

Local Stories, Local Literacies at Logan- a place-based learning approach. (by Kerith Power)

Summary.

Background

This research seeks to apply concepts originating from the 'New Literacies' (Barton 2002) now being employed to explain early literacy development (Jones Diaz et al 2001). Starting from the premise that young children learn key early literacy skills in their first five years of life, before entering school, a place-based learning approach is being used to study how young children in the contexts of their families and communities in Logan City learn to communicate and make meaning. In the light of how children develop early literacy through social practice, the role of culturally situated knowledge must be very important in children's later success in school.

Place- based learning:

is rooted in the unique history, culture, environment and economy of a particular place. The community provides a context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning (Rural School and Community Trust 2003).

Logan City, South- East Queensland, Australia, the place in which this study will be carried out, has an estimated population of 170, 000, 25% of whom are under 15 years old. While the top five languages other than English spoken at home are Samoan, Chinese, Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog/Filipino, it is estimated that 160 different cultures are represented in Logan (Logan City website 2005). This diversity, based on many different places of origin, and therefore many different culturally situated bodies of knowledge, makes for diverse storylines and cultural positionings (Davies 2000, Somerville forthcoming). Cultural meaning-making practices are passed on to young children and must therefore influence how they subsequently learn literacy on entering school.

The project is progressing through the first of three phases:

Phase 1: Local Context Analysis

Observation of places in Logan using a local context analysis schedule (Barnes McGuire 1997) developed by Professor Barnes at the Institute for the Study of Families, Children and Social Issues to evaluate Britain's national Surestart early intervention initiative for families with children under three years old living in disadvantaged areas.

Phase 2: Visual ethnography

Using visual ethnography, the principal investigator will document by means of digital video, young children's communication with parents, other adults in their immediate communities and each other

Phase 3: Project work and documentation

Project work (Chard & Brooks 2004) will be carried out by students of early childhood education within their existing course of study. They will document in a visual diary format, early multiliteracy capabilities demonstrated by young children before they reach school age. This data will form the basis of a cultural map of early literacies in Logan City.

The paper will report on early findings of Phase 1.

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