'Cos if Esmeralda wasn't strong the baby would've been killed.*

Logan: *Yeah, she was brave too.*

Tia: *My aunty was brave 'cos on the weekend she killed a snake that was gunna get the chooks.*

Lisa: *Wow, that was brave, Tia.*

Max: *My mum kills spiders.*

Lisa: *That **is** brave, Maxy.*

Kelly: *My dad's brave 'cos he, he goes on real long kayak trips* [pause] *an' my mum says that's scary but he's brave.*

Lisa: *Yes it seems to me that girls and boys can be just as brave as each other.*

Adam: *Yeah girls and boys is brave.*

Adam's final comment here brings the gender issue to a close for Preschool A. It was not raised after this cycle. It seems that treating texts that highlight these issues, even though deep critical discussion was not generated in the initial cycles, has allowed for deep thought processes to engender thoughts on equality and empowerment. This was evidenced in action through more inclusive play practices in both preschools:

Journal entry (Friday, week six action research phase): Wow, girls on the fort *with* the boys; boys in the home corner *cooking*. Great stuff! I've been noticing this over the last couple of weeks. Wonder if it's the study? Lisa said that she'd noticed this *phenomena* not long after the big "blow up" a few weeks ago [week two] regarding the "battle of the sexes". Kate and Shell said that they have noticed a lot more acceptance of boys in the home corner. Took a photo of Jerry, Michael and Jedda after they had been playing together in the home corner and dressing Jerry in gown and gum boots. Until recently the boys were not welcomed by the girls in the home corner and as a

consequence the boys took delight in trying to sabotage the girls' games. This has not been the case over the last few weeks of the study.

Photograph 7.4
Jerry, Michael and Jedda playing "dress-ups"

ISSUES OF INTEGRITY AND SELF-WORTH

The issue of integrity and self-worth became surprisingly apparent during cycle three and the reading of *Nicketty Nacketty Noo Noo Noo* with Preschool B. This was surprising because the research team initially considered this text non-critical which would inspire only mundane responses. The story is about an ogre who kidnaps a "wee woman" and puts her to work cooking and cleaning for him. She in turn tricks the ogre and escapes. The following vignette is taken from the middle of the reading:

Kate: *Wow, the little wee woman has to cook and clean for the ogre. I wonder what she will do? Calissa?*

Calissa: *Well she* [pause] *she should cuddle and kiss the ogre and do whatever he wants and then he might be nice to her.*

Kate: *Mmm. So you think she should cuddle and kiss the ogre. Mmm even though he's keeping her in his castle against her wishes? Do you think she'd feel good about herself if she did that? Tilly?*

Tilly: *She'd feel embarrassed and she'd feel sad because she doesn't like him.*

Kate: *Okay. Ellery?*

Ellery: *She'd be dumb to kiss him 'cos he's mean to her* [pause] *he's bad.*

Caddy: *Well she should stand up for herself. She shouldn't kiss him 'cos that's sort of pretend and lying and she'd feel bad 'cos she's saying something that she doesn't mean.*

Kate: *Mmm, true. Yes Calissa?*

Calissa: *Well maybe she shouldn't kiss him; but he shouldn't keep her. He's not good. It's not right.*

Kate: *Yeah, Calissa. No-one has the right to keep another person against their wishes.*

Don: *He's real bad. The police should get him. That's what should happen if someone hurts you, or kidnaps you, or takes stuff away from you. It's not right. She should get outta there and tell the police.*

This vignette highlights children of three and four years of age displaying reflection that is mature, insightful and critical. Initially, Calissa's strategies for survival highlight practices that may damage one's integrity and self-worth; however, the preschoolers are quick to pick this up and to challenge the idea. Ellery's comment is almost a 'put down' of Calissa's suggestion saying that the "*wee woman*" would be "*dumb*" to do this; however, Kate let this go to see what direction the discussion would take. This was wise because had Kate intervened Caddy may not have had the chance to voice her very eloquent and insightful comment that pretending to be someone you are not is like lying and can make you "*feel bad*". It also gave Calissa the opportunity to re-think her position and highlight the fact that something "*not right*" was taking place. Interestingly her brother also uses the term "*not right*" which almost reflects a stance to promote *human rights* and to stand against human rights violations: "*she should get outta there and tell the police*".

During cycle six and the reading of *I Like Myself* issues of self-worth became apparent for Michael, a four year old boy with curly blonde hair, blue eyes and dimples (the reason for noting this description is made more apparent in the following chapter on pp. 296-298). The following vignette is taken from the post-storytime discussion:

Kate: *Wow, the girl in this story really likes to be the person she is. Do you like the person you are?*

Unison response: *Yes.*

Kate: *Yeah, I like me too 'cos I have a great time with my friends at preschool and, yeah, I guess I like my sense of humour. What about you, what do you*

like about yourself? Yes, James?

James: *I like how* [pause] *I can ride my bike now.*

Don: *Me too.*

Laura: *I taught Shania to ride my bike.*

Kate: *That was kind of you Laura. Yes, Ellery, what do you like about yourself?*

Ellery: *I, I, umm* [pause] *I like* [pause] *I can run fast.*

A number of preschoolers: *Me too, I can run real fast.*

Tilly: *I like **everything** about me.*

Michael: *I hate myself* [hardly audible].

Kate: *Mikey, why not?*

Michael: *I just don't. I, I* [looking down].

It was apparent that Michael was becoming quite stressed by this situation. Shelley had noted in her journal that Michael was fidgety and distracted during the reading, which was unusual for him. Michael was flushed and appeared to have tears in his eyes. Kate quickly ended the storytime session. Later she quietly endeavoured to ask Michael why he had said that he did not like himself. However, this did not go well and Michael remained uncomfortable with this line of questioning. Kate and Shelley believed that Michael was quite sincere in his lack of self-worth and decided it was of importance to speak privately with Michael's mother when she collected him at the end of the school day. The result of these discussions can be found in the following chapter.

However, the vignette is put forward here to highlight the fact that not all children have the same perspective and it can be an extremely uncomfortable experience for some children to confront fears, hostilities and in-grained beliefs. Respect, empathy and understanding are required allowing each individual child the freedom and space to "work through" and process thoughts and new knowledge. Michael's peers had very different perceptions of themselves compared to his own self-perception. This proved to be quite traumatic for Michael who had never articulated his thoughts about himself to his peers. On consultation with Michael's parents it was decided to monitor Michael's self-perception and encourage self-esteem building through play, peer collaboration and through picture books that

would blur the lines of gender stereotyping (for an extended discussion see Chapter Eight pp. 296-298).

(DIS)ABILITY

Although Kate and Shelley chose the picture book *Marty and Mei Ling* during cycle two because it highlighted diversity of race and ability (one of the main characters displayed characteristics of a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), neither of these issues were explored in class discussion. The reasons for this are examined in the following chapter (pp.267-268).

(Dis)ability, as a theme, did not emerge until cycle nine and was raised by Preschool A preschoolers during the reading of *Milly and Molly and Different Dads*. While the text talks about many different types of fathers (tall, short, homosexual, hetrosexual, dark skinned, light skinned, working, house-fathers), those who captured the preschoolers' greatest attention and generated more intense and reflective discussion were the fathers who had some form of disability.

> Dave: *That dad's in a wheelchair. That's real sad.*

Many preschoolers agreed with Dave's comment and many faces showed sadness and concern (frowns; furrowed brows).

> Lisa: *Why do you think it's sad that that daddy's in a wheelchair?*
> Dave: *'Cos he can't play with his little boy.*
> Colin: *Yeah, he can't run around with him and, and.*
> Melinda: *Yeah, he can't play footy.*
> Adam: *Yeah, yeah no and he can't play basket ball.*

At this point Harley jumped up and became quite animated.

> Harley: *No! No! I've seen 'em* [people in wheelchairs] *play basketball an' they're real good!*
> Chanel: *They dance in wheelchairs too.*
> Carryn: *Yeah a girl in my brother's school's in a wheelchair and she goes to*

discos.

This sparked a discussion highlighting the possible *abilities* of the father in the wheelchair. The children, through discussion, came to the realisation that the father in the wheelchair, and also the fathers who were vision and hearing impaired, had just as much love and fun to offer their children, and indeed the community, as did their own fathers.

Colin: *That dad who can't see. You know what, you know* [pause] *he can even read to his kids. My dad told me* [pause] *he reads bumps on the book, ummm* [pause] *I don't know what it's called* [pause] *something it's called.*

Lisa: *Yes, it's called Braille and you're right Col, people who don't have sight can read stories just like us by feeling bumps and dashes on a page just like people with sight read words. I'll get some Braille books to show you tomorrow.*

Ella: *They have talking books too.*

Reggie: *The dad who can't hear couldn't have talking books.*

Ella: *He wouldn't need 'em. He could read and*

Logan: *But people who can't hear can have grommets to help 'em hear good.*

Lisa: *You're right Logan and some have hearing aids.*

Gabby: *My Pa has a hearing aid and he does all the same stuff as my Gramppy.*

Lisa: *What does he like to do, Gabby?*

Gabby: *Ummm, he likes to play with me and he plays cards and goes fishing and plays golf.*

Many preschoolers talking at once (inaudible).

Lisa: *Do you think someone in a wheelchair could do all of these things?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Lisa: *What do you think the daddy in the wheelchair in this book could do with his kids? Yes, Jake?*

Jake: *I reckon he could do all the stuff the other dads could do.*

Lisa: *Yes, like what?*

Jake: *Well he could take them on picnics.*

Madelyn: *And movies.*

Many preschoolers talking at once (inaudible).

Lisa: *Yes, Max?*

Max: *But that dad* [in the wheelchair] *can't drive.*

Many preschoolers talking at once (inaudible).

Lisa: *I can't hear, Kelly. Yes Kelly?*

Kelly: *They can drive cars; I saw a man at the shops driving and he got a wheelchair off his roof with a thing.*

Lisa: *So is there anything else people in wheelchairs can do the same as people not in wheelchairs? Tia?*

Tia: *Have fun.*

Lisa: *Have fun. Yeah, and what do you think the kids think about their daddy in the wheelchair? Jane?*

Jane: *They love him and he loves them.*

The children's reflective responses to *Milly, Molly and Different Dads* prompted Lisa and Pippa to read *Mumma Zooms* the following storytime session. This text focuses on a mother's *ability* although in a wheelchair. Again discussion was intense. At the beginning of the storytime session when discussing the front cover of the picture book a few preschoolers were challenged by the idea that the mother in the story was constantly reliant on the wheelchair:

Trixi: *I think that that mummy's pretending.*

Lisa: *Oh you think she's just pretending that she needs the wheelchair?*

Ella: *No, I think that she's got a sore leg and it'll get better.*

Colin: *Yeah, she doesn't need the wheelchair all the time.*

Lisa: *Oh, so her sore leg will get better and she won't need the wheelchair? Chanel?*

Chanel: *Yeah, she's got a broken leg but it gets better.*

Lisa: *Mmmm, You know some people need to rely on a wheelchair all their lives to get around.*

Gabby: *That's so sad. The people in the wheelchair would be sad.*

The discussion then focused on the obvious happiness of the characters in the story (as seen in the illustrations) which guided the children to realise the *ability* of

the mother and that she led a happy and fulfilled life and that her son and partner loved her just as the preschoolers love their own mothers.

> Darren: *He looks happy.*
>
> Lisa: *You think the little boy looks happy Darren?*
>
> Darren: *Yeah, he's laughing with her in the wheelchair.*
>
> Melinda: *Yeah they're going fast. Like me and my dad on his motor bike. He goes fast.*
>
> Lisa: *So you like going on your dad's motor bike, Melinda, like this little boy likes going fast on his mum's wheelchair with her?*
>
> Melinda: *Yeah, it's fun.*
>
> Lisa: *Do you think the mum is having fun? Chanel?*
>
> Chanel: *Yeah 'cos she's laughing and hugging him.*
>
> Lisa: *So why do you think that she's having fun? Yes, Dave?*
>
> Dave: *'Cos she's with her little boy and they're together and she's happy and she's looking at her* [pause] *at her* [pause] *at the man.*
>
> Lisa: *Yes, she is smiling at the man. Who do you think he could be?*
>
> Many preschoolers talking at once (inaudible).
>
> Lisa: *Yes, Heidi?*
>
> Heidi: *I think he's the daddy and she's the mummy and he's their little boy.*
>
> Colin: *They're a family. That's why they're happy.*
>
> Lisa: *Wow, they're happy because they're a family and they're having fun together?*
>
> Unison response: *Yeah.*
>
> Lisa: *So they're having fun even though the mum's in a wheelchair?*
>
> Ella: *Some kids think that mums in wheelchairs are different and it's not okay; but it's okay to be different and it's okay to be in a wheelchair.*

Ella's final comment shows that she is developing a metalanguage to articulate her thoughts regarding difference and diversity. The preschoolers from Preschool A engaged in quite intense and reflective discussions regarding (dis)ability. The group moved through its initial discomfort regarding (dis)ability to challenge stereotypical views of (dis)ability and then moved towards a celebration of diversity.

The following vignettes illustrate that many preschoolers were developing a metalanguage to discuss difference and diversity. During cycle ten another picture book that focused on (dis)ability, *The Race*, was read to the Preschool A group. I asked the preschoolers to "*See if you can discover what is a little bit different about this little boy in our story today*?" After listening to the first few pages Ella proposed:

Ella: *I think that boy can't hear properly!*

Logan: *Like me* [Logan had grommets in both ears]. *He should get grommets.*

Adam: *He feels sad.*

Karen: *Why do you say he feels sad, Adam?*

Adam: *'Cos his face looks sad when the teacher is mean to him.*

Ella: *He can't help it if he can't hear properly.*

Jake: *Maybe he could get a hearing aid? Then he could hear better.*

Heidi: *Just because he's different the teacher shouldn't pick on him.*

Lisa: *Do you think the teacher is picking on Greg because he's different?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Karen: *Yes, Janie?*

Jane: *It doesn't matter that he's a little bit different. He's still the same on the inside.*

Karen: *Do you mean he's the same as us on the inside?*

Jane nods.

Karen: *So how do you think Greg feels when he's left out because he can't hear well? Yes, Melinda?*

Melinda: *He should just* [inaudible].

Karen: *So* [pause]. *Yes, Kel?*

Kelly: *He'd feel real sad.*

Colin: *And real lonely.*

Karen: *Sad and lonely. So you think that he'd like to feel part of the group?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Post storytime discussion further revealed how the preschoolers were developing their understandings of difference, diversity and human dignity and the use of a metalanguage to articulate this.

Karen: *How could you help Greg feel part of the group? Carryn?*

Carryn: *Make sure he's in your games.*

Karen: *Yes, include Greg in your games. Colin?*

Colin: *Be like the nice teacher and make sure he can use his eyes.*

Karen: *Another good strategy, Colin. Yes, Madelyn?*

Madelyn: *Be nice to him.*

Karen: *How would you be nice to him, Maddy?*

Madelyn: *Umm… invite him to my party.*

Karen: *A lovely idea. So you would include someone who was different to you in your games and parties? Dave?*

Dave: *He's different 'cos he can't hear proper; but he's the same as us too.*

Karen: *Okay he's the same as us. How? Dave?*

Dave: *He likes running races.*

Karen: *Yeah, he certainly does. Tia?*

Tia: *He has the same feelings. He feels sad and he can feel happy just like us.*

Jack: *An' the teacher made him feel sad 'cos he was different.*

Karen: *Wow… How do you feel about that, Jake?*

Jack: *Not good. It's not fair.*

Karen: *So it's not fair to make someone feel sad because they're different?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Ella: *That's mean!*

There was also a lot of discussion regarding "*It's okay to be different and it's what's in your heart that counts*" (Colin); however, much of this discussion was a repeat of earlier discussions previously highlighted in this chapter and therefore, does not warrant further analysis here. It was apparent that the preschoolers were now employing a metalanguage to discuss difference and diversity (e.g. there are differences but there are similarities: feelings, interests, anatomy; it is "okay" to be different; fair/unfair) and they are discussing inclusive practices that may promote inclusivity (i.e. including children who are different to themselves in games; focusing on similarities and strengths; inviting children who are different to themselves to participate in functions).

It may appear that I put forward the idea "*it's not fair to make someone feel sad because they're different.*" However, on thorough analysis this notion came from Jack in the previous turn. I synthesised his ideas into one sentence. Jack's ideas are significant as the action research phase of the study was nearing completion. His ideas suggest an understanding that intolerant treatment due to difference which causes duress is unfair (unjust). This vignette also shows many of the preschoolers empathising with someone who was different to themselves and focusing on the similarities between themselves and another. Therefore by analysing the preschoolers' responses to storytime sessions the first research question is being addressed: Through sensitive examination and critical discussion of children's literature that highlights (dis)ability preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity, and human dignity are nurtured and heightened and they are encouraged to identify social injustices.

POVERTY

The theme of poverty first emerged during cycle three where, following a discussion on the importance/unimportance of outward appearance, the children from Preschool A wished to donate the clothes and toys that they had outgrown to those children who did not have as much as they.

> Ella: *I saw some kids on the TV without much food and raggy clothes. It made me sad.*
>
> Chanel: *We could give our clothes that don't fit us anymore to poor people.*
>
> Jane: *And our toys.*
>
> Colin: *That's charity.*
>
> Lisa: *That's a lovely idea Chanel and Janie.*
>
> Max: *It's kind.*
>
> Lisa: *Yes, that's right Max that's a very kind idea and a caring thing to do.*

This vignette demonstrates that many preschool children had empathy for those less fortunate. However, Colin's comment was interesting: "*That's charity.*" Lisa did not ask him to clarify his comment; so his articulated understanding and opinion of the term "charity" was lost. Nonetheless, with the preschool group, Colin

participated in collaboratively writing a letter, which Lisa scribed, that was sent home to parents asking for donations of clothing and toys (see Appendix H). For the next few weeks the preschoolers delighted in seeing the boxes of clothing and toys overflow. This activity is of significance to the research project as, through engagement with the picture books that encouraged critical discussion regarding outward appearance and our dressing down, the preschoolers not only demonstrated transformation through their articulated thoughts but also through their actions.

The theme of poverty continued during cycle ten when Preschool B read the picture book *Arnold the Prickly Teddy*.

> Tilly: *Hey his shorts are all broke. He's got holes!*
>
> Kate: *Does that matter?*
>
> Tilly: *Naa. But he must be poor. His dad doesn't have much money. See 'cos he doesn't have toys and got the teddy from the bin.*
>
> Kate: *That's right Tilly. Who remembers why Arnold* [the teddy bear] *was in the bin? Caddy?*
>
> Caddy: *The shop man threw him away 'cos he was different.*
>
> Kate: *Wow, good listening, Caddy. What do you think about the shop owner throwing Arnold away because he was prickly?*
>
> Caddy: *That's not fair.*
>
> Kate: *Not fair? Why?*
>
> Caddy: *'Cos he's still a good teddy.*
>
> Kate: *Well at least the little boy loved him. Why do you think the little boy loved him so much? Henry?*
>
> Henry: *'Cos he didn't have any other toys. He's poor and he doesn't have anything. And he wants to look after him so he'll have something.*

This vignette confirms that the preschoolers are very aware of what poverty looks like. Also Caddy expresses very clearly that treating someone, in this case a teddy bear, disdainfully on the grounds of difference is unfair. This vignette also displays what has been noted previously: preschoolers acquiring a metalanguage to articulate social justice issues.

>Tilly: *Yeah, the little boy was kind to the teddy.*
>
>Kate: *Yeah, Tilly, and what happened to Arnold through the little boy's kindness?*
>
>Jedda: *He got soft.*
>
>Kate: *Why do you think Arnold got soft?*
>
>Calissa: *The little boy loved the teddy and the teddy loved the little boy.*
>
>Kurt: *He like his cuddles*
>
>Ron: *They needed each other to love.*

This vignette again shows children as young as four reflecting in a manner that was, perhaps, far beyond their years. Ron's comment is particularly poignant. It shows that he understands the universal human need for love and nurturing.

LONELINESS

During cycle two Kate read *Marty and Mei Ling* to Preschool B preschoolers. Although there was not a great deal of reflective discussion it was briefly discussed that Mei Ling felt lonely and that this made some children feel sad:

>Lisa: *Mei Ling looks a bit lonely. How does that make you feel?*
>
>Caddy: *Sad.*
>
>Jedda: *Bad.*
>
>Don: *It's sad to be alone.*

This was one of the initial action research cycles where reflective discussion was not generated. The reason for Mei Ling's loneliness (that her racial difference made her feel excluded) was not discussed. However, this very brief vignette is put forward to show that very young children (three years of age) can empathise with another person. The following vignettes display the development of these initial empathetic responses.

During cycle five following the reading of the picture book *Enora and the Black Crane* a small group of Preschool B preschoolers and I discussed the importance of belonging. Data for this vignette were taken from an audio-taping that followed the storytime session:

Jedda: *His family would've been real sad 'cos he was turned into a bird.*

Karen: *Yeah, Jedda, what do you think could have happened differently?*

Jedda: *He shoulda listened to his mum.*

Kurt: *He did the wrong thing.*

Karen: *You think he did the wrong thing, Kurt?*

Kurt: [Nods].

Ryan: *You shouldn't kill birds.*

Tilly: *He didn't mean to. He just wanted to show his family.*

Karen: *But then he was turned into a bird.*

Ron: *He loved his family, didn't he?*

Karen: *Well, what does everyone think?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Tilly: *Yeah he loved his family so he shoulda not killed the bird. He shoulda done the right thing and not killed the bird so he wouldn't be turned into a bird.*

Laura: *Yeah, he can't be a boy anymore and he can't be with his family.*

Karen: *So it's important to be with family?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Karen: *Do you think Enora disappointed his family* [pause] *let his family down? Michael?*

Michael: *My mum and dad would be so sad. You gotta stay with them and belong to them.*

Tilly: *Yeah, and you gotta care about them.*

Karen: *Mmm* [pause]; *so how do you care for your family?*

Tilly: *You love them and you listen to them and do like your mum says.*

Jedda: *Yeah, and you don't hurt them.*

Karen: *Do you think Enora hurt his family when he got changed into a bird?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Michael: *Yeah they're real upset.*

This vignette is situated within the theme of loneliness because it reveals the preschoolers' understandings of the opposite of loneliness which is belonging. This vignette shows that the preschoolers understand that belonging to a family comes with it the responsibility of acting in ways to support and uphold relationships.

The issue of loneliness was raised again with Preschool B preschoolers during the final three cycles of the action research phase of the project. During cycle eight the picture book *A Bit of Company* was read to the preschool group.

> Kate: *What do you think makes people lonely?*
>
> Laura: *If they got nobody to talk to.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah. Ron?*
>
> Ron: *They all 'lone.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah. How would they feel?*
>
> Kirra: *Sad.*
>
> Tilly: *Scared.*
>
> James: *Angry.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah. Sad and scared and even angry. Wow, how could they stop feeling lonely?*
>
> Tilly: *Talk to people.*
>
> Calissa: *Go to the shops.*
>
> Henry: *Go to friends' houses.*
>
> Kate: *What if they don't have any friends?*
>
> James: *Make friends.*
>
> Kate: *How? How could they make friends?*
>
> Caddy: *Be nice and help people.*
>
> Kate: *How could you help Chris and Molly in our story?*
>
> Ellery: *Be nice to 'em.*
>
> Jedda: *Invite them to a party.*
>
> Tilly: *Play with them.*

This vignette again shows very young children (Kirra, Caddy and Jedda were not yet four years of age) displaying empathy for people who were in different situations from themselves. They understood that to be lonely would create feelings of sadness, fear and anger and they proposed ways of countering this. As the vignette demonstrates the preschoolers' language and the strategies that they put forward were inclusive and showed a depth of care. This picture book was explicit in its message that people need other people to talk with and to share experiences. The text also encouraged discussion on how "talking things through" instead of "bottling

things up" assists a person to be healthy.

> Kate: *Why do you think Molly is screaming like that?*
>
> Tilly: *'Cos she doesn't have anyone to talk to an' to listen to her.*
>
> Henry: *She's so* [pause] *she's so* [pause] *rrrrr* [shaking his fists].
>
> Kate: *She's so rrrr* [shaking her fists]*; frustrated?*
>
> Henry: *Yeah, she just doesn't have anyone to tell things to and it's all there inside her and she can't get it out.*
>
> Kate: *Wow. So Molly's got all this stuff bottled up inside her and she just can't get to tell anyone about it. So do you think screaming would help her?*
>
> Tilly: *Nope. She'd get a headache.*
>
> Kate: *She'd get a headache? Sounds like you know what that feels like, Till?*
>
> Tilly: *Yeah, if* [pause] *yeah when I yell I get a headache.*
>
> Kate: *So screaming doesn't help. What do you think she could do instead of screaming?*
>
> Isaiah: *Maybe she could go to the RSL* [Returned Services League] *like my Nan does and she gets friends.*
>
> Kate: *Good thinking, Isaiah. Who'd like to stay and make a list of what we could do instead of screaming for finding and keeping friends?*

Isaiah's comment was quite reflective and placed the story into a real-life context. He realised that the character in the story, Molly, was of the same vintage as his grandmother and, because his grandmother met her friends at the local RSL Club, perhaps Molly could do the same. Although this picture book engaged the preschoolers for an extended period of time a few preschoolers became restless during the post-storytime discussion. However, Kate could see that some children wanted to continue the discussion; therefore she invited those who wished to create a list of alternatives to screaming to stay.

Photograph 7.5
Tilly and Kurt displaying their list of alternatives to screaming

Kurt, Caddy, Ryan and Tilly remained with Kate and created the list displayed in Photograph 7.5. This list revealed that the preschoolers understood that inclusive practices were required to promote positive relationships. The list included

- ➢ Go and see someone
- ➢ Have a sleepover
- ➢ Tell someone how you are feeling
- ➢ Share games
- ➢ Play with them
- ➢ Go outside to see someone
- ➢ Lend your teddy
- ➢ Share your toys
- ➢ Help them to feel better and take them to the park
- ➢ Go outside to talk to people.

During cycle nine the theme of loneliness was continued with the reading of *The Sad Little Monster and the Jellybean Queen.* To orientate the preschoolers to the story Kate used a guided question and suggested *"Let's see how the friends in this story become helpful friends and true friends and how they look after each other."* After reading a few pages Kate asked:

Kate: *How would you feel if no-one ever visited you and you were all alone?*
Jerry: *Sad.*
Kirra: *I'd cry.*
Caddy: *Yucky.*
Kate: *Yeah. So why do you think the little monster was sad? Yes, Tilly.*

Tilly: *He was sad 'cos he was all alone and his island was dark and no-one ever came.*

Kate: *Yeah. Do you think he was lonely?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

This vignette again displays the empathy of the preschoolers towards a character quite different to themselves. Post-storytime discussion drew further reflective discussion on loneliness. The preschoolers engaged with the story and discussed the importance of sharing and kindness to people who are lonely and perhaps different to themselves.

Kate: *So who remembers how the little monster was cheered up? Yes, Michael.*

Michael: *The jellybean queen went to his island.*

Kate: *Yeah. Did she cheer him up with her jellybeans?*

Tilly: *No* [laughing] *she dropped them all on the hill and she didn't know.*

Kate: *Yeah. So how did she cheer him up? Yes, Henry.*

Henry: *She was his friend. She was.*

Kate: *Yeah. So how did she show that she was his friend? Laura?*

Laura: *She talked to him and had dinner with him and stayed and played with him and then the sun came to the island.*

Kate: *Wow you really listened to the story Laura. The little monster was very different to the jellybean queen. He looked different. Was she scared of him?*

Tilly: *Naa* [pause] *she was just "oh he needs a friend" ya know.*

Kate: *Oh, so she just thought he needs a friend and I'm a good friend?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Kate: *Okay. So what sort of things do you do to be a kind friend?*

Ryan: *Help.*

Ellery: *Have sleepovers.*

Calissa: *Visit friends' places.*

Henry: *Play with them.*

Kurt: *Play games.*

Tilly: *Share.*

Jedda: *Talk.*

Calissa: *Cuddle.*

Don: *Have jokes and laugh.*

Kate: *They sound like great things for friends to do. So could you try these things for someone who was lonely?*

Unison response: *Yeah.*

Many preschoolers talking at once (inaudible).

Kate: *Great ideas friends. I think Ron's trying to tell us something so let's listen.*

Ron: *When Gran died my Pa was lonely and sad and I went straight into his arms.*

Ron's poignant final comment shows that he related the story back to his own life and the loneliness of his grandfather whose wife had recently passed away. His comment shows sincerity and deep reflection.

Loneliness was mentioned during the reading of *Big Al* in cycle nine where the preschoolers displayed empathy towards a character who was treated unfairly because of his appearance.

Tilly: *Big Al looks real lonely and sad.*

Kate: *Yeah.*

Henry: *He needs some kind friends.*

Calissa: *Them little fish are mean. They should be kind.*

Loneliness was also an issue for the preschoolers during the final cycle of the action research phase and the reading of *Arnold the Prickly Teddy*. The text did not mention that any character would be lonely; however the preschoolers empathised with the characters and deduced that they would be lonely.

Caddy: *That little boy was lonely and that teddy was lonely.*

Laura: *Yeah, but yeah, now they've got each other.*

Kate: *Okay. So they're not lonely anymore? What do you think about that? Jerry?*

Jerry: *Good.*

Kate: *Good? Yeah, Ellery?*

Ellery: *They're friends.*

Tilly: *Yeah they're friends and it's good to be friends and have someone to play with.*

Alicia: *And be kind.*

Kate: *And be kind. Yeah, Alicia. You think it's important to be kind?*

Alicia: [Nods].

Loneliness and friendship became a substantial issue for Preschool B preschoolers. Alicia, who always attended during storytime sessions yet did not often participate in group discussions, was driven to articulate her understanding that friends should show kindness. It could be said that it is easy to show kindness to friends as friends are those who are like us. However, it has been discussed previously that these preschoolers understood that friends can be very different to us: "*The little monster was very different to the jellybean queen. He looked different. Was she scared of him?*" (Kate); "*Naa. She was just 'oh he needs a friend' ya know*" (Tilly).

The above section has highlighted the preschoolers' voices in the development of their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity. The above section employed a themed approach to analyse the preschoolers' responses to storytime sessions to address the first main research question regarding how children's literature might be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity, and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices. A concise summary of the strategies that complemented the use of children's literature to address this question can be found in Chapter Ten. The following section examines the concluding conversations that were held with each preschool child at the end of the action research phase of the project. The data presented and analysed below were taken from audio-recorded conversations with the preschoolers. These conversations were transcribed verbatim.

CONCLUDING CONVERSATIONS: PRESCHOOL A

During the last week of the action research phase concluding conversations were held using the same books and the same techniques as the initial conversations (outlined and discussed in the previous chapter).

Critical text: *Bunyips Don't* (a summary of this text can be found in Chapter Six, page 166).

Introduction to each conversation:

Karen: *Hi* [child's name]. *Miss Lisa just read the story* Bunyips Don't. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Preschool A concluding conversations:

Twenty three preschoolers were involved in these conversations. Two children were away (Madelyn and Rick); two children have left the preschool (Bailey and Dustin); three children joined the preschool during Term Three and did not participate in the initial conversations (Carryn, Heidi and Logan).

Nineteen children identified the bullying of Old Bunyip as inappropriate and said that Young Bunyip should be able to dance, sing and go to parties; therefore, it is acceptable for bunyips to be different. Twelve children said that Old Bunyip's demands on Young Bunyip were "*not fair*" (a phrase that was not used at all in the initial conversations). This metalanguage developed over the course of the action research phase; however it was the preschoolers (not the educators) who used the term for the first time during recorded storytime sessions (Caddy from Preschool B during cycle 10; Jack from Preschool A also during cycle 10). This term could have been reinforced by the educators at other times in the preschool day over the course of the action research phase, and/or the home, media and peers. An excerpt of Gabby's conversation transcript is included here as an example:

Karen: *So what do you think of the way Old Bunyip treats Young Bunyip?*

Gabby: *Horrible* [pause]. *He's not fair.*

Karen: *Not fair?*

Gabby: *Mmm* [nods] [pause]. *He doesn't let Young Bunyip do things that are fun and nice* [pause] *and that's not fair.*

Karen: *How would you feel if Old Bunyip treated you that way?*

Gabby: *Sad* [pause]. *Old Bunyip's mean and wants everyone to be sad.*

Karen: *So do you think everyone should take Old Bunyip's advice?*

Gabby: *No.*

Karen: *Why?*

Gabby: *'Cos it's okay for bunyips and people to be different.*

Karen: *How are people different?*

Gabby: *Umm* [pause], *hair, skin, wheelchairs* [pause]. *Umm, some people have different clothes*

Karen: *And what do you think about that?*

Gabby: *Good* [pause]. *Good* [pause]. *Yeah.*

Twenty children identified that Old Bunyip acted maliciously towards Young Bunyip. An excerpt from Colin's conversation transcript is offered here as an example (Colin is a very articulate four and a half year old):

Colin: *Yes. Well, Old Bunyip wouldn't let Young Bunyip do what he liked.*

Karen: *What did Young Bunyip like to do?*

Colin: *He liked to dance and sing and go to parties.*

Karen: *And Old Bunyip wouldn't let him do those things? Why not?*

Colin: *Well, you see Old Bunyip is old and can't do that sort of stuff.*

Karen: *Oh, okay* [pause]. *So do you think Old Bunyip would have liked to sing and dance when he was younger?*

Colin: *Probably not 'cos he's pretty mean* [pause] *he didn't like to have fun.*

Karen: *Oh, so he didn't want Young Bunyip to have fun?*

Colin: Yeah, *and that's pretty mean and that's not fair.*

Karen: *Why is it not fair?*

Colin: *Well, you see Young Bunyip was different 'cos he liked to sing and dance and bunyips don't do that* [pause] *and it's not fair to make bunyips all the same.*

Karen: *Oh, I like the way you're thinking Colin. So you think that bunyips should be allowed to be different?*

Colin: *Yeah*

Only three children (Harley, Verity and Darren) considered Old Bunyip's behaviour to be acceptable. An excerpt from Harley's conversation transcript is offered here as a different opinion to that held by most other preschoolers:

Harley: *All bunyips should act the same.*

Karen: *Okay. What do you think about Old Bunyip?*

Harley: *Okay.*

Karen: *Okay? So it's okay for Old Bunyip to call Young Bunyip names.*

Harley: *Yeah, it's funny.*

Karen: *What if an older person called a young person names?*

Harley: *Naa* [pause] *that's not nice. Bunyips can; but not people. Bunyips have to be the same but it's okay for people to be different they can be different.*

Twenty children said that it is reasonable and right for people to be different with fifteen children volunteering that they would play with children who looked different to them (e.g., skin colour, eyes, hair, (dis)ability). An excerpt from Ella's conversation transcript is offered here as an example:

Karen: *It's okay for bunyips to be different?*

Ella: *Yeah and people too.*

Karen: *It's okay for people to be different?*

Ella: *Yeah.*

Karen: *How are people different?*

Ella: *They can have different colour skin* [pause] *and speak different* [pause] *and wear different clothes.*

Karen: *So how would you treat people who look different to you?*

Ella: *Be kind and be friends. Friends matter.*

Karen: *Friends matter?*

Ella: *Yeah* [pause]. *Being friends matter and it's important to be kind.*

Karen: *Can you tell me what that means?*

Ella: *Umm* [pause]. *It means* [pause] *it means* [pause] *it's important to be friends* [pause] *to be kind to people.*

Karen: *Even with people who are different?*

Ella: *Yeah. 'Cos we're the same on the insides.*

Karen: *How are we the same on the insides?*

Ella: *Everyone has bones and bloods* [pause] *and hearts.*

Karen: *But we can look different?*

Ella: *Yeah. We can have different skin and eyes but it doesn't matter if you look different; it's what's in your heart that matters.*

Karen: *What would be in someone's heart?*

Ella: *Being kind and nice;* [pause] *talking friendly; umm, loving people.*

Karen: *So if a new preschooler came to* [Preschool A] *today who looked very different to you; what would you do?*

Ella: *I'd be friends.*

Karen: *How would you be friends?*

Ella: *I'd play with them* [pause] *and I'd invite them to my birthday party.*

Three children (Darren, Alice and Verity) stated that all bunyips and people should be and act the same. Alice and Verity are twins. Alice stated that she "*wouldn't play with people who had dark coloured skin or in a wheelchair.*" Verity said: "*all people should have white skin*" but then said "*it's okay for people to have dark skin.*" An excerpt from Alice's conversation transcript is offered here as a different opinion to that held by most of the preschoolers:

Karen: *So Young Bunyip was different to Old Bunyip?*

Alice: [Nods].

Karen: *What do you think about bunyips being different?*

Alice: *They should be the same.*

Karen: *Why?*

Alice: *'Cos* [pause] *umm* [pause] *'cos Old Bunyip says.*

Karen: *Do you think all bunyips should be the same as Old Buyip?*

Alice: [Nods].

Karen: *Even though you said he's naughty?*

Alice: [Nods].

Karen: *What about people? Should all people be the same?*

Alice: *Yes.*

Karen: *What about people with different coloured skin?*

Alice: *People should all be the same.*

Karen: *What would you do if someone who looked different to you came to* [Preschool A]*?*

> Alice: *I wouldn't play with people with dark skin or who were in a wheelchair.*

Mary's response is significant. It appeared that Mary was developing an inclusive *language*; however, her intended *actions* communicated otherwise. Had Mary simply worked out what she thought I wanted to hear? Had she travelled part of the journey to now *tolerate* people whom she perceived to be different? An excerpt of Mary's conversation transcript is offered here:

> Karen: *So Young Bunyip was different to other bunyips?*
>
> Mary: *Yeah.*
>
> Karen: *What do you think about Young Bunyip being different?*
>
> Mary: *The young one* [pause]. *Umm, Young Bunyip should be allowed to sing and dance* [pause]. *It's okay to be different.*
>
> Karen: *Okay. What about people? Is it okay for people to be different?*
>
> Mary: *Yes. It's good for people to be different.* [Mary was ending the conversation by leaving her chair; she then called over her shoulder] *But I wouldn't play with them.*
>
> Karen: *Why not?*
>
> Mary: *'Cos they're different.*

Table 7.2 shows a summary of the issues raised by individual children using the same categories that emerged from the initial conversations. Twenty-three children involved in these conversations, nineteen children asserted that Young Bunyip should stand against unfair and bullying behaviour, while only four children stated that the status quo should be upheld.

Table 7.2 Preschool A: Summary of Concluding Conversations Using the Same Categories as the Initial Conversations

			Logan		
			Tia		
			Melinda		
			Ziek		
			Max		
			Colin		
			Jane		
			Chanel		
			Mary		
			Dave		
			Heidi		
			Carryn		
			Jack		
			Trixi		
			Kelly		
		Harley	Ella		
		Alice	Gabby		
		Darren	Reggie		
		Verity	Adam		
Non-related	**Unwilling to respond**	**Bend to authority**	**Rebel against unreasonable authority**	**Individual happiness important**	**Ridicule of physical appearance causes withdrawal**

Table 7.3 shows a summary of issues raised by individual children during the concluding conversations that highlights the different categories and issues that emerged during this second set of conversations. It highlights issues that emerged from the concluding conversations apart from those raised during the initial conversations. The categories of the two tables are not identical as both conversations were child-directed. While I endeavoured to discuss the same questions with each child in both the initial and concluding conversations most children took the conversations in directions that interested them.

Table 7.3 Preschool A: Summary of Categories that Emerged During the Concluding Conversations

			Harley			
Logan			Logan			
Tia			Tia			
Melinda			Melinda			
Ziek			Ziek			
Max			Max	Tia		
Colin			Colin	Dave		
Jane			Jane	Ella		
Chanel	Logan		Chanel	Logan		
Mary	Tia		Mary	Verity		
Dave	Melinda		Dave	Melinda		
Heidi	Ziek		Heidi	Ziek		
Carryn	Colin		Carryn	Max		
Jack	Jane		Jack	Colin		
Trixi	Chanel		Trixi	Jane		
Kelly	Mary		Kelly	Chanel		
Ella	Carryn	Harley	Ella	Heidi		
Gabby	Trixi	Alice	Gabby	Carryn	Darren	
Reggie	Ella	Verity	Reggie	Jack	Alice	
Adam	Gabby	Darren	Adam	Kelly	Verity	Mary
Bunyips should have the freedom to be themselves	**Old Bunyip was unfair**	**All bunyips should be the same**	**People have the right to be different**	**I would play with people who look different to me**	**All people should be the same**	**"It's okay for people to be different but I wouldn't play with them"**

The following vignettes from concluding conversations with Preschool A children are not included in Table 7.2 or Table 7.3; however they are of significance to the findings of the research project as they display deep reflection and an understanding of and sensitivity to difference, diversity and dignity. They also show that the preschoolers are exploring the rights of an individual to freedom and self expression.

- Reggie – *"Old Bunyip is scared. He doesn't like being himself. . . .* [Old Bunyip] *is not nice to Young Bunyip. . . . Old Bunyip is tough."*

- Ella – *"Being friends matters and it's important to be kind. . . . It doesn't matter if you look different it's what's in your heart that matters."*

- Heidi – "*Young Bunyip should be able to dance. He should listen to himself and ignore Old Bunyip. He's* [Old Bunyip] *mean.*"

- Dave – "*Old Bunyip is mean and says naughty words. That makes Young Bunyip sad.*"

- Chanel – "*Old Bunyip is not nice and not fun. . . . I think that's not fair. . . . Young Bunyip should be allowed to sing and dance. Old Bunyip should do what he wants but not force Young Bunyip.*"

- Melinda – "*That's not fair. Young Bunyip should be allowed to have fun and dance and sing. . . . It's okay to be different. Young Bunyip should be allowed to be different.*"

RESEARCH TEAM'S REFLECTION AND ANLAYSIS OF CONCLUDING CONVERSATIONS (Preschool A)

Twenty children identified that bunyips and people have the right to be different and that difference should be honoured. It is interesting to note that after discussing many books over the course of the action research phase that employ anthropomorphism to highlight social justice issues most of the preschoolers easily identified injustices and were able to extrapolated these into the human realm.

Only three children gave a negative response to difference/diversity. The research team understood that family beliefs heavily influenced responses of children. Lisa explained that most of the preschool A parents had shown great interest in the research project; however she had heard negative comments from the twins', Verity and Alice, mother and Mary's mother regarding difference of race and skin colour. This could be the reason behind the twins (Alice and Verity) and Mary's responses.

The research team felt Darren's responses during the concluding conversation seemed to be at odds with his responses during the storytime sessions over the preceding term. He may be confusing the terms *same* and *different*. It was felt that he may think by saying "*we should all be the same*" he could mean that we should *treat* each other the same, that is with kindness and compassion; or that we are the same "*on the inside*", as a few children had commented. There seemed to be confusion for

some children when using the terms same/different. Harley's responses also indicate that he could have been confusing the terms. These are difficult concepts for some young children. Therefore, the need to guide children in the use of a metalanguage for social justice has emerged as very important.

Comparisons between initial and concluding conversations (Preschool A)

Contrary to the initial conversations where eight children were either unwilling to respond or made non-related comments not one child fell into this category. All children responded appropriately and willingly. In the initial conversations only two children agreed that Old Bunyip's demands were unreasonable and inequitable and that Young Bunyip should stand against these unfair demands. In the concluding conversations nineteen children concurred that Young Bunyip should not bend to these demands and should stand up for his rights.

As opposed to the initial conversations where no child made the parallel between bunyips and people twenty children made the link and used terms such as it is "*good*", "*right*" and "*okay*" for people to be different. In the initial conversations the only children to show any concern toward injustice were Jane and Tia. In the concluding conversations nineteen children displayed concern toward injustice with twelve children using the phrase "*not fair*". This phrase was not used at all during the initial conversations.

The following conversation transcript is put forward in its entirety to clearly display the disparity of responses between the initial and concluding conversations (see Table 7.4). Only one preschooler's conversation transcripts are put forward due to constraints of length. Ziek was quite an articulate four year old. His conversation transcripts are put forward here to highlight the disparity between his initial conversation and his concluding conversation on social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity. His initial conversation revolved around his desire to uphold the status quo even if it meant negating one's differences to "fit into" society. It appeared that Ziek could not articulate his ideas on how people could be different. It is not known if difference was confronting for Ziek or that he did not yet have a metalanguage with which to articulate his thoughts. It can be seen in the transcript of his concluding conversation that Ziek could comfortably articulate his

ideas and thoughts regarding difference and challenged the notion of "fitting" the status quo.

Table 7.4 Transcript of Ziek's Initial and Concluding Conversations

Name: Ziek	Name: Ziek
Preschool: A	**Preschool:** A
Date: Monday, 19 June, 2006	**Date:** Monday, 18 September, 2006
Text: *Bunyips don't*	**Text:** *Bunyips Don't*
Initial Conversation	**Concluding Conversation**
Karen: *Hi there Ziek. Miss Lisa just read the story* Bunyips Don't *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*	Karen: *Hi Ziek. Miss Lisa just read the story* Bunyips Don't *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*
Ziek: *I think he's mad 'cos he's very, very grumpy all the time.*	**Ziek: *Mmm, yes. I thought Old Bunyip was very mean and naughty.***
Karen: *That Old Bunyip's grumpy all the time. And what did he tell Young Bunyip?* [long pause] *Bunyips don't*	Karen: *Yeah. Why did you think he was naughty, Ziek?*
Ziek: *Sing.*	**Ziek: *Well* [pause] *'cos he yelled at Young Bunyip and wouldn't let him dance or sing or have any fun.***
Karen: *Yes. Sing.*	
Ziek: *Bunyips don't sing. They don't live on the sunny side of the river.*	Karen: *What do you think about Old Bunyip telling Young Bunyip that bunyips didn't dance or have fun?*
Karen: *Do they go to parties?*	**Ziek: *That's not fair***
Ziek: *No.*	Karen: *Not fair? What's not fair about bunyips not dancing?*
Karen: *Do they dance?*	
Ziek: *No.*	**Ziek: *Well* [pause] *Young Bunyip should be allowed to be himself* [pause] *he should be allowed.***
Karen: *So Old Bunyip told Young Bunyip he wasn't allowed to sing and dance or go to parties. So do you think Young Bunyip should do those things?*	
Ziek: *Hmm. No.*	Karen: *Okay, so Young Bunyip is a bit different to other bunyips?*
Karen: *So Young Bunyip liked to do things that were a bit different?*	**Ziek: *Yes***
Ziek: *Yeah.*	Karen: *So* [pause] *what do you think about that?*
Karen: *So what do you think about that?* [long pause] *Do you think bunyips should be all the same or different?*	**Ziek: *Umm* [pause] *it's okay to be different* [pause] *it's good. Young Bunyip should be allowed to be different***

Ziek: *All the same.*

Karen: *They should be all the same? So they should do the same thing?*

ZIEK: *Yes.*

Karen: *What else would you like to tell me about the story, Ziek?*

Ziek: Turn the [indistinct] **page and think about that.**

Karen: *Yes, turn the page, darling. You can go right through the book if you like. What's he doing there?*

Ziek: Sitting down on the sunny side.

Karen: O*n the sunny side.*

Ziek: Maybe he can't dance because it [pause] **because the old one got a bit carried away.**

Karen: *Oh, Old Bunyip got a bit carried away do you think?*

Ziek: Like, he forgot what bunyips can do.

Karen: *Oh* [pause] *Do you think Old Bunyip is losing his memory about what bunyips can do?*

Ziek: Yeah.

Karen: *Mmm* [pause] *Interesting. But Old Bunyip told him that he wasn't allowed to sing and dance, because "bunyip's don't". What do you think about that?* [long pause]. *Do you think he should be allowed to sing and dance if all other bunyips don't do those things?*

Ziek: Hmm. No [pause] **if all other bunyips don't well he shouldn't.**

Karen: *Even if it makes him happy and isn't hurting other bunyips?*

Ziek: Mmm [pause] **'cos it's a bit different and it might make the others mad.**

Karen: *So you think Bunyips should be allowed to be different?*

Ziek: Yes

Karen: *How do you think the other bunyips would feel if they saw Young Bunyip sing and dance?*

Ziek: Umm [pause]. **They might get mad.**

Karen: *They might get mad? So should Young Bunyip stop if they get mad at him?*

Ziek: Well [long pause]. **Young Bunyip should do the stuff he likes to do 'cos it's good and it makes him happy and it's not hurting the other ones. They might start singing too and get happy.**

Karen: *Oh, so by Young Bunyip being different other bunyips might become happy?*

Ziek: Yes.

Karen: *What about people; should people be allowed to be different?*

Ziek: Yes.

Karen: *What do you think about people being different?*

Ziek: It's good for people to be different. It's boring if we're all the same.

Karen: *Yeah. How can people be different, Ziek?*

Ziek: Well, people can have different coloured skin and be different shapes and have different clothes and come from different countries [pause] **but people are the same on the inside.**

Karen: *How are people the same on the inside?*

Ziek: They have the same [pause] **everyone has bloods** [pause]. **Umm, and insides.**

Karen: *So, Ziek, if a new preschooler came*

Karen: *What about people, Ziek? Should all people be the same?*	*to* [Preschool A] *who was from a different country and looked very different to you; what would you do?*
Ziek: *Yes.*	**Ziek: *I'd be nice to him.***
Karen: *Why?*	Karen: *How would you be nice to him?*
Ziek: *'Cos* [pause] *'cos then people wouldn't get mad.*	**Ziek: *I'd play cars with him and teach him to speak Australian.***
Karen: *Why do you think people would get mad with people who are different?*	Karen: *Do you think your new friend could teach you anything?*
Ziek: *'Cos they're different, umm* [long pause].	**Ziek: *He, umm, he might teach me hi s* [pause] *umm, his* [pause] *the way he talks and some new games.***
Karen: *How can people be different?*	Karen: *You'd be a great new friend, Ziek. Well, thank you for sharing your ideas. It's been lovely talking with you.*
Ziek: *Mmm* [pause]. *I don't, umm* [long pause].	**Ziek: *Thanks Miss Karen. See ya.***
Karen: *Well, thanks Ziek. Thanks for sharing your ideas.*	

The research team considered that the disparity between conversations was directly due to the intervening pedagogical strategy of critical discussion before, during and after storytime sessions carried out over the preceding term. At the time of the initial conversations the children had not engaged in critical discussion regarding texts read. If any discussion had occurred at all it usually focussed on literal recall of the text's story. Following the action research phase and at the time of the concluding conversations the children were used to and enjoyed discussing social justice issues raised during storytime sessions. They were now prepared to reflect deeply on, not only the story of the text, but also the social justice issues highlighted in the texts and share their thoughts in a coherent and articulate manner.

Through the action research phase it emerged that all texts do have the potential for critical analysis in the classroom; however, the team concluded that treating explicitly critical texts (those overtly and sensitively treating issues such as gender stereotyping, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, socio-economic status) has a greater impact and encourages deeper, more critical reflection and discussion.

CONCLUDING CONVERSATIONS: PRESCHOOL B

Critical text: *The Paper Bag Princess* (a summary of this text can be found in Chapter Six, pages 169-170).

Introduction to each conversation:

> Karen: *Hi* [child's name]. *Miss Kate just read the story* The Paper Bag Princess. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Preschool B concluding conversations:

Twenty children were involved in these conversations. One child, Murray, left the preschool during the term and there were five new enrolments during Term Three (Calissa, Don, Edward, Isaiah, James).

Fifteen children identified that Prince Ronald was unkind. An excerpt from Caddy's conversation transcript is offered as an example:

Karen: *Hi Caddy, Miss Kate just read the story* The Paper Bag Princess. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*

Caddy: *Well, actually* [pause] *umm, I thought the prince was real mean to her.*

Karen: Prince Ronald was mean? How was he mean?

Caddy: *He yelled at her and told her to go away.*

Karen: *Mmm. How do you think Princess Elizabeth felt then?*

Caddy: *Sad* [pause] *she felt sad and angry.*

Karen: *Angry? Why do you think Princess Elizabeth was angry?*

Caddy: *'Cos she just saved him and he yelled at her.*

Karen: *Why do you think he yelled at her?*

Caddy: *'Cos she was all dirty and in a paper bag; but she saved him.*

Karen: *Do you think he was angry because she saved him?*

Caddy: *Hmm* [pause]. *He was angry 'cos she was dirty and that's not fair 'cos she saved him and he didn't even say that's* [pause] *didn't even say thank you.*

Karen: *So you think he yelled at her because she was dirty and messy? What do you think about that? What do you think of*

Caddy: *I think that's not fair. He was mean and* [pause] *mean* [pause]. *It doesn't matter what you're wearing. He should of said thank you and been kind to her.*

Fourteen children identified that the Paper Bag Princess was kind and brave. An excerpt from Laura's conversation transcript is presented as an example:

Laura: *Well, I think the prince was so awful to the princess and she was so brave and kind.*

Karen: *How was she brave and kind, Laura?*

Laura: *Well all her clothes was burnt off; and all of her castle was burned; and she just thought* [pause] *she just went and saved the prince. And she tricked the dragon.*

Karen: *Okay, so she didn't think of her own safety. She just tried to save the prince?*

Laura: *Yeah and that's real brave and clever.*

Karen: *Clever? You think she's clever? The princess?*

Laura: *Yeah 'cos she tricked the dragon. She's clever.*

Ten children stated that the Paper Bag Princess should not marry Prince Ronald because he was "*mean*" to her (Caddy, Ellery, Calissa, Kurt, Laura, Jedda, Tilly, Jerry, and Ron). An excerpt from Ron's conversation transcript is offered as an example:

Ron: *He was so mean and she was real nice.*

Karen: *Oh, okay, so do you think they should get married?*

Ron: *No!*

Karen: *No? Why not?*

Ron: *'Cos he's so mean. He's just real mean to her.*

Karen: *Hmm; how was he mean to her?*

Ron: *He said go away* [pause] *and, and, umm* [pause]

Karen: *Yeah, Ron, why do you think he said go away?*

Ron: *'Cos she got all dirty* [pause] *but she saved him. He's a meanie.*

Even though four children (Don, Henry, Isaiah, James), all boys, identified that Prince Ronald was unkind to the Paper Bag Princess who saved him, they still felt that she should marry him. An excerpt from Henry's conversation transcript is presented as an example:

Karen: *So you think that the prince was pretty nasty to the princess?*

Henry: *Yeah.*

Karen: *So do you think they should get married?*

Henry: *Yeah.*

Karen: *They should get married even through you said that the prince was nasty to Princess Elizabeth?*

Henry: *Yeah.*

Karen: *Why should they get married?*

Henry: *'Cos girls* [pause] *'cos umm; 'cos princesses get married. 'Cos ladies and mans* [pause] *men get married.*

Three children (Laura, Michael, James) mentioned that it was acceptable for girls to rescue boys. No child mentioned that it was **not** acceptable for girls to rescue boys. An excerpt from Michael's conversation transcript is offered as an example:

Michael: *Well I liked the dragon* [pause] *and I didn't like the prince.*

Karen: *Oh, you didn't like Prince Ronald. Why?*

Michael: *'Cos he's mean and naughty.*

Karen: *How could you tell that he was mean and naughty?*

Michael: *'Cos he said naughty things to her.*

Kren: *What did he say?*

Michael: *"Go away and get cleaned up. You're messy and dirty". See; see him* [pause] *he's angry on this page.*

Karen: *And what do you think about that?*

Michael: *Well, that's mean 'cos she saved him. You know girls can save boys.*

Karen: *Oh yeah she did save him. What do you think about girls saving boys?*

Michael: *Yeah, good. It's good.*

Twelve children (Caddy, Ellery, Calissa, Don, Henry, Laura, Jedda, Tilly, Michael, Ron, James, and Ally) identified that Princess Elizabeth and The Paper Bag Princess was in fact the same person inside: kind, brave, clever, nice were words used to describe the Paper Bag Princess/Elizabeth. Many children mentioned that it does not matter what a person wears. An excerpt from Don's conversation transcript is presented as an example:

Don: *I think the princess is nice and brave.*

Karen: *You think she's nice and brave? Do you think that she would be nicer and braver in her princess dress or in her paper bag?*

Don: *I think she's the same in the bag or the dress.*

Karen*: So she'd be brave in her dress too?*

Don: *Yeah 'cos she's the same person.*

Karen: *But the prince seemed to like her in her princess dress but didn't seem to like her in the paper bag?*

Don: *Yeah.*

Karen: *What do you think of that?*

Don: *Umm* [pause] *He's not nice. It doesn't matter what you wear* [pause] *it doesn't matter that she weared a paper bag 'cos she saved him and he shoulda been nice.*

Five children (Alicia, Kirra, Ryan, Isaiah, James) negatively commented on the Paper Bag Princess' cleanliness: Alicia, Kirra, Ryan, Josh stated that they would not play with her because she was dirty; Isaiah said that "*Prince Ronald was mad because the Paper Bag Princess was dirty and that's okay because he should be mad.*" Alicia and Ryan said that Prince Ronald should not marry the Paper Bag Princess because she was dirty. An excerpt from Alicia's concluding conversation transcript is offered as an example:

Alicia: *Her hair's all tangled.*

Karen: *Mmm, she did look a bit messy at the end after saving the prince. Do you think they should get married?*

Alicia: *No.*

Karen: *No. Why not?*

Alicia: *He shouldn't marry her 'cos she's all messy.*

Karen: *So if the Paper Bag Princess came to* [Preschool B] *would you play with her?*

Alicia: *No 'cos she's all dirty and* [Alicia pulled a face].

Two children (Mark and Edward), although agreeing to be interviewed, became uncomfortable during the interview; therefore the interview was terminated immediately. There was no stress put on these children to persist with the interview and each conversation ended happily.

Table 7.5 shows a summary of issues raised by preschool B children during the concluding conversations using the same categories raised during the initial conversations. Most children identified the Paper Bag Princess as brave and the prince as acting unkindly. Most children felt that the princess should not marry the prince because of his unjust and unkind behaviour.

Table 7.5 Preschool B: Summary of Concluding Conversations Using the Same Categories as Initial Conversations

					Ally	
					Ryan	
					Alicia	
					Jerry	
					Ron	
			Jerry		Michael	
			Michael		Tilly	
			Tilly		Jedda	
James			Jedda		Laura	
Isaiah			Laura	James	Kurt	
Kirra		Ron	Calissa	Isaiah	Calissa	
Ryan		Alicia	Ellery	Henry	Ellery	Edward
Alicia		James	Caddy	Don	Caddy	Mark
Physical beauty and cleanliness reflects kindness, fairness and friendliness	**Girls should not rescue boys**	**Would play with Princess Elizabeth**	**Would play with the Paper Bag Princess**	**Should marry Prince Ronald**	**Should not marry Prince Ronald**	**Non-Verbal or extremely shy**

Table 7.6 shows the issues raised by Preschool B children during the concluding conversations. The categories of the two tables are not identical as both conversations were child-directed. While I endeavoured to discuss the same questions with each child in both initial and concluding conversations most children took the conversations in directions that interested them.

Table 7.6 Preschool B: Summary of Categories that Emerged During the Concluding Conversations

		Ally		
		Jerry		
James	Ally	Ron		
Isaiah	Jerry	Michael		
Ron	Ron	Tilly		
Michael	Michael	Jedda		Jerry
Tilly	Tilly	Laura		Ron
Jedda	Jedda	Kurt		Michael
Laura	Laura	Henry		Tilly
Kurt	Kurt	Don		Jedda
Henry	Henry	Calissa		Laura
Don	Don	Ellery		Kurt
Calissa	Calissa	Caddy		Calissa
Ellery	Ellery	Kirra	Ryan	Ellery
Caddy	Caddy	Alicia	Alicia	Caddy
Princess Elizabeth and the Paper Bag Princess are the same person	**The Paper Bag Princess is kind, brave, clever, friendly, and funny.**	**Prince Ronald is mean, not nice, not fair, mad, angry, naughty, bad, and a toad.**	**The Paper Bag Princess should not marry Prince Ronald because she is dirty.**	**The Paper Bag Princess should not marry Prince Ronald because "he's mean to her and she doesn't like him anymore."**

The following vignettes from concluding conversations with preschool B children are not included in the above tables; however they are of significance to the findings of the research project as they display deep reflection and an understanding of and sensitivity to difference, diversity and dignity. They also show that the preschoolers are challenging gender stereotyping and unfair behaviour.

- Calissa – "*She* [the Paper Bag Princess] *is brave, clever and she tricked the dragon. She shouldn't marry him* [Prince Ronald] cos *he's mean!"*

- Kurt – "*She's* [the Paper Bag Princess] *kind and brave* [pause]. *He's* [Prince Ronald] *not nice, umm, a toad! She shouldn't marry him cos she doesn't like him anymore."* When Kurt was asked if Princess Elizabeth and the Paper Bag Princess were the same he replied: "*She's different* [lengthy pause] *'cos in this one* [pointing to the opening illustration] *she's in a dress and then she's got a paper bag*."

- Laura – "*When she's the Paper Bag Princess she's dirty but she's the same inside. She's kind and brave. . . . It's okay for girls to save boys."* Note this is a complete reversal from Laura's initial conversation.

- Tilly – "*The Paper Bag Princess is friendly and got sad because he* [Prince Ronald] *yelled at her. He's not nice. He's mean. She shouldn't marry him 'cos he's mean. . . . It doesn't matter what you wear!"* Note the difference between Tilly's conversations. She was considered almost non-verbal when attempting the initial conversation.

- Michael – "*She's* [the Paper Bag Princess] *brave and she'd be the same in any clothes. . . . He's* [Prince Ronald] *mean and naughty. He didn't treat her right. She shouldn't marry him cos he's mean. It's okay for girls to be brave and save boys. But I wouldn't play with her cos she's a girl."* This is also a big "turn around" for Michael.

- James – "*I'd only play with her when she was in a dress not in a paper bag!"* Note that James joined the preschool half way through Term Three.

RESEARCH TEAM'S REFLECTION AND ANLAYSIS OF CONCLUDING CONVERSATIONS (Preschool B)

The team noted that the two children who were considered non-verbal were not in attendance for the initial conversations: Mark was away and Edward joined the preschool during Term Three. It was pleasing to the team that most children identified the bravery of the princess and the unkind and unjust behaviour of the prince.

The majority of children identified that Prince Ronald was "*mean*" and "*nasty*"; and that the Paper Bag Princess was kind and brave. The majority of children identified that Prince Ronald's behaviour was "*mean*" and acted unfairly. Ten children stated this as the reason the Paper Bag Princess should not marry Prince Ronald. Only five children focused on the cleanliness of the Paper Bag Princess in a negative way with eight children saying that they would like to play with her because she was "*clever*", "*kind*", "*funny*".

Edward, James and Isaiah's responses (or lack thereof) were considered rather negative and did not support difference or gender equity; however these

children did not attend the preschool when the initial conversations were held; therefore this was the first time that they were exposed to the book. However, Calissa and Don were not at the preschool for initial conversations and responded positively.

Kate felt that the children who were regularly read fairy stories at home may come to the conversations with the pre-conceived idea that marriage is the only way to have a "happy ending". Therefore, Henry's response *"'cos princesses get married. 'Cos ladies and mans* [pause], *men get married*" could be justified. However, Laura is also read to regularly at home and her response was quite definite: "*Prince Ronald was mean and she* [the Paper Bag Princess] *shouldn't marry him cos he's mean*".

Alicia's definite responses in both the initial and concluding conversations regarding the Paper Bag Princess' cleanliness were of concern. Kate felt that these responses are at odds with Alicia's gentle and accepting nature and may be a product of her Maori background. Kate surmised that Alicia and her family may have experienced prejudice due to race and skin colour and that Alicia would not want to be seen to go against the "norm". Therefore Alicia may equate cleanliness and beauty to Western acceptance and that her desire for acceptance impacts on her ability to challenge Western stereotypical views.

Kate and Shelley affirmed that the children's responses to the concluding conversations gave them firm directions in their continuing efforts to teach for social justice with this preschool group for the remainder of the school year. They would monitor Alicia's acceptance by the group and continue to explore the issue that physical beauty does not mirror inner qualities. They would also continue to explore gender stereotyping and challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions implied in fairytales.

Comparison between initial and concluding conversations (Preschool B)

Contrary to initial conversations the three children who were considered non-verbal were responsive during the concluding conversations. Unlike her lack of interaction during the initial conversation Tilly's interaction during the concluding conversation was clear and articulate and displayed great depth of understanding regarding gender issues and justice. The two children who were considered non-

verbal during the concluding conversations were not involved in the initial conversations.

During the initial conversations no child mentioned Prince Ronald's ungraciousness or the Paper Bag Princess' bravery. However, the concluding conversations reveal that fifteen children discussed Prince Ronald's unjust behaviour describing him as mean, nasty, not nice, angry, mad, naughty and a toad. Fourteen children discussed the kindness and bravery of the Paper Bag Princess. As opposed to the initial conversations no child mentioned that it was inappropriate for girls to rescue boys. In fact Michael, who was adamant in the initial conversations that girls should not save boys, has reconsidered his stance.

The initial conversations revealed that nine children discussed the impending marriage between Prince Ronald and the Paper Bag Princess. These conversations revolved around issues of the princess' cleanliness: Alicia, Laura, Michael, Murray, Ryan and Caddy stated that she should marry Prince Ronald "*only when she gets cleaned up*"; Jedda, Jerry and Ron stated that they should not get married because "*she's dirty*". Alicia, although still concentrating on cleanliness, in the concluding interview said that she should not marry Prince Ronald due to her dishevelled state ("*her hair's all tangled*"). However, concluding conversations reveal that Laura, Michael, Jerry, Caddy, Ron, Jedda, Ellery, Kurt, Tilly and Calissa now contended that the princess should not marry Ronald due to his unkind and unjust behaviour.

The initial conversations highlighted that all children identified the better, kinder, nicer version of the princess to be the regal Elizabeth in her gown (seen in the opening illustration). Most children thought that Elizabeth and the Paper Bag Princess were two different characters. However, the concluding conversations reveal that twelve children identified Princess Elizabeth and the Paper Bag Princess as the same person, describing her as brave, clever, kind, funny and friendly.

As opposed to the initial conversations where no child would play with the Paper Bag Princess, six children voluntarily stated that they would play with her. However, five children said that they would not play with her because she was dirty.

The following conversation transcript is put forward in its entirety to clearly display the disparity of responses between the initial and concluding conversations (see Table 7.7). Again only one preschooler's conversation transcript is presented due to constraints of length. The research team considered Tilly's responses during the initial conversations almost non-verbal. However, as evidenced by the concluding conversation transcript she has developed a metalanguage to clearly articulate her thoughts regarding social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity which include discussing the unimportance of outward appearance; gender issues; individuality and standing against injustice.

Table 7.7 Transcripts of Tilly's Initial and Concluding Conversations

Name: Tilly	**Name:** Tilly
Preschool: B	**Preschool:** B
Date: Thursday, 22 June, 2006	**Date:** Thursday, 21 September, 2006
Text: *The Paper Bag Princess*	**Text:** *The Paper Bag Princess*
Initial Conversation	**Concluding Conversation**
Karen: *Hi Tilly.*	Karen: *Hi Tilly.*
Tilly: *Hi, Miss Karen.*	**Tilly: *Hi Miss Karen***
Karen: *Tilly, Miss Kate just read the story* The Paper Bag Princess. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*	Karen: *Miss Kate just read the story* The Paper Bag Princess. *I'd love to hear your thoughts about anything in the story.*
Tilly: *She was dirty.*	**Tilly: *Yeah, that prince was pretty mean eh?***
Karen: *She was dirty?*	Karen: *How was he mean, Tilly?*
Tilly: *Yep.*	**Tilly: *He yelled at the princess.***
Karen: *How did she get dirty?*	Karen: *Why did he yell at her?*
Tilly: *The dinosaur made her.*	**Tilly: *'Cos she was dirty and messy.***
Karen: *Yeah, the dragon made her dirty. So is she like normal princesses?*	Karen: *How did she get that way?*
Tilly: [Indistinct].	**Tilly: *The dragon burned her***
Karen: *Is she different to other princesses? How might she be different?* [long pause]. *Well, what does she wear? Look at what she's wearing. Is she wearing princess clothes?*	Karen: *And what happened next?*
Tilly: *No* [long pause].	**Tilly: *The dragon took away that prince; but she saved him and he yelled at her. That's pretty mean. That's not nice. That's not fair. The Paper Bag Princess is friendly and got sad because he* [Prince Ronald]**

Karen: *No, she's wearing a paper bag. And what did she do in her paper bag – what did she do here?* [long pause]. [Tilly shrugs]. *She tried to rescue Prince Ronald.*

Tilly: **But he didn't want to, eh?**

Karen: *So what do you think about Prince Ronald?*

Tilly: **Don't know.**

Karen: *Okay. What do you think about Princess Elizabeth?* [long pause] *Do you think she was brave?* [Tilly shakes head and shrugs]. *You don't know. What do you think will happen to Princess Elizabeth now? What do you think she'll do?*

Tilly: **Go and play?**

Karen: *Go and play. Do you think she'll play with Prince Ronald anymore?* [long pause]. [Tilly shrugs]. *You don't know. What do you think about the Paper Bag Princess rescuing Prince Ronald?* [long pause]. [Tilly shrugs]. *You're not sure. That's okay. Okey-dokey. Thank you, Tilly.*

yelled at her. He's not nice. He's mean. She shouldn't marry him 'cos he's mean **[pause].** **He didn't treat her right. It doesn't matter what you wear!**

Karen: *Wow. How do you think the princess felt?*

Tilly: **Sad; but you know she's nice eh?**

Karen: *How do you think she's nice?*

Tilly: **I think she's friendly. She'd be a nice friend.**

Karen: *Oh, she'd be a nice friend. Would you play with her?*

Tilly: **Yeah.**

Karen: *Would you play with her in her gown or paper bag?*

Tilly: **Doesn't matter what she wears. But she could wear some shorts so we could play on the fort. 'Cos it's better when you wear shorts 'cos dresses get caught eh?**

Karen: *I bet she'd love to play with you Tilly. Do you think she should marry Prince Ronald?*

Tilly: **No, 'cos he's mean. She should just leave him and not marry him 'cos he's not nice to her.**

Karen: *I really like your thinking, Tilly. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about about the story?*

Tilly: **Umm; nah.**

Karen: *Well thanks for sharing all those great thoughts with me today, Tilly.*

Similar to the reflective comparison on Preschool A's initial and concluding conversations the team identified that the disparity between conversations was directly due to the intervening pedagogical strategy of critical discussion before, during and after storytime sessions carried out over the preceding term. The majority

of children from preschool B were six to twelve months younger than the children from preschool A and this is reflected in their responses that were not as articulate. However, it can be clearly seen that these children were developing language skills and a metalanguage to express their ideas regarding social justice issues. Terms such as "*not fair*" were being used and children were reflecting on characters' behaviours and justifying their responses, for example "*the Paper Bag Princess is friendly and got sad because he* [Prince Ronald] *yelled at her. He's not nice. He's mean. She shouldn't marry him 'cos he's mean* [pause]. *He didn't treat her right. It doesn't matter what you wear!*" (Tilly).

Again it was apparent to the team that children need to be guided in a metalanguage to explain their thoughts on social justice issues. Kurt's responses during the concluding interview encouraged the team to reflect on how literal children are and to take care to word questions and explanations appropriately. When Kurt was asked if Princess Elizabeth and the Paper Bag Princess were the same he replied: "*She's different* [lengthy pause] *'cos in this one* [pointing to the opening illustration] *she's in a dress and then she's got a paper bag.*" If Kurt had not been allowed ample time to explain his response his clarity may have been misunderstood.

SUMMARY

This chapter has highlighted the preschoolers' voices throughout the action research phase of the project. Data were presented as illustrations (McIntrye, 1995) and the data analysis tools of critical reflection and analysis of knowledge in action adapting Fairclough's (1992) framework as described in Chapter Four were employed. A themed approach was used to present and analyse the preschoolers' responses to storytime sessions during the cycles of the action research phase. The chapter also presented and analysed the findings of concluding conversations held with each preschool child regarding the same critical text that was used for the initial conversations. The chapter concluded by offering a comparative analysis between the initial and concluding conversations. Presentation and analysis of data have revealed how children's literature, used during storytime sessions throughout the action research phase of this study, assisted the preschoolers in developing their awareness and understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity.

The next chapter highlights the voices of the educators as co-researchers. It reveals how a strong research team developed from very tenuous beginnings and addresses both research questions. However, the second research question is of great significance to the next chapter:

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

CHAPTER EIGHT: FROM SHAKY BEGINNINGS TO SOLID TEAMWORK

> *Through action research people can come to understand their social and educational practices more richly by locating their practices, as concretely and precisely as possible, in the particular material, social and historical circumstances within which their practices were produced, developed and evolved – so that their real practices become accessible to reflection, discussion and reconstruction as products of past circumstances which are capable of being modified in and for present and future circumstances.* (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p. 25)

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter, employing a themed approach, reported on and analysed the preschoolers' journeys in this action research project from assuming notions of exclusivity to embracing notions of inclusivity. Foregrounding the preschoolers' voices revealed that they initially spoke of difference and diversity using deficit language and exclusion; however, during the course of the action research project this discourse began to change to more inclusive language and inclusive actions. A comparative analysis of initial and concluding conversations held with each preschool child revealed that the research project had impacted positively upon the preschoolers' developing awareness and understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity.

This chapter concludes *Part Three: Action and Observation* and moves the focus from the preschoolers' voices to those of the co-researchers. It examines how the research team moved from tentative beginnings, where team members were nervous about having their teaching practices scrutinised and where little discussion of social justice issues was scaffolded in each preschool setting, to a solid team that challenged, supported and encouraged each team member to teach for social justice. As Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) suggest in the quotation that introduces this chapter, the research team came to understand its social and educational practices more richly by reflecting on, discussing and reconstructing storytime sessions to

impact on its present understandings of and future directions in teaching for social justice. This chapter therefore attends to the second research question:

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

The data that foreground the co-researchers' voices in this chapter are taken from research meeting minutes that examined the storytime sessions over the action research phase, field notes and journal entries. As explained in Chapter Five, research meetings were held weekly during the action research phase of the study and involved all members of the research team (notwithstanding illness and Sandra's work commitments) who together analysed videotaped storytime sessions of both preschool groups (11 weeks, 11 meetings, 36 videotaped sessions). Over the course of the action research phase of the study, the research team proposed strategies that might work to encourage the preschoolers' critical examination and discussion of the social justice issues highlighted in the picture books read during storytime. The strategies were applied and then analysed by the team when examining the videotaped storytime sessions.

Meeting minutes were mostly written verbatim as what was said during each meeting. These minutes were verified by the co-researchers at each consecutive meeting; therefore the accounts portrayed here are trustworthy. However, the interpretations of the data are my own. The vast number of data gathered over the 11 week term that encompassed the action research phase precludes me from reporting every meeting. Nevertheless, there were critical meetings and critical moments that heralded turning points for the research project which invite in-depth analysis. What I judge to be critical meetings and critical moments are based on the following: instances when plans seemingly went awry; when critical self-reflection was evident on the part of co-researchers (myself included); when previous personal or team assumptions were challenged; when critical discussion moments were missed during storytime sessions and/or research meetings; when a specific strategy was used which encouraged deep critical discussion and reflection by both the teachers and the preschoolers; and when evidence of transformational learning may have been demonstrated in the preschool settings. Therefore, I have chosen to present the most

pivotal meetings for deeper critical analysis. The portrayal of these meetings is essentially a narrative that recounts the research story, whereas the critique (which in this chapter utilises critical reflection, analysis of knowledge in action and reflections on issues of quality and validity as explained in Chapter Five) provides fundamental and valuable transformative tools that may encourage a deeper understanding of the research project (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). To distinguish the critique in this chapter it is set into a text box and blue font is used.

THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PHASE

When the teacher as researcher connects with other teachers as researchers interested in the ambiguities, contradictions and tensions of their practices, a dynamic and vibrant process follows which can encourage educational change, critical pedagogy and a democratic workplace (Kincheloe, 2003). Indeed, the action research phase of this study became a dynamic process that encouraged educational change in each preschool setting through critical pedagogy. However,

> Action research projects are not always the neat and tidy processes that they can sometimes appear to be in textbooks. The collaborative nature of these processes in real-world settings means that they are far from being objective laboratory exercises. They are in fact very human processes. (Marshall, Cobb & Ling, 1998, p. 187)

This chapter highlights the understandings of Marshall et al. (1998) and reveal that action research is often a messy endeavour and, indeed, a very human process. It is my intention here to make sense of the "messiness". Like Reason (1988), I ask "How can I understand what I [and the research team] have been through?" (p. 80). For Mezirow (1991) making meaning is "to construe or interpret experience – in other words to give it coherence" (p. 4). To do this I interpret, analyse, reflect and contemplate (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000).

The research team also interpreted, analysed, reflected and contemplated when examining the initial conversations held with each preschooler (outlined in the previous chapter) and viewing each storytime session. Through analysing and reflecting on the initial conversations the research team planned action for the first weeks of the action research phase. The research team decided to focus the storytime sessions for both preschools on princesses to begin challenging the stereotype of

gender and countering the preschoolers' assumptions regarding the importance of outward appearance.

Initially the research team wished to compare the children's responses to what it considered *critical* texts with their responses to what it considered *non-critical* texts. We identified that critical texts were children's literature that addressed social justice issues such as race, gender, ability, class, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation that highlighted another's perspective. These books typically focused on social justice issues and involved situations where characters were marginalised in some way as a result of the existing systems of power (Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005). We identified that non-critical texts were children's literature that addressed lighter issues than critical books. They usually attend to mundane experiences that maintain the status quo (Leland et al., 2005). However, with the help of the preschoolers, our naïve choices of texts that fitted these categories and our assumptions regarding critical and non-critical texts were soon challenged. We began to understand that all texts have the potential for critical examination, thus becoming critical texts. Hence our misconceptions regarding critical texts and non-critical texts were quickly realised. This is borne out in cycle three (see pages 271-273 of this chapter). However, the first two cycles of this action research project portray our "shaky beginnings".

CRITICAL MOMENTS

As previously indicated the action research phase of this study took place over an entire school term comprising 11 weeks. The research team's plan was that each week two storytime sessions would be videotaped from each of the preschools involved in the study. The research team met weekly to observe and analyse the four videotaped storytime sessions. From this weekly analysis of the educators' pedagogy and the preschoolers' responses, picture books were chosen and strategies proposed for the following week. Each week was considered an action research cycle with each consecutive cycle building on the one before it. Throughout the action research phase there were critical meetings and critical moments that impacted more significantly on the study than other meetings. These critical meetings are now presented and analysed.

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: CYCLE ONE

I have chosen to report on, or rather portray, this first cycle because, to some extent, it connects to the second research question as the data show the difficulties of collaborative research. An understanding of initial apprehensions of team members (as exemplified in the following data) will assist the reader(s) in an appreciation of the challenges of this research project for the co-researchers. The reader(s) will be able to track how the research team developed over the following cycles and how teachers took on a collaborative role, albeit tentatively at first, in this research project to address the second research question. Data from meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) and journal entries are offered for analysis.

Cycle One research meeting: Plans going awry and critical self-reflection

Journal entry (Friday, week one of the action research phase): Only one storytime session from each preschool was videotaped owing to my being unwell this week. Disappointing, not a good start. The team didn't seem to mind. At the meeting the team decided to view both storytime sessions and take notes before any discussion. The videotaped footage revealed little class discussion with both teachers beginning the storytime session by simply telling the children the titles and ending the session by closing the book and inviting the class to move to different activities. After the viewing Lisa admitted that she had not critically read the text *Snow White* before reading it to the children and she felt that this was detrimental to the storytime and the study. Kate explained that just prior to storytime she could not find the book of *Snow White* that she planned to read to her preschool group so quickly grabbed *Caps for Sale* instead. Both Lisa and Kate felt embarrassed by examining their storytime practices.

> Kate: *I never thought I'd feel so uncomfortable. I was thrown by not finding* Snow White. *You can see my nervousness on the tape! That's embarrassing!*
> Lisa: *I had all last term to get used to the camera, but when it actually started I thought to myself, "Oh, my God, this is really happening" and I just froze! It's awful. I didn't do any of the stuff we'd talked about. You know, scaffold discussion and draw out the issues we wanted exposed. I'm sorry.*

Journal entry (Friday, week one of the action research phase): Lisa was

emotionally upset and obviously close to tears. I think team members sensed this and jumped to Kate's and Lisa's defense.

> Pippa: *Hey, you were great, Lisa. And so were you Kate. I hate being in front of a camera. I freeze up too.*
>
> Shelley: *Oh you guys should see me. I hate even looking at my wedding video!*
>
> Sandra: *We'll all get used to this. It's okay.*
>
> Karen: *You all look so worried. I didn't ever want to add to your already stressed lives. I'm so grateful that we have such wonderful people on our team and I don't want you to stress over this. Okay, so we didn't get much discussion going with the kids but we can work on that and*
>
> Lisa: *But, Karen, that's why I feel so awful* [pause] *I took this on for the kids. You know* [pause] *to try to challenge their thinking and all I did was read a poorly written story. There was so much more I could've done with it.*
>
> Karen: *But, Lisa, that's exactly why we're here; to work out* **how** *to do this. There's lots of positives to come out of this week.*

Journal entry (Friday, week one of the action research phase): When I said it was okay it felt as if the whole room actually sighed. We all literally drew breath and leaned back in our chairs. We had become a little tense! Supportive comments followed.

> Shelley: *You know Lisa, although there wasn't a lot of discussion regarding* Snow White, *the children's facial expressions showed real interest and you could tell they were engaged with the story.*
>
> Pippa: *Yeah, and the kids' laughter, when they were listening to* Caps for Sale *was really a sign that they got it. You read it so well, Kate.*

Reflective analysis:

At the end of the orientation phase, we believed that we were well prepared and ready for the action research phase of the study. However, the first week into the action research phase of the study did not reflect this. It was affected by the "human condition" in that, because of my illness, only one storytime session was videotaped

from each preschool. My journal entry revealed that I was "disappointed" by this and felt it negatively impacted on the study: "not a great start". Through examining both my journal entries and the meeting minutes it seemed that each member of the research team (myself included) was feeling tentative. It was clear that the educators (co-researchers) were feeling vulnerable due to the fact that it was now, more apparent than ever that their teaching practices were on show and would be held up for scrutiny. I was feeling anxious because I did not wish any participant in this study (co-researcher or preschooler) to feel stressed and/or negated due to the impact of this study.

Unlike positivist research where feelings and emotions are considered tainted, subjective and which contaminate the research, data analysis here must include these human traits. Indeed "by leaving out our analytic commentary (especially when it is emotional), the data take on an obdurate quality. The notes become recorded facts rather than constructed understandings" (Kleinmann & Copp, 1993, p. 19). Therefore, feelings and emotions play a major part in this research project's data analysis.

Much emotive language is used in the above accounts. There is a lot of talk about our *feelings*: "I never thought I'd feel so uncomfortable" (Kate); "I feel so awful!" (Lisa). It is clear by their language that Lisa and Kate were feeling vulnerable, to the point of becoming emotionally upset, having their teaching practices scrutinised. This encouraged Pippa, Shelley and Sandra to defend Kate's and Lisa's teaching practices regarding this week's storytime sessions instead of offering constructive criticisms: "*We'll all get used to this. It's okay*" (Sandra). Bray et al. (2000) contend that "distress is often accompanied by heightened defensive routines" (p. 114). Pippa, Shelley and Sandra, in the above vignette, were employing defensive routines in order to dispel their colleagues' (and friends') distress and smooth over the issue of poor teaching practice. I also felt uncomfortable and was concerned that the research was too much of a burden on these early childhood educators. It can be seen that I resorted to flattery to try to smooth over the issue and make my co-researchers feel "better" without offering any constructive feedback. Defensive routines actually enable distress to continue (Bray et al., 2000) and in this instance, if unaddressed, the continuation of teaching practices that the co-

researchers wished to change. However, the reality was that we all knew that this research project would take a great amount of time, effort and emotional and cognitive strength. This shows the difficulty of collaborative, participatory action research. Even though we had proposed our research "constitution" during the orientation phase and, at that point in time believed we were prepared for the action research phase to commence, it seemed, like those who experience childbirth, nothing could prepare us for the anxiety of what lay ahead. Also, pedagogically it is difficult to confront and challenge societal long held assumptions on gender, appearance and all the other issues that we planned to talk about.

Kate: *Thanks, Pip, but I initially thought, you know, I thought that colours and numbers could be taught by using this book* [Caps for Sale] *but it didn't encourage much critical discussion. But looking at the footage I can see that I could've drawn out how the peddler only got his caps back after he stopped using aggressive behaviour. Damn, I could've gone into peaceful practice is a better way of resolving conflict!*

Lisa: *I know just how you feel, Kate. You know in this version, in this* [pause] *Snow White had no voice in this version. Only the men in the story actually spoke! I didn't realise this until after I'd read the story to the kids. I was thinking about the book all day and wondering why I felt so uncomfortable about the reading. It was only on reflection that I realised that Snow White had no voice AND I didn't even bring this up in discussion. It was awful!*

Reflective analysis:

The above account shows that both Kate and Lisa are still quite distressed however, through this distress they are beginning some critical self-reflection on what they could have done differently. They have used, albeit briefly, Noble, MacFarlane and Cartmel's (2006) four step model for critical reflective practice. They have *deconstructed* their teaching practice as well as the texts read, they have *confronted* their lack of engagement with the texts' critical issues, they have *linked* this confrontation with the theory of using children's literature to teach for social justice, and they have *challenged* themselves "to think outside the dominant discursive framework and come up with other ways, or better ways of thinking about and practicing teaching" (Noble et al., 2006, p. 16). Thus, their distress may have been

enabling. According to Heron (1992),

> A certain amount of distress emotion is enabling; it is a shock or spur to growth and development… the fear of the unknown can be a motive for learning and inquiry. Beyond a certain threshold of tolerance, distress ceases to be enabling, goes into overload and becomes disabling. (pp. 128 – 129)

Before their distress became "disabling" it was important to handle the issue effectively. As a team we needed to show empathy for one another and how, as a team, we could move forward.

Sandra: *Well, girls, it's time to roll the sleeves up and take action. We thought we'd basically be looking at the children's comments, but it seems that we're looking very critically at our own practice and we don't like what we see. Did you notice that there were even a few kiddies who had their hands up wanting to talk but were just not noticed? That's okay. This is the first week, early days, and we can make it better. We know that we need to work on strategies that will get some good discussion going.*

Kate: *Yeah and that might make me feel a bit more comfortable being in front of the camera.*

Reflective analysis:

Sandra's comment in the above vignette made apparent that initially the co-researchers believed that although they realised that their teaching practices would be displayed, they would be mainly examining the preschoolers' understandings of social justice issues. This meeting highlighted that if teaching practices did not change then there would be no preschoolers' comments to "look at". However, Sandra brought to the meeting the perspective that, indeed, it was "early days" for the action research and there was a need to focus on the future, to work out some strategies, as a team, that would encourage discussion within the preschool groups. This is what participatory action research is all about: examining a problem (which may mean shifting focus) and exploring possible resolutions with interested stakeholders (Bell, 2000; Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Torres, 2004).

Meeting minutes written as notes: Our plan of action for the second cycle of the action research phase (week two) addressed the following questions that were raised during this meeting: How could we feel more confident and comfortable with the videotaped storytime sessions? How could we promote more classroom discussion? What picture books should be chosen?

The following strategies and plan of action were proposed for cycle two:

- Always read texts thoroughly and critically before reading to the children and plan storytime sessions (proposed by Lisa).
- Pre-plan a few strategic guided questions and/or comments (proposed by Karen).
- If feeling uncomfortable ask Karen to stop videotaping (proposed by Karen).
- Stop at intervals during the reading to ask questions and invite discussion (proposed by Sandra).
- Employ the use of higher order, open-ended questions (proposed by Kate).
- Shelley and Pippa will spot those children who are quietly waiting to contribute to discussions and inform Lisa and Kate (proposed by Shelley).
- On reflecting on the children's responses to the initial interviews and the research group's reflections on this storytime session, all agreed that the issue of gendered stereotyping should be challenged. Texts focusing on the fairytale genre highlighting the stereotypical feminine ideal of princesses were decided upon: *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and to counter these texts critically *The Paper Bag Princess* and *Princess Smartypants* were suggested. However, Preschool B will not use *The Paper Bag Princess* as it was used in the initial conversations.
- A parent newsletter outlining the findings of the initial conversations and the direction of the study will be sent home with preschoolers next week (proposed by Pippa).

Journal entry (Friday, week one of the action research phase): The meeting ended with team members giving one another a supportive hug (which was to become a ritual farewell after each meeting).

Reflective analysis:

This meeting was not an easy meeting to facilitate as it was quite emotionally charged. However, although much of the above accounts show defensive routines; they also show support, encouragement and empathy. Because, as a team, we had worked out our research philosophy and framework during the orientation phase of this research project based on an ethic of care and feminist communitarianism, we displayed sensitivity to one another during this meeting. This bears out the importance of the orientation phase and the co-construction of a research team philosophy and constitution (Bray et al., 2000; Whitmore & McKee, 2006).

A major concern at this early stage of the action research project was that very little discussion with the preschoolers had taken place. I was hoping to highlight the preschoolers' voices (their opinions, ideas and beliefs) and perhaps the themes that emerged from these initial videotaped storytime sessions; however, because there was such little discussion this was not possible. Yet, it appears that such tentative beginnings are not uncommon in collaborative research. Bray et al. (2000) highlight Linda Smith's collaborative research with a community women's group: "At first, the inquiry process seemed to be a struggle" (p. 15). Indeed, like Smith's, the first two cycles of this research project were a struggle for all co-researchers.

Interestingly, although it was very apparent through viewing the videotape and, indeed, their own admissions that neither Lisa nor Kate had prepared for this week's storytime sessions, no-one actually voiced this opinion. However, the plan of action proposed by Lisa (to thoroughly prepare for storytime), bore this out. Perhaps this was a subtle strength of this action research project (especially during the early cycles of the action research phase): Inadequacies that were so apparent through viewing the videos may not have needed open criticism. To address these obvious, yet unstated, weaknesses through an articulated plan of action may have been all that was required. This is debatable.

It can be seen by the strategies put forward in the action research plan for cycle two that each of the co-researchers brought to the study her own professional experiences that she believed could work to improve classroom discussions and facilitate smooth data gathering. Improving teaching practice was important to each

member of the research team; however, to do this the research team needed to be strong. Through the physical sign of a hug as a farewell gesture after each meeting we were showing one another support and care. "The more the participants appreciate each other as people beyond their role as group members, the better the inquiry" (Bray et al., 2000, p. 111). To this end as a team we took time at the beginning of each meeting to share both personal and professional "happenings", concerns and joys apart from the research project over afternoon tea. We took time-out where we met socially away from the research meeting venue. "Time spent socialising apart from the inquiry contributes to fuller participation within the inquiry" (Bray et al., 2000, p. 111). As these bonding activities took place we came to understand one another as people with aspirations, struggles, hopes and dreams; and, as the reader(s) will find in the later meetings analysed in this chapter, our analytic discussions became more reflective, critical and in-depth. We were conducting research on a more holistic level, trying to understand one another and develop relationships. We were researching "as if people were human" (Rowan, 2006, p. 114) and we were not standing behind roles of researcher/researched; knower/ignorant; university facilitator/educator. I believe as we grew to know one another on a more personal level our commitment to one another, and therefore the research project, became deeper and stronger allowing each of us to speak more freely and take more risks within the research group. This will become apparent to the reader(s) as the cycles unfold.

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: CYCLE TWO

Data from meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) and journal entries of cycle two are offered for analysis. These data continue to demonstrate the difficulties of action research and further exemplify how the research team developed collaboratively, which is highlighted in the second research question. The data also show that it is pedagogically difficult to challenge taken-for-granted societal assumptions that may be entrenched at a subconscious level.

Cycle Two: Plans going awry, critical self-reflection and critical discussion moments missed

Journal entry (Friday, week two of the action research phase): The team decided to view Preschool A's storytimes first and provide feedback and then view

Preschool B's storytimes followed by feedback. Again there was concern that not a great deal of discussion was being generated. Lisa began our analysis by reflecting on her own practice. Lisa was disappointed that when reading *The Paper Bag Princess* she didn't challenge the preschoolers' opinions that outward appearance is most important. She also forgot to use guided questions. During the reading of *Princess Smartypants* Kate picked up that Lisa had inadvertently referred to the character as "nasty and bossy".

> Lisa: *Mmm, still not getting good discussion going. I could have really developed a more critical discussion on the importance of outward appearance. The preschoolers were so adamant that prettiness and beautiful clothes make for a good person. I really should've challenged that more directly to get them thinking. Yeah. Forgot about the guided questions too* [pause]. *That would've helped.*
>
> Karen: *Yeah, I think a few guided questions or even comments to flag the gender issue would've alerted the children to what they could be looking for as you read the story.*
>
> Kate: *Did anyone pick up right at the beginning of* Princess Smartypants *that Lisa referred to her as "nasty and bossy"?* [Said with a giggle].
>
> Lisa: *Did I?* [Shocked].
>
> Kate: *Yeah, right at the beginning when she was getting rid of the first prince.*

Journal entry (Friday, week two of the action research phase): The tape was re-wound and re-played to reveal that Lisa did indeed say in an off-hand manner, "*Well that's nasty. . . . She's being a bit bossy*" and then continue reading. This amused Kate. However, Lisa was distraught.

> Kate: *That's hilarious!*
>
> Lisa: *I can't believe I said that* [pause]. *It just came out, I didn't even realise. I was trying to get across that women can be assertive and self-assured and I called her "nasty and bossy"! I must think that deep down! Assertive women are bossy! No, I'm sure I don't. I don't know where that came from.*
>
> Pippa: *Lisa, we didn't even pick it up at first; except Kate. It's fine* [pause]. *The kids didn't even react.*

Lisa: *I know. Which goes to prove that there's no discussion happening here! What a disaster!*

Kate: *Oh, Lisa, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to make you upset. I just thought it was funny calling her "nasty and bossy" when you were trying to get the opposite message across. Freudian slips happen all the time.*

Lisa: *Exactly, that's why I feel bad; 'cos maybe subconsciously I think that.*

Kate: *Oh, I didn't mean Freudian slips* [pause]. *I meant* [pause], *you know* [pause], *we all say things we don't mean in the heat of the moment. You know, you were trying to juggle classroom management and still keep kids on track; you know involved with the story.*

Karen: *It's okay; little slips up happen. It's good to know that, because now we can be very aware of our thought processes and the way we use words especially adjectives to convey our messages.*

Kate: *No, Lisa, I truly am sorry. I didn't react very empathetically. I should've considered your feelings in the way I brought it up. It's just my warped sense of humour but I forgot our philosophy of empathy.*

Lisa: *No, it's good that you brought it up. I need to be aware of my subconscious thoughts coming through, if that's what they are.*

Kate: *Yeah, but the way I talked about* [pause]*; the way I laughed* [pause]*; no I shouldn't 've made it seem like a joke. It's not; and this is hard* [pause]. *Of all people I should've been more empathetic. I don't like looking at myself on the video. I didn't mean to make it a joke.*

Lisa: *Kate, it's okay. Really.*

Reflective analysis:

   This meeting, like the first, was also emotionally charged with co-researchers quite aware of the "feelings" of other team members: *I didn't react very empathetically. I should've considered your feelings in the way I brought it up* (Kate). Kate drew on our team's "research constitution" of empathy in an effort to support Lisa. This highlights the importance of creating such a research constitution during the orientation phase. This vignette, also, emphasises the difficulty in challenging hegemonic, taken-for-granted societal assumptions and stereotypes that are ingrained in one's subconscious (Ayers, 2004). Lisa, herself, was not sure why she had referred to the assertive Princess Smartypants as "nasty" and "bossy".

> Lisa did not want to admit that perhaps on a subliminal level she believed assertive women to be nasty and bossy and contended that she did not "know where that came from." However, gender and how one defines and assumes the characteristics of gender are socially and culturally constructed (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu, 2008). This highlights the importance of critically reflecting on and examining one's own beliefs and assumptions as these will impact on what one teaches, how one teaches and what perceptions one imparts on one's students (Killen, 2033). Therefore it is crucial that educators "confront their own prejudices from the outset" (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2008, p. 54). This research project constantly required all team members to reflect on and confront personal beliefs, assumptions, values and prejudices.

Journal entry (Friday, week two of the action research phase): On further reflection Lisa was especially disappointed that she did not attend to Reggie's comment that Princess Smartypants should turn Prince Swashbuckle into a knight "*and then he could save her.*"

> Shelley: *I wonder why Reggie thought that this strong, assertive woman needed saving?*
>
> Lisa: *I wish I'd gone there; it was such a passing remark. And you could see that other kids spoke over the top of him and I turned my attention to them. I realise now that his remark was the one that sparked the whole 'only boys save' thing.*

> Reflective analysis:
>
> Again, the complexity of challenging ingrained societal assumptions is highlighted in the above vignette. Was it easier for Lisa to attend to classroom behaviour rather than address and challenge a student's belief that women need "saving"? Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002) found that many teachers new to critically exploring children's literature (which they referred to as critical literacy) were uncomfortable in opening up classroom space for this type of discussion.

Journal entry (Monday, week two of the action research phase): Preschool A boys became very heated in a one sided discussion that strongly stated "*only boys can save*" (Harley). Why didn't the girls rebuke?

Kate: *What surprises me is the girls' passive silence.*

Pippa/Shelley: *Mmm.*

Karen: *Yeah, I was too; but I think that they got to thinking over the next storytime session when they examined* The Paper Bag Princess *because there was a heated discussion at morning tea time where Colin announced "Boys are braver than girls" and the girls pounced, especially Ella.*

Lisa: *Yeah this resulted in a "boys against girls" yelling competition until I had to step in and ask for inside voices. The "debate" ended.*

Pippa: *But this strong belief of the boys that, you know, only boys can save is beginning to waver. Dave, who up until very recently was all 'only boys can be brave and strong' is now "oh yeah, girls can be brave" and a lot of the other boys are saying similar things. Even Colin said, rolling his eyes mind you, "yeah, yeah, girls can save boys." And I think that's directly the result of reading these two books.*

> Reflective analysis:
>
> What did the girl's initial passive silence tell us? Why did Colin roll his eyes: was it conceding or condescending? Nevertheless, it can be seen that Preschool A's critical discussions are actually developing and the gendered stance that boys are braver and stronger is beginning to be challenged. However, it was clear that for the most part the responses of children from preschool A to *The Paper Bag Princess* were similar to those of children from preschool B during the initial conversations regarding the same text: males save/females need saving; physical appearance is important; princesses (girls) should get married (despite the fact that they may not wish to be married). Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2004) attest that children's critical thinking skills must be developed to identify and challenge stereotypical images of not only gender but also race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, class, age and physical appearance. As can be seen in the analysis of critical meetings that follow this cycle this research project attended to Derman-Sparks and Ramsey's imperative.

The meeting then turned its attention to preschool B's storytime sessions.

> Kate: *Sorry that we didn't stick to plan and read, um, um*
>
> Shelley: *Fairytales and* Princess Smartypants.
>
> Kate: *Yeah. Sorry but we've had a hell of a couple of weeks with our new enrolment, little Edward. I don't like labels and Shelley and I avoid them but; we're not sure, but he's showing definite signs of ADHD* [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder]. *Can't sit still, no attention span, very loud, a bit aggressive. I don't think he means to be aggressive, he's just bombastic and other kids get in his way. We're looking for ways to help him settle in and feel part of the group. So we thought it might help everyone if we read* Marty and Mei Ling *because, without explicitly saying so, it looks at a boy who also shows signs of ADHD. But it also focuses on diversity and difference through exploring racial difference.*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, but we'd like to go back to the gender issue later in the term and do* Princess Smartypants *and* Snow White *then.*
>
> Lisa: *Oh. I was looking forward to comparing our kids' responses.*
>
> Pippa: *Hey but that's okay. What's going on in your own preschool is really important.*
>
> Karen: *Of course, that's right Pip. You guy's really do have your hands full, and you're both so patient.*

Journal entry (Friday, week two of the action research phase): For a while the meeting turned its discussion to effective and respectful strategies for helping children who show signs of ADHD. After a while I steered the meeting back to the job at hand. I was really disappointed that Kate and Shelley didn't keep to the plan.

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette and journal entry show the *messiness* of participatory action research (Bray et al., 2000; Marshall et al., 1998). Meeting discussions often diverged from the research issues; plans were not fulfilled; and individual agendas impacted on the research project. All this can create a messy feel to the research project. It is interesting to note that in the meeting I stated that I supported Kate and Shelley's change of plans; however, in my journal I disclose my disappointment. It is

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clear that I was concerned by the messiness which I discuss in the following chapter.

It is with great discomfort that I now recognise that my desire to keep to the "plan" went against the ethos of action research that seeks to improve the lived experiences of the participants in their specific contexts. This may require diverging from plans or even changing plans altogether (McIntyre, 2008). Also, due to my discomfort, the research team missed an opportunity to explore more deeply how we could employ children's literature to celebrate and respect the difference of (dis)ability (which in this instance involved a child who possibly had ADHD). This was only week two of the action research phase and I had a lot to learn. Thankfully the preschoolers' responses to (dis)ability allowed the study to explore this theme more deeply during the latter weeks of the project.

Journal entry (Thursday, week two of the action research phase): Preschool B group was hard to settle at the beginning of storytime due to a number of children who displayed signs of behavioural and learning challenges (Mark and Edward in particular). However, at times due to classroom management, the discussion went so far off track that the children forgot that they were engaging in storytime and began crawling around the floor. Tilly, who usually enjoys storytime, made the impatient comment "*can you just turn the page*?!"

> Lisa: *This is a great book to highlight difference and diversity.*
> Kate: *Yeah, but I don't think the message got through to the kids.*
> Karen: *You're probably right, Kate. Again maybe using guided questions or comments* [pause], *you know, flagging difference and diversity at the beginning of the session to orientate the children could've helped. You talked about feelings of being alone but you really didn't explain or discuss why Mei Ling felt alone: you know… her racial difference made her feel excluded. I don't think this was made clear; and with your little ones, because they're a bit younger than Lisa and Pip's, maybe things* [pause], *um, you know, the social justice issues, need to be made really explicit.*

Journal entry (Friday, week two of the action research phase): Again Kate and Shelley did not stick to the plan! Aargh! Instead of reading either *Snow White* or

Princess Smartypants, the book T*he Ripe Red Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear* was treated. When viewing the videotaped footage Kate was surprised that she didn't attend to Mark's comment "*Kill him! Kill him!*" She felt that she missed a good opportunity to discuss peaceful practices and sharing.

> Kate: *I nearly fell off the chair when I heard Mark say "Kill him! Kill him!" just then on the videotape. I can't understand how I didn't hear that when I was reading, it was so loud and hostile on the video! I really should've attended to that. That was said with such venom. Again I could have talked about peaceful practices and you know* [pause] *sharing.*

Reflective analysis:

Similar to last week there were quite a few openings for critical discussion that were lost during all storytime sessions this week. Also there were a lot of yes/no questions asked which did not encourage further discussion. In addition the action plan to begin each storytime session with guided questioning/comment did not eventuate. However, on reflection of my journal and my monologue (perhaps lecture is a better word) seen in the above vignette it is apparent that plans going awry and the messiness of participatory action research was beginning to become a strain on my countenance. I reverted to my comfort zone of university lecturer and the "bearer of knowledge" which was never my intent and went against our research philosophy and constitution. It was not until writing up this dissertation that I feel strangely uncomfortable with this piece of data. Did my discourse try to assert a certain authority over my co-researchers? Was I trying to "put them in their place" and "get the job done" *my* way? This is discussed further in the following chapter.

It is evident in the above vignettes that Lisa and Kate, who were new to critically exploring children's literature in their classrooms, were having difficulty generating discussion regarding the social justice issues raised in the texts and challenging the preschoolers' stereotypical assumptions. As noted previously, Lewison et al. (2002) drew similar findings from their study. Clarke (2005) contends that it is much easier and safer to ignore issues regarding difference, diversity and social justice in the classroom. However, "uncomfortable terrain is not a reason to avoid a journey, but rather a reason to keep going and try new routes to achieve a

desired destination" (Clarke, 2005, p. 156). Therefore the research team forged ahead and looked for strategies that would generate critical discussion in the preschool classrooms and assist in teaching for social justice.

Meeting minutes written as notes: Our plan of action for week three addressed the following questions that were raised during this meeting: How could we promote more classroom discussion? How can we be better listeners to our preschoolers? What picture books should be chosen? The following strategies and plan of action were proposed:

- Listen more attentively to all children's comments. Pippa and Shelley to help in this regard. They will alert Lisa and Kate to pertinent comments that may have gone unnoticed; and they will alert Lisa and Kate to children who may have had their hand up to speak but who have been overlooked (proposed by Kate).

- Orientate the children through guided and open-ended questions before reading the text (proposed by Lisa).

- Higher order, open-ended questions still needed (proposed by Karen).

- Endeavour to treat texts agreed upon (proposed by Lisa).

- To examine the stereotype that girls can not be strong and courageous Lisa and Pippa would like to continue with the fairytale theme by sharing with their preschoolers the text *Cinderella* and then counter this with *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door*.

- Kate and Shelley would like to continue examining racial difference and diversity by reading either *The Kinder Hat* (which is not very explicit and only highlights difference through illustrations) or *Let's Eat*. A non-critical text will be accessed next week.

- At our next meeting we will reflect on the quality and validity of our research project so far (proposed by Karen).

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: CYCLE THREE

Data from meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) and journal entries from cycle three are offered for analysis as this cycle appeared to be a turning point for the research project. The data present an initial conversation that encouraged us

to challenge our assumptions regarding critical and non-critical texts; it shows that co-researchers were actively listening to their preschoolers and responding with learning strategies to address taken-for-granted assumptions of the preschoolers; it displays the co-researchers as self-critical and self-reflective; and it highlights, through the actions of the preschoolers, that transformational learning may have taken place. This data goes a long way in addressing the second research question.

Cycle Three: Critical self-reflection; assumptions challenged; specific strategies used to encourage deep critical discussion; evidence of transformational learning taking place

Journal entry (Friday, week three of the action research phase): The research team reflected on the non-critical texts read to the preschool groups over the last three weeks and found that they did encourage, or could have encouraged, critical reflection. This led us to question our position on non-critical texts. Firstly we believed that we were naïve in thinking that traditional fairytales like *Snow White* and *Cinderella* are not critical texts, as they conceptualise women in stereotypical roles.

> Lisa: *You know* Cinderella *got some really good discussion going this week and it really brought home what the preschoolers think about the importance of physical appearance. And looking back on what I could've done with* Snow White*. I really think that these books are critical.*
>
> Karen: *Absolutely!*
>
> Kate: *I've been thinking that too. These women are portrayed as subservient, inept, and needy.*
>
> Pippa: *You know what I've always hated about these books is that syrupy politeness is considered okay; that women should be sweet, cute, sooo polite. It's sickening.*
>
> Sandra: *And that their so called feminine features. You know their soft skin, red lips, beautiful face, tiny feet, are their only characteristics of significance.*
>
> Karen: *I agree wholeheartedly. Maybe we were a bit naïve* [pause] *maybe a lot naïve, to think of these texts as non-critical.*
>
> Shelley: *Well, yeah. I mean this* [research] *is all about challenging stereotypes and don't these books, stories, um, perpetuate the stereotypical*

image of women? Weren't we going to challenge this?

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Reflective analysis:

    We reconsidered our assumptions regarding critical and non-critical texts. Firstly, we revised our conjecture that fairytales could be considered non-critical texts and now identified that these texts were indeed critical texts and their stereotypical gender messages must be challenged. Indeed, Johnson (2006) notes that fairytales "have become pervasive cultural paradigms, artistic images that remain with us as we grow, and which, as many critics have observed, affect in diverse ways how boys and girls think about their life options" (p. 488). Secondly, the non-critical texts that we thought quite mundane had the potential for encouraging critical examination. We found, as Watson (in Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006) concluded, that books can include stereotypical material and/or can expose children to misinformation about themselves and others; therefore teachers should draw attention to the books' flaws to encourage children's critical thinking.

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Kate: *And* [pause]. *You know* [pause]. *I thought* Nicketty, Nacketty [Noo Noo Noo] *would have to be the most non-critical book ever written. Until now I've never taken the text seriously. When Calissa said the little wee woman should kiss and cuddle the ogre who'd just kidnapped her and was forcing her to cook for him and be really nice to him so that he might be nice back to her… well it raised so many issues. We explored the human rights issue of holding people against their will; we explored self respect and integrity. It's not a non-critical text!*

Sandra: *The way I look at it, it seems just about every picture book has the potential for critical examination.*

Pippa: *Mmm, what about this* [reaching over to the book shelf and holding up a board book titled *My First ABC*].

The team examined the text to discover that only White children were depicted in the text.

Sandra: *Mmm, so only White children have the privilege of learning the alphabet?*

Pippa: *Yeah* [pause] *by leaving out certain people* [pause]*, yeah.*

Lisa: *It negates them!*

Kate: *True. It's not necessarily who's in the books that's the issue; but who's left out of the books.*

Shelley: *And it's usually the kids with coloured skin or the kid in a wheelchair.*

Lisa: *So we really should be aware of this when we're reading to the preschoolers. If a book does exclude certain people we should really bring this up, don't you think?*

Kate: *Yeah, or choose books that don't exclude people. Choose books that go out of their way to be inclusive of many cultures and, you know, celebrate difference.*

Reflective analysis:

It is not necessarily those who are portrayed in the children's literature that are concern for teachers who wish to teach for social justice but those who are left out. Omitting different races, cultures, genders, ages, and abilities tells the reader, perhaps on a subliminal level, that these people are not valued (Stephens, 1992).

The meeting then turned to preschool A's storytime sessions for the week and Lisa explained to the team that she had been concerned by many children's responses to the story *Cinderella* that placed great importance on Cinderella's appearance.

Lisa: *I was really surprised by the preschoolers' responses to* Cinderella*. You saw yourselves* [pause] *most of them said that it was important to have beautiful clothes. People who wear beautiful clothes are nice. Melinda said "I like her better in her beautiful clothes. Beautiful clothes are important".*

Karen: *Well, yeah, that's not unlike Kate and Shelley's preschoolers' comments in the initial conversations last term. Most of them said that the nicer, kinder, better princess would be the one in the beautiful gown, even though she was the same person. So the preschoolers really concentrate on the importance of outward appearance.*

> Reflective analysis:
>
> In her study Clarke (2005) found that fifth grade students, through examining teen magazines, concluded that the "perfect girl" needs make-up, shoes, lovely hair and beautiful clothes. No student mentioned the need for any inner quality such as honesty, kindness, bravery or trustworthiness. There is little doubt that the media and societal assumptions have also influenced the preschoolers involved in this study to conclude that 'clothes make the woman' and "*beautiful clothes are important*".

Kate: *Yeah, but Lisa you were getting some good discussion going.*

Shelley: *Yeah, even though most of the kids were saying things like "it's important to have nice clothes" they were at least talking and discussing. That's the most discussion we've had!*

> Reflective analysis:
>
> By revisiting the issue of the importance or otherwise of outward appearance Preschool A was beginning to develop thought processes and discussion. It appears that an issue needs to be raised and developed using more than simply one storytime session. Watson (in Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006) contends that "one book, even if excellent, can never depict the diversity within a group, so a range of stories and images are always necessary" (p. 151). This is especially apparent for preschool children. Also, the social justice issues raised in the children's literature may be enhanced by employing further strategies as outlined in the following vignette.

Karen: *Well, what happened next was very exciting. Lisa, it was your idea so you explain.*

Lisa: *Well, instead of keeping to the plan of reading* Esmeralda and the Children Next Door, *Pip, Karen and I decided to challenge their* [the preschoolers'] *assumptions that outward appearance is so important and defines a person. So the next day we "dressed down" and wore old jeans and torn shirts and observed the children's reactions. Naturally they were a bit puzzled but many kids treated us very differently.*

Pippa: *Yeah, they didn't even speak normally to me and normally they want*

me to help with games and jigsaws but not then.

Karen: *It could've been that they didn't know what was going on and what to expect; but it was a really good exercise and got some great discussion. Oh Lisa should explain.*

Lisa: *So in place of normal storytime we talked about how we felt when the preschoolers acted differently towards us just because we were dressed rather scruffy and we revisited the texts* Snow White, The Paper Bag Princess *and* Cinderella, *and discussed appearance.*

Journal entry (Friday, week three of the action research phase): During our "scruffy dress" discussion the preschoolers' began to understand that stereotyping people because of how they dress can be unjust, cause tension and make others feel "less". Every child in the class participated in these critical discussions and Carryn suggested that the preschoolers donate their outgrown clothing and toys to those less fortunate. Ella's comment came towards the end of the storytime session and was quite poignant: "*It doesn't matter what you look like; it's what's in your heart that matters.*" This comment prompted a discussion on kindness and caring.

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Reflective analysis:

Through direct instruction that highlighted that unfair behaviours hurt others, the preschoolers were encouraged to challenge their preconceived assumptions and motivated to action. As Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) assert children must be guided in the development of their cognitive skills to identify stereotypes, comments and behaviours directed at one's own or others' identities and also be guided in developing "emotional empathy to know that bias hurts" (p. 5). Through discussion the preschoolers were guided to develop the cognitive reasoning that outward appearance is not as important as kindness, caring and compassion and were led to act empathetically towards others less fortunate.

</div>

Shelley: *Wow, great discussion.*

Kate: *Yep in- depth and critical.*

Sandra: *Yes, I told the girls on Tuesday how impressed I was. I could see and hear from my little office. The real life experience really helped the kiddies understand the **unimportance** of outward appearance. I loved Ella's*

comment toward the end "It's what's in your heart that matters".

Shelley: *And that was a lovely idea to send the letter home asking for outgrown clothes and toys* [See Appendix H].

Kate: *What's more it came from the kids themselves. Have you had much response?*

Pippa: *Heaps! We'll need some help getting all the stuff to a charity!*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette is included to show that the team was developing empathetic support for one another and offering positive feedback on the videotaped storytime sessions.

Journal entry (Thursday, week three of the action research phase): Before reading *Nicketty Nacketty Noo Noo Noo* Kate asked the children *"to watch to see how people are treating one another in the story; is it kind or unkind? Would you like a friend like the ogre? Maybe there are other ways the characters in the story could have acted towards one another?"* Kate skillfully revisited these guided questions after reading the story which sparked a good deal of rich discussion.

Sandra: *Great focusing there Kate.*

Karen: *Yes, really good guided questions to orientate the session. And what's more you revisited them after the reading.*

Kate: *Yeah, I was please with the discussion the guided questions generated. Finally got some in-depth discussion going.*

Reflective analysis:

The research team decided upon using a guided comment/questioning technique to orientate the preschoolers to the social justice issues raised in the children's literature and introduce the picture book. It springs from the Shared Reading and Guided Reading techniques that are used in many early childhood classrooms where students are orientated to the text that is read to the whole class group by examining the front cover of the picture book and predicting the story (Winch & Holliday, 2006). We extended the prediction of the story to include comments and/or questions that would alert the preschoolers to the social justice

issues that were highlighted in the picture books. This technique proved to be successful as much discussion was generated during Preschool B's storytime session when Kate employed its use for the first time when reading *Nicketty Nacketty Noo Noo Noo*.

Journal entry (Thursday, week three of the action research phase): Kate and the preschoolers assisted us [the research team] in realising that *Nicketty Nacketty Noo Noo Noo* is definitely not a non-critical text. The text encouraged discussion on human rights, self respect and peaceful conflict resolution.

> Kate: *I guess I gave it away before when I was talking about this book; but it's not a non-critical text. You saw just then on the video, the preschoolers, because of Calissa's comment, got right into the issues of human rights and self respect. And wasn't it great to see Ryan talking about peaceful conflict resolution?*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, I would've liked to hear what Mark would've said, but he was away.*
>
> Lisa: *Shelley, you said that we got the best discussion going that we've had; but so did you guys. That was in-depth discussion. I wish I'd remembered the guided questioning strategy 'cos that really worked. They* [the preschoolers] *got right into talking about kindness and caring and friendship and treating people with respect.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette reinforces what has been discussed previously: all texts have the potential for critical examination and therefore may be considered critical texts; it is important to listen carefully and critically to preschoolers' responses; guided comments and/or questions that orientate the preschoolers to the social justice issues raised in the picture books and introduce the text encourage rich, in-depth discussion.

Journal entry (Friday, week three of the action research phase): The videotaped footage of the storytime session exploring *Let's Eat* shows that the children were engaged from the start. Kate again used guided questions to focus and

orientate the children: *"While you're looking and listening to this story let's think about what things are different to your family and what things are the same?"*

> Lisa: *Guided questions really help with discussion. I was impressed to hear Kirra talking about her family while you were reading and relating events to her own life. She's sometimes hard to engage I think.*
>
> Kate: *She is at times* [pause] *she's young; not four yet; but this text really spoke to her. Maybe it was the guided question; maybe it was just the opening she needed to engage, you know, relate the story back to what's important to her: her family.*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, I thought it was cute when Jedda related the foods back to the food she likes: tacos.*
>
> Pippa: *But what about Henry: "Yuck, I don't" and he'd never tried them!*
>
> Karen: *Yes, and that was very skillful of you Kate, to initiate that discussion on getting to know something before you make a hasty decision. It was great that you extended the discussion to include people and places as well. Somewhat along the same lines as what Lisa and Pippa have been talking about with their preschoolers this week.*
>
> Lisa: *Yeah… getting back to the food topic. I noticed quite a few children pulling* [disdainful] *faces when the Spanish food was mentioned and saying "yuck".*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, but did you notice that as the story and the discussion progressed the face pulling and the remarks got less and less. And it was interesting but when Kate turned back the pages for clarification* [pause] *I think it was Kirra who kept asking what was going on and how come someone wasn't at the table. That really sparked more discussion.*
>
> Lisa: *Yeah, that's true. You could see the kids become really interested when the pages were turned back.*
>
> Karen: *There's been some really indepth discussions going on with the preschoolers this week.*
>
> Sandra: *Yes girls, this is shaping up to be a good week.*

Reflective analysis:

> The above vignette again highlights the success of using guided questions

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and/or comments to orientate the storytime session. It is noted that the picture book *Let's Eat* is very explicit in its multicultural message of highlighting that while there are cultural differences there are similarities in all cultures. This explicit message was flagged by Kate's guided questions; however, the picture book encouraged rich discussion, especially from the younger members of the preschool group. This prompted the team to consider that picture books that highlight social justice issues very explicitly are more appropriate for this preschool age group. The preschoolers were especially interested to re-visit certain pages for clarification and this became a recurring strategy to assist the preschoolers' understandings of the social justice issues embedded within the texts. The text also encouraged dramatic multi-cultural play whereby a few preschoolers, who had originally pulled faces showing disdain at the mention of Spanish food, began "cooking" a Spanish feast and held a Spanish "picnic" (see photographs 8.1a and 8.1b).

Photograph 8.1a   Photograph 8.1b

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.

Kate and Shelley (quoting from their journal notes from week three of the action research phase) explained that the phrase "aye que pena" was very popular at the preschool for a few days.

Kate: *Shelley and I brought along our journals to share with you how much the kids loved using the phrase "aye que pene". We were taken by them saying it just after we read the story so we decided to use a tally to see if it would keep going and how many times. I've got 21 and that's only since last Friday; and how many did you get, Shelley?*

Shelley: *Twenty seven but some may overlap. But it shows you how this text*

interested the children that they would even remember the Spanish phrase.

Karen: *Did you jot down who was saying it?*

Kate: *No, we just didn't have the time. But from memory it was a good number, not just one or two. I can remember Calissa, Jedda, Kirra, Laura* [pause] *um Caddy* [pause], *um.*

Shelley: *Don and Henry were saying it too. Oh and Tilly.*

Karen: *That's actually quite pleasing, because I noticed in the video that Henry pulled a face that encouraged Tilly to also, on the first couple of times that the phrase was read during the session.*

Reflective analysis:

This seemingly simple picture book *Let's Eat* was important to our study. At first glance it can be seen that, yes, it engaged very young children and encouraged them in their understandings of multiculturalism. However, it became much more. According to Johnston (2006) the way teachers use literature in their classrooms can give children the space to grow and teachers the grace to let them. "We can perform, try on roles, engage with language not our own, and engage with new ways of using language, and indeed new languages. [Therefore] literacy becomes, appropriately in a postmodern age, multi-active, multipurpose, and multidimensional" (Johnston, 2006, p. 559).

Following the viewing of the videotaped storytime sessions for week three the team reflected on the research journey so far. It examined its own practice using Reason and Bradbury's (2006) issues of quality and validity for action research.

Research team's reflection on its practice

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence

Are ideas emerging that will help us to continue to explore how children's literature impacts on our preschoolers to teach for social justice in the future?

Journal entry (Friday, week three of the action research phase): This week seemed to be a significant week for the study. Lisa and Kate were feeling much more confident in front of the camera and not as concerned about having their practice scrutinised by our supportive group. We have decided that all texts may be regarded as potentially critical texts. Co-researchers were actively listening to children's

comments and encouraging discussion from them using higher order and open-ended questioning techniques. Guided questions were used effectively. Class group discussions were becoming more rich, in-depth and critical.

Sandra: *Well, this week seems to be very encouraging for our study. Good classroom discussion has begun. It's been quite rich and in-depth and reflective. You've been actively listening to the preschoolers and encouraging discussion using guided questioning techniques*

Lisa: *Not so much me* [pause]. *But I can see how valuable the strategy is and I'm going to use it next storytime.*

Karen: *But you **have** used higher order and more open-ended questions this week, Lisa, and that's also encouraging critical discussion.*

Lisa: *Yeah, Karen, I've felt a lot more confident this week, more organised maybe. And I don't mind so much seeing myself on video.*

Kate: *I feel the same. It's been a good week. It sort of clicked for me* [pause] *using the guided questions has really helped me get the discussion going and now I don't feel like I'm failing.*

Karen: *Oh Kate* [pause] *there's no failing here.*

Kate: *Yeah, but you know what I mean.*

Lisa: *I do* [pause] *the whole point was to get the children talking and up to now it wasn't happening. I feel like we've broken through somehow.*

Kate: *Agreed. And we now see that all books have the potential for critical examination.*

Shelley: *And that fairytales like* Cinderella, Snow White *and* Sleeping Beauty *are definitely critical books and their stereotypical gender messages should be challenged.*

Reflective analysis:

The above journal entry and vignette show that although co-researchers felt discouraged during the first two cycles of the action research phase they now considered the study to be moving ahead and strategies that were put into place to encourage more critical storytime discussion were beginning to develop success. This cycle appears to be a turning point for the study and mirrors other action

> research investigations that also began tentatively (Bray et al., 2000; Marshall et al., 1998).

Issues of outcomes and practice

Are we developing a critical and self-critical understanding of our situations? Is this research project assisting us to transform ourselves, our teaching practices and our preschool settings? If yes: how and in what why? If no: how can we improve this?

> Kate: *I was shocked at my nervousness over the last couple of weeks and didn't want to feel like that again. It's like we're on show. Naked for all the world to see!*
>
> Lisa: *I totally know what you mean, Kate. I think that's why this week's been a bit of a turn-around; because I wasn't organised and I wasn't using the strategies that we'd talked about. But I did feel better watching the footage this week because I was more organised and I was trying to use open-ended questions and really trying to actively listen and respond to the preschoolers' responses; still forgot the guided questioning, though.*
>
> Karen: *But this is good because you **are** being self-critical to improve your practices.*

> Reflective analysis:
>
> All co-researchers agreed that the first couple of weeks of the action research phase were at times a little uncomfortable. The women in McIntyre's (2008) participatory action research project felt similarly challenged and interestingly made the comment "baring our souls for all to see" (p. 18) which closely resembles Kate's comment "it's like we're on show. Naked for all the world to see". Participatory action research is not an easy task. As in McIntyre's (2008) study the co-researchers "allowed themselves to be vulnerable in front of others" (p. 20) and as a result of working through the self-consciousness and discomfort and calling upon our research philosophical framework, we developed and co-constructed the skills and knowledge that would assist us in transforming ourselves, our teaching practices and our preschool settings.

> Shelley: *It was tough at the start, though. I really was out of my comfort zone*

because I've never had to scrutinse someone else's work, especially Kate's.

Pippa: *Yeah, I'd rather have someone examine **my** work than me examine someone else's. To be truthful I pulled back from discussing the first week's storytime because I'd never want to hurt anyone, especially Lisa and Kate.*

Kate: *I sort of got that, Pip. I think we were all a bit that way, especially that first week. But, you know, when all the stuff that we'd talked about last term kicked in: caring, empathy, trust, support, love, you know, we seemed to move forward.*

Shelley: *Yeah, I don't feel as anxious and I'm learning to examine teaching strategies, not Kate or Lisa, if you know what I mean.*

Pippa: *Yeah, it's not personal.*

Sandra: *It's difficult to be critical, but constructive criticism really means that you need to be firstly critical of yourself and what you're going to say and how this might impact on the person and the team. So you chose your words to address the practice, and not the person, in a constructive, empathetic and supportive way.*

Kate: *Definitely. And our little group* [pause] *well, I think it's a safe place now. It's* [pause] *it's just not as scary as it was a couple of weeks ago. And it's so good to be talking about these social justice issues, you know?*

Pippa: *Absolutely.*

Lisa: *This* [the research project] *isn't just bettering my practice in the hope of improving my preschoolers' understandings of the social justice issues that we're talking about; it's making me think about my stance on these issues.*

Kate: *Yeah, it* [the research project] *really makes me stop and think, "Now how am I going to respond to say, Calissa's comment on 'just kiss the ogre and everything'll be okay'?" Up 'til now I probably would've thought, "oh, that's cute" and glossed over it. It's* [the research project] *really making me think and listen to my preschoolers more actively and critically. And I think that I'm responding more authentically, you know, really getting to the heart of what they're saying and not just the superficial stuff.*

Lisa: *You know, I'm doing that in my everyday dealings with people.*

Reflective analysis:

The research project was not only impacting on how each team member

reflected on practice but also on her own life, beliefs and relationships. The above vignettes reveal reflections that were quite candid and were signs that we did indeed trust and empathise with one another. These reflections bear out Park's (2006) understandings that

> Interpretive knowledge, when applied to human situations, has the potential for bringing people together in empathy and making it possible for them to know one another as human beings affectively, as well as cognitively, which constitutes relational knowledge. In everyday usage, when we say we know someone, we mean this in a very different sense from knowing a fact or theory, or knowing right from wrong; it has a distinctively relational meaning. In participatory research, this kind of knowing plays an important role in strengthening community… And more broadly, the spirit of 'deep participation' that Reason (1994) situates in human inquiry shares much in common with this notion of relational knowledge. (p. 86)

Indeed, the interpretations that we were making to co-construct our knowledge and improve pedagogy in the preschool contexts were bringing us together in empathy and helping us to know one another affectively.

Karen: *I was initially worried that this research would add stress to all of you, but now I feel that we're really melding as a team and can honestly and trustingly "lean on" one another for both constructive feedback and support. It's also great to see the preschoolers driving us to reach for 'bigger and better' strategies to teach for social justice.*

Sandra: *Karen, we're early childhood educators; it's our business to be stressed. But yes, I agree and I think we all feel that we have support in this group.*

Kate: *It is stressful looking critically at our practices, but it's worth it and I feel we're getting somewhere; we're getting discussion going and we know where we're headed.*

Lisa: *And like Karen said we're listening to the preschoolers and letting them drive us.*

Reflective analysis:

Analysis of the first two cycles reveals that not a great deal of transformative action was occurring. However, critical self-reflection on the part of co-researchers was evident. This critical reflection led to improved practice during the third cycle of

the action research phase of the study. Strategies were put into place and finally acted upon during this cycle. Critical self-reflection is not an easy task. McIntyre (2008) contends

> Self-reflection, in conjunction with investigation, critical questioning, dialogue, generative activities, and a determination to take action about issues under exploration, contributes to the development of a project that is judged not against the criterion of an objective truth but against the criterion of whether the people involved are better off because of their experiences as participants in a PAR project. (p. 62)

From the above vignettes it is understood that this research project was transforming not only the co-researchers' pedagogy but also our personal lives in a positive way. Therefore, it was identified that the project was beginning to improve our professional and personal lives and we were, indeed "better off" because of our experiences as participants in this participatory action research project.

Issues of significance

Is our analysis of each storytime session of significance to each setting? How, why and could we improve? Is the research project still important to you? If not, why not and how can we help?

A unanimous response of support for the research project met these questions. Each team member felt that the research project was still of great importance to her and each preschool setting. Lisa summed up the consensus of the group:

Lisa: *Our storytime analysis is driven by what our preschoolers are saying. That has to be of significance to us!*

Reflective analysis:

It is worthy to note here that the co-researchers claimed that the project was significant because the data gathered and analysed were effecting change in the preschool settings and this change was driven by the preschoolers' responses. The preschoolers and their understandings were pivotal to the research and the outcomes of the research project. Dahlberg and Moss (2005), Rinaldi (2005) and more recently Egan (2009) advocate a *listening pedagogy* whereby educators pay close attention to the constructs and concerns that engross young children. The educators as co-

researchers in this research project embraced this pedagogy and developed it during the course of the research project.

As can be seen by the data presented and analysed in the first two cycles developing a listening pedagogy is not an easy task. Listening requires effort, attention and awareness. Kate's admission that she would, prior to this study, simply think Calissa's self effacing comment as "cute" is testament to this fact. However, by critically listening to Calissa's comment and engaging in dialogue that might challenge this stereotypical thinking Kate supported, not only Calissa's but, the whole group's critical thinking and the development of their understandings of social justice and human dignity issues. As Egan (2009) suggests, "a listening pedagogy that both respects children's capabilities and rights and supports their learning in the most effective and beneficial manner is being increasingly recognized as fundamental to good practice in early years education" (p. 55).

Issues of relational practice

Do you feel an equal co-researcher? Do you feel invigorated and empowered? Are we developing critical consciousness that engenders new insights into our situations? If so: what and how? If no: how can we address this deficit?

> Pippa: *Well, yes, but you guys* [pause] *Sandra, Lisa and Kate* [pause]. *You guys are the teachers* [pause] *and Karen. I sometimes feel that I probably shouldn't really speak up.*

> Shelley: *Yeah, Pip, I feel that I probably don't know enough.*

> Kate: *Pip and Shelley, you know the preschoolers as well as me or Lisa or Sandra because you spend so much time with them.*

> Lisa: *You're* [Pippa and Shelley] *the ones called upon to look after the kids when they're sick or hurt.*

> Sandra: *Pip and Shelley, your perspective is invaluable to the study and it's important for you both to realise this.*

> Karen: *Yes! You pick up a lot of what's missed by Lisa and Kate because they're concentrating on reading the story and I'm busy with the videocamera.*

> Kate: *You're both very valued, appreciated and needed!*

Reflective analysis:

Again this vignette shows the importance of support and empathy in participatory action research projects (Park, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). It was understandable that both Pippa and Shelley hesitated at the question of equality. They were teacher assistants and as such may have been used to the understanding that the teacher had the power. As in Davis and Cook's (1998) participatory action research project issues of hierarchy and sustaining inclusive process with the view of change was not an easy task, but an imperative one if the study was to produce worthwhile outcomes for all participants. As can be seen in the above vignette the other members of the research team assured Pippa and Shelley that they were equally valued members of the research team.

Therefore, it was advantageous to include and discuss this issue of relational practice (especially during the initial cycles) to allow Shelley and Pippa to air their trepidations and for other co-researchers to offer support for their opinions and efforts. However, this type of acceptance and trust must be developed and built over time. By examining the later cycles the reader(s) may understand how this grew over the course of the action research phase. Davis and Cook (1998) conclude that "the social structures and hierarchical decision-making processes into which we have been socialised, have marginalised us all to some extent. (We) need to become aware, committed and empowered to challenge the 'dominant paradigm'" (p. 81).

Kate: *I didn't feel empowered in the first week, even last week, but this week has been really positive. I really feel like I'm learning and changing. Yeah, I'd say I'm starting to feel empowered.*

Lisa: *It's early days yet but I feel very positive about the research and what's more I want it to invigorate and empower the preschoolers. I think it's beginning to do that because they're discussing more deeply and beginning to challenge certain stereotypical taken-for-granted assumptions, for instance, the gender thing, girls can't save boys.*

Reflective analysis:

The team asserted that we were developing critical consciousness due to the very nature of the study. The "how" to develop critical consciousness became an

issue for the research team.

Sandra: *Well, we're critically examining storytime sessions to understand preschoolers' appreciation of social justice issues which will hopefully engender new insights into teaching for social justice in our preschools. I think that's developing critical consciousness.*

Karen: *I agree, Sandra. I've also noticed* [pause]. *It's interesting that most of this… probably all of our critical consciousness is coming from our critical* **self-***examination… and then the team reflects to give supportive suggestions.*

Shelley: *I think that goes back to what we were talking about before, um, I felt uncomfortable criticising Kate or Lisa's teaching practices* [pause] *but I knew, I knew deep down that they'd know* [pause] *Oh how do I say?*

Kate: *We stuffed up! Sorry Lisa.*

Lisa: *No, I agree. When I looked at the first videotapes I cringed. I knew that the lesson was awful and that I didn't do anything that we'd talked about. And what's worse I knew that you all knew and no-one was saying anything.*

Karen: *But I think that that's changing* [pause]. *Not so much that we're criticizing; it's more that we're verbalising our wonderings* [pause]. *Like when Shelley* **wondered** *why Reggie thought Princess Smartypants needed saving; that allowed us to explore that remark and how this was coming to play in the preschool* [pause]. *And like when Lisa* **wondered** *about the preschoolers' face pulling when Spanish food was mentioned; we were then able to explore what happened next. And through all these wonderings and self-criticisms we are working out ways to choose picture books and raise the preschoolers' consciousness regarding difference and diversity.*

Kate: *So we're actually working out how to be critically conscious.*

Reflective analysis:

Without critical dialogue involving each member of the team (note Bray et al., 2000) would Kate and Lisa have critically reflected on their practice? Would they have changed their pedagogy in relation to storytime? Reflecting on one's own pedagogy and having it held up for scrutiny by others is daunting. However, just as daunting is the need in this study for critical feedback from other members of the research team. Initially the co-researchers felt uncomfortable with this situation. It is

not easy to develop critical consciousness whereby one does "not only work with and acknowledge external critics, but also, most importantly, (one's) own internalised critic (superego)" (Gordon, 2006, p. 245).

Issues of plural ways of knowing

Are we discovering what we need to know to use storytime to teach for social justice more effectively? How are we valuing one another's knowledge?

> Kate: *Well, yeah, of course we're discovering how we can use storytime to teach for social justice. We've had a huge epiphany this week. We've discovered that fairytales should be used to challenge stereotyping and that nearly any book has the potential for critical examination.*
>
> Pippa: *And we're really* [pause], *well, this week, we're really listening to what the preschoolers are saying and responding to them.*
>
> Lisa: *And we're using, well Kate's using, guided questions to focus the preschoolers. And our questioning techniques are developing.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette shows that the team considered that it was indeed discovering how to choose and use children's literature to teach for social justice pertinent to each preschool context. It could also be seen that we were valuing one anothers' opinions and ideas because they were being put into practice. We identified that participatory action research was working well for us in the pursuit of ways of discovering how to use children's literature to teach for social justice and transform our situations. The transformative power of action research is well documented (Gordon, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2001; Park, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

> Kate: *This research is changing the way we teach or at the very least how we understand and use storytime. It is transformative, even though it's bloody hard work!*

Reflective analysis:

Through critical reflection of storytime sessions and examining pedagogical

practices and preschoolers' responses, plans are now being put into action and strategies are now being tried. The team is discovering what it needs to know and what works best to use children's literature to teach for social justice.

Meeting minutes written as notes: Our plan of action for the fourth cycle of the action research phase (week four) addressed the following questions that were raised during this meeting: What strategies are working and should be continued? What strategies are not working? How can we create real-life contexts from the social justice issues raised in the picture books? How can we encourage more involvement and interaction between the preschoolers and the picture books? What picture books should be chosen for the next cycle?

- Continue employing the use of guided and open-ended questions to orientate children to the message of the texts.
- Maintain the use of higher order, open-ended questions.
- Persist in carefully and actively listening to preschoolers' comments and questions and scaffold discussion from them.
- To follow the success of Preschool A's "charity drive" it is suggested, as much as possible, to scaffold the understandings of the social justice issues highlighted in the texts in the preschool context and how the issues impact on the preschoolers' lives.
- Allow preschoolers to turn back the pages of the texts to those that interested them for further discussion and clarification.
- Encourage artistic/creative responses to the texts.
- Pippa and Shelley to continue to flag pertinent comments that have gone unnoticed and to alert Lisa and Kate to children who wish to contribute to discussions but have been overlooked.
- Lisa and Pippa would now like to consolidate on the themes that have emerged from the preschoolers' discussions of gender issues and appearance by exploring these issues through the text *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door*. They would like to reflect upon how this text is received by the children before deciding on a future plan.
- Children from Preschool B have enjoyed texts relating to food so it was decided to keep the theme going and extend the celebration of difference and

diversity by introducing Indigenous foods through the non-fiction text *Bush Tucker* followed by a text challenging the notion of whiteness: *Whitefellers are Like Traffic Lights*.

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: CYCLE SIX

Data from journal entries and meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) from cycle six are offered for analysis as this cycle shows that, despite being over half way through the action research phase of the project, there can still remain pitfalls in action research (especially when young children are involved). However, this cycle also displays positives emanating from the research project: the data show that the teachers employed pedagogical strategies to promote rich discussion within the preschool groups; for the first time in the research project, collaboration with a parent was productive in addressing the self-esteem issues of one particular preschooler and challenging societal assumptions; and it demonstrates the co-researchers' self-critical and self-reflective practices. Hence the data presented in this cycle also address the second research question.

Cycle Six: Plans going awry; critical self-reflection; assumptions challenged; specific strategies used to encourage deep critical discussion

Journal entry (Monday, week six of the action research phase): Lisa was unwell this week and could not teach. I facilitated the storytime session for *Let's Eat* as I had built a warm rapport with the preschoolers and knew the text well. As with Preschool B during week two's storytime session, this text was well received by Preschool A preschoolers. I used similar guiding questions: "*As we read the book today let's think about how the family in the story is the same as your family and different from your family*?" I displayed the foods mentioned in the text and I asked the children to "*watch out for these foods in the story.*" A discussion of differences and similarities allowed the children to understand that there were more similarities than differences. I asked each preschooler individually if s/he would play with Antonio and his family. Most children said that they would and gave reasons such as "*They're friendly*" (Kelly); "*They eat lots of different things*" (Verity); "*They could teach me Spanish*" (Ella, Jack, Reggie). The children did not base their reasons for wishing to play with Antonio's family on physical appearance. However, four children said they would not play with the family. Adam and Melinda could give no

reason for their response; Mary said she would not play with them because "*They had different coloured skin*" and Trixi said, "*Because they're just different.*"

> Lisa: *Those guided questions are really working and getting good discussion.*
>
> Pippa: *Yeah, and it really helps to put the issues, you know, of difference and diversity, back into the real worlds of the preschoolers, you know? I mean, asking them if they would play with kids who are different to them.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah, putting the issues into context for them.*
>
> Shelley: *It was good this time that they were asked to give the **reasons** behind their decisions.*
>
> Lisa: *Mmm, what about the four kids who still say they won't play because of difference?*
>
> Karen: *Well, only Trixi and Mary gave the reason being "difference". Adam and I think it was Melinda didn't give a reason. But still yes, what does everyone think?*
>
> Kate: *I think we should keep treating books that celebrate difference and diversity in a really explicit way.*
>
> Karen: *A gorgeous book comes to mind:* White Socks Only. *It's about segregation in America in probably the fifties. I haven't got a copy but I could try and get it if you like. It would be a good one to ask the preschoolers how they would feel if they were the little girl in the story. She's African American and she's hot and wants to have a drink from a bubbler but the sign says "Whites only" so she assumes that it means that she can't step up to the bubbler wearing her black shoes; so she takes her shoes off and steps up in her white socks. White people start abusing her until she is rescued by an African American man called the Chicken Man who seems to have mysterious powers. What do you think?*
>
> Pippa/ Laura: *Sounds beautiful. Sounds great.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah, I'd like to treat that one too.*

Reflective analysis:

There is a lot to look at in the above vignette and journal entry. The human condition (illness) could have impacted negatively on the study; however, because I had built a warm rapport with the preschoolers from the orientation phase through to

cycle six of the action research phase I was able to read to the preschool group and elicit genuine responses because the preschoolers were comfortable with interacting with me. This shows the importance of the orientation phase. "Because action research is labour intensive and because it takes time to build the relationships and structures needed it is difficult to start from scratch" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 71) at the action research phase.

Of some concern to the team were the negative responses of Adam, Melinda, Mary and Trixi to issues of difference and diversity. We wished to challenge their thinking with a very explicit book: *White Socks Only*; however, this picture book could not be procured for the next action research cycle which frustrated the research team.

The strategy of holding a conversation with each preschool at the conclusion of the storytime session was very popular with Preschool A preschoolers. This week also saw good use of higher order and open-ended questioning techniques producing rich critical discussion from both preschools. For example, instead of asking if the preschoolers would play with the children from the story who were different from themselves and generating simple yes/no responses; they were asked to give reasons for their answers. They were also asked what they expected to achieve or gain from these interactions with the children who were different from themselves. This put the characters from the story into the preschool context and created a feeling of real-life connections.

Journal entry (Tuesday, week six of the action research phase): *Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* is a rather dated text and could be interpreted that it maintains that white people "have the answers" and are superior. I wish we had analysed the text more critically last week. However, Pippa's reading and guided discussion drew from the preschoolers that the Aboriginal people could have taught Pumpkin Paddy many things for example, how to find bush tucker. Pippa's reading was sensitive BUT, if this book was read without such sensitivity and critical discussion, messages that counter prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping and promoting peaceful practices could be lost, even negated.

Kate: *Mmm. On listening to this on the video I think this book could be dangerous in the wrong hands. You did a great job with it, Pip, but just say someone grabbed it from the book shelf and read it without any discussion or even the wrong type of discussion.*

Karen: *Yes, I agree, Kate, and I've been thinking about this since Tuesday. Pip and I had a talk about it after the reading.*

Pippa: *Yeah, we both felt a bit uncomfortable with it. You know, I loved this book when I was a kid and I actually thought that it upheld the Aboriginal people; that's why I recommended it, but, mmm.*

Karen: *Yeah, when Pip and I talked it through afterwards we felt that it actually* [pause] *well, its underlying ideology supports white supremacy. You know, the white character was the one that helped the Aboriginal people over their supposedly "silly" fear of the bunyip, and it was the white character who was the hero of the day.*

Lisa: *Yeah, watching it read on the video, great job by the way, Pip, even the illustrations are a bit degrading of the Aboriginal people. They had big wide eyes and timid stances. They certainly weren't depicted as strong or resourceful. Pumpkin Paddy was though.*

Kate: *Mmm. Maybe not one for the kiddies then?*

Karen/Lisa/Pippa: *No. Not for the kiddies.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette clearly shows that books that were perhaps viewed as cute or even respectful a generation prior may not be so for the following generation. Indeed, my childhood memories regarding Dorothy Wall's (1966) *The Complete Adventures of Blinky Bill* are full of wonder and appreciation of Blinky's rambunctious nature, flippant disregard for authority and rapid retorts. Having re-read the stories thirty years on, he now appears rude, insolent, sexist and obnoxious. Indeed, reader response may change with maturity and altered sociocultural norms. Having disclosed this, it is with embarrassment that such a picture book as *Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* was included in our study. This is testament that **all** children's literature must be examined prior to reading to a preschool group. Reliance on childhood memories is a dangerous strategy.

The vignette also show the team's support of Pippa's reading and guided questioning and discussion to circumvent the damage that the book could have done in upholding the ideology of white supremacy. Without condemning Pippa's recommendation of the book the team concluded that if read without appropriate scaffolding it could be considered dangerous and should not be read to children. However, on reflection the book could be used to encourage critical thinking if its flaws are exposed. Watson (2006) argues that "adults must practice critical thinking" (p. 151) in this regard and decide whether the students have the cognitive skills to cope with this type of critical literacy practice.

Journal entry (Thursday, week six of the action research phase): It was difficult to settle Preschool B into storytime today owing to the fact that both Mark and Edward were particularly disruptive; therefore storytime was aborted. I was really disappointed with this. I thought Kate could have sent those preschoolers who were disruptive to other activities and ask if anyone wanted to hear the story well before she did. By the time she asked if anyone wanted to hear the story it had been twenty minutes of classroom management and, I believe, everyone was bored with the whole situation. Why did Kate try to keep going for so long?

Reflective analysis:

Six weeks into the action research phase and plans were still going awry. My journal entry shows my frustration as, at the time, I felt that the project was not getting a good amount of data from Preschool B. This was not the case and I further analyse my frustration in Chapter Nine. To answer the question I asked at the conclusion of this section of my journal: In Kate's mind she may have been trying extremely hard to settle the whole group into storytime to benefit the study. In her defense at no time did I or any co-researcher suggest that it could be of benefit to conduct storytime with only a portion of the preschool group. Also, it can be seen in a later vignette that this situation made Kate feel extremely embarrassed. On reflection I feel my frustration was harsh and unwarranted. I lacked the empathy that our research constitution requested.

Journal entry (Friday, week six of the action research phase): Mark was away from the preschool for the second storytime session of this week and Edward

appeared much more focused than yesterday. The second attempt at reading *I Like Myself* engaged the children and they responded positively to the text. Tilly's response mirrors the consensus of the group: "*It's okay to be different. It's good to be yourself.*" However, of some concern was Michael's comment, "*I hate myself.*" Kate and Shelley believed he was sincere in this comment and felt obliged to inform, Kylie, Michael's mother. She was aware of Michael's feelings and also concerned. Michael has very blue eyes and curly blonde hair that draws much attention from strangers who actually touch his hair. Being a shy child Michael does not appreciate this attention and as a result "hates" his hair. Kylie stated that she was extremely concerned when Michael overheard an acquaintance say, "*He's too pretty to be a boy*", after which he said he "*wanted to die*". It appeared from the conversation with Kylie and our observations that Michael had gendered himself by the age of four (with the help from subliminal stereotypical messages on gender) and he felt that golden curls and blue eyes were not masculine. Kylie was considering clipping his hair close to his head. Kate and Shelley are aware and will be observant of any negative self remarks from Michael and also any reference to his appearance from others in the preschool setting. The team is searching for texts that challenge stereotypical responses to masculinity.

> Kate: *That just blew me away when Michael said he hated himself.*
>
> Lisa: *Wow, yeah, but that was good to attend to that straight away, Kate. He really didn't want to talk about it, though.*
>
> Kate: *No, just kept saying he didn't like himself, that he hated himself. I tried to get him to talk after the reading too but he wasn't into it.*
>
> Shelley: *That's why we contacted Kylie. We believed he was really sincere; he didn't like himself.*
>
> Kate: *Kylie was aware, wish she'd let us know before this. She's worried too. When he overheard someone saying that he was too pretty to be a boy he said that he wanted to die because he looked like a girl. He hates his curly hair. Kylie might clip it close to his head. So we need to keep an eye on this. Watch out for comments from preschoolers and parents regarding Michael's appearance; and we could access some picture books challenging this type of gendering. There's a good book called* Princess Max *and* Prince Cinders *could be good too. I'll try to get them for next week.*

Reflective analysis:

From the above vignette it can be seen that Kate and Shelley are intent on careful and purposeful listening to their preschoolers' responses. They are developing a *listening pedagogy* (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Rinaldi, 2005; Egan, 2009) that respects what their preschoolers are articulating. Michael's response that he hated himself was hardly audible; however, Kate was very careful to address the issue immediately. Michael did not wish to discuss his self-efficacy; nonetheless both Kate and Shelley thought it important enough to include his mother. As Davis and Cook (1998) found, parental involvement can have a positive impact on action research projects such as this. It is worthy to note also that the above vignette displays Kate's own transformation in regard to using stories not only for social agency but also to enhance her preschoolers' self efficacy.

Research team's reflection on its practice

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence

Are ideas emerging that will help us to continue to explore how children's literature impacts on our preschoolers to teach for social justice in the future?

Journal entry (Friday, week six of the action research phase): All team members agreed that guided comments and questions at the beginning of the storytime sessions were really helpful in orientating the preschoolers to the social justice issues that were highlighted in the texts. The team has also realised the importance of storytime discussion, clarification and scaffolding.

Lisa: *Most of the kids just don't get it* [the social justice issue] *unless the issue is explicitly discussed. It's made me realise that so much discussion and scaffolding is needed to get the point across.*

Kate: *Yeah, just reading the story isn't anywhere near enough. You have to really draw attention to the issues. Like with* I Like Myself, *without explicitly drawing the parallel between the main character and each preschooler **liking themselves** I don't think Michael would've voiced his insecurities. This is really important.*

Shelley: *Yeah, discussion is so important and before we just didn't do it. We just got through the story and that was it. I guess sometimes we'd ask if the*

kids liked the story but nothing deeper. I can see that it's just as important, maybe more important, to discuss issues during the story, than after. You know - things just pop into their heads and it's important to talk right then and there.

Kate: *You're so right, Shell. It's so important to listen to what they're saying. I don't consider it an interruption any more when the kids interject. I used to say "hold that thought until after the story" but now I realise that so many wonderful insights come through when they're allowed to speak freely. And their thoughts are developing my thoughts.*

Lisa: *I know what you mean. Without this intense discussion that's starting to come through I wouldn't have thought that picture books like* Nicketty, Nackety [Noo Noo Noo] *could be considered a critical text. We're I guess* [pause]; *well I reckon that we're all learning together.*

Shelley: *Well, yeah, I've always thought the kids were my best teachers.*

Journal entry (Friday, week six of the action research phase): The team has come to realise that it is through careful, attentive non-judgmental listening to their preschoolers' opinions and ideas drawn out in these discussions that authentic scaffolding is achieved. Although team members confided that more open-ended and high order questioning techniques were still needed during storytime sessions, we could all see the merit in using them as they gleaned richer, more in-depth discussion from the preschoolers. This can be seen in the post storytime discussion of *Let's Eat* where the preschoolers responded with reflective comments as to why they would play with Antonio and his brother and sister: "*They look like they have fun*" (Jack); "*He could teach me to speak Spanish*" (Colin); "*It's what's in your heart that's important*" (Ziek).

The team has also realised that all texts must be critically analysed before reading to the preschool groups. A text that may be remembered from past personal experience as a worthwhile text may now be considered inappropriate, as was the case with *Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip*.

Kate: *This research has made me conscious of exploring the underlying messages of a text before actually reading it to the preschoolers.*

Lisa: *I think that there must be quite a number of inappropriate, even dangerous, picture books out there. We need to be very conscious of this.*

Reflective analysis:

It is clear from the above vignettes and journal entries that the research team has come to similar conclusions to the findings of a major longitudinal study carried out in the United Kingdom: the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE). Part of this longitudinal study examined the role of extended child-centred conversations, which Sylva et al. (2003) refer to as *shared sustained thinking*, as an indicator of effective pedagogy in early childhood settings. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) describe this as *sustained cognitive engagements* between the adult and the child and suggest that "the cognitive construction in this case would be mutual where each party engages with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of reflexive co-construction" (p. 720). This has occurred in this participatory action research study whereby the shared sustained thinking characterised by sustained cognitive engagements have informed the learning of both the preschoolers and the educators on social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity.

Issues of outcomes and practice

Are we developing a critical and self-critical understanding of our situations? Is this research project assisting us to transform ourselves, our teaching practices and our preschool settings? If yes: how and in what why? If no: how can we improve this?

Lisa: *We're realised what the preschoolers are saying pretty well I think; but even the videotapes go past so quickly that I still don't know if any child is being left out.*

Kate: *Yeah, or even worse, I'd like to know if any child is being, you know, silenced. I mean if anyone is made to feel their opinion isn't good enough. Oh, what do I mean? You know put down.*

Pippa: *I think we'd pick that sort of thing up in the video* [pause] *but maybe not. How could we look at this sort of thing more closely?*

Lisa: *I've been thinking about this and maybe we could put together a sort of response sheet with all the kids names on it down one side and criteria on the top: like "Asked a question", "Interrupted another child", "Derogatory remark to another child's response". You know, that sort of thing.*

Karen: *That sounds really worthwhile. Would you like to do up this sheet um, proforma, or would you like me to do it?*

Lisa: *We could all work on it together, if everyone agrees.*

Reflective analysis:

Each team member was becoming more astute in analysing storytime sessions and each of us wished to delve deeply into how deeper analysis could be achieved. Therefore a Preschooler Response Sheet was devised that would show if any child did not contribute to discussions, dominated discussions or was silenced during discussions. Co-researchers comments and findings regarding the Preschooler Response Sheet may be found on pages 311 – 312.

The above vignette reveals that the research project was not only transforming teaching practice but also the personal lives of the co-researchers. Heron and Reason (2006) point to personal transformation as a secondary outcome of this type inquiry.

Journal entry (Friday, week six of the action research phase): During our reflection on our research everyone voiced that this research project was assisting us to transform ourselves and our teaching practices positively.

Lisa: *I now feel like a real researcher.*

Kate/Shelley: *Me too.*

Lisa: *Yeah, I look forward to our meetings and don't even mind hearing and seeing myself on tape. I love sharing with you guys. This* [research project] *isn't only impacting on my teaching but also my personal life. When I'm talking to someone I now take time to reflect, and I ask myself "How will what I say impact on who I'm talking with?"*

Pippa: *Yeah, I think I listen more attentively to people. And I'm definitely more aware of the books I read to Claire* [Pippa's daughter]. *I find myself*

looking for the social justice issues and I'm seeking out books to buy for her that, you know, uphold umm, you know, celebrate difference.

Issues of significance

Is our analysis of each storytime session of significance to each setting? How, why and could we improve? Is the research project still important to you? If not, why not and how can we help?

> Pippa: *I'm still worried about Mary and Trixi's negativity to difference.*
>
> Lisa: *Yeah, we've been talking about it a lot this week. Mary equates goodness to looking pretty and said she wouldn't play with people who don't look pretty; and Trixi just straight out said she wouldn't play with people who have different coloured skin. What do we do?!*
>
> Karen: *What does everyone think? Any suggestions?*
>
> Kate: *Just keep going. Just keep up our research. We can't hit them over the head and say, "You have to think this way, our way." We just have to keep guiding, scaffolding, and reading books that challenge their assumptions.*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, but how about consolidating on their enthusiasm for different food like in* Let's Eat. *Maybe you, well both preschools could try it, have some people from the community come in and cook. I could ask Chris* [Shelley's husband] *if his friend, Len, would be willing to come in and cook. He's the Chinese chef at the RSL.*
>
> Lisa: *And I bet Aggie would love to come in. She's Sri Lankan.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah, I think it's a great idea to invite Lennie and Aggie to the preschools. But I don't think we should stop there* **and** *I don't think we should just have like a multicultural day or week. I think it's more worthwhile if we have this sort of on-going cultural exchange. You know, make it part of our pedagogy. You know, try to get across the anti-bias part of teaching for social justice.*
>
> Lisa: *I totally agree, Kate. There are probably lots of people in the community who would love to show off their culture. It may be hard at first to encourage people if they're being discriminated against by certain parts of the community. But it would be good to celebrate these people…*
>
> Pippa: *Yeah, I bet Barry* [an Indigenous friend and didgeridoo player] *would*

come in.

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Reflective analysis:

As in our previous reflective meeting on our own research practice held in week three there was unanimous response of support for the research project and its significance to each preschool context. All team members concluded that it was important to explore strategies that work to teach for social justice. It was becoming very apparent that this research project was needed to challenge many taken for granted assumptions held by the preschoolers. Anti-bias multicultural education is important especially when "all the kids are white" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 1). The use of children's literature became a catalyst to infuse each preschool curriculum with anti-bias multiculturalism and teach for social justice. The co-researchers were determined to build on what was happening in the storytime sessions to include the broader community. It was, indeed, a departure from reading and discussion of powerful stories to action regarding these stories and the social justice issues that they highlighted.

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Issues of relational practice

Do you feel an equal co-researcher? Do you feel invigorated and empowered? Are we developing critical consciousness that engenders new insights into our situations? If so: what and how? If no: how can we address this deficit?

Shelley: *Well, I think we're all working as a team.*

Lisa: *Yes, I feel the group works together in a way where everyone feels confident to share ideas that will improve our practice.*

Pippa: *Yeah, I've never really been someone who speaks up and I still feel a bit "out of my depth at times" but with our group I know that my opinions will be listened to and respected.*

Kate: *Absolutely! I feel valued. We respect one another and I think this goes back to our research philosophy that we planned right at the beginning. We have very harmonious, productive discussions and interactions.*

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Reflective analysis:

The above vignette shows that both Shelley and Pippa are developing

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confidence as researchers. There is still some tentativeness in their responses: "*Well, I **think** we're all working as a team; I still feel a bit 'out of my depth at times'*." However, these responses are less anxious than those of week three and the co-researchers felt valued and respected. Interestingly Kate cited our research philosophy as the reason for the team's harmonious and productive interactions. This vignette also highlights, as Whitmore and McKee (2006) discovered, the importance of collaboratively formulating a research philosophy and constitution during the orientation phase of a research project such as this.

Issues of plural ways of knowing

Are we discovering what we need to know to use storytime to teach for social justice more effectively? How are we valuing one another's knowledge?

> Shelley: *Yes! I feel we're reflecting on social justice issues through our books and from the storytime discussions. We noticed awareness through play.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah, Shell and I were talking about this the other day. We reckon that the preschool group is playing in a more harmonious and inclusive way than before the research began. There's not as much gender issues like before the research began. The girls are playing on the fort with the boys and the boys are joining in on the playdough table. And no-one's saying "You can't do that 'cos you're a boy" or "You're a girl." And I think we're becoming more informed, you know, driven by the children's responses and understandings of social justice issues in the texts.*
>
> Lisa: *Definitely! The children are questioning and challenging and articulating their thoughts more. You can see this developing on the videotapes each week. And, like Kate and Shell, we've noticed a lot less "Boys only on the fort" and no more talk of boys against girls.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette reveals that the team identified that transformative learning may have taken place in both preschools as evidenced through the preschoolers' play behaviour. Preschool B children were acting in a more harmonious way with a less gender issues regarding playing together and using play equipment. Preschool A children were expressing their thoughts more openly and

also joining together in play. This shows that transformation was occurring beyond discussion and behaviour is changing. This was of great significance to the research project because the study was positively impacting on articulated thoughts and action to uphold inclusivity and harmony. The following section is taken from cycle six research meeting minutes. They outline the team's action plan for cycle seven, week seven.

Meeting minutes written as notes: Our plan of action for the seventh cycle of the action research phase (week seven) addressed the following questions that were raised during this meeting: What strategies have worked well and should continue? What strategies have not worked? How can we introduce different cultures into our classrooms? How can the study positively impact on those children who continue to use deficit language when discussing difference and diversity? How can this study positively impact on feelings of self-worth? How can we gauge if all preschoolers are contributing to "sustained shared thinking" sessions; and that all contributions are valued?

- Continue to employ the use of guided and open-ended questions to introduce the texts and to orientate children to the messages of the texts.
- Maintain using higher order, open-ended questions.
- Start inviting people of different cultures to come in and cook something simple and authentic for the preschoolers. Allow plenty of discussion time.
- Start compiling a possible list of people who might come into each preschool to share their culture through music, art, language, etc.
- Persist in carefully and actively listening to preschoolers' comments and questions and scaffold discussion from them.
- Closely monitor those children who are continually expressing negative responses to difference and diversity (Trixi, Adam and Mary).
- Kate and Shelley to monitor Michael's feelings of self-worth and self-respect.
- Because it was difficult for Pippa and Shelley to fill out the Preschoolers' Response Sheet gauging if any child is silenced, left out of discussions or dominating discussions this week owing to illness it was decided to try to fill these forms out in the coming weeks during storytime sessions.
- The preschoolers from Preschool A are focusing on the importance of

sharing, helping, caring and kindness. The team will examine the text *White Socks Only* that looks at segregation in the United States in the 1950s through the eyes of an African American six year old. (However, this text could not be accessed. So Laura and Pippa decided it would be beneficial to explore the text *A Piece of String*. It highlights the above qualities through a traditional Japanese story).

- Kate and Shelley contend that humour is a valuable text mechanism through which to engage their preschoolers and so would like to explore individuality and dignity through humourous texts. They would like to treat *Prince Cinders*, which also counters gender stereotyping (which may assist Michael), and dependent upon the children's responses they may explore *Princess Smartypants* in the following storytime session.

ACTION RESEARCH PHASE: CYCLE NINE

Data from meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) and journal entries of cycle nine are offered for analysis as data gathered from this cycle show, when compared to the first two cycles of this action research project, that the research team has grown and developed from tentative individuals to a strong, supportive team. The data presented in this cycle address the second research question. It is interesting to note that what are considered the most pivotal research meetings were those where the research project and its progress were reflected upon by the research team. This reflection occurred only in cycles three, six and nine, the cycles which I have deemed most critical. This may be a coincidence; or it may be that each team member was prepared to be more reflective in these extended meetings.

Cycle Nine: Group observations, analysis and reflection

Journal entry (Friday, week nine of the action research phase): Lisa and Pippa chose *Milly, Molly and Different Dads* to read on Monday owing to the fact that Father's Day had just passed and the text upholds the celebration of difference and diversity. This needed to be treated sensitively as Logan's father had passed away earlier this year. Although many and different fathers were discussed in the text (single fathers, same gender couples, "uncles", and fathers of differing skin colours), the fathers in the story who really captured the children's attention were those who had a (dis)ability. Dave stated that the father in the wheelchair could not play with

his son and this made him "*really sad*". Many children agreed and many faces showed great concern. However, Harley challenged this by countering, "*No. I've seen 'em* (people in wheelchairs) *play basketball and they're real good.*" Chanel added, "*They can dance in the wheelchairs, too.*" This sparked a discussion highlighting the possible *abilities* of the father in the wheelchair. The children, through discussion, came to the realisation that the father in the wheelchair, and also the fathers who were vision and hearing impaired, had just as much love and fun to offer their children, and indeed the community, as did their own fathers.

The children's response to *Milly, Molly and Different Dads* prompted Lisa and Pippa to read *Mumma Zooms* during the following storytime session. This text focuses on a mother's *ability* despite being in a wheelchair. Again discussion was intense. A few children (Trixi, Colin, Ella, Chanel) voiced their opinion that the mother was not really confined to the wheelchair but was either pretending or had a sore leg. When Lisa explained that some people have to rely on a wheelchair all their lives, many children confided that this made them sad and that "*The people in the wheelchair would be sad*". The discussion then focused on the obvious happiness of the characters in the story (as seen in the illustrations), which guided the children to realise the *ability* of the mother and that she led a happy and fulfilled life and that her son and partner loved her just as the preschoolers loved their own mothers.

> Lisa: *Pip and I think that* [Milly, Molly and] Different Dads *and* Mumma Zooms *sparked the most preschooler initiated discussion to date. The preschoolers really enjoyed these books and engaged in quite intense and reflective discussions.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah. It was interesting to see how they moved themselves from their initial discomfort of confronting disability to challenge stereotypical views of disability and then move towards a celebration of diversity.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette again shows the effectiveness of shared sustained thinking characterised by sustained cognitive engagement. The preschoolers were initially quiet confronted by characters in the picture books who were (dis)abled. However, through the whole group's shared sustained thinking and engagement with

one another, stereotypical views were challenged and the group moved to a deeper awareness and understanding of, and sensitivity to (dis)ability. As highlighted by Egan (2009), this type of group conversation is indeed significant in developing preschoolers' critical thinking skills.

Journal entry (Friday, week nine of the action research phase): Kate and Shelley chose two texts that related to the theme of loneliness and friendship in which the children from preschool B have become interested. Both texts also highlight the importance of valuing difference and diversity. Kate's guiding comment, "*Let's see how the friends in this story become helpful friends and true friends and how they look after one another…*" helped orientate the preschoolers and assisted them in understanding what they were examining in the story *The Sad Little Monster and the Jellybean Queen*. The children engaged with the story and discussed the importance of sharing with and kindness to people who are lonely and perhaps different from themselves. Ron's comment at the end of the storytime session related the story back to his life and the loneliness of his Pa whose wife had recently passed away: "*My Pa was lonely and sad and I went straight into his arms*".

> Pippa: *That was really touching how Ron related "the sad little monster" to his own life.*
> Kate: *Yeah, and wasn't the way he worded it just beautiful?*

Journal entry (Friday, week nine of the action research phase): Kate orientated the preschoolers to watch for the big fish and see how he changes. *Big Al* encouraged the preschoolers to discuss the stereotype of physical appearance: "*Just 'cos he's big doesn't mean he's bad*" (Don). The team was very pleased to see Mark engage with the text and participate in relevant discussion for the first time: "*What about that big one when he got caught in the net. He saved the little ones. They* [the fishermen] *chucked him back.*" Although Mark's comment may not initially appear a critical moment for the research project per se, the team felt that it was a critical moment for Mark.

> Kate: *For the first time this year Mark engaged with the text and made relevant comments. He identified the main character of the story, highlighted*

his bravery and explained how he'd returned to the sea.

Journal entry (Friday, week nine of the action research phase): This highlighted the power of this particular text and how the research project is impacting on the preschoolers' thinking to engage and interact with storytime sessions.

> Reflective analysis:
>
> Mark displays characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. However, as seen in the above vignette, Mark has obviously engaged with the picture book and contributed to the preschool group's shared sustained thinking in this research cycle. It has taken the greater part of this action research project to actively engage Mark; however, through Kate and Shelley's persistence to include Mark in storytime sessions he is beginning to engage with the text and interact with the preschool group. The above vignettes and journal entries show how the preschoolers are relating the picture books back to their own lives to help construct meaning.

Research team's reflection on its practice

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence

Are ideas emerging that will help us to continue to explore how children's literature impacts on our preschoolers to teach for social justice in the future?

Journal entry (Friday, week nine of the action research phase): The ideas that were emerging during our reflection in week six remained pertinent for this meeting [for this reflection refer to pages 297–303]. What has emerged over the last three weeks is that the younger children from both preschool groups engage more readily with simpler, more explicit texts. These texts were quite overt in relating their social justice messages.

> Kate: *I think that the more explicit texts like* Big Al *and* The Rainbow Fish [to the Rescue]*, not that I'm focusing on a sea theme here. Oh, another one:* Milly, Molly and Different Dads. *Their messages are so explicit in celebrating difference and diversity that it's easier to encourage deep discussion. Texts like umm,* Enora [and the Black Crane], *and maybe* A Piece of String*,* [pause] *the messages are too hidden, especially for the younger*

ones.

Shelley: *Yeah, you could see even Mark engage with* Big Al *and remember Mary's interest in* The Rainbow Fish [to the Rescue]. *They really got it.*

Reflective analysis:

It may seem as though the obvious is being stated in the above vignette. Explicit texts whereby the social justice issues are easily identified, that use simple language, and that have colourful and uncluttered illustrations have engaged the younger preschoolers more readily. Texts that contain more complicated language have not encouraged deep 'shared sustained thinking' by the younger members of the preschool groups. Although this may appear obvious, for this study it is a finding and must be made apparent to the reader(s).

Lisa: *Also relating the social justice issues that are raised in the picture books back to the context of the preschoolers and to individual children has helped them to understand the books' messages more easily. And inviting people to the preschool who the preschoolers don't usually associate with has been amazing. Tying it in with food and* Let's Eat *worked well. I think it made the preschoolers realise that we all have to eat; it's something we all have in common.*

Kate: *We've had such a great time with Aggie and Lennie. They're amazing cooks but they tell such great stories of life in China and Sri Lanka. And they help out and get down and play with the kids.*

Pippa: *Yeah, and the kids just love Barry. He's been in a few times with his didgeridoo.*

Reflective analysis:

Both preschools invited people of differing backgrounds to the preschool to share their food, stories, songs, dances and traditions. This became a regular occurrence and was not seen as simply holding a "multicultural day". Many of the visitors returned on a voluntary basis to assist with the day-to-day running of the preschools, thereby allowing the preschoolers more naturalistic interactions with people whom they previously considered extremely different from themselves and with whom they had had no contact. The co-researchers were very aware to avoid

---

"tokenism" whereby a school setting organises and "extravaganza multicultural day" in the belief that anti-bias and multiculturalism has been achieved. Dau (2001) and Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) point out the absurdity of such tokenistic thinking.

Kate: I reckon another good strategy that's impacted positively on the preschoolers has been to highlight the social justice issues in the books through other media, like posters, songs, music, jigsaws, dolls and other manipulatives.

Lisa: I really agree, Kate. After reading Milly, Molly and Different Dads *and we borrowed the wheelchair. Well, the whole experience de-mystified the wheelchair and allowed the preschoolers to engage in authentic experience. It was great.*

Photograph 8.2
Children from Preschool A engaging in play with a wheelchair

Reflective analysis:

Using children's literature as a catalyst to develop children's thinking on social justice issues prompted the research team to explore further strategies that might complement the social justice issues raised during storytime sessions. Besides encouraging visits from people in the community with whom the preschoolers had previously little or no contact, the research team endeavoured to create as true to life experiences for the preschoolers to understand difference, diversity and human dignity as possible. To this end the preschoolers engaged with wheelchairs (see

Photograph 8.2), Braille books, talking books, dolls from different cultures, manipulatives such as chop sticks, music and songs from different cultures, and posters highlighting other countries and cultures.

Issues of outcomes and practice

Are we developing a critical and self-critical understanding of our situations? Is this research project assisting us to transform ourselves, our teaching practices and our preschool settings? If yes: how and in what why? If no: how can we improve this?

> Lisa: *Well, I believe our entire research process has been critical and self-critical because we've been continuously and consciously analysing our teaching practices to positively transform our situations.*
>
> Shelley: *And at the start of the research it was so hard. We all hated being critical of our teaching practices and now it's just a matter of course.*
>
> Kate: *You know what helped me? I think it was good that we all went out for your birthday, Shell, way back in April. That sort of broke the ice.*
>
> Lisa: *Yeah, I agree. We did seem more of a team after that.*
>
> Karen: *Yeah, it was a great night and, yeah, after that, for whatever reason, we did seem to gain momentum.*
>
> Kate: *Yeah, you know and then after we had that girl's night at your new place, Karen. That was fun and after that I just looked forward to our meetings and even looked forward to the videos. And now, well, because you pick up so much that you missed in class.*
>
> Shelley: *Yeah, and the Response Sheet has been really helpful in seeing if any child's left out of discussions, or not contributing, or dominating.*

Journal entry (Friday, week 9 of the action research phase): The Preschooler Response Sheet [introduced as an action plan four weeks ago] has highlighted some interesting facts.

> Kate: *Yeah, Ally and Kurt have language delays and that would account for their unwillingness to participate, and Alicia is really very shy* [Alicia migrated with her family from New Zealand last year. She is of Maori heritage and the only non-Anglo Australian child involved in the research project]. *And it's no surprise that Henry and Tilly tend to dominate discussions because they're older and quite articulate. What did surprise us*

[Shelley and Kate] *is that Don and Calissa, who've only recently turned four, contribute a lot to discussions with pretty relevant and interesting responses.*

Shelley: *And another surprise was that Laura, you know, fairly mature and articulate, doesn't often contribute to group discussions.*

Kate: *Yeah, this is good info to have. We'll be trying to draw Laura, Alicia, Kurt and Ally into more shared group discussion and hopefully support their critical thinking. Well, we can't actually gauge if they're doing any critical thinking if they're not sharing their thought processes, can we? So we'd better concentrate on this. Hey but what about our Mark this week with* Big Al. *For the first time his comments were relevant and sensible. He totally engaged with this text.*

Journal entry (Friday, week 9 of the action research phase): The Preschooler Response Sheet has revealed that all children from Preschool A contribute to group discussions. The dominant speakers were Ella, Colin, Jane and Dave. No child was silenced from either preschool group.

Reflective analysis:

Interestingly, we felt that we became more cohesive as a team after socialising at the beginning of the orientation phase and then again at the beginning of the action research phase of the project. Bray et al. (2000) found the same response during their study. The above vignettes and journal entries show that the research team contended that this research project was transforming their pedagogy. The co-researchers focused on the Preschooler Response Sheet that was devised in week four. They commented that this response sheet had provided them with information that would inform their pedagogy and that they hoped would improve shared sustained thinking with students who were not contributing to conversations.

Issues of significance

Is our analysis of each storytime session of significance to each setting? How, why and could we improve? Is the research project still important to you? If not, why not and how can we help?

Again it was identified that the research project was of great significance to each preschool setting and to each team member.

Lisa: *I believe that we've learnt so much from the preschoolers. I had no idea that Trixi, Mary and Harley had such negative perceptions of difference and diversity and without this study I bet I'd be none the wiser. And I guarantee that there'd be more with this little trio if not for the study!*

Shelley: *I agree.*

Kate: *It's been so beautiful watching this unfold. At times it's been bloody embarrassing, like when they* [Preschool B preschoolers] *went so silly that we had to cancel storytime! But on the whole it's* [the research project] *impacted very positively on the preschoolers and on my teaching.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette shows that the co-researchers asserted that co-constructions of learning have taken place. As Egan (2009) contends

such co-construction of meanings in which teachers and learners engage together can also be identified in Aristotelian terms as a form of *poiesis* (making action). Both *praxis* (a combination of professional knowledge and values) and *poiesis* can be seen as contributing to professional knowledge and understanding. (p. 46)

Therefore the *poiesis*, the co-constructed understandings of how children's literature might be used in their preschool classrooms (co-constructed by the preschoolers and the educators), have informed and contributed to *praxis* (the educators' pedagogy). However, this was not without hard work and sometimes frustration as Kate suggests in the above vignette and the following vignette shows.

Kate: *It's been a bit annoying at times when we couldn't access the picture books that we felt would work perfectly.*

Karen: *I guess that was probably unavoidable. Our own libraries aren't endless.*

Lisa: *And we really couldn't choose books too far in advance because we chose books on the responses and interests of the preschoolers only the week before.*

Shelley: *Mmm. I guess we couldn't really pre-arrange anything.*

Lisa: *At least we now have a pretty good idea what we could examine with the preschoolers when they* [the picture books] *become available.*

Kate: *But it might be too late. The moment might be lost!*

Karen: *Well, Lisa's right. We now have some idea of texts that could work and we can always revisit social justice issues as they arise in the future, and in the meantime build on our private libraries, especially acquiring the texts that we found difficult to access through the public libraries.*

Shelley: *It's not only the books that we know worked well. It's all the other stuff. It was a real success to have so many people come in and cook and talk to the kids.*

Karen: *Yes! That really consolidated lots of issues that we were talking about with the preschoolers and got heaps of discussion going. Even Trixi and Mary were enthralled by Barry's bush tucker and didgeridoo playing. There was no face pulling or negative comments that day! And I half expected that there would be.*

Lisa: *Yeah, me too.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette shows that action research can sometimes become frustrating for the co-researchers as, in this study, planning too far in advance could not occur due to the fact that the action plan was done on a weekly basis and formulated on the preschoolers' responses to storytime sessions. Sometimes picture books that were recommended could not be procured in time for the intended research cycle. The vignette also highlights that action research can take the action plans in directions that were not expected. Unexpected strategies, like inviting people from differing cultures to share with the preschoolers on a regular basis, worked very well in complementing the social justice issues that were raised during storytime sessions.

Issues of relational practice

Do you feel an equal co-researcher? Do you feel invigorated and empowered? Are we developing critical consciousness that engenders new insights into our situations? If so: what and how? If no: how can we address this deficit?

Shelley: *Well, I can honestly say that I really feel an equal co-researcher and I wish Pip was here because I think she'd say the same. We felt funny at the*

beginning but, you know, I think, for me, it changed when Kate was away and I took the reading that week. Yeah, at first I felt awful listening to myself on tape. I hate my gravelly voice, but yeah, I felt that I was contributing [pause] *that **my** teaching practices were being looked at* [pause] *and because we were all involved in this* [pause] *I mean, all supportive, I don't know, it just didn't feel scary any more.*

Lisa: *Exactly! That's exactly how I felt about three weeks in. I suddenly thought, "Hey, this isn't so frightening* [pause]*, scary. It's okay".*

Kate: *Yeah and I think that answers the question of empowerment. It took a while because at first I was so conscious of the videotape and* [pause]*, well, self-conscious. But after a few weeks I began to look past my self-consciousness to see ways that this was helping my practice. I guess instead of being caught up in the superficial thoughts of "Oh, no, I look terrible on TV" I moved through to the deeper issue of how I am going to teach for social justice and how important this was to me.*

Lisa: *Yeah, Kate* [pause] *I guess it's all about new insights into our situations. This has changed the way I look at books and storytime and the importance I place on what children say. It's made me so aware.*

Karen: *This is great, but how is this happening* [pause]*? What is it that we're doing?*

Kate: *Well, I think it's through the strong support we give one another, and encouragement.*

Lisa: *And it's the nitty gritty stuff* [pause] *the really critically looking at our practices, the constructive criticisms, the suggested strategies* [pause] *all of that.*

Kate: *Yeah, this has been worthwhile.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette shows the feelings of the co-researchers regarding their place in this research project. It shows that feelings of empowerment have developed. Shelley began this journey rather timidly: "*I feel that I probably don't know enough.*" She now can "*honestly say that I really feel an equal co-researcher.*" The vignette also displays the importance of the feeling of support that participatory action research offers.

Issues of plural ways of knowing

Are we discovering what we need to know to use storytime to teach for social justice more effectively? How are we valuing one another's knowledge?

> Kate: *We're discovering what the preschoolers need and want to know. We're valuing and respecting the preschoolers' knowledge. That's the difference. That's what's important.*
>
> Lisa: *Yeah, and the other side is that we've built on our knowledge* [pause]. *Well, I'll put it in my own perspective* [pause]. *I've built on my own ideas and knowledge on teaching for social justice by tapping into and using all of **your** experiences and knowledge.*

Reflective analysis:

The above vignette again highlights the importance of implementing a listening pedagogy underpinned by an understanding and deep respect for the co-construction of knowledge. Kate highlights that she has learnt from the preschoolers' knowledge and Lisa emphasises that her knowledge has been co-constructed through engagement with other co-researchers.

Meeting minutes written as notes: Our plan of action for the tenth cycle of the action research phase (week 10) addressed the following questions that were raised during this meeting: What strategies have worked well and should continue? What strategies have not worked? What more can we do?

- Continue to employ the use of guided and open-ended questions to orientate children to the message of the texts.
- Maintain the use of higher order, open-ended questions.
- Invite people of varying cultures, abilities, races etc into the preschool.
- Persist in carefully and actively listening to preschoolers' comments and questions and scaffold discussion from them.
- Outline texts using Pippa's proforma.
- Pippa and Shelley to fill out the "Preschoolers's Response Sheet" gauging if any child is silenced, left out of discussions or dominating discussions during this week's storytime sessions.

- Continue to monitor closely those children who are continually expressing negative responses to difference and diversity (Trixi, Adam and Mary).

- Kate and Shelley to continue to monitor Michael's feelings of self-worth and self-respect.

- Lisa and Pippa would like to explore (dis)ability further with the preschoolers through the text *The Race*. They would like then to conclude their storytime sessions for this research project by examining difference, diversity and human dignity through the text *Whoever You Are*.

- To culminate the action research phase of our research project, Kate and Shelley chose two texts that highlight the four key features of the study: challenge stereotypes, oppose suppression, give voice to those sometimes silenced and promote peaceful practices. The texts: *Arnold the Prickly Teddy* and *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* (this text was examined by Preschool A in week four). [Two texts that also explore peace: *Peace Crane* and *What Does Peace Look Like?* could not be accessed].

Reflective analysis:

As can be seen in the journal entries, field notes and meeting minutes that have been presented as data and analysed in this chapter, the research team explored many strategies to support teaching for social justice. By examining the language of the above section relating to the strategies and plan of action for cycle ten, the last cycle of the action research phase prior to the concluding conversations, it may be understood that most of these strategies have been undertaken and found to work well. The team would *continue*, *maintain* and *persist* with these strategies and effectively plan to teach for social justice in their early childhood settings.

From the data presented in this chapter it can be understood that even when teachers are mentally prepared and wish to embrace teaching for social justice and encourage deep discussion on challenging social topics, this type of pedagogy is difficult. It does not just happen. It takes more than simply wishing to uphold and celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity. It takes thought, time, energy, effort and requires reflective listening, engagement and action. Working with a team of empathetic, like-minded members who offer support and encouragement has assisted each co-researcher in this endeavour. Without the team effort the pedagogy

of teaching for social justice may not have eventuated in the co-researchers' preschool contexts.

This team effort, however, was not an easy road. Like teaching for social justice, building a strong, empathetic team takes effort, time, energy, thought and reflective listening, engagement and action. The team members came back time and again to the research team's philosophy and constitution which formulated during the orientation phase. Formulating such a philosophy and constitution was also not an easy task (see Chapter Six), but a necessary one as it gave each team member an opportunity to articulate what she believed an open, transparent, empathetic, authentic research team should "look like". Throughout the research project words such as *respect* and *valuing* were often expressed. What is very apparent in the vignettes presented and analysed through this chapter is the respectful way with which each team member engaged in conversations and discussions. Each team member was very aware of the "feelings" of the other team members and each member endeavoured to support feelings of acceptance, confidence, and success.

During meetings there was always an atmosphere of hope and collegiality (perhaps friendship and love are more suitable terms for meetings that were held later in the research project). This atmosphere was probably created *before* each meeting began formally through informal engagement and conversation over afternoon tea where professional dialogue gave way to personal help and encouragement. Team members also met socially which not only strengthened personal ties but also helped build a strong research team.

As explained in Chapter Four, action research such as this usually recruits people of like mind who seek to improve their life experiences. It may be understood by examining the above vignettes that the development of this strong team was, indeed, underpinned by each team member's dedication to the aims of the research project. These co-researchers were committed to exploring strategies to teach for social justice and improving their pedagogy. Therein lay the beauty of participatory action research: a group of people joined and driven by their passion to transform their situations. Solidarity is the key to successful participatory action research.

SUMMARY

This chapter concludes *Part Three Observation and Action*. It has highlighted the co-researchers' voices to investigate the research questions:

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

This chapter has drawn attention to the complexity of participatory action research and the difficulties faced by the co-researchers in this study. It reports on how the research team developed from tentative beginnings to form a dedicated and supportive team to address the research questions and explore strategies to teach for social justice.

The next chapter introduces *Part Four: Final Reflections* by discussing the research team's final reflection on its own practice and my own reflection, as research facilitator, on the participatory action research as a whole. It addresses concerns of quality and validity by discussing issues of emerging and enduring consequence, outcomes and practice, relational practice, plural ways of knowing and significance. These issues are discussed through eight choice-point questions based on the work of Reason and Bradbury (2006). The chapter then examines the limitations of the research project. Chapter Ten summarises the emergent findings of this participatory action research project, concludes Part Four and draws this dissertation to a close.

PART FOUR:

FINAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER NINE: REFLECTIONS

If you've come to help me you're wasting your time. But if you've come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let's work together. (Aboriginal Activist Group, 1970s)

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed how the co-researchers developed from shaky beginnings to gradually work together to form a solid and supportive research team. It presented and analysed data that addressed both research questions and how this research project has assisted the educators/co-researchers with strategies to support and promote teaching for social justice.

This chapter continues to explore both research questions:

How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

The quotation that introduces this chapter and *Part Four: Final Reflections* is often attributed to Lila Watson (an Australian Aboriginal elder, artist, academic and activist); however, she does not wish to be acknowledged as the sole creator of the quote (Watson, 8 June, 2008, personal communication). This chapter makes clear that this participatory action research endeavour underpinned by a participatory worldview was as much a liberating exercise for me as it was for the co-researchers. As the above quotation emphatically and passionately demands, my liberation was indeed bound up with the co-researchers' search for liberation to teach effectively for social justice. It can be understood by reflecting on my personal narrative presented as a picture book in Chapter One that I have been searching for meaningful strategies that work to teach for social justice, as have the co-researchers. However, until this

research project began we could never fully explore the possibilities that were burgeoning in our hearts and minds and thus just out of reach. Each of us used the excuses of time constraints, work commitments and the feelings of isolation ("*No-one else cares about teaching for social justice*") to subdue our explorations. We needed support and the "sharing of emotionality" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 52) that we each found as a participatory action research team member. Indeed, our liberation was bound together.

This chapter firstly highlights the research team's final reflection on its own research practice following the action research phase. It then explores my own reflections, as research facilitator, on the participatory action research as an entity by addressing concerns of quality and validity through discussing issues of emerging and enduring consequence, outcomes and practice, relational practice, plural ways of knowing and significance. These issues are examined through eight choice-point questions (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The chapter concludes by discussing the limitations of the research project.

TEAM REFLECTIONS

When this study was introduced to each of the co-researchers, it was not envisaged that meetings would continue much past the action research phase of the project. However, team meetings did continue after the action research phase of the study had concluded because we had formed very strong bonds both personally and professionally and wished these bonds to continue. We were ardent about continuing to support one another in teaching for social justice.

I have chosen to present data from the first of these meetings for critical analysis because during this meeting each team member reflected on the entire research journey. The data are taken from meeting minutes (presented verbatim in *italics*) and journal entries, and presented here to display how the research team addressed both research questions. As in cycles three, six and nine, the research team examined its own practice by using Reason and Bradbury's (2006) issues of quality and validity for action research.

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence

Are ideas emerging that will help us to continue to explore how children's literature impacts on our preschoolers to teach for social justice in the future?

During this meeting the research team reflected on notes and scribbled transcripts to examine which texts produced the greatest response from the preschool groups. It was discovered that the texts that we considered most explicit about their messages and that were realistically illustrated inspired greater and more in-depth discussion; for example, *Milly, Molly and Different Dads*; *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue*; *Mumma Zooms*; *Whoever You Are*; *The Sad Little Monster and the Jellybean Queen*; *Big Al*; and *Arnold the Prickly Teddy*. The team considered such texts as *Princess Smartypants* and *Prince Cinders* too adult in their humour to engage the preschoolers fully. Texts such as *Kuia and the Spider*, *A Piece of String* and *Enora and the Black Crane* did not engage the preschoolers to the extent of the above explicit texts. This could be due to the darker and more abstract illustrations. However, as was noted, the texts that we considered explicit were chosen towards the end of the action research phase. We asked ourselves: Were we getting better at reflecting on children's responses? Were we getting better at choosing texts accordingly? Were the preschoolers getting better at critically discussing any text?

> Kate: *I think that a combination of the three is the answer: the use of texts that explicitly highlight and celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity; our increasing skills of listening and reflecting; and the preschoolers' developing skills of participating in discussion.*
> Shelley: *Yeah, I agree. All three impacted positively on the preschoolers' ability to critically reflect and critically discuss.*

All co-researchers asserted that the research project had impacted positively on their understandings of teaching for social justice and has given them strategies that they would continue to employ in their everyday teaching practice.

> Kate: *I believe that we can go ahead with the confidence that we lacked at the beginning of the study. We've now got tried and true strategies that work for us.*
> Sandra: *And we know storytime works so well when we use it to teach for*

social justice; even when we get new groups next year, we can adapt all
we've learnt to accommodate for different groups by monitoring their
responses just as you did this year in this study.

The co-researchers concluded that they could continue to explore social justice issues using storytime to advantage and to employ the strategies that had worked to support teaching for social justice, outlined in Table 9.1, without the constant help of the research group. Initially we agreed to keep meeting on a fortnightly basis to support one another in teaching for social justice during the last term of the school year. However, because we had become close friends we met on a fairly regular basis over the course of the next year to continue to develop both personal and professional bonds.

Table 9.1 Strategies that worked to support teaching for social justice

STRATEGY:
elevated storytime status from a transition activity to an important session of the day (e.g., beginning the preschool day)
allowed ample time for "shared sustained thinking" characterised by "sustained cognitive engagements"
read and discussed critical texts that celebrated difference and diversity of race, ability, culture, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and socioeconomic status
read and discussed texts that challenged the status quo
used guided questions or comments to introduce the texts and orientate the children
individually talked with children to gauge their understandings of and sensitivities to the social justice issues raised in the texts (these were not formal interviews but were dialogues and conversations held during morning tea or at the culmination of a storytime session)
utilised open-ended and higher order questioning techniques
actively and carefully listened to children's responses and reflectively chose (and allowed children to choose) texts that consolidated the social justice issues that had been highlighted in previously read texts
revisited whole texts or parts of texts for clarification;
placed the social justice issues covered in the texts into the preschool context
responded to social justice issues through action (e.g., encouraged the sharing of what the children had – clothes, toys – with those who did not have; supported inclusion in play situations at preschool)
invited people of diverse races, cultures, abilities and backgrounds to the preschool
encouraged artistic responses to the texts read (e.g., re-enactment, drawing, construction, dramatic play, music, singing and dancing)
reinforced and consolidated social justice issues read in texts by displaying related posters and making available relevant jigsaws, dolls and games
involved and informed parents
embedded teaching for social justice into the preschool curriculum.

Both groups of preschoolers were asked the question: "*What have all the stories that Miss Karen has videotaped made you think about?*" Their responses highlighted the fact that they were, indeed, valuing difference, diversity and human dignity.

Responses from Preschool A children included:

Dave: *It's okay for people to be all different. . . . It's good to be different . . . . You can be different. . . . It doesn't matter if someone's got different skin.*

Ella: *It doesn't matter what you look like. . . . Your friends can have different coloured skin.*

Ziek: *It's what's in your heart that matters. . . . Be kind and care for people.*

Harley: *People in wheelchairs are just the same as us. They can do the same stuff.*

Jane: *We're all just the same. Like the last book, um, we all cry the same.*

Colin: *Just because people are different, um, with their skin and with their clothes and with stuff, we should play with them* [pause]. *They're the same in their hearts. . . . People are different all over the world, and that's good.*

Responses from Preschool B children included:

Caddy: *We should be kind to people. And if they look different we should be kind.*

Don: *It's fun to find bush tucker.*

Calissa: *People with black skin and people with white skin can play together.*

Jedda: *You shouldn't be mean to people and you should help them. Even if they look different.*

Tilly: *You should share and be kind and visit lonely people* [pause]. *And poor people.*

Issues of outcomes and practice

Are we developing a critical and self critical understanding of our situations? Is this research project assisting us to positively transform ourselves, our teaching practices and our preschool settings? If yes: how and in what why? If no: how can we improve this?

This research project has encouraged all co-researchers to become critical and self-critical of their situations.

> Sandra: *It seems to me that we've critically reflected on our own philosophies and pedagogies to bring about change in our private and public lives. On talking with Lisa, Pip, Shell and Kate I believe that this research has transformed the way we teach and our attitudes to difference and diversity both in and out of the classroom.*

However, the team agreed that this has not always been an easy task. Lisa was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health; however, through a personal phone conversation she confided:

> *When I first found out about the study I was really exhilarated and even during term two, when we were exploring our philosophies, I felt "yeah, this is great;" but when we started the videoing and the real heavy stuff and the long meetings, I thought, "oh no I just can't do this, it's too confronting." I'm so glad I pushed through that because I really did get so much out of this. It's changed the way I teach.*

Kate reiterated Lisa's comments:

> *It's been a challenge but this research project has **transformed** [Kate's emphasis] me, the way I see teaching, and the way I listen to my preschoolers.*

Sandra explained that she felt "*challenged, changed and uplifted*" by the professional and personal discussions. Shelley commented that she had never heard of teaching for social justice before this study but can now see how important it is:

> *It* [the research project] *has made everyone think really deeply. The parents are telling us what their kids are saying, like "Jerry said it doesn't matter what you look like. It matters if you're kind to people". And this just blew Bronwyn* [Jerry's mother] *away!*

Pippa reported an incident during outside play at the beginning of term four (after the action research phase had completed) where a group of boys were beginning to exclude Logan from their games. When Pippa asked why they were doing this one of the boys retorted, "*'Cos he's weird* [pause] *he's different*". Pippa explained at the meeting that she did not even have time to respond to this remark before Dave (one of boys who had been excluding Logan) conceded, "*Just 'cos he's different doesn't mean we should treat him bad. Like what we talked about when Miss Karen was here.*"

> Pippa: *After Dave said that, the boys ran over to Logan to invite him to play on the fort.*
>
> Sandra: *Well I believed that these are signs that transformative learning has taken place for all of us and the preschoolers.*
>
> Kate: *I agree.*
>
> Lisa: *Totally.*

Issues of significance

Is our analysis of each storytime session of significance to each setting? How, why and could we improve? Is the research project still important to you? If no: why not and how can we help?

Kate summarised the responses of the research group:

*This research project will always have significance to me because it has changed the way I look at storytime and the way I listen to my preschoolers. I'm committed to teaching for social justice now and I'll advocate for it wherever I go; **and** [Kate's emphasis] I know I can back myself with the strategies that we've put into place and know work well. I feel good about my teaching.*

All team members agreed. This lays testament that action research can be an effective method of professional development that leads to increased self-efficacy of educators (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 1999; Noffke, 1997).

Issues of relational practice

Do you feel an equal co-researcher? Do you feel invigorated and empowered?

Are we developing critical consciousness that engenders new insights into our situations? If so: what and how? If no: how can we address this deficit?

Each member of the research team asserted that her input, ideas, opinions, constructive criticisms and suggestions were equally valued. It was apparent early in the action research phase that Shelley and Pippa's participation was invaluable to the research project as they could facilitate storytime sessions during Kate or Lisa's absence. Shelley and Pippa's support for and understanding of the research project made sure that storytime sessions continued in a manner helpful to the research project (e.g., orientating, scaffolding, actively listening, encouraging discussion) and that this added to the trustworthiness of the research outcomes.
We all agreed that while the research project had been challenging in both time and effort it was, indeed, invigorating and empowering.

> Kate: *It's been bloody hard work. But like I said I feel good about my teaching.*
> Sandra: *It's led all of us through to better practice, and that has to be invigorating and empowering!*

Pippa's comment could be considered pertinent to both this issue and the above issue of outcomes and practice:

> *I felt more and more confident as it* [the research project] *progressed. I wish it could continue. Who knows I might just leave the preschool and go to uni.*

Issues of plural ways of knowing

Are we discovering what we need to know to use storytime to teach for social justice more effectively? How are we valuing one another's knowledge?

The research team contended that we were all equipped with knowledge to teach for social justice. Kate's words echo the sentiments of the entire research team:

> *We respect one another and value one another's opinions and ideas. We've listened, reflected on, challenged, upheld and acted upon one another's ideas all through this project. I'd say yes, we've valued one another's knowledge* [pause] *and the preschoolers' knowledge!*

The team asserted that the strategies that worked to highlight social justice issues for their preschoolers and cyclical reflection following each storytime session would continue to inform their exploration of social justice issues throughout their teaching career.

> Kate: *I'll continue to value and respect storytime as a strategy to teach for social justice. I'll continue to listen to my preschoolers, reflect on what they say and choose books that'll guide them to celebrate difference and diversity.*

ISSUES OF QUALITY AND VALIDITY

I now turn to my own critical self-reflection on the research project as an entity. For clarification the eight choice-points that emanate from the five issues of validity and quality in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006) are re-visited and posed as questions:

> Is the action research:
> - Explicit in developing praxis of relational-participation?
> - Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?
> - Inclusive of a plurality of knowing?
>
>   - Ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity?
>   - Embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
>   - Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
>
> - Worthy of the term significant?
> - Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure?
>
>   (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 350)

These questions are addressed below as a personal reflection on the participatory action research project.

Issues of emerging and enduring consequence

Did the action research emerge towards a new and enduring infrastructure? Issues of emerging and enduring consequence link with *participatory evolutionary reality* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *emergent developmental form* (a characteristic of action research); all have greatly impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapters Three and Four. As mentioned in Chapter Four this issue involves first person (work with and for oneself), second person (work with

and for partnerships) and third person (work for people in the wider context) research and emerges and develops over time. It is imperative for action researchers to ask questions about "how our work has emerged and developed over time, whether it is sustainable into the future, and how it will influence related work" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 345). These questions emanate from first, second and third person research and are addressed below in the context of this research project.

First person research began during the orientation phase of this research project when each team member examined her own philosophies and underpinnings and helped melded them into a collective research philosophy that could be adopted by the research team. As Pippa commented, *"I've never really deeply reflected on what it is that motivates me and what drives me as a person or as an educator."* This research project has been very cathartic for me also as it has encouraged me to examine philosophies that were connected to spirituality and yet grounded in practical care and solidarity. From the outset I felt I was growing as a person and as a researcher. At times I felt overwhelmed and "out of my comfort zone". Initially I was challenged by and struggled with the structure of Preschool B (outlined in Chapter Five). I wondered if these preschoolers could even stay seated to listen to a story let alone participate in critical reflection and discussion. The lack of discussion from both preschool settings during storytime sessions in week one fuelled my trepidation and I speculated if this research project was doomed from the start of the action research phase.

I realised that this was my ego as a doctoral candidate rising with such thoughts as, *"My* research is doomed!", *"I'm* going to look foolish!", "How can *I* get this study back on track?" I had to critically and reflectively check myself and my own commitment to participatory action research. From the orientation phase to the conclusion of the action research phase, this study was *our* research project. Each team member, as a co-researcher, was drawn to this study because she wished to improve her practice by exploring strategies through children's literature to teach for social justice. I reminded myself that these co-researchers had the drive, knowledge and expertise to work towards better practice for themselves and their settings. I had faith in them.

Now, writing the research project as a dissertation, it is *my* duty to respectfully and candidly report *our* research project and analyse it from a research facilitator's perspective and represent each co-researcher truthfully. I draw heavily from notes taken down verbatim and clarified in research meetings and journal entries shared with the team. It is clear from these notes that each co-researcher believed that the research project impacted in a positive way in developing her as a person:

> Lisa: *This* [research project] *isn't only boosting my confidence in my teaching but also my personal life. When I have something to say now I don't just blurt it out, I think about it and how it will affect people. I listen to people more intently and hear them through without butting in, like I used to do. The study has given me the confidence to sit back and reflect more.*

Shelley commented:

> *I never felt that I had much to offer as far as something like this research* [pause]. *You know, I never felt like my opinions were all that great* [pause]. *All I thought I was doing all day was finding shoes, tidying collage trays and stopping kids from falling off the fort. Now I know my opinions are respected and valued. I* [now] *watch and listen for comments about the issues we've been reading about. Kate always said I was her support and her co-educator but I never really felt I was until now.*

Therefore this research project encouraged first person research which positively impacted on our collaborative research.

Second person collaborative research, as in this participatory action research, evolves over time through mutual engagement and influence (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). From tenuous beginnings, where Kate and Lisa were extremely nervous about being on camera and having their teaching practices scrutinized, this project developed to the point where both co-researchers enjoyed this professional scrutiny and interaction because feedback was constructive, objective and supportive. This scrutiny also developed from tenuous beginnings where co-researchers did not wish to criticise another's work for fear of hurting someone's feelings, to open debate and discussion regarding better practice.

However, it is through the analysis of initial and concluding conversations with each preschooler and storytime sessions over the course of the action research phase that the research project's main purpose is clearly understood to evolve. Through storytime analysis it was found that the preschoolers' awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity changed, grew and developed over time. Discussions, that were almost non-existent at the beginning of the action research phase, developed into reflective, empathetic, critical debates on issues such as race, ability, gender, difference and loneliness. Initial conversations with each preschooler highlighted that many children could not articulate their thoughts and were unaware of social justice issues. Concluding conversations with each preschool child highlighted that many children now had the meta-language to explain and articulate their thoughts, beliefs and ideas, and that they had an increased awareness and understanding of and sensitivity to social justice issues.

There may be contributing factors to the disparity of children's responses between the initial and concluding conversations. Indeed, cognitive and language development of the preschool children over the course of the school term may have a bearing on results. Intense and regular discussion following storytime on any topic may encourage children to articulate their individual thoughts and ideas in a more in-depth, critical and reflective manner. Even though the preschoolers and I had built up a happy and comfortable rapport at the time of the initial conversations, the increased familiarity between the preschoolers and me at the time of the concluding conversations could have a bearing on results. However, the research team concluded that the intervening pedagogical strategy of using storytime to teach for social justice has positively impacted on the preschoolers' development, understanding and awareness of and sensitivity to social justice issues.

Third person research encompasses a wider context. One of the questions emerging from third person research asks whether the study was germinated in such a way that participation could continue and be sustained in the absence of the instigating researcher (Reason & Bradbury, 2006)? The co-researchers' responses to this question over the span of this research project, and especially in the responses at the last meeting after the action research phase, conveyed that these educators now

had strategies that would support and promote teaching for social justice in their settings and that they would continue to use these strategies. Another question emanating from third person research is "can we use your work to develop our own?" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006c, p. 345). The research team concluded that the action research undertaken in this study may be replicated in educational settings from early childhood to secondary settings and beyond. The findings may vary; however, we assert that the journey is very worthwhile. It encourages educators to scrutinse their own practice with the view to improved practice and to listen to the voices of their students to inform this practice and teach for social justice.

Issues of outcomes and practice

Was the action research guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes? Issues of outcomes and practice link with *practical being and acting* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *practical issues* (a characteristic of action research); all have greatly impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Participatory action research is fundamentally concerned with pragmatic outcomes (McIntyre, 2008; Swantz, Ndedya & Masaiganah, 2006) and this research project was no exception. Participatory action research is more concerned with making the process and product of the research project meaningful to participants than it is with *getting it right* as in the positivist sense (Greene, 1992; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

The entire research project was about "making it meaningful" for all participants through reflection and action. This meant that the participant educators (as co-researchers) explored strategies that were meaningful to them in their own contexts and that they would use in these contexts. It also meant that the research project (both process and findings) was meaningful to the preschoolers. "In the simplest sense people should be able to say 'that was useful – I am using what I learned!'" (Reason & Bradbury 2006c, p. 347).

This objective is mirrored in co-researchers' comments: "*It* (research project) *changed the way I look at storytime and, like Kate said once, the way I listen to my preschoolers. I'm using all the strategies we found worked well in my new class. I love looking for books that have something to say about social justice and challenge*

stereotypes; and I feel confident that I can do justice to teaching for social justice." (Lisa, personal communication, 3 November, 2006). Reason and Bradbury's (2006) action research objective is also echoed by the preschoolers who were using what they had learned: *"Just 'cos he's different doesn't mean we should treat him bad. Like what we talked about when Miss Karen was here."* (Dave, recounted through Pippa, personal conversation 3 November, 2006).

Issues of relational practice

Was the action research explicit in developing praxis of relational-participation?

Issues of relational practice link with *ecological form* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *participation and democracy* (a characteristic of action research); all have greatly impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapters Three and Four. The above question needs to be regarded on multiple levels in this research project. The research team consisted of six team members, five of whom were co-researchers and at the same time having their teaching practice scrutinised; preschool children were involved; parents were consulted; I was the facilitator, for want of a better term. Therefore it was necessary for the team to not only build collaborative, trusting relationships based on empathy and compassion, but to also extend these values to the preschoolers and their parents. As the university member of the team, and the initiator of the study, I needed to ensure that all participants shared equal voice during this action research project and the "complex web of power and privilege" (Goldstein, 2000, p. 521) was transparent.

As an example of the difficulties and complexities involved in this I will highlight my own position in this inquiry. As a university researcher I had no power in the preschool classroom yet I had the privilege of participating in the preschool day and observing storytime sessions. As a university researcher I had the power of access to the world of academia and afforded team members the privilege of scrutinising this forum. As a university researcher this study was my doctorate. As a team member it was about improving practice and I was accountable to the other members of the team, the preschoolers and their parents. As a university researcher I had the power to instigate the research and to write the research as a dissertation. However, during the action research project the power of how data were collected,

when they were collected, how they were scrutinised and how they were used was in the hands of the team members who were accountable to and responsible for those participating in the study: the preschoolers, the parents and one another.

The concern of power and privilege is ever present in collaborative research (Goldstein, 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Ryan & Campbell, 2001). I believe the orientation phase of this research project was of vital importance to the project as a whole, as it became a time to not only get to know one another before the action research phase began but also to explore critically our personal and collective research and pedagogical underpinnings and philosophies. From these discussions we were able to base our research project in feminist communitarian solidarity underpinned by an ethic of care. Each co-researcher was committed to encouraging equity and equality through empathy, trust and care within the team. Therefore, much of the concern regarding power and privilege was alleviated. This was brought about through much open debate, discussion, clarification and reflection on the part of each member of the participatory action research team. There were spaces for disagreement and simultaneously our discourse aimed for mutual understanding and the honouring of moral commitments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Each team member saw the importance of this investigation to her community.

However, a critical moment for me as research facilitator occurred at the very beginning of the action research phase of the project. Preschool B did not follow through with the action plan for the first two weeks of the action research. This disappointed the other members of the team as we were looking forward to comparing the different groups' responses. The reasons Kate and Shelley gave were twofold. Firstly, the first week back after the holidays was rather hectic and they did not have a chance to access the texts agreed upon even though in prior research meetings they were quite sure that the texts were in their storeroom. Secondly, they felt that because a child new to the preschool would displayed signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, the picture book *Marty and Mei Ling* would be more beneficial to their preschool group and still remain true to the study because it focused on diversity and difference through (dis)ability and racial difference. I assumed that Kate and Shelley were committed to the research project; however, because they changed their action plan without the group's knowledge, I began to

question their commitment and wondered if this was to be a recurring action that might jeopardise the trustworthiness of the entire action research.

I soon realised that this was not the case and that action research sometimes veers away from the planned path owing to unexpected circumstances and the very nature of the participation. The human condition (e.g., illness, fatigue, family commitments and work load) may impact on the research project. Success is not based on whether participants complete the steps rigidly, but whether they have a strong and genuine sense of development, growth and progress stemming from their involvement in the participatory action research (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Although Kate and Shelley veered away from the planned action they *were* developing and evolving their understanding of using children's literature to support teaching for social justice based on the immediate needs of their setting. I believed in this research and the capabilities of the research team; as Freire (1971) suggests, "to be a good [participatory] researcher means above all to have faith in people; to believe in the possibility that they can create and change things" (p. 62).

Another important aspect of this issue of relational practice regarding quality and validity is the distinction between *involvement* and *participation* in participatory action research (McTaggart, 1997). In contrast to merely being involved in this research project I wanted co-researchers to have ownership of the project. To this end they shared in the way the research was "conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world" (McTaggart, 1997, p. 28). It was important to the research project and the research team as a whole that each member was equally valued, respected and upheld. This is apparent in the time and effort each team member gave to each phase of the research project, especially during the orientation phase which set the scene for the study in an ethic of care and solidarity.

Issues of plural ways of knowing

Was the action research inclusive of a plurality of knowing?

Issues of plural ways of knowing link with *extended epistemology* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *knowledge-in-action* (a characteristic of action research); all have greatly impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapters Three and Four. This study drew on four epistemological frameworks:

Park's (2006) relational, reflective and representational forms of knowledge; a sacred existential epistemology (Christians, 1997, 2003, 2005); socioconstructivist epistemology (Bryman, 2008; Burr, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003); and feminist epistemology (Lather, 1991, 1992, 2000; Mac Naughton, 2001; Olesen, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000). These epistemologies reflect the research project's concern with the everyday preschool experience of storytime and the development of living knowledge gained from the storytime experiences. It examined the knowledge construction of the preschoolers through what they were saying and doing in response to these storytime sessions. This examination assisted the early childhood educators (co-researchers) to build their own knowledge of how to teach for social justice. The research team's epistemological understandings ensured conceptual theoretical integrity; embraced ways of knowing beyond the intellect; and assisted in intentionally choosing appropriate research methods.

Was the action research inclusive of a plurality of knowing and ensuring conceptual theoretical integrity?

The concepts and theories that grounded this research project were underpinned by a participative worldview and drew on a number of theories (theory of a participatory worldview [see Chapter Three], critical theory [see Chapter Three], and constructivist theory [see Chapter Two]). These theories are embedded in this research project's assertion that the co-construction of practical knowledge helped transform the lived experiences of the participants in this study (the preschoolers and the early childhood educators). The co-researchers' conceptual view of storytime changed over the course of the action research from that of a simple transition activity to one that embraced critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice. The preschoolers' responses to social justice issues raised during storytime sessions changed from initial stereotypical reactions to more reflective, critical discussion. Thus, conceptual theoretical integrity was upheld throughout the research project.

Was the action research inclusive of a plurality of knowing and embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?

Relational knowledge was valued by this research project as it built on shared feelings and experiences where people come together in empathy making it possible for people to know one another affectively as well as cognitively (Park, 2006). This

way of knowing connected each co-researcher emotionally, by acknowledging and respecting feelings of inadequacy, nervousness, and tension as well as feelings of competence, control and calmness. Feelings such as inadequacy, which may have been considered negative and signs of weakness in other research projects, were made transparent, acknowledged, respected and allowed to evolve as part of the process of this research project. As a result the co-researchers grew to know, respect, empathise with and understand one another on a very deep level. This could also be said for the way the co-researchers viewed the preschoolers and how the preschoolers began to view one another and the characters in the texts. They developed an emotional connection with characters who were being treated unjustly and unfairly. They also developed an emotional connection with characters who were different from themselves. Therefore, feelings and emotions were valued as ways of knowing by this research project.

Relational knowledge is closely related to representative knowledge where there must be a willingness and openness to carefully and actively listen to the people participating in the study (Park, 2006). However, the team did not simply listen. We watched for facial expression, body language and voice intonation and variance. Therefore the team wished our understanding of representative knowledge to be a holistic interpretation of what the preschoolers, and indeed one another, were saying and doing. Similarly socio constructivist epistemology maintains that human thought cannot be meaningfully disconnected from human feeling and action (Bryman, 2008; Burr, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003).

Was the action research inclusive of a plurality of knowing and intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
Reflective knowledge and feminist epistemology, both drawing on critical theory, argue that meaningful human knowledge must not merely understand the world in which we live but aspire to transform it for the better (Braidotti, 1992; Lather, 1991). Because this way of knowledge was of vital importance to the study the choice of participatory action research was clear, as action is an essential element of reflective knowledge (Park, 2006) and feminist epistemology (Stanley, 1990). Through action the research team gained knowledge of preschoolers' understandings of social justice

issues and how storytime worked in each preschool setting. We understood that there was room for improvement and set about to change practice and make it better.

A sacred existential epistemology also allies well with that of participatory action research in that it is grounded in shared governance, empathy, love, solidarity, empowerment, care and community underpinned by the belief that knowledge is constructed through the sociocultural contexts with which one engages (Christians, 1998, 2005). This is also reflected in a socio constructivist epistemology that assumes a progressive and evolving view of knowledge construction (Bryman, 2008; Burr, 2003; Kincheloe, 2003). The research team actively constructed meaning through the process of participatory action research to arrive at an understanding of knowledge that was meaningful and useful to the setting and context of each team member with a view to generating positive change.

The melded epistemologies assisted the team to appreciate the use of videotape, conversation and journal entries as appropriate research techniques that would help our analysis of storytime sessions and preschoolers' understandings of and sensitivities to social justice issues. We ensured that these techniques would not be invasive, but would be respectful, honouring and empowering. To this end, during group analysis, comments were thoughtfully put forward, supportive and always open for debate; preschoolers were encouraged to say exactly how they felt during storytime sessions and their comments were never judged.

Issues of significance

Is the action research worthy of the term significant?

Issues of significance link with *meaning and purpose* (a dimension of a participatory worldview) and *human flourishing* (a characteristic of action research); all have greatly impacted on this research project and have been discussed in Chapters Three and Four. I contend that, as a result of this research project, each member of the research team, perhaps unknowingly, embraced a *pedagogy of love* (Darder, 2002). This is not romanticised love, nor is it based on unconditional acceptance or absolute consensus. Instead it is:

> unconstricted, rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with
> purpose in our life and to intimately connect that purpose with what [Freire]

called our 'true vocation' – to be human. In Freire's words to be passionate and to love in the midst of all our fears, anxieties, and imperfections truly constituted powerful expressions of our humanity – the humanity we had to courageously embrace as educators committed to the practice of freedom. (Darder, 2002, p. 34)

All co-researchers willingly committed to this research project and persistently struggled through our fears, anxieties and imperfections with our research purposes. However, the research aims became enmeshed in our struggle to be fully human and to value this humanity, not only for ourselves individually but also for those in our care: the preschoolers, their families and one another. To be fully human meant for us to be interconnected, to be interdependent, to be participatory, to be collaborative and to value, uphold, celebrate and respect humanity. Thus we had a profound commitment to humanity which is essential for liberation education (Freire, 1996). This idea of humanity is not a simplistic notion of having positive self-worth, but more "a deeply reflective interpretation of the dialectical relationship between our cultural existence as individuals and our political and economic existence as social beings" (Darder, 2002, p. 35). The research team argued that the social and economic inequalities and injustices that exist in our world dehumanise. This distorts our capacity to love one another, the world and ourselves (Darder, 2002). The research team asserted that guiding preschoolers to an awareness and understanding of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity enabled the preschoolers involved in the research project to love and respect others, the world and themselves.

The main purpose of any form of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful and usable to those involved in the study and to their increased well-being and human flourishing (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). To this end the research team explored new possibilities to enhance their situations, to improve their practice and to impact on their preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to social justice issues. These matters were of great significance to each team member. Through this research project the research team concluded that they improved their practice to support and promote teaching for social justice in their settings and in doing so guided their preschoolers to value, respect and uphold

difference, diversity and human dignity in the hope of contributing to a "better, freer world" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2).

The advantages of critical action research, such as this research project, go beyond an attempt to break away from the "blinders of instrumental rationality" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 134) to gaining insight into the dynamics of actual classrooms. These advantages were especially apparent in this participatory action research. This research project encouraged educators/co-researchers to examine their teaching practices through carefully and actively listening to what their preschoolers were saying. The emergent findings of this research project are mirrored in these words:

> When teachers listen to their students and elicit their opinions and perspectives, a variety of benefits are derived. Students who are allowed to express thoughts previously suppressed for fear of negative judgement or retribution experience a form of catharsis. This catharsis allows for a healthier, more authentic student-teacher relationship inevitably leading to better communication and mutual understanding. The student, and in many cases the teacher, is confirmed, his or her experiences validated. If for no other reason, the student feels a greater sense of self-worth resulting from the attention and interest displayed by the teacher researcher. Such teacher-questioning of students induces pupils to organise previously unfiltered thoughts in order to render them understandable to the teacher. Thus an element of interpretation is necessary – an interpretation which is relatively easy to elicit from students because of its connection to their lived worlds. (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 134)

The benefits outlined above were significant in the context of both preschools involved in this research project. Not only did the research assist educators with strategies to support and promote teaching for social justice in their classrooms, it also encouraged open communication during storytime sessions whereby the children freely and without judgement expressed opinions, beliefs and ideas that had never before been voiced. This open communication highlighted to the children that their opinions, beliefs and ideas were valued by the teacher. As the study progressed the children's responses and discussions became more reflective, articulate, critical and in-depth.

This research project is significant in that it transformed how the co-researchers involved in this study viewed and understood storytime to allow it to be used effectively to teach for social justice and it also explored strategies that complemented this use of storytime. However, of equal importance is the fact that

this participatory action research project may be replicated in other settings and contexts from early childhood to secondary schooling. As explained previously, the findings may differ from context to context; however, a research project's inability to produce infallible research results is definitely not a mark of failure (Kincheloe, 2003). The notion of transferability is considered in action research such as this study, more in terms of a heuristic than those of mathematical probability. This research is not telling educators what to do, but more importantly encouraging them to "raise questions and consider possibilities" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 170). It is the process of examining one's own practice, with the support of others, and carefully and actively listening to students, without judgement, that will impact on one's own teaching for social justice. This is of significance to teaching as a whole.

Of further significance this research adds to the growing body of knowledge regarding participatory action research. It was important to this research project from the outset that, as a team, we explored our frameworks of understanding. Therefore, each team member reflected upon her personal and professional philosophy and epistemology; from these reflections we melded a collective philosophy that the team adopted and that influenced how the research was conducted. To this end the research project was underpinned by feminist communitarianism and an ethic of care (discussed in Chapters Three and Six) that valued solidarity, shared governance, compassion, empathy, trust, loyalty, care and love. Each team member was committed to building a team based on these qualities. This did not mean that there was not dissension in the team at times. However, because we had constructed a research philosophy valuing an ethic of care and feminist communitarianism, there was room for open debate in an atmosphere of support and care. To each member of the research team collaboration and participation outweighed personal agendas.

Although this participatory action research was extremely demanding of each team member's time, energy and effort; and although, at times the process was "messy" the research project produced knowledge that was useful and usable to those involved in the study. This research project would not have been as significant to each team member and each preschool setting without the orientation phase that looked critically and deeply into our frameworks of understanding and was invaluable in forming a collegial, dedicated and committed team. However, like all

research projects this study had not only strengths, as outlined above, but also limitations that are discussed below.

LIMITATIONS

Like most participatory action research projects, this study required a significant investment in both time and energy (physical, intellectual and emotional) from all co-researchers. It is difficult to recruit participants to such an investment; and the research was very dependent on continual participant commitment. This research project was fortunate to recruit dedicated and committed professionals; however, the 'human condition' did impact on the study. My own illness during the first week of the action research phase allowed only two storytime sessions to be videotaped for that week. Teacher illness could have impacted very negatively; however, teacher assistants (as co-researchers) were able to undertake the storytime sessions without any duress, thus allowing the research to continue. Sandra, Lisa's supervisor and the preschool director of a busy preschool with three levels of educative care, was often unable to attend team meetings due to work commitments. The team kept her up-to-date via meeting minutes and personal communication. At the conclusion of the action research phase Lisa moved to another location. This could have impacted negatively on the study if this had happened before the completion of the action research phase.

Building collaborative relationships is not an easy task but it was an imperative one for this research project. As a team we believed that we had formed a very strong bond which can be seen by the fact that most team members continued to meet long after the action research phase of the study had concluded and much longer than I had anticipated. With six co-researchers all having equal and valued input into the direction of the action research open debate was quite often time consuming and "messy" with discussions "going in circles". Nevertheless, all discussions and action research cycles were supported by our research philosophy and underpinned by care, consideration and empathy.

A logistical limitation of this research project was that sometimes picture books, which the team identified as being of possible benefit to the preschoolers' developing understandings of social justice issues (and therefore of benefit to the

study), could not be accessed when they were required. Although the preschools and I had our own collections, they were limited, and often the library did not have the texts that we would have liked to explore with the preschoolers. Picture books could not be accessed too far in advance because the team wished to select books based on the preschoolers' responses to the texts read during storytime sessions each week.

This research project highlighted the importance of the preschoolers' voices: their opinions, beliefs and ideas moved the action research forward. However, with some discomfort, it is noted that the preschoolers were not asked during the course of the study to be actively and directly involved in reflections regarding quality and validity. Preschoolers' responses to questions emanating from the five broad issues of quality and validity (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), such as the following, would have benefited the research project: Is this research project invigorating and empowering you? How could we improve the research to meet *your* needs? Is the project of significance to you? Do you feel your opinions, beliefs and ideas are valued? What are you discovering by being involved in this research project? The research team analysed the preschoolers' responses to initial and concluding conversations and storytime sessions to answer these questions *for* them; however, we failed to ask the preschoolers directly and therefore lost their valuable reflections.

During the final week of the action research phase, Kate and Pippa did ask their preschoolers "*What have all the stories that Miss Karen has videotaped made you think about*?" This discussion was not videotaped; nevertheless, journal notes reveal that the preschoolers were valuing difference, diversity and human dignity (see p. 326 in this chapter). However, the preschoolers' thoughts regarding the significance of the study and how the research project was conducted were not deliberately explored.

It is hoped that the preschoolers involved in this research project will, in the future, stand against injustice and help create a world that values difference, diversity and human dignity through respect, care, acceptance and understanding. However, due to the scope of the study this cannot be confirmed. Although the findings suggest that many preschoolers were beginning to develop awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human

dignity, the possibility that this research project has positively impacted on the future lives of these preschoolers cannot be proven.

Owing to the fact that only two preschool groups participated in the research project, it may be considered a fairly small scale project. Indeed, it has been argued that action research will be of limited influence if we think only in terms of single or small scale cases, and that research should be spread over a large terrain intervening "in as many places in the overall movement as possible" (Gustavsen, 2003a, pp. 96-97). By contrast, a counter argument may be put forward that supports this small scale participatory action research. If we aspire to do work of significance and to influence changes in society in the direction of justice and democracy, we must not only build large scale networks of inquiry but also engage in transformations of consciousness and behaviour at personal and interpersonal levels (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). While it may be correct that we cannot create large scale change on small scale cases, "neither can we build truly effective and liberating political networks of inquiry without developing significant capacities for critical inquiry in the individual and small communities which constitute them" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. xxvi). As Margaret Mead (as cited in Lutkehaus, 2008) suggests, perhaps the only way to encourage systemic change is through the commitment and dedication of small groups of people.

SUMMARY

This chapter began *Part D: Final Reflections* by firstly highlighting the research team's final reflection on its own practice. It then reflected my own perceptions of the research project as an entity and explored issues of quality and validity by employing eight choice-points of quality in action research. This reflection highlighted that my liberation (my seeking knowledge of strategies that would support and promote teaching for social justice) was, indeed bound up with the co-researchers' search for better practice that would impact positively on their preschoolers' developing awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues which might contribute to building a better world. The chapter concluded by outlining the limitations of the research project.

The following chapter brings this dissertation to a close by highlighting the emergent findings of this participatory action research in relation to the aims of the study and the research questions as outlined in Chapter One. It then explores how this research project extends knowledge in the areas of researching in early childhood settings, teaching for social justice in early childhood education, participatory action research methodology and giving voice to participants, and the theory of a participatory worldview. The chapter concludes by discussing suggestions for further research that might build on this research project.

CHAPTER TEN: LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

> *I do not really wish to conclude or sum up, rounding off the argument so as to dump it in a nutshell for the reader. A lot more can be said about any of the topics I have touched upon. . . . The point is not a set of answers but making possible a different practice.* (Kappeler, 1986, p. 212)

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter reported on the research team's reflections on its own practice. It also detailed my own perceptions of the research project as an entity and explored issues of quality and validity by addressing eight choice-points of quality in action research that are related to the dimensions of a participatory worldview and the characteristics of action research. The chapter concluded by outlining the limitations of the research project.

This concluding chapter brings *Part Four: Final Reflections* and, indeed, this dissertation to a close; however, as the title and above quotation indicate there is still much to say and explore regarding teaching for social justice in the early years, participatory action research and the theory of a participatory worldview. The title of this final chapter borrows from Australian singing icon, Slim Dusty's (2000) hauntingly reflective recording: *Looking Forward, Looking Back*; and this theme pervades the chapter. It looks forward to possible further advances in teaching for social justice in the early years and, it is hoped, looking back on this research project raises possibilities and inspires further discussion, debate and exploration.

This chapter firstly highlights the significance of addressing gaps in the current body of knowledge through examining children's literature with young children in preschool settings to heighten and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and to encourage them to identify social injustices. The chapter then discusses the emergent findings of this participatory action research project in relation to the aims of the study as outlined in Chapter One. It then

explores how this research project extends knowledge in the areas of teaching for social justice in early childhood education, participatory action research methodology and the theory of a participatory worldview. The chapter concludes by discussing suggestions for further research that might build on this research project.

ADDRESSING GAPS IN THE CURRENT BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Through a thorough literature review (see Chapter Two) this research project identified three main gaps in the current body of knowledge relating to teaching for social justice and early childhood education. These gaps linked with the research project's aims as shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Identified Gaps Linked with Research Aims

GAPS	RESEARCH AIMS
Very little research involving teaching for social justice and anti-bias curricula has been undertaken in preschool settings. Furthermore, such research has seen little investigation in Australia.	Investigate ways in which children's literature could help preschoolers to reflect upon, clarify and articulate their awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues and promote positive attitudes towards difference and diversity. (Undertake study in Australia).
Transformative and productive ways of sharing the teaching/learning experience that facilitate preschoolers' understandings of social justice issues regarding difference, diversity and human dignity have seen little exploration. Educators have struggled to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to promote and support teaching for social justice and an anti-bias curriculum.	Assist early childhood educators who have struggled to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to teach for social justice; Investigate ways in which children's literature could help preschoolers to reflect upon, clarify and articulate their awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues and promote positive attitudes towards difference and diversity; Explore how preschoolers could critically examine children's literature to identify and challenge social injustices and stereotypes.
Research often overlooks the voices of participants, especially children.	Investigate ways in which children's literature could help preschoolers to reflect upon, clarify and articulate their awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues and promote positive attitudes towards difference and

	diversity;
	Explore how preschoolers could critically examine children's literature to identify and challenge social injustices and stereotypes;
	Employ a collaborative, caring and socially just mode of inquiry where the voices of all participants were valued, trusted and acted upon.

From the above gaps and aims two research questions were proposed and addressed within this dissertation:

How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?

How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

A summary of the emergent findings of this research project outlines how the research questions and aims were addressed. In turn, these findings addressed the gaps in the current body of knowledge.

EMERGENT FINDINGS RELATED TO THE STUDY'S AIMS

Because the above aims are so closely connected, they are discussed as a whole. The introductory chapter of this dissertation cited Noble (2003), who argued that the thoughts and beliefs of those children who will become caretakers of the planet for the next generation can be shaped and moulded by love. Mandela (1994) asserted that people can be guided to love, because love comes naturally to the human heart. I hoped that this research project could guide the preschoolers involved in this study to love and care about and for those who were different from themselves. What I did not envisage when embarking on this research journey was that those involved in this study (the preschoolers, co-researchers and parents) would

instil in each member of the research team a deep longing to find a new ethic, a philosophy of life, an essence that would better equip us for all that lies ahead. As a research group we examined philosophies and ethics that would support our collaborative research endeavours and created our research philosophy based on an ethic of care and grounded in feminist communitarianism (refer to Chapter Six). We embraced this philosophy as a research team; however, as I observed and reflected I saw this philosophy spill over into our pedagogy and our day-to-day dealings with one another, the preschoolers, the parents and the larger community. Consequently, as a result of this research project and as explained in the previous chapter, each member of the research team, perhaps unknowingly, embraced a pedagogy of love (Darder, 2002).

All co-researchers were passionate about and committed to this research project. However, as may be seen when reflecting on the previous chapters of this dissertation (particularly Chapters Eight and Nine), there were times when our fears, anxieties and imperfections were very apparent. Yet, in the midst of these fears, anxieties and imperfections, each member of the research team embraced our ethic of care and showed love towards one another "as educators committed to the practice of freedom" (Darder, 2002, p. 35). This "practice of freedom" was not limited to our practice as a research team (liberating one another to explore pedagogical possibilities and strategies to teach for social justice), but it can be seen from the emergent research findings outlined in Part Three that many of the preschoolers involved in this study were also liberated from stereotypical and hegemonic thinking.

As indicated in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, challenges were set. There was a need for researchers and educators to explore ways whereby preschoolers' negative attitudes towards difference were challenged and they were encouraged to appreciate diversity (Connolly, 2003). And there was a call for research into new pedagogies that promised to engross students in critical dialogues where complex cultural particularities and social traditions were investigated, with the aim of encouraging new ways of relating to and understanding social relations with a view to attaining a peaceful and just world (Elenes, 2002). It cannot be stated that this research project has attained world peace and justice; however, it can be said that this study did engross the preschoolers in critical discussions during storytime

sessions where complex cultural particularities and taken-for-granted assumptions were investigated. These dialogues encouraged the preschoolers to challenge stereotypical and hegemonic beliefs and to replace these with new ways of relating to difference, diversity and human dignity underpinned by respect, acceptance and the need for understanding. Thus this research project addressed both Connolly's (2003) and Elenes' (2002) challenges.

The research project also transformed the way that the co-researchers, as educators involved in this study, viewed storytime in their settings (refer to Chapter Six). Transformative pedagogies must relate to existing conditions but go beyond the present situation to bring into being something better (Greene, 1995). To this end, storytime was elevated to a valued time of the preschool day where all involved were encouraged to debate, discuss and engage with the social justice issues raised in the literature read to the group. The educators (co-researchers) involved in this study now view children's literature as a productive catalyst for teaching for social justice and raising their preschoolers' awareness of and sensitivities to social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity. To use this catalyst wisely these educators now understand that specific strategies should accompany the use of children's literature which in their classrooms also facilitates critical examination of social justice issues highlighted in the texts. These strategies have been discussed as they emerged in Part Three and are summarised in the following section of this chapter. Employing children's literature and these strategies encouraged the preschoolers involved in this research project to not only examine social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity but also to look for injustices. At the conclusion of the research project preschoolers were using terms such as "*Not fair*", "*Not right*", and "*We should care for one another*". These terms were not used by the preschoolers prior to the research project but instead were developed during the course of the study (refer to Part Three).

Rightly, action research is frequently thought of as a process that produces local knowledge (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Wadsworth, 2006; Whitmore & McKee, 2006). However, "with more doctoral students using it [action research] for their projects, it also clearly has the potential to inform the knowledge bases of our fields of study" (Herr &

Anderson, 2005, p. 128). To this end this research project has been discussed at numerous conferences through paper presentations and a journal article highlighting research in early childhood education. The following sections of this final chapter discuss how this research project might inform teaching for social justice in the early years, inform the researchers wishing to undertake participatory action research, and inform and build upon the theory of the participatory worldview.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: WHAT WORKED?

Firstly I will summarise findings that connect to the first research question: *How might children's literature be used with young children in preschool settings to heighten, nurture and support their awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity and encourage them to identify social injustices?*

By examining the classroom discussions that developed over the course of the action research phase and by comparing the initial and concluding conversations held with the preschoolers, the team concluded that the intervening pedagogical strategy of critically examining social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity through storytime sessions heightened the preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, these social justice issues. The following actions (which have been more thoroughly explained as they emerged in Part Three) impacted positively on this awareness, understanding and sensitivity:

- ✓ elevating the status of storytime sessions from simple transition activities to important components of the preschool day;
- ✓ reading explicit texts that may be considered critical texts that highlight and celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity;
- ✓ engaging, as a group, in shared sustained thinking characterised by sustained cognitive engagements regarding picture books read during storytime;
- ✓ actively and carefully listening to children's responses (practising a listening pedagogy) and reflectively choosing (and allowing children to choose) texts that consolidated the social justice issues that had been highlighted in previously read texts;

- ✓ engaging in shared sustained thinking characterised by sustained cognitive engagements with individual children to gauge their understandings of and sensitivities to the social justice issues raised in the texts;

- ✓ employing guided questions or comments to introduce the literature and orientate the children to the social justice issues highlighted in the texts;

- ✓ utilising open-ended and higher order questioning techniques;

- ✓ revisiting whole texts or parts of texts for clarification;

- ✓ placing the social justice issues covered in the texts into real life and the preschool contexts;

- ✓ responding to social justice issues through action (e.g., encouraging the sharing of what the children have – clothes, toys – with those who go without; supporting inclusion in play situations at preschool);

- ✓ inviting, on a regular basis, people of diverse races, cultures, abilities and backgrounds to the preschool to share their ideas, games, food, music, art, language, wisdom, expertise and knowledge;

- ✓ encouraging artistic response to the texts read (for example re-enactment, drawing, construction, dramatic play, music, singing and dancing);

- ✓ reinforcing and consolidating social justice issues read in texts by displaying preschoolers' artistic responses and related posters and making available relevant jigsaws, dolls and games;

- ✓ involving and informing parents; and

- ✓ embedding teaching for social justice in the curriculum through the above strategies.

The findings that connect to the second research question are now reported:
How might teachers take on a collaborative role and develop as a research team to address the above research question and explore the pedagogical strategy of using children's literature to teach for social justice?

The teachers and I, as co-researchers, developed the research team through dedication, commitment and perseverance. This was not an easy task and much time,

effort and energy were needed. During the orientation phase of the project each co-researcher contributed to formulating a research philosophy and constitution which underpinned and strengthened the collaborative project (see Chapter Six). This required each member of the research team to research and reflect upon what she believed would help create a successful and truly collaborative research endeavour. This is expanded on in the section *Expanding the boundaries: Empowering participant voice* (pp. 358-362 of this chapter). The team drew on an ethic of care, sacred existentialism and feminist communitarianism to ground this research project. Therefore, each research meeting and, indeed all our communications, were conducted with care, respect, support and empathy.

The research team developed an atmosphere of hope, collegiality, friendship and love. This atmosphere was created through both professional and personal engagement. Meetings always began informally through conversation over afternoon tea where support and encouragement were offered for both professional and personal endeavours. Team members also met socially which strengthened personal ties and contributed to building a strong research team.

Not only did the research project draw on an ethic of care to frame how the inquiry was conducted, but the research team also drew on an ethic of care to teach for social justice and guide the preschoolers to respect and dignify others. We respectfully, and without judgement, listened to and valued the preschoolers' views, ideas and beliefs. This encouraged and supported the preschoolers to reflect upon, develop, clarify and reconstruct their understandings of social justice issues related to difference, diversity and human dignity. Therefore, a pedagogy of listening (Egan, 2009) was embraced.

The gaps in the current body of knowledge, which were identified in Chapters One and Two, have been broadly addressed above. However, the following section explains further how this participatory action research project has expanded the boundaries of the current body of knowledge in specific areas.

EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES: VALUING RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS AND GIVING YOUNG CHILDREN A VOICE

This research project has identified that the preschoolers involved in the study were capable of critical reflection and had the capacity to participate in profound discussions that challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about issues of physical appearance, gender, colour, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability. The preschoolers actively engaged in storytime discussions to construct their knowledge of difference, diversity and human dignity. As discussed in Chapter Five, language is not simply a form of expression but also a basic tool for constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962). Therefore, when the co-researchers as educators used language and encouraged children to do the same and to engage in open discussion, they were promoting and supporting thought as well as speech (Trawick-Smith, 2006).

Each preschooler involved in this research project actively constructed her/his understandings of and sensitivities to the social justice issues highlighted in the children's literature that was read. Therefore each preschooler was actively constructing an understanding of the social world and her/his place in it (refer to Chapter Five). The study found that the preschool children involved in this research project were capable of making moral judgements. They were capable of understanding another's point of view. They were also capable of displaying empathy towards others. Many entered Hoffman's (1991, 1995) last stage of empathy development whereby they understood and were sensitive to the "bigger picture" of human suffering. This can be seen by Preschool A preschoolers initiating a campaign to send clothes and toys to community aid providers (refer to Chapter Seven).

EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES: DEVELOPING TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS

This research project has extended and enhanced our knowledge in the area of teaching for social justice in early childhood education. As noted, prior to this study educators were not employing appropriate pedagogical strategies to support and promote teaching for social justice. This research project has equipped the educators involved in the study with pedagogical strategies to teach for social justice in their settings. Principally the strategy of employing children's literature,

particularly the use of texts that explicitly highlight and celebrate difference, diversity and human dignity, was successful in facilitating the preschoolers' awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to these social justice issues. It was identified that the preschoolers involved in the study were capable of critical reflection and had the capacity to participate in profound discussions that challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about issues of physical appearance, gender, colour, ethnicity, socio-economic status and ability.

As previously explained, the study gave dignity to and elevated the status of storytime from a simple transition exercise to a valued part of the preschool day where voices were valued and trusted. This encouraged discussion within the preschool groups and, as the study progressed these discussions became more critical and in-depth. The educators used guided questions to introduce the storytime sessions and to focus the preschooler group. Reflection on these storytime sessions and discussions highlighted that, when educators, actively and without judgment, listened to their preschoolers' opinions, beliefs and ideas, and scaffolded when appropriate, using higher order and open-ended questioning techniques, more critical and in-depth discussion resulted. When discussion was child-driven, allowing ample time, and was open and honest (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006), it was found that the preschoolers "bounced off" one another, engaged in dialogue, challenged ideas and created space for multiple understandings.

The research team contends that it is important to examine preschoolers' opinions, beliefs and ideas regarding social justice issues and choose literature to be read during storytime sessions accordingly. Therefore a cyclical research approach to storytime that involves observation, planning, reflection and action should be employed. This mirrors action research methodology.

EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES: EMPOWERING PARTICIPANT VOICE

As noted in Chapter One and discussed in Chapter Four, this study embraced the research design of participatory action research because, firstly, it reflected my participatory worldview by which this action research project was framed; and secondly, it is a collaborative inquiry method that values participant knowledge, skills and expertise and seeks to empower and give voice to those involved in the

study and to those who will use the findings. As can be seen in previous chapters the use of participatory action research enabled the co-researchers, as educators, to explore possibilities to improve their practice and gave them pedagogical strategies to teach for social justice in their early childhood settings. However, perhaps the most significant contributions that this research project makes to action research methodology are threefold. Firstly, the study may add to understandings of action research analysis through the analytical framework that was melded to assist in analysing data gathered throughout this research project (see Chapter Four). Secondly, this research project may contribute to action research methodological understandings through the research team's committed and conscious search for a research philosophy and constitution that could underpin and support our research endeavours (see Chapter Six). Thirdly, this research project may contribute to action researchers' understandings regarding issues of "Truth" through the regular and consistent use of the five broad issues of quality and validity from which emanated eight choice-points for addressing these issues in action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

The analytic framework which was explained in Chapter Four has assisted in analysing the data and writing this dissertation. It melds critical reflection, an understanding of knowledge in action adapting Fairclough's (1992) framework and critical narrative. Although this research project did not employ discourse analysis it did use Fairclough's (1992) three aspects of discourse and the three functions of language as a guide to construct a framework to assist with data analysis. As a research team, we analysed discursive practices at the micro level that focused on how preschoolers and teachers interpreted the children's literature. We also analysed discursive practices at the macro level focusing on intertextuality: how each storytime session and each research team meeting built on the last and also looked to the future. Macro-analysis examines the interplay of participants and what they drew upon (including one another) to produce and interpret texts (meaning both literature and discourse – the written and the spoken), and whether this production and interpretation were being created in normative or transformative ways. We therefore analysed the social practice of storytime. The "writing up" of this analysis employed critical reflection and critical narrative. Participatory action researchers may find this analytical framework helpful.

During the orientation phase of this research project and after much research, reflection and discussion, the research team adopted the feminist communitarian model through which to conduct this inquiry. This model was underpinned by an ethic of care and a sacred existential epistemology. As explained in Chapter Six, from our understandings of an ethic of care, a sacred existential epistemology and feminist communitarianism we based our research constitution on seven principles that guided our research team through the inevitable "ups and downs" of this collaborative research project (refer to Chapter Six).

Others wishing to apply participatory action research may also be encouraged to incorporate an orientation phase and, as a research team, explore a research philosophy and constitution that will support their specific research endeavours. This is time consuming and challenging. However, this exercise helped base our research efforts on mutual solidarity, love, care and support. This was especially crucial to a research project that scrutinised the practices of its co-researchers.

Also time consuming and challenging to this research project was the importance of addressing issues of quality and validity. As noted in Chapter Four, the issue of validity is quite vexed for action researchers. It has been argued that the traditional discourses of validity, couched in positivism, do not fit the qualities of action research (Kvale, 1989, Herr & Anderson, 2005; Woolcot, 1990). According to many writers on qualitative research, the terms *trustworthiness* or *truth-value* are usually employed to assess the validity of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mac Naughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001; Stake, 1995; Wiersma, 2001). Lather (2001) has considered shifting the frame of validity from discourse regarding quality as normative to a relational exercise. However, Reason and Bradbury (2006) shifted the dialogue regarding concerns of idealist questions seeking truth to concerns regarding "engagement, dialogue, pragmatic outcomes and an emergent, reflexive sense of what is important" (p. 343). This discourse reflected what our research team was endeavouring to do: we wished to engage with one another in dialogue through cyclical, emergent, deep reflection to produce significant pragmatic outcomes that would inform our teaching for social justice. The main issue for us, as action researchers, was about "making it meaningful" rather than "getting it right" (Greene, 1992, p. 39). Therefore, to examine the quality and validity of our research we

addressed the five broad issues of quality and validity (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). These issues were posed as questions to the research team and were revisited regularly (refer to Chapters Eight and Nine).

Reflecting on and addressing questions of quality and validity were not easy tasks for the research team. It was both time consuming and at times challenging. However, the research team concluded that the regular exercise of reflecting on its own research practice was worthwhile in that it re-focused us as a team. It often re-positioned us in the direction that we intended, clarified that what we were doing was of great significance to each of us and the preschool settings, and brought to light any problems. It also allowed us to reflect on how far we had come and how we had grown as a research team.

To address concerns regarding quality and validity, I also reflected on the overall research project once it had been completed (Chapter Nine). Again I reflected upon the five broad issues of quality and validity in action research and addressed eight choice-points (posed as questions) that emanated from the issues (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Again this reflection was both time consuming and challenging. This reflection highlighted my own perceptions of the research project as an entity. However, I struggled with this reflection because entering into an individual examination of the research project positioned me as being separate from the other research team members. Yet I felt it necessary to include in a dissertation that I claim as my own work. Therefore, in such an exercise being undertaken, the complexities and peculiarities of writing a participatory action research project as a doctoral dissertation became ever apparent. The research project seemed to change quickly from group ownership to one of individual tenure. All my understandings during this reflection were critical, honest and open; however, I had the constant and uncomfortable concern regarding what each of us as a research team member had gleaned from the research project. Was this balanced?

As I write this final chapter, I am still struggling with this question. All the early childhood educators as co-researchers agreed that the research project helped

them improve practice by discovering strategies that worked to support and promote teaching for social justice in the areas of difference, diversity and human dignity. However, is this fair recompense for the hours of research meetings and extra work that this demanding research project necessitated? Returning to the question of balance: it is hoped that through this research project I will be conferred a Doctorate of Philosophy. Are the scales tipping in my favour? If so, can this research project be referred to as a socially just mode of inquiry (which was one of the research aims in Chapter One)? It is hoped that my torment is not enmeshed in academic elitism whereby a doctorate is valued over what has clearly been a research project that has impacted positively on the contexts from which it emanated? In my mental struggle I am comforted by the fact that I have tried, with my co-researchers, to conduct research in a truly collaborative, caring and loving manner. Indeed, my liberation (my seeking of knowledge of strategies that would support and promote teaching for social justice) was bound up with the co-researchers' search for better practices that would impact positively on their preschoolers' developing awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues which might go towards building a better world.

EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES: UPHOLDING A PARTICIPATORY WORLDVIEW IN COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

Although upholding a participatory worldview in collaborative research was not identified as a gap in the introductory chapters of this dissertation, it has been highlighted that this worldview is relatively new to research circles and it is hoped that this research project may add to critical discussions regarding a participatory worldview. As was noted in Chapter One and discussed in Chapter Three, the research project outlined in this dissertation is underpinned by a participatory worldview and joins those who are promoting this new and emergent paradigm (Heron, 2001, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skolimowski, 1995; Tarnas, 1991). Although it may be said that worldviews co-exist rather than replace one another, with others I have argued in this dissertation that the positivist, secular, dualistic, reductionist worldview, often referred to as a mechanistic worldview, may no longer be helpful (Heron, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skrbina, 2001; Tarnas, 1991). This new, emergent worldview has been described as holistic, systemic, experiential, relational and feminine; however, its defining characteristic is that it is participatory

(Heron, 2001, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Skolimowski, 1995; Skrbina, 2001; Tarnas, 1991). Our world consists of interdependent relationships which we co-author. We participate in our world, experiencing "reality" as a co-creation that engages "the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 7).

The participatory metaphor was particularly appropriate for this action research project, because as a research team we participated in co-creating our understandings of teaching for social justice and exploring possibilities of pedagogical strategies to do this (particularly in the areas of difference, diversity and human dignity); yet we were already "embodied and breathing beings *who were necessarily acting*" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. 7) in the situation that we were endeavouring to improve. Therefore as a research team, through participation, we co-created our realities. This meant not only that we improved our teaching practices but also that, as can be seen throughout this dissertation, we developed our research philosophies, which in turn had an impact on our personal philosophies in an emotional, spiritual way. As a group we became connected physically, mentally and emotionally. Thus, through participation, our bodyminds (refer to Chapter Three) co-crafted our realities. Our development as researchers, educators and human beings depended on participation with one another.

To encourage this, we needed to enable and empower one another and the preschoolers involved in the research project. The research project valued the knowledge that each participant (educators as co-researchers, and preschoolers) brought to the study and each participant's ideas, beliefs and opinions were acknowledged, respected and appreciated. Moreover, the research project perceived all participants as beautiful and wonderful in the philosophical sense and guided the preschoolers involved in the study to see the beauty and wonder in all people regardless of gender, sexuality, colour, ethnicity, religion and/or (dis)ability. This notion arcs back to the participatory worldview characteristic which suggests that we experience the world as a sacred place (Berman, 1981; Heron, 2001, 2003; Reason, 1994; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Therefore, the sacred existential epistemology (Ayers, 2006; Christians, 2003, 2005; Rowan, 2006) explained in Chapter Three became part of this research project's epistemological framework. Because a participatory worldview embraces the idea of reality as subjective-objective, it involves an extended epistemology (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). To this end, and to frame this research project, a number of epistemologies were drawn upon and melded.

Park's (2006) epistemological framework highlighting relational, reflective and representational forms of knowledge was extremely helpful as it was contextualised in participatory research. Feminist epistemology highlighting "the linkage of gaining voice to the recognition of knowledge as a social construction in the context of human relations" (Maguire, 2006, p. 65) was critical to this research project. This study strove to give voice to the educators and preschoolers involved in the research project and address the fact that teachers and students are often silenced or at the very best their ideas and opinions are considered unimportant in scientific research paradigms (Cooper & White, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003; Walsh, Tobin & Graue, 1993).

Finally, the epistemological position held by critical social constructivism that assumes that it is impossible to conceive knowledge without thinking of a knower (Kincheloe, 2003) was melded into this research project's extended epistemology. Through critical social constructivism this research project highlighted that the "knowers" (the early childhood educators and preschoolers) involved in the study had the capability to construct knowledge that was pertinent to their contexts and to make positive change in their public and private domains. These complementary epistemological understandings were expanded upon in Chapter Three. They have implications for researchers who wish to uphold a participatory worldview and embrace a melded and extended epistemological framework.

POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation has examined how, though conducting participatory action research, children's literature was used in two Australian preschool settings to heighten young children's awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to,

social justice issues of difference, diversity and human dignity. There are possible research directions that could build on this research project.

As noted in Chapter Nine, it is hoped that the preschoolers involved in this research project will, in the future, stand against injustice and help create a world that values difference, diversity and human dignity through respect, care, acceptance and understanding. However, owing to the scope of this small scale study, this cannot be confirmed. Although the findings suggest that many of the preschoolers involved in the research project were beginning to develop understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues, a longitudinal study would be needed to examine the possibility that this research project has positively impacted on the lives of the preschoolers. Therefore it is suggested that a longitudinal study conducted over the course of the preschoolers' school lives be researched. This could involve a research project such as the one examined in this dissertation beginning the longitudinal study and follow-up observations and/or conversations with the preschoolers at different junctures throughout their school lives. Depending on the scope of and the personnel involved in this new research endeavour the research time frame could culminate at the end of the early phase of learning, the end of elementary/primary schooling, the end of middle schooling or the end of the secondary years.

This research project was undertaken in quite homogeneous settings with all except two children from Anglo Australian backgrounds and only one child with a non-white heritage. Therefore another possible direction that could build on this research project is to conduct the research in multicultural early childhood settings with diverse cultural backgrounds.

A further possibility is to scale the research project up or down. The former could involve many early childhood settings, becoming a large scale project, and the latter could research only one case study using the teacher as action researcher approach (Kincheloe, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 1999).

As can be seen throughout this research project, participatory action research is a socially just mode of inquiry that empowered early childhood educators with strategies to teach for social justice. Another possible research direction using

participatory action research could be for teachers of any age group to meet to engage in a similar research approach to develop any number of teaching strategies for any curriculum area, not only teaching for social justice.

Undertaking research such as that suggested above will build on the research examined in this dissertation and the findings will add richness and further depth to the discourse that this research project may inspire. As indicated by this chapter's introductory quotation, this research project does not contain all the answers to the complex question of teaching for social justice in the early years, nor is it a definitive encapsulation of participatory action research. There still remains much to explore. It is hoped that this study will inspire research endeavours that might further address the challenges outlined in Chapter One.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This dissertation has explained how the methodology of action research particularly the design of participatory action research as a collaborative inquiry process, was employed to value participant knowledge, skills and expertise and empowered and gave voice to those involved in the study and to those who used the findings. The choice of participatory action research was informed by a participatory worldview which underpinned the research project.

As was highlighted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, no-one is born hating another person because of the colour of her/his skin, or gender, or ethnicity, or religion, or ability, or class, or sexual orientation (Mandela, 1994). People learn to hate, and this begins in infancy. I argue that people can be taught to love, because love comes more naturally to the human heart (Mandela, 1994). I also argue that this education must begin in the early years to lay solid foundations for lifelong learning based on respect, empathy and accord; irrespective of colour, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and/or (dis)ability. However, as previously stated, it was found that educators have struggled to find appropriate pedagogical strategies to assist in this education. To address this deficit, this research project examined pedagogical strategies to reveal how children's literature may be successfully employed to heighten young children's awareness and understandings of, and sensitivities to, social justice issues regarding

difference, diversity and human dignity. As Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006) suggest:

> doing anti-bias/multicultural work with white children and their families . . . is pioneering. The destination is a vision; we construct the paths to our destination as we walk them. Mistakes are inevitable. Like all deeply important curriculum, this work requires preparation, constant tending, enthusiasm, and commitment. It also requires faith in the outcome as Eric Hoffman, an experienced anti-bias early childhood educator explains: "I try to provide experiences that will sow the seeds of change." (p. 12)

Although I am sure that mistakes were made along the way, it is hoped that this research project did indeed "sow the seeds of change" in the hearts and minds of the preschoolers, their families, their educators (co-researchers) and myself.

As was explained in Chapter One, I could not, nor did I wish to, divorce my physical, spiritual, emotional self from my intellect in participating in this research project and in writing this dissertation. It is a holistic story. In a way, my narrative seems to have come full circle from a young child who experienced prejudice owing to her difference; through teenage years of anxiety over "man's inhumanity to man"; through a teaching career frustrated by the ineffective use of storytime; to a researcher who sought to explore strategies that would promote respect for and the celebration of difference, diversity and human dignity.

However, this dissertation is not only my research narrative but also a narrative of the co-researchers and preschoolers involved in the study. It is a collaborative, participatory narrative that upholds a participatory worldview. Research such as this participatory action research does not come to a conclusion simply because it has been written as a dissertation. It lives on in the minds and hearts of those who participated in the study and it continues as a never-ending research project in their preschool settings.

It is with humbling appreciation that I leave the final words of this dissertation to Kylie, the mother of four year old Michael from Preschool B:

> *It's so very important to build an understanding of respect for others and an understanding of self-worth as early as possible, because these are the building blocks of life. As children get older it's just too late.*
> (Kylie, personal communication, 18 August, 2006)

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APPENDIX

SECTION

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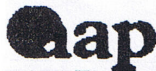
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Appendix C
Table Summary of Action Research Weekly Cycles

TABLE SUMMARY OF ACTION RESEARCH WEEKLY CYCLES

(ACTION RESEARCH PHASE)

Key: c – critical text

nc/c – initially thought of as a non-critical text; on reflection became critical

Cycle One

Table B1 The Action Research Phase: Week One

Week 1	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Snow White* (nc, on reflection c)	*Caps for Sale* (nc, on reflection c)
Key Features:	Challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenge oppression. Uphold freedom of speech These key features were given to this text **after** analysis and critical reflection of this storytime session, as this text affords the opportunities to explore these key features.	Promotes peaceful practices. This key feature was given to this text **after** analysis and critical reflection of this storytime session, as this text affords the opportunity to: engage in discussion about using peaceful practices for conflict resolution.
Children's Responses	Little discussion.	Lots of laughter. Children enjoyed humour. Very little discussion.
Critical Moments:	Lisa: "Snow White had no voice in this version. Only the men in the story actually spoke! I didn't realize this until after I'd read the story to the kids. I was thinking about the book all day and wondering why I felt so uncomfortable about the reading. It was only on reflection that I realised that Snow White had no voice AND I didn't even bring this up in discussion. It was awful!"	Kate: "I thought that colours and numbers could be taught by using this book but it didn't encourage much critical discussion. But looking at the footage I can see that I could have drawn out how the peddler only got his caps back after he stopped using aggressive behaviour. Damn, I could have gone into peaceful practice is a better way of resolving conflict!"
Key words or phrases:	Nil	Nil
Emerging themes?	Little group discussion.	Little group discussion.

Cycle Two

Table B2 The Action Research Phase: Week Two

Week 2	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Princess Smartypants* (c)	*Marty and Mei Ling* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.
Children's Responses:	Children thought that Princess Smartypants should marry Prince Swashbuckle "because he did good things for her" (Heidi). Children thought that Princess Smartypants should have turned Prince Swashbuckle into a knight "and then he could save her"	Children said they would feel "bad" and "sad" if they were alone like Mei Ling

	(Reggie).	
Critical Moments:	Lisa: "Can princesses save knights?" A resounding "NO!" from class group. Colin: "They can't save 'cos princesses are not brave… 'cos they're girls." Harley: "Only boys can save."	No discussion on why Mei Ling felt alone.
Key words or phrases:	"Only boys can save"	"Sad to be alone."
Story 2:	*Paper Bag Princess* (c)	*The Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear* (nc, on reflection c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech.	Uphold peaceful practices. This key feature was given to this text **after** analysis and critical reflection of this storytime session, as this text affords the opportunity to discuss peaceful practices.
Children's Responses:	Many children concentrated on the 'dirty old paper bag' and the importance of "nice, clean clothes" (Melinda). Trixi: "She's angry and sad because she's wearing a paper bag. She's dirty!" Alice thought that the princess was in danger and "the prince should save her". The class as a whole thought that Ronald's words were "mean". However, most children felt that Ronald had every right to insist that Elizabeth come back when she was more presentable "then they can get married" (Tia). On the question of bravery Dave's comment sums up the consensus: "Yeah, girls can be brave. But boys can't be scared! Girls are scared."	Calissa: "He [the mouse] looks sad and scared." Don: "Maybe he could throw the strawberry at the bear." Mark: "No kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" (said laughing)
Critical Moments:	Discussion at morning tea time: "Boys are braver than girls" (Colin). This resulted in a 'boys against girls' (and visa versa) yelling competition until Lisa stepped in asking the children to use inside voices. The "debate" ended.	Mark's comments ignored.
Key words or phrases:	"Boys are braver than girls"	"scared"
Emerging themes?	The importance of outward physical appearance. The gender debate: Boys are braver than girls.	Kindness and sharing are important.

Cycle Three

Table B3 The Action Research Phase: Week Three

Week 3	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Cinderella* (nc, on reflection c)	*Nicketty Nacketty Noo Noo Noo* (nc, on reflection c)
Key Features:	Challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenge oppression. Uphold freedom of speech. These key features were given to this text **after** analysis and critical reflection of this storytime session, as this text affords the opportunity to explore and discuss these key features.	Challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenge oppression. Uphold freedom of speech. Promote peaceful practices. These key features were given to this text **after** analysis and critical reflection of this storytime session, as this text affords the opportunity to explore and discuss these key features. The right of all human beings to live in freedom can be drawn from this text.
Children's Responses:	Children did not like the step mother and sisters: Dave – "They're not nice they make Cinderella do all the work." Colin – "They're evil!" A lot of discussion on the importance of appearance. For example: "Beautiful clothes are important." (Melinda). "She doesn't have nice clothes. She should make some nice clothes" (Trixi). "The sisters are bad 'cos their ugly" (Dave).	Discussion on peaceful practice for resolving conflict. Tilly: "She should talk to the ogre." Discussion on the cleverness of the 'wee wishy woman'. Don: "She was good to trick the ogre so she could run away." Discussion on Human Rights: No-one has the right to 'keep' someone against their will. Caddy: "Nobody should take you away if you don't want to go."
Critical Moments:	Melinda: "I like her in beautiful clothes. Beautiful clothes are important." Lisa: "Do you think that she would be just as nice a person in her old rags?" Most children said "No."	Calissa: "The little woman should kiss the ogre and cuddle him and do everything that he wants. Then he will be nice to her." Sparked a discussion on self worth and integrity.
Key words or phrases:	"Pretty"; "Beautiful"	"Not right."
Story 2:	Recapped *Snow White, The Paper Bag Princess, Cinderella* (c) Discussion following children's assertion of the importance of appearance. Lisa, Pippa and Karen 'dressed down' in old worn jeans and stained and ripped shirts for this exercise.	*Let's Eat* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.
Children's Responses:	Discussion: outward appearance does not define a person. Children agreed that Lisa, Pippa and Karen were still good and kind people even if they wore "daggy clothes." Rick: "She'd be sad because she [Cinderella] didn't have nice	"Eew", "yucky", "disgusting!"; many children pulled faces showing disdain when Spanish food was mentioned. Jedda: "I like tacos." Henry: "I don't! I never tried 'em." Discussion on getting to know

	clothes like other people." This comment encouraged a discussion on poverty in today's society. Jack: "Aboriginals are poor." Lisa clarified that people from all cultures can experience poverty. Chanel said that "we could give our clothes that don't fit us anymore to poor people." The preschoolers agreed that they would like to do this; so they dictated to Lisa a letter to parents asking for donations of clean clothes and toys to give to poor people. Lisa: "Just because these people don't have lovely clothes as you do, does that make them not as good as you?" Ella: "They're good"; Jane: "The same as us."	something (food, people, places) before making hasty decisions. Children asked many questions during the reading: "What's she doing?" "What's empanadas?" "What is 'aye que pena'?" Kira especially engaged with this text, noticing empty chairs on certain pages: "Where's Tony?" and repeating the words "Aye que pena." Discussion on family similarities and differences. Fore example: "My granddad lives with us" (Don); "My mummy's having a baby" (Ellery); "They eat different things" (Kirra). Children engaged with this text which generated a lot of discussion.
Critical Moments:	Ella: "It doesn't matter what you look like it's what's in your heart that matters." Children agreed that kindness was important.	Laura: "I love the sound of 'aye que pena'." Most children agreed with her and from then on responses were more positive.
Key words or phrases:	"… what matters…"	"… different…"
Emerging themes?	Focus on the importance of outward appearance being challenged by a few children.	Beginning to discuss human rights issues. Beginning to discuss differences in a positive way.

Cycle Four

Table B4 The Action Research Phase: Week Four

Week 4	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*The Strongest Girl in the World* (c)	*Bush Tucker* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.
Children's Responses:	Children understood that the "kids next door were mean and Esmeralda was nice." (Ella). Croup consensus: "Yeah, girls can be strong." (Colin)	Discussion on how the Aboriginal people hunted and gathered their food. Henry: "There was shops". Shelly clarified that there were no shops before white people arrived in Australia. Children discussed the skill and resourcefulness of the Aboriginal people when hunting and gathering bush tucker. Harley: "It's [barramundi] not bush food! It's in the creek!" Shelly was able to clarify that 'bush tucker' refers to all food huntered and gathered by the Aboriginal people.
Critical Moments:	Trixi: "If she changes her clothes the kids will play with her."	Henry: "If they carry them [barrumundi] like that [pointing to

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		picture in text] they'll get all stinky!"
Key words or phrases:	"… mean…"	"… bush food"
Story 2:	Role plays based on *The strongest girl in the world* (c) and inclusive play practices. Discussion of photographs from *We, the children*	*Whitefellers are Like Traffic Lights* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices.
Children's Responses:	Children enjoyed role plays about inclusive play practices. Karen: "Why do you think this little boy looks sad?" Harley: "He's black!" Ella: "Naa, it's because kids won't play with him. I'd say 'you can play with me'."	Don was extremely interested in the parts of the story that discussed bush tucker. Children engaged with story.
Critical Moments:	Most children said that they would play with people who had dark coloured skin. However, Trixi, Gabby, Alice, Verity, Melinda and Mary would not. Ziek concluded "It's what's in your heart that's important."	Shelly: "Why do you think they can't play together?" Calissa: "Because you need a white friend." Discussion followed leading to the children deciding that "it doesn't make any difference what colour your skin is; you can still play together" (Tilly).
Key words or phrases:	"He's black!"	"Black skin"; "White skin"
Emerging themes?	Skin colour can encourage negative responses from some children.	Skin colour can encourage positive responses from some children.

Cycle Five

Table B5 The Action Research Phase: Week Five

Week 5	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Nini at Carnival* (c)	*Enora and the Black Crane* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression Upholds freedom of speech	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices
Children's Responses:	Children discussed how Nini would be feeling because she felt "left out" because she did not have a costume to wear to Carnival. They discussed ways that might help Nini create a costume. When Nini's friend helped her by wrapping a coloured cloth around her, Mary commented: "That's not a very good costume. It's only a cloth!" Discussion on the importance/unimportance of	The children were interested in the illustrations of the birds. Ryan: "Shouldn't kill birds."

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	outward appearance.	
Critical Moments:	Children's responses to initial guiding question: Colin "I'd play with them because they could teach me different things." Trixi: "I wouldn't play with them 'cos they got different skin." Ziek: "I'd play with her 'cos she's the same on the inside." Ella: "I'd play with her 'cos she the same in her heart." Max: "I'd play with those kids 'cos they're beautiful!"	After storytime had finished Karen spoke with a small group of children. Jedda: "His family would be really sad that he got turned into a bird." The group then discussed how our actions affect our loved ones.
Key words or phrases:	"I'd play with them…" "I wouldn't play with them…"	"…wrong"; "…right"; "Didn't mean to…"
Story 2:	*Cleversticks* (c)	*Fish Out of Water* (nc/c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech	Promotes peaceful practices (?)
Children's Responses:	Discussion on differences. Discussion of feelings. Discussion on pride in our achievements: Dave – "I can ride a two-wheeler." Most children said that they would play with the children in the story.	Lots of "Ohh" and laughter at the rapid growth of the fish. Caddy: "He shouldn't keep feeding him. He should listen to the man." Henry: "The police help ya if you're in trouble…" Don: "And the firemen."
Critical Moments:	Ella: "Everyone in the class in the story is helping each other."	Nil
Key words or phrases:	"helping"; "sharing"; "kind"	"helping"
Emerging themes?	Outward physical appearance still important to some children. Some children are still responding negatively to difference of skin colour.	Feelings of belonging are important. Family is important. Keeping family rules is important.

Cycle Six

Table B6 The Action Research Phase: Week Six

Week 6	**Preschool A**	**Preschool B**
Story 1:	*Let's Eat* (c)	*I Like Myself* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.
Children's Responses:	Discussion on differences and similarities. Ella: "They could teach me to speak Spanish and I could teach them to speak [Harmony] Bay." Dave: "This family loves each other like my family. We like to talk." "My grandpa lives with us" (Heidi) Darren: "I like them people."	Children were extremely hard to settle (particularly Edward and Mark). The storytime session was aborted.
Critical Moments:	Most children said that they would play with Antonio and his family.	N/A

	However, Trixi, Gabby, Alice, Verity, Melinda and Mary would not. Ziek concluded "It's what's in your heart that's important."	
Key words or phrases:	"It's what's in your heart that's important."	N/A
Story 2:	*Pumpkin Paddy Meets the Bunyip* (c)	*I Like Myself* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Promotes peaceful practices.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.
Children's Responses:	"Aboriginal people don't have houses" lead to discussion of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal people and housing. Discussion on helping others; the importance of family and friends.	Children showed great excitement over the colourful and rather eccentric illustrations. They enjoyed the humour of the illustrations which highlighted the message of the story: It's wonderful to be yourself no matter how different you are.
Critical Moments:	Dave: "It's okay to have different coloured skin. That's just the way it is."	Tilly: "It's okay to be different. It's good to be yourself." Michael: "I don't like myself."
Key words or phrases:	"That's just the way it is."	"It's okay to be different."
Emerging themes?	Some children are beginning to challenge stereotypical responses to differences due to skin colour and ethnicity.	Some children are beginning to understand that "It's okay to be different. It's good to be yourself."

Cycle Seven

Table B7 The Action Research Phase: Week Seven

Week 7	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*A Piece of String* (c)	*Prince Cinders* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech.
Children's Responses:	Rick: "He's ugly." However Rick stated at the end of the story: "He's nice and kind." Most children discussed how the main character Heih was kind and sharing and that this was more important than how a person looks.	Discussion on teasing and feelings. "It's not nice to tease" (Kurt). Discussion on being made to clean up another's mess. "Not fair!" (Ryan). "We can all clean up together" (Tilly). Children enjoyed the illustrations.
Critical Moments:	Trixi: "He's bad… 'cos he got ugly clothes." Alice: "He's not nice 'cos his skin's different."	Ryan: "Not fair!"
Key words or phrases:	"ugly"; "bad"; "not nice"; "kind"; "sharing"; "nice"; "thoughtful".	"Not fair"
Story 2:	*Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* (c)	*Princess Smartypants* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.

	Promotes peaceful practices.	
Children's Responses:	Discussion on front cover. Lisa: "How would you feel if you were the little stripy fish?" Mary: "I'd be frightened of the other fish 'cos they looked different to me." Ziek: "I'd feel left out."	Children focused on the illustrations. Very little discussion.
Critical Moments:	Mary: "If I was a sparkly fish I'd play with the little fish."	Nil.
Key words or phrases:	"… frightened… different"	"She's tricky."
Emerging themes?	Children are beginning to empathise with those who are 'different'.	The children are beginning to explore what they believe to be fair and unfair behaviour.

Cycle Eight

Table B8 The Action Research Phase: Week Eight

Week 8	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Kuia and the Spider* (c)	*A Bit of Company* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Promotes peaceful practices	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Upholds freedom of speech.
Children's Responses:	Post story discussion drew from the children that they would not be happy if arguments went on indefinitely and a discussion on peaceful resolution and how to achieve this followed: Dave: "You gotta talk to people to let 'em know how you feel…" Jack: "Mum says you can't always get your own way 'n sometimes you gotta do what you don't want… umm like eat veggies." Reggie: "I help my little brother when I don't want to." Carryn: "Maybe you can just go somewhere else." Ella: "I've got a friend and she's bossy…. I don't like being bossed." Discussion on difference (see Trixi's comment below).	Discussed feelings of being lonely. Kate: "What makes people lonely?" Laura: "If they got nobody to talk to." Ron: "They all 'lone." Kate: "How would they feel?" "Sad"; "Scared"; "Angry" Kate: "How could they stop feeling lonely?" Tilly: "Talk to people." Calissa: "Go out to the shops." Henry: "Go to friends houses." Kate: "What if they don't have any friends?" James: "Make friends." "How?" Caddy: "Be nice and help people." Kate: "How could you help Chris and Molly in our story?" Ellery: "Be nice to 'em." Jedda: "Invite them to a party." Tilly: "Play with them."
Critical Moments:	Trixi: "I like people from Fiji with black skin; but I don't like them in that poster…. 'Cos I don't know 'em."	Tilly, Caddy and Kurt stayed with Kate after reading to make a list of alternatives to screaming for finding and keeping friends.
Key words or phrases:	"talk"; "help"; "black skin".	"Sad"; "angry"; "scared"; "talk"; "play with"; "help".
Story 2:	*I Like Myself* (c)	Preschool Excursion
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.	N/A
Children's Responses:	Lisa: "This little girl on the front cover looks very happy. I wonder why?" Mary: "'Cos she's in a pretty	N/A

	dress." Kate: "Would you talk to this blue man?" A resounding "Yes" from the class group. Mary: "I wouldn't play with that funny baby." Lisa: "How would you be a super person?" Ella: "Use your manners." Tia: "Be nice to friends.' Gabby: "Eat properly." Kelly: "Do good" Colin: "Help people" Jack: "Take care of people." Discussion on peaceful conflict resolution: Carryn: "Say 'stop'." Dave: "You could walk away. Just walk away." Colin: "Tell the teacher." Ziek: "…ignore 'em…"	
Critical Moments:	Mary: "'Cos she's in a pretty dress."	N/A
Key words or phrases:	"be nice"; "do good"; "help people"; "take care of people".	N/A
Emerging themes?	Children are beginning to express that they believe it is "right" and "good" to help and share with those in need.	Children are beginning to express that they believe it is "right" and "good" to help and share with those in need, especially the lonely.

Cycle Nine

Table B9 The Action Research Phase: Week Nine

Week 9	Preschool A	Preschool B
Story 1:	*Milly and Molly and Different Dads* (c)	*The Sad Little Monster and the Jellybean Queen* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech. Promotes peaceful practices.
Children's Responses:	In-depth discussion on (dis)ability as one of the fathers in the text was in a wheelchair. This disturbed most children and the discussion required scaffolding for the children to be guided to realise that people with a disability have many *abilities* that are just the same as the fathers of the preschoolers.	Children reflected upon how they would feel if no-one ever visited them and they were all alone: "sad"; "I'd cry"; "yucky". Comparisons were drawn between the two islands with the children all agreeing that they would prefer to live on the sunny island with the jellybean queen. Kate: "What sort of things do you do to be a kind friend?" "have sleep-overs"; "visit friends places"; "play together"; "play games"; "share"; "talk"; "cuddle"; "have jokes and laugh".
Critical Moments:	Dave: "That's really sad… 'cos	Ron: "My Pa was lonely and sad

	they can't play 'cos his dad's in a wheelchair."	and I went straight into his arms!"
Key words or phrases:	"*can* do…."; "the same inside".	"It would be sad to be lonely"; "help'; "play with".
Story 2:	*Mumma Zooms* (c)	*Big Al* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech. Promotes peaceful practices.
Children's Responses:	Through discussion the children came to understand that people in wheelchairs can do just about anything, experience all feelings, love, laugh and are "just like us" (Jane).	Kate: "How would you feel if you were all alone and had nobody to play with?" "Sad" Kate: "Why do you think the little fish went away from Big Al?" Tilly: "'Cos he's big and scary." Henry: "Big Al's brave." Jerry: "The little fish should help him… he helped them."
Critical Moments:	Ella: "Doesn't matter if your mum's in a wheelchair 'cos your mum's still the same."	Mark: "What about that big one when he got caught in the net. He saved the little ones. They [the fishermen] chucked him back…"
Key words or phrases:	"… still the same"; "just like us".	"brave"; "big"; "little"; "help", "save".
Emerging themes?	Children are challenging stereotypical assumptions regarding people with disabilities.	Children are contextualizing loneliness by discussing it in the preschool context and providing strategies to address this issue.

Cycle Ten

Table B10 The Action Research Phase: Week Ten

Week 10	**Preschool A**	**Preschool B**
Story 1:	*The Race* (c)	*Arnold the Prickly Teddy* (c)
Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression.
Children's Responses:	Children were very sensitive to the feelings of the boy in the story. Children suggested strategies to help people who are hearing impaired.	Tilly: "He's shorts are broke. He's got holes." Kate: "Does that matter?" Tilly: "Naa."
Critical Moments:	Ella: "Some kids think that mums in wheelchairs are different and it's not okay… but it's okay to be different." Jane: "It doesn't matter that he's a little bit different. He's still the same on the inside."	Caddy: "That's not fair." (that the toy shop owner threw Arnold out just because he was different).
Key words or phrases:	"doesn't matter that he's different"; "… same on the inside."	"… not fair"
Story 2:	*Whoever You Are* (c)	*Esmeralda and the Children Next Door* (c)

Key Features:	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech Promotes peaceful practices.	Challenges prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes. Challenges oppression. Upholds freedom of speech.
Children's Responses:	Discussion on how we can be different yet the same.	Most children commented that Esmeralda's physical appearance does not matter and concentrated on her bravery: "Esmeralda saved the baby. She's brave. They should play with her" (Kirra); "They should play with her" (Jedda). Most children said that they would play with Esmeralda (Mark did not wish to respond).
Critical Moments:	Ella: "It's sad [if we were all the same] 'cos that's pretty mean, and that's pretty boring." Harley: "They're mud people."	Ron: "I'd say to them kids [the children next door]: Don't you get mad at me girly!" Jerry: "That's not nice!"
Key words or phrases:	"different"; "same"	"not fair"; "not nice"
Emerging themes?	All children are displaying sincere sensitivity to people with a disability. Most children are challenging negative stereotypical responses to difference and diversity.	Most children are recognising and displaying sincere sensitivity to violations against human dignity, acceptance and inclusion.

The University of Southern Queensland

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Email: bartletc@usq.edu.au

18 October 2005

Ms Karen Hawkins
20 Farrants Hill Road
Farrants Hill NSW 2484

Dear Ms Hawkins

Re: Ethics Clearance for Research Project, *A Cry for Justice: The Use of Children's Literature in Facilitating Pre-Schoolers' Conceptions of Social Justice*

The USQ Human Research Ethics Committee recently reviewed your application for ethics clearance. Now that you have addressed the concerns of the Committee your project has been endorsed and full ethics approval is confirmed. Reference number **H05STU505** is assigned to this approval that remains valid to 18 October 2006.

The Committee is required to monitor research projects that have received ethics clearance to ensure their conduct is not jeopardising the rights and interests of those who agreed to participate. Accordingly, you are asked to forward a **written report** to this office after twelve months from the date of this approval or upon completion of the project.

A questionnaire will be sent to you requesting details that will include: the status of the project; a statement from you as principal investigator, that the project is in compliance with any special conditions stated as a condition of ethical approval; and confirming the security of the data collected and the conditions governing access to the data. The questionnaire, available on the web, can be forwarded with your written report.

Please note that you are responsible for notifying the Committee immediately of any matter that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the proposed procedure.
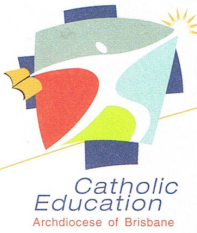
Yours sincerely

Christine Bartlett
Postgraduate and Ethics Officer
Office of Research and Higher Degrees

Copy: Associate Professor G Potter

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A11.071 LE
11 April 2006

Ms Karen Hawkins
20 Farrants Hill Road
Farrants Hill NSW 2484

Dear Ms Hawkins

Thank you for your letter regarding permission to approach Brisbane Catholic Education colleges for your research on *'A Cry for Justice: The use of children's literature in facilitating preschoolers' awareness and understandings of social justice issues'*. Permission is granted to approach the following schools listed:

> Guardian Angel's School, Ashmore
> St Kevin's School, Benowa
> Marymount School, Burleigh Waters
> Our Lady of the Rosary School, Caloundra
> St Vincent's School, Clear Island Waters St Augustine's School, Currumbin Waters

> Siena College, Sippy Downs
> Stella Maris School, Maroochydore
> St Mary's School, Maryborough
> St Brigid's School, Nerang
> St Thomas Moore School, Sunshine Beach
> Star of the Sea, Torquay

I would ask you to contact the principal of the respective school seeking their involvement in the project.

Please note that participation in your study is at the discretion of each of the principals.

If you have any further queries, please contact me on (07) 3840 0427.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lisa Eastment
Research Coordinator
Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Brisbane

Appendix D
Ethical Clearance

commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

06 June 2006

Mrs Karen Anne Hawkins
20 Farrants Hill Road
FARRANTS HILL NSW 2484

Dear Mrs Hawkins

ISSUE OF A POSITIVE NOTICE – REGISTRATION NUMBER 490869/1

Thank you for your blue card application. It has been considered and approved. You have been issued with a positive notice (in the form of this letter) and blue card (enclosed) under the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000* (the Act).

You must retain both of these documents. They are valid until 6-Jun-08, unless cancelled earlier. A renewal notice will be sent to you sixteen weeks before the expiry date.

Change of details - you must advise the Commissioner **within 14 days** of any of the following:

- you change your name/s; or
- you start using a different name/s; or
- you change your contact details.

Failure to notify the Commissioner of any of these changes is an offence and may result in a fine.

Change in criminal history – if you acquire a criminal history or if there is a change in your criminal history while the positive notice is still valid and:

- you are **employed or engaged in paid or voluntary employment** regulated by the Act, you must immediately disclose this change to your employer or prospective employer. Your employer or prospective employer must then apply to the Commissioner for a further blue card. The Act does not require you to give your employer any information about the change other than the fact it has occurred. It is not a requirement for your employer to stop employing you when informed of the change.
- you are a **person carrying on a business** regulated by the Act, you must immediately apply to the Commission for a further blue card.

Failure to comply with these obligations is an offence and may result in a fine.

Lost or stolen positive notice and/or blue card
If your positive notice letter or blue card is lost or stolen, you must apply for a replacement notice and/or card within 14 days. Failure to do so is an offence and may result in a fine.

Forms for notification of changes to your personal details or criminal history are available from the Commission's website at **www.bluecard.qld.gov.au**.

If you have any questions about this information, please call the Commission on **1800 113 611** or **(07) 3247 5145**.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Fraser
**Commissioner for Children and Young People
and Child Guardian**

the working
with children
check

Co-researcher Consent Forms

Research Project Principal/Director Consent Form

Title: A Cry for Justice: The Use of Children's Literature in Facilitating Preschoolers Awareness and Understanding of Social Justice Issues.

Name:…………………………………………………………………

School:……………………………………………………………………….

Address:……………………………………………………………………

Contact Details:…………………………………………………………

Please circle either yes or no for each of the statements below.

1. This research project has been thoroughly explained to me.   Yes   No

2. I have had all my questions satisfactorily answered.   Yes   No

3. I know what is expected of me, my school and the preschool teacher.   Yes   No

4. I understand that videotaping will take place in the preschool classroom. Yes   No

5. I understand that audiotaping will take place in the preschool classroom. Yes   No

6. I understand that photography will take place in the preschool classroom. Yes   No

7. I understand that this research project has been granted ethical clearance. Yes   No

8. I understand that, if needed, a complaint against the study may be lodged with the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee (07) 4631 2956.   Yes   No

9. I understand that parental consent will be sought for each preschool child to participate in this research project.   Yes   No

10. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity are assured.   Yes   No

11. I understand that I will be kept informed of the progress of the research project and will also be informed of the study's findings.   Yes   No

12. I understand that I may withdraw my consent for this research project to be conducted in this school at any time during the project.   Yes   No

13. I give my consent for this research project to be conducted in this school. Yes   No

…………………………………………..   …………………………………………..
Principal's Signature   Preschool Teacher's Signature

…………………………………………..   ………………………………………….
Researcher's Signature   Preschool Assistant's Signature
                    Date………………………………….

Appendix E
Co-researcher Consent Forms

Research Project Teacher/Teacher Assistant Consent Form
Title: A Cry for Justice: The Use of Children's Literature in Facilitating
Preschoolers' Awareness and Understanding of Social Justice Issues.

Name:…………………………………………………………………….

School:…………………………………………………………………….

Position:…………………………………………………………………….

Contact Details:…………………………………………………………….

Please circle either yes or no for each of the statements below.

1. This research has been thoroughly explained to me.	Yes	No
2. I have had all my questions satisfactorily answered.	Yes	No
3. I know what is expected of me.	Yes	No
4. I understand that videotaping will take place in my classroom.	Yes	No
5. I understand that audiotaping will take place in my classroom.	Yes	No
6. I understand that photography will take place in my classroom.	Yes	No
7. I understand that this study has been granted ethical clearance.	Yes	No
8. I understand that parental consent will be sought for each child to participate in this research project.	Yes	No
9. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity are assured.	Yes	No
10. I understand that, if needed, a complaint against the study may be lodged with the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee (07) 4631 2956.	Yes	No
11. I understand that I will be informed of the study's findings.	Yes	No
12. I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time during the research project.	Yes	No
13. I give consent for this research project to be conducted in my preschool classroom.	Yes	No

………………………………………….. …………………………………………
Teacher's Signature   Preschool Assistant's Signature

………………………………………….. …………………………………………
Researcher's Signature   Date

Research Project Parent Consent Form
Title: A Cry for Justice: The Use of Children's Literature in Facilitating
Preschoolers' Awareness and Understanding of Social Justice Issues.

Parents' Name(s):……………………………………………………….

Child's Name:……………………………………………………………

School:……………………………………………………………………

Please circle either yes or no for each of the statements below.

1. I/We understand what this research is about.   Yes   No

2. I/We have had all questions satisfactorily answered.   Yes   No

3. I/We understand that videotaping will take place in the classroom.   Yes   No

4. I/We understand that audiotaping will take place in the classroom.   Yes   No

5. I/We understand that photography will take place in the classroom.   Yes   No

6. I/We understand that my/our child may be interviewed by the researcher. Yes   No

7. I/We understand that this research project has been granted ethical
clearance, and that both the principal and preschool teacher have given
consent for the study to be conducted in the preschool classroom.   Yes   No

8. I/We understand that confidentiality and anonymity are assured.   Yes   No

9. I/We understand that, if needed, a complaint against the study may be
lodged with the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee (07) 4631 2956. Yes   No

10. I/We understand that I/we may withdraw my/our consent at any time
during the research project.   Yes   No

11. I /We give permission for my/our child to participate in this research. Yes   No

……………………………………………………………………………………
Parent's Signature(s)

…………………………………………   …………………………………..
Teacher's Signature   Researcher's Signature.

          Date:...

Hi ....From...
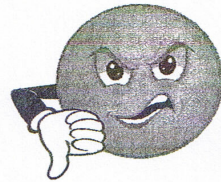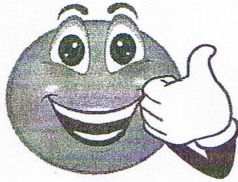
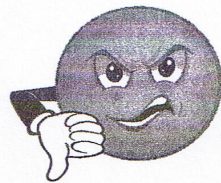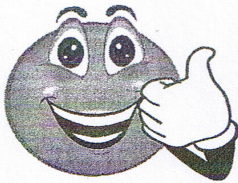**Is it OK with you that Miss Karen:**

Video-tapes you listening to stories and talking about the stories
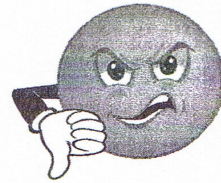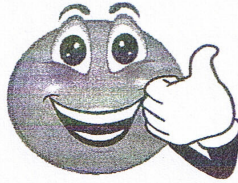
Takes your photo

Talks to you about stories and records what you say

You can change you mind anytime you like.

Thank you from Miss Karen

LETTER FROM YOUR CHILDREN

This letter was written with the preschool children on their behalf.

Dear Parents,

Can we give our clothes away if they are too small? We want to give them to people who need them and don't have many clothes.

From the Dolphin Class.

As a part of our literacy study with Karen Hawkins (Doctorate study) we have been exploring the way children respond to different forms of dress and how it affects the way they interact with these people. Some children have identified through our stories (Cinderella, Paperbag Princess, Princess Smartypants) that people change personality traits as they change their clothes. After dressing up in rags we exposed the children to the fact that even though different clothes were worn we were still the same people underneath the clothes. Our personalities didn't change. After much discussion the children have started to explore the idea that some people are less fortunate and don't have access to beautiful clothes like they do. The children have decided that they would like to donate some of their old clothes that are either not worn or are too small to those that are less fortunate.

We do not expect that all the children will be able to bring clothes in to donate, however if you do wish to donate old clothing, we will be collecting these items and donating them to charity. A large box will be in the hallway near the lost property for you to place the clothes into.

We appreciate your involvement in this and believe that the children will learn a valuable lesson in human kindness.

From   and Karen.